

– The – Carolina Heroine

**EMILY GEIGER, COLONIST SPY
REVOLUTIONARY WAR**

1781

Sixteen-year-old Emily Geiger shared her father's support of the colonies' struggle for independence from the British. Both wanted to take up arms against the redcoats, but they couldn't for different reasons. Her father John was disabled by a stroke that partially paralyzed his right arm and leg. Emily wasn't able to enlist because girls weren't allowed to join the Continental Army.

"If only I were a man," huffed Emily. "Then I could fight for my country."

"Now, now, dear," said John. "There are other ways to help the cause, like supplying the patriots with our crops."

Emily wanted to do more than assist her father on their sprawling farm located about fifty miles north of Columbia, South Carolina. The Geigers lived among several well-off colonists who remained loyal subjects to the British crown.

Such people were known as Tories or Loyalists. Although the neighbors knew that John Geiger was a Whig – a supporter of the rebellious patriots – he was well respected. As for Emily, they considered her a thoughtful, hardworking girl.

But she was more than that. Having been reared on the frontier, Emily was strong, daring, self-reliant, and accustomed to riding long distances alone.

And she turned into a spy.

Dressed in her blue bonnet and cotton cloak, the lanky brunette would visit Tory neighbors, often bearing a basket of fresh flowers, for a friendly chat. Occasionally, she would overhear conversations of Tories who had returned from British encampments. Sometimes during her visits, her neighbors introduced her to British officers who were passing through. She paid close attention to every detail and then rode off to a rebel outpost and repeated everything she had heard.

But the Tories learned not to trust Emily. She gave herself away because she found it hard to muffle her true feelings. She displayed three traits that no good spy should have: She couldn't lie, she blushed easily when she didn't want to answer a question, and she had a sharp, sarcastic tongue.

One afternoon, she brought over a bouquet of yellow and white, pleasant-smelling chamomile. A visiting British officer asked her, "What do you call them?"

"They're rebel flowers," she replied.

"Why are they named that?"

"Because," Emily said tartly, "they thrive most when they're trampled on."

He understood the double meaning. After that, Loyalist

neighbors clammed up whenever Emily came to visit, although they remained polite to her. She was frustrated because she figured her spying days were over. But she soon got another chance.

In June 1781, Robert Riley, a fellow Whig, stopped by the Geigers' home. He had just come from the camp of General Nathanael Greene's rebel troops a few miles away. Riley told the Geigers that British forces led by Lord Francis Rawdon were marching south toward Charleston. General Greene wanted to attack Rawdon's men, but he knew he couldn't win without the help of General Thomas Sumter's forces, which were about a hundred miles away.

"Greene needs to get a message to Sumter to join up with him," said Riley. "But it's too dangerous because the area is full of bloodthirsty Tories, who most certainly will murder any man who undertakes this journey."

"If only I were a man," said Emily, repeating a wish she had uttered in frustration countless times before.

"Yes, dear," said Geiger. "But you are a young girl – and a fine, spirited one at that."

Why should it matter if the spy who carries the message is a male or a female? Emily asked herself. *I'm just as clever and brave as any boy – and apparently more patriotic. Why don't I volunteer for that mission?*

So, without telling her father, Emily rode her horse to General Greene's camp. She took off her bonnet, curtsied respectfully, and introduced herself. "General, I've heard you need someone to carry a dispatch to General Sumter."

"Yes, but it's an extremely dangerous mission through areas swarming with Tories. It will take the better part of three days."