

RIDE FOR THE REVOLUTION

by Lynne Drysdale Patterson

Sybil Ludington rode through the night to protect America's freedom during the Revolutionary War.

Galloping through the pouring rain, a lone horseman stopped in front of Ludington's Mill.

"The British are burning Danbury, sir!" the man shouted. "You must march."

Colonel Ludington ran outside. "Our guns are in Danbury!" he said, standing in the mud. "The Redcoats will destroy our cannons and muskets."

"Yes, sir," the messenger wheezed. He slid from the saddle and collapsed to the ground, exhausted from his long ride.

Sixteen-year-old Sybil, snug and warm in her trundle bed, was startled by the chaos outside her window. She had just finished saying prayers with her little sister, Molly.

While Molly slept, Sybil lay wide-awake. She couldn't stop thinking about the brave colonists. Her father ran a spy ring in Eastern New York for General George Washington.

As Colonel Ludington carried the messenger inside, Sybil whispered a prayer. She could hear her parents talking downstairs.

"We must find someone to gather the militia," her father said.

Sybil hugged her pillow. *I know the roads*, she thought. It was late April 1777, and the men were busy planting crops on their farms. But, as true minutemen, they would jump into battle at a minute's notice.

Suddenly, Sybil sat up. "I can ride as well as any man!" she said.

SADDLE UP

Sybil tiptoed down the staircase. Surprising her parents, she walked into the kitchen.

"I'll go," she whispered.

"What do you mean?" her mother asked.

"Go back to bed."

"I will muster the men," Sybil declared.

Colonel Ludington studied his daughter. She was the oldest of 12 children—and the bravest. He thought back to the day when loyalists tried to capture him at home. Sybil had lit candles all around the house and ordered her siblings to march like soldiers. The loyalists mistook the shadows for an army and ran away.

"There's no one else who can go," Sybil argued. "Please, send me."



After a long pause, Colonel Ludington spoke. "All right, young lady. You may go."

Sybil raced upstairs. Without waking Molly, she slipped into her riding clothes. Then she hurried to the barn to saddle her horse, Star. Her parents were waiting for her.

"Take this," her mother sniffed, choking back tears. She handed Sybil a red, wool cape. "It will keep you warm and dry."

Her father gave her a long, wooden stick.

"Whatever you do, don't get off your horse," he warned. "Rap on the windows with this stick. That will alert the men.

And watch out for skinnners!"

"I'll be careful." Sybil tried to smile. "Thank you, Papa."

She gently tugged Star's halter and whispered in the horse's ear, "We can

do this, Star. With God's help, we can do this!"

Star snorted and pawed the ground excitedly. Slinging her leg up and over Star's back, Sybil looked toward the horizon. The sky glowed bright red! The British had set fire to Danbury.

"Ride south to Mahopac Falls, head to Stormville, then circle back and return home," her father ordered. In that moment, Sybil felt like one of his trusted soldiers.

With her feet planted firmly in the stirrups, Sybil looked at her parents. "Pray for me," she said.

"Godspeed, my daughter," Colonel Ludington replied.

Thrusting her heels into Star's flanks, Sybil raced out of the barn, down the muddy lane and disappeared into the night.

THE LONG ROAD

The wind whipped through her hair. Sybil reached up and tugged her hood tightly to her head. She still had a long way to go.

Star thundered into the Alder family farm. Sybil banged her stick against the cedar-shake siding. "The British are burning Danbury!" she yelled. "Muster at Ludington's Mill!"

Giving Star's halter a tug, they raced toward the next farmhouse. Low-hanging branches lashed at Sybil's face. Her horse struggled to keep its footing on the muddy, rutted roads.

All the way to Mahopac Falls, Sybil rode and yelled. Her arm throbbed from waving the heavy stick. Her voice grew hoarse.

"Please, God," Sybil prayed, "help me keep going."

Sybil remembered the verse Ephesians 6:10—"Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by His vast strength." With that, she gained a second wind.

"Rise up, minutemen," she shouted as she rode into Stormville, waking the whole town. "Defend your country!" Sybil felt proud to help the American cause.

"Mission accomplished, Star," she gushed breathlessly. They paused by a stream to soothe their parched throats. Then they began the long trek home.

The sun was rising by the time Sybil reached the mill. Hundreds of men stood in her yard, ready to rally against the British soldiers.

"Sybil, thank God!" her mother cried. "You did it!" 🐾

Sybil Ludington rode her horse, Star, 40 miles that night. She roused 400 militiamen, while avoiding capture by the British. With God's help, she risked her life to defend her country.