

## **The Medal of Brigadier Gerard**

by Arthur Conan Doyle

(Adapted book. Beginner level)

My name is Brigadier Gerard. In 1814 I was a soldier in the French army, and we were with the Emperor Napoleon in the town of Reims. One day a man, MacDonald, came to see me and my friend, Major Charpentier.

'The Emperor wants to see you,' MacDonald said. 'Come with me.'

We went with him to the Emperor's rooms.

'Charpentier, Gerard,' the Emperor said. 'Come here.'

'Yes, sir,' we said.

'See on this map,' the Emperor said. 'We are at Reims, here, and there is Paris. The German and the Russian armies are near Paris, but I will stop them! My brother, the King of Spain, is in Paris now, and he has 100,000 soldiers.'

'Take these letters to my brother,' the Emperor said. 'I am going to Paris in two days, and he will read that in these letters. You, Charpentier, will ride your horse to Oulchy, then Neuilly, then to Paris. And you, Gerard, will ride to Soissons, and Senlis, and then to Paris. Only these towns. Do you understand? I said, do you understand?'

'Sir! Yes, sir!' we said.

Charpentier and I rode to the town of Bazoches. There, he took the road to Oulchy and I took the road to Soissons.

'Gerard,' Charpentier asked me, 'why did the Emperor say what was in the letters? And why did he tell us to go to towns where there are Russian and German soldiers?'

'He knows we are good soldiers and clever men,' I said.

Charpentier laughed. 'We are good soldiers, my friend, but clever men?... Oh, no!' He laughed again, then he rode away.

I rode my horse, Violette, to Soissons, and I thought about Charpentier. Why did he laugh?

It was dark, and in a forest near Soissons a woman stopped me and said, 'Soldier! Soldier, are you going to Soissons? The Germans are there.'

I did not wait. I rode Violette fast to Soissons. There they were in the streets - German soldiers. I took out my sword and shouted, 'The Emperor! Napoleon! France!'

The Germans rode after me. I cut one soldier's arm with my sword. They tried to catch me, but Violette was very fast.

We quickly came to a quiet road in the forest, and the Germans could not find me. I gave Violette some water, then we rode slowly to Senlis.

The night was dark and quiet. I thought of a girl, Lisette; she lived in Paris. I was happy.

Then there were men shouting at me. I saw six German soldiers standing near some trees. One of them shot at me. One of them got on his horse and rode after me. Violette ran fast, but she was tired now and the German soldier came very near me on his horse. He had a sword, but no gun.

I rode Violette slowly. I was ready to shoot at the German soldier, then I saw his face. He was very young - a boy of only seventeen or eighteen. I thought of his mother; I shot the boy's horse.

Oh, after that we rode fast, Violette and I. Then I saw hundreds of French soldiers on the road and I was very happy. I stopped and talked to one of them, my old friend Bouvet.

'I'm going to Paris, Bouvet,' I said. I have a very important letter from the Emperor to his brother.'

'But why are you here? The Russians and Germans are here,' said Bouvet.

'I talked to the Emperor, and he said, 'Go to Senlis,'" I said.

'Come with us, my friend,' said Bouvet. 'We're going to Senlis with some Polish soldiers. They don't like the Russians!'

We arrived at Senlis in the morning. The Russian soldiers were all in a big house in the town; there were German soldiers in the forest near Senlis. The Polish soldiers shouted, took out their swords and ran into the house. Bouvet ran with them. Then I went into the house, my sword and my gun in my hands. I was a soldier of France! I wanted to be with Bouvet and the Polish soldiers. But I had the Emperor's letter and I was wrong not to go to Paris.

'Good, now we have Senlis,' said Bouvet. 'I want a drink. Where's the wine?'

'Let's look for it. Come on!' I said

We went to a big room under the house and found some wine. We started to drink. The wine was very good.

Then there were shouts in the house; guns shot and feet ran. It was the German soldiers from the forest. Bouvet ran back up to the house. I thought of the Emperor's letter and I stayed in the room. I wanted to get to Paris.

'What can I do?' I thought. 'There are two or three hundred German soldiers in the house. There are no windows in this room. Where can I go?'

Then I saw a small door. I opened it and went into a small, dark room. I looked for a long time and then I saw a face - a man's face - a Russian soldier's face. He shouted, I shouted. Then I took out my sword and said, 'Come here. Slowly!'

'Who are you? Come on! Who are you?' I said.

'I'm Count Boutkine,' he said. 'A soldier of the Emperor Alexander of Russia.'

'Why are you here, under the house?' I said.

'I came down here for some wine this morning. I drank some wine, then you French came and I stayed here,' he said.

'Count Boutkine, this is all very difficult and dangerous,' I said.

'Why?' he said.

'There are Polish soldiers in the house and...'

'Polish!' he said 'And I'm a Russian soldier - I'm a dead man. What can I do?'

'I'm thinking, I'm thinking...' I said.

I looked at the Count. 'Your uniform', I said.

'My uniform?' he asked.

'You have a Russian uniform,' I said. 'Take my uniform. The Polish soldiers will see you in a French uniform and you can get away.'

'You're a good man,' the Count said. 'But what will you do? The Polish soldiers will see you in my Russian uniform...'

'Oh,' I said, 'they know me. I'll run to them and shout, "I'm Brigadier Gerard. I'm French."'

The Count gave me his uniform quickly.

'You stay here,' I told him. 'I'll talk to the Polish soldiers first.'

I put a heavy box at the door of the small room; I didn't want the Count to go up to the house and see the German soldiers. Then I walked into the house.

In the house I put the big Russian hat on my head and walked slowly to the door.

'Good morning,' one of the German soldiers said to me. I only knew these words in Russian: 'At night I'll see you near the tree, in the morning I'll see you at the river.'

The soldier didn't understand Russian, but he was happy with my answer. I found Violette and rode quickly away from Senlis.

I rode Violette for some time, then I saw a man. He was a Russian soldier. He rode quickly to me and smiled. 'A Russian soldier', he thought. 'I'll go and talk to him.'

'I'm finished,' I thought. I took my sword in one hand, then I took the Emperor's letter from my shirt.

'Perhaps the Russian will kill me,' I thought, 'but I'll eat this letter first!'

The soldier shouted at me in Russian, but I answered in French, 'Napoleon and France!'

The Russian stopped. I rode fast at him. My sword was out. He rode fast at me. I hit the soldier with my sword - he didn't hit me. I hit him again. He was dead.

I rode fast for St Denis and the French army in Paris. I arrived in St Denis. The French soldiers saw my uniform. 'A Russian!' they shouted. 'He's Russian!'

One young man came at me with his sword. I shouted at him in French, 'I'm Brigadier Gerard. I come from the Emperor.' Ah, his face went white then.

I gave Violette some food and water. Then I rode to Paris to see the Emperor's brother, the King of Spain. The people of Paris knew of me. They knew of Senlis and the Russian uniform. In the streets the men shouted at me and the women smiled. I was very happy.

I gave the letter to the King of Spain, and he read it. After, he looked at me for a long time. 'Perhaps he wants to question me,' I thought.

'Is Major Charpentier here, sir?' I asked the King.

'No,' he said. 'Who is Charpentier?'

'He has a letter too, sir, the same letter,' I said.

'Oh, I see. Now I understand,' the King said. 'I do not think Charpentier will arrive.' He laughed.

Not arrive? Why did the King think that? What did he understand? And why did he laugh?

I rode back to Reims and went to see the Emperor. He was with some soldiers. They had a map on the table before them. Then the Emperor saw me.

'What's he doing here?' the Emperor said. 'MacDonald, where is Charpentier?'

'With the Russians, sir.' said MacDonald. 'They have his letter.'

'Good!' the Emperor said. 'Charpentier is a clever man and I'll give him a medal. But you, Gerard... no medal for you!'

'Sir, I don't understand.' I said. 'You told me to give my letter to your brother.'

'Oh!' the Emperor said. 'I wanted the Russians or the Germans to catch you! I wanted them to have the letter! Read it!'

I will be with you in Paris in two days with my army. We are going to Soissons then Senlis.

'I want the Russian and German armies to go to Soissons and Senlis,' the Emperor said. 'Then we will go to Oulchy and Neuilly, and from there to Paris. It will be easy for us to get to Paris. Do you understand, man?'

'I understand now,' I said.

'Now? Now? MacDonald, where did you find this man?' the Emperor shouted.

I stood with my head up. 'Sir,' I said to the Emperor, 'you told me to take this letter to Paris. It was very dangerous. I did it for you. I did it for France.'

Then I told the Emperor of the Germans at Soissons, the young German soldier in the forest, Count Boutkine and his uniform, and the Russian soldier on his horse.

'They didn't catch you?' the Emperor asked. 'That's good. Yes, that's good.' Then he laughed and said, 'MacDonald, give me a medal for Gerard. He is not a clever man... but he is a very good soldier!'

- THE END -

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