

**MAX  
PATCH  
BEND**

A Novel

by

**Nathan B. Tracy**

*A Todd Casey Adventure*

**YAV PUBLICATIONS**

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**ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA**

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**ISBN: 978-1-937449-17-9**

*Published by:*

**YAV Publications**

Asheville, North Carolina

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3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

*Assembled in the United States of America*

*Published June 2013*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

My wife, Martha, spends many hours looking at the back of my head as I work at the computer. I know she would much rather that we be doing something else, or at least talking occasionally. She has read the manuscript several times, checking for errors. All nerve wracking reads. Now she is free to read it as a novel, and I hope she likes it.

I also want to thank Denise Look for proof reading a printed manuscript. By design she mostly concentrated on my use of commas and involved herself only slightly with sentence structure and the larger aspects of editing. Please hold her harmless for any structural problems. Now I know how successful authors can knock out a book every six months. If you could afford a thorough edit of your manuscript, the labor of writing a book would decrease by 80%. I am going to try it on my next book if I become suddenly wealthy.



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## FOREWORD

The year 1783 followed closely the end of hostilities in the American Revolutionary War. The British surrendered, and were shipping their troops back to England, and mercenaries to their homelands. The Continental Army also slowly disbanded, sending the fighters homeward.

The foundation stones for the constitutional convention began to form amid constant verbal skirmishes between the leaders of the thirteen colonies. The post war era became a time of change and awakening.

During the war, our soldiers left their small towns, coves, hollows, cuts, or valleys, and isolated farms. They mixed with others from different areas and marched to places hundreds of miles from home. They returned with a wider understanding of their new country, and a desire to move westward awakened within them.

Before the Revolutionary war civilization virtually stopped at the east edge of the Appalachian mountain, chain. There were no roads westward. There were no bridges over rivers, no supply posts, and few people. In those days, there was no travel in wagons because the only way to cross the mountains was to follow game trails and buffalo paths. Travel was by foot or by horseback. The Appalachian Mountains are a series of many parallel steep ridges, and narrow valleys lying side by side and running north and south. It is said by sociologists that it took a generation to move to the next valley as the children grew and moved westward over the next ridge.

As the generations moved on, they left behind better trails, often wide enough for wagons. Occasionally there were bridges of logs over streams and gullies, and eventually men built barges to carry men and horses across wide rivers. Small trading posts began to appear.

The more rugged the mountains were, the more sparse the population. Communities were often so isolated they, of

necessity, became a hundred percent self-sustaining. The language became a mix of foreign words and dialects. The dialect often changed within a fifty miles or less, depending on the ethnic origin of the settlers.

The isolation and the lack of things except the basic needs of life drove the people into fierce independence and self-reliance. They willingly gave help to others, but found it difficult to receive.

In the United States, we have few poor today who are not a hundred times better off physically than a family living deep in the recesses of the mountains. The rustic mountain cabins of your dreams do not represent reality. Cabins were smaller than the average living room today. The few windows were small, with no windows of glass, only crude wood shutters. The single room was small, dark with a floor of mountain dirt, and only a rough fireplace for both heat, and cooking. The furniture was of axe-hewn tables, benches and stools, and few of those. Light came from candles and lamps. Oil being precious and candles few; the people lived mostly by daylight or firelight.

Clearing the land was difficult, but necessary before the planting of crops. Man tilled his soil with crude ploughs, pulled by a cow, the wife, or if lucky, a horse.

There were no sawmills or chain saws. You cut and split your wood with an axe, you made your boards with an axe; you made your shingles with an axe. If you hurt yourself during the process, there was no doctor.

Game was not plentiful or easy to kill. Your gun was a flintlock, undependable and required you pour powder and shot down the barrel and into the priming pan for each shot. When you pulled the trigger, there was a delay before the powder ignited, if it did at all, and in the rain, it seldom did.

The people ate anything, including coon, possum, woodchucks, squirrel, bear, or deer. Mostly they ate corn flour foods such as biscuits and fried breads. Their cooking oil was lard made from the fat of animals, especially bears.

They picked each kind of berry in its season, cleaned them, and dried them. They found and dried apples and gathered nuts, especially the abundant chestnuts would keep them, and their stock alive. They dried their beans and corn, buried their root vegetables, and cabbages in a dirt keep. The

only refrigeration was the cold creek water, where they kept food in crocks and jars.

Water came from the creek in wooden buckets, carried by hand. Settlers heated water for bathing in an iron or copper pot nestled in the coals of the fireplace. They used it sparingly. Soap came from the fat of animals mixed with lye made by draining water through wood ashes. The soap was grey and rough.

Work began at sunrise, and ended after sundown. You made most of your own clothing, including shoes and boots. You worked nearly all the time, and children labored with their parents. There were no schools, and education was limited to what a parent provided by firelight.

The setting of this story begins in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia in 1782. Driven from home because of an accusation of attempted murder, our hero escapes southward and westward into the mountains. The heroine, under similar circumstances travels from the Piedmont of North Carolina, westward into these same sparsely populated mountains.

The valley of Max Patch Bend does not exist. The author did have a particular example in mind. While on a trip to a western state, he stood on a high cliff, looking down at an extensive circular valley, ringed by continuous cliffs. A river flowed in a large circle, exiting near to where it entered. The river undercut the cliff on one side of the valley and the ruins of stone buildings remained in the cleft.

Creating the valley simply required mentally relocating the valley, letting the river cut through the small neck, leaving the valley high and dry. This imaginary place afforded the chance to populate the area with any tree, bush, flower, or animal desired.

The author lives just off Max Patch Road, in the Fines Creek Community of Western North Carolina. You will not find the mythical Max Patch Bend around there, except in your imagination, and mine.

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Nathan B. Tracy

1783

**SHENANDOAH VALLEY  
OF  
VIRGINIA**





## CHAPTER 1

# THE AMBUSH

A HORSE GALLOPED TOWARD THE FARM of Gilbert Casey, a cloud of dust following. Jerking the horse to a walk, the rider shouted at Todd.

“I is Deputy Horace Snipe with a message for Todd Casey. Sheriff Grasty wants to speak to you at his office in town. Now!”

His voice was harsh. He jerked his horse back toward town, roughly spurring it into a gallop.

Todd was using his first day home in the field with his family planting potatoes. His shirt darkened with sweat, but he was feeling a deep satisfaction with life after graduating from the Virginia Military Academy the previous day. Then the voice of the deputy sheriff sounded an alarm. He knew Deputy Snipe and Sheriff Grasty. They knew him, making him wonder why their summons was so formal and abrupt.

Todd’s father, Gilbert Casey heard the shouted message. As the rider wheeled away he said, “Snipe has no call to be rude like that. Something is not right. You better go, Son, but take your weapons with you. His attitude is not correct. Keep a steady hand on your temper.”

“I will, Sir.”

“Remember, Son, the Sheriff is in league with Lord Wellington Howe. Since we have not yet signed the formal peace with England, he still has power. It may have something to do with the threat his son Quincy made to you. I will clean up and be along shortly.”

Todd nodded and started for the barn. He remembered the threat well. In his mind, he saw his dorm room. He remembered the door opening suddenly and slamming against the wall. He saw himself turning in his chair, then jumping to his feet, startled by the loud sound. He did not brace to attention as required of lower classman, but stood erect, ready to deal with whatever problem confronted him.

“I come to warn you, farmer boy—you are soon to die,” Quincy Howe shouted with a high-pitched voice. “Your daddy is a traitor to the king, and he helped the colonial rabble steal this land from England.”

The cadet continued with an exaggerated English accent even though he was born and raised near Richmond, Virginia. His round and fleshy face flushed with anger. He wore a blue and gray uniform with a scarlet sash covering his protruding waist; over it, a sword hung in a belted scabbard. A fat hand rested on the fancy hilt as he stood in the doorway of Todd’s room in the military Academy. Standing behind Quincy were two cadets, Dills and Smathers. Both had round, ruddy faces and soft bodies, and both were sons of English Tories. Both were followers of Quincy.

“Don’t hand me stuff, Quincy,” Todd said forcefully but not shouting. “The only reason you wear blue is because wearing red would get you shot if you went off campus.

“You may think I am a farmer boy, but my shoulder boards show more rank than yours,” Todd continued. “You only received your scarlet sash and sword because your daddy threatened to stir up trouble for the Academy. They stretched a few rules for you. They made you the cadet corps supernumerary and gave you a purple sash and a senior’s sword.”

“It makes me an officer, dirt farmer.”

“It makes you a fool, Quincy. Do you know what a supernumerary is? The word means superfluous or extra, or an actor who only walks by and does not have any lines to say. Your daddy owns ships and should know what the word means, but you seem to think it is something special. I received my sash and sword for having good grades and four years of hard work.”

“That is the trouble with this outpost you call a country,” Quincy shouted with a sneer on his face. “You are a commoner, and think you have more rank than the son of a Royal. We graduate in one week, and as soon as we get home, you are going to die,” he said as his face flushed red with rage. “Mark my words, peasant boy—you are dead meat!”

“If you try to kill me, Howe, be sure to bring your friends because you are not man enough to do it yourself.”

“We will be at your killing,” cadet Dills said.

“I plan to pound your face to mush before we kill you,” cadet Smathers said.

“Out-of-my-room, Quincy,” Todd said slowly and with menace in his voice. He moved one foot forward, his wide shoulders moving as his muscles tightened, his arms and rough hands ready at his sides.

“It is Lord Quincy Howe to you, farmer boy. My father is the Lord Wellington Howe. Your father is just Gilbert Casey, a lowborn dirt farmer. You cannot go any lower than dirt farmer, plowboy.”

“Your father is no Lord in this country. He is suspected of being a traitor and lucky to be alive,” Todd said, with disgust plainly in his full voice and on his square face. “Get out of my room!” he shouted as he leaned toward the doorway. Quincy looked up at Todd’s face and jumped backwards. He jerked the door, slamming it shut.

Todd glanced over to the small painting of George Washington astride his white stallion. It gave him a measure of peace, knowing the great general had suffered so many indignities and earned so few of them. His mother gave him the painting the Christmas of his first year as an inspiration, and it always hung over his desk.

Todd heard and saw the encounter in his mind as it flashed through his consciousness. When he reached the barn, he whistled for his horse. He responded immediately. Todd put the saddle and bridle on the horse, mounted, and turned him toward the dirt road. His father waved as Todd rode from the farm.

As his large stallion, Eagle, trotted toward town with upraised head and tail, Todd relived the last few hours at the military Academy. He saw the seniors sitting on chairs on the outside platform to the left of the podium. They were resplendent in their dress uniforms. Their tight blue blouses were fitted with white button-in collars and white buttoned-in cuffs. White cross belts met in the center of the chest with a large brass clasp. Their hat bills and shoes glowed with polish and the trouser creases were pressed to a fine edge. Symbols of rank adorned their shoulder boards, and honor braid looped down from their shoulders. Each wore a purple sash and a sword.

As a matter of custom, the professors did not post final grades for the seniors until after the ceremony—no one was sure of graduating. When the Head Master called your name, you walked to the podium, made a crisp left turn, and saluted. If you graduated, he returned the salute, handed you a diploma, and shook your hand. If you failed, He did not return the salute and stood completely still. You made a back step, turned, and marched off the platform. How you reacted to either situation was a matter of personal honor and decorum.

Because of his high cadet rank, Todd was one of the first to cross to the podium to receive his diploma while the assembled parents and cadet corps cheered. Silence greeted Quincy Howe as he shuffled to the podium. He thought his father might have managed to buy him a diploma. Dills and Smathers did not even show up but sat in the Howe's carriage while it waited to take Quincy home. Quincy received no return salute, received no diploma, and no handshake.

Turning away from the Headmaster, Quincy stalked across the platform with an upraised chin and haughty air, reminding Todd of cartoons of a haughty admiral. Quincy marched directly to the waiting carriage pulled by matched geldings.

A driver clothed in bright red livery sat stiffly, holding the reins. Quincy mounted and sat beside the driver, jerked the reins from the driver's hands, grabbed the whip from its socket, and cracked it near the heads of the horses. They bolted into action and galloped down the dirt road with Quincy still cracking the whip. His departure received notice only in derision. He failed his senior year. Todd felt embarrassment and pity for Quincy. America winning the war put an end to Quincy's royal lifestyle.

Todd shook off the thoughts of the Academy as he rode into town. A closed sign hung on the door of the sheriff's office. The deputy who delivered the message sat on the porch of the office, smoking a cigar in a leaned back straight chair. He jerked his thumb toward the end of town.

"Put your horse in the stable. You got to wait, college boy."

Todd was suspicious but did as the deputy ordered. He wondered why he had received an urgent message to come to town and then being told to wait.

He led his horse into the stable, but the stable master was not there, so after unsaddling Eagle he put him into a stall.

"It is good you unsaddled your horse, dirt clod, because you will not be needing him." The words came from the tack room. Todd started at the sound of the voice but recognized it immediately.

"I would guess the girly voice came from Quincy," Todd said as he stepped into the main room of the barn.

"You are done talking mean to me," Quincy said as he moved into the space between the haymows. He held a pitchfork with tines pointing forward, aiming at Todd's chest. Todd experienced a mixture of anger and fear.

“What are you doing with the pitch fork?” Todd asked warily. “You have never pitched hay in your life, judging by your puffy little white hands.”

“It is hog sticking time,” Quincy said with a sneer on his fat face, “and you is the hog.”

“Where are your buddies? You never do anything without a backup.”

“Right here, plow boy,” a voice with a British accent said as a short youth stepped out of the shadows with a larger fellow beside him. Both wore a sword at their side.

“Well, well,” Todd said, “Dills and Smathers backing you up like you planned it.”

Todd said the words in a casual manner as he picked up a singletree bound with iron collars and hitch eyes on the ends, a swivel in the center. It was a wagon part used to equalize the pull of the traces—made from a fat piece of hickory three feet long. He found it leaning against the wall near the harnesses that were hanging from pegs.

Without warning, Quincy charged. The sudden attack caught Todd off balance. The tines of the pitchfork were only a few feet from his chest when he swung the singletree. The blow knocked the fork from Quincy’s hands, sending the broken handle and the tines spinning toward the wall. Todd’s hand dropped to the loaded pistol at his hip, but he did not pull it.

“So the farmer coward is going for a gun,” Quincy said. “Why can’t you fight like a man?” he asked, stepping back quickly beside his friends.

Todd did not intend to pull the gun. The threat was not yet sufficient, and his training as a cadet hardened him against taunts and insults. His fear subsided as the adrenalin quickened his senses, readying him for action.

Quincy’s two friends crowded beside their leader with drawn swords in their right hands, smirks on their faces. Todd knew Dills was left-handed and up to something.

“Let me have him first,” Quincy said as he drew his sword. He stood somewhat sideways with his left arm behind his body. “Our cowardly troops may have lost one war, but I am going to win this one. I plan to open your belly, dung heap, and string your guts from one end of town to the other.”

He lunged forward with a long dagger held low in his left hand, ready for an upward thrust to Todd’s stomach. He held the sword high in his right hand to distract Todd, and ready to deliver a chopping blow.

Todd sidestepped the lunge, swinging the singletree and landing a hard blow to Quincy's ribs.

Todd, still unbalanced, changed the force of his swing upward and then pivoted as Dills lunged with his sword now in his left hand. Todd swung the singletree downward, deflecting the sword, and smashing him high on the upper arm, shattering the bone and shoulder socket. Dills stumbled a few steps and then fell against Quincy, still staggering and gasping for air because of the blow to his ribs.

Quincy tripped in the hay, dropping his sword. Still gasping for breath, he fell because of the impact of Dills' body against his. His left shoulder struck the floor, driving the upraised blade of his dagger into his guts. Quincy screamed in fear and pain. His friend, Dills, fell beside him, also screaming and holding his broken sword arm.

Quincy screamed again and rolled to his back, the handle of his own dagger protruding from the center of his bloated belly.

"You stabbed him! You murdered him!" yelled Smathers as he lunged at Todd with his sword. Still holding the singletree, Todd ducked the clumsy slash of the sword and swung the heavy wagon part low, striking Smather's hip, sending him to smash against the wall.

"The Sheriff knows about this, and you are going to prison for attacking us," yelled Smathers, lying on the stable floor holding his damaged hip. He sobbed, tears running down his cheeks.

Todd backed away with his hand on the pistol butt, the pistol still not drawn. He glanced around to see if there were any more attackers. He was breathing hard and his eyes moved quickly.

"You guys best take yourselves and Quincy to the doctor," Todd said with a concerned note in his voice. "Dills has one good arm, Smathers, you may limp but you can walk. If you see the Sheriff, tell him he missed the whole ambush and should have trained you better. No wonder you guys flunked out."

Todd started saddling Eagle while watching the boys. He looked up to see the startled face of the deputy looking through the unshuttered window opening. They stared into each other's eyes. The deputy ducked and ran.

Todd finished saddling and led the horse outside, carefully looking around. He mounted, pulled his scabbard rifle, and after checking the priming, laid the rifle across his lap, his right hand near the trigger. The reins were in his left hand, but the horse did not need guiding. He rode Eagle slowly, watching the two youths struggling to support the wounded and sobbing Quincy as they staggered down the street.

Todd's father, Gilbert Casey, rode into town on his galloping horse, dust following him. They met in front of the still closed Sheriff's office. As they watched, the three wounded youths struggled toward the doctor's home. Todd told his father what had happened, watching the cadets enter the doctor's door with the help of the doctor and his wife.

The sound of boots on gravel behind the Caseys caused them to turn suddenly. As Gilbert turned, he drew his pistol. Deputy Snipe stepped from behind the corner of the office with his rifle in his hands, pointing their way and wearing a tied-down pistol sagging low on his hip. He was a scrawny man who tried to make himself look dangerous.

"Point your rifle at either of us and you are a dead man," Gilbert said, aiming his pistol. "You best go help tend to those boys."

The deputy took his time but lowered the rifle. The two Casey men wheeled their horses and galloped out of town.

## CHAPTER 2

# ESCAPE

LATE IN THE AFTERNOON, one of Gilbert Casey's friends learned Lord Wellington Howe and the Sheriff were forming a posse to arrest Todd for attempted murder of Quincy Howe.

Following his father's advice, Todd left the farm within an hour of hearing the news of the posse and the charge. Gilbert knew the Sheriff was corrupt, and Howe remained powerful with the local judge in his pocket. The political climate was unstable, and in Gilbert's mind, it was necessary for Todd to disappear until he was able to resolve the issue.

Todd knew nothing of the posse's arrival an hour after he left or of the threat issued by Howe. Todd took his colt on a lead line behind his stallion Eagle, both horses loaded with a few possessions his parents provided. The colt was too young to ride. It wore a distinctive blaze of a white tomahawk on his forehead.

Todd's faithful dog Anvil was too old to keep up with horses but her son, Hammer, eighty or more pounds of brains and muscle, was eager to travel. The dog earned his name as a pup by gnawing off the hickory handle of Todd's favorite hammer.

Before leaving, Todd hugged his small but hard-bodied mother, and his flat-chested teenage sister Nancy. He shook his father's rough hand and stooped to pet Anvil, a large bitch that had guarded him through his teenage years. His eyes were wet with tears as he scratched her throat and then mounted, Eagle, who had carried him during his years of military training at the Academy.

Once mounted he waved to his parents, and with Hammer ready beside him, he turned away, tears running down his cheeks. His hybrid colt trailing on a lead line he cantered out of the farmyard, guiding the animals toward the mountains.

Gilbert Casey and his wife Lucy watched Todd until he disappeared around a curve in the narrow dirt road. Gilbert knew the

Sheriff was involved with Lord Howe and passed the word to his neighbors, telling them he might need help. His military service in the war was well known, and he had many loyal friends.

Following his dad's instructions, Todd rode southwest, backtracking and zigzagging over several ranges west of the Shenandoah Valley. During the lonely night, his thoughts returned to the military Academy that was his home during four years of study and discipline.

He saw the old, well-used brick buildings in his mind. The campus consisted of the large timber-framed horse barn and three brick buildings, each three stories high, built like boxes with chimneys at both ends. Each building contained a wide central stairway to allow the cadets to enter and leave quickly. Each retained its distinctive smells and its unique creaks of stairs and floors.

The buildings were severe in their furnishings, decorated with flags and rough, functional furniture. An occasional portrait looked down from the walls. The entrance hall of each building, displayed a yellow flag with a coiled rattlesnake and the words, "DON'T TREAD ON ME" written across the bottom.

He loved the Gadsden flag with the coiled rattlesnake. Every freshman soon knew it as the first official flag of the newly forming nation, flown on its naval ships in 1775. Beside it stood the Betsy Ross flag of 1776, red and white stripes, with thirteen stars on a field of blue.

The stable for the Cavalry horses, their fodder, and tack emitted the strong smell of horses and hay with a hint of leather. Todd savored the smell of the barn and his daily task of caring for and grooming his personal Cavalry horse, Eagle. The stallion was a gleaming chestnut color, well-muscled, and standing seventeen hands tall—a horse of fine breeding. Eagle was loyal, smart, and loved Todd, who relied on him as a solid anchor of friendship through the hard years of the cadet life. Todd's young dog, Hammer, who had received training beside Todd and Eagle, lived in the barn with the horses.

All of the buildings smelled of heartwood pine used for timbers and flooring. One building served as a barracks which also smelled of sweat and shoe polish. Another, used as an academic building, smelled musty and somewhat moldy because of the library. The other contained the mess hall, administration offices, and the offices for the professors. It always smelled of food, usually the aroma of cabbage soup and braised beef. It stayed somewhat warm in winter because of the cooking fire, but in summer, it was hotter than the other buildings. Its cool, deep cellar was filled with supplies, cured hams, smoked meats,

and slabs of side bacon and fatback as well as piles of meat buried in salt on long tables. There were vegetables home canned in glass jars, as well as vegetables in bins or covered in dirt.

A tall, wooden flagpole flying the stars and stripes stood in front of the Academy. Surrounding the flagpole was an area paved with flat stones, grass filling in on the edges and in the cracks. It served as the official station for making announcements, flag ceremonies, and the officer's gathering area. West of it lay four acres of flat field, kept mowed by a flock of sheep. Cadets from previous classes split the rails and built the fence surrounding the field. Beyond the flagpole, a wide gate opened into the field. The width allowed companies of cadets to march through as a unit.

No grass grew in the field around the fenced area. It was worn bare by the galloping Cavalry horses and thousands of footfalls of marching cadets. The first year students, known as Rats, were responsible for policing up the horse and sheep droppings before each drill session or parade.

Across from the parade grounds was a group of small homes where the professors lived. Near them was a large wooden building of one large room that housed the first year students, half of whom would drop out before the year ended.

The cadets wore gray woolen trousers with a tight blue blouse, decorated with woven gold colored cords on their shoulders and various symbols of rank and accomplishment. All of the cadets wore the same basic uniform and looked alike on purpose.

The students were a varied group from many economic, political, and social levels. Each went there due to the patronage of a wealthy or influential person. The uniforms made them equal except for distinguishing between academic years and cadet rank. The wool uniforms were thick, heavy, and itchy. They were warm in winter and brutal in summer.

The school proclaimed two main goals. The first goal was a classic education pointing to a career serving the colonies. The second goal centered on training men to fight for, and defend, the new colonies and the new nation emerging from England's rule. Many of its graduates served in the army, fighting against the British, some against the Indians, and all against whatever they perceived as a threat to their safety or liberty.

In 1776, the Declaration of Independence had brought a new fervor to the cadet corps, as well as a tighter vision of independence and the value of the individual.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, all men are created equal, and they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

All of the first year cadets knew they would be stopped dozens of times, called to attention, and ordered to recite all, or part, of the Declaration of independence.

A great experiment emerged from the war—"One nation under God indivisible with liberty and justice for all."

"All men are created equal." Quincy hated equality and refused to accept it. Todd recognized Quincy's basic problem. Equality was contrary to many generations of customs and privileges. He remained unprepared to accept or implement such a proposition.

For the first time in history, the people would establish and ordain their own framework of a country. No tyrant or king would impose his will—the will of the people would rule.

A deep and genuine animosity emerged between some of the boys, caused by the diametrically opposed political views of the fathers and patrons. Todd's father fought as patriot, proud of being an American and proud to help forge a new nation under God, where birthright and titles held no sway. The worth of a man was demonstrated by his abilities and his integrity.



Todd rode until dawn, set up camp after hobbling his horses, and started a fire. He fried some fatback, boiled a mess of grits, and shared the food with Hammer. Then he sacked out in a large rhododendron thicket on a mountainside a hundred feet from his campfire, his freshly charged musket at his side. His black 'puppy,' as the family called Hammer, did not appear tired from the day's travel. Todd was exhausted and pulled the dog toward him, covering them both with his blanket against the mountain chill.

At dusk, he saddled up and headed for the farm owned by Sergeant McGinnis. Everyone Todd knew simply called McGinnis

'Sergeant.' Before dawn, he found the farm deep in a hollow of the mountains. He rapped the family signal on the door. It was opened a minute later by Judith, Sergeant's tall and sturdy wife. A small child in nightclothes hugged her leg. She patted the child's head with one of her large hands with unkempt nails. She looked like she laughed easily and often.

"We had word you was a comin' soon," McGinnis said as he loomed up behind his wife. He was tall and thick, his large muscular arms covered with scars. He had a long serious face with a slightly crooked smile.

"Your dad's old scout can find anyone, anywhere," he said in a deep voice rumbling from his chest. "He left out of here last evening. He brought a lot of new information you need to know. We have fresh coffee, so come in and set a spell while we give you the news."

## CHAPTER 3

# THE POSSE

BEFORE DARK on the day Todd had left home, Lord Howe and his corrupt Sheriff began to cause trouble. Even as his son lay grievously injured and near death, Lord Howe finished rounding up a posse of his few friends and their servants. The sheriff added a few of the local men from the bars and led the group straight to the Casey farm. Word of the posse had reached Gilbert and he was ready.

A successful tobacco farmer and experienced military officer, Gilbert Casey acted as an aide to the governor in the formation of the Declaration of Independence and in the politics of writing a constitution. He fought in many battles and rode with George Washington. He was with the Green Mountain Boys who stole the cannons from Fort Ticonderoga and turned them on the British at Boston. Confrontation did not bother him.

Captain Casey had no slaves but he employed laborers. He also had many friends, and they responded to his call. They stood as a formidable group in front of the Casey home, awaiting Sheriff Grasty and the group gathered by Howe.

The sheriff and his posse arrived at the closed gate to the Casey farm. It was only a chain between two posts but it sent a message. Lord Wellington Howe, who looked and dressed like a nobleman, shouted orders, demanding Todd surrender himself for arrest. He cited "Todd's unprovoked attack on Quincy Howe and his peaceful cadet companions."

"He is not here," Captain Casey answered. "Besides, we all want to hear about this attack. Did my son pull his gun and shoot somebody?"

"He stabbed my boy about to death," yelled Lord Howe.

"What with? He only carries a folding knife and it has a three-inch blade. And where were the others he is said to have fought?"

“We ain’t answering no more questions except he beat them boys with a singletree,” the Sheriff said. “We’re taking him for attempted murder of three men.” The sheriff sat erect trying to puff himself up but remained a narrow shouldered, weaselly looking man.

“I met my son in front of your office. He did not have a mark on him, not any blood or any torn or dirty clothing. He told a different story, and we all know Todd is not a liar.”

“Are you calling my boy and them others liars, sobbuster?” Howe shouted out the words.

Casey stood at apparent ease, but he knew the mood of the men behind him. “Stand easy,” he said over his shoulder to the men.

“Mr. Howe, it is clear by your actions you cannot claim relationship with the Howe who fought at Bunker Hill. He was an Englishman, but he was a real man—no kin, I am sure.”

Howe bristled, urging his horse forward. The sheriff held out his hand to stop him.

“I plan to search the house, the barns, and the farm to satisfy myself,” the sheriff said with an arrogant tone of voice. “Men,” he yelled to his rabble, “Get ready for a scrap. I have a belly full of this bunch of farmers. Open this gate,” he shouted.

“It is not going to happen,” Gilbert Casey answered. “Get off my property or face the consequences. You are trespassing.”

“I say it is going to happen,” replied the sheriff. “I got the men behind me to prove I can do whatever I want to do. You just have a bunch of farmers.”

“Form up,” Gilbert shouted over his shoulder to his gathered friends.

The men behind him shifted into two ranks, the front row kneeling with rifles in shooting position. The second rank stood behind with rifles cocked and aimed.

“Pick targets and fire at my command.”

Gilbert Casey stepped forward toward the sheriff’s horse, ignoring the drawn pistol leveled at his chest.

“Sheriff,” he said, “we fought a war for peace and justice, and we can do it again. Many of these men here were in those battles. Now, if I were you, I would turn my horse around and take my rabble back to town before one of these muskets happens to fire by mistake—because all of these men might then fire.

“You come back here with the governor and we will talk. Do not bring papers from judge McCoy. He is a drunk and addled to boot. The

governor is an honest man. You come back without him and there will be trouble.

“By the way,” Gilbert continued, “the man riding beside you is the one who told my son you wanted him in town. I heard the conversation. He shouted it like a command as he rode away real quick, but I recognized him as your deputy, Snipe. He is the same man who sent my boy to the livery stable, and the same man who witnessed the fight peeping through the window, and the same one who threatened us with his rifle in front of your office. It looks like you and he are involved in this frame up, and it is you and Snipe who need arresting.”

The sheriff cursed, tightening his hand on the reins of his horse. The deputy rested his hand on the butt of his pistol.

“Men,” Gilbert Casey said over his shoulder. “Keep your eyes on those two edgy lawmen. Fire if they aim a gun.”

The sheriff quickly dropped his pistol into its holster.

“Mr. Howe,” Gilbert continued as he turned to the man riding behind the sheriff. “I am sorry your boy fell on his own dagger. You should be home tending him and not out here trumping up charges against my son with a bunch of lies. Now get off this land! Take your king lovers and your bought sheriff with you. Get!”

The sheriff and the deputy stared at the barrels of twelve muskets aimed at them. The sheriff swore, wheeled his horse, and kicked him into a canter. The rest of the rabble followed, but Lord Howe lingered a moment.

“This is not over, Casey. Your boy Todd is marked to die. Until it happens, he better ride looking over his shoulder.” He turned his horse and galloped away.

Not liking the situation, most of the men in the posse were happy to retreat in the face of superior odds and experience, and most were happy that the upstart spawn of Howe lay stricken at home. Only Sheriff Grasty, his deputy, Snipe, and Howe were infuriated. Their anger arose from their failure to kill Todd, not because of the well-deserved wounds of the corpulent Quincy.

One who rode with the posse later told Gilbert about the muttered conversations as they bunched up to talk on the way back to town. The sheriff, Snipe, and Howe had been riding out ahead.