

Revives the Legend that MARSHAL NEY SURVIVED the FIRING SQUAD



ON the seventh day of December, 1815, a firing squad from the French army stood in the Luxembourg Gardens, in Paris, shivering in the misty dawn, and prepared to do a grim little job of work.

Facing them stood a tall man in knee breeches and a dark coat. Waving aside an officer who offered him a bandage for his eyes, he faced the soldiers proudly and struck his breast with his hand. The muskets of the firing squad cracked out an uneven volley and the tall man fell to the ground.

Michel Ney, marshal of France in the armies of Napoleon, had been executed in the manner prescribed by a military court after the downfall and exile of Bonaparte.

All very matter-of-fact, that, with no loose ends for myths and legends to cluster on. A condemned man executed by a firing squad and borne away from the place of execution in his coffin—nothing in that, surely, to give rise to fantastic tales.

But legends and fantastic tales do arise, none the less. For the old veterans of the grand army of France, the men who had followed this Marshal Ney on long marches and through desperate battles, presently were whispering to one another that their marshal had not been shot, after all; that he had escaped alive from France and had found refuge in America, through the connivance of men in high places.

In the graveyard of the old Third Creek Presbyterian Church, near Salisbury, North Carolina, there is a flat, old-fashioned tombstone to mark the last resting place of a country schoolmaster, who died away back in 1846. If that grave were to be opened, it might contain proof that would substantiate that legend—for there is evidence—disputed evidence, to be sure—to show that the man buried in it was, in plain fact, none other than Marshal Ney.

THIS evidence was rounded up recently by LeGette Blythe, North Carolina newspaperman, in a book called "Marshal Ney: A Dual Life." In this book, issued by Stackpole Sons, Mr. Blythe has presented that evidence as one of the most romantic and amazing of all footnotes to modern history.

According to this evidence—which, as Mr. Blythe admits, is not yet conclusive, but which possibly may become so in the near future—Marshal Ney did escape the firing squad and did flee to America. In America he became Peter Stuart Ney, to wind up as a schoolteacher in the Carolina Piedmont counties. He lived for upwards of a quarter of a century as an American, and on his deathbed he raised himself among his pillows and declared:

"I will not die with a lie on my lips.



Marshal Ney as he looked when he was one of Napoleon's most trusted aids.

I am Marshal Ney of France."

It is only fair to add that there are historians who have examined the Ney legend and pronounced it false. They say that Ney's death in Paris was abundantly attested, that the American Peter Stuart Ney made numerous absurd errors in his written comments on Napoleon's campaigns and that he was, quite obviously, much younger than the French marshal would have been.

Son of a sergeant, Michel Ney rose quickly to top non-commissioned rank in the French army. Then, during the Revolution, he became a captain, and when Napoleon took command of the army against half of Europe, Ney soon found himself, a marshal, second in command to the great leader.

Napoleon's Waterloo also was Ney's. He was tried and condemned to be shot.

According to history, he actually was shot; according to legend, he was not. The legend even says that the Duke of Wellington knew of the plan to save Ney's life, and secretly approved of it. And here, says the legend, is how it was done.

Ney was given a little sack of red fluid, to hide under his waistcoat, over his heart. When he faced the firing squad, he begged the soldiers not to shoot at his face and disfigure him;



Refusing a bandage for his eyes, the tall man faced the soldiers proudly and struck his breast with his hand as a signal for them to fire.

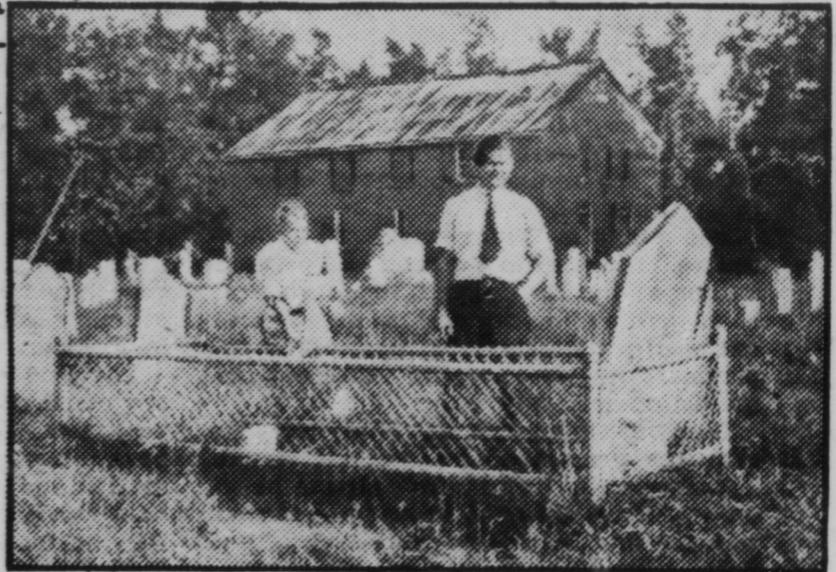
soldier in Napoleon's army and that he had to leave France for political reasons. He is a studious man, and establishes a school.

Time passes. The family of Col. Benjamin Rogers, with whom he lives, notices that he receives and writes many letters. He talks often of battles he has fought in Europe, and is plainly counting on Napoleon's return to France. When, at last, he reads in a newspaper of Napoleon's death, he falls in a faint; the next morning the family finds him unconscious in bed, covered with blood. He has tried to commit suicide.

This Peter Ney lives on for many years. He travels a good deal, and moves from place to place in the Carolinas. Occasionally he takes too much liquor, and then he talks freely of his past.

"People call me Old Ney, but they don't know me. I am Marshal Ney of France," he said once; and again. "I

The grave of Peter Stuart Ney in the cemetery of the Third Creek Presbyterian church near Salisbury, N. C.



let them shoot at his heart, instead, when he gave the sign. So, throwing his head back, he struck himself violently on the chest.

The soldiers fired—but unknown to themselves, fired blanks. Ney's blow had broken the little sack. He fell to the ground, a great red stain appeared on his left breast, and the soldiers—supposing they had killed him—marched away. The officer in charge bent over Ney's body, announced that he was dead, and permitted Ney's friends to take him away.

THAT is the legend. It goes on to say that Ney was smuggled out of Paris by his friends. He got to Bordeaux and took ship for America; 35 days later, his ship deposited him in Charleston, S. C.

By 1819, a French emigrant named Peter Stuart Ney has appeared in Cheraw, S. C. He refuses to talk about his past, saying only that he was a

am not Peter Stuart Ney. I am Marshal Ney of France, and when the emperor's son (the exiled youth known as L'Aiglon) becomes emperor of France I am going home."

So Peter Stuart Ney, who was either a great soldier in exile or a half-mad country schoolteacher suffering from delusions, lived out the long years. He wrote copiously, in a strange shorthand which is now being deciphered and which may yet prove that his boasts were true. Incidentally, Mr. Blythe submitted samples of Peter Ney's handwriting and of Marshal Ney's handwriting to a handwriting expert in the U. S. Treasury Department, and got from him the verdict that they had been written by the same man.

He died, at last, in 1846, and was buried in a country churchyard. And Mr. Blythe has shown that the romantic legend about him has the backing of enough evidence to make it worthy of further investigation.