

A
*Lasting
Legacy*



Cynthia Roemer

To my kindred spirit, Cindy Snyder, who showed me the blessings of true friendship and courage. Until we meet again in God's kingdom. You are loved and missed.

*“Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake:
for when I am weak, then am I strong.”
(2 Corinthians 12:10)*

One



Wednesday, August 24, 1814
Bladensburg, Maryland

“Something’s not right. I can feel it.”
“Hush, Noah. You’ll have the entire militia on edge,” Private Daniel Hawkins cautioned his friend. And yet, he sensed there was something to what his companion surmised. He peered out at the landscape, squinting against the noontime sun. From their heightened vantage point on Lowndes Hill, they had a clear view of the narrow, wooden bridge across the Anacostia River—the only access to Washington that hadn’t been destroyed.

His nervous cohort shifted his feet, wiping sweat from his brow. “But surely you realize the threat. You heard as well as I the redcoats are not far from Bladensburg. Washington is but a few miles away. If they overpower us and seize the capital, all is lost.”

Daniel widened his stance and tipped his chin higher. “Nearly six thousand strong, we should have little trouble repelling the British should they launch an attack.”

It was rumored that President Madison himself had joined the ranks somewhere between here and the capital.

“I see them!”

The sharp tenor voice of a sentry farther up the rise brought every soldier to his feet, musket at the ready. Daniel scoured the east side of the river, finally spotting the long line of red-coated soldiers in the distance as they marched along the road to Bladensburg. Whether from the blistering heat or his own raw nerves, sweat droplets slithered down his temples onto his cheeks. He swiped them away with the sleeve of his dark-blue uniform jacket.

He'd faced redcoats before. Why should this time be any different?

His thoughts flickered home, and one corner of his mouth lifted. Mayhap it was that Maggie had given him more reason to stay alive.

He reeled in his thoughts. If he were to prevail, he must stay focused. These soldiers were well trained, formidable opponents. Far better equipped than he and the rest of the American militia. The prattle of drums thrummed in the distance, announcing their enemy's approach. As they neared the river, the soldiers fanned out in all directions. Some headed toward the bridge; others dispersed themselves among the buildings in the settlement on the east side of the river.

Daniel squinted at the spindly contraptions the soldiers were setting up along the river's edge. The odd devices resembled firecrackers fastened to long poles.

“What do you suppose those are? Some sort of weaponry?” Noah's nerve-shattered voice carried across the stillness.

Daniel arched a brow. “Possibly. They don't appear too intimidating, but by the way the redcoats are flittering about them, it appears we'll soon find out.”

The command from General Winder to open fire set off a barrage of musket rounds. Several British soldiers fell instantly to the ground, while others knelt to return fire. Daniel set his

sights on the column of soldiers attempting to cross the bridge. Singling out the one on the far left, he steadied his aim, pulled the trigger, then watched his target drop to the wooden planks. Another American bullet found its mark, and a second soldier collapsed to the bridge floor. Others in the squad fell back, retreating into the small settlement nestled across the river.

As Daniel reloaded his Springfield 1795, a loud whistle split the air. He flinched and glanced up to see a flaming projectile soar through the sky, arching high overhead as it spiraled toward them. On its descent, the shaft exploded in midair, sending a spray of shrapnel in all directions. Though dozens of yards from the blast, Daniel flattened himself on the ground, heart pounding.

A man's shrill cry pierced the air.

Daniel ventured a glance in the direction of the sound. Several yards in the distance, a man writhed on the ground, while another ran to offer assistance. The rest of the soldiers in the vicinity scattered.

Still half stunned, Daniel stood and brushed off his soiled uniform. "Indeed, they *are* weapons."

Coming up beside him, Noah cut a glance at the far side of the river. "How will we defend ourselves against such weaponry?"

"The best we know how—with much faith and courage." Gripping his musket, Daniel pointed it at the nearest redcoat and fired. His aim rang true, finding its mark in the chest of the British soldier.

More rockets flared overhead.

Noah stumbled backward, face blanched. "Heaven preserve us. Come. We must flee!"

Daniel hesitated, his gaze vacillating between the rockets and his fellow militiamen. Many had fallen back, blasting a final shot before seeking refuge or fleeing. Would they be routed so easily?

He heard their sergeant call to them. "Courage, men! Stand firm and fight!"

A few soldiers paused and turned, but as the missiles

continued to explode around them, they took flight once more. Daniel fell back a few paces and fired off another shot, conscious of the constant barrage of rocket blasts peppering the landscape. Not one to shy away from battle, he balked at the thought of fleeing. And yet, the intruders would have to face two more waves of soldiers guarding the capital. Mayhap it would be best to regroup with his comrades and combine their efforts.

Noah paused his running and pointed frantically to the sky. "Daniel, above you!"

Daniel caught a glimpse of the projectile bearing down at him. Drawing a hurried breath, he sprinted forward, his heart drumming in his ears. He prodded his muscles harder, faster up the incline, dodging obstacles in his path.

Thoughts of Maggie and the babe in her womb spurred him on. They had their whole life ahead of them. He must live.

He must.

With every stride, he breathed a prayer. *Preserve me, Lord. For Maggie's sake.*

For our child's.

A deafening "pop" sounded, and sharp pain pierced the back of his left leg. Another, his side. He tumbled to the ground, lurching to a stop face down in the grassy field.

Muffled voices called from every direction. Most, unfamiliar ones.

British voices.

Shots zinged overhead.

Daniel's mind whirled. His musket had flown from his hands in the fall. With no means to defend himself, he had no choice but to lie still and pray he would be presumed dead. He ground his teeth against the excruciating pain in his upper thigh. He could feel the steady trickle of blood seeping from the wound. The shrapnel must have cut him deeply. As soon as able, he needed to rig up a tourniquet to stem the flow.

But for now, he must remain still and wait.

When the battle ended, someone would come for him. Noah, most certainly.

Some time passed before the blare of rockets and gunfire faded. When all went quiet, Daniel lifted his head. Sweat streamed down his face, the pain in his leg almost more than he could bear. He blinked, weak and struggling to focus. The bodies of soldiers—more American than British—lay strewn about the battlefield. The rest, it seemed, had been routed toward the capital. He could only pray the British attack had been stymied somewhere along the way.

His gaze fastened on one fallen soldier farther up the rise, and his breathing shallowed. Though the body lay twisted and bloodied, there was no mistaking the dark mop of hair and familiar lean frame of his friend. “Noah,” he murmured, loud enough for only himself to hear.

Daniel tried to rise, but his leg gave way, the pain intensifying. With a groan, he propped himself onto his forearms and pushed himself along with his good leg. After several yards, he collapsed to the ground, breathless, his strength sapped. His injuries and blood loss were significant. And yet, if not for Noah’s warning, Daniel would likely have suffered much worse.

Through blurred vision, he studied his friend from a distance. The dark stain on his uniform gave clue that Noah had taken a musket ball to the chest. His limp, unnatural position assured he hadn’t survived.

Moisture pooled in Daniel’s eyes. Since their youth, he and Noah had been inseparable. When Daniel determined to enlist in the militia, Noah had reluctantly followed, hopeful their efforts would bring a quick end to the unwanted threat to their freedom.

They’d boasted such plans for the future. When their thirteen months of service were up, they would claim the one hundred sixty acres promised them and settle on adjacent plots and share the work and produce of their land.

Daniel's throat caught. Now his friend was gone, and their dream had died with him.

He tensed at the shuffle of boots in the grass. Fighting fatigue, he slowly shifted to his side, cringing at the sight of approaching British soldiers. Whether from the sweltering heat or loss of blood, his limbs felt drained, heavy. The soldiers faded in and out as his vision blurred. He closed his eyes, powerless to fight them.

His thoughts returned to his sweet Maggie and the wee one she now carried. What would become of them if he were imprisoned or killed? He tried to rally but dropped back down from his elbows with a groan.

He dug his fingernails in the grass. Earlier, he'd spoken with such courage and fortitude. Now, he hadn't the strength to even put up a struggle. *Have mercy, Lord.*

Yielding to his weariness, Daniel laid his head down in defeat, wondering if Noah had suffered the lesser fate.