

## **PUSH TO APPOMATTOX**



**Roland Menge**



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for Jeanne

Then, too, our republican institutions were regarded as experiments up to the breaking out of the rebellion, and monarchical Europe generally believed that our republic was a rope of sand that would part the moment the slightest strain was brought upon it. Now it has shown itself capable of dealing with one of the greatest wars that was ever made, and our people have proven themselves to be the most formidable in war of any nationality.

But this war was a fearful lesson, and should teach us the necessity of avoiding wars in the future.

Ulysses S. Grant (1885)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART I: THE NATIONAL PUSH 9

1. Lincoln moves to end the war, confers with Edwin Stanton..... 11
2. Grant learns of his promotion, talks with aide Josiah Derr ..... 15
3. Lincoln welcomes his new commander at a White House reception ..... 19
4. Josiah gets a personal inquiry from the president himself ..... 23
5. Lincoln, Stanton, and Grant talk alone in the Blue Room ..... 28
6. Grant receives his commission and a request from his aide ..... 32
7. Grant visits Brandy Station to meet his first commander, Meade ..... 36
8. Grant goes West to confer with his second commander, Sherman ..... 41
9. Josiah finds his sister Emily Derr in the contraband camp ..... 45
10. Arriving at home, Josiah encounters his boyhood friend, Hiram Stone ..... 49
11. Hiram returns to Powhatan County contemplating his family’s grim prospects..... 54
12. Hiram asks his mother to join in freeing Turner Ross ..... 58
13. Louisa Stone accepts Josiah’s letter but refuses to read it ..... 62
14. Hiram visits the slave cabins eager to speak to Turner ..... 66
15. Hiram attends as Lee explains the Richmond defenses to Davis ..... 71
16. Lee prepares himself and his forces for the spring campaign ... 75
17. Grant presents Lincoln with his plan for a national push..... 79
18. Lincoln contemplates the politics of the Union and the war..... 83
19. Lincoln considers the “Negro problem” and the citizen capacity of blacks..... 87
20. Emily Derr steps forward as champion of the contraband school..... 91
21. Josiah talks with his father about the ministry and war ..... 96
22. Grant readies his final plan as Josiah returns for duty ..... 100
23. Lee and his lieutenants view Union lines from Clark’s Mountain..... 104
24. Josiah’s regiment advances as the Union army’s national push begins..... 108

**PUSH TO APPOMATTOX 6**

25. Josiah leads his regiment in the Battle of the Wilderness ..... 113

26. Lee realizes that Grant intends to exchange life for life ..... 117

27. Sherman advances toward Atlanta, his mission “all the damage possible” ..... 121

28. Lincoln monitors the war and shores up support for reelection..... 125

29. Josiah, Hiram, and Louisa interact obliquely on a bloody battlefield ..... 130

30. Grant recoils in face of the Cold Harbor 10,000 dead ..... 134

**PART II: THWARTED AND REDIRECTED 139**

31. Lee meets Davis as attention turns to the Shenandoah Valley 141

32. Early heads out determined to strike at the Northern capitol.. 145

33. Hiram talks with his mother about the morality of slavery..... 149

34. Louisa prepares her ambulance team to join Early’s Valley campaign..... 153

35. Early prepares to meet Hunter and talks with his wife ..... 157

36. Lincoln travels to City Point, Virginia, to confer with Grant.. 161

37. Grant and Lincoln discuss the changing dynamics of the war 166

38. Early’s army pushes north amidst more scenes of “rampant destruction” ..... 170

39. Sherman falls short in a frontal assault at Kennesaw Mountain..... 174

40. Word comes to Harper’s Ferry a Confederate army is approaching..... 178

41. Emily enters the Confederate lines to meet with Louisa Stone ..... 183

42. Early plots his options as his army crosses the Potomac ..... 187

43. Hiram prevents the Harper's Ferry contraband camp from being destroyed..... 192

44. Early races against time to assault the center of power..... 196

45. A humbled Lincoln questions his own leadership after Early withdraws..... 200

46. Lincoln pauses to reevaluate the war and his political objectives ..... 204

47. Sherman faces a new bolder adversary in John Bell Hood ..... 208

48. Grant sets in motion his plan to respond to Early ..... 213

49. Josiah travels to his father’s funeral reflecting on the war..... 217

50. Emily considers her legacy from her father, her growing autonomy .....	221
51. Josiah addresses his father’s spirit regarding being a Christian soldier .....	225
52. Josiah reports to Philip Sheridan to join the Valley re-invasion .....	229
53. Sheridan brings years of preparation to the task at hand.....	233
54. Sherman unleashes the fury of war upon the city of Atlanta ..	237
55. Sheridan proceeds methodically to entrap the Army of the Valley.....	241
56. Josiah comes upon Hiram within the chaos of “The Burning”	246
57. Lincoln acknowledges the valor of the “colored troops” at Chaffin Farm.....	250
58. Early strikes with hungry troops, then absorbs a crippling blow .....	254
59. Hiram happens upon Turner’s handwritten testament of his intellectual goals .....	259
60. Hiram and Emily reprise an old tradition at Charlotte’s Grove .....	262
<b>PART III: The Final Thrust                    267</b>	
61. Lincoln learns that the nation has re-elected him as president	269
62. Sherman creates a path of destruction from Atlanta to Savannah.....	273
63. Josiah attends the Derr family Christmas weighted by war memories.....	277
64. Hiram considers his family’s slavery past and well-intentioned moral complexity .....	281
65. Hiram offers Turner his friendship amidst concerns of impending chaos .....	285
66. Elon Sievers organizes a secret society “to act when needed” .....	289
67. Lincoln promotes the 13th amendment and contemplates full racial equality.....	293
68. Sherman distributes land to Carolinian slaves liberated by his march .....	297
69. Grant considers what is still outside of his national push .....	302
70. Early watches as his remnant army is captured at Waynesboro .....	306
71. Louisa sets up in Petersburg despite the specter of defeat .....	310

**PUSH TO APPOMATTOX 8**

72. Emily learns of an invisible line in New York City..... 314

73. Lee confers with Davis as Grant extends his line westward... 319

74. Breakthrough fails; Davis bids farewell to his wife and family ..... 323

75. Lincoln visits City Point with the war’s end in sight ..... 327

76. Sherman talks with his wife Eleanor in an imagined reunion. 331

77. Davis contemplates his legacy as the chief apologist for slavery..... 335

78. Hiram reads a Richmond editorial defending “The Southern Lost Cause”..... 339

79. Early, removed from command, leaves his wife and family behind ..... 344

80. Josiah finds Louisa wounded as the Union troops overrun Petersburg ..... 348

81. Still resolved on victory, Davis withdraws his government from Richmond..... 352

82. Emily visits Mary Lincoln seeking ideas for helping former contrabands ..... 356

83. Terner leads his fellow slaves in defending the Stone Plantation ..... 361

84. Lincoln tours Richmond feeling beset by “the primal eldest curse” ..... 365

85. Sheridan cuts off the withdrawing columns of Lee’s starving army ..... 369

86. Josiah watches Lee surrender to Grant and reunites with Hiram ..... 374

87. Terner is captured and lynched as he leaves Powhatan County ..... 378

88. Lincoln promotes prompt and compassionate reconstruction leaving behind secession legalities ..... 382

89. Hiram talks with his mother about family prospects and obligations..... 386

90. Josiah visits Powhatan to pay his respects to Louisa Stone .... 391

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 397

DERR AND STONE FAMILY TREE 411

ABOUT THE AUTHOR 413

## **PART I: THE NATIONAL PUSH**



## 1. Lincoln moves to end the war, confers with Edwin Stanton

No cannons sounded on that day,—Thursday, March 3, 1864,—in the wooded hills of Virginia. In their respective camps, north and south of the Rapidan River, the soldiers of the Union and Confederate armies sat huddled by campfires, the next battle still far enough in the future to temporarily forget. The war that had locked the nation, North and South, in grim conflict, the war that had proven longer and harder than anyone had expected, had come to a halt.

In the Union's capitol, however, on this day of rainy weather, an event as important as any battle was unfolding. In a closed carriage sat two figures noticed by many on the street side. The first, tall, bearded, and marked by an expression at once genial and grave, was Abraham Lincoln, 14th president of the United States. The second, bearded also, with a bare upper lip, was in visage pugnacious and almost fierce; yet he observed the other, at this moment, with a keen solicitude and kind regard. This second man was Edwin Stanton, the Secretary of War, who had been in his embattled office for the last two of the three years the bitter war had ensued.

“Now that this new rank has been approved by Congress,” Lincoln was stating, “I think, Edwin, you and I are in accord about what the next step should be. Let us bring Grant to Washington and announce to all that he will be general-in-chief of all the Union armies.”

“It will mean giving Halleck another title,” Stanton replied. “But his reputation will not be diminished. He will still have his books.”

They were traveling along 14th Street NW, a few blocks north of the White House, having just left the secretary's house. The president had stopped there on his way back from the Soldiers' Home, as he often did, to pick up this stern, forbidding man who had clashed with him at first, and who had then, by degrees, become a close friend.

The army officers to which they referred were Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, who was to be promoted to the revived rank of lieutenant general, and Maj. Gen. Henry Wager Halleck, the current general-in-chief who oversaw the Union armies from his office in the Capitol. The rank of lieutenant general had not existed (other than in brevet form for Winfield Scott) since George Washington had held it, and it had taken an act of Congress to revive it. Halleck had been Grant's former superior in the

Department of the Missouri, and he was known as a military scholar. His *Elements of Military Art and Science*, published 18 years before, was a central part of the curriculum that many of the current leaders of both the Union and Confederate armies had studied at West Point.

“Grant will be a far different general-in-chief than ‘Old Brains’ has been,” Lincoln remarked. “I intend to let him set up his command as he sees fit, but he does not seem inclined to sit in an office.”

Here the president paused to acknowledge the hurrahs of some soldiers on the sidewalk. Within view now was the White House, with its tall white pillars in the plantation style.

“Wade, Sumner, and Davis, and their friends in Congress,” Stanton returned, “have been pleading for three years for a ‘hard war,’ as Stevens called it. Now they shall have it.”

“As shall we,” Lincoln said. “It is time for it, surely.”

Sen. Benjamin Wade of Ohio, Sen. Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, and Rep. Henry Winter Davis, of the 3rd Congressional District of Maryland, were three of the most prominent members of the Radical faction of Lincoln’s own party. Since the initial disappointment of the Union defeat at the First Battle of Bull Run, they and their allies in Congress had been pressing for what Lincoln had sought himself,—a vigorous and sustained military effort. But the “Radical Republicans,” as they were sometimes called, had accompanied that demand with others that Lincoln could not accept, such as for Congressional appointment of high-level officers and immediate emancipation of slaves in the Confederate states.

“There has been much conjecture in the press about what Grant will do,” Stanton declared. “Will he move here? Will he remain out West?”

“This will be our last summer before the election,” Lincoln responded. “If the war is uncertain, we will lose the election, and with the Democrats in power, we would lose the war.”

“McClellan is your likely opponent and just today he called himself the ‘peace candidate’ again. Meaning a negotiated settlement.”

“We cannot allow it.”

Stanton was referring, they both knew, to Maj. Gen. George Brinton McClellan, who, after a mixed result as a military commander, had turned to politics.

Within view now was the White House with its tall white pillars in the plantation style.

“I think I may have told you, Abe,” Stanton continued, “when I first met the general in Nashville last fall, he came off the train, not expecting me to be there, and I could not mark him out among the officers with him. In appearance he was the least distinguished. I told him of his new command, head of all four departments west of the Appalachians, told him how concerned we were about Chattanooga, with the rebs on Lookout Mountain, the supply road blocked, the horses starved, the men without rations... And he took it all in as if he was already working on the solution. And, by God, he was!”

“This is precisely this determined approach that we need,” Lincoln replied.

The carriage stopped in front of the White House for the president to get out. The War Building, where the secretary was headed, was a block further, just across the lawn.

“So tell Halleck to send the telegram this evening, if you will,” the president called back as the driver held the carriage door. “Within a few days, the general will be here.”

Outside the carriage, Lincoln glanced at the scene so different from the simple scenes of his boyhood. In the distance, encased in scaffolding, was the Capitol dome that he had insisted should be completed despite the war. Nearby flew an American flag, with its seven rows of five stars representing still both the Union and Confederate states.

Among those, Lincoln knew, were stars for the formerly Confederate-held states of Tennessee, Arkansas, and Tennessee, which, per his plan presented to the 38th Congress four months before (and not yet approved), were in various stages of being “restored” to the Union. He preferred this term, “restored,” owing to his belief that these states had never left the Union, but rather had been absconded by rebel forces.

At the White House, Lincoln proceeded through the North Portico. With a kindly gesture, he greeted the guard who stood at the door.

Reaching the Great Hall, he noted with relief that no supplicants were awaiting him, but he had gone only a few strides when he discovered a plainly dressed woman, only about five feet tall, approaching him with a look of distress. At once, he gave her his full attention.

The woman’s concern, as he understood it, was that her son had been mistakenly arrested as a deserter.

“My husband passed,” she entreated, “and my son came home at once because of that. He told people he was leaving. He

must have told the wrong person. He has been a good soldier all along. He has been in three battles. He was wounded in one, and, after he got better, he went back again.”

“If that is the case, ma’am, I assure you, he will be pardoned and back where he was. What is his name?”

“Tom Edwards.”

Lincoln repeated the name in his mind as he left the woman behind and ascended the wide steps to his living quarters.

There he saw his wife Mary approaching him, dressed in an elegant gown of the type that she had been criticized for wearing amidst the dearth of war. Apparently, she had it on from some official function. He knew how anxious she was to rise to the social and appearance requirements of her role.

“Tad has been looking for you,” she announced with mock drama, “and he can wait no longer!”

Lincoln laughed and saw his 11-year-old son running toward him from the adjoining room.

“Papa Day!” the boy shouted, emitting a rapid string of words such as were unintelligible for many, because of his lisp, but not for his father, who listened intently and comprehended all of them.

“In just a moment, Tad,” the president assured him, “I will be all anticipation to see this new carriage you have invented! First, though, son, sit with me here a moment while I dictate a letter. If I can locate Hay!”

“John is here right now, Father,” Mary informed.

The Lincoln’s often addressed one another in this way, not by their first names, but as “Father” and “Mother,” a practice that had given more ammunition to those who considered them quaint and provincial.

John Milton Hay, the president’s personal secretary, a bearded young man of 25 years, greeted the president with a bow.

“Just a short one,” the president said.

“To whom, sir?”

“To Maj. Gen. George Meade. Say this: ‘If there is a man by the name of Tom Edwards under sentence to be shot, please suspend execution till further order, and send record.’”

“Yes, sir, at once.”

Later, Lincoln followed as his son ran up the hall to the back door leading to the shed where he kept his two goats.

Provided by that with a moment for reflection, Lincoln recalled the first time he had taken note of Grant, when the captures of Ft. Henry and Ft. Donelson had brought the first major

Union victories in the stagnated war, in the summer of 1862, two years before. Asked for terms of truce, Grant had replied, “No terms but immediate and unconditional surrender.”

There was that decisiveness again, so needed in the national effort, the president noted, but needed more was Grant’s demonstrated capacity for management of forces and supplies. For so long he had hoped for that, the president thought, finding it not in his cautious first general-in-chief, McClellan, and not in Halleck, with his office-constrained view. But Grant was not cautious like McClellan nor office-bound like Halleck. Lincoln had great hopes that with Grant’s commission, a decisive turn toward ending the war had begun.

## **2. Grant learns of his promotion, talks with aide Josiah Derr**

Upon receiving the telegram informing him of his new command, Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant remarked to his aide-de-camp: “I was aware that this promotion was under way, as you know, Josiah. This is something I have hoped for. With a unified command, we can win this war, indeed,—providing we attack and keep attacking until it is done. It will require the best we can be in duty and valor and the worst as makers of war.”

This interchange occurred in a house on the dome-shaped hill called Orchard Knob that had been Grant’s headquarters during the battle in which he had watched the soldiers of the Army of the Cumberland, dishonored at Chickamauga, redeem themselves with their assault on the Confederate forces entrenched on Missionary Ridge. Since then, Grant had been in Knoxville and Nashville, attending to other armies in his command. He had come back to the scene of his great victory to arrange for disposition of the troops still there.

The aide-de-camp, whose full military title was Capt. Josiah Derr, listened to the general without a reply, as he often did. As often, also, no reply was needed; his sensitive face, in its nuances of expression, told much of his inner thought. In this case, Josiah welled up at the mention of duty and valor, while clouding over at the need to do the worst as makers of war.

The general and his aide were a study in contrast. Grant, at this time 41 years old, was small in height and frame, with neatly trimmed brown hair and beard, and with an appearance overall that seemed intentionally understated. His eyes, while suggesting approachability, had the bearing of a hard-scrabble farmer worn

down by setbacks while rejecting defeat. The aide was 26 years old and as neat in dress as a military cadet. He was dark-haired, clean-shaven, and athletic in build, with clear eyes indicative of noble intent and an exquisite sense of his soldierly obligations. Most notably, he lacked the gritty look of prior close encounters with defeat that so marked his commanding officer.

General Grant often talked to his aide in this plain manner, as, indeed, he did to many people around him when not in the act of command. Derr had been with Grant for more than two years, since the Battle of Shiloh in April of 1862. On this occasion, Grant had allowed himself a glass of whiskey, which he did on occasion but not often due to earlier problems.

Grant, glancing out the window toward the sandstone cliffs of Missionary Ridge, a mile to the east, recalled how two divisions of the IV Corps, and one division of the XIV Corps, of the Army of the Cumberland (consisting in total of 24,000 men), had charged in double-quick formation at first, and then in a full run, with their flag bearers in front of them. Ignoring the gunfire directed upon them, (and brought to a frenzy at times by the charismatic new leader, Maj. Gen. Philip Henry Sheridan,) they had overwhelmed the enemy soldiers in the first line of rifle pits, and, without orders to do so, had continued up through the rocks and trees to the rifle pits on top of the cliffs. The Confederate soldiers from the first line had fled in such confusion that chargers and retreaters had mixed, preventing the soldiers in the second line from firing down, out of concern for striking their own men.

In all of the campaigns of the war had been no comparable example of a frontal assault succeeding against soldiers entrenched on such higher ground, as far as Grant was aware. Maybe in all the history of warfare, there had been no such assault. It appeared as if the triumph had followed from the exhilaration and sense of invincibility created by the reckless charge. Within hours, the Confederates all along the ridge had fled toward Chickamauga Creek, where the XV Corps and the Second Division of the XVII Corps of the Army of the Tennessee, under Maj. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman, were awaiting them.

The spirit of victory, thought Grant, had spread through the Union ranks as surely as the spirit of defeat had spread through the Confederate ranks. That night, their leader, Gen. Braxton Bragg, had withdrawn his army toward Atlanta after other developments had followed on the same day.

“You know what I think of often, Josiah,” Grant observed, standing to look at a national map on the wall. “We have been in

this war for three years. We have fought more than 20 battles at a loss of some of our best people, as has been so for the South, also. And yet,"—he gestured to the map,—“all of our efforts have been along the edges of the states in rebellion... We have won the Mississippi River and Louisiana. And Tennessee. At Antietam and Gettysburg, we stopped the Confederate advances in the upper Shenandoah Valley, just over the mountains from where Lee is now. But the South, in its inner extension from Alabama to Virginia, has hardly been touched.”

To this, again, Josiah merely nodded.

“We must change that now,” the general affirmed. “We must strike the heart of the South. The only way out of this war is by pushing through. Then maybe we shall regain the fellowship we had before these issues of slavery and states’ rights made us so hopelessly divided. We who were fellows before who were able to reconcile.”

Grant spoke as if to himself, and Derr was not sure if Grant’s remark about “fellows” referred to Americans in general or to the soldiers of Grant’s generation who had fought with him in the Mexican American War, an era of commonality the senior officers often referred to.

Grant glanced at Josiah after completing his remarks, not expecting a reply. He did notice there, however, the earnest engagement that he could always rely on. He liked this young man, so guileless in his idealism; he was glad to serve as his mentor.

“Across this whole span of the South,” the general went on, “there are just two armies we need to defeat, the Army of Tennessee under Johnston and the Army of Northern Virginia under Lee. There are also forces in the Shenandoah Valley, of course, and Forrest and Mosby with their rangers in Kentucky and Virginia. They are a thorn in our side. But when we defeat the armies of Tennessee and Northern Virginia, the South will fall.”

Grant pronounced this with finality but continued to face the map.

“If only it were just that, Josiah!” Grant continued. “A brave meeting of armies, such as you and I have been trained to conduct, with the honor of soldiers we have been taught! But to defeat the Southern armies,—once and for all,—we must destroy the resources that support the armies. We must destroy the Southern roads, bridges, railroads, and factories. We must break the will of the Southern people!”

Dismissed later, the young aide went to his tent and thought

of the general's remarks on the need to destroy Southern resources and break the will of the Southern people. Through his extended family, he had relatives in both northern and southern Virginia; he regretted the need of such an assault. Through a long process of examination and self-determination, however,—carried out with the earnestness of a preacher's son, which he was,—Josiah had not only accepted his role as a soldier, but wished to shoulder more of the burden of battle than he had yet shouldered.

Josiah was no stranger to the field of battle. He had served in two battles as a platoon commander in a United States regiment (to which he had been assigned since, being from eastern Virginia, there was no state regiment he properly belonged in). Though he had been in personal jeopardy in combat, he had not experienced killing another person, and soon he had been recognized for his verbal and organizational abilities and called to serve as Grant's aide-de-camp. Thus far, Josiah had served in the Western theater against opponents not so similar in speech and manners as those he would encounter in Virginia, if Grant went east for his new command. As aide-de-camp, he would be buffered from direct participation in fighting, but he had begun to formulate some thoughts about this.

Memories of Virginia came to Josiah's mind. He recalled a college scene with military buildings. The setting was "VMI," the Virginia Military Institute, from which he had graduated five years before. Amidst the envisioned buildings was a cadet with reddish blond hair and blue eyes. This cadet was Josiah's best friend from boyhood, Hiram Stone, currently an officer in the Confederate army. Soon to enter Josiah's mind, also, were two feminine forms. One, dark-haired and serious in bearing was his younger sister, Emily. She had attended a women's college, Hollins, 30 miles from VMI. The other, who had hair of a striking red color, was Hiram's cousin, Louisa Stone, a student at Hollins, also. For her, Josiah had a fondness that continued despite estrangement due to the war.

These connections between the Derr's and Stone's had arisen, and persisted, as a result of relationships extending from the two wives of Josiah and Emily's father, Elias Derr. The first wife, Charlotte Stone, who had died from scarlet fever 28 years before, was the sister of Caleb and Nathaniel Stone, the fathers, respectively, of Hiram and Louisa. Josiah and Emily were children of the second wife, Elena. In addition to a younger brother named Ebediah, Josiah and Emily had an older half-sister named Lydia, the child of Elias Derr and Charlotte Stone. She was married to a

Union soldier, also a graduate of VMI.

“Josiah, are you still awake, Josiah?” Grant called into his tent later.

“Yes, sir, I am,” the aide replied.

“Tomorrow, we will leave for Washington. I have just made arrangements. My son will come, too, and the rest of my staff.”

“Yes, sir. I’ll be ready.”

“In Washington, as we assemble our plans, I would like for you to spend a few days at the War Department with the staff of Gen. Halleck.”

“Yes, sir. Of course.”

“We have much ahead of us, Captain Derr. This is the start of what I believe will be our final campaign. I am glad for all you have done to assist me, and for all you will do.”

### **3. Lincoln welcomes his new commander at a White House reception**

Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant and his five staff officers arrived in Washington City on Tuesday, March 8, 1864. They checked in at the immense, five-story, brick-structure National Hotel on the northeastern corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and 6th Street NW, crossways from the Washington Canal.

Next day, Grant and Capt. Josiah Derr walked eight blocks to the White House to attend the evening “levee” in his honor. The other members of the staff, given the option, traveled by carriage to the grand event.

About this man, Grant, there was so little of ceremony or self-importance that few people took note of him as he walked by in a blue uniform coat. One group of soldiers did recognize him, however; they greeted him with salutes which he acknowledged with a salute of his own.

“Call out the guard for the commanding general!” one of them shouted.

“Hope you are having a good evening, gentlemen,” Grant replied.

“Yes, sir, general, we are!” another responded.

When the White House came in view, Grant considered it with a look of apprehension. “I would just as soon they dispensed with occasions of this kind,” he confided to Josiah. “I don’t mind them from the side of the room, but being the center of attention is something I’d rather avoid.”

“Have you met the president before, sir?” Josiah asked.

“No, I never have, though I heard a great deal about him out West,” the general replied, pausing to examine a team of horses hitched to a post by a hotel. “Favorable accounts, always, from officers under me who had known him all their lives.”

He patted the head of one of the horses. “Morgan’s, they’re called where I come from. You have any like this at the orchard you told me about, where you used to go in summer?”

“Oh, yes,” Josiah nodded. “We had two like this.”

“Did you care for the horses much?”

“Greatly, when I was a boy.”

“Didn’t up for the cavalry, though?”

“I did think about it.”

“I was quite the boy expert with horses when I was coming up, back in Georgetown, Ohio,” Grant offered with a laugh. “Used to make runs every couple days from the woods to our house to stack up logs for winter. I was too little to pile the wood on or take it off so someone else would do that. I started when I was seven years old. But soon it got to be, whenever anything needed to be done with horses, they called on me.”

Josiah took remarks like this from Grant as the general’s way to convey a fatherly interest, and often Grant’s remarks took Josiah in a direction that stayed with him for some time. In this case, seeing the sunlight glinting on the mirror-like water of the canal, he recalled a similar effect of sunlight on the pond at the orchard just mentioned, which was called “Charlotte’s Grove” after Charlotte Stone, Josiah’s father’s first wife, who had planted a grove of apple trees there the spring before her life had been claimed by scarlet fever.

Another image came to Josiah’s mind, also, of Charlotte’s Grove as it first appeared when approaching it from the higher height of the road upon which he and his family had often traveled there for the traditional apple harvest in late October of each year. The pond was prominent in this view, too, with the blue-roofed, two-story, red brick house, the white barn beside it, and the neat, white fence extending around the corral, where the two Morgan horses that he had just acknowledged to the general had been kept, and from which a trail led out through pine trees to the low hills just beyond.

Upon recalling this trail, Josiah remembered riding out from the corral with his boyhood friend, and later-to-be VMI room mate, Hiram Stone; the fellow cadet that he had recalled several evenings before, at Chattanooga, in response to Grant’s comments

regarding the need to break the will of the Southern people.

“Some day we may be soldiers riding like this together”

Josiah recalled Hiram calling out as they rode, “if we go to VMI.”

He and Hiram had been just school boys at that time, Josiah recalled. VMI had seemed far in the future, and no one had imagined then that Virginians would wind up on opposite sides of a civil war.

This series of memories and images, relating to Charlotte’s Grove and its part in his childhood, passed through Josiah’s mind with peculiar intensity as he walked with General Grant along the canal.

The two together, one the bearded and gritty-featured commander of the entire Union army, the other a clean-shaven young man just four years out of college, were soon crossing the wide lawn toward the North Portico of the White House. There they saw a sign at the door, “Reception in Honor of Lt. Gen. Grant, 8 P.M.”

“I would just as soon do without the honor,” the general sighed, “but I don’t suppose we can convince them of that.”

Men and women in formal dress, and others not so formal, were approaching the high doors, from which a splendid carriage was leaving. Everyone was going in without showing invitations. Like many events at the White House, this reception was open to anyone who cared to attend.

Inside the Vestibule, the general and his aide de camp were amazed to see the president himself, dressed in a tuxedo, greeting each of the guests as they waited in a line to come through. For those he did not know, he had a cordial remark of some kind. Those he did know, he greeted by shouting their name.

“Matthew Kendrick!” he said to one. “All the way here from Plainfield?”

“Yes, sir, with the 24th Illinois.”

“And how is your father? Does he still have his shop?”

“Yes, sir, he does. My younger brother is helping him now.”

“Gabe, that would be.”

“Yes, Gabe. I will tell him you recalled him.”

“We’re honored to have you here.”

Grant did not go forward to the front of the line, as might have been expected. Instead, he took the last position, behind three women dressed in floor length evening gowns. He came forward like everyone else, with his aide at his side.

Soon, though, Lincoln peered over the crowd, settled his gaze upon the general, and reacted with a jerk of recognition and a

sudden spark of animation in his eyes.

“General Grant? Is that you?” he shouted, coming forward with long strides. “Ulysses S. Grant, I believe!”

“Yes, sir, at your service,” Grant replied. “No need for a fuss.”

“No need for a fuss!” Lincoln exclaimed. All in earshot had rearranged themselves in a circle around him and the man of the hour. “I have many powers as president, sir,” Lincoln laughed, “but to prevent a fuss has not been granted me!”

“It is an honor for me to be here,” Grant replied, looking so uncomfortable at being singled out that those around him peered with all the more curiosity upon him.

“An honor for you, general, a delight for us all!” Lincoln declared, as if addressing a group of revelers in a country square. “But, more importantly an opportunity, a new direction for our country!”

“And I hope to be worthy of that, sir,” the general replied in a tone of finality as if to say, “Well, there, we have said it and now we are done and can all settle down.”

The expansive president had other ideas, however. “Here is the general! Here is General Grant!” he persisted in his booming voice. “Where is Mrs. Lincoln?”

“Here she is, Mr. President!” called out a white-bearded man at the door leading to the Great Hall. It was the Secretary of Navy, Gideon Welles.

Mary Todd Lincoln, standing beside Welles, responded to the eyes directed toward her with more ease than had the self-effacing general; but still, in her elaborate gown, overdone in embellishments, and in the way she bustled forth, too plain and too round compared to the pretty women all around her, she did not seem to quite belong in such rarified air. Still she came forward, smiling, as if to convey that this was just another high society event such as she had so many of.

“Gen. Grant, it is my pleasure,” she exclaimed.

There was little chance of a longer interaction, by this time, as the crowd pressed from all sides, and people arrived from the Great Hall and the East Room. With the First Lady leading the way, holding his arm, the general was swept down the hall toward the East Room amidst hurrahs and loud applause.

The band, alerted, struck up a military march, as the First Lady, the general, and, close behind, the president and Capt. Derr, took up position on one end and then looked toward the exuberant assemblage under the elaborate chandeliers on the ornate ceiling.

Officers and enlisted men in blue dress uniforms, congressmen and men of influence in three-piece suits, and elaborately coiffed ladies in bustle-fanned gowns, embellished with lace, flounces, and frills, milled around under the three glass chandeliers, each six feet in diameter and eight feet high, in the ornate, open room, 80 by 37 feet in dimension, with its tall windows like pillars on the narrow dimension of the room. Dignitaries in uniforms of foreign governments, adorned with medals and braids, were in the mix, too, and common people of Washington, among whom was a boisterous group centered near tables heaped with food, where dark-skinned servants handed out plates.

The crush of the crowd was so great, in the East Room, with the several hundred guests all pressing in, that the tall president, with a nod and laugh, lifted the general up to stand on a couch in view of the boisterous crowd. Grant, seeming embarrassed by that, raised his hand in acknowledgement.

It was still apparent, however, by how those in back of the crowd who kept pressing in, that many could not see him.

“Parade around!” Lincoln exclaimed. “Let’s do one of the parade arounds!”

The guests, after turning in competing directions to their own amusement, began moving in the same direction around the perimeter of the high-ceiling room, while the general, lifted down from the couch, greeted those coming past.

“Three cheers for the Union!” one of the officers yelled. “Now and forever! Hip! Hip! Hurrah!”

#### **4. Josiah gets a personal inquiry from the president himself**

Almost unnoticed amidst the guests in the East Room as Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant endured the attention of the parade around march, was Grant’s aide-de-camp, Capt. Josiah Derr.

For anyone who did notice him, however,—as was the case with several young ladies standing in the Great Hall,—he struck a handsome figure in his crisp blue uniform with his insignias of rank on his epaulets, his sword at his side, and his hat held in his white-gloved hands.

Josiah felt disappointed that, in the swift movement of the event, he had exchanged no words of greeting with President Abraham Lincoln. But, after the parade around concluded, the president settled his gaze upon him and came across to where he

stood.

“Captain Josiah Derr, the general told me your name is,” Lincoln remarked in his emphatic manner. “From Harper’s Ferry, he said, in our new state of West Virginia.”

“Yes, sir, I am highly honored to meet you.”

“Well, I’ve been meaning to make up the slight of the improper greeting in the hall.”

“Oh, no need, sir!” Josiah replied. “I know you have much to deal with at all times.”

“No doubt of that, I’m afraid, but I am pleased nonetheless to make your acquaintance. Have you been the general’s aide for long?”

“For about a year, sir. Before that I was a lieutenant in the infantry, in Grant’s organization. He heard from someone of my student efforts at VMI, and he requested for me to attend to his paperwork.”

“VMI is the Virginia Military Institute, I believe.”

“Yes, sir, in Lexington.”

“Your record must have been outstanding, to attract his attention.”

“Yes, sir. It was.”

“Not many of your classmates, I suppose, came on with the Union.”

“No, sir, just two of us, and the other is my sister’s husband, from Harper’s Ferry, too.”

“Well, I meant to ask you about that. There was a young lady came by here, just last week, by the name of Derr, also, to plead the cause of educating the contrabands in Harper’s Ferry. Her name was Emily, as I recall. Quite an ardent spokesman of her cause, a little bit shy, perhaps, so far as she herself was concerned, but, as for her cause, not ready to accept no for an answer.”

The captain laughed. “Yes, I know this woman well! She is my dear sister. I have two sisters, the other I just mentioned, and Emily.”

“Well, your sister had a brief visit with my wife and Mrs. Lincoln was very impressed with her.”

“I am very glad to hear that, sir, but this is the first I have heard of this project.”

Actually, Josiah, on his transit to Washington, on the private train with Gen. Grant’s party, had passed through Harper’s Ferry the day before, traveling on the track of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad that crossed the Potomac River there to Maryland Heights. He had noticed the Army tents of the former slaves at the

base of the bridge, between the tracks and the brick fire house that had been used as a fort by John Brown in his ill-fated rebellion of the slaves five years before. There were a couple hundred people in the contraband camp, Josiah had observed, with what appeared to have been a whole family arriving in a canvas-covered wagon of the type used out West by the pioneers crossing to Oregon.

Josiah had also received a letter, a few weeks before, that, in retrospect, gave an indication of how his sister had come to take upon herself this new project with the contrabands. In the letter Emily had mentioned that she had read an article in the *Atlantic Monthly* calling upon all women to rise to the challenges of the war by taking on the new roles that the war demanded. "Call to My Countrywomen," as he remembered, the article had been titled. One line in particular from what his sister had told him remained in his mind: "I wish you to be the consolers and encouragers, and not tremble in perpetual need of consolation and encouragement."

Josiah also knew, however, that, although it was true that his sister had not been bold in the past, it was true, also, that this exhortation in the *Atlantic Monthly* had fallen on fertile ground. Throughout his childhood, he had been aware of Emily's quiet admiration for bold women such as Anna Dickinson, whom Emily had traveled by train to listen to when the dramatic abolitionist speaker had appeared in Baltimore. He knew that Emily admired women writers such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, and that she was a member of a woman's league collecting signatures in Harper's Ferry for an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would abolish slavery.

"No doubt you learned early not to contend with this sister in argument," Lincoln said.

"This boldness is new for her," he answered.

"Well, Captain, you can tell Emily for me, my dear wife has taken on this project and has gathered some books already."

"That's wonderful, sir. Emily will be delighted and grateful for her help, I can vouch for that. "

"I can't take much credit. Mary took it up on the slightest word. When our women are determined, what can we do?"

"I have learned this lesson myself."

"If only we men had such hearts as these, perhaps we would not fall into such wars as this one."

"Yes, sir. Agreed."

Josiah thought that the president had introduced this humor as a pleasant means to excuse himself and go off to another guest;

but, as the music played and couples began to dance, Lincoln remained nearby, holding a glass of water that had been placed in his large hand.

“I suppose, Captain, many of your classmates have taken up with the other side,” Lincoln ventured, “VMI being the school, I’ve heard, that in the past has provided many of the fine officers from Virginia.”

“Yes, sir, nearly all, including my closest friend of boyhood, Hiram Stone, who is an officer now like me. With him, too, our whole family has been sundered.”

The topic was still in Derr’s mind since his talk with General Grant just three days before in which the general had almost reluctantly spoken of the need to destroy all of the resources of the South, and the Southern will as well, in a final push to end the war.

“And how is that,” Lincoln inquired, “that the families are sundered?”

“Lydia, the older sister I mentioned, is a half sister, daughter of my father’s first wife, Charlotte, who died of scarlet fever,” Josiah explained. “Hiram is Lydia’s cousin, son of Charlotte’s brother, and another cousin, Louisa Stone, is the daughter of another brother. They both have been like a part of my own family.”

“Ah, yes,” Lincoln said. “Some members of my wife’s family, in Kentucky, are Southerners to the core, with plantations and slaves, and two of her brothers are in the Confederate Army. So it is not difficult for me to understand this family tension you speak of. You saw Hiram and Louisa then throughout your youth?”

“Yes, sir, and we were together in college,—Emily and Louisa at Hollins Institute in Botetourt Springs; Hiram and I at VMI just 30 miles distant. We were the closest friends until the start of the war.”

“And now you are estranged?”

“Hiram is a lieutenant colonel in the Army of Northern Virginia. Louisa is involved in the army, also, in nursing of the wounded. I’ve talked to Hiram twice. But Louisa refuses to communicate with anyone ‘making war on her own people,’ as she says.”

“Well, one fine day, my son, this war will end,” the President offered with a parting bow, “and then, Lord willing, we will find a way to forgive one another so as to all be fellow Americans once more.”

“I hope so, sir. It is my heartfelt prayer.”

Left to his own thoughts, Josiah admired the many beautiful women, with their lovely hair of various colors, gracefully dancing in the ornate room. The result was not to draw his thought toward them, however, but rather to divert his thought to his childhood sweetheart, Louisa Stone, with her luxuriant red hair and her own graceful movement, combined so jarringly at times with the flares of righteous anger for which she was known.

Josiah had been the recipient of this anger, especially with respect to the war and the damage that the Union armies were visiting upon the South. He had also seen another side of Louisa, however, in her gentleness toward people she cared about and her efforts to encourage those she felt entrusted for, including the slaves on her parents' plantation. Josiah had learned, also, even in grammar school, when he had seen his red-haired “kind of cousin” on family occasions, that Louisa was eager to engage his considerations of social and political questions.

She had flared up at times over disagreements, but she had never been cynical or snide regarding anything he had said, or, so far as he knew, regarding anything anyone else had said, either. She had expected of him that he would speak to her with candor, and she had spoken to him many times, staring into his eyes with her inordinate seriousness, as if to gauge his integrity and intent, before allowing him to kiss her.

It was the same kind of earnestness that extended to Josiah's sister Emily and, indeed, to all of the foursome of his college years, as the bond that held them together. They had imagined themselves working together to build a new and brave future somehow, not having ideas more specific than that, but rather a common spirit of optimism and idealism.

That spirit, too, had been dashed by the war, and Josiah continued to feel a sorrow at having lost it.

As for Louisa, Josiah had never had the second kiss that he had expected would follow from the first; the war had intervened at that time. The feeling of intimacy had continued in him, however; and he dreamed often of looking into her green eyes as he had done before the war had started. Josiah suspected that the feeling of intimacy had persisted in Louisa, also, though she had refused to have any further interactions with him after the first Virginians had perished from Union bullets, in the first Battle of Bull Run, three years before.

## 5. Lincoln, Stanton, and Grant talk alone in the Blue Room

Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, standing nearby while President Abraham Lincoln conversed with Capt. Josiah Derr, listened to the interaction, seeming to indicate, by an inclination of his head, sympathy for the family division created by the war that Josiah had described.

The Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, seated with his wife at a table near where the dark-skinned servants held trays with refreshments for guests, rose and whispered something in Lincoln's ear.

The president leaned toward the general and said, "My able secretary informs me we need to meet briefly somewhere more private, —perhaps in the Blue Room down the hall, if you will indulge us, General Grant."

"Of course, sir. At once."

In the East Room, the president, secretary, and general took seats on the two couches.

"A relief to be away for a moment," the president remarked.

"Yes, it truly is," the general replied.

"Has your wife remained out West?"

"Yes, in Louisville. She has family there."

"Julia is her name, I believe I have heard."

"Yes, Julia Dent was her maiden name."

"And she is the cousin of the Confederate general, James Longstreet, I have heard."

"Yes, James and I were classmates at West Point, and he was best man at our wedding."

"Is that so!"

"Yes, sir, who would have ever expected such divisions as we have now!"

"And have you children, also?"

"Yes, Mr. President, I have four children. My oldest, Fred, 13, is with me here. He is recuperating from a bad case of typhoid fever, contracted while visiting me in camp. My other children are Ulysses Jr., 11, my daughter Ellen, 8,—Nellie, we call her,— and a whirlwind of a lad we call Jesse, now seven."

"Sounds like my own Tad."

"Oh, yes. And with your leave, sir, I will tell you a little story about my Jesse."

"Please do!" Lincoln replied.

"In a rooming house where my wife and children were staying," the general said, leaning forward with a smile, "two

meals were served each day, breakfast from seven until noon, and dinner from two to eight. Well, Jesse, whenever he passed by the dining room, saw people seated there, and he therefore concluded another meal had begun.”

“And so he sat down!” the president replied with a slap.

“As you can imagine, sir, I soon heard the management was about to send me a new bill.”

“Well, we had a young man back home,” Lincoln returned, leaning forward in the same way, and with a similar smile, “much older than your Jesse, of course,—old enough to have learned just how few good meals life provides!—and he heard of a tavern where for a quarter you could eat all you wanted, provided you did it in one sitting. And, it got so, at the sight of him loping down the road, the tavern lights would go out, the guests inside would be routed out the back door. I asked the owner about that and he said, ‘In one meal this man can take my profit for a whole day. I don’t think, on account of that, I can be held to my offer.’”

“Well, I trust my Jesse will learn of limited meals before he causes any shutdowns of taverns,” the general responded.

“Have you considered, General Grant, where you will set up your headquarters?” Stanton asked. He had followed the interaction without ever losing the fierceness of visage conveyed by his downcast eyebrows and inflexible lips.

“Not quite, sir, I’ve been weighing between here and closer to General Meade, in Virginia, maybe between him and the Rapidan, where Lee has set up his line,” Grant replied in a businesslike tone.

“So you will not return out West?”

“Just to set up the command there.”

“Meade will be under you now, also.”

“From what I know of him, sir, he and I will work together with no problem. But my intention overall, with no slight to him, is to be close to the battle myself. We will eventually call in the Army of the James, also, and I want to be in the midst of whatever we do when weather permits, which will be soon, I think.”

“And that we are glad to hear,” Stanton remarked.

“Well, if Julia and your family move here,” the president said, “we will be glad to assist them. I can assure you my Mary will be delighted to be brought into the arrangements.”

“We will be much obliged.”

There was a slight pause at this juncture, at which the strains of a waltz and laughing voices drifted in from the East Room.

“General, there’s one thing more I’d like to make you aware of,” Lincoln ventured with a change in tone. “Tomorrow, at the cabinet meeting, when I present your commission, I will say a few words. I’ve written them down so you won’t be surprised. You will then reply. I have written down, also, what I think would be appropriate for you to say.”

“Thank you, sir. I will adhere to it carefully.”

“It is not that I don’t trust you, but this is what we provide to the press later and then I don’t trust.”

“Some of the Copperheads are worse than the rebels!” Stanton threw in. “They jump upon any mis-statement and trumpet it to the entire nation!”

“I will take that as a dire warning, sir,” Grant answered.

“On a like note,” Lincoln continued, “although I shall not seek to intrude on your freedom, yet I must warn you to be on guard in general with the press.”

“It’s not just the Copperheads,” the secretary said, “there’s a whole group of them bent on making things hard. Horace Greeley up in New York has been promoting his meeting in Niagara Falls, telling people there’s a way to end the war without a military victory.”

“Yes,” Lincoln threw in. “While it is true that our greatest challenge in preserving the Union is in winning the war, there is another war,—or a struggle at least,—in maintaining the Union in our Northern states where some of our well-to-do citizens regard the war as an impediment to business. That is what’s behind Horace’s effort, I am convinced myself. He has a whole group of mill owners behind him who only care about the availability of cheap cotton. No consequence to them whether cotton be furnished by slave hands or free.”

“Like our good friend, McClellan, the so-called ‘peace candidate,’” Stanton added. “He and his Democrat friends watch for any mistake we make, in word or deed, to call it down upon us.”

“McClellan is slow to mount an attack in battle,” Grant commented. “Maybe he will be slow in this attack, also.”

“Not so with us! We need to strike hard!” Lincoln declared. “We’ll need to sustain losses. And they’ll be waiting to pounce on it as too much or too little.”

“Yes,” said Grant. “I have observed myself that they take a Union victory and make it seem qualified, while they take a Southern victory and make it seem like a rout.”

“All too true!” Lincoln returned with Stanton nodding

assent.

“I can assure you, though, we will advance in such a way that they will hardly have time to calculate,” Grant asserted.

“General Grant, this is what I have longed to hear for some time!” Lincoln said.

“I shall do my best to deserve your confidence, sir.”

With that, the group rose from their chairs, and Stanton and Grant returned to the East Room together while the president stayed in the Blue Room, sank into his chair, and looked at the *New York Tribune* left there earlier in the day.

In the six columns of dense text without illustrations on the front page of the newspaper, Lincoln found a single reference to the event he was occupied with at the moment: “OBJECT OF GRANT’S COMING TO WASHINGTON. It is generally understood here that the object of General Grant’s journey to Washington is to take Halleck’s place.”

Except for that cryptic report, however, the president could find no reference at all to the possible changes in command that many had been speculating about. He knew, though, without having to look into the other newspapers lying on a nearby table, how reaction would fall into the various camps that he had been dealing with throughout the war.

On the pro-war side, the self-styled radicals of his own party plus the more moderate members, the anti-slavery members of the border state Union Party, and the so-called “war Democrats” would all hail Grant as a general who would bear down hard on the rebels at last.

On the anti-war side, the pro-slavery members of the Union party and the “peace Democrats,” otherwise known as the Copperheads, would castigate Grant as an unskilled butcher who had won battles by throwing away lives and who would continue to do so, heedless of the great losses sustained by his army. They would say that Grant had no understanding of war as an arm of diplomacy wielded to achieve an initial advantage in negotiation. They would say that Lincoln’s selection of Grant showed that Lincoln, too, was hopeless in seeing no way to end the war other than in application of blunt force.

Of this, too, the president was quite aware, and the mere thought of it, engendered in him a silent resolve to continue the course despite what might be said of him in the press.

Meanwhile, thought Lincoln, any situation that could be exploited had to be attended to as well as the battles being fought. In Confederate areas in the South, more had to be done to make

the slaves aware that, as a result of the Emancipation Proclamation, they were legally free. Desertion of the labor force of the plantations would strike a blow to the South. Maybe Frederick Douglass, the freedman spokesman of the Negro cause, could be enlisted to help with that.

In the North, the latest conscription call had been issued that very day. A total number of 500,000 had been called for two months before, with that number to be reduced by the number who had volunteered for service in the meanwhile, thought to be close to 200,000. Two years before such a number of drafted men had seemed gigantic, but not so much anymore when battles such as Antietam and Gettysburg resulted in the casualties of tens of thousands.

## **6. Grant receives his commission and a request from his aide**

After observing Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant in his interactions in the White House ballroom, some advisors of President Abraham Lincoln had remarked that the new general of the entire U.S. army had not appeared to be such a giant figure as people had expected. The next day, however, a different General Grant presented at the Cabinet meeting where, ceremoniously, he was to be awarded his commission.

This different General Grant gave the impression of possessing an inner strength that he would be capable of wielding at any moment. In his plain uniform, with his two stars on each epaulet, where there would soon be three, he seemed a man of no nonsense, ready to apply himself to the task when duty required. His obvious stature among his staff officers, among whom were his aide de camp, Capt. Josiah Derr, also told much about Grant. They stood erectly, positioned like a guard with Grant at their center.

Lincoln rose and the eight men at the table rose, also, though the lanky president still towered above them. Glancing at them, he saw representatives of the divisions, from radical to moderate, that he had sought to placate and balance in order to present a united front in the war.

On the radical side, and physically close to one another in the room, were the long-bearded secretaries of the Navy and War, Gideon Welles and Edwin Stanton, respectively. With them was the Secretary of the Treasury, Salmon Portland Chase, the clean shaven, broad-browed former leader of the Free-Soil Party whose

name had recently been put forward, the *New York Times* had reported, as part of “an active opposition to the renomination of Mr. Lincoln.” *The Times* had remarked that “Mr. Chase is relieved of complicity, for all know him to be too honorable to be involved in such as a scheme.” But Lincoln, knowing Chase’s long-standing ambition to be president, doubted that Chase was totally free of involvement.

Across the table from these radicals were several in continual conflict with them owing to their own more moderate policies with respect to the war effort and emancipation. Most notable of these was the thin and aloof former senator from Maryland, Montgomery Blair, whose family in the antebellum years had been Jacksonian Democrats and whose father had published the pro-Democrat *New York Globe*. The junior Blair had become anathema to the radicals owing to his family’s connection with efforts to end the war through negotiation.

John Palmer Usher, Secretary of the Interior, was in this moderate group, also. He had lost interest in the war as he had promoted a railroad from the Mississippi to the Pacific coast. Hannibal Hamlin, the vice president, a former senator from Lincoln’s own Illinois, had been brought into the Cabinet as an appeal to Midwestern voters. Edward Bates, the attorney general, had supported Lincoln’s early efforts to suspend *habeas corpus* in order to arrest and hold Southern sympathizers, but he had been demoted in influence by the others because of his resistance to civil rights for blacks.

Separate from all in the room was the Secretary of State, William Henry Seward, clean shaven like Chase though less suave in appearance. Due to his resented influence on the president and the charge that he dealt with the European nations without seeking the advice of the president and his fellow Cabinet members, Seward had been the subject, two years before, of Congressional demands for removal, demands the president had rejected.

These were men of intoned speech and expansive gestures, Lincoln knew; and, glancing from them to Grant, he was struck with how unlike them the general was in seeming free of any desire to impress.

“General Grant,” Lincoln began, “the nation’s appreciation of what you have done, and its reliance upon you for what remains to be done in the existing great struggle, are now presented, with this commission constituting you lieutenant-general in the Army of the United States.”

These were the exact words Lincoln had conveyed to the

general in his note of the previous evening. He paused to pin the new stars on Grant's epaulets and went on with his remarks.

"With this high honor, devolves upon you, also, a corresponding responsibility," Lincoln continued. "As the country herein trusts you, so, under God, it will sustain you. I scarcely need to add, that, with what I here speak for the nation, goes my own hearty personal concurrence."

General Grant stepped forward with a complete lack of fanfare or self-importance.

"Mr. President," he declared, "I accept the commission with gratitude for the high honor conferred. With the aid of the noble armies that have fought in so many fields for our common country, it will be my earnest endeavor not to disappoint your expectations. I feel the full weight of the responsibilities now devolving on me; and I know that if they are met, it will be due to those armies, and above all, to the favor of that Providence which leads both nations and men."

In so speaking, Grant followed the exact words prescribed, and, after completing these words, he took a backward step and resumed his posture of self-containment.

"Do you expect, Gen. Grant," Chase inquired, "that you will start your efforts in Virginia, with some battle there?"

Lincoln reacted with a large hand upraised. "Now, Secretary Chase, although I am aware of, and admire, how your intellectual curiosity compels you at every moment, I promised the general he will answer no questions today."

"With your permission, Mr. President," the general interjected with a bow, "I will make just one comment."

"Of course."

"When I do start, Mr. Chase," Grant remarked, "whether in Virginia or elsewhere, it will not be with a plan to win a battle; it will be with a plan to win the war."

"Heartily applauded," Lincoln concluded.

Grant and his staff were ushered out by the president, who walked with them down the Great Hall. There they saw two men in suit coats that Lincoln recognized from a distance.

"Yonder are two wolves for whom we are not men but sheep," Lincoln said to Grant. "The one on the left is Herbert Klein from the *New York World*. The one on the right is his assistant."

Upon seeing the president, the men walked toward him briskly, coat tails flapping as each readied the notebook held in one hand and the pen in the other.

“Have you heard what the wolf said to the sheep?” Lincoln asked Grant as the men closed upon them, with the leader, Klein, becoming more animated with every step, his mouth opening to speak, his hand raised, the one with the pen in it.

“No, I have not, sir,” the general replied.

“He said, ‘No need for alarm. I mean to accommodate you in every respect.’”

“That might well be a principle of war. The second part.”

“I had not thought of that.”

“Mr. President!” Klein called out. “Pleased to see you, sir!”

“And I would be pleased to see you, also, Herbert, were it not for the keen look in your eyes.”

“I have been asked to inquire of you, sir, will you go forward with plans for more battles despite the possibility some are referring to now of peace negotiations that could save thousands of American lives?”

“We do not take lightly the loss of any American lives,” the president replied, “and we will consider any offer to end this long war that preserves the Union and frees the slaves.”

“A question for the general, sir?”

“The general is a man of few words, he was just telling me. He does not reply when accosted in halls.”

Outside the White House, with the president having departed, Grant and his staff walked back to the hotel. Soon the general dropped back to review business with his aide.

“Josiah, as I mentioned to you in Chattanooga, I would like for you to stay here in Washington for a week,” Grant remarked.

“Yes, sir, of course,” the aide replied.

“I telegraphed to Gen. Halleck already. He will assist you in making up an inventory of all our armies nationwide.”

“Yes, sir, of course.”

“Tomorrow, I go to see Gen. Meade in Brandy Station. Directly on that, I meet with Sherman in Nashville.”

They continued through the peaceful scene. The hills of Virginia were visible in the distance, on the far side of the Potomac River.

“I was thinking, also, Josie, when I heard the president referring to your family in Harper’s Ferry,” Grant resumed, “this may be a good time for you to take a furlough.”

“I would be glad for the furlough. I cannot deny that.”

“After your furlough, you will be a Major.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“You can join me at my new headquarters.”

At the hotel, they paused outside.

“Sir, with your permission,” ventured Josiah. “I have been meaning to talk to you about something that has been much on my mind.”

“Of course, Josie, speak freely.”

“I would like to be considered for battle duty, Gen. Grant. As for my promotion just mentioned, I understand it may be therefore revoked, and I hasten to say, it has been a great honor to be your aide, I have learned much from it and admire you greatly, but I am a soldier, sir. I have deliberately become a soldier through VMI. And so, I merely express this wish, with due respect for the difficulty of your position. I know the outcome will rest on what is good for our army.”

Grant considered the unclouded face of the young man standing before him. Josiah, as Grant knew, was no stranger to battle. Prior to being called upon to serve as aide-de-camp, Josiah had commanded a platoon in several battles, including at Shiloh Church, under Grant’s command. Grant had heard good reports about him, along the lines mainly that Derr had never been ostentatious as a battle presence but strong and silent in holding his position.

“I will think about what you have asked me, Josiah,” Grant answered. “In requesting this, you show the spirit of devotion to duty that I have noted before. But, as for your future assignment, it will be what is best for our collective efforts, as you say.”

“That is my own deepest wish.”

“We will see then what can be arranged when you return. In any case, you will keep the promotion.”

“Thank you, sir. Good day.”

## **7. Grant visits Brandy Station to meet his first commander, Meade**

The next day, Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant went from Washington City to Brandy Station, Virginia, a distance of about 60 miles, to meet Maj. Gen. George Meade, commander of the Army of the Potomac.

Grant traveled by private train on a track of the Orange & Alexandria Railroad, which, as he knew, continued beyond Brandy Station to the Rapidan River, beyond which was Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia, bivouacked for the winter. They were waiting there, Grant knew, for the attack everyone expected to

begin in the spring when the snows melted and the roads were dry.

As he watched the countryside passing into view from the window of the train, Grant mulled over what he had heard about Meade. He had served with Meade in the Mexican American war, but as a junior officer, never having direct contact, as Meade had been a senior officer at that time. Grant had heard Meade praised as an able commander and for his victory in Gettysburg. He knew, also, that Meade had been criticized by many, including President Abraham Lincoln, for not pursuing the army of Lt. Gen. Robert E. Lee after its defeat.

Grant recalled an article he had come upon in the *New York Herald*, in the National Hotel, on the evening of his reception at the White House, a summary of the accusations leveled against Meade by the Congressional commission investigating Meade's performance at Gettysburg. Among the charges was the accusation that Meade had been disengaged from the battle, to the extent of not being aware that his soldiers were involved in some skirmishes that they had won; and that, after the battle, Meade had not only neglected to pursue the defeated Lee, but had called back his lieutenants from doing so with the desultory order, "Let him go." The article had also listed another charge: that Meade had called for surrender earlier in the battle, an order his generals had ignored.

Grant had enough distrust of both Congress and the press not to take these charges at face value. He had another source of information, regarding Meade that he trusted more, the reports of fellow officers who described Meade as an able commander. Howsoever that might be, Grant reminded himself, he would need to assure that his forces in the new campaign would respond more aggressively than Meade had done, not only in victory but in response to setbacks.

Thirty miles from Washington, the train crossed Bull Run, where Grant could see, on his right, the tree-covered hills where the first skirmishes of the war had occurred. The North had not been ready for such a serious engagement, he reflected. There had been shock nationwide over the 4,000 casualties that the battle had brought. What was that loss, though, Grant reflected, compared to tens of thousands at Antietam and Gettysburg? War had come to be known, since then, as more grim and comprehensive in what it required and affected.

Just ten miles further than that, Brandy Station came into sight. It was a sprawling camp, more than a mile across with white tents in long rows, amidst tall pines, and log buildings on the edge,

where horses stood in corrals. Beyond that were the buildings of the town. Women and children moved about there among the houses, but not all the women were with families, Grant observed. There had been an ongoing problem around the camps of prostitution and other illicit activities.

A band struck up the “Generals’ March” as Grant emerged from the train. Zouave troops waited in their distinctive uniforms of blue jacket, red baggy trousers, red fez, and white boots. General Meade was standing erectly in a long-coated uniform with three members of his staff beside him. He was tall, lean, and dignified, with a chin beard of a type worn by European nobility. He had sunken eyes shadowed by a prominent forehead.

“Lieutenant General Grant, we are honored by your visit,” he said with a bow. “Congratulations on your promotion.”

Grant and Meade walked together to Meade’s tent as soldiers stood in attention around them,—Meade tall and patrician in figure, Grant looking like an unremarkable man of a Western small town, a farmer or leather worker, such as his father had been.

In the tent, they sat at a table.

“General Grant, I am ready to step aside if you have someone, such as Sherman, that you would feel more at one with,” Meade said at once. “I am eager to serve wherever you place me.”

“General Meade, I respect and appreciate your service, and I desire for you to stay in your current position,” Grant replied.

The attitude expressed said much of good about this man of grave bearing, Grant thought. Still, there was the matter of the hesitation; he could not dismiss it.

“General Meade,” Grant began, “in our spring campaign, we will have one task, to strike at Lee until the Army of North Virginia is destroyed.”

“Yes, sir,” Meade replied.

“With that objective defined,” Grant said, “I would like to hear your thoughts on the situation that now exists between the two armies, and what the possible strategy might be.”

Meade rose and turned to a map mounted on a board on one side of the table. The map showed an oblong area of Virginia 80 miles east to west and 150 miles north to south. Running from west to east, along the north border of the map, just west of the city of Fredericksburg, which at present was in Union hands, was the Rapidan River, the present division between Meade’s Army of the Potomac and the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia under Lt. Gen. Robert E. Lee. In the bottom center of the map,

northwest of the James River and its estuaries, was the semi-circle of defenses around the Confederate capitol of Richmond and its rail center, Petersburg.

“If we strike from the Rapidan, where we are now,” Meade proposed, “we hit Lee at the point where he has his weakest defenses. The terrain prevents him from building better defenses. But this same terrain,—the ‘Wilderness,’ as it is called,—will make it hard for us to advance. There are many unfordable streams which will require bridges to be built for passage of artillery. Also, if we attack from this northerly point, we must bring all our supplies across land from Manassas.”

To this, Grant nodded but made no reply. Indeed, these were the exact thoughts he had had himself.

“If we attack further south,” Gen. Meade continued, “we have open ground for advances, but the open ground is built up with barricades so strong that one man of theirs will be worth five of ours. On this south-eastern side, we can supply ourselves from the James River. We will have unlimited supplies. But, also, if we move to the south, the way is left open for Lee to strike through the north toward D.C.”

“And what is your conclusion, then?” Grant asked.

“I would say, let us strike on the north, through the Wilderness, where Lee has his weakest defenses, but on his right flank so we may pivot southward if needed. We will safeguard against the danger of an attack by him from his left flank with our reserve forces.”

“Precisely as I have thought myself,” Grant remarked.

He was glad that there would be no need of persuading Meade of a different plan of action, he acknowledged to himself, but he would still need to ensure that the assault would not falter once begun.

“I would just say this,” Grant declared, “with due respect. I have observed that, no matter what might be the circumstances of a battle, the side that is attacking is presumed by both sides to be winning, and thus gains the mental ascendancy as the action continues. I say this because whether on any given day we win or lose, if at all within our options, we shall attack. We can keep attacking because we have more men. Lee, with his small and irreplaceable army, will need to conserve his forces, but, if we move our army between him and Richmond, he will have no choice.”

“Yes, sir. I understand,” Meade replied, making the connection between this declaration and the caution he had been

accused of after Gettysburg.

“Some say the fall of the Confederacy will come with the fall of Richmond,” Grant continued. “But, our object, General, will not be Richmond. Our object will be to destroy Lee’s army. When the Army of Northern Virginia is defeated, the Confederacy will be defeated, in my opinion.

“We will move toward Richmond to keep him attacking in order to intercept us. We have many more men than General Lee. We will keep attacking until his army is used up.”

There was a pause again during which it became apparent that Grant had concluded his message.

“And, sir, have you considered where you will set up your own headquarters?” Meade asked. “Will it be in Washington where you can be in close contact with Stanton and Halleck?”

“I want to be closer at hand,” Grant said. “I have just now decided on Culpepper in looking at this map.”

Culpepper was only ten miles from his own camp, Meade thought, and ten miles closer to Lee. He had felt complimented at being asked for his opinion of where to initiate the attack on Lee, but now he understood that Grant was not so trusting of him or so appreciative of his abilities as he had begun to believe.

“The house is available there where I had my command before we moved here,” Meade offered, being careful not to show any negative reaction. “I will be glad to assist you in arrangements.”

After leaving Grant at the train that had brought him, Meade told a trusted staff officer of Grant’s intention to move nearby.

“To keep a close watch on us, do you think?” the officer asked.

“Yes, I think so,” Meade answered.

Later Meade recalled what Grant had said about the need to keep on attacking and, if necessary, to accept a large number of casualties such as Lee would not be able to sustain. His own responsibility, he reflected, would be to send these men into battle. He did not like the prospect of having to do that under a “close watch,” lacking the ability to exercise his own sense of prudence for safeguarding lives.

## 8. Grant goes West to confer with his second commander, Sherman

Soon after returning to Washington City from his visit with Maj. Gen. George Meade in Brandy Station, Virginia, Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant left with his staff in a private train along the track of a different railway, the Baltimore & Ohio. The object of this trip was to meet in Nashville, Tennessee, with Maj. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman, to whom Grant had assigned his former command, the Military Division of the Mississippi.

Grant had no reason, as he traveled through Maryland and West Virginia, to speculate on unknowns of personality as he had speculated on his previous trip regarding Meade. He had fought with Sherman (as his superior in rank, though younger in age by two years), at Shiloh, Memphis, and Chattanooga. As a result of these shared experiences and a growing shared philosophy of war, Grant and Sherman had become close friends.

Grant also believed that he was indebted to Sherman for the military success that had brought him his recent promotion. Two weeks before, on Friday, March 4, 1864, he had sent Sherman a letter in which he had said: "How far your execution of whatever has been given to you entitles you to the reward I am receiving you cannot know as well as me."

Later, as he looked out to a wooded bank of the Ohio River, beside which he was traveling, Grant recalled a similar woods obscured with smoke of cannons and guns. He was riding along the line of engagement to assess the ongoing state of the battle, with respect to his own command at that time, the Army of the Tennessee. Sherman was there, holding the line with his Fifth Division while others were falling back. Grant had heard the men refer to Sherman as a "general who led from the front." Sherman was a stalwart soldier who evinced the finest qualities of leadership and gallantry.

Sherman was standing at the station, flanked by his staff officers, when Grant stepped from the train. Though often rough in appearance, with his red hair uncombed, Sherman had groomed himself like a West Point cadet at inspection. Despite meeting an old friend, he did not smile as he saluted.

"At your service, sir," he said, giving no indication of any bond between himself and his new commander.

Later, though, when the two generals separated from the others, Sherman declared: "Grant, it's great to see you as always. I assure you there is no one I would rather have in your new

position than you.”

Sherman, as always, looked intense, with his shoulders held stiffly. That did not bother Grant, however, who was accustomed to Sherman’s high-strung nature and rapid, articulate speech. By contrast, Grant appeared relaxed. His words came more slowly in the laconic cadence of the rural frontier.

“Were the situation reversed, Cump,” Grant said, “and I was reporting to you, I would be as glad.”

“What did you think of ol’ Abe?”

“The man is what we used to call a good ol’ boy. Not a false bone in his body.”

“That is what I have heard from others, also.”

That evening, at Grant’s request, Sherman rode with him on Grant’s private train to Cincinnati. While in route they discussed which generals presently without assignments might be restored to service for upcoming campaigns. These generals included George Brinton McClellan, Ambrose Burnside, and John C. Fremont in the East; and Don Carlos Buell, Alexander McDowell McCook, James S. Negley, and Thomas Leonidas Crittenden in the West. They agreed on a geographical division, with Sherman assigned to those in the West while Grant kept the rest himself.

“I would request to keep your ideas from Stanton until I speak to him,” Grant said. “It is just a matter of courtesy.”

“Of course.”

Next day came the more important discussion of disposition of the federal armies in the succeeding months. For this, the two generals met with their staffs in the Burnet House in Cincinnati, an elegant hotel that at one time or another had housed just about every major politician and military leader in the area.

On the wall beside them hung a national map, amidst other maps strewn around on study tables.

The map was the same that Grant had pointed out to his aide, Josiah Derr, on the day when he had received the invitation to travel to Washington to accept his new command.

The map showed the American nation extending from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, but with only half of it demarcated into states. Minnesota, Iowa, and Missouri, positioned north to south along the west side (mostly) of the Mississippi River, and Kansas, to the west of Missouri, were the furthest west shown of the contiguous union. Bordering on the Pacific Ocean were the states of California and Oregon. Nevada, just added to the Union, was still shown as a territory. In the vast area without demarcated states were the territories, also, of Dakota, Nebraska,

Montana, Idaho, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico, and the “Unorganized Territory” relegated to the Indian tribes that had been forced into Oklahoma.

Indicated on the map by colored pins were the armies that Grant had mentioned to Josiah as those the Union would have to defeat in order to end the war. These armies were, most notably: the Army of Tennessee under Gen. Joseph Eggleston Johnston, currently defending the route to Atlanta, after withdrawing from Chattanooga; and the Army of Northern Virginia under Lt. Gen. Robert E. Lee, currently positioned between the Union Army of the Potomac and the Confederate capitol of Richmond. Of strategic importance, also, was the Confederate Trans-Allegheny Department under Maj. Gen. John Cabell Breckinridge, in the upper Shenandoah Valley; and the Confederate forces in Louisiana and Alabama, currently being assaulted by the Union Navy under Adm. David Glasgow Farragut and the Union Army of the Gulf under Maj. Gen. Nathaniel Prentice Banks.

Other pins represented the Confederate ranger units operating in Kentucky under Lt. Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest, and in Virginia under Col. John Singleton Mosby, both of them never an existential threat, but effective in wearing down public support for the war in the North.

“On this I know you and I agree,” said Grant, indicating the pins on the map for Johnston and Lee, “our focus must be on destroying these two armies. My part of that will be Lee, yours will be Johnston. By taking Johnston and joining Atlanta to Mobile, we will split the Confederacy again, as we did by winning the Mississippi.”

“Do you have a general plan yet, Grant, for how we will coordinate?” Sherman asked.

“Nearly so, yes. But, Cump, I have decided to present it to the president before I go further. He has not asked for this, and, in fact, he told me he did not care for details, but I feel it is to the benefit of all for him to understand it.”

“Yes, sir, agreed,”

Later, when the generals sat in the hotel dining room with drinks, their talk turned again to Shiloh, the battle they had fought in together almost two years before, in early April of 1862.

“Grant, I remember that first night,” Sherman remarked, “when I came upon you smoking your cigar there at the edge of the woods, I didn’t want to say how bad it had gone, so I said the Devil had given us a bad day. And you said, ‘Well, lick them tomorrow.’”

“Which you did.”

“Some were saying I was crazy at that time,” Sherman continued. “I had to reach an accommodation to do the work of war.”

“As had we all, Cump, as had we all,” Grant returned. “They had plenty to say about me, also, as I think you will recall.”

“Yes, I do,” Sherman replied.

“For us both, I think, that battle was a cause for alarm,” Grant observed, “not just the extent of damage, but that the enemy, supposedly defeated, had just withdrawn; and, by doing so, would be nursed and sustained by a sympathetic population. It made us realize we would have to accept that battles would be fought harder and faster and with more loss of life.”

“It made us realize, also, and I know you agree with this,” Sherman replied, “that the non-military public, and the cities and countryside, too, must be relentlessly attacked to the extent they are supportive of the war effort. I’ve heard it called ‘total war.’ This is what has been laid at our feet.”

“That is the nature of the accommodation you referred to, I know,” Grant remarked. “Neither of us expected this, or wanted it, and, yet, as you say, it has been given to us and the most we can do is to be worthy of this great obligation.”

Following from this, Grant thought later, after leaving his old friend behind in Cincinnati, of a remark Sherman had made to a group of junior officers during the Siege of Memphis. “War cannot be refined,” Sherman had told them. “It is cruelty, and no noble sentiment can cast it in any other mold.”

Many, hearing such words, would have thought that Sherman was an insensitive person, given over to a mindless infliction of damage, Grant reflected; but Grant’s own sense of Sherman was that the opposite was true. Sherman was a person with an acute sensitivity to damage who had subjected all he had seen and done in the war to a scrutiny merciless to his own mentality; and that mentality, Grant had observed, was one inclined to dark moods and bleak assessments. Grant recalled Sherman walking amidst the piled up bodies at Shiloh, and he remembered, also, how overwhelmed Sherman had been following the death of his eight-year-old son after the boy had contracted camp fever the year before during a visit with his father. Through experiences like that, Grant knew, Sherman had arrived at the attitude that he had expressed in Memphis, and these same experiences had added an emotional intensity to his conviction that the war had become so horrible it had now to be visited upon

those in the South who had thus far avoided its horrors.

In connection with this, as he traveled back to Washington, Grant thought again of the clear eyes and ardent idealism of his aide-de-camp, the new major, Josiah Derr, and of how Josiah had requested to be given battle duty when the snows melted in Virginia and the push began.

### **9. Josiah finds his sister Emily Derr in the contraband camp**

The next morning, on the same Baltimore & Ohio track upon which Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant had traveled eastward, only eight hours before, Maj. Josiah Derr was traveling westward, looking out to a view familiar from his boyhood.

The view was of a town of a hundred or so buildings, constructed mostly of red brick or stone, and situated on a dome-shaped hill above two rivers that converged near the trestle bridge toward which the train was heading. Across from the town, on both sides, were bluffs crowned with trees. Many of the buildings—amidst which were houses, churches, stores, and warehouses,—showed the damage of the war; they were missing roofs or had walls with ripped timbers jutting out from crumbling mortar; some were mere ruins, no longer used.

This town was Harper's Ferry, where Josiah Derr had grown up. In his boyhood days, it had been in "Old Virginia." Now it was in the state of West Virginia, formed just two years before from the non-secessionist counties in the western third of the previous state. The rivers converging were the Shenandoah and Potomac. The Shenandoah led toward the Confederate capitol in Richmond by way of the fertile valley where many battles had been fought. The Potomac led to Washington City, where President Abraham Lincoln and his Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, were plotting the fall of the Confederate forces. Harper's Ferry had passed back and forth seven times between Southern and Northern control; it had been in Union hands for the past 18 months.

Off to his right, as the train rumbled over the bridge, Josiah could see the charred ruins of the arsenal burned by Union forces at the start of the war to prevent the Confederacy from gaining control of the machine works and rifle stocks. A trestle made of timbers ran all along the river front, above which were the tracks of the railroad and the walled-in waterway of the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal. Above the river front was the town hill; and there,

near the top, within a stand of trees, was the two-story red brick home of the Derr family. Down and to the right of that, on the waterfront, flew a Union flag beside the immense, barnlike warehouse presently used as the headquarters of the Union garrison in control of the town. A row of about a dozen white army tents bordered the dirt road that slanted up obliquely from the waterfront on the north side of the town hill. Below those tents were others off by themselves on the hillside.

Through the windows across the aisle, on the southern side of the train, Josiah could see the contraband camp where he had heard his sister Emily was working.

After being invited by General Grant to take a furlough, Josiah had intended to send a letter or telegram home announcing that he intended to visit, but, amidst the flurry of arrangements, he had neglected to do that, so his visit home would be a surprise for his sister as well as for the rest of his family.

The contraband camp consisted of rows of white army tents, some improved with fireplaces made of unmortared bricks. People that Josiah assumed were former slaves moved about there in the plain cotton clothing of their previous state. Beyond the camp was the stone and mortar building that seven years before had been John Brown's fort in his ill-fated attempt at instigating a slave rebellion.

After exiting the train, Josiah went around it, with his pack slung over his left shoulder, to see if Emily was maybe in the camp at the moment.

He saw her on the far side of a building that had obscured a view from the train. She was amidst a group of children, a slender but shapely woman, about five foot six inches tall, with dark hair and eyes like those of her brother, and with a pensive bearing like his, also. She was dressed in an ankle-length blue dress and a brown waist coat. In her hands was an open book, from which she was reading to a group of children seated in front of her.

"Josie! What a surprise!" she exclaimed when she saw him approaching in his blue uniform. "You got time off?"

"Yes, two weeks."

The children drew back slightly as the brother and sister joined in an embrace, then pressed back toward them shouting questions.

"You a soldier?" one boy asked.

"Yes, I am," Josiah answered.

"Where you fight at?"

"All around."

“You ever kill anybody?”

“Lately, no.”

“Children, let’s not bother the poor man with so many questions,” Emily reproved. “Later you can talk to him more.”

“Alright, Miss Emily,” they said, moving off,

“How did you know to find me here at the camp?” she asked when and her brother were alone.

“Emily, that is part of the story I’ve been waiting to tell!” Josiah announced. “I had the privilege this past week of being at the White House with General Grant. And Mr. Lincoln himself came across to me and asked me about you!”

“He remembered me from my visit?”

“Yes, he did. He said you are a strong-willed woman and he expects you will get your way. He told me, too, the First Lady herself will get you what is needed for your school.”

“Astounding, indeed!”

“So I did know, Emily, where to look for you at once,” Josiah said. “How ever did you get the idea to start this school?”

She laughed. “Start it I did not! I just saw it from my window.”

“‘Call to young women’...”

“Yes, so true! The war has called us both.”

“Whose school is this, then?”

“This school is itself what it purports to encourage. It is a school founded and led by a freedman. There he is now! Would you like to meet him!”

“Yes, I would.”

Emily waved toward some more permanent-looking tents with brick chimneys built into them. The black man who waved back had neatly-clipped gray nap hair and a dignified bearing. As he approached, he drew a wake of children.

“Your sister had been a great help to us here, Josiah,” the headmaster said, after being introduced as Jefferson Banner. “All of the children love her to death.”

“How ever did you get the idea for this school?” Josiah asked the headmaster.

“I was taught how to read and write when I was coming up on our plantation in Maryland,” Banner replied, “and I was blessed enough in learning that I was asked to teach the others. Then, after many years of that, I was given my freedom.”

“Well, you certainly have been a great boon to our community,” Emily remarked.

“Well, thank you, Miss Emily. So have you. I don’t know

what I would do without you. Your sister, you know, she can go beyond where I can when I reach the limit of what I know.”

Soon after this, the reunited brother and sister walked from the camp through the lower town area of street front shops where the family store called “Derr General” occupied the lower floor of a three-story building. The store was closed for the day, but Josiah paused to peer through the window toward the barrels of dry goods and other items on shelves.

From there, they proceeded up the concrete steps that led up the hill to the Derr family’s red brick house, located just above the war-wracked, roofless walls of the Methodist Church where their father, Rev. Elias Derr, had been an unpaid minister while working, also, in the family store. At the invitation of the local Catholic priest, the Methodist congregation still met for their weekly services further down the hill in St. Peter’s, a Catholic church that not been damaged.

His father still served as minister, Josiah knew, though, as he knew, also, illness had intervened, preventing his father from working much at the store.

“I am often at school all day long, Josie,” Emily informed. “But, today, because of matters at home, I just stopped by.”

“And what are these matters?” Josiah asked.

“Nothing urgent. You will see when we get home.”

“Jefferson reminded me of Turner,” Josiah remarked.

“Oh, yes, very much.” Emily replied, “The same sense of dignity. But Turner has been able to go much further. Jefferson struggles beyond the elementary level, which is why he is glad for me.”

The other person they referred to was Turner Ross, the educated slave at the Stone plantation in Powhatan County, the childhood home of the two friends that Josiah had mentioned to the president, Lt. Col. Hiram Stone and his cousin, Louisa Stone. Educating slaves was against the law in Virginia. Still, it was done on some plantations to enable the slaves to read the Scripture. The Stone’s were the most liberal slave holders in the area around Richmond, educating selected slaves out of an evolving sense of justice. Only Turner had risen to the level of a college graduate. For years, he had done clerical and accounting work on the plantation.

“Walking here together with you, Josie, reminds me of the four of us together,” Emily chimed. “We were such an unexpected group, two from the North, in sympathies, at least, and two from the South, bound together by family, cousins kind of, but not in

blood, and not family enough to prevent us from falling in love, each with another.”

“Yes,” Josiah answered.

His mind settled on a wayside where the Derr and Stone families had gone together on occasions that had brought them both for school-related reasons to the lower Shenandoah Valley where both VMI, where Hiram and Josiah had gone, and Hollis Institute where Emily and Louisa had attended, were located.

“Do you think of her often?” Emily asked.

“Considering the state of our dealings, hers and mine,” Josiah returned, “I would say too much for my own good.”

“Ha! It would be worse to forget her! And what of Hiram?”

“How can he ever be other than my boyhood friend, my VMI room-mate? I am sorry for the division between us. I pray for his well-being while wishing for defeat of his cause,—if it can be called his cause! He seems to be loyal to a cause that he does not believe in, merely because he has grown up near Richmond.”

“He believes in Virginia.”

“Of that, Emily, there can be no doubt.”

## **10. Arriving at home, Josiah encounters his boyhood friend, Hiram Stone**

“Josiah, there is something else I must tell you,” Emily Derr said when she and her brother, Maj. Josiah Derr, reached the top of the hill.

The Derr family house was just beyond. It was a two-story, box-frame house with a red brick exterior and white trim on the doors and windows. It sat on the highest point of the hill where there was an open area with two burgundy maple trees side by side.

“I didn’t want to tell you too soon, but it is something I know will concern you.”

“And what is that?”

“Luellen Beecher, Hiram’s aunt, is in a bad state. She collapsed while working. She cannot move normally. She has trouble speaking. We were down there yesterday.”

“When did this happen?”

“Almost two weeks ago.”

“Hiram will be greatly affected,” Josiah replied. “She has been like a second mother to him.”

“Josiah, when we went down there yesterday, we found

Hiram with her.”

“How can that be?”

“He came up through Charlotte’s Grove and crossed the river downstream from the rapids.”

Charlotte’s Grove was the orchard shared by the Derr and Stone families. It had been started almost 30 years before by Elias Derr’s first wife, Charlotte née Stone, who had died at age 24 of typhoid fever.

“I must find a way to go see him,” Josiah said as they approached the door of the house.

Arriving at the house, unexpected as they were, as Josiah had sent no prior word of his visit, they saw their father sitting in his study, which was in the corner of the house off to the left of the door.

Rev. Elias Derr rose at once and limped toward them. He had neatly combed gray hair, a pale complexion indicative of his recent illness, and a notably kind demeanor. “Josiah, you are home on leave?”

“Yes, just for two weeks.”

“What a wonderful surprise!”

Elena, the mother, had heard them from the kitchen and she was coming across to them as they were greeting the father.

“Josiah, we are so glad to see you!” she said.

“Ebediah is not here right now. He is off somewhere,” Elias said, referring to the youngest child, who was 12 years old.

“And have you told Josiah about Aunt Luellen?” the mother asked.

“Yes, I just did.”

“And Hiram?”

“Yes, but not that he is here.”

“Hiram is here?” said Josiah with astonishment.

“Yes, Josie, just by coincidence for this one evening. He will leave tomorrow, he says.”

“Where is he?”

“Downstairs, I think,” Elena replied. “Emily, please go tell him Josiah is here.”

Lt. Col. Hiram Stone appeared, grinning as he came toward them. He was five foot ten, slender in figure, upright in stature, with blond hair streaked with natural red highlights.

Josiah greeted him with a troubled expression. “Hiram, you place yourself in mortal jeopardy, being in this town. I could not prevent you from being arrested!”

“Assuming discovery, Josie!” Hiram replied with a cheerful

voice. "And I know more of the secret places of this ol' town than anyone on either side, except maybe you!"

"Yes, that is true,"

Later, they all gathered for the evening meal in a room with windows facing the sunset lit cliffs of Maryland Heights towering above the trestle bridge Josie had crossed hours before.

Now Ebbie, at age 12 the youngest, was with them, alert and attentive as he followed the conversation. He had the same dark hair as Emily, Josiah, and the mother, Elena.

Missing from the table was Lydia Derr, daughter of Elias Derr and his first wife, Charlotte. Portraits on the wall showed that Lydia had flaxen colored hair and blue eyes like those of her father and her father's mother whose picture was beside hers.

Complicating the relationship further between the Derr and Stone families, Lydia's husband, Maj. Darren Beecher, was the son of the aunt that Hiram had come to visit. Luellen and her husband, Jacob, ran a flour mill below the town, on Virginius Island, where before the war there had been many mills of different kinds powered by water diverted from the rapids of the Shenandoah River. Like Josiah, Darren Beecher was a rare case of a Union officer who had gone to VMI.

With the Potomac River and the spire of St. Peter's visible in the windows across from him, Josiah found everything familiar and comforting except for one change. The change was in his father's appearance. The look of physical fitness that Josiah was used to had been replaced with a new look of declining health. The family doctor had said the underlying cause was a constriction of the blood vessels leading to the heart.

In the manner of a close family, as they were, the group at the table had gone quickly to topics such as they would not have discussed outside the family. The Derr family was unusual in that they discussed political, social, and religious topics thoroughly and fervently. This was a situation originating in the mentality of the father, who had started his adult life as a store keeper and then a store owner, and who, in his mid 30's, after much soul searching, had decided to pursue a ministry degree in a small college in a nearby town. His marriage to his second wife, Elena Fordham, a college graduate from a New England academic family, had increased the likelihood that a mentality of intellectual seriousness and inquiry would be offered to the children; it had been and they had all accepted it.

"Well, Hiram, what do you think of Emily's work?" Elena asked, to begin the dinner with a provocative query as she often

did.

“I think highly of it,” Hiram remarked.

Hiram, as he spoke, did so with the approval all around of his relatives. He had clean features, alert, sympathetic eyes, and a willingness, always, to entertain either humor or a serious remark. He never ignored a matter laid before him; he gave it his best effort and seldom challenged the validity or intent of what was presented to him.

“A modern woman,” said Elena.

“And no wonder,” Emily replied. “Since you and Father have educated me to be one.”

“I wonder, though, Emily,” Hiram ventured, “being honest, do you think the contrabands are capable of being citizens such as we?”

“Your own Turner Ross is an example, is he not?” the minister father retorted.

“Yes, he is, and I admire Turner greatly. But is Turner an anomaly among his people? I sometimes think that he is.”

It was a remark that in divided Virginia, among some families once close before the war, might have caused a stir of emotion, mutual accusations, and maybe a lasting division. But this was a family in which most of the members had resolved to maintain cordial ties despite being separated by the war into opposing camps,—a family, moreover, in which all had, for years, gotten used to a situation where one part of the family had kept slaves while the other part had been increasingly receptive to abolitionist ideas.

Only Louisa had become inaccessible, and she had only done this with Josiah, and not with vehemence but with what seemed a sad acceptance of the present state of affairs.

“It is a wonder that Turner was allowed to be educated,” the minister declared, “with our Virginia laws against it and people afraid that the coloreds would revolt.”

“Yes,” Hiram said, “it was allowed because of my father’s stature, and because of the high reputation of Turner’s mother, and the place of his education in our house, apart from the other slaves. I wonder, though, could more of the slaves respond as Turner has?”

Though Hiram threw off this remark in a casual manner, he had thought a great deal about this subject and about asking the other white adults on the plantation (his mother and aunt) to support him in offering Turner his freedom.

“Well, time will tell, Hiram,” Emily remarked softly

“Yes, and please accept, Emily, I do wish for a good result! It is not this that has made me a soldier for the South.”

“I do know that, Hiram.”

Emily did, in fact, know this, for she knew that Hiram’s fundamental quality was that, like her brother Josiah, Hiram was idealistic and approachable on such subjects.

“I just want to say to you all,” Hiram announced. “I am sorry we have become disconnected by the war.”

“You are not disconnected,” Mrs. Derr replied. “You are part of our family.”

“And my nephew,” Mr. Derr added.

“And Lydia’s cousin,” proclaimed the boy.

“Yes, I am nephew and cousin, and glad for it,” Hiram replied.

Only at the last did the subject of Louisa Stone enter the conversation and then Josiah revealed that he had not heard from her the entire time of the war.

“Louisa is afire with each of her passions, as you know, and she is a loyal daughter of Old Virginia, as she and I have been taught to be from our childhood,” Hiram responded.

“So I have always known her to be,” Emily added, “passionate, as you say, and made of a single cloth of Southern loyalties.”

“The very heart of the South,” Josiah remarked.

“Is she still a nurse to the wounded?” asked Elena.

“She is the one fiercest to assert their every need!”

“Tomorrow you leave to go south again?” Elena inquired of Hiram. “Won’t you be in danger of being discovered?”

“Aunt Elena,” Hiram said, “Both the North and South have great armies, I grant you. But not so great as to encompass all of Virginia.”

“I think Hiram is right, Mama,” Josiah declared. “All of the Shenandoah is like that, free of soldiers, except where the armies meet.”

“And that is where I shall go,” Hiram exclaimed, “where the soldiers are not. Up first to Loudon Rock. Josie remembers that! Then over the ridge to Charlotte’s Grove, where I left my horse. Then along the mountain routes home. I expect to have some good views of the Shenandoah Valley.

There was one matter to be resolved between the two soldiers after the family members left the table.

“Hiram, I have written a letter to Louisa,” Josiah said, “Will you take it to her?”

“Yes, old friend, I will,” Hiram replied with a grin, “and I think Louisa will be glad to get it, and will act like she is not.”

### **11. Hiram returns to Powhatan County contemplating his family’s grim prospects**

After their meal, the Derr family,—with only Lydia, the oldest daughter, not among them,—went by horse and carriage down the winding road to the Beecher Flour Mill on Virginius Island. It was located in an area that years before had supported an additional, much larger flour mill, a tannery, a saw mill, a livery shop, two cotton mills, a blacksmith shop, and an iron foundry, all running on hydraulic power obtained from water diverted before the falls of the Shenandoah River. The visitors saw none of that; they saw the mere shell of the building that had been the large flour mill beside the military warehouses set up in the buildings that had once been shops.

Often Elias and Elena Derr combined this routine trip to pick up flour for the family store with a social visit to their daughter’s parents-in-law, Jacob and Luellen Beecher. On this evening, however, there was the added complication that Lt. Col. Hiram Stone was hiding in the back of the carriage.

Luellen could not speak but she wrote a farewell message to her nephew in a notebook that she kept beside her bed.

“We are so proud of you, Hiram, and so sorry for how the war has put barriers between us.”

The eastern sky was showing the first light of dawn when Hiram Stone emerged from the Beecher house the next morning, and glanced toward the Union flag silhouetted against the moonlit water of the Potomac River.

Hiram saw no soldiers by the cannons lined up beside the tent rows of the contraband camp. He scurried in the opposite direction, southeast, on the gravel road that ran beside the canal used for pulling boats around the rapids.

A mile upstream, where the river curved southward, Hiram untied a rowboat from a dock and pushed out into the dark water. Reaching the other side of the river, he turned at once toward an outgrowth of rock where the trail began that led up the bluff, which towered above him.

By the time the sun appeared above the bluffs on the eastern side of the Potomac River, Hiram had reached the overlook that he had mentioned to Josiah the night before. He looked down on the

dome-shaped hill of the town, settling on the blue roof and red brick exterior of the Derr family house amidst the winter-bare trees on the hill.

Hiram searched for, but could not see, the lithe, dark-haired form of Emily. He was glad he had taken the risk to see his aunt, and glad that, in the course of that, he had had occasion to visit Emily, also.

Despite his aunt's illness and the burden of war, Hiram felt hopeful and joyous. He knew that the reason for his positive state of mind was in the embraces he had received from Emily and in her expressions of faith in him and trust in his intentions.

For most of that day, Hiram continued south-southwest along the ridge until led by a break in the terrain downward into a high valley. There he saw the blue house and red barn of Charlotte's Grove. In a corral beside a pond was the chestnut mare he had left a week before. On the hillside beyond, tinged by sunset colors, were the maple woods he had ridden through as a boy with his companion, Josie Derr.

There was no one at the orchard, Hiram knew. The house and grounds were cared for by an old couple who lived down the same road. He found the key in its usual place and went into the house carrying logs taken from those stacked up outside. He built a fire and watched the flames in the fireplace as memories arose of past occasions spent in these same environs. A painting on the wall of the red-haired Charlotte Stone bore a striking resemblance to his cousin, Louisa.

The caretaker of the farm came by the next morning. "I heard there are preparations everywhere in Richmond," he said, while holding the horse by the bridle as Hiram secured the saddle.

"This may be the year of a great siege," Hiram replied.

"You think we can win it still?"

"I think we can hold out," Hiram answered, aware that a year before he would not have given such a reserved assessment.

Soon Hiram was riding through the surrounding hills and thinking of the same ride Josiah had thought of several evenings before,—the ride on which the boys Hiram and Josiah had joked about one day being soldiers.

At an overlook called Eagle's Nest, Hiram stopped to contemplate a curve of the Shenandoah River, beside which were the clustered buildings of a small town. Beyond that, the verdant fields and woods of the "Great Valley" extended westward to the Appalachian Mountains and southeastward to Massanutten, the so-called "middle mountain." He recalled looking off as a boy to this

scene with a sense of pride in his Virginia heritage.

Virginia had been a colony, and a separate country almost, from the time of Queen Elizabeth I of England, Hiram reflected. It had extended, in its early years, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River. As a part of the United States, when the larger nation formed, Virginia had made great contributions. Four of the first five presidents (George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Samuel Adams, and James Madison) had been born and raised in Virginia. Some of the greatest military leaders of the United States had been Virginians, including Washington and “Lighthorse Lee,” father of Lt. Gen. Robert E. Lee. Virginia had been the home of Patrick Henry, who had proclaimed, “Give me liberty or give me death.” Virginia was where the first bill of rights had been written.

As for his own family, Hiram recalled, they had been settlers in Virginia since 1664, three years after an act of the Virginia House of Burgesses had made it legal for any white person to purchase slaves. Starting with savings earned from his trade as a cooper, Hiram’s familial ancestor, Joshua Stone, seven generations before Hiram, had bought a tobacco farm and then had purchased slaves when he and his wife Elizabeth Donne had acquired land holdings too extensive to work themselves. Thereby the involvement in slavery of his family had happened, Hiram knew, as part of a distorted fulfillment of the Jeffersonian dream that his family had pursued of becoming yeoman farmers.

Howsoever understandable as that might have been, Hiram reflected, the dependence of his family on slavery had become a burden. Throughout the Northern states and by many of his peers outside of the planter elite,—most prominently, for Hiram, the Derr family,—the institution of slavery had been increasingly assailed as an unjust system.

Being an idealist, as he was, Hiram had searched earnestly to define a personal and societal position with respect to these issues presented by the dependence of the Southern economy on slavery and the dependence of his own family on the entrenched societal structure of the South.

Hiram had first noticed, starting in his teens, that slavery was not monolithic. Conditions differed between plantations for the half million slaves in Virginia who lived amidst a million whites. Blacks lived in deplorable conditions on many plantations. On the plantation his own family had owned for four generations, however, the slaves had good shelter, food, and clothing, and worked reasonable hours. His father and uncle (Louisa’s father) had insisted on such conditions.

Hiram had also learned, as he had grown older, that others within the planter elite, in Virginia and elsewhere, had sought in a conspicuous manner to provide good conditions for slaves, most notably Joseph Davis, the older brother of the current president of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis. On the Davis plantation, Hiram had heard, conditions were similar to those on the Stone family plantation. The slaves lived in cabins with fireplaces. They had full access to good food and clothing, and were never physically punished. But the purpose of the Davis model had not been to refute slavery, Hiram knew. The purpose had been to prove that slavery could be humane.

A planter in Kentucky had gone still farther toward ending slavery, Hiram had heard. This planter had proposed an economic model whereby slaves would be freed and offered a chance to remain as hired workers. Hiram had taken note of this model as a possible solution to sustaining the Virginia economy through replacing slavery with a payroll system.

Of course, the related issue had loomed up of whether the blacks, when freed, would be citizens with the right to vote. If such were the case, and many were freed, they could overwhelm their white fellow citizens with malicious intent. Hiram had thought a great deal about this, and had decided that the issue could be resolved through a gradual process with educational requirements that would ensure that blacks who did vote would do so with a sense of belonging to the entire new society of whites and blacks.

This approach had been promoted, Hiram knew, as “gradual emancipation” and some proponents had lately accomplished it by including in their wills a provision that their slaves should be freed after they died.

Hiram had kept his contemplations about slavery to himself because of the resentment toward his own family that he feared might be engendered if he expressed in public such wide-reaching ideas. He had not even mentioned to Emily his idea of a pay-for-work system, though she had long been his confidante on many aspects of the slavery question.

That had been before the war. Now with the secession in progress, Hiram had decided that his ideas would have to wait until the conflict reached a conclusion. If the North could be held off long enough for the South to bargain for a negotiated settlement, then his family would be able to continue as planters and perhaps he would be able to proceed toward a different economic model.

If the North did win the war, then the outcome for his family would be unsure. Some in the U.S. Congress were calling for confiscation of all plantation property by the federal government. Such a change would bring disaster to his family, as it would strip them of their wealth, and it would also bring disaster to former slaves, Hiram believed. Thousands of slaves would be set loose to wander about without moorings, looking for a means of survival.

## **12. Hiram asks his mother to join in freeing Terner Ross**

Terner Ross was a separate matter, however, thought Lt. Col. Hiram Stone as he came over a familiar hill and saw, amidst rolling fields, the two elegant white houses of his plantation home (one belonging to his own family, the other to the family of his father's brother, Louisa's father Nathaniel). Out of simple justice, the faithful and valuable slave, his boyhood playmate, deserved to be freed.

Hiram was determined to broach this subject with his mother before returning to service. He had spoken with her about it on his previous visit home, but she had managed then to turn the attention to another subject.

From where he stood, Hiram could see the entrance road of the plantation, which was about 40 feet wide and a mile long, and bordered with hickory, birch, and beech trees, leading toward the two white houses. On either side of the entrance road were fields extending out a mile to the west and east of the central road. In total, the plantation encompassed 1,400 acres, divided into 960 acres of crops, 140 acres of loblolly pines (tapped for the resin distilled into turpentine, one of the plantation's main sources of cash), and 300 acres of parklike grounds, on which were the houses, barns, and slave camp.

About half of the fields were unplanted at present due to the absence of adult men, both white and black. Hiram himself was the only remaining adult male in both the Stone families. Though not obliged to serve as soldiers, (being, under Virginia law, as "planters," exempt,) Hiram's father and uncle had volunteered for service. Both had lost their lives. Hiram had no siblings owing to a medical complication that had prevented his mother from having children after him. Louisa had a younger sister, Jessica, 14 years old.

As for the more than 40 black men who in the past had done

the heavy labor in the fields and turpentine orchard, all of them, including Turner Ross, had been impressed into public work by the Confederate government,—14 in the Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond, 26 building fortifications around the city. With their men absent, the 46 black women had pushed back against the tentative direction of Hiram's mother, Anne, and Louisa's mother, Eliza, who had taken on a new role of managers of the day-to-day operations of the plantation.

Greatest cause of the dire circumstances, however, as Hiram knew,—and affecting not only his own family, but the entire society of the seceded states,—were the Union blockades in ports like Savannah and Mobile, which had resulted in a lack of basic goods of all kinds.

Hiram received a warm welcome from his mother. Soon he was seated at a table in the ladies' parlor where he and his mother were at once attended by two servants, both young Africans who inquired what they wanted and in a moment returned with coffee for Hiram, tea for his mother, and a plate with pastries.

Mrs. Anne (née Bonnard) Stone, dressed at the moment in a gray cotton frock with white collar and cuffs, was a stately blonde known for her beauty and for her care for her appearance. She had been born and raised on a plantation in a nearby county; and, like many girls of her generation from the planter elite, she had spent her teenage years at a finishing school for girls (in her case, Charbonne's French Academy in Philadelphia). There she had mixed with girls from both Northern and Southern wealthy families, some of whom, from New England, had been quick (she had once told Hiram) to espouse abolitionist ideas. About this and other issues of the day, the girls had argued freely, Anne had said, with no subject out of bounds. But this had not apparently affected her basic ideas about slavery. After returning to Virginia, she had resumed her life as she had left it, and soon as a planter's wife, with no objections or expressions of opinion.

Anne Stone had a sweet and cheerful personality, however, and she was as sweet and cheerful with the slaves as with everyone else, and was exceedingly popular with them.

She listened quietly as Hiram told her of the news regarding Luellen Beecher, who, as earlier described, was her sister (three years her senior). In many summers during Hiram's youth, Aunt Luellen had given Hiram a second home and an opportunity to experience life outside of the plantation.

"And she was not able to speak to you then?" Anne asked.

"No, but her thoughts when she wrote them out were as

clear as ever.”

Then came inquiries regarding Luellen’s husband, Jacob, and the Derr’s, who came into the picture because they were in-laws through the marriage of Maj. Darren Beecher and Lydia Derr. Also, Lydia was Anne’s niece as the child of Anne’s sister-in-law, Charlotte Stone.

Anne was especially interested when she heard that Emily was a teacher at the contraband camp.

“The times are changing so fast,” she remarked. “It is more than I can comprehend.”

That Hiram had accidentally come upon Josiah, though, was the matter of greatest interest.

“Was he glad to see you?” she asked.

“He seemed alarmed at first,—for my safety, with the Yankees all around, —and then he seemed glad.”

“He did not show a muted anger toward you?”

“I did not sense that, no.”

She sighed at that. “This war will end some day,” she said, “and we will all be reconciled. We will be family to one another fully, as we were before the war.”

“That is my own true wish, also.”

Hiram went to the window, from which he could see a stretch of the James River with the loblolly pines of the turpentine orchard on the other side.

“There is another thing, too, which I have been waiting to talk to you about,” he said softly, turning toward her. “I’ve been thinking we should grant Turner his freedom now. I would like to do this with your approval.”

This was not a new matter, as earlier noted. He had broached the idea before with Anne and Eliza and they had deflected it.

“Hiram, dear,” she said, “why do you persist in this so?”

She said this as if not aware of the tendencies of his thought,—and she was not in that she had never been explicitly told of the tendencies of his thought,—but she had heard pieces of it throughout the years, and she had noted that his reading material had included abolitionist material from the North.

“The reason I persist is to be consistent,” he answered.

“And why is consistency so important to you now?”

“Because, Mother, I may die in this war, and if this were to happen, I would want to know that I have fought the war for something I believe in. What I believe in has nothing to do with the continued servitude of the colored people. I believe in

freedom,—my own freedom, and the freedom of the people of Virginia to decide how to manage our own affairs through our own laws.”

She sighed.

“As it has been since the days of Patrick Henry!” he added.

“If a Negro such as Turner comes into your concept of freedom,” she said, “now would be a good time to free him. He is of little value to us now for all of the education your father gave him. We receive three dollars a month for his labor. Hard pressed though we are, we could do without that for the sake of your consistency, if it is so important to you.”

To this he had no reply.

“Just be aware of this,” she continued. “If you do free Turner, he may not be free here, on the Stone plantation. There is a colony of freedmen down in Norfolk, I hear. He can go down there and live apart from us.”

“And why is that?”

“Because, Hiram, I am not willing to live in my own house, on my own land, with a Negro being the only free adult male on this plantation, with you gone.”

“I can understand that, Mother.”

“St. Paul in his Epistles says that free men and slaves are equal partakers in salvation through Christ, but he also says that, in this world, slaves should remain bound to their earthly masters.”

“Yes, I know, and that masters should be kind and respectful to their slaves.”

“Which we are. In any case, there is another part of this, also, at present, Hiram,” she said.

“What is that?”

“The sheriff, Elon Sievers, was here while you were gone.”

“For what business?”

“He never said, but he pointedly remarked that he had seen some of the impressed Negroes passing notes, and that Turner was close at hand. Notes are a cause for alarm.”

“Yes, I know,” said Hiram. “Because of Ned Turner. I will warn Turner when I see him.”

“There was something about rumors of articles, for journals and so on.”

“I will warn Turner of this, also. It would not surprise me to learn that he has been writing, but it would not be of insurrection.”

“Whatever we do, whatever they do, it must be with caution, Hiram. I fear some of our neighbors, and what they might do in reaction, either in this war while it continues or in our new

South after the war, whatever it may be.”

“But, if such were the case, don’t you think Turner should be granted the license to make up his own mind about how to confront such dangers?”

She sighed. “Hiram, you wear me out. If you ever do marry, I hope it will be a woman such as your Emily who will be willing to trudge with you through these convolutions of your mind.”

“On that note,” he said, “have you seen Louisa?”

She laughed. “Yes, that is another one for torture! I believe she is over at the other house right now. She decided not to live at the hospital anymore and just came home again when you were gone. She insists on staying there, in her old room.”

“How is she?”

“As always, opposed.”

“Opposed to what?”

“To whatever constrains her. Lately, she feels constrained in being unable,—or thwarted, at least,—in going forward with her ideas about how to better attend to the wounded.”

“I think I will go to see her right now,” he declared.

### **13. Louisa Stone accepts Josiah’s letter but refuses to read it**

Louisa Stone, Hiram’s cousin, was of a physical type that had come down for generations on the female side of the Stone family. The predominate feature was wavy and voluminous hair of a classic red color, not streaked with copper or blonde or darkened to auburn. In addition to this distinctive hair color, there was a distinctive eye color, a gray, green, and blue mix that changed colors in different settings, though most people described the eyes as green. Finally, there was a stern set to the forehead and eyebrows that gave the impression of determination.

Most recently, Louisa’s aunt Charlotte, her father’s sister, had had these trademark Stone family features. This was the same Charlotte who had been the first wife of Elias Derr, by which marriage Louisa upon birth had become the “almost cousin” of Josiah and Emily. This was the aunt, also, who had begun the apple orchard (“Charlotte’s Grove”) about ten miles south-southwest of Harper’s Ferry, where Hiram had stopped to re-claim his horse on his way back to Powhatan. Despite the bitter battles fought in the war, the orchard was still shared by both families with all wishing for the war to end to return the situation to normal.

Louisa, as Charlotte had been, was known for her beauty. She was five foot six in height, solidly built, well-proportioned, and, in every respect, a handsome woman, noticed by all and lacking in vanity or coquettishness.

Louisa's life and the war had been uncannily synchronized, she often thought. After graduating from the Hollis Institute with a Bachelor of Science in Biology in 1859, and then spending a year as an anatomy instructor at that same school, she had returned to Powhatan in summer of 1861 just subsequent to the First Battle of Bull Run. When the wounded were brought back to Richmond in wagons and the call had gone out for women to assist in nursing, Louisa had begun working in the hastily put together camp that in the following year would become the Chimborazo Hospital, located on a hill in the eastern outskirts of Richmond.

Then, the following year, when the Union Army, under Maj. Gen. George Brinton McClellan, had invaded the James Peninsula, Louisa, as a nurse known for her scientific knowledge, had been assigned to a team stationed on a roadside near a battlefield from which the wounded, after having exceeded all space remaining in the hospitals, were being brought to be laid side by side on the ground while awaiting disposition. Here she had found herself doing what in later times would be called "triage," separating the wounded men into three groups: urgent, able to wait, and hopeless. She found herself interfacing, also, with the wagons used to carry off cases; they were not yet called "ambulances," but before the war would continue another year, they would be called so, and the word "ambulance" would become well known to the medical corps of both the Confederate and Union armies.

Most importantly for her further development as a nurse, Louisa at this time had an experience that made a great impact upon her. When presented one evening, during the Seven Day Battle, with a young man from whom blood was pulsing out of a severed artery close enough to the surface to be seen, she had relied on her knowledge of anatomy to isolate the vessel and tie it off. That evening, after the artery had been surgically repaired, the doctor told her, "If you had come upon that boy five minutes later, he would be dead."

From this experience, Louisa had formed an intention of continuing in such intervention to the degree that she could while extending its reach as close to the battlefield as she could arrange. When the war had shifted north, she had continued in similar early appraisal duties in the entry area to the Chimborazo Hospital. Into

that entry area, wagons carrying the wounded were directed for assignment within the hospital camp, which had grown to be a small city of side by side, oblong white buildings, each 20x40 feet in dimension, and each composing a separate ward.

Lately, however, capitalizing on the reputation she had earned for her early appraisal efficiency, Louisa had been quietly promoting another plan. When the Union army again attacked Virginia, as all knew would soon happen, she would take an ambulance, she had proposed, and a proven team, out to the edge of the battlefield, where the chance was greatest of saving lives. The ambulance would accompany the army as an integral part.

“Hiram, it is as if this task came to me, was made for me!” she told her cousin later on the day of his arrival. “It is what I can do for our country, what I must do because I can do it!”

He knew what the “task” was that she spoke of with such intensity; she had explained it to him before. And he knew that by “our country” she meant Virginia. With the war having gone on for more than four years, bringing so many offenses, as Hiram and Louisa saw it, from north of the Potomac, they no longer regarded themselves as Americans.

“At Hollis, I studied physiology, anatomy, disease,” Louisa continued in her ardent tone, “sometimes not knowing why. Now I know the reason! I have been forming a group of volunteers that no one will be able to reject. We will go closer to the battle. We will be there when the wounds happen.”

Louisa always spoke like this, carefully picking her words and fitting her thoughts into the complex sentence structures that she and Emily had been taught at Hollings, being, as students there, part of an elite group, they were both aware. Virginia had this one women’s college only, though there were a half dozen or so women’s colleges in the Northern states.

“My mother said you are in a mode of opposition always,” Hiram remarked.

At that she laughed. “Well, yes. But, in this case, it makes sense.”

“You are staying here alone in the old house, my mother told me?”

“Yes, just to be in my old room. But I have been eating meals up in the other house, with the others, and I am often up there.”

“Well, I am glad for that.”

This sweetness of interaction was for them both, with one another, a long-established manner of communication.

“And you think your superiors will really agree to this, your ‘ambulance’?”

“Mrs. Pember told me so herself.”

Phoebe Pember was the matron of Chimborazo Hospital, Hiram knew, and she had grown to be influential in the setup of the medical services.

“And who are the volunteers you mention?”

“One is a young women from Powhatan. You know her. Marcia Loudon.”

“Yes, she is a fine person. There can be no doubt.”

“We have also a younger woman named Helen. Just 22. And another is a war widow and older, nearly 40. Her name is Florence. Her age will prevent any assaults upon our reputations.”

Hiram sighed. “Louisa, you know that in the North this would not even be conceivable. They would not accept any woman under 35.”

“Yes, I know that. But we in the South are not blind followers of rules and regulations. We have shown that already.”

“Have you met any opposition?”

“Yes, we have met some. Doctors who think we should not be dispensing medicine except under their supervision. Women, including even my mother and I think, also, yours, who think we may be subject to moral corruption, being so close to so many men.”

“Maybe there is some wisdom behind that, Louisa. Some of these men are far from gentlemen.”

“I assure you, Hiram, should I desire to be immoral, I know already how I might proceed!”

“I don’t mean to argue,” Hiram replied with a gentle laugh.

“I just wish that those who look upon us with suspicion would look further to see what we women are doing everywhere to respond to this war that is all around us,” Louisa said. “We are gathering supplies and giving up own supplies of things we need ourselves, making clothes, blankets, and embroidered flags. Your own regiment from Powhatan has one of our flags.”

“Yes, Louisa, and we are proud to fly it,” Hiram returned. “When I see it, Louisa, I think of you, and I am grateful we have such women as you in our family and in Virginia.”

“Well, thank you for that.”

They went on in silence.

“Louisa, there is one other matter,” he said.

“And what is that?”

“When I was in Harper’s Ferry, Josiah arrived home on a

furlough, also. Despite the war, despite how we both know that we may be pitted against one another, we interacted as old friends.”

“Well, I hope he is well,” she said. “But I have no desire to hear any more about him.”

“There is one more thing.”

“And what is that?”

“He wrote a letter and asked me to bring it to you, and I promised to. I have his letter and would like to give it to you now.”

“I will accept it, Hiram,” she replied with a toss of the red hair. “But I will not read it! I cannot bear to read it! I am sorry for your effort in bringing it here, and for his in writing it!”

“Louisa, do with it as you see fit,” Hiram replied. “From what I have observed of poor Josie, he will be overjoyed just to know that the letter was placed in your hand and that you did not destroy it.”

“I cannot allow myself to communicate with him,” Louisa remarked with a sudden softening of her voice. “But I would never destroy any part of him. He is too fine a person to deserve that. It grieves me to hear him called poor.”

“I will tell him then that you kept his letter and did not discard it.”

“To that, I will not object.”

“We will talk more this evening.”

“I will be glad to, Hiram. I look forward so much to our every interaction.”

Louisa returned to her family’s house, and went up to her room with Josiah’s letter in her hand. She contemplated his written letters of her name and his, placed the letter on her desk, where she wrote her journal entries, and sat looking out the window at the sundown scene.

#### **14. Hiram visits the slave cabins eager to speak to Terner**

Having gained the approval of his mother to free Terner Ross, and subsequently the approval of his Aunt Eliza, Louisa’s mother, Lt. Col. Hiram Stone waited to talk to the slave that he had grown up with in the “big house.” The next chance, Hiram knew, would be on the coming Sunday, as the impressed slaves returned to the plantation each weekend.

Meanwhile, Hiram received a dispatch from his corps commander, Maj. Gen. J.E.B. Stuart. The dispatch informed him

that he had been promoted to the rank of full colonel and would command a regiment when he returned from furlough. Hiram was also instructed to participate in a detail that would accompany Stuart and the commander of the entire Army of Northern Virginia, Lt. Gen. Robert E. Lee, on a review of the Richmond defenses scheduled for the following week by the President of the Confederate States, Jefferson Davis.

On Sunday morning, acting upon his decision to inform Turner Ross of his intention to free him, Hiram followed the well-worn path past the second Stone house and down a wooded slope to the lower area by the river where the slave camp was located. As he walked, he reflected on Turner's request to move to this camp (a request made nine years before, Hiram figured in his mind). Having been at that time on an intellectually intimate and substantial enough basis with Turner to be aware of his mental formulations, Hiram had known that this move had followed from Turner's assessment that living in the big house placed him in a higher status than the slaves. Turner had renounced that higher status with the intentionality that,—even at that age, at only 17,—had been so characteristic of his every endeavor.

After moving, Turner had still returned to the house each day to continue the clerical work and book-keeping that he had done since first displaying a high level of competence at such tasks.

Turner had had no problem in being accepted in the slave camp as he had kinfolk there. He had risen quickly to a position of leadership in the camp, respected for his dignified bearing and for his work as a deacon in the Pentecostal church in the slave camp.

Hiram also thought, as he walked, about what his mother had told him about the recent visit to the house of the local sheriff, whose full name was Elon Sievers. Ironically, thought Hiram, the sheriff did not own slaves, yet he was the most adamant of those who opposed any betterment in the condition of the slaves and he kept close company with the county officers called "patrollers" who rode around at night watching for slaves moving about without the required passes.

The church, made of lap-sided pine planks, painted white, with a square plank-clad bell tower, also painted white, was one of the few such churches in the entire area. It had been constructed as a joint project of the slaves and Hiram's father and uncle, in defiance of Virginia laws banning churches wholly run by blacks.

Hiram, emerging from the trees, saw a group of black men, who came forward at once to greet him. Like his father and uncle,

Hiram had never been an odious master; he had made every effort to underplay the power that the slaves were aware he had over their lives.

“Master Hiram, it is so good to see you,” said the lead person in this spontaneously assembled delegation. “Will you be attending the service, sir?”

“Yes, if you will have me.”

“We are always glad to have you, sir.”

In the plain church, when Hiram entered, he saw Turner Ross in the deacons’ pew, facing the congregation. Turner, who had a genial disposition, but seldom joked or smiled, nodded to his boyhood friend. Though renowned, through his own efforts, as a man of the mind, Turner was, in appearance, a man of the body, also, six foot two, barrel chested, and thickly muscled in shoulders, arms, and legs.

Following the sermon, Turner was called upon to read, whereupon he read from the Gospel of Luke:

*And the Lord said, “Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season?”*

After reading, Turner said: “I think our Lord means by this that all of us are stewards in our own domains. We must learn what our domain is and our responsibilities within it.”

After the service, he immediately approached Hiram.

“Master Hiram, you are back from up north, I take it,” he said in his deep voice, with a formal bow, his pink-hued eyes never losing the keen, feverish-almost intensity that made him seem under some mental burden. “We are honored by your presence, sir.”

These two men, placed by birth and circumstance in this relation of master and servant, always spoke to one another in this formal, respectful manner. They had done so even as boys, while acquiring an intellectual and philosophical sense of one another (as so inclined they both had been even as boys), and an intense level of affection and commonality approaching that of brothers, although they were not biological half-brothers, as might have been suspected on some other plantations. Also, everyone had known Turner’s father, a swarthy, handsome man with troubled eyes like those of Turner, and with skin of a coal black color, to whom Turner bore an unmistakable resemblance.

“Thank you, Turner. I am honored to be here,” Hiram replied.

Soon, as the two men walked along the river bank, Hiram presented his news of his intention, with the approval of the entire family, to grant Turner his freedom, though with the condition his mother had stipulated, that on being freed Turner would need to leave the area.

“Master Hiram, you must think me not much of a man, if I would secure my own freedom in this way, leaving behind the people I have grown up with,” Turner remarked.

“Turner, we have offered this out of a sense of justice for your accomplishments and qualities,” Hiram said, “but, of all these qualities, the one I admire most is your nobility of character, which is what you display at this moment.”

The slave once more bowed his head. “I appreciate very much your kind assessment, sir,” he replied.

“Someday you may all go off together, if you wish, and if I can arrange it, when this war is over,” Hiram said, “and, if you do so, Turner, it will be with my heartfelt good wishes. Until then, what can I say, what can I do? We are besieged here,—in this place we have all lived. And my response to all of this is to defend what I have known until the danger is passed. Then much will change, many injustices will be corrected!”

“That I do hope, sir, and, although I am aware that injustices have indeed been committed, you yourself have abated them to the extent you have been able.”

They turned back toward the slave camp, Hiram remaining in a pensive bow.

“There is another thing,” he said.

“And what is that?”

“Sheriff Sievers was here last week talking to my mother with no clear indication why he had come. He did mention, however, that he had seen some slaves exchanging notes and that you were nearby. Now, Turner, I do not know, nor do I wish to know, if you were passing notes. I merely wish to inform you that there is a great deal of malice behind such an investigation.”

“I have watched Sheriff Sievers,” Turner said. “For people of the white race, he has a pleasant manner, but for colored’s he has a cold stare.”

“Yes, I would expect that.”

“I heard a story about him, also, about five years back,” the slave continued. “Remember Joey of the Clayton’s, black enough to be a slave, white enough to remind people of his mixed race origins? Did you hear of the circumstances of his death?”

“Just that he was young. I was in college then.”

“He refused to work after being unable to sleep all night because of the cold and not having a good blanket. Bart Harris, the overseer, took a whip to him and Joey ran off into a stream. Harris said, ‘Joey, I will give you one chance, up to three, and by three if you are still there, I will shoot you.’ Which he did, and Joey, just 15 years old, died in the stream, with the water flowing red. And this sheriff, when called, refused to make an arrest. That is this sheriff’s sense of justice.”

“Which is precisely why I warn you, Turner, if you know who these writers are, never betray that to the sheriff. He would surely act.”

“I shall mark your words, Master Hiram.”

“I go back to the front soon,” Hiram added. “and who knows, something decisive in this war may soon happen.”

“I hope and pray for your safety in battle.”

Hiram did, by coincidence, run into Elon Sievers a few days later in the town of Powhatan, about ten miles from the Stone plantation. Sievers, a former sergeant in the infantry, was missing his left hand and foot (replaced with prosthetic devices), a war injury that had prevented his return to duty. A large man, about 50, with a gray beard, coarsely cut, shoulder length gray hair, and eyes of a diluted blue color, he was watching the people moving past store fronts devoid of goods.

“Hiram, have you heard of our niggers passing around notes?” the sheriff asked.

“My mother told me you stopped by and were concerned about our Turner being one of them.”

“I did think I saw him exchanging notes.”

“Surely you must have known before he is proficient in writing.”

“Well, to be passing notes is not allowed of slaves. There are some not as tolerant as me.”

Hiram continued down the street.

“There’s a reason it’s against the law,” the sheriff called after him. “No one wants to encounter arguments from uppity niggers.”

“And why is that?” Hiram replied, “Being so superior, as you say, surely we will show our advantage in thought.”

“That will be the case, I have no doubt,” the sheriff replied, “should such a sad day come.”

After this exchange, the sheriff turned back to the street and resumed his sullen watch.

## 15. Hiram attends as Lee explains the Richmond defenses to Davis

Hiram Stone, the new colonel, had occasion later, as he traveled, in uniform, on horseback, through Powhatan County toward Richmond, to ponder what Turner Ross had told him regarding the death of the slave boy, Joey, five years before. Hiram trusted that Turner had heard the story from a trustworthy source and would not exaggerate the circumstances of the boy's death or of the sheriff's response.

About halfway to Richmond, Hiram passed the Clayton plantation, where the incident had occurred. The splendid, 20-room edifice, amidst sprawling magnolia trees, and surrounded by pink, yellow, and blue carnations, was the most ornate big house in the whole county. The field holdings encompassed more than 2,500 acres. Despite the impressment, male slaves worked in the fields. Samuel Clayton, the owner, was also there, Hiram had heard. Clayton had not volunteered for military service, claiming he did more good for the Confederacy as a planter.

There were many abuses of slaves in the plantation system, Hiram knew, usually not rising to the level of murder, but offenses in the sense of being infringements upon human dignity, to the extent that the slaves could be argued to have a right to dignity despite their bondage.

Even that much had not been granted by many like Clayton, Hiram reflected. Many abuses, he acknowledged to himself, had followed from the attitude that the slaves had no value except as property. It was a deeply rooted attitude, legitimized by the U.S. Supreme Court in the Dred Scott Decision of seven years before, which had concluded that slaves, as property, had no civil rights. Hiram (at that time a freshman at VMI) had given much thought to this decision, and, in his own mind, he had not accepted it. Instead, Hiram had formally defined an alternative belief that he had felt was more in accord with the Christian precepts adhered to by his family. This alternative belief was that slaves, when not managed as labor, did have civil rights, among them the right not to be subjected to unjust discipline, the right not to be separated from loved ones, the right to decent food and housing, and the right to free time.

In confirming for himself this idea of slaves having rights, Hiram had known that he had departed from the belief held by many of his classmates. Not wanting to jeopardize his standing at VMI, he had only spoken about his idea with Emily Derr, and then

only two years afterwards. In that year, her first at Hollis, she had become his confidante in such matters.

Hiram, as he mulled this over in his mind, on his passage toward Richmond, thought to himself that that year, when he had brought Emily into his confidence, had been the turning point in his understanding of slavery. Under her influence, he had made the inquiries that had led him to admitting that the true circumstances related to slavery were more grievous than he had acknowledged up to that time. He had learned that there were, in fact, numerous plantations such as he had heard of, but had discounted as exceptions from the norm, where slaves were kept under the whip and forced to work long hours that sometimes caused pain, such as the deep bone aching caused by hours of moving along in a bent over position.

Hiram knew, also, that the easy access of masters and overseers to black women, who were often attractive and exotic in appearance, had led to sexual abuse and to distorted behaviors combining sexual liberties with humiliation and infliction of pain. He had considered such sexual abuse as well. He, and his family so far as he knew, had not engaged in it. Were not such practices possible wherever there was a condition of domination between any two people? Ending slavery would not bring an end to such abuse, Hiram thought, whereas the chaos of an abrupt end to slavery would harm both white and black people.

Richmond soon came into view from Manchester, through which Hiram passed, south of the James River. In the nearly flat skyline of church spires, box-frame houses, and brick buildings, partly hidden in thick foliage, and rising and falling slightly on the several low hills of the city, Hiram saw not much different from what he recalled having seen in the years before the war. On a hill near the Pantheon-like white pillared Capitol, elegant houses lined a ridge commanding a view of the river. There some of the elite families of Richmond had continued their lavish lifestyles, he had heard, unaffected by the war that had brought such dearth to others.

Hiram saw reminders of the war, however, as he crossed the Mayo Bridge. At mid-bridge, the prison-of-war camp on Belle Isle came into view. Hundreds of white tents, like teepees, and scores of desultory men amidst them, comprised that scene. On the city side of the river, where the river rapids bent southward along the bypass canal, were the immense brick buildings and squat chimneys, spewing smoke, of the Tredegar Iron Works. There, Hiram knew, hundreds of impressed slaves, including Turner Ross

and others from his own plantation, were forming molten ore into cannons needed for the spring campaign and train tracks needed to replace those ripped up and bent by Union forces.

Within the city, Hiram noted the dirty streets, thronging with people. He was aware that the population of the city had tripled during the war, with families, many headed by women, seeking jobs that the city provided in its activities supportive of the war. Housing and food were in short supply, he had heard. Two women with a train of small children, passing near him, had a look of hunger in their lean figures and grim faces, evocative of the bread riots of the previous spring.

Arriving at the state capitol, Hiram saw, in the adjoining square, two groups of men in Confederate uniforms with their horses tied off in a grove of trees. Within the first group, he noticed at once the erect, white-haired general-in-chief of the Army of Northern Virginia, Robert E. Lee, standing hat in hand next to a thin man with a pointed beard, who, in his riding suit, was the only person not in uniform. That was President Jefferson Davis, Hiram knew from likenesses he had seen. Close by was a more youthful, brown-bearded man that Hiram recognized as his own corps commander, Maj. Gen. J.E.B. Stuart. Next to him was a lean officer soldier of about 45 with an intense, angry face, whom Hiram had known as a boy, his father's cousin, Maj. Gen. Jubal Early.

Hiram Stone did not interact with this group, other than to nod in recognition to his cousin Jubal. He went up to a group of mostly younger men with a more carefree air. These were the regimental commanders invited as an honor guard.

"Gentlemen," said General Lee later when the group had assembled around him, "our purpose today, as you are aware, is to review the present status of the fortifications around Richmond. In this process, you also may gain an understanding of our situation with respect to the North as we head into what we all know will be a fierce spring onslaught, testing all of our capabilities."

The company of about 50 men, with a chorus of hurrahs and a cloud of dust rising from the hooves of their spirited horses, headed out at a trot under a blue sky streaked with white clouds. Ahead of them, snapping in the wind, was the square crimson flag of the Army of Northern Virginia.

Just two miles east of the last buildings of Richmond, the mounted officers stopped by a trench that extended a mile or more in each direction. The trench was five feet deep, ten feet wide, and buttressed with timbers. In the ground leading toward the trench

from the east, from which direction an attack might come, were hundreds of thinner, pointed timbers like spears.

“Such fortifications as these no war has yet seen,” Lee remarked. “Ten men in these trenches can stop the advance of a hundred outside them. We have completed the entire system, as you know, Mr. President, in an arc of more than 50 miles.”

There was no plan to employ these defenses at the outset, though, Lee reminded. Southern troops would meet the Union forces wherever they advanced,—in the Wilderness near the Rapidan River or further south between there and the estuary of the James River.

Continuing beyond that trench a mile further, the officers found another. From this outer trench, the Chickahominy River could be seen, about a half mile eastward.

Hiram observed the noble appearance of Lee and Stuart as they conferred along the ride. Stuart sat at attention almost, just slightly relaxed from that, as if aware of the honor of being called into the counsel of his commander.

From this vantage point, the mounted men rode southward along the outer trench for another ten miles, crossing the Richmond & York River Railroad, the Williamsburg Road, and the Charles City Road, and stopping on the summit of a low hill from which the wide and winding estuary of the James River was visible below them.

Later General Early, who had an intelligence function, presented to Lee and Davis, who listened intently. Stuart and the senior officers stood several feet apart from them, while slightly further apart again stood Hiram and his fellow junior officers.

“Let us be frank,” Early declared. “We have our Virginian forces spread 300 miles from the Shenandoah to the ocean. In all, we are 60,000 men, with no prospect for reinforcements. We are outnumbered and outgunned, and in short supply of goods.”

“Precisely why struggle must by necessity be defensive,” Lee added. “Even when we attack,—as we will,—our goal must be to strike in such a way to sustain and make optimum use of the defensive perimeter we have built here. We will meet the enemy as we must outside of it, but if we are forced to fall back, then we can defend against a much larger force by moving our forces rapidly back and forth within our trenches wherever they are needed.

“So long as we retain the minimum number that we will need to do this, we will be able to survive, trusting always in our valiant people for new and unexpected resources.”

## 16. Lee prepares himself and his forces for the spring campaign

Lt. Gen. Robert E. Lee, throughout this entire day of touring the Richmond defenses, had presented the noble aspect that Col. Hiram Stone had noted, interacting with the devoted men of his command in a manner suggesting contemplation, gravity, and resoluteness of purpose, and demonstrating, in each interaction, the high regard in which they held him. Hiram, if asked, could have further described what Lee represented for Southern officers like himself, given to defense of the Confederate cause: the embodiment of that cause, the physical manifestation of the soldierly ideal.

Lee, at this time 57 years of age,—15 years older than his main adversary, Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, and two years older than President Abraham Lincoln,—was six feet tall, with thick hair of a grayish white color. He was lean and erect in figure and serious in facial expression. He spoke in a calm voice in the slow cadence of a Southerner, but without a drawl. In dress, he was exquisitely neat, with shoes and brass polished and uniform ironed. He spoke to the mostly younger men around him with the manner of a school headmaster, which he had been at West Point, where many of them had attended college.

General Lee, with the men of the honor detail, accompanied President Jefferson Davis back to Richmond, where all were feted at a reception and accommodated overnight in a nearby garrison. Next morning, the officers returned to the Confederate camp, traveling in two coaches on the Virginia Central Railroad. At Gordonsville, 40 miles northwest of Richmond, they would change to the Orange & Alexandria Railroad for the final 20 miles to Orange, just south of the Rapidan River and about 40 miles south of the winter camp of the Union army. From Orange, they would continue to Montpelier, where their camp was located, three miles southwest of Orange, on the former plantation of the former American president James Madison.

Lee, seated in a private compartment, used his time on the train to conduct interviews with key officers regarding details he desired to know in relation to the upcoming campaign.

First to be summoned was Maj. Gen. J.E.B. Stuart, commander of the cavalry, at this time 31 years old. He came in dressed in a red-lined cape and yellow sash.

“What do you think, General Stuart, of the cavalry forces aligned against you?” Lee inquired, ignoring the preciousness of

dress, with which he was quite familiar.

Stuart had been in Lee's command for three years as a junior officer. In addition, Stuart had been a cadet at West Point during the years (1852 to 1855) when Lee had been superintendent.

"I've heard, sir, their horses are excellent and well-equipped," Stuart replied, "with all the Midwest providing forage as good as from our own Shenandoah."

"Yet you have reported your own horses are in excellent shape, have you not?"

"Yes, I have, sir, though I am concerned about forage as the summer months come in."

"Yes," Lee replied thoughtfully. "So am I. And what think you, Jeb, of the Union cavalry commanders?"

"There is one commander, sir, whom I consider most formidable, without any doubt."

"Philip Sheridan," said Lee.

"Precisely. Custer is more gallant,— and reckless in bravery. But Sheridan has the same spirit, tempered, and he is a master strategist. In my opinion, sir."

"Let us hope that Grant regards Sheridan as too important out West to brought into our sphere of action here."

Neither Lee nor Stuart voiced what each also knew, that the Union cavalry assigned to the upcoming campaign, regardless of whoever led it, would be two or three times larger, in number of men and of horses, than the beleaguered Army of Northern Virginia would be able to muster. This fact did enter Lee's mind, however. Throughout his interviews, he was much occupied in his thoughts with matters of this kind.

Recalling the event of the previous evening, Lee repeated in his mind a remark that he recalled President Davis having made in his speech the evening before. "As most of you are aware," Davis had said, "I worked night and day for twelve years to prevent this war, but I could not. The North was mad and blind, would not let us govern ourselves, and so the war came."

That was a reminder of the logic of state sovereignty, Lee reflected, that had led to the current war. In relation to that logic, he recalled a further remark that the president had made: "As know you well, being our fine soldiers, a people morally and intellectually equal to self-government, as we attest to be, must also be equal in self-defense."

Lee had watched the reaction of his men to that remark, noting that they were not so weary from the grind of the war as to

not be moved by such sentiments.

Lee had had a long personal history with the Confederate president, going back to the 1850's in Washington City when Davis, then a Mississippi representative to the United States Congress, and Lee, then a major in the United States Army, had both been offered, in turn, the lucrative command of a filibuster expedition to invade Cuba. Both had refused out of a desire to remain in public service, and in this sequence of events, they had come to know and respect one another. Later, after the start of the war, when the Union army under Maj. Gen. George Brinton McClellan had invaded the James Peninsula, Davis and Lee had both been involved with the defense of Richmond. During that time they had become friends and had come to respect and admire one another. Especially as an apologist for the Southern cause, Lee respected Davis; in this spirit Lee had listened to Davis's speech.

Lee peered out of his window to the tracks arcing westward toward the Shenandoah Valley. The railroad was in Confederate hands only to the mountains of West Virginia, he knew. North of where he sat, he noted, the Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac Railroad extended for only 20 miles. The Orange & Alexandria Railroad, the only other railroad northward, was in Confederate hands only to the Rapidan River, just north of which the Army of the Potomac was bivouacked. South and west, a single line provided the connection to Atlanta and Mobile. That same railroad had a southeastern branch down the Atlantic coast to Savannah. Coaches such as the one on which he traveled were in short supply. Rolling stock was depleted due to overuse and due also to the iron shortage in the South that had affected the ability of his army to acquire new guns and rifles.

Later Lee ate his evening meal privately with his son, William Henry Fitzhugh, who was a division commander in the cavalry corps and had taken part in the honor detail. Midway through the meal, the topic came up of the occasional mentions made of the known superiority of Northern access to men and supplies, far beyond what the South would be able to obtain. Several people had expressed concern over whether the South would be able to hold out.

"Rooney," Lee said, addressing his son with his boyhood nickname, "we are resolved not to allow these defenses to fall, but should they fall, or, should the onslaughts continue until we are depleted,—not in bravery or skill, but in sheer number of men and arms,—our cause would not be lost. We would retrench in the mountains and keep on fighting until the North becomes exhausted

with the stubbornness of our resistance.”

Rooney Lee had never heard his father articulate anything so close to a recognition of the possibility of a setback of such gravity. At the same time, he saw in the statement, also, the resolve of holding out, in some fashion, until victory would be finally achieved.

“I say this to you, Rooney, as father to son, you and I being descendants of some of Virginia’s finest soldiers. I think, though, that, for the time being, it will be best for us all not to discuss such ideas contemplating defeat.”

“Yes, father, of course.”

At the Orange station, the men of the detail were greeted by wives and sweethearts dressed in bonnets and ankle length gowns. These women were among the many who had taken up residence in Orange to be near the winter camp of their partners.

Lee watched as Flora, the dark-haired, pretty wife of J.E.B. Stuart, and their four young children greeted the corps commander in a display of family closeness. Lee saw much in it of the exchange of intense emotion that the constant possibility of loss had brought to the families of his men. In Flora’s face, Lee saw a resemblance to her father, Maj. Gen. (Bvt.) Philip St. George Cooke, who had been at West Point, two years ahead, in the late 1820’s when Lee had been an underclassman. A Virginian, also, Cooke had remained in the Union cavalry after the war had begun, while his daughter had moved to Richmond to be near her Confederate husband. Her brother, John Rogers Cooke, a brigadier general, was a Confederate, also, serving in Lee’s army.

That evening, Lee sat in his tent thinking of concerns that were often on his mind. His men had spent the winter lacking adequate food, clothing, and blankets. In all the James Peninsula, there was not a blanket factory. Many of the men were without shoes, wrapping their feet with rags.

The general, as he contemplated, ate his meal consisting of corn pone and cabbage boiled in salt water. He insisted on eating the same fare as his men. In keeping with that, he had four ounces per day of bacon or beef jerky.

Though aristocratic in appearance and by birth, upbringing, and education, Lee was presently far removed from his previous gentility. Arlington, the family plantation owned by Lee’s wife, Mary Anna (née Custis) Lee, had been seized by federal forces. She lived part of the time as a guest on the Cocke family Bremo Plantation in the Virginia Tidewater region and part of the time in a modest rented house at 707 East Franklin Street in Richmond.

Before retiring to his bed, General Lee sat on his bedside reading, from his bible, psalm 144, which he read every night. It began with the words, “Blessed be the Lord, my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight.”

## 17. Grant presents Lincoln with his plan for a national push

Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant approached the White House on Tuesday, April 5, 1864, hoping to present to President Abraham Lincoln an overview of the military plan determined for the spring campaign. Lincoln had earlier told Grant that he would not ask for such details, but the general had since then decided that his anticipated ongoing attempts to keep the president informed, as the war proceeded, would be facilitated by the president’s having such an initial total view. Having gained a sense of Lincoln as eager to comply with any reasonable request, Grant felt sure the president would agree to being briefed on the spring campaign.

Grant paused at the door of the North Portico, where he had been let out of a carriage, and looked toward the statue of Thomas Jefferson in the center of the turn-around which the carriage was traversing as it left,— Jefferson, he reflected, who had spoken of a country large enough, in its western expansion, to support a thousand generations of yeoman farmers. By the statue was the Union flag with its 35 stars representing all the states in the Union, including those that at the moment were inside the Confederacy.

Jefferson has been a Virginian, and Virginia was one of the states under Confederate control, Grant reflected. Monticello, where the second president had lived, was less than 40 miles south of the Rapidan River, toward which the Union army would soon advance to begin the final push of the war.

Yes, the push would be final, it had to be final, the general reasserted as he headed into the White House. There was no longer any luxury of time to discuss how victory might come. Victory could only come in an unavoidable conflagration that would destroy the last shreds of Confederate resistance.

Within the vestibule, Grant encountered the hubbub he had become used to in the Lincoln White House. Society women in floor-length gowns,—a bevy with a single purpose, it appeared,—were moving into the Great Hall, with the lady in the lead shouting to the others. A middle-aged couple, dressed as for church, had papers in their hands and on their faces expressions of concern.

Most likely parents of a soldier, Grant surmised, on some business for which they were seeking Lincoln's intercession. He knew the president gave interviews to anyone who asked.

Grant paused for a moment and saw the First Lady bustling toward him in one of her elaborate gowns. Her excitable face bore an expression of anxious anticipation, as was often the case with her. On this occasion, as on many others, the general found her a puzzle as to the reason for her concern.

"General Grant, how nice to see you!" she exclaimed. "The president told me, if you come by today, you can find him in his office."

"With your leave, then, ma'am," Grant replied with a bow, "I will proceed in that direction."

When he did, however, she remained beside him.

"I've been meaning to ask you, General," she said, "the aide who was with you on the night of your reception..."

"Josiah Derr."

"He is the one with the sister in Harper's Ferry who came here looking for help with getting books?"

"Yes, as I understand, ma'am."

"Well, we've gotten the books and we're about to send them. Do you know the family address? I would like to write the girl a note. Her name is Emily, as I recall."

"Mrs. President, I shall send the address to you this very day."

Down the long hall went the general soon later alone, up the wide steps to the second floor, and down another hall to the Oval Office. There he found the president, looking like a woodsman in a suit, behind his officious desk. At once, the great man sprang from his chair like a gangly youth, smiling, while offering his large hand for a handshake.

"General, so nice to see you!. Back from Out West! I envy you for that! Even in serious business, it is wide open country and does the heart good every time!"

"Yes, it does."

"And saw you General Sherman then? And, I trust, had a good meeting."

"Yes, sir, a good meeting and all is well."

They paused then, and Grant went straight to the purpose of the meeting, that he wished to give Lincoln a sense of the grand plan he had devised. The president in his congeniality agreed at once. The change of topic to the details of the war, however, brought a look of gravity to his rough-hewn features.

Soon they were standing at a table looking at a map of the United States, which Grant had requested and which the president had speedily procured.

“What I wish to convey to you, sir,” General Grant began, “is a simple point, which I shall illustrate on this map with a single line. This line, as you can see, extends all across the line of division between North and South,—in the east to where Burnside now is, in Maryland; in the west, to Texas, where Banks is, near Shreveport, Louisiana; and more in the center, to where our armies are poised to attack in Culpeper, Virginia, in the Shenandoah Valley, and in Chattanooga.”

“Ah, yes,” the president responded.

“Along this single line shall be the single front of all our armies,” Grant went on. “This single front will not advance in disconnected sections, but in a single national push, and this will occur when Meade and I attack at the Rapidan.”

“I understand. There will be no chance for them to meet an attack in one place by transferring their troops from another.”

“Yes. The rear guard guarding against a breakthrough behind us will move forward, too.”

“As we say out West, those that can’t skin can grab a leg.”

“Precisely, sir.”

Satisfied that the president was in accord with the immensity of the operation proposed, Grant went out to the details of the individual units. Most importantly, Sherman would advance southward from Chattanooga to Atlanta and then hook to the east with the object to split the South in two. A more comprehensive form of warfare would be required. Not just armies, but whatever supported the war, would be destroyed. Only in this way could the Southern will be broken; the day to hold back was past.

“It is a horrible prospect, but the Lord in his wisdom has given us this fight,” Lincoln declared, “and now we must be equal to it.”

“As we advance,” Grant warned, “there will be some of the rebels who are left loose behind us,—Mosby with his rangers in Virginia, Forrest in Mississippi and Tennessee.”

“We will have to carry the flour,” Lincoln remarked, “with some of it leaking from the seams.”

Emerging from the basement south door of the White House later, to avoid the people on the first floor, Lincoln and Grant headed out into a spring breeze and walked toward the Washington Canal. On the east side of the Capitol mall, about a mile distant, the still uncompleted dome of the white marble

Capitol building was relieved against a bright blue sky.

Soon the president's son, Tad, who had just turned eleven years old on the day before, was beside them with a kite he had assembled inside and had brought out to try. The president and general watched as the boy ran with the kite trailing on a string, trying to launch it into the wind. It swooped up at once.

"You got it, Tad!" yelled the president. "Give that string a jerk now! See how it reacts."

"Success!" called Grant.

"Oh, to have the mind of a child, General! For I think not just the kite soars, but his spirit with it, up into a realm that you and I are no longer capable of reaching."

"Yes, sir, I would say the same for my own son, Jesse."

"The one of the frequent meals."

"Yes, the same."

The two men talked later, as they walked, about the dream of the West that they both, as sons of pioneers, had experienced growing up.

"I was never much for church or politics in my early days," Grant revealed. "But if I had been forced to choose, I would have been a Methodist like my mother in religion, though not inside a church, and a follower of Henry Clay in politics."

"Your inclinations as a youth were like my own," the president replied.

"Our great projects—the railroads, the national roads, the march of our civilization westward. It is what we are fighting for, too," Grant said. "Though I have never carried it so far as being 'manifest,' as some have called it."

Grant was referring to the notion of the "Manifest Destiny," Lincoln knew. The Whigs had not supported it, thinking it would exacerbate the already existing national differences regarding the extension of slavery into the West.

"We are much in accord on that, also," Lincoln replied. "Full of pride for the western advance but cautious."

Later, as Grant and Lincoln turned back toward the White House, the president inquired, "Is there anything more I can do for you or secure for you in any way to make the campaign ahead go better?"

"There is one thing."

"And what is that?"

"I would like to reorganize the cavalry under a new commander. I will not say a better man than Meade has now, I will just say this is someone I know and am with in spirit."

“General, you have no need to ask. In your new command, the disposition of every soldier in the Union army is at your discretion. Who is this man?”

“Philip Sheridan.”

“Yes, indeed, I heard about his charge in Chattanooga, how the men all followed him. I will speak to Stanton about him this very day.”

Grant, as he departed, replayed his meeting with Lincoln in his mind. Lincoln was the best kind of commander-in-chief, he thought, concerned for the men and protective of them, yet realistic about the necessary losses.

Grant thought also about the importance of the upcoming single front, the coordinated national push that he had described to the president. It was an undertaking on a scale, he reflected, that had never been attempted before in the history of warfare, and it would call for an intensity of warfare such as had never been attempted before, also.

## **18. Lincoln contemplates the politics of the Union and the war**

The nation was divided by the war from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River, President Abraham Lincoln reflected after the departure of Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant. Now, as Grant proposed, the armies of the Union would advance in a single front along that same line. A national push of this kind did, indeed, seem like the beginning of the end of the war. A new kind of more comprehensive war would be required, as Grant had suggested, to destroy the Southern infrastructure and with it the spirit of the Southern people, but the Union had to be preserved at all costs, Lincoln reaffirmed in his mind, to carry forward the legacy of liberty to future generations of Americans.

Dispensed of this train of thought, the weary president paused at the back basement door of the White House, his mind proceeding to the memories of the Whig nationalist dreams of his young manhood that he had touched upon with Grant.

The Whig “program,” as Lincoln recalled, reforming it in his mind, had consisted of “three pillars”: a protective tariff, a national bank, and an “American system” of roads, canals, and railroads. The tariff would protect the emerging industrial power that had followed from victory in the War of 1812. The national bank would provide money for investment so this industrial power might grow. Industrial power, as it expanded, would facilitate the

American system, which, through its burgeoning infrastructure, would connect the Old East, where American ideas of democracy and liberty had been conceived, with the Western territories where these ideas were being realized in communities forming in what before had been wilderness.

In connection with that, as Lincoln considered these matters in his mind, he reflected on the idea of the "Manifest Destiny" that he had also touched on with Grant. Lincoln had first read about it about 20 years before when the war with Mexico was being proposed. He had not fully accepted the idea, he recalled, owing to how the Democrats had used it to justify that war. He did agree, however, he acknowledged in his mind, that America was the "best last hope for humanity," and that, because of this, it had a providential purpose, as had been proclaimed by the originator of the idea, the journalist John L. O'Sullivan.

In those two decades since he had first heard of the "Manifest Destiny," Lincoln reflected, the states of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Missouri, and Arkansas had formed along the Mississippi River, from St. Paul to Little Rock. Florida, on the Atlantic Coast, and Kansas, on the Great Plains, had entered the Union, as had West Virginia, formed from the anti-slavery counties of Ol' Virginia. Texas, the Lone Star Republic, had joined the Union after winning its war against Mexico. California and Oregon had become states on the Pacific Coast, with Nevada expected to follow.

Congress had passed, and Lincoln had signed, a Homestead Act granting 160 acres to anyone who paid a small filing fee, built a residence on their land, and improved it over a five-year period. For the most part, the fertile land being allotted had been cleared of the Indian tribes who had claimed them; the Indians had been removed to less desirable parcels. Work had begun on a trans-continental railroad that would extend from Omaha to Sacramento.

But how did the war fit into all this? Lincoln asked himself. At this he came to a stop in the hall, his tall figure bent in thought. Terrible as it was, he answered, the war,—when viewed within the saga of American history,—was part of a decades long struggle to promote and secure this national unity, enabling a republic of free citizens,—"the great experiment of American democracy,"—to extend from coast to coast.

In any case, Lincoln thought, as he started again down the hall, he, as duly elected president of the American nation, as the commander-in-chief who had sent American boys into battle,

would bear responsibility, after the war, for whatever devastation it had wrought and for whatever lives had been lost in it, in both North and South.

Surely, though, Lincoln continued in this mind, the hand of the Almighty was in this, also. If American slavery was an offense that, in the providential plan, had had to come, but that, having come and continued, had now to be removed, who was he to stop the sword from repayment for each lash of the overseer's whip? Slavery had been an injustice sewn into the fabric of the society that had prospered from it.

Up two flights of stairs proceeded Lincoln, and down to the east end of the second floor hall where his neatly bearded young secretary, John Hay, dressed in a white shirt, blue tie, and gray vest, sat penning a letter at a huge table desk. On Hay's right side, close at hand, were an ink pot and a cup of coffee. Two writing desks bordered a tall window looking out to the United States Treasury Building. Arranged across the table and desks were stacks of newspapers, periodicals, letters, and books.

Lincoln, his mind still lingering on his meeting with Grant, thought to himself that these stacks were representative of the constituencies he would need to placate or persuade in order to succeed in his effort to win the war,—the press, the Congress, his own party, the publishers of books and periodicals, and those who wrote them, the academic community, abolitionist and feminist organizations, state and local officials,—and the most important constituency of all, the people who would or would not vote for him in the upcoming election. Surely, he thought, if he lost the election, it would be because the war was not going well; and those who then gained power would end the war short of the goals he had sought: the complete ending of slavery and the complete restoration of the Union.

“What is the news today, John?” Lincoln asked.

“A so-called Soldiers' Festival in New York, Mr. President,” Hay replied. Despite his full beard, he had a boyish countenance with pink, unwrinkled skin and large blue eyes suggesting intelligence and attention to the task at hand. “To make money for the Sanitary Commission. And Union won big in Connecticut,—in the special election yesterday.”

“How big?”

“The Connecticut Senate is at Union 15, Democrats 3.”

The Union Party in Connecticut, Lincoln knew, consisted of a union of Republicans and “War Democrats,” as they were called, lured away from the “Peace Democrats” who would be his

principal opponents in the upcoming election.

The entire front page of the *New York Tribune*, Lincoln noted as he took the paper in hand, was devoted to the Soldiers' Festival that Hay referred to.

"The plaintive appeal of our wounded and perishing heroes," the lead paragraph read, "presented to the great Northern people by the patriotic Sanitary Commission, has awakened a glorious response in the popular heart."

The report of the festival included details on the opening prayer, a military march, a hymn sung by the soldiers, and a speech by Dorothea Dix, all reported in full and verbatim, with a list of the military units that had marched in the parade.

Further inside, Lincoln found the article on the Union Party victory in Connecticut. The article reported that William Alfred Buckingham, the Republican governor, associated with Lincoln for having led his 1860 campaign in Connecticut, had been reelected by an unprecedented margin of 8,000 votes.

"The people had made up their minds that the Rebellion must be put down," the article said, "and they, as hoped, have clearly indicated that determination."

"Such news must hearten you, sir," Hay remarked.

"I am glad always for their support of the war and for their support of ending slavery," Lincoln said to Hay, though as much to himself, "but it is how they go further than I can that concerns me, for if these people, the Radicals like Stevens and Fremont, manage to put up a candidate in opposition to me, then they could perhaps pull away enough votes from me to enable a Peace Democrat like McClellan to win."

"That is true," Hay replied.

The Radicals Lincoln was referring, Hay knew, were Rep. Thaddeus Stevens of the 9th Congressional District of Pennsylvania and Maj. Gen. John C. Fremont, who had resigned from the Union army and was active in forming an alternative party that would challenge Lincoln. Maj. Gen. George Brinton McClelland, the Peace Democrats candidate, was the former commander of the Army of the Potomac.

"What a different world we live in, they and I," Lincoln said. "I contemplate each day whether and how the war can be won, while they are past the war in their minds, thinking in terms of how they will chastise those who fought against us,—their 'iron clad' oath as they call it,—and demanding of me that I support policies for the Negroes that I think would be better considered after a real victory."

“You are in accord with them on the amendment, though.”

The proposed 13th amendment to the U.S. Constitution, if passed and ratified, would prohibit servitude in any form (except as punishment to crime) in the entire United States. Three days before, on April 8, the Senate had approved the amendment by a vote of 38 to 6, with five senators from the border states absent.

“Now it must go to the House,” said Hay. “Almost all of the Democrats will oppose it, but some few may be brought to support it. They will be pressing for your help in that.”

“An amendment would be the best achievement of all, better than victories in battle, even,” Lincoln said, “because there is no way under our Constitution to bring an end to slavery except through a presidential decree permitted by requirements of war. The Constitution of today not only permits slavery, but it provides a formula for counting slaves as worth three-fifths of a white man. Then, too, the Supreme Court has upheld slavery and has defined slaves as property, as you well know.”

The upcoming battle in the House was the other side of it. Lincoln knew who these representatives were who would oppose the 13th amendment, and he knew the nature of the constituents that they represented. He would have to proceed carefully, he reminded himself, so as to maintain the loyalty of this constituency until the election was secured.

## **19. Lincoln considers the “Negro problem” and the citizen capacity of blacks**

The “Negro problem” and the future of the Union were integrally related, President Abraham Lincoln had come to believe. The Union had been conceived and had ventured forth bearing this problem, and he saw it reflected everywhere he looked, beginning in his own complexity and inconsistencies, which he was aware of from his many articulations on this subject. The Negro problem was not just whether the slaves would be freed. The problem involved, also, how blacks were perceived and regarded; the extent to which they could prove themselves worthy of being perceived and regarded other than they had been in the past; and the extent to which, having done so, they could mitigate and overcome the racial animosity that many held toward them. This further part of the Negro problem Lincoln saw reflected in blacks, in their range of types from deferential and hesitant in expression to the bolder types that had lately come forward to

challenge the old assessments; and he saw it reflected in the statements and actions of his fellow whites, in their display of every attitude toward blacks from acceptance and encouragement to hatred and ill will.

The public reaction to the Senate's passage of the bill proposing the 13th amendment had taken form as Lincoln and his secretary John Hay had expected. Articles calling for Lincoln's greater involvement with the members of the House, first in securing a floor vote for the bill, then in securing the necessary number of ayes for the bill to pass, had appeared in the press; while, at a dizzying pace, the debate in Congress and in the public at large had proceeded to what might follow a constitutional ban on slavery, when freed people entered the wider society and sought perhaps to secure suffrage as well. That prospect had created a growing resentment, Lincoln had heard.

Indeed, a few days later, in a wholly different sphere, at Fort Pillow, on the Mississippi River in Henning, Tennessee, an incident occurred that seemed to have been born in resentment to the Senate vote. In a battle there, a confederate commander, Lt. Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest, known for his raids behind Union lines, had ordered his men to mow down, with no quarter, hundreds of black soldiers,—or so it was alleged.

Lincoln heard of this incident late at night from Edwin Stanton, the Secretary of War, who had learned of it over the telegraph wires used for military communications.

"Water was red with blood, according to the account," Stanton said.

"How many men were involved?" Lincoln asked. "What regiment?"

"Almost 300 men. The 1st Alabama Siege Regiment. And a section of the 2nd Colored Light Artillery."

Lincoln was familiar with Forrest, a wealthy slave holder, and former slave trader, who had risen in rank from private to general, and who operated independently against vulnerable facilities, attacking and fleeing with his well-equipped forces, which he paid for himself.

"There will be calls for you to exercise the Retribution act," Stanton opined, "to take a life for a life."

"Yes," replied Lincoln sadly. "I know. But shall I take an arbitrary life of some innocent reb?"

Knowing that Frederick Douglass, the abolitionist leader, was in town, Lincoln decided to invite him to the White House to inform him of what had happened before the news came out in the

press. Lincoln had met with Douglass once before, just after the Emancipation Proclamation, when Lincoln had asked for Douglass's support in getting the word out to slaves in the Confederate states that they were legally free. Douglass had helped with that, in his congenial manner, but he had recently joined the call for a Radical alternative to Lincoln in the upcoming election.

The president was in his office when the former slave was ushered in. Douglass, large and stolid, dressed in a suit and tie, was a formidable presence, owing to the atmosphere he projected of unassailable dignity and devotion to his cause. His immense mane of grayish black hair gave a fierce appearance, contrasting with the intelligence conveyed by the pink-hued brown eyes.

"Mr. President, if you are occupied, I can return in a short while," Douglass offered with a bow.

"No, for you I always have time, my friend. Come in, Mr. Douglass, take a chair!"

Douglass, when told of the massacre, said: "Mr. Lincoln, as a boy, as a slave, I often observed such hatred toward black people, especially men, and I observed something else, that as soon as the black man begins to improve, then this hatred increases commensurate with the level of success."

"They see it as a threat to their own position," Lincoln remarked.

"Yes. And, for me, sir,—if you will permit..."

"Of course."

"For me, sir, this brings to mind an injustice that you, as president, could right this very day! This injustice is that the black soldier goes forward into battle, knowing that he may be gunned down in this manner, without quarter, or captured and returned to slavery, and yet he draws only half the pay of white soldiers."

At this Lincoln looked directly and kindly at his guest. "Yes. I can decree this or that, Mr. Douglass, but I cannot decree the response. An action of this kind would draw resentment from a large part of the soldiers and a large part of the body politic. And, please consider, Mr. Douglass, how much has been gained in the past few years,—the black man in uniform, being paid as an American soldier. Not full pay yet, as you say, but these are the small steps by which we must proceed. There will be more steps, I promise you, to the extent I can proceed as president."

"That is all I ask of you, sir," Douglass responded. "I trust in your good-heartedness and sincerity, Mr. President, and I pray for your tranquility to endure such decisions as you must make."

Lincoln contemplated this exchange throughout the day and that evening he spoke to his wife about it as they sat with a fire blazing in the fireplace.

“Mother, remember I once told you about the time I rode with our store supplies on a raft down the Mississippi, and there was a group of Negro men there, on the same raft, in chains.”

“Yes, I do.”

“Well, as I told you, these men, despite their chains, impressed me as being some of the happiest people I had ever seen. They were all the time joking, and one of them played a guitar while the others sang. Beautiful music, everyone listened.”

“Yes.”

“Then, by comparison, I meet this man, Frederick Douglass, a black man, too, and he is not such a happy man. He is a troubled man burdened by the mission he has placed upon himself. Still, he is a marvelous man. He places demands on me for his people, as he must. Yet, he understands my other considerations and he forgives me for them; he has concern for me as a friend.”

“Well, he is an extraordinary figure with his wild hair and proud bearing,” Mary Lincoln replied. “The hair seems to say, this is what I am from my forbears. The pride seems to say, this is what I want us to become.”

“Ah, yes! Ah, yes!” Lincoln answered softly, turning his large muscular figure toward the small figure of his wife, as she fixed her gaze on him, as his own mother had done, with strength of a different kind, which he wanted so much to satisfy.

“With Mr. Douglass,” he continued, “I begin to see a future I never thought I would see with Negroes no longer relegated to a separate class but functioning as full-fledged citizens. His mind is as complex and strong as any I have met in the high levels of law or government.”

“Yet, if such a case is to be made, we must remember that he is not a true Negro, he is half-white.”

“Yes. I know that! I know that! And it gives me pause! But I have heard of others, not half-white. I heard a preacher speak once, Mother, in Springfield. Such an amazing poetry of speech, in their dialect! It is not our dialect. It is their own.”

“There will be great resistance, Mr. Lincoln, if the colored people are given full citizenship. Even in Abolitionist centers like Boston. That was the sentiment that our friend, Senator Douglas, took such advantage of in your debates back home in Illinois. Have you forgotten that?”

“Surely not, Mother. But maybe, after a gradual process of

education, such a future could happen. That is where people come in like the young teacher from Harper's Ferry, sister of the young officer, Grant's aide-de-camp."

"Yes."

"Now there is a young woman not afraid to strike out on new ground!"

"Women have always been teachers," came the quick reply.

"Yes, I know, Mother," Lincoln returned with a smile, "but this Emily Derr has become a manager, assessing the material needs and petitioning for them. Like you yourself, as you have done here with your causes, not content to remain in the background."

He took note of how she welled up in response.

"Yes, Father," she answered, "and what a task of education it shall be when this horrible war is done! Miss Derr told me there are 300 students in her camp. The camp of education—after the war—will have thousands of students!"

"Freed slaves, you mean."

"Yes. It will be an enormous task. Hundreds of Miss Derr's will be required."

"That is for certain."

"You no longer speak of Liberia, Mr. Lincoln, your idea for a colony of the freed slaves?"

"Not lately, no. I think I told you, Mother, amidst the Negro ministers who came to see me last year was one who told me he was as American as I, and more so, being the sixth generation of his family that has lived in America as slaves."

"Yes, I do recall that."

"That statement, Mother, and his look of pride in being an American, as we, made an impression on me," said Lincoln. "And, by the way, speaking of Miss Derr, were you able to secure the supplies she asked for?"

"They are in shipment."

"Splendid, Mother! You yourself are becoming part of this vast effort that, as you say, will be required to make the new status of blacks a true status of freedom."

## **20. Emily Derr steps forward as champion of the contraband school**

From the stone-walled levees of Harper's Ferry, near to where the bridge of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad crossed from

Maryland and the trestle-supported tracks bent to the north along the Potomac River, strains of music wafted up on the cool evening of Saturday, April 16, 1864, music such as few of the white people in this town had heard until a year or two before. This music was the songs of “the coloreds,” as the townspeople called them, singing the soulful lyrics often heard in slave camps in the South. The singers were occupants of the contraband camp located between the bridge and the brick engine house where John Brown had made his last stand.

The reason for the music and this celebratory setting, with lanterns flickering and red, white, and blue streamers flapping in the wind, was the receipt, four days before, of 15 cartons of school supplies from Mary Todd Lincoln, wife of the President of the United States.

The men, women, and children of the chorus, all black, stood at the edge of the downtown section of brick buildings, within a stage like circle of illumination produced by gaslights. Dressed in purple robes with white collars and cuffs (donated by a local church), they swayed in rhythmic motion, clapping their hands or raising them up in gestures as graceful as their voices. The songs being sung were the “Negro Spirituals” known throughout the South, with their many references to the Hebrew slaves of the Bible, —songs including, on this evening in Harper’s Ferry, “Hold Your Light,” “Bound to Go,” “Ride In, Kind Savior,” “My Army Cross Over,” and “O de Dying Lamb”:

*I wants to go where Moses trod,  
O de dying Lamb!  
For Moses gone to de promised land,  
O de dying Lamb!*

From each side of the chorus, the flickering lanterns branched out to enclose the flat area of the river front and, by a projection of the line of lights on both sides, the narrow streets of the town, with their two-story brick buildings and the stone steps leading up the hill to the buildings located on the slope above the town.

The audience, consisting of about 200 white residents of the town and a like number of Union soldiers from the garrison on the riverfront, sprawled out throughout this area. On the river side of the chorus were other blacks, some dressed in plain cotton clothes suggesting their recent life as slaves, and others dressed in the newly acquired, more colorful clothes of the townsfolk. Most of these blacks standing on the sidelines were deferential in facial expressions and posture, though some of the young men were

bolder in expression and more expansive in their physical movements than the older blacks beside them.

Not all of the people in the town had come to this event, however, and not all who had come were content with the racial transformation taking place before them. There had lately been growing strain as these same young men of the bold movements had begun to explore the commercial streets of the town, raising alarms against this breach of the unspoken rule that blacks, even if “free,” should not mix socially with whites.

Not all looked with approval, either, at the beautiful, dark-haired young woman who stood at the side of the stage near the black people singing. This woman was Emily Derr, brought by this occasion into a new role as spokesperson for the event.

Some had whispered that Emily, a local girl known to all from her childhood, had become too bold in this new role, mixing too freely with the colored people, in particular with the black men. Emily did not look bold, however, as she stood in the center of the stage light. Dressed in a plain but lovely green silk dress, without the usual hoops and truffles, her face glaringly white compared to the dark faces around her, she stood stiffly with clasped hands awaiting the cue to give the formal address of recognition to Mrs. Lincoln.

When she did speak, however, Emily remembered to “let her voice ring out,” as her father had advised.

“I think I can humbly say for us all,” she proclaimed, “what we have seen in this kind gift: an indication of how important Mrs. Lincoln regards our work as being for the welfare of our nation. And what is our work? Our work, our sacred obligation, is the education of these people whom we have welcomed to freedom.”

Jefferson Banner, the gentle, gray-haired freedman school teacher, was next to come forward. “What can I add after the fine words by Miss Derr?” he ventured in his deep voice, easily heard throughout the crowd. “I mus’ jes’ acknowledge, I do believe she correct in how important learnin’ is, like she say’s, so we may do great things for our nation.”

Not all approved of this statement, either, judging by the restiveness that followed from the statement among some in the crowd who wanted these coloreds to remain where they were, by the river front, or if not content with that, to move out of the town.

Soon, though, the black chorus returned to the music from which they had been interrupted, and again the lovely sounds rose up, this time the “Battle Hymn” of the Republic,” which brought the soldiers to their feet.

*Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;  
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath  
are stored;*

*He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift  
sword:*

*His truth is marching on.*

Among the soldiers was Col. Josiah Derr in his blue uniform, his dark hair and the dark lines of his eyebrows and shadowed, deeply set eyes producing an effect of virile solidity beneath his tan hat with its red officer's plume. While at home on leave, Josiah had not worn his uniform up until this time, but to support his sister in this event that he knew was of such importance to her, he had not only worn it in its basic form, but had also donned the full dress accoutrements of yellow leather gloves, braided scabbard, and ceremonial sword.

Finding Emily beside him soon after the music ended, he walked with her through the flickering torch light and commotion of moving bodies as the crowd dispersed.

"You were splendid, Emily," he said, glancing over to her face, which was clouded over in a thoughtful pose such as he had seen often on her face in their years of growing up and especially when he and she had been in college.

"Was I, really, Josie? Sometimes it is so much more that I ever expected to do! I feel the burden of not being able to do justice to it."

"You did do justice to it."

"Thank you."

At the base of the stone steps that led up the town hill, where people were climbing upward to return to their homes, sister and brother joined in the ascent. The other members of the family had left by carriage as the father, due to ill health, was not able to make the climb. Lydia, the eldest daughter, Elias Derr's child by his previous marriage to Charlotte Stone, was also home at this time, visiting with her soldier husband, Darren, son of the Beecher's who ran the flour mill on Virginus Island. She had gone back in the carriage.

At a level area of the hill by the Catholic church of St. Peter, Emily and Josiah stopped to look off in the direction from which they had just come. Below the hill, where the event had been, the lanterns were still lit. The residents of the contraband camp were still active, gathered in small groups. Over to the south side of them, gas lamps glowed in the windows of the hotels on the water front. Beyond that, the gray line of the railroad bridge

extended toward the silhouette of the bluffs of Maryland Heights. To the right of the bridge, the dark form of the Shenandoah River could be seen, beside the thinner dark line of the bypass canal and the sparsely distributed lighted windows of the dwellings and industrial buildings of Virginius Island.

Here, in this scene, were many reminders of the war, keenly observed by this brother and sister, but not recognized in speech, most strikingly the partial walls of damaged buildings and, amidst them, the two remaining stone walls of the church where their father had been pastor when they were children.

Josiah took cognizance in this scene, also, of the two rivers of his childhood: the Potomac, streaming toward Washington, the heart of the Union, and the Shenandoah, flowing from the fertile valley called the "bread basket" of the Confederacy.

Higher in his view, Josiah saw the gray cliffs below the Loudon Heights Trail where he had gone hiking often as a boy with Hiram Stone.

Emily, without being asked, continued the conversation with her brother where it had left off.

"It is such a new role for me," she said, "to be almost in charge of everything. Jefferson expects me, being a white person, I suppose, to do that. For him it is new, also. He is careful not to go too far. The war has turned so much upside down! The coloreds, newly free, it is such a great change for them! And where can they go, how will they make a living? They have such questions! No one can answer them! You, too, Josiah, how your life has changed!"

"Yes, it has."

"Remember I told you about the article I read, calling for women to rise to new tasks?"

"Yes, I do."

"I have tried to do that," Emily remarked, "but sometimes I feel I am losing the old things a young woman might have done."

Josiah knew that Emily meant the romantic dreams she had talked of as a girl, but he did not turn the subject to where he knew it would lead,—to Hiram Stone, and then from Hiram to Louisa Stone, whom he still thought of often.

Josiah did not speak either of how his own life had changed due to the war. Just the day before, he had received a letter from Gen. Grant informing him that when he returned to duty, several days hence, he would command a regiment with the new rank of colonel.

## 21. Josiah talks with his father about the ministry and war

During his time at home on furlough, Col. Josiah Derr had been thinking a great deal about his upcoming service and the battle command that he had requested and would soon assume. Often his thoughts on these matters had taken him back to his boyhood aspirations of becoming a minister and to the statements and influence of his father, Elias Derr, who had been the source of these aspirations, as well as the model of the minister ideal that Josiah had aspired to until he had decided, at age 16, to attend the Virginia Military Institute.

Whereas for some there had been neither sense nor logic in Josiah's redirection, at that age, from the ministry to the military, for Josiah, in this formative period of his youth, the military and the ministry had been intimately related; he regarded the military as requiring a fuller sacrifice, (and as being, therefore, when there was prospect of war, a nobler pursuit,) while encompassing the same ideals of godliness, patriotism, and duty as those that he saw in his vision of the ministry.

The boy Josiah had consulted with his father when making this large decision; and the father, in his thoughtful manner, had considered it as he and his son had walked along the canal, by the Shenandoah River, on Virginius Island, remarking at last: "Much as I would regret to see you exposed to the dangers of a soldier's occupation, Josiah, yet do I believe that what you say is true, and that, as Christ himself has said, there is no greater love than that a person lay down his life for another,—or, I would add, for a great cause, the 'other' in such a case being the community of all. And sometimes we do have great causes that we must fight for. Certainly that was the case, I think, in our American war for independence."

The stone church in which Josiah had attended services as a boy, as already described, no longer existed at this time, in 1864. It had been damaged in the shelling that had occurred between August 1861 and February 1862, when Harper's Ferry had changed control four times. The former church since then had been a ruin, two jagged walls without a door or a roof. Still, the services of the same congregation had continued in the basement of the Catholic church on the same hillside. As a result, Elias Derr had continued in ministry of the same congregation, and, despite the lack of a physical church, he had never paled as a guiding light for his son in the intense interaction that had continued between his son and himself even as the war had progressed, removing the

son further from his boyhood dreams.

One element of the interaction between Josiah and his father had been a book that his father had recently given Josiah to look at, an account of a New England chaplain, Arthur Buckminster Fuller, who had died in the Battle of Fredericksburg on December 11, 1862. Josiah had just begun reading this account and he was thinking of it on the morning after his sister Emily's speech, as he accompanied his younger brother "Ebbie" down the town hill to the flat area where the contraband chorus had performed the previous evening.

One passage in particular from this book, (written by the chaplain's brother, Richard Frederick Fuller,) had remained in Josiah's mind, and he had read it again just a short time before. This passage asserted that patriotism in America, "more than anywhere else in history," was an "intensely religious sentiment," to such a degree that "those who are found to love their country most are the best soldiers of the cross."

Another similar passage that had remained in Josiah's mind claimed that such individuals "see in the beloved stars and stripes of the Union flag the standard of the cross; and follow their Master to war against rebellion as did the Israelites the pillar of cloud and fire" (as recounted in the Old Testament).

The view of Harper's Ferry, in the morning light, was quite different from what Josiah and Emily had looked off toward the previous evening. The sun had just appeared above the cliffs of Maryland Heights on the other side of the cement-pier-supported trestle bridge of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. The golden light had broken through to the water streaming past toward the convergence of the Potomac and Shenandoah rivers. Smoke swirled up from the rooftops of the brick buildings on the riverfront.

The occasion toward which the brothers were headed was a family picnic on Virginius Island where the Derr's would meet with Jacob and Luellen Beecher, the daughter Lydia's parents-in-law. Lydia's husband, the Beecher's soldier son, Maj. Darren Beecher, would not be present; he had been unable to obtain a leave from his adjutant duties in Winchester. In connection with this gathering of relatives, Ebbie was full of questions about the complicated family relationships and how they figured into the intricate north-south division of the family.

Josiah patiently explained what he knew his 12-year old brother had heard before, that Lydia had a different mother than did he, Emily, and Ebbie, and that Lydia's mother had died of

scarlet fever when Lydia had been three.

"Charlotte, Lydia's mother, was a Stone. Charlotte's brother, Caleb, is Hiram's father. That is how Father is Hiram's uncle."

"And who is Hiram's mother then?"

"You have met her, Ebbie. Remember? Aunt Anne? And remember she is the sister of Aunt Luellen who will be with us today, the mother of Lydia's husband, Darren."

"It's all a little confusing!"

"Yes,"

"Why did Hiram come up here so often when you and he were children?"

"Hiram wanted to work just like an ordinary worker, which he was able to do at Beecher Mill. Hiram has many ideas of this kind! Luellen, being the sister of Father's former sister-in-law, gave him a connection for meeting us, and, through this connection, Lydia met Darren."

"Was Louisa a part of that, too?"

"Yes. Louisa is the daughter of another brother of Lydia's mother. Her father's name was Nathaniel Stone. Louisa is Hiram's cousin and Father's niece. But I did not really get to know Louisa until Hiram and I were at VMI when Emily and Louisa were at Hollis Institute, about 20 miles away. We would get together to talk."

"You like Louisa, don't you?"

"Yes, I guess it shows. I like her very much."

"Do you think you will marry her?"

"I thought so once."

Together the brothers passed the contraband camp where banners remained from the previous evening. They were similar in build, being both slender and long-legged, as well as in facial features, being narrow-headed, though pleasing in features overall; but the older brother had dark hair like their mother and Emily, while the younger had flaxen-colored hair like their father and Lydia.

Next came river-front hotels and the brick buildings of the small downtown, amidst which was the family store with its displays of the baked goods made by their mother. All these places for Josiah evoked more memories of Hiram and Louisa.

Josiah recalled also what Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant had told him in Chattanooga, that to defeat the South decisively the North would need to destroy all the resources supporting its armies, including the will of the Southern people. That was the part of his

upcoming service, the young colonel thought, that he could not so heartily accept.

Later, while his two sisters, Emily and Lydia, were walking arm in arm along the river bank talking, Josiah, seeing his father alone, went over to him and watched with him as the water surged into the intake tunnels for the hydraulic works that powered the mills.

“Father,” Josiah said, “I have been a torrent of thought, restless in my soul.”

From that Josiah went on to what had been the cause of the “torrent,” his struggle to make sense of the soldier duties looming before him (which he was quite aware, he ironically had sought); he would have to accept being an agent of the kind of war that Grant had told him would be necessary to achieve victory.

“The only way I can make sense of it all is within the scheme of a providential plan,” Josiah reflected. “There is a providential plan by which the colored people have been sold into slavery and have lived as slaves, and on that account have had the necessity to achieve their freedom, as with the Hebrews in ancient time. And there is a providential plan by which we, in the North, and we soldiers in the Union army, have been called upon to assist the colored people in their struggle for freedom, and to assist in the continuance of our national unity... All of this is part of the providential plan... Maybe the point of it all is to provide us the opportunity to rise to moral excellence.”

“Josiah, you have put a great deal of thought into this, for someone your age,” Elias Derr remarked. “I agree with what you say, that it is all somehow part of a providential plan, a large scheme that God has placed upon us. You have always been such a gentle soul, thinking of service in the ministry. I know that taking up the sword is a hard, hard thing for you to do.”

Heads bent in thought, they walked along the canal through which boats were pulled to avoid the rapids, the father moving cautiously owing to his angina condition

“And strange as it is, incomprehensible as it is, Father,” the clear-eyed young soldier continued. “I believe that what Hiram and Louisa are doing, and so many of our kin, is part of providence, too. I would say, of course, that they are on the wrong side, but I believe that they can, and do, act with the greatest honor.”

“And I, too,” Elias Derr replied

“I pray to God, though, that it will never fall upon us to inflict any damage upon one another.”

“Yes,” said the father, “your mother and I pray for that, also. Every night, we pray for your well being and theirs, and we pray that this time of discord will soon come to an end.”

Nothing further was said on this topic on this occasion, but Josiah left the river bank with the torrent still in his mind.

## **22. Grant readies his final plan as Josiah returns for duty**

On Friday, April 30, 1864, while his former aide-de-camp, Col. Josiah Derr, was in passage to report to him, as requested, Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant was in his headquarters, in a courthouse in Culpepper, Virginia, with, in front of him, a map depicting the area where his forces would be engaged.

A southward facing window, on the second floor of the courthouse where he stood, looked out over rows of tents and a rim of woods, on the southern edge of the camp of Grant’s headquarters company, also present in Culpepper. In his mind’s eye, however, the general saw beyond those trees to a similar rim of trees ten miles beyond, just south of the Rapidan River, where the dense woods formed a natural line of defense that on the map was labeled “the Wilderness.”

Grant’s immediate concern was to arrange for the speedy movement of his army so as to get his entire force as quickly as possible beyond the Wilderness to the open ground further south, in the area of the Spotsylvania courthouse. It was there, in that terrain more amenable to the use of his superior artillery, that he wished to engage the Confederate army. Grant had resolved, however, that he would attack at once wherever the Confederate army appeared, then he would continue to attack relentlessly while pivoting his army flank left to place his forces between the Confederate army and Richmond.

The whole area around the Rapidan was not a new area, by any means, in the Union army cognizance. Chancellorsville, where the battle of that name had been fought two years before, was just 20 miles to the east. There the great Confederate general Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson had been killed by an inadvertent shot from his own men. And, in all such cases, the pertinent central fact of the ultimate outcome had been that a routed Union army had withdrawn for regrouping. Jackson, more than most others, had seldom missed the opportunity to strike at such a moment of confusion. Grant was determined not to allow such a withdrawal to happen again whatever the outcome of the imminent

engagement.

The Rapidan River ran from side to side across the map that Grant was looking at, extending for about a hundred miles from its multiple sources in the Blue Ridge Mountains to near Chancellorsville where it flowed into the Rappahannock River about 30 mile southwest of Washington City.

South of the Rapidan River, somewhere west of the Wilderness, the troops of Lt. Gen. Robert E. Lee were in the process of being positioned for the anticipated advance toward them of the Union army. The three main east-to-west parallel roads there,—the Orange Courthouse Turnpike, the Orange Plank Road, and the Catharpin Road,— were prominently marked; travel across the rough country, off of these roads, would be nearly impossible for military units.

The Rapidan River, although only about 60 feet wide, would be an significant impediment in terms of the alacrity required to reach the open ground beyond the Wilderness. “We must move across the river quickly,” Grant had told his lieutenants. “We cannot allow ourselves to get bogged down.”

Moving with dispatch, Grant knew, would be a major challenge as the supply train following the army when on a single road extended more than 70 miles. His plan was to advance his fighting units along three parallel roads with the component supply train for each unit moving along the respective road with them. He had assigned to each company an individual wagon that would remain with that same company throughout the engagement.

Along the northern side of the Rapidan River, on his map, Grant had scribbled notes and symbols indicating the anticipated location of his forces. He had divided the Army of the Potomac into four army corps, a cavalry, and an artillery. Each of these he had placed under trusted leaders, all major generals. Winfield Scott Hancock, “Hancock the Superb,” had II Corps. Gouverneur K. Warren, the “savior of Little Round Top,” was assigned to V Corps. John Sedgewick, soon to be the highest ranking officer killed in the war, would command the VI Corps. Ambrose Burnside, assigned to IX Corps, would be kept in reserve in Maryland to prevent him from having to report to George Meade, whom he had previously outranked. Philip Henry Sheridan would command the Cavalry, and Henry Jackson Hunt the Artillery. Sheridan was the officer Grant had asked for as his one direct request from President Abraham Lincoln. Hunt had commanded the Artillery at Gettysburg.

Regarding each of these men, Grant had noted qualities that characterized them in his mind. For example, he was aware that, on July 2 in the Battle of Gettysburg, when the Confederate Third Corps under Lt. Gen. A.P. Hill had threatened to overrun Hancock's First Division, Hancock had dispatched a regiment, the 1st Minnesota Volunteers, against a brigade four times its size. The regiment had lost more than three-fourth of its men, but the defensive line had been held. Grant had taken that as an example of the fortitude required to assign men to dangerous duty in combat, a quality that he believed would be much needed in the upcoming campaign.

The map showed only part of the line across the nation that Grant had described to Lincoln in the White House three weeks before, the part extending between the Atlantic Ocean and the Appalachian Mountains; but Grant, in his imagination, saw the line's extension beyond the Appalachian Mountains to Tennessee, where Maj. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman was poised for his advance from Chattanooga toward Atlanta, and further still to the Red River Valley in Texas, from which Maj. Gen. Nathaniel P. Banks would march toward Mobile.

Grant was also aware that another imaginary line extended in a perpendicular, north-south direction, pointing directly toward the Confederate capitol 90 miles away. That was the line that his forces would follow were capturing Richmond the objective of the upcoming campaign. As Grant had told Meade, however, in his meeting with him in Brandy Station two weeks before, as earlier described, Grant had no intention of driving toward that objective. His sole objective would be to engage the Confederate army. "Wherever Lee goes, there you must go, also," Grant had reiterated to Meade just the previous day.

Neither did Grant intend for any of his forces attacking all along the east-west line, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River, to attack nearby cities. His direction to all was the same as given to Meade, to attack and destroy the opposing army, while destroying all Southern resources that came into their path.

As for the center part of the east-west line, where a middle prong of the national push that was aimed up the Shenandoah Valley, Grant was concerned with what might transpire there with the forces under Maj. Gen. Franz Sigel, whose mission would be to apply pressure upon the Army of Northern Virginia from its presently protected western side. Sigel, an expatriate German, had held on to his command position owing to his success in recruiting

German immigrants. Could he be trusted after his blunders against the first Confederate Army of the Valley two years before? In the overall dynamic of the national push, Grant knew, the Shenandoah Valley presented what could eventually be the biggest problem. If the valley stayed in Confederate hands, it could provide a route to Maryland or Pennsylvania, and, beyond, to Washington City, as had been the case in spring of 1862.

Grant was still occupied in contemplating the map when his former aide-de-camp entered the room and came to a salute, which the general returned with a kindly gaze, though he looked back to the map.

“Now, the problem with any line of attack, Josie, is there is always a weak link,” the general said.

Josiah saw that Grant’s eyes were directed toward the Shenandoah Valley, but, as in old times, he listened to the general’s without returning a comment.

“You had a good visit home?”

“Yes, sir.”

“How is everyone?”/

“Fine, except for my father. He has an angina condition, growing gradually worse.”

“I’m sorry to hear that?”

“He fares well despite it.”

“How do you like your new command?”

“I like it greatly, sir, and I’m much obliged and grateful for your confidence in giving it to me.”

Josiah, on his return to his own camp later, mulled over all of this in his mind, as he saw around him signs of the buildup for the upcoming campaign. All along his route from Harper’s Ferry to Brandy Station, he had noted this buildup in both numbers and suspense. He had seen it first in Baltimore, at the sprawling depot there, in the sober expressions of men in uniform returning like him from furlough; and he had seen it along the further route of his return, where other men in uniform had greeted him with hellos or silent nods.

Soon, also, Josiah had seen the buildup in the two-mile wide expanse of the Brandy Station encampment where hundreds of blue-coated soldiers, arranged in units, had moved about in a commotion of marching, readying weapons, and otherwise preparing for the imminent advance.

Josiah had noted also the ferment the war had caused in the “Old Virginia” of his youth as a result of the central issue of the war, of to what extent Virginia would retain the sovereignty it had

once claimed and still claimed in Richmond: people thrown from prior roles into new roles the war had brought, similar to changes he had observed in his sister Emily. He recalled what Emily had said as he and she had stood in Harper's Ferry in the contraband camp, looking out the war damaged buildings: "The war has turned so much upside down!"

In camp, on the present day, Josiah had observed a group of women, earnest like his sister, passing out hand-knitted socks to the men, who had gathered to receive them.

Across the field from that, Josiah had noted a further indication of the changes that Emily had referred to as occurring among the African American people: black men in coveralls, at work at some menial work to which they had been assigned corresponding to the popular concept of what was proper for them, talking to the black soldiers there that, Josiah had heard, had been dispatched from Maryland to participate in the advance,— not as laborers, but as soldiers.

### **23. Lee and his lieutenants view Union lines from Clark's Mountain**

The general-in-chief of the Army of Northern Virginia, Robert E. Lee,—aware, like Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, of the approaching confrontation,—directed his corps commanders and a selected group of his lower level officers to ride with him to the signal station on Clark's Mountain, just south of the area where the Union army was massing on the north side of the Rapidan River. Col. Hiram Stone, recently appointed a regimental commander, (and with family connections highly regarded by all,) rode out with this group on the splendid spring morning of Monday, May 2, 1864, four days after Grant had met in Culpepper with his former aide-de-camp, Col. Josiah Derr.

The object of Lee's excursion was to provide an opportunity for his commanders to observe firsthand the terrain through which the opposing armies would soon be moving their forces. A map knowledge was enough, however, to indicate the overall design of the geographical outlay. Lee and his men, in coming to Clark Mountain, had traveled east from the Confederate camp at Montpelier, the former James Madison plantation, for about ten miles to Orange; and from there they had continued eight miles further, in a northeasterly direction, to the signal station. The Army of the Potomac, where it currently stood, was about ten

miles due north of this mountain, positioned near a town called Winston at a junction of several routes that led southward toward Richmond, just 70 miles south. To stop the Union army from advancing on Richmond, Lee would have to intercept the Union army and turn it back.

From the summit of the mountain, at an elevation of 1100 feet, this situation was put into a real topography. Below the hillside, which tumbled down through 600 feet of green woods, was the blue line of the Rapidan River, the river that all knew the Union army would soon be crossing, at some unknown location, to begin its assault. That whole area through which the Union army would need to pass consisted of a thick forest of secondary growth left from the over-timbering of previous generations, an area of scrubby, densely packed trees, intertangled with an undergrowth of brambles and brush, and cut by numerous spring-swollen creeks branching out from the base of the mountain—jagged lines in the rough terrain.

“We will attack from the woods,” Lee remarked to a group of men around him. “When they respond, they will need to enter the woods, also. There will be no opportunity for troop formations or for movement of wagons and guns.”

Just that morning, Lee had received an intelligence report from Lt. Gen. Jubal Early, who was among the group he addressed. The report had conveyed more of the same message of inequality in numbers and arms, between the North and the South, that Early had conveyed weeks before on the day that a group of officers had accompanied President Jefferson Davis, as earlier described, in his tour of the Richmond defenses.

The Army of Northern Virginia was, like the Army of the Potomac, divided into corps (though into three instead of four): the First Corps under Lt. Gen. Richard H. Anderson, the Second Corps under Early, and the Third Corps under Lt. Gen. A.P. Hill. Like the Union army, the Confederate army had a Cavalry Corps (under Maj. Gen. J.E.B. Stuart) and an Artillery (under Brig. Gen. William N. Pendleton). Available to the Confederate army, however, was no supply, such as was available to the Union army, of easily re-assignable corps from nearby inactive Union armies and the seemingly endless line of backup troops collecting near Culpepper. The readily available resources of the Army of Northern Virginia were present in their present camp in Montpelier.

Among those grouped around General Lee was Col. Stone, notable among the rest for his erect stature and the rim of reddish

blonde hair below his gray cap. From where the officers stood, a swath of nearly flat countryside opened northward toward Culpepper, where myriad white tents in neat rows marked one encampment of the Union army.

“We see it all so clearly from this vantage point,” Lee began. “They are there, on the other side of the river, massed in numbers twice that of our entire army. Behind us, just 60 miles to the south, is our capitol, Richmond. We cannot allow the Union forces to turn our right and get between us and Richmond. Still we must proceed with caution, so as not to direly lessen our numbers.”

Lee paused to consider the scene before him and, looking back to his men, continued.

“For many of you, however, this terrain before us, which we can see so well from this mountaintop, is familiar from our battles conducted almost one year ago exactly today just miles from where we stand today. We achieved great victories here in the past because we know this country so well. We will have this advantage again in the coming weeks.”

Lee was referring, his men knew, to what had come to be known as the Battle of Chancellorsville, where he, with this same army, had conducted what many had called a “perfect battle,” thrice dividing his forces (then numbering about 60,000) to boldly defeat the Union forces under Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker (whose Army of the Potomac, with its seven corps, calvary, and artillery, had then numbered more than 130,000).

As Hiram stood at the side, then, he heard Lee observe to Jubal Early: “I fear this battle to come will require much from both sides in lives and blood. Yet, this terrible state is our ally if, God help us, it is terrible enough to cause a pause in the direct meetings of our armies.”

“Hopefully, we can trust that, as in the past, one great battle will be all they can stomach,” Early replied.

“We must observe, though,” said Lee, “that that has not been the case with Grant. He is inclined to hit again at once after any setback.”

Lee, coming down the mountain later, visually followed the blue line of the Rapidan River eastward to the wooded country about 20 miles in that direction where the Rapidan flowed into the Rappahannock River, ten miles west of Fredericksburg. At that city, in December of 1862, Lee recollected—a half year before the battle he had referred to just moments before,—this same army had attained another great victory, against the Army of the

Potomac, then under Maj. Gen. Ambrose Burnside, also in a similar terrain of tangled trees and undergrowth. In that battle, the Union had attempted a frontal assault,—122,000 men against his own 78,000, entrenched on a ridge across from the city. Despite those odds, his Confederates had killed more than 1,200 men against a loss of 600.

Thinking back to that battle, Lee recalled that a major part of his advantage then had been in the speedy and reliable support he had had received from Maj. Gen. Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson. The great hero had died from complications of a wound received at Chancellorsville, shot by mistake by his own men. After having his left leg amputated, Jackson had died from pneumonia four days later with his wife beside him.

Lee knew that in the upcoming confrontation he had no one he could rely upon so firmly as he had relied upon Jackson. Early, perhaps, had such potential, Lee thought, but Early’s anger was a negative factor.

Lee already knew how he would fight the upcoming confrontation with Grant. He would wait until the entire Union force (as much as would come along the Germanna Road) had crossed the Rapidan. Then he would attack on the left flank of the Union army (when turned toward him) to contain the enemy and keep him within the Wilderness as long as possible. In that terrain, the Union would be unable to maneuver its artillery and unable to set up the large column movements that Grant was fond of. Instead of large units confronting one another on an open field, small disconnected groups would clash within the confusion created by the fog of battle and dense undergrowth.

“Your corps will be kept where it is,” Lee remarked to Longstreet as they rode down the winding trail together. “We must safeguard against a surprise attack in that direction.”

“Yes, sir,” Longstreet replied.

More specifically, what Lee referred to, as Longstreet was aware, was the possibility that the Union would feint an attack down the Germanna Road and then cross the Rapidan further west, at Raccoon or Somerville Ford, moving toward Orange parallel to the route of the Orange & Alexandria Railroad. That would place the Confederates with the Union behind them, or on both sides, and separated from their camp.

“When you are needed here,” Lee cautioned, “you will need to come quickly.”

“Yes sir. I am aware of the urgency,” Longstreet replied. “We will be ready for a forced march.”

As for the young colonel, Hiram Stone, as he rode with the others to the Montpelier camp, his main thought was that he had proven himself worthy in battle before and would prove it again. Just outside Montpelier, though, he saw a sight that drew him fully to the scene, a wagon marked with a red cross, before which was a woman with red hair addressing three other young women in long dresses with white aprons.

He pulled aside on his gray horse as the others with him proceeded toward the tents on a nearby hill.

Seeing him nearby, his cousin ended her presentation, said a few words in explanation, and came across with a welcome expression.

“So you have triumphed in persuasion,” he said, as his cousin came toward him.

“We have permission from Lee himself to move forward to the edge of the battleground when our boys move forward.”

“That edge is easier to comprehend as a concept than on the battlefield, Louisa.”

“So I have been told, Hiram.”

“If gunshots or men are anywhere near, Louisa, you are at risk of placing your girls in jeopardy.”

“Trust me, Hiram, we will exercise the utmost care.”

He dismounted his horse and spent an hour with his cousin, talking about home and about a recent letter she had received from Emily Derr. Not a word was spoken, however, of Josiah Derr, nor was mention made either of the assembling units of the Union army that Hiram had observed from Clark’s Mountain just hours before.

## **24. Josiah’s regiment advances as the Union army’s national push begins**

On Wednesday, May 4, 1864, the grand movement of the Union army began.

Fully dressed in uniform, though it was only 4 A.M., Col. Josiah Derr surveyed the assembled troops around him. He was just a cog in the vast dynamic of the gathering confrontation, he told himself; still, the manner in which he would dispatch his duties, in the upcoming battle, could factor substantially in the ultimate result of victory or defeat.

As a regimental commander in the 1st Brigade of the First Division of the V Corps, under Maj. Gen. Gouverneur K. Warren,

Josiah had charge of about 900 men. His regiment was a United States regular army unit, not a state-based organization. Josiah's two battalions were organized into five companies each, with each company consisting of about 80 men. From their silent ranks, they watched as the regiment before them turned onto the plank road that led to the Germanna ford. There, Josiah knew, the entire V Corps, with its four divisions, would cross the Rapidan River into the area controlled by the Army of Northern Virginia. Just 60 miles south of that crossing, he also knew, was Richmond, the unconquered capitol of the Confederate States.

There being no music or drums to exhort the men on, as a quiet advance was desired, the Germanna Plank Road provided its own solemn effect as the boots of hundreds of men hit down within the dark corridor of trees, a starry sky overhead.

The march had been heralded, almost exactly at midnight, by the at first distant and then quickly approaching, thunderous sound of the lead cavalry division of 2,500 horses and men,—which Josiah had watched as they galloped past,—led by the tall figure of Maj. Gen. James H. Wilson, upright in the saddle, with his division flag beside him. Wilson, a topographic engineer, had been assigned to this command and ordered to take the lead, Josiah had heard, because of his skills in building and destroying roads, bridges, and railroads, and sources of supplies. Josiah had only to think back to the remarks made to him in Chattanooga by then Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant,—regarding the importance of destroying the South not just in its army but in all of its strategic capacities,—to understand how that objective, expressed with such conviction then, was now being realized in the present advance of the Union army.

At the Germanna Ford, the cavalry had encountered a small force of Confederate pickets, Josiah learned, but the pickets had been driven off and a pontoon bridge constructed, allowing for the Army of the Potomac to begin crossing the Rapidan before dawn, as originally planned.

Earlier, as Josiah had watched his men clustered around campfires for their breakfast meal, he had allowed himself to reconnect with a memory of a smaller campfire, near to which, in addition to him, sat his sister Emily, his boyhood friend Hiram Stone, and Hiram's red-haired cousin, Louisa Stone. They were talking about some serious subject such as they had often entertained. He had not been able to remember what the subject had been. What had come to Josiah's mind, instead, was how, in making a point on which Louisa had trusted in his mutual interest,

she had touched his hand.

Josiah's regiment, the 18th United States, composed in part of some men that he had known in Harper's Ferry as a boy, was the tenth regiment to take the road. Along the wooden span, within a corridor of trees, each regiment occupied about a quarter mile.

Riding, horse mounted, at the lead of his regiment, with his staff officers beside him, Josiah watched as the column of blue-coated soldiers headed down an incline toward the ford, crossed the pontoon bridge, and headed up a steep incline into the dense woods on the other side of the river. Over to his left, the ragged clouds in the eastern sky were etched with the red light of dawn. Cavalry guards with rifles watched from highpoints of land commanding a view of the crossing on both sides.

A message came to Josiah, delivered by a lone horseman from further along the same road.

"I was told to tell you, sir, the column has halted."

"For what reason?"

"I was not told the reason, sir."

"For how long?"

"Sir, I was not told."

Soon later, just as mysteriously, the column started moving again—down the embankment, across the pontoons, and unto the plank surface that continued toward Richmond.

The woods on either side of the road were composed not of large trees, Josiah noticed, but of the new growth he had heard of, with a ground cover of brush and bushes. They were proceeding in a column directed south, but a Union attack, if made, Josiah had been told, would be directed to the west, into the woods on the right side of the moving column. Beyond those inscrutable woods somewhere, Confederate troops were waiting, or planning an imminent move.

The entire V Corps, including its final unit, an artillery brigade, had crossed the river. Behind them, the VI Corps, under Maj. Gen. John Sedgewick, had reached the pontoon bridge and had begun crossing the river, he heard soon later. But where was the II Corps, under Maj. Gen. Winfield Scott Hancock? That corps was in motion somewhere, Josiah knew, and the IX Corps under Maj. Gen. Ambrose Burnside, Josiah had heard, had been held in reserve, but he had an imprecise sense of all that, muddled by rumors.

The limited extent of the communication just reminded Josiah that, while now in the midst of the action, as he had desired, he was no longer aware of the overall extent of the action, as he

had often been when aide-de-camp.

Josiah did find out one fact, near noon, as his division arrived at the junction of the Germanna Plank Road and the Orange Courthouse Turnpike, which crossed it running from west to east in a valley clearing cut by a stream. In the community located there, consisting of three houses, a tavern, a blacksmith shop, and a pine-plank church, the headquarters flag of Maj. Gen. George Meade flew over the easternmost house.

The commander of the brigade to which Josiah's regiment belonged, Brig. Gen. (Bvt.) Sumner Carruth, soon appeared.

"This is where we will camp for today. Have your men entrench at once."

The men began the familiar activity of digging a ditch and laying felled timbers beside it,—in this case, along a line parallel to the Germanna Plank Road and facing west toward the location of enemy troops. Other men pitched tents in orderly rows within a clearing that extended on all side of the junction of roads. The artillery brigade arrived with its 30 wagon-borne, cast-bronze guns. Then came a train of horse-drawn, two-wheeled caissons carrying gunpowder and ammunition, a mule bearing a spool of telegraph wire, and a horse-drawn wagon with the poles upon which the wire was being hung.

Later at a meeting with the brigade commander and fellow regimental commanders, following a meeting of the higher rank officers with General Meade, Josiah learned more of the overall disposition of the army.

Sedgewick with his VI Corps had completed his crossing of the Rapidan, Josiah learned. Sedgewick would camp for the night just south of the pontoon bridge. Hancock with his II Corps had crossed at Ely's Ford, eight miles east of Germantown Ford; he was encamped six miles east on the Orange Plank Road, a position that would permit him to move to the south to form the left flank of the Union army when faced westward for an attack.

"Tomorrow we will proceed southward toward the open ground at Spotsylvania," the brigade leader informed, "but if the enemy intercepts us, we will attack."

The work of the day was complete. Some of the quartermaster wagons assigned to the V Corps had arrived. Crews of black cooks had set up field kitchens, each with a fire. Beside the fires that flickered in the dark, all through the campsite, were groups of men. From the camp came their muffled voices as they exchanged rumors about the battle that everyone expected would soon happen. As with Josiah, none of these men had a full picture

of the unfolding campaign.

Only five miles away from this camp, however, near Germanna Ford, where troops and wagons were still crossing, sat one man, Ulysses S. Grant, who before midnight had as full of a picture of ongoing developments as could be garnered from all available sources. Alone in his headquarters, set up in an abandoned farmhouse, he reviewed what he had learned from the telegraph wire regarding the four of his major generals whom he had entrusted with crucial elements of his overall plan.

Maj. Gen. Benjamin Butler and his Army of the James, composed of the XVIII Corps from Virginia and North Carolina, and the X Corps from New Orleans, had arrived on steamships at City Point, Virginia, 30 miles southeast of Richmond, where his army was landing with no opposition.

Maj. Gen. Franz Sigel, with his XI Corps,—the possible “weak link” that Grant had identified in his private thoughts,—had launched an offensive into the Shenandoah Valley, and was advancing up the Valley Pike to disrupt the rebel communications at Staunton and Charlottesville, his ultimate objective the canal and railroad complex at Lynchburg.

Maj. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman, with his combined armies of the Cumberland, the Tennessee, and the Ohio, had begun moving through the mountains from Chattanooga toward Dalton, Georgia, where the Confederate Army of Tennessee, under Gen. Joseph E. Johnston, was poised to defend the route to Atlanta.

Burnside and his IX Corps, left behind at Warrenton to guard the railroad between Bull Run and Culpepper, had been sent for as soon as VI Corps had completed its crossing. The troops now crossing were his. Some of his men would march all night, a distance of 40 miles, to arrive at the river crossing.

Still arriving were hundreds of wagons carrying food, forage, and supplies—more than 4,000 wagons in all, traveling by parallel roads. They were expected to complete their crossing sometime the next day.

The great movement had indeed begun, Grant reflected, with the mechanics that had been so carefully defined now acting in unison to press upon the Confederacy from all sides in the national push that would bring victory at last.

## 25. Josiah leads his regiment in the Battle of the Wilderness

The earlier thoughts that had disturbed Col. Josiah Derr,—regarding the dire necessity of visiting destruction upon those of his fellow Virginians who had taken up with the Confederacy,—had, by this time, receded in his mind, eclipsed by the reality of the forces gathering for battle. His other, similar thread of thought, having to do with why God allowed such damage to happen, had receded, also. He had come to believe more firmly in the idea, tentatively expressed to his father weeks before, that the struggle for life or death brought about by the war was meant as a providential test of his own resources and ideals, as well as of those of everyone around him, including not only his fellow Union soldiers, but also his former Virginia countrymen. In face of this test, a solemn resolve had settled in his mind with a leaden intensity.

On this second day of the unfolding campaign,—Thursday, May 5, 1864,—Josiah was up and dressed again before dawn. Standing on the plank road over which he and 30,000 of his fellows had marched from north of the Rapidan on the day before, he looked down the road toward the recess of darkness from which the route designated in the battle plan, the Brock Road, extended from the Germanna Plank Road toward Richmond. The object of the present day, he knew, was to follow that road, and a lesser road called Parker's Store, to Spotsylvania, on the southern edge of the Wilderness, where the more open landscape would permit the Union Army to make the most of its superiority in numbers and artillery.

When the 900 men encharged to him had assembled, Josiah addressed them: "None of us knows what will happen today. We will be marching again. Perhaps we will be engaged in battle. If we encounter the enemy, my advice to you all is, remember you are part of a larger unit. In battle, much will be obscured by the smoke of powder and shells. Act with your fellows in mind. Be aware of their location and of whatever they may shout for you to hear. Gentlemen, whatever this day shall bring, let us be brave and strong."

Walking by himself later along the column of men, between them and the woods where the earthworks had been thrown up the day before, he came upon a boyish soldier, ten years his junior, whom he had known years before in Harper's Ferry, one of the many who had looked up to him at that time as a VMI cadet.

"Sammy Rodes, is that you?" he said. "When did you come

on with this outfit?"

"Just last week, sir."

"Well, welcome to the regiment, Sam. It is not a Virginia regiment, but you and I will make it Virginian."

"Yes, sir, we will."

"How are your father and mother? Do they still have the house up over the canal, on the side of the hill?"

"Yes, they do."

"And does your father still work at the canal, pulling the boats?"

"Yes. And now with his own team."

"He may have you doing that one day, I expect."

"Yes, sir, I hope."

"Please give him my greeting. And your good mother, too."

"I will, sir. Thank you kindly for your regard."

Soon they were marching, with the dawn sky red above the campground from which they just departed, but they had gone only as far as the junction of the Germanna Plank Road and the Orange Courthouse Turnpike, when gray-uniformed mounted scouts appeared a mile to the west, beyond the open area called Saunders Field.

A courier was sent to convey this sighting to the corps command, while word of it spread along the long column of regiments and flags.

Other mounted men in gray uniforms soon appeared on the road in the distance, and soon a column of raggedly clothed men, with muskets in hand. They looked lean and back-woodsy, Hiram thought. Several of them had long jagged hair hanging down from their caps, and they were shoeless with cloth wrapped around their feet. The column turned into a pine thicket south of the plank road. A second column approached and turned into the woods on the other side.

Soon the corps adjutant informed there would be an attack as soon as the units were in order to begin.

"Colonel Derr, you will be back on the road, about a quarter mile," Brig. Gen. (Bvt.) Sumner Carruth, the brigade commander said. "We will form along the Germanna road, And down along the road there, toward Parker's Store. Our corps will be in the center, the left taken up Sedgewick, the right by Burnside."

On hearing this, Josiah understood that the Union battle line would be miles wide, extending south toward the Catharpin Road, three miles south of the turnpike. Standing on the plank road later, with the regimental flag beside him, and the men of his unit facing

west, Josiah looked in the other direction, toward the Germanna Ford, and saw a continuous line of men stretching as far as the turn of the road a half mile to the north, amidst which line flew other regimental flags.

At the road crossing by the turnpike, an artillery battery with six horse-drawn cannons, was moving behind the section of the battle line that crossed the turnpike there. Other batteries were moving into position at intervals of about a hundred yards along the Germanna Plank Road.

It was still early morning, about 7 A.M., when the long line started forward. Skirmishers sent ahead elicited gunfire about a mile to the west along a line north and south of the point where the Confederate columns had been observed leaving the turnpike. Something else happened, however, volley of gunfire that came from the Union right about a half mile forward of the rest of the Confederate line and directly to the right of the line that Josiah's regiment would follow if moving west with the other units.

Josiah understood at once that if the units moved forward together, those to his right might be impeded, leaving his regiment to move forward into enfilade fire.

"Sedgewick has not yet come up on the right," the brigade commander said. "We will wait for him, I've been told, so he can push back that wing."

The men in the long lines of blue-coated troops waited silently, tense with expectation amidst foliage so thick that human presence not have been detected 50 yards away. In the end, however, the wait proved to be futile as the II Corps was slow to appear. The order that came at last was to attack at once without them.

"Col. Derr, you will be in the most vulnerable position here to the enfilade fire," General Carruth said. "Are you aware what to do?"

"As I remember my instruction, sir," Josiah replied, "to present a narrow depth of forces toward that side, to seek the lowest elevation so the fire will go overhead."

"Precisely, Colonel. Carry on."

There was a moment then for each soldier to check his percussion caps and cartridges while Josiah instructed his battalion commanders on the tactic to be used in face of enfilade fire: two battalions facing and firing west; the third advancing west in a column while facing and firing north toward the known extension of the enemy line.

Union cannons started firing. Branches shattered in the web

of branches ahead. Hundreds of muskets fired all along the mile-long line as the men pressed forward toward a low rise from which the musket fire of the enemy flashed from dense foliage. What a moment before had been a quiet woodland scene, with sunlight streaming through the spring green leaves, became a hell on earth obscured by the black smoke of muskets and the fiery plumes of cannon shells exploding on the branch-gnarled, uneven ground. Officers were yelling orders, and men shouting out in an exchange of information or in acknowledgement of a wound, their words inseparable from the din of musket shot and cannon boom.

Josiah saw soldiers falling, as if swallowed by the dark swells of the woods. They were his own men but he could not discern who they were or where exactly they had fallen. The air was acrid with powder smell, the light staccato from musket fire. He moved about exhorting the men whenever the musket fire subsided. When the battalion facing north paused in a confusion of falling men, he rushed across to direct them to lower ground, while returning fire as quickly as he could affix the caps and jam down the cartridges.

Through all of this, despite the intensity of the exchanged fire, he never actually saw the face of the enemy except for once when the smoke cleared enough for him to see his unit coming upon gray coated soldiers who had their bayonets ready.

“Bayonets!” he shouted, and, with his own, he joined in the hand to hand combat.

Flailing bodies and grimacing faces were around and upon him then, and the need to parry and strike, with no time for assessment. Then, at the end, Josiah struck a final blow that pierced the ribs of the last soldier opposing him.

The soldier sprawled onto his back and looked up with one hand raised as if to plead for mercy while blood pulsing from his mouth prevented him from speaking.

He was just a boy, Josiah saw, and similar in body build and blue color of eyes to the youth from Harper’s Ferry whom he had spoken to before the battle. Overcome by emotion and remorse, he knelt and took the boy’s hand to say softly for him the words of the “Our Father.”

Within seconds the boy was dead.

Withdrawing with his men later in response to a trumpet call, Josiah learned that the IX Corps was surging forward to take over the place his own unit had left, while attacking the extension of the enemy line that the enfilade fire had come from.

Josiah looked for the Harper’s Ferry youth, and was glad to

see the boy had made it through safely. The face of the other youth, however, remained in his mind. He tried to sort out his experience of the day from the thoughts and resolution with which he had fortified himself before the battle, but he could not summon the strength, at the moment, to rebuild his rationale.

## **26. Lee realizes that Grant intends to exchange life for life**

By this time, in late afternoon of the second day of the developing battle,— Friday, May 5, 1854,— Lt. Gen. Robert E. Lee, commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, had established his headquarters in a log cabin farm house called “Widow Tapp’s” (after the soldier’s widow who had previously lived there). From a garden clearing there, where corn plants in long rows had just begun sprouting, the general could see down a wooded slope to a line of smoke puffs rising above the foliage.

Amidst those trees, Lee knew, hundreds of his soldiers were exchanging fire with a dismounted Union cavalry regiment located on both sides of the Orange Plank Road. In the distance, this same road ascended a low hill to a crossing with the Brock Road, which provided the Union army with a route toward Richmond.

The Union cavalry was using Spencer carbines, Lee had observed,— breech-loaded, repeating rifles firing 14 to 20 bullets per minute, compared to the two mini-balls per minute delivered by the barrel-loaded, single-shot muskets of his own men.

As his Union counterpart, Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, had done at the Rapidan River two days before, Lee had paused on the previous evening to review in his mind the complex image that had there taken form, and that kept reforming, of the ever changing troop positions within the area of encounter, based on reports received from corps leaders, hilltop observers, and cavalry units moving about on the periphery of the locations where other units were engaged.

Grant’s image, as earlier described, had been of the broad configuration of his five corps, each numbering about 30,000 men, a battlefield image that evinced the manpower and material dominance of the Union armies. Lee’s image, by contrast with that of Grant, made obvious his limited and crucial resources. Lee’s entire army, except for the cavalry, consisted of three columns, each a corps of less than 20,000 men.

Two of these corps had proceeded from west to east in parallel lines on the preceding day: the Second Corps under Lt.

Gen. Richard S. Ewell along the Orange Courthouse Turnpike; and the Third Corps under Lt. Gen. A.P. Hill (the unit presently in Lee's view) along the Orange Plank Road.

As for third column (consisting of the First Corps, under Lt. Gen. James Longstreet), it was assigned to the Catharpin Road, about two miles south of the Orange Plank Road, and it had not arrived. As earlier described, Lee had held that corps 40 miles back as insurance against the possibility that the Union army would feint an attack down the Germanna Road and then attack through Orange or further west. Having confirmed that such an attack would not happen, Lee had sent for the First Corps, which was still about 15 miles out from the Germanna Plank Road.

For the past day and present day, Lee had monitored his three columns as they advanced to assault with the Union forces in execution of his plan to engage the Union forces in the Wilderness where chances were greatest of the tree-protected attack that Lee felt would inflict the greatest possible damage while being best suited to preserve his own resources.

Going from north to south on a dynamic map of the ever changing engagement, the situation that unfolded on the second day of battle (May 5) was as follows::

In the north, on the Orange Courthouse Turnpike, about three miles south of the Rapidan River, Ewell had reformed two of his three divisions of his Second Corps into a single line north and south, west of Saunders field, with his third division (under Early) held in reserve. The forward divisions were being pushed back by the Union VI Corps, led by the "Iron Brigade," known for its tenacity.

That had led in quick order to a request from Ewell to Lee, communicated in a brief note that said, "General Lee, I am inclined to call upon Early, though behind him, there is nothing."

Lee, no man for either indecision or slowness of action, had at once returned a message for Ewell: "Send up Gordon."

That was a reference to Maj. Gen. John Brown Gordon (whom Lee knew to be Early's best brigadier).

Minutes after the message was sent, Gordon's Brigade, with Gordon himself in front of them, burst from a pine thicket and drove back the Union line with fists and bayonets.

That left the northern column on the map in a new state of ascendancy as the Confederates regained the ground that they had lost just hours before.

Going further south on the map to the second column sent to intercept the Union on the Germanna Road with a broadside

attack from their western side, Lee, from his log cabin vantage point, watched as Hill's Third Corp struggled to prevent a Union advance. Seeing that the initial defenders, the dismounted cavalry already described, were fewer in numbers than his own men, Lee ordered an immediate attack. But, no sooner had the attack begun, when the battle flags of another Union division emerged at the junction in the distance where the plank road intersected with Brock Road.

"It is Getty, 2nd Division of the VI corps," Lee was told, "brought across from the Union right."

Lee reconfigured his units again, and then saw that Hancock's entire II Corps was coming down the Orange Plank Road in a formation of men eight abreast followed by a train of caisson-borne guns.

Lee called up more of his reserves, and soon, with a lusty cheer, hundreds of men burst from the trees and rushed toward the river where Union soldiers were wading across in the ankle deep stream.

As for the third column (going downward from north to south on the map), Lee inquired whether word had come from Longstreet, who had been requested to arrive at noon.

"He is eight miles out, sir," came the reply.

There turned out to be no reason for further alarm, however. for this southern-most column on the map. Again, the line held through the tenacity of the backwoods soldiers who Lee knew were fiercely loyal to him.

Then, as the skies grew dark over the smoky woods above all three of Lee's columns as they struggled to keep advancing, something that shocked everyone on both sides of the conflict occurred.

Explosions thundered in Saunders Field and towers of fire churned up. Cries arose, shrill enough to be sorted out from other battle sounds.

"The field has caught fire, sir," Lee was told. "There's a wall of fire, sir, fanned by the wind."

With this shocking finale, the first day ended with a surreal afterglow of the fire on the northern horizon.

Thus ended the second day of the battle, May 4, with the forces dug in on both sides facing one another from their final positions of the day as efforts continued to rescue soldiers of both sides from the burning field.

The fire was still smoldering the next morning, on the third day of the battle, Saturday, May 6, when the two northernmost of

the three Confederate column were again drawn into action, with the southernmost column, the First Division under Longstreet still not arrived but reported to be just miles away from the battlefield on the Catharpin Road

Here the sounds of guns firing and the appearance of a huge column of soldiers on the northernmost route heralded the arrival of fresh Union troops at Saunders Field, while further to the south another column appeared that was soon identified as Hancock's II Corps, reinforced by Wadsworth's and Getty's divisions from the VI, more than 40,000 men.

Two rapid developments on Confederate side, however, saved the day for the Confederates.

First, Lee himself became involved in the action when, from his vantage point at Widow's Tap, he looked toward a bend in the plank road about a mile to the south, and saw a single star flag and a gray-coated column. It was the first regiment to arrive of Longstreet's First Corps.

"It is the Texans!" Lee shouted, as he ran toward his horse to lead an attack himself,

A common soldier close at hand, seeing the carbines firing from just ahead, seized the harness to hold Lee back, and dared a caution: "Sir, you place yourself in jeopardy!"

Lee relented, but, inspired by his action, the men alongside him moved forward with the Texans in a new attack that forced back the Union column.

The second development soon followed when Longstreet himself arrived. His scouts had discovered an abandoned railway, he disclosed, not on the map.

"It cuts across Brock Road, sir, just south of the Union left flank. If we move quickly."

From the railway, Longstreet's Second Division (aka Fields) charged in a surprise assault that threw the Union soldiers into a rout all along the earthworks west of Brock Road.

In the midst of this, however, word came that Longstreet had been gravely wounded by one of his own men. Hill's corps, moved out of action for rest, discovered another Union force advancing between the two battle fields of the previous day.

It was Burnside's entire II Corps, sent by Grant to come up behind Hill on the plank road, and arriving too late to fulfill its mission. Hill's corps, though exhausted from the previous day, pushed Burnside back..

The battle was done, and won, but there had been a great blow to the South in the loss of Longstreet, who was removed

from the battle field to be attended to back in Orange.

“We have hurt the enemy more than he has hurt us,” Lee said to his staff that evening. He understood that they hoped, as he, that the day’s damage would be enough to cause the Union to withdraw as they had done after Chancellorsville. That night, in fact, the VI Corps was observed moving northeast behind the V Corps.

Next morning, however, the Confederates discovered that the Union VI Corps had faked its withdrawal and had moved five miles southeast to the Spotsylvania Courthouse to position itself between the Confederates and Richmond.

More than ten thousand casualties had occurred on each side, and that ten thousand was a sixth of the entire Army of Northern Virginia.

“It is as we anticipated on Clark’s Mountain, but hoped it would not be,” Lee remarked. “Grant intends to keep hitting until he wears us down through a mere exchange of lives.”

## **27. Sherman advances toward Atlanta, his mission “all the damage possible”**

Five hundred miles from the opposing armies at Spotsylvania Courthouse,—at the southeastern end of the range of mountains (called on its coastal side the Blue Ridge) extending from Virginia to Georgia,—another event in the Union’s national push was unfolding: Maj. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman, with his Military Division of the Mississippi (consisting of the combined armies of the Cumberland, Tennessee, and Ohio), was advancing down the narrow, cross-mountain road between Chattanooga and Atlanta, his object the Confederate Army of Tennessee under Gen. Joseph E. Johnston.

Sherman had no need,—as others in the often political generalship of the war might have had,—to be reminded that his object was not the capture of Atlanta, but rather the destruction of the opposition army, “inflicting all the damage possible,” as Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant had directed him, “upon the enemy’s war resources.” Sherman had been with Grant, as earlier described, in the hotel room in Cincinnati where the national push had first taken form,—on a conceptual level,—and he had shared with Grant, since the Battle of Shiloh, the conviction that a war which had proven for everyone more horrible than anticipated could only be ended, satisfactorily to the Union side, by doubling down on

that horror, in loss of lives and in breadth and intensity of collateral damage.

As for determining the location of the army that he had been ordered to destroy, Sherman on this particular morning had no need for that, either. From Tunnel Hill Ridge, in Chattooga County, Georgia, 30 miles southeast of where he had started two days before in Chattanooga, he could see, on two side-by-side, densely forested mountains, the fortifications of the army he sought. At the tops of the mountains, about a thousand feet higher in elevation than his own location, were sheer cliffs extending from his left to his right, except for where a narrow valley broke the ridge line. A road, a railroad, and a creek ran lengthwise toward him through the same valley. Upon reaching this place, called Mill Creek Gap, Sherman had discovered, also, that the creek had been damned, forming a reservoir that had covered the road and railroad track. His guns had broken the damn, leaving a wash where the reservoir had been. Looking through his binoculars at the distant ridge, he could see Confederate star and bar flags, packed earth artillery abutments, shafts of glinting guns, and human figures looking toward him.

The date was Saturday, May 7, 1864, the day after the Battle of the Wilderness has ended in Virginia (to be succeeded at once, as Lt. Gen. Robert E. Lee had anticipated, by another battle).

Later that day, as Sherman stood beside a map propped against a tree,—with, looming behind him, the same fortified ridge, locally called Rocky Face,—he met with the heads of his three armies, Maj. Gen. George Henry Thomas of the Army of the Cumberland, Maj. Gen. James B. McPherson of the Army of the Tennessee, and Maj. Gen. John Schofield of the Army of the Ohio.

“Gentlemen,” Sherman said, “let me re-iterate our situation and our plan, some of which you already know. Johnston is before us, above the feature we are facing, in a force, we estimate, of about 45 thousand, with 15 more and cavalry distributed around him. Six miles behind him, running on a north to south axis, east of Dalton, is the Western & Atlantic Railroad, on which he depends for most of his supplies, as we do for ours.”

In addition to being taller than most of his men, Sherman stood out from most of them in seeming more intense. He had a rough appearance and looked lean, almost gaunt, especially in his cheeks which were hollow and taut. His red hair, as always, was not combed, but jagged almost, sticking out here and there in a way that suggested that he seldom looked in a mirror. His eyes were hawkish, with wrinkles around them from squinting. He had

the look of a severe Puritan (as his ancestors had, in fact, been, some of the group who had settled at Plymouth Rock).

Sherman had placed constraints around his army's comforts such as had no other commander upon his men. He did not permit tents except for one tent for each headquarters to be used as an office, insisting that everyone including officers use only "wall tent flies," strung between trees, to shield themselves from weather. The object, he had explained, was for the army to be light and mobile. He himself, in the field, used only a wall fly himself, sleeping outdoors.

"Thomas will demonstrate here, in this valley," Sherman declared in his no nonsense manner, "advancing toward Mill Creek Gap, and Schofield just south of here, at Dug Cap, below Buzzard Roost, to give the impression of a two-pronged assault. McPherson, out of enemy view, on the other side of Tyler Ridge, will move ten miles to the southern end of the ridge. This, we hope, will be our surprise. He will pass below the ridge, through Snake Creek Gap, and emerge at the railroad, south of Resaca, where our cavalry has told us the enemy has no presence."

As Sherman spoke, he paced back and forth and gestured with his long arms. Delivering an order to an officer who had to go off at once to do it, he walked with him in the direction that he had directed him to go, ending up by shoving the man toward his objective. The strategic implications of the plan were clear. Cut off from his railroad, Johnston would need to abandon his strong position above the cliffs. Exposed from the north as he moved south to protect his line of supplies, he would be caught between Thomas and McPherson.

Later, Sherman rode to the northern side of Tunnel Hill where he noted the long line of box cars marked with non-local names. To secure the thousand box cars and hundred engines needed to provide the pre-campaign buildup requirement of 130 boxcars per day, he had commandeered rolling stock from railroads all across the Midwest, and he had prohibited civilians from using trains for travel. Troops had been ordered to march to duty. Horses not ridden and cattle for slaughter had transported themselves.

Sherman knew from this firsthand just how much Johnston needed his railroad connections to Atlanta and further east. That was why Johnston had positioned his troops with the railroad behind them; and for the same reason Johnston, if forced to retreat, would be compelled to follow along the railroad toward Resaca and Atlanta.

The Union cannons began booming early the next day. Thomas had more than a hundred guns positioned southeast of Tunnel Hill and Schofield had 30 guns firing from below Buzzard Roost.

Sherman meanwhile waited to hear from a cavalry corps sent with Schofield on whether the southern surprise had succeeded. Word came back that McPherson had gotten through the Snake Creek Gap without being detected. But Sherman arrived there later to find that McPherson had returned to Snake Creek Gap to await further word on how to proceed.

“General McPherson,” he said, “what on earth possessed you? You have deprived us of what might have been the greatest victory of this war! You have given Johnston time to fortify. We are again faced with what could be a costly assault!”

McPherson, ten years younger than Sherman, and with his native optimism too different in temperament to ever share fully in Sherman’s grim focus on destruction, was, in response every bit the soldier in posture and attitude. He had been, as everyone knew, first in his class at West Point. But this caution,—overcaution, in Sherman’s estimate,—was a new trait that Sherman had not been aware of.

“Sir, on coming out to the open ground south of Resaca, we found the enemy there. Lacking cavalry at the moment, I was unable to determine the strength of his presence. I thought perhaps a portion of Johnston’s army had already come south, and that I was in danger of being encircled. So I pulled back to the gap to wait for word from Thomas, to see where he was.”

“But Johnston was in front of Thomas! Johnston was bound to arrive first! How could you have not seen that?”

“I did see it, sir, though with a wrong interpretation. If you would like my resignation, I will comply at once.”

“Resignation! You are one of our best commanders! I could not replace you!”

“I will make the outmost effort to do better, sir.”

The next morning the Union attacked from north and south of Resaca, hoping but not expecting Johnston to accept a full scale battle, and Johnston did not. Word soon came that the Confederate army had deserted Resaca, escaping eastward into the mountains where they were fortifying another ridge.

Sherman rode into Resaca and found himself before a scene of startling beauty with the buildings of the town relieved by the golden light of dawn. But there was an aspect of the scene that made him unable to react; the sight reminded him of a dawn walk

with his then nine-year-old son, Willie, in the military camp where the boy had stayed with him for several weeks two years before, becoming a favorite of the soldiers, who had named him an honorary sergeant. Close upon that memory came another of his son in bed the night before his death. Sherman recalled that on being told by the priest that he might soon die, the boy had said that he would not mind dying, if that was God's will, but he would miss his mother and father.

An hour later, Sherman stood again before his lieutenants, giving a summary of the ever changing situation.

"Gen. Johnston has eluded us," Sherman remarked. "He has done a wise thing, moving away from our forces, which he knows are superior in numbers and guns. We are impeded, gentlemen, but not defeated or stopped. I can assure you he will be somewhere not far from here, between us and Atlanta. He and his men want rest, as do we, but we will not allow him rest. We will not allow him time to send some of his men to assist Lee in Virginia. Grant is pushing hard and we will push just as hard until Johnston's army is worn down to nothing."

## **28. Lincoln monitors the war and shores up support for reelection**

Aware that the national push, described to him earlier by Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, was unfolding at an inexorable rate, as his general-in-chief had promised, President Abraham Lincoln passed often from the White House along the stone wall that led to the War Department. There, the president knew, he would find his pugnacious Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, ready with reports garnered from telegraph lines the previous night

"Well, our man has done it again," Stanton began on one of these occasions,—Friday, May 23, 1864,—with his bare upper lip pressed tightly against the lower lip, below frowning eyebrows, "flank left and attack! One battle is hardly over before he has set up for another!"

"Where is he now?"

"Twenty miles further south, by Hanover Junction, on the North Anna River."

Two weeks had passed since the last skirmish in the Battle of the Wilderness,—after which Grant had not deserted the field of battle, but had executed the left flank maneuver that Stanton referred to. For two full weeks since then, Grant had engaged the

army of Lt. Gen. Robert E. Lee in a series of battles that had removed Grant farther from his initial location while bringing him closer to Richmond. As Grant had predicted, Lee had followed to interpose between Grant and Richmond.

Lincoln observed a copy of the *New York Times* on Stanton's desk. On the first page, in the left column, the headlines said: "RICHMOND -- The Onward March -- Lee Outflanked -- Brilliant Success of Grant's Flank Movement."

"The Copperhead press is full of news with an opposite emphasis," Stanton remarked. "They are keen to trumpet each loss of Union lives."

"Yes, 'the butcher of Virginia,' some of them call Grant," Lincoln replied. "But the way I see that, Edwin, it is not so much Grant having a butcher mentality, but having the strength of character to weigh in the balance what he must do, and to do it without apology."

"Heartily agreed!"

Lincoln left off from regarding Stanton's somber face, and, as he was already standing and restive, he walked toward the tall windows that lined the war office and looked beyond the white tents of the presidential guard to the bright water of the Washington Canal.

"In all of this, the matter of most interest, I thought, was Sheridan's ride," Stanton opined from behind him.

Lincoln, his lean figure relieved against the sunlit scene outside, turned to face his war secretary again. He recalled that when he and Grant had last met in the White House, the general-in-chief had emphasized how important it was to have Sheridan relocated from the Western theater to the armies under Grant's personal command.

"It was a bold act," the president remarked, "and it showed the overall situation, surely, Lee's army confronting Grant's, and behind the two armies, the long line of defenses around Richmond, and nothing else... a guard of old men and boys, and war wounded invalids. Anxious women. Slaves waiting to be freed."

"Sheridan made a show of it," Stanton observed, "going all the way down, from north to south, behind the rebel line. But he showed the problem, also, in that tactic, in quickly outrunning his supply lines."

"Yes," Lincoln replied.

This man Sheridan was an interesting character, Lincoln thought, small in stature, but with an indomitable spirit and self-assertion to compensate for his physical smallness. Sheridan

would not admit to being unable to do anything, the president had heard; he rushed into danger with disregard for personal safety.

“At the end, by the James estuary,” said Stanton, “‘Little Phil’ was almost trapped. A lesser commander would have given up. He forced his way out of the trap he had put his men in.”

“A side story, also, in the death of Jeb Stuart,” the president went on in his slow, contemplative manner. “They say, before his final battle, at Yellow Tavern, he stopped to see his wife and four children. His home is there, just miles from where Sheridan rode through. Young children, the oldest just a little older than my Tad. And his wife is so devoted to him. Mary remarked on it. His death was a coup for our cause. Still I must confess, Edwin, when I heard of his death, I was not happy, but sad, as if my own brother had fallen.”

“Not too long ago, Stuart was our brother. That is the tragedy of this entire affair.”

“Yes, true,” Lincoln answered softly.

“The necessary tragedy.”

Lincoln left the War Department building, where he had met with Stanton, and proceeded along the familiar walk, beside a stone wall, leading to the White House about a hundred yards away.

Looking off toward the south, he could see Washington Canal, where it joined the Potomac River. Beyond that rose the sleek obelisk of the Washington Monument, reflecting the sunshine on its eastern side. Further still was a broad band of the Potomac, where it bent to the southeast between the national mall and the low hills of Virginia on the southwestern shore of the river.

Seeing that, Lincoln remembered again the opposing armies just 200 miles beyond that southwestern horizon, and the appraisal occurred to his mind that the war was going as well as could be expected in face of the dogged resistance of the stalwarts of the Confederacy. Also, he reflected, the war was bringing with it the horrors and sadness that it could not help but bring in the loss of lives of both soldiers and civilians and in tragedies such as how the war now appeared to affected loved ones like the wife and children of J.E.B. Stuart. The intensifying loss had fanned the fires of hatred, also, on both sides.

In addition, there was another aspect of Lincoln’s personal, political struggle that was continuing and gaining in importance, while Grant’s campaign of relentless attacks and left flank movements was grinding on in the background, and this was the

ongoing grouping of factions and selecting of candidates for the upcoming presidential election. To this aspect, Lincoln gave his keen attention in the following week, as the Union corps in Virginia advanced from the North Anna River to the Pamunkey, 20 miles closer to Richmond.

In Lincoln's own faction,—composed of moderate Republicans, War Democrats, and border state Unconditional Unionists,—the new name of “National Union Party” had been proposed by some to be adopted at the convention to be held in Baltimore on June 7-9; and Lincoln understood that he was still favored to be the nominee, though amidst an atmosphere of unsureness fed by the qualified judgement that many in the public still applied to Grant's military progress.

Over against this, at this very moment (on Tuesday, May 31), the Radical faction of the former Republican Party,—newly coined as the “Radical Democracy Party,”—was holding its own convention in Cleveland, Ohio, with one object being, Lincoln knew, to apply pressure on the moderate faction in Baltimore (his own faction) to adopt a more radical platform or perhaps to replace him with a nominee more acceptable to the Radicals.

The Radical Democrats had nominated as their candidate a man all too familiar to Lincoln: John C. Fremont, hero of the abolitionists. As a major general and commander of the Department of the West, three years before, Fremont had issued an emancipation edict freeing the slaves in that area. Lincoln had countermanded the edict on the grounds that it was unconstitutional and not fair to slave holders deprived of their property (slaves) without due compensation. The party platform of the Radical Democrats called for constitutional amendments not just to abolish slavery but to secure to all men (including freed slaves) “absolute equality before the law.” The platform demanded that Congress, not the president, determine reconstruction policy, with plantation land confiscated and doled out in the manner of the Homestead Act of the previous year (among which homesteaders, presumably, would be freed slaves). It called for returning the former rebel states to the status of territories; they would have to reapply for statehood with anti-slavery constitutions and with former Confederate soldiers prevented from voting or holding public office.

Feminists like Elizabeth Stanton Cady were in this group in Cleveland, Lincoln had noted, as were abolitionist leaders like Frederick Douglass, the same who had conversed so kindly with him in the White House just weeks before, following the Ft.

Pillow massacre.

Lincoln did not resent Douglass' involvement, however, or that of any of those at the convention; but he could not subscribe to the rapid pace of change that they insisted upon.

"They don't understand the resistance that would be engendered," he said to himself, "the division that such rapid changes would cause in American society."

Oddest development, though, from Lincoln's perspective was the alignment that soon materialized of the most extreme anti-war wing of the Democratic Party, the so-called Copperheads, with these Radical Republicans, who were the most pro-war extreme wing of the Republican Party. Lincoln got wind of this by way of an article in the *New York World*, arguably the most Copperhead newspaper in America, that appeared in the last week of May, just after the adjournment of the Radical Democracy Convention.

The anti-war newspaper was full of praise for the pro-war Radicals, declaring that the convention in Cleveland had been "timely, manly, truthful, patriotic and vigorous," and that candidate Fremont had "dignity and positiveness of character" and "the elements of unbounded personal popularity."

While there was a difference of opinion on the slavery question, the paper declared, between "the Fremont men and the Democrats," there were "other questions of vastly more importance on which both parties agree." Presumably, one of these other questions on which they agreed, Lincoln acknowledged to himself, was on the unwelcomeness of his own re-election and the desirability of his defeat.

Lincoln observed that the sudden found new sympathy for the Radicals from the Democrat side was reciprocated to some extent by the Radicals despite their history of opposition and contempt of everything the Democrats had promoted. With this in mind, in an attempt to mollify the resentment of the Democrats, the convention had voted down resolutions calling for achievement of the goals of suffrage and land grants for freed slaves written into the party platform.

Surely these developments, Lincoln thought, showed the extent to which he had created resentment among his political rivals despite his attempts at civility and fairness.

## 29. Josiah, Hiram, and Louisa interact obliquely on a bloody battlefield

In his six battles experienced in the three weeks just passed of the ongoing campaign, Col. Josiah Derr had distinguished himself as might have been expected for someone with his youth, idealism, and ennobled sense of his obligations as a commander. Twice he had led his regiment in attack, not from behind, but from in front of them, on foot, sharing in the danger that he exhorted his men to defy. Once, with an instinct for protecting them, he had pulled them back in time to avoid damages that he foresaw would not have been warranted by the potential gain. He was a well-liked and respected commander, and a dashing figure always in the eyes of his superiors and his peers,—and of those others, too, who on occasion saw him passing by,—lean in physique, with a taut, sculpted face, his dark hair, when seen (with cap removed), massed above his keen eyes. Most notably, he was determined in aspect while conveying his native sympathy and his generosity of estimation for those with whom he interacted as leader or report.

Between the intense episodes of nearness to possible death, also, Josiah had enjoyed the reverse benefit of this reminder of mortality in a heightened sense of the beauty and mystery of life. He looked off with wonder at the light-imbued brilliance of the Virginia hills and woods, (which often had purple flowers amidst them, on the floor of the woods where not trampled down). With the sensibility of a young poet, he noted the magnificent expressions and buoyancy of moods of the young men all around him. When not engaged in battle, they could often be seen joking, helping one another, bent energetically in labor, or poring over letters or likenesses received from loved ones. There were nightly campfires with stars overhead, and fervent exchanges of opinion and regard. Josiah took all of these things in earnest; he had not come yet to a level of skepticism or jadedness that would prevent him from responding with a pure mind and heart.

Still, there was the other side of the war that Josiah had also seen, and that weighed upon him with increasing intensity; and this was the side on which loomed up the faces and cries of the wounded and dying that he had witnessed, and the expressions their faces had borne of fear or, at times, of acceptance of death. Connected to these, also, in his mind, were the background processes that he associated with those whom he had seen wounded or dying, including his ongoing struggle to make spiritual sense of the war, and his struggle to come to terms with

his felt duty to engage in mortal battle with soldiers who he knew regarded themselves as representing the interests of his own state of Virginia. He was ever aware, also, that the army being confronted had amidst its members his boyfriend friend, Hiram Stone, and that with this army, also, was his boyhood object of affection, Louisa Stone.

Louisa was, as always, at the center of his whole being. Josiah thought of her often, and most poignantly after battles when often a “no man’s land” existed temporarily between the locations of the armies, owing to the unwillingness of either side to raise a white flag in order to claim its wounded. In this no man’s land, during this interval of suspense, the wounded lying between the armies could be heard by both sides, calling out for assistance. Louisa’s self-assigned mission, Josiah knew from what he had heard from his sister, Emily, who corresponded with her still, was to lessen this time of waiting so as to attend to these men in time to perhaps save some of their lives or at least to alleviate their pain. He imagined that at some point he would see her there, passing among the wounded, though he expected that, if he ever did see Louisa, he would have no interaction with her,—or worse, that seeing him, she would regard him with accusation for having brought harm.

Then, one day, this situation that Josiah kept imagining might happen, as if thrown outward from his inner thoughts, actually occurred. He was looking down into such a no man’s land, waiting, like the others, for the moment of truce that would allow both sides to intervene, and suddenly he saw a group of four women, dressed in nurses’ uniforms, proceeding, with heads upraised, into the field from the Confederate earthworks on the other side of the narrow valley that both armies were facing. In the lead of this group was a woman, lithe in form with red hair, who Josiah at once suspected was Louisa. He looked with binoculars and confirmed that this woman was indeed Louisa, directing the other women as they bent over the wounded men.

Soon Josiah observed, also, that Louisa was looking with concern in the direction of the stream that ran close to the contested area but beyond the range of her own forces. She needed water, he deduced from that, and was considering whether, to get it, she should approach the Union lines.

Without conferring with anyone, Josiah called for his horse. With a mounted junior officer beside him with a white flag, he proceeded across the shell-pocked field.

Then, as he did so, Josiah saw another amazing sight. Hiram

Stone, bare-headed and recognizable by his distinctive red-streaked blond hair, was standing on the Confederate earthworks, with his right hand extended, palm directed behind him, in a gesture that implied, "Hold your fire."

"Ma'am, we have water, if you need it," Josiah announced, with a tip of his hat, when he drew near to Louisa.

"We could use it, indeed, sir," she answered with a bow, turning to a girl who looked no more than 18. "Helen, take a wagon, and go where the soldiers show you."

"Yes, ma'am," the girl replied.

"We thank the Northern officer for his courtesy," Louisa said, not looking toward him, though, with a slight change in her face that few as much as he could have read, she betrayed that she knew to whom she was speaking, and that it was for her an event of great importance.

"The lady is welcome always in her noble endeavor," Josiah replied, nodding toward the field where many lay already dead. "We are sorry for your loss of these brave soldiers."

"As are we for yours, kind sir," Louisa replied. And then she looked toward him with her keen green eyes. "May the Lord be graceful to you."

"As to you, ma'am. Godspeed."

That said, Josiah spun on his horse and prompted it over the uneven ground, strewn with bodies of his own army, as his junior officer, the one with the white flag, followed behind him. Blue-coated soldiers, sent out to attend to the wounded men, were leaning over them here and there, speaking in soft voices to some who were wounded mortally but still alive.

As for Louisa, for the rest of the day, she labored at her works of mercy, helping some and watching others die; then, at last, in a camp where fires were burning, she sat outside the wagon where she slept and took a letter from a small bag containing her personal belongings.

It was the letter from Josiah, never opened, that had been delivered to her by her cousin Hiram several months before.

She opened it and read:

"Dearest Louisa, my dear friend and non-kin cousin, my hoped for sweetheart and her whom none other can equal in my estimation, I write to you today hoping to speak of myself for what I am and must be, and to speak to you of how I regard and admire you and long for you to be the person of central importance in my life.

"Dear, dear Louisa, I am a soldier, as you know, and I am

devoted to fulfilling even to death the obligations of my soldierly ideals.

"And yet, when I attempt to envision all of this, for which I seek to give so much devotion, the truth is, dearest Louisa, I envision you. I see you with your red hair and green eyes. I look into your eyes to explain to you why I am devoted as a soldier. I look to find there an understanding of my devotion.

"I love you, Louisa. Surely you must know. And I cannot believe, Louisa, that you do not, also, love me. I will wait until I can speak to you to profess my love. I will wait until in response you say, 'Josiah, I do love you. I shall always love you.'

"Except for this, darling, I will have no love. No other love seems to be equal to the love I feel and profess for you.

"My dear Louisa, separated though we be, you and I, and so many, by this great war which has consumed our single people,—whether of two nations or of one,—and knowing of your staunch defense of your own Southern cause, I hesitated to write you; yet, what I have heard of you from Hiram gives me hope that you still bear toward me some of the old affection and regard.

"I dearly hope so, Louisa, and I merely wish to tell you now that I think of you with that same old affection; and more, that I am devoted to you in friendship and in admiration for your noble efforts to attend to the wounds of your brave soldiers.

"Some fine day, Louisa, this horrible war will end, and then you and I, I fondly hope, will be able to attend to our wounds, also, through some kind of reconciliation with one another.

"If this be not the case, if you no longer entertain such sympathies, forgive me, please, for my boldness and presumption.

"Yours always, your obedient servant,  
Josiah Derr."

Josiah was beside a fireside, also, with the most terrible of the events of the day persisting in his mind. But amidst them now was his recollection of his encounter with Hiram Stone and Louisa Stone. He kept thinking of Louisa's face as he seen it when she had looked at him with the strong, intelligent eyes that he had looked into so often in days past. He kept thinking of how she had called him "kind" and of how she had said, "May the Lord be graceful to you."

### **30. Grant recoils in face of the Cold Harbor 10,000 dead**

On Tuesday, May 31, 1864,—after 26 days, ten battles, and 65,000 casualties, two-thirds of which had been sustained by his own side, in his campaign of attrition,—Union general-in-chief Ulysses S. Grant ordered another left flank movement. This one began with Northern and Southern armies confronting one another on both sides of Totopotomoy Creek, 20 miles northeast of Richmond. It ended with the flanking Union cavalry brigade, under Maj. Gen. (Bvt.) Alfred Thomas Archimedes Torbert, dug in at Old Cold Harbor, less than 15 miles from the Confederate capitol.

Cold Harbor had a strategic importance appreciated by both sides. Located at a junction of three roads, two of them leading to Richmond, it was five miles from the entrenchments composing the castle hold of the Confederacy. The Southern commander, Lt. Gen. Robert E. Lee, began at once positioning troops between the Union lead cavalry and the city. Grant, seeing an opportunity for another face off with his adversary, directed his corps to move in that direction, also.

For Lee, the setting had a personal importance, also. It was the very ground upon which, two years before, in his first battle as commander of the army that he would soon rename the Army of Northern Virginia, Lee, in the Battle of Seven Pines, had scared off Maj. Gen. George Brinton McClellan. Bodies were buried there from that engagement, both commanders knew.

Grant was no McClellan, however. In place of the caution that had been McClellan's fatal flaw, Grant had unyielding resolve. His greater concern was that another left flank movement would move the Union army away from Richmond, not toward it.

“We must attack here and attack hard,” Grant remarked, “lest we give the impression we have backed off.”

Later, as he sometimes did, Grant, knowing the troop movements he had ordered would be underway at dawn the next day, walked out along the entrenchments on the west side of his current battle line.

Everywhere he went in his unpretentious manner, soldiers snapped to attention, some with shovel or coffee cup in hand.

“As you were,” he repeatedly said in response, and most of the men, at that, returned to whatever they had been doing before his appearance. Many, though, threw out a greeting or a playful remark.

“Now this one here, general, he ought to get two of the

digging badges,” one scruffy fellow said as he paused with his shovel in hand from throwing up the dirt over the splayed branches of the felled trees along the entrenchment. He was referring to the crossed picks shoulder patches that he was wearing himself as was the man he pointed to, who was well over six feet tall with the girth and arms of a blacksmith.

“And why is that?”

“Well, to get right to the point, sir, word has it one of his parents is a gopher.”

‘Is that the case?’

“He digs six feet across in the time I dig three, and I was told I am good at it before.”

“I can see he has the strength for it.”

The second fellow, child of the gopher, said nothing this whole time, just kept looking on with a silly grin.

They were unsophisticated types, Grant thought later, men such as many he had known as a boy wagoner driving from the woods to town to deliver cut logs. These men, in their duty, were not likely to be killed, but many similar fellows had been killed the previous day.

Back in his tent later, thoughts of the fallen soldiers of the current campaign returned to Grant’s mind. He was aware that he was being called a butcher by some in the press, and that some were questioning why he had come across land from Culpepper, with such a loss of lives, only to arrive near the mouths of the James River, where he could have debarked from ships with no lives lost at all.

Of course, thought Grant, the answer to such questions was that only through exchanging lives had he been able to break down Lee’s army. It was a grim reality, to have to exchange lives in this manner, he acknowledged to himself. He accepted the reality but he knew that the press and public in the North accepted it, if at all, more qualifiedly. On the one hand, he had to consider how many men he had whose lives could be sacrificed; on the other he considered the number that could be accepted before a public outcry.

Next morning at daybreak, Grant rode off with his aides toward the location where the battle was expected to occur. There, on a ridge above a shallow valley, he listened as his scouts told how the opposing army was forming a line eight miles long just beyond the shallow stream in front of them. His forces would need to cross that low land, Grant saw, to assault the rebel line.

Soon he saw approaching his sub-commander, Maj. Gen.

George Meade, lean and stiff in the saddle, and looking, with his long, straight beard, like a Babylonian judge in an illustrated Bible. Riding with Meade were his adjutant, aides, and a soldier bearing his flag, a swallow-tailed guidon, magenta in color, with a golden eagle in a silver wreath.

“They are busy at it, I hear,” Meade said as he saluted.

“But near exhausted, I would think,” Grant replied, saluting back. “They are the same ones doing everything.”

The units rapidly moving into battle order along the long line were the same as had been confronting one another the entire month. On the west were Lee’s three corps, led, from north to south, by Maj. Gen. Richard H. Anderson, Maj. Gen. Jubal Early, and Lt. Gen. A.P. Hill. Grants’ units, to the east of them, consisted of the V Corps under Maj. Gen. Warren K. Gouverneur, the II Corps under Maj. Gen. Winfield Scott Hancock, and the VI Corps under Maj. Gen. Horatio Wright. Another corps, the IX, under Maj. Gen. Ambrose Burnside, was force-marching in. Word had come that they were making slow progress across swampy ground.

That was the first order of business.

“I think it not wise, sir,” said Meade, “to move forward without Burnside on hand, as we planned.”

“Heartily agreed.”

With binoculars, Grant followed along the entrenchments forming in the distance. Black laborers with white overseers beside them were in a stand of trees chopping. Soldiers with shovels glinting were throwing up dirt over a line of felled trees.

“Every hour lost by us is an hour gained by them in their ability to fend us off,” said Grant. “They know that we will attack, and must.”

Grant had in mind already a strategy to employ against the firmly entrenched Confederate lines, a swift, columnar attack, without pausing to trade fire, such as had been used successfully by a brigade commander against fortified entrenchments in the Battle of Spotsylvania three weeks before. The attack had overwhelmed the “Mule Shoe” salient and the assaulters had breached the breastworks, though they had been pushed back.

Grant’s plan would depend on the same commander, Maj. Gen. (Bvt.) Emory Upton, leading the 2nd Brigade of the First Division of the VI Corps, positioned before the low land on the Union left flank.

What Grant did not know, however, was that his adversary Lee was anticipating just such an attack and had ordered his engineers to devise a new method against it. In response, they

were placing flags at artillery sightings so units passing near them could be targeted with known set points.

All the next day, Grant waited for word from Burnside, and word came that his men were too exhausted from their forced march to fight the next morning.

“We will need to delay another day,” Grant said to Meade. “Our situation is not ideal, but nonetheless, at first light tomorrow, we will attack from our right flank. Burnside will come up behind our current lines as rear guard.”

Meade recalled Grant’s remark, months before, at Brandywine Station: “The side that is attacking is presumed to be winning, and thus gains the mental ascendancy.”

The Union attack occurred amidst early morning fog through the no man’s lands that had been pre-sighted. Grant watched with binoculars as the blue-coated soldiers of the 12 regiments selected for the charge, with hurrahs, trumpets sounding, and flags fluttering, charged in column formation across the open, wet ground, where in places lay skulls and skeleton remains from past battles. They had run for about a quarter mile when the Confederate guns starting booming. Volley upon volley of shells whistled through the air and exploded amidst them. Bodies and parts of bodies spewed up as smoke and fog mixed in an acrid haze.

At most a quarter of the splintered columns of men made it to the defensive line of trees and dirt. There they could be seen being hacked down or shot point blank as they tried to surmount it.

Within an hour, 8,000 men had fallen. Cries of distress and pleas for help came from the bodies strewn in the low land between the Union and Confederate lines.

Grant sent a dispatch at once to Lee, proposing that hostilities cease without white flags to allow the wounded to be retrieved. Lee responded that he would have to demand that the Union raise a white flag because he had no wounded of his own to recover.

For two days, the wounded remained in the no man’s land between the armies as Grant steeled himself against offering the signal of defeat. Then he directed another dispatch: “I will send immediately to collect the dead and wounded between the lines of the two armies, and will instruct that you be allowed to do the same. I will direct all parties going out to bear a white flag, and not to attempt to go beyond where we have dead or wounded.”

Grant watched as the dead were collected and wounded men carried off the field on stretchers. He walked amidst the sprawled

bodies, which covered the entire field of battle, an area of ten acres. He visited the field hospital to talk with the wounded.

The press would attack again, Grant expected. They would say now was the time to re-evaluate; and he would re-evaluate, the determined general acknowledged in his mind. But Grant knew already that, so long as he remained in command, the national push would continue.

## **PART II: THWARTED AND REDIRECTED**



### 31. Lee meets Davis as attention turns to the Shenandoah Valley

The figure upright in the saddle on the elegant gray horse was none other than Lt. Gen. Robert E. Lee, commander of the Army of Northern Virginia. As always, he was impeccably dressed in his gray uniform with its three stars. Traveling with him, on horseback, were members of his staff. He was passing through the fortifications that protected Richmond,—a place of trenches, churned up earth, entangled wire, and breastworks buttressed with long timbers, amidst which were soldiers who greeted him with faces animated by loyalty and affection.

The day was Saturday, June 11, 1864, three days after the last skirmish at Cold Harbor had demonstrated that the month-long left flank advance of Lee's adversary, Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, had been thwarted. These trenches, more formidable than those that the Union columns had fallen before at Cold Harbor, meant that the North could only advance further with enormous losses and with less losses sustained by the defenders. The North would need to redirect, the main reason being not the Union's supply of soldiers, but the manifest unwillingness of the Northern people to accept huge losses—an unwillingness known to both Southern and Northern leaders, including the presidents and key politicians of the Confederacy and the United States.

The overall dynamic was already changing. A Union assault had begun in the Shenandoah Valley. The antagonist, attacking with a force of 8,500, was Maj. Gen. David Hunter, who, after the Union loss at the Battle of New Market, on May 15, had assumed command of the XI Corps of the Army of the Potomac. The defending force of 5,000, under Brig. Gen. William E. Jones, had been defeated, leaving no Confederate forces between Piedmont and Lynchburg, where Maj. Gen. John C. Breckinridge was ensconced with 6,000 men. This development was to be the subject of the meeting with the Confederate president, Jefferson Davis, toward which Lee was headed.

In the distance, the James River glittered with sunlight as it coursed beside the tree-covered Belle Island and the long line of piers supporting the bridge that spanned the river there to the city center. North of the bridge, on a low hill, were the tall columns of the capitol and the gray stucco house where Davis lived.

Near the Three Mile Radius Circle, where forts of timber had been erected, soldiers shouted hurrahs as the general came past.

A woman in worn clothing with children hanging on her legs, called out: "In war, we still have children! Children need food and shelter!"

"Ma'am, I am sorry to hear of your urgent needs," Lee responded in a soft voice.

"Go find food for her," he directed a soldier beside him. "Ask around for somewhere she can stay."

"At once, sir!" the soldier replied.

Arriving at the east portico of the presidential residence, Lee found waiting there, on the small porch, the lean, erect leader of the fledgling republic, dressed in a black frock coat with a white shirt, a black silk vest, and a black cravat.

Lee was no stranger to this house and its social events conducted despite the war, but on this occasion there was no show of good cheer. All were aware of the death, days before, of the president's son, Joseph, age five, as the result of a fall from the deck just around the corner from where they shook hands.

"This loss has brought much sadness," Davis remarked, "but the war goes on. Let us proceed."

Despite the formality suggested by this exchange, Lee and Davis had an extensive personal history going back to Washington City in 1849 when Davis (then United States Senator from Mississippi) and Lee (then a major in the Baltimore District of the Corps of Engineers of the United States Army) had both, consecutively, been offered command, by the Venezuelan adventurer, Narciso Lopez, of a privately funded expedition to overthrow the Spanish colonial government of Cuba. Davis and Lee had both turned down the lucrative offer, thinking their duties to the United States more important; and thereby they had gained a sense of one another based on their shared high regard for public service. Later, when Richmond had been under assault during the Union Peninsula Campaign, in summer of 1862, Davis and Lee had conferred almost daily after Lee had assumed command of the Army of Northern Virginia from the wounded Gen. George E. Johnston.

Indeed, Lee and Davis, and the officers with them, were all aware of the historical significance, with respect to that same 1862 Peninsula Campaign, of the library within the executive mansion to which they next went together. Set out on a long, dark-wooded table, beside a bust of Maj. Gen. Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, were maps reminding of the military councils held at this table during that same period when Richmond had been under assault and in danger of Union occupation.

Of course, the situation then had been different from the present situation. The Northern army, at the mouth of the York River, had been farther from the Capitol, 30 miles. But a similar imbalance in numbers had existed. George Brinton McClellan, the Union general-in-chief, had commanded, at that time, more than a hundred thousand men. Maj. Gen. John B. Magruder, sent out to meet him, had commanded only 12,000. Tactics later to become familiar had been employed for the first time. Magruder had used fake shouted commands and staged troop movements to make his forces seem larger. A 12-mile-long defensive line had been built from Warwick to the Warwick River and along the river to Yorktown.

That previous council of war, two years before, had decided to make the most of such defensive lines to delay the Union advance. The resultant slow withdrawal toward the capitol had allowed a Confederate buildup (with troops from Georgia and other places), leading to the battle at Seven Pines, seven miles from Richmond, that had repelled the Union advance.

Lee, as he studied the maps, recalled that key battle in which he, taking over for Johnston, had emerged as a decisive field commander. By attacking continuously, he had unnerved his cautious opponent, causing him to withdraw. Having accomplished that result, Lee had pivoted to the North and had invaded Maryland. The nature of the war had changed.

Lee acknowledged to himself, as this memory occupied his mind, that he had never wanted the war to occur. He had joined the Virginia army only because of reluctance to take up arms against his fellow Virginians. He had become leader of the Army of Northern Virginia only because of Johnston's being wounded. He had overcome his native caution out of an insight that boldness would be required to prevail at Seven Pines. He had continued in such boldness borne on the momentum of his success.

Davis, contemplating the maps, had memories, also. One of them was a national map used in a prior meeting to illustrate that the Union was employing "a vast enveloping movement," as someone had called it. This map showed the internal boundaries agreed on by the U.S. 31st Congress 14 years before. California was there, the new free state, while the territories named Minnesota, Oregon, Utah, New Mexico, and "Unorganized" reminded how futile the attempt had been to achieve the equilibrium of Northern and Southern legislative power that John C. Calhoun, then a candidate for the Senate, had demanded. Now the South had carried out the secession that had been threatened

then. Davis recalled Calhoun's defense of slavery as a "peculiar institution" that had advanced civilization while lifting the "lower race," and he recalled his own denunciation in that same era of Northern attempts to devise legislative incursions upon the constitutional rights of the South.

"Looking at the picture overall," Davis said, "Grant has Sherman out West, pressing on Atlanta. In the East, he has his own armies pushing on us here. In these places we have kept their progress slow, but still the advance has continued. In the Shenandoah, though, an apparent third part of the pattern was thwarted. Now comes Hunter up the valley again. That is the new emphasis. With the loss there at Piedmont, the way is open toward Lynchburg where Breckinridge is exposed with only 5000 men."

"There are reports of widespread damage," said someone. "Not only bridges and railroads, but crops and houses. It is a new kind of warfare, against the whole society."

"We cannot allow Lynchburg to fall," said Lee. "It would open us to a rear action here and would mean the loss of the railroad to Atlanta. But I see in this an opportunity."

"I see it, also," Davis replied. "If we surprise Hooker and drive him out, then the Valley is open all the way to the Potomac. We can take from Breckinridge whatever can be spared."

"It would be a bold move, indeed," Lee reflected. "We could strike at Washington again as we did two years ago. They would not expect us to spread ourselves so thin."

Lee thought, as he rode back to camp the next day, that he knew exactly who the right man would be to re-take the Valley and strike at the North,—his current Second Corps commander, Jubal Early.

Early was grave in appearance when he reported at Lee's tent, ready to assume whatever might be asked of him.

"How is my angry old man?" Lee began.

"Honored to be here, sir," Early replied.

"We have had a long go of it these past weeks, but we have kept the enemy at bay, I think."

"Trust my word, sir, they will not break through."

"Looking back now," the white-haired commander said, "I am sorry, Jubal, if by misjudgment or error, I have lost any one of you."

"You, sir, have led and fought like a noble soldier skilled in military applications, which we need must employ. The other has no skill except to send out his men to lay down their lives, hoping they will bring down some of us with them."

“In that,” Lee answered, “he has succeeded.”

Lee then presented to Early the plan he had discussed with Davis. Early would depart at once, with his Second Corps, for Lynchburg, with the object to join Breckinridge and attack Hunter. If Hunter were forced out, then the Valley would be open for an advance northward.

“As God is our strength, sir,” Early declared, “we will break through, I swear; we will invade the North again.”

### **32. Early heads out determined to strike at the Northern capitol**

This man, Jubal Early, who now came forward to revive the Southern cause, had taken part in nearly every major battle of the Civil War thus far conducted in the Eastern theater of conflict,—in Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania. He had commenced, in the First Battle of Bull Run, as a colonel, commanding a brigade; he would lead the upcoming campaign as a lieutenant general, heading a force constituted from the Second Corps of the Army of Northern Virginia (with which he left Cold Harbor) and the Department of East Tennessee and Southwestern Virginia (then in Lynchburg under Maj. Gen. John C. Breckinridge). Soon this force would be called “the Army of the Valley,” harking back to the storied force led by the hero general, Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson, two years before.

Early was no stranger to this valley, the Shenandoah. He had grown up in Franklin County, at the top of the valley. Often, before the war, he had traveled down the valley to the Potomac River and to the states north of it, which had remained in the Union. He was aware, also, of how Jackson’s victories in the Valley, in June of 1862, had given Lee the opportunity to invade Maryland, and thereby, at least in the public imagination in the North, to threaten Washington City. Those events had given the South a new lease of life that continued to the present day.

Aloof and taciturn by nature, Early had shown little emotion for those triumphs of the past, and he had no need to be informed of the history and significance of the mission entrusted to him. His experience of the war had given him a unique insight and an inner emotion intensified by self-containment.

An important primary element of his personal experience of the war had occurred in April of 1862 during the first Union advance on Richmond. Early, then a brigadier general, had been

sent by railroad with his brigade of that time to the marshy lowland, where a force of 12,000, under Maj. Gen. John B. Magruder, was building a 12-mile defensive line of earthworks and water-flooded fields called the Warwick Line.

What Early recalled most strikingly from that experience was his first view of the Union army: a landing fleet of hundreds of ships anchored offshore; ordered rows of white tents spanning a distance of ten miles; men and horses unloading hundreds of boxes of supplies as well as the “big guns” that would presumably be used to decimate the defenses on which he stood.

Standing there on the Warwick Line, Early had understood how formidable the Union was, and would increasingly become, in numbers and material. Only with a different kind of resources, he had decided at that time, could the South win the war. This immense fleet had been impeded, Early knew, by the ingenuity of an iron-clad vessel, first of its kind. On March 8, a month before, the *CSS Virginia*, by attacking and sinking the Union’s all-wood, sail-powered USS Cumberland, had impeded the Union’s plan for naval support of its army. In the subsequent engagements on the ground, Early had realized, also, circular movements and fake commands had done as much as big guns.

Two weeks later, at Williams, where a second line had been established, Early had been thrown from his horse by a bullet that had pierced his shoulder. After re-mounting, he had continued in the battle until, faint from loss of blood, he had taken himself to a field hospital, hoping to be repaired and return to the front. Early had learned from this that he could muster the strength to put victory above his own life.

Back on horseback, and leading his brigade again, in the newly named Army of Northern Virginia, led by his hero, Lt. Gen. Robert E. Lee, the ardent warrior had been in the jubilant force that had crossed the Potomac, in August of that same year, to invade the Union. Early had not forgotten how reports of the war in the press had shifted after that from Richmond to Washington City, which, to the astonishment of all, had come within range of the Southern army.

The second invasion of the North, in summer of 1863, had brought Early another transformative experience in a sense of the depth of sacrifice being required of his fellow soldiers. There, on the last day of the Battle of Gettysburg, he had seen the battlefield, a full mile wide, strewn with the bodies of the hundreds who had fallen in the ill-fated charge on the Union center—comrades-in-arms that he had known as buoyant youths with lovers waiting, or

as settled men with families, the flower of Southern manhood.

Early thought of this personal progression, with respect to the war and the arrogant North, early on Sunday, June 12, 1864, as, with the sun rising behind him, he led his ragged column along the turnpike toward the town of Charlottesville, 80 miles distant, and the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Expectations for his current mission were lower than for the two previous attempts to invade the North. In contrast to the force of 1862, which had numbered more than 30,000, his force numbered less than 10,000 (though soon to be joined, Early hoped, with thousands more from Breckinridge). The army of 1862 had had ten artillery batteries; Early had two with ten six-inch, rifled guns. A third of his men were shoeless, their feet wrapped in cotton cloth. The dozen wagons rattling behind him,—not 32, as in 1862,—carried flour, beans, dried meat, and coffee meted out from a repository growing scantier each week.

An additional wagon with medical supplies, and with nurses led by his cousin, Louisa Stone, would possibly join his army in the valley somewhere, Early knew. He had accepted her offer to help on the condition that she first obtain permission from the matron of the Chimborazo Hospital and then, with Early's own recommendation, from the surgeon general of the Confederate army. Early's other cousin, Col. Hiram Stone, would be joining the force, also, at Early's request..

Could he find a way to defeat or route the Union army under Maj. Gen. David Hunter with a minimum loss of men and resources? If so, with the valley opened, he would need to advance with deliberate speed, arriving at Harper's Ferry in less than a week. He would scrounge provisions from the countryside, but without pausing to pick and grind grain. Avoiding major engagements, he would cross the Potomac and turn to the southeast toward Washington. Could he remain long enough to dampen again the Northern will to war?

Early's thoughts were interspersed, also, with some of a more intimate nature. Near Lynchburg, the city to which he might go,—depending on Hunter's location, when determined,—he had a common law wife with whom he had had four children and from whom he had become so distant from absence that he and she were estranged. He did not plan on going to see her, but he knew that she might come to see him if she heard of his presence.

Late on Wednesday, June 15, he noticed the Blue Ridge on the horizon and saw Charlottesville amidst the summer foliage. Behind the town was the wind gap that he knew would provide an

alternative route if Hunter had not yet reached Staunton.

In Charlottesville, Early rode directly to the telegraph building and saw that the wires were intact. Within the building was an operator bent over a key. The telegraph, addressed to him, contained a response from Breckinridge to a courier sent the day before.

HUNTER IS 50 MILES OUT, BUT PAST STAUNTON –  
STOP – MCCAUSLAND HAS SLOWED HIM – STOP –  
WE HAVE SET UP A LINE – STOP – I AM UNABLE  
TO GO OUT – STOP - P. HILL HAS TAKEN CHARGE.

He would need to move at once to Lynchburg, Early decided. In the railroad yard outside sat five passenger cars and an engine with smoke rising from it.

“We need to secure this train,” he said to a junior officer.

“Are there any others?”

“One, at Waynesboro.”

“Send for it at once.”

Not enough cars had been gathered by daybreak the next day to carry all of the men. Early boarded with Ramseur’s division and about half of Gordon’s. Rode was to march with his division and the rest of the army toward Lynchburg to be picked up when the trains returned.

Traveling on tracks that had been destroyed and repaired, the train, also in poor condition, took eight hours to travel the 60 miles to Lynchburg.

Early went to the house where General Breckinridge was convalescing from a wound suffered at Cold Harbor.

The former Vice President of the United States, (under Lincoln’s Democratic predecessor, James Polk,) was seated in a rolling chair by a window, looking southward toward the road on which Hunter’s army was approaching.

“Greetings, sir,” Breckinridge said, “I will write an order at once for you to take charge of this army,”

“Thank you, John, I will evaluate directly what we need to do.”

Though the fact had never been acknowledged between them, Breckinridge and Early had in common that they had both, before the war, counseled against secession. Both, once the first federal shots had been fired at Fort Sumter, had enlisted in the Confederate army. Breckinridge, then a senator, was the only man expelled as a traitor by the U.S. Senate.

“Hill is in command at the moment. They are constructing a line just north of the city. Look, you can see them by the bridge.”

“You said in your message McCausland is slowing them down.”

“Attacking and withdrawing. He has only 400 men.”

Early rode out to examine the defensive line, noting it was too close to the city, with buildings in range of cannons. The center of the line was manned by weary soldiers of Breckinridge’s army and by dismounted cavalry demoralized from being defeated at Piedmont. Gaps in the line were filled by reserves, invalids, and cadets from VMI, the same boys who had defeated Sigel at New Market despite leaving their boots in ankle deep muck as they crossed a muddy field.

“We will move the line forward two miles,” Early said. “When the others arrive, keep the train. Run it back and forth to give the impression of more coming. Place soldiers beyond the line with flags, making noise.

“We must make ourselves look big.”

### **33. Hiram talks with his mother about the morality of slavery**

After being assigned to his cousin’s army currently taking form near Lynchburg, Col. Hiram Stone had arranged to travel there by horse so as to be able to stop for a brief furlough at his family plantation in Powhatan County. Traveling with him was his determined, red-haired cousin, Louisa Stone, and nurses under her direction in the Confederate medical corps. Louisa had arranged to hold a rally in the town square, assisted by local women, for the purpose of collecting donations for the horse-drawn ambulance she and her nurses were bringing to the Valley, where they would join the new force.

For months, Hiram’s attention had been on fulfilling his duties as commander of a cavalry regiment. As he approached his home, however, and saw before him the setting of his childhood, he began to dwell on home-related considerations. As on his previous visit, prior to the Union crossing of the Rapidan, he noted the appearance of distress. The fields along the James River that he had previously observed has been left unplanted, owing to the ongoing impressment of the male slaves, were now overgrown with weeds. The garden area by the house was only partly used.

Over beyond the worn outbuildings and the fallow fields, also, Hiram observed something that had a more powerful effect upon him. A notch in the tree line there of the white-flowered dogwoods, reminded him of the path led from that notch down the

slope to the slave camp. Memories of the slave camp came to his mind, pleasant and rich memories; he had many such memories of the community of slaves that had lived in the camp. He did not remember any contention such as he had heard had occurred on other plantations. In addition, he recalled walking on the path with his childhood companion, the educated house slave, Terner Ross, the one to whom, on his previous visit home, he had offered freedom.

In this memory, also, was his personal sense of having neglected to do what he should have done. He had taken things so far, Hiram thought to himself, but he had not had the integrity to take them to their end; and this was true, in particular, in regard to his long-held desire to arrive at some arrangement which, regardless of the outcome of the war, would allow the current group of 85 adult slaves (and their children) to continue living and working on the plantation, if they wished, while being legally free and employed for wages, as he had read had been done at several other plantations, such as at the Blair plantation in Maryland (though only two slaves had been involved).

Hiram thought, also, that he had ought to complete the conversation that he had begun with his mother on his previous visit home about this subject.

As it turned out, however, Anne Stone brought up the subject herself after the evening meal on his first evening home by saying that she had wondered about it since hearing, months before, of his desire to free Terner Ross. As earlier described, Terner had refused to accept that change in status because a condition of his being granted freedom, insisted on by her, was that he move away from the plantation and the camp where many of his relatives lived.

“The truth is, Mother, I have not been wholly honest with you on this subject,” Hiram said. “Indeed, I have not been honest with myself. For I have had a long thought process regarding this,—related in part to freeing Terner, as you and I discussed last year,—but going further in my mind. I have never owned up to this thought process in terms of bringing it to expression or action.”

Anne Stone was not surprised by this revelation. She knew how idealistic her son had been from a young age, always tormented over moral questions despite his carefree manner. In fact, she had observed that his manner was part of the armor that he had developed to defend himself from self-accusations.

Still, she said: “Further how?”

To which he replied: "Further to the idea that I have never admitted to anyone but one, that all the slaves would be freed, while continuing of their own free will to live and work here."

She smiled. "A pipe dream, in other words," she remarked. "How is it, though, that you came to have such ideas? A young man like you from such a family as this, from a background of generations of planters. Did you have friends at VMI with ideas like these?"

"No, of course not," he exclaimed. "But I think you must know, or suspect, Mother, it was on account of Emily Derr. She was inquiring always, challenging me to justify my ideas."

"I did notice you always placed great weight on what Emily told you or asked you," Anne Stone replied, "even as a boy, long before you were old enough to look upon her as a woman. So she is this 'one' that you mentioned before?"

"Yes, there was something unusual always in the influence she had on me."

"Unusual? Maybe not. But there is much in this dynamic between boys and girls, and men and women, that contributes to why we all want so much to be good! And for this, Hiram, I will forgive you for your strange ideas."

He laughed at that. He knew his mother was not a typical Southern woman in this respect, having been educated in Pennsylvania amidst liberal girls from elite New England families.

"Mother, they are not such strange ideas. Henry Clay, the so-called great compromiser, was a slave owner, and he stated publicly that he thought it was wrong, and should be discontinued. And Joseph Davis, the older brother of our president, Jefferson Davis, has entertained such ideas."

"Yes, I have heard of his ideas, Hiram. A 'utopian plantation,' as he calls it, where the slaves are treated with benevolence, and, in matters of transactions or personal disputes, are tried in a court where the jurors are other slaves."

"And they have a slave like our own Turner."

"Yes, I have heard that, too, and that does seem like a better idea, I admit, for all slave owners to go in that direction. But we have treated our own slaves with benevolence, also."

"Yes, but here, as well as with Davis, they are not free."

"No, they are not. But let us just imagine that, as an outcome of the war or of legislation in our own state, all the slaves of Virginia should go free. If they leave the plantations, they will be wandering around, or crowding into the cities, or trying to make it to the North. Thousands of them."

“And maybe that would be the time then,” Hiram replied, “to offer them a condition where they can continue doing the same work, and living in the same homes. But for the work they will be paid. For the houses they will pay rent or maybe they will buy them.”

“Everything is the same, then,” Mrs. Stone responded, “except with the illusion of freedom? And, in the North, do you think the common people will welcome them with open arms?”

“I do not know.”

“The essential problem, Hiram, is what can they do? In a free world, for them, it will come to such a test. And if they fall short in this test, they will be slaves of a new kind.”

“You think they lack the capacity to do better?” Hiram said.

“I don’t know. I can just see what they have done here. In their defense we can say, we have not taught them how to do better. But they have not taught themselves, either, whereas we have taught ourselves and our children.”

“Turner has shown you wrong, Mother, in your low assessment.”

“First, let me be clear, Hiram, it gives me no satisfaction to make such a ‘low assessment,’ as you call it,” Anne said softly. “And, second, let us admit, also, in the interest of being honest: Turner is a genius among these people,—in comparison with the others, I mean,—but, in our world, Turner is no better than you and I, and we are just normal among our own kind.

“Our geniuses are able to create great art, great poetry, great music,—and I don’t mean great music in the sense of being emotional. Oh, I know these people, in their simplicity, can do that! I mean, in the sense of structure and thematic development. I’ve studied music myself. Franz Josef Haydn with his hundred symphonies! Now that is genius, an alternative language based on sound!—Oh, let us be honest, Hiram, at least with one another!—There is no indication anywhere that the Negro people have the capacity to deal with complexity of any kind.”

Hiram walked over to a tall window and looked below the sprawling trees toward the path that led off through the woods to the slave camp by the river.

“We will just have to let it happen and see where it leads,” he remarked, looking back to her. “We will have to do this no matter what is the outcome of this war.”

That clear eyed look was reminiscent of what Hiram had been as a child, as she remembered him, idealistic and well-intentioned throughout, and plotting always for how to take the

best next step into the future.

“I trust, Hiram, in your sincere desire to do the best for everyone,—including these people who have lived here for generations,—and in your earnest speculations regarding all of these things. And if your decision in this is to keep these people here as no longer slaves, but as free people, then I will abide by that and try to help this new situation to succeed on an economic level. But in my mind I will not accept they are equal until they prove what they can do.”

Hiram went off soon later, not in a mood of annoyance with his mother, or feeling chastised by her, but with a sense that he went with her blessings, as always. Within himself, on a deeper level, however, the turmoil and self-dissatisfaction continued, as he crossed the wide lawn, shaded by the sprawling branches of the magnolia tree in the back yard, and headed from there down toward the river along the path he had earlier recalled.

### **34. Louisa prepares her ambulance team to join Early’s Valley campaign**

The Saturday morning scene in Powhatan town square was marked by a dearth of goods, compared to before the war; but on June 18, 1864, the scene was made more interesting by the presence, under a sprawling oak, of Louisa Stone, her ambulance wagon, three other volunteer nurses, and a group of mostly women and children listening to her plea for support.

The nurses, except for Louisa, were those she had described to her cousin, Hiram, three months before. Included among them were: Marcia Loudon, a fair-haired, 26-year-old fellow native of Powhatan; Helen Rheims, 20 years old, thin and ascetic-looking, with long dark hair, from Richmond; and 40-year-old Florence Guilan of Powhatan, short and severe in appearance with brown hair bearing a touch of gray and a sad, drawn face showing the effect of the loss of her child and soldier husband in a war-related incident two years before, when their home had been destroyed by an errant shell.

The nurses wore ankle-length, straight cotton dresses, of various muted colors and patterns, over which hung a white bibbed apron tied at the waist. Under white bonnets, with faces marked by good will, they looked out to the bystanders

Louisa, at this time 26 years old, presented a like benevolent countenance, but with a stalwart resolution in her eyes and chin

suggesting her readiness to defend her project of bringing her team as near as possible to the battlefield so as to respond more quickly in situations where a soldier's life might be saved. She and her nurses had persisted in this project throughout the Union's overland campaign east of Richmond, working, in the main, in the entry area of the sprawling Chimborazo Hospital grounds, and, in a few cases, going near battlefields, when she could obtain permission.

Lately, however, as earlier described, Louisa had been pursuing her plan to take her team out to assist the new Army of the Valley under the command of her cousin, Lt. Gen. Jubal Early. At his request, she had obtained permission from Phoebe Pember, matron of Chimborazo Hospital, and subsequently from the chief surgeon of that army, who had been favorably alerted to her by General Early. All that remained in her way was this left step to obtain full provisions for her team.

Because a number of men from Powhatan County were serving in Early's army, Louisa had come to make her special plea for assistance of the local community. She expected, however, that the skepticism and disapproval encountered throughout the war would be present on this occasion, also.

In response to a query, she said: "We need clean cotton cloth of all sizes. Muslin for bandages. Blankets. And sheets for hot weather. We need jugs of all kinds."

"And we could use a little hatchet," remarked one of the nurses. "For chopping wood for our fire."

That brought laughter from the group and loud huffas from an old man who had just been telling everyone that he had fought in the Cree War.

"And you need a little liquor, don't you, Louisa," a woman called out, "so you have something to offer on those lively evenings with the men?"

This remark was made as a ploy, everyone knew. These people had grown up with Louisa and knew that such a remark was sure to bring forth a display of indignation.

"We do not socialize with the men, Mrs. Welland!" Louisa replied with a familiar flaring up of her nostrils and uplifting of her head that made them all smile. "We have a rule against it, and no one stays on our team who is unwilling to abide by this rule. So we see little of this liveliness which you deem of such interest! But we do keep liquor to use as medicine, and I can assure you it is only used for assuaging pain."

Standing by the wagon, which had a canvas-covered dome

that the nurses slept under on the road, Louisa was a sight such as she did not know herself to be: bold, distinctive, and beautiful in every way.

There was, first, the impression she gave of determination and sturdiness as she looked out, seldom smiling and squarely planted on both feet. She was feminine, surely, with full breasts and firm, wide hips, but she gave the impression, also, that she would not allow herself to be the object of attention or flattery. Despite this, however, the beauty of her hair and eyes was such that no attempt at plainness could dull its effect. Her red hair had a luxuriant fullness and brilliant sheen. Her eyes were the gray, green, and blue mix, earlier described, that she could not prevent from sparkling as she spoke.

Later, Louisa walked down the main street of the town with Marcia Loudon, who was quite pretty, also, with ivory skin and light brown hair.

The ages and female gender of her nurses were issues with some people, Louisa knew. She was keenly aware of the opinion that Matron Pember had warned her she might face, that the duty she proposed for her nurses, involving hands on contact with the bodies of wounded men, “would be injurious to the delicacy and refinement of a lady,— that her nature would become deteriorated and her sensibilities blunted.”

For the time being, though, Louisa found herself returned to another self less taken with obligations. For a moment, she became what she had been before the war, a hopeful, joyous person occupied with the normal dreams of a young woman, and looking off with wonder to the beauty of life around her.

It was a brilliant, sunny day with a blue sky overhead. There were flowers all around the square. The war had not caused a lack of them! Children ran by, laughing, a reminder that Virginia had a future, too, despite being under siege by Yankees.

“It’s a pity we didn’t know one better when we were school age,” Louisa said. “I knew enough of you, though, to know you have as many memories of this square as I do. Seems like I saw you here often.”

“Oh, yes.”

“My favorite memory is when I was 16,” Louisa went on. “It was in the general store here, in the post office in back. A package came for me. It was the first book I sent for and received from Leary’s book store in Philadelphia. *Micrographica* by Robert Hooke.”

“The British scientist?”

“Yes.”

“I heard of him, in one of the journals I subscribe to. How was it you came to know of this bookstore and how to order it?”

“My father had a scientific interest, related to agriculture on our land. On a business trip north, he came upon this book store and learned that they could obtain books from England. He brought back a list and helped me to order.”

“You are fortunate in having such encouragement, Louisa.”

“Yes.”

“And such education you have received!”

“Yes, I know I am blessed.”

Marcia’s father, a cabinet maker, had worked in many households of the planter elite, but he was not wealthy himself, and Marcia had had no opportunities to go off to fine schools.

“What was it in this book you found so interesting?” Marcia inquired.

“That all of the plant world as we know it (and they are saying now, animal life, too) is composed of building blocks called ‘cells.’ Even on a minute level, there is an intricate, beautiful design. That is where the ‘graphica’ comes in. Hooke did not just look; he drew pictures of what he saw through his microscope.”

“I’d love to see the book sometime.”

“I’ll bring it for you next time I see you, Marcia. You can keep it in the wagon.”

“I’d like that very much.”

After Marcia left, Louisa returned to the Stone plantation and headed at once to the path to the river. Often she had walked on this path as a girl and young woman; and once she had done so with Josiah Derr on his visit to the Stone Plantation.

Louisa observed a single leaf on a branch in front of her. Bathed in sunlight, it was glowing like a lamp. A wonder of nature, Louisa thought, such as she and Marcia had talked about. The light was inside the leaf; the leaf would use it to prosper in its plant life.

Louisa had a secret with respect to her interest in science, and this entered her mind at this moment, also. She wanted not just to be a student of science as she had been, not just a science teacher of young women as some had suggested she might be, or a nurse after the war as others had suggested; she wanted to become what she had read one woman had become, a full-fledged doctor.

This woman, named Elizabeth Blackwell, whom Louisa had heard about through journals, had become a doctor, after resolving

many difficulties, in 1849 (when Louisa had been nine). Through new schools in New York and London, Louisa had learned, it would be possible to obtain a medical degree.

The war had interrupted her ambitions, and, in addition to its complications, there was another related almost reflectively to Josiah, which was, if she did pursue that dream, and if she were on a permanent basis with him, how could he and she manage to coordinate their lives.

Indeed, Josiah was the only person who knew of Louisa's dream, and he had expressed a desire to help her in any way he could. Despite her resolution not to think of him, she could not prevent a sense of him from taking form in her mind.

But a second memory followed. This memory was of an outing by the Shenandoah River that she, Josiah, Emily, and Hiram had gone on in their last year of college. For this one time, their conversation had turned to the threats of secession coming from the U.S. Congress. Josiah had stated he could never become a soldier against the United States. She recalled her response to that: "Josiah, if ever you take up arms against our own Virginia, you will lose my friendship forever. I swear it, Josiah, I do!"

Many times Louisa Stone had recalled those words. She was sorry she had said them. Many times, also, she had read Josiah's letter, since reading it that first time after meeting him by chance on the battlefield the previous month.

### **35. Early prepares to meet Hunter and talks with his wife**

"You are one familiar with reports, General Early. I wonder if you have any wish for a report on your children."

So remarked a person Lt. Gen. Jubal Early had not expected to encounter on the morning of Sunday, June 19, 1864, when the Union army was somewhere south of the defensive line he had established two days before. The Yankees were reported to be moving, but no one had yet determined whether they were repositioning for an attack or leaving.

"Yes," Early replied. "You know that I do."

The woman standing before Early was his common-law wife, Julia McNealy, whom he had not seen for more than a year, owing to the strain between them related to his long absences and the lingering memory of his refusal, in the second year of the war, to allow her and the children to stay with him in Manassas. He had refused to allow similar arrangements to all of his junior officers,

in the brigade he had commanded at that time, stating then that an army apt to be ordered into battle at any time should not be hindered by the presence of women friends, wives, and families. Since then, he had sent Julia brief letters, however, and with them he had always sent money for the children she referred to, of which the oldest was 14 and the youngest four.

Early had taken up with Julia in 1849, when she had been in her late teens. At this time, she was 32, an attractive woman with a softness of appearance in contrast with her resoluteness of speech. She was five foot four in height, with a comely figure and a pale, freckled face hinting of her Irish origins. She had blue eyes and shoulder-length brown hair.

"They are all faring well, Jubal, and they all love you, and admire you, and are proud of what you have accomplished as a soldier."

"And what of their mother?"

"She is as loyal as they, but not so admiring. What you have done has come at a great price to her."

"Yes, I know that, Julia. Are you staying here in Lynchburg?"

"We came up yesterday for supplies,—the Jonson's and I,—and happened to find the armies here. Just a half hour ago, the word came around that you had arrived with the soldiers that came in by train. The children are at home with my mother. We are leaving right now for Hardy. I am anxious to get back."

This town where she lived, and where Early had grown up, was 60 miles to the southeast.

"Julia, is there something I should know? Any complications?" the general inquired.

"No, Jubal, they are all faring well. It is just my nature, as you know. I am always anxious about them."

"And how is Bobby?"

He was referring to the youngest.

"He is a beautiful little boy, as you know. He loves his summer days. He plays in the woods behind the house. He has a fort in the woods. Joey takes him. Joey is a good older brother."

"Yes, I know he is. And Flo?"

"A flower of delight."

"After the war, Julia," --

"Yes, I know, Jube. May God protect you now."

With that, she pulled around her long skirt to leave, not giving him an opportunity to embrace her.

At the same moment, the adjutant appeared to provide an

update on the disposition of the confronting armies. After a glance again toward his wife, who was already exiting the door, Early walked with the adjutant to a table map, nodding thoughtfully.

“They are retreating then along the old turnpike!” the general remarked. “We have managed to give them a good scare!”

The route being followed by the Union commander, Maj. Gen. David Hunter, was the same by which he had approached Lynchburg after moving up the Valley in a southwesterly direction from Staunton and then curving eastward through the pass below the Peaks of Otter. There was no indication yet, however, whether Hunter would follow that same route going back. Several routes fanned out from the turnpike to the west and southwest, and the line of mountains leading in a southwesterly direction offered the option of turning off on one of the narrow roads that wound through rough terrain toward West Virginia.

“Send Ransom up through the Peaks of Otter to Buchanan, to intercept them, if they turn down the valley,” Early directed, deciding at the same time to send a courier with word to blockade another possible route, west through the mountains to Lewisburg in West Virginia.

“With the rest of our force, we will pursue him up the turnpike. He has a good 20 miles on us. Send the cavalry ahead to delay him. We can maybe engage him tomorrow.”

Early rode out with that main force later, relieved to be freed from the stress of waiting to hear of the disposition of the enemy, and glad to be in the open country in active pursuit. Just ahead was a brigade of the Second Corps (aka “Rode’s Corps”), the unit Early had traveled with on the train from Charlottesville.

The old turnpike was churned up from the heavy load it had borne in the past week. The men, urged on at a rapid pace, struggled across the jagged rocks. Many had feet still wrapped in cotton cloth. A promised shipment of shoes had not arrived.

On the western horizon were the Blue Ridge Mountains, towards which Hunter’s army was moving. The land between consisted of wooded hills, amidst which were crop fields, houses, and outbuildings.

Ten miles out, Early rode forward past the troops, receiving a chorus of hurrahs, to speak with his youthful corps commander, Maj. Gen. Robert E. Rodes. As the road curved over a hill, Early noticed plumes of smoke in the distance in several places, rising above the trees.

“Black smoke,” he said.

“Yes, sir,” Rodes replied. “From buildings, I imagine. The

Yankees are at it again.”

Coming closer to the first plume of smoke, they saw it was rising from a large barn, an understandable Union military target, but down the road another plume was rising from a one-story house where a limping, gray-haired man, a thin, young woman in a tattered dress, and two frightened children were outside by a shed they were converting into a shelter. Piles of clothes and other items, apparently taken from the burned house, were arranged on the ground.

Further down the road were more burned barns and fields with crops trampled by horses. In one place, clothes hanging on a line had been ripped by swords or pulled to the ground. From a house partly burned down, a young boy looked out from a charred doorframe around which the wall had crumbled.

“The Yankees have made a science out of this new kind of warfare,” Early remarked. “This is damage such as we would not have done to the Mexicans in our war down there 15 years ago, and they are doing it to their fellow Americans.”

“This is how they presume to break our spirit,” Rodes said.

“They will not break it. But these people are not soldiers. They are women, many of them widows, and young children, and old men too old to fight anymore.”

Early’s thoughts, as he rode through more of such destruction in the succeeding hours, went back to his speech in the Virginia state legislature in the lead-up to the war. He recalled saying that the United States was a great country that he wanted to continue to be part of. Who would have ever thought his fellow Americans could do deeds such as these?

“We will teach Hunter a lesson and then we will turn up the valley,” Early said. “We will make the Yankees learn again that the South will not be taken for granted or mistreated.”

“Yes, sir! I yearn for the day.”

Later, word came back from the cavalry that the Union troops were moving along the Virginia & Tennessee Railroad between the Blue Ridge and the Allegheny Mountains. The route they were following was one that offered an opportunity, every ten miles or so, to divert into the mountains toward West Virginia if too closely pursued.

Early perceived in that development in an instant the significant fact that Hunter was abandoning the valley. The valley would be open, with none of his own resources yet expended. For the moment, however, the task was to strike at Hunter while in the open, with no defensive lines dug behind him.

“We must attack Hunter as soon as we encounter hm. We must inflict enough damage to ensure he has no chance of striking us from the rear if we advance on Harper’s Ferry.”

That, Early understood now, was not just a wild dream but a realistic option.

At another turn in the road, from which again a view of the country ahead opened up, the general saw the enemy through binoculars about five miles ahead. White smoke, perpendicular to the road, indicated that Hunter had placed there a rear guard artillery to protect his column from direct attack.

“Sir, the enemy had gone into Blue Ridge at Buford’s Gap,” an aide informed him. “He has set up a battery on the bluffs there. The road is too narrow for a column. We will have to string the troops out, if we proceed there.”

Early knew then that the present conflict with David Hunter was over. He returned with men toward Lynchburg, in the course of which he looked with binoculars, and saw, amidst the wooded hills, the white pine-board exterior, gray shingled roof, and house-wide front porch with white railings of the two-story box-frame house where his own family lived.

“Send back word we start up the valley day after tomorrow. Draw up plans and replenish the wagons to the extent we can,” he told his adjutant. “Tonight and tomorrow, I will visit my family here.”

A single day was available now, Early told himself, to make up in some way for his lack of fatherly presence with these people who loved him as a father; then he would turn to the great duty that had been placed upon him,—to invade the North again, and thereby to maybe secure for the South enough time to hold off Grant until the Northern people, in exasperation, had replaced Lincoln with another president.

### **36. Lincoln travels to City Point, Virginia, to confer with Grant**

On Monday, June 20, 1864,—one day after the retreat of the Union army into West Virginia had opened a route toward Harper’s Ferry for the Confederate Army of the Valley,—President Abraham Lincoln boarded the 200-foot-long, side-wheel steamer, the U.S.S. *Baltimore*, at the Navy Yard in Washington City, his destination the huge federal port, supply depot, and hospital complex at City Point, Virginia. There the president was

slated to meet with Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, his commander-in-chief of the national push to end the war.

At the embarkation dock on the southeastern edge of the capitol, on the bank of the Potomac River, Lincoln stood amidst members of the vessel crew, his own head, in top hat, towering above the heads of the men around him. Later, he stood on the canopied deck of the steamer, listening to the sound of churning water emanating from behind the sheet metal encasement of the big wheel as the gathering steam from the boiler forced it around. He stroked his beard in a reflective pose as he scanned the sprawling yard with its stacks of wooden boxes containing food and ammunition, and its rows of guns, mortars, and projectiles. Once he glanced to the north to the obeliscal form of the Washington Monument. Finally, as the vessel spun half a circle around, he peered to the south to the straight stretch of water that extended to the next bend of the river.

Lincoln then sat down at a table, as he had been welcomed to do, and turned to see the mustachioed face of his private secretary, John Hay, and a folded newspaper extended toward him, the *New York Tribune*.

“And what is the good news today?” Lincoln said.

“A history of your administration, sir. By Gov. Raymond. Third edition. A dollar fifty-nine. And soon to come: Lives of Lincoln and Andrew Johnson. In pamphlet form. Twenty-five cents.”

“Oh, Lord,” the president replied.

He did look at that ad, which occupied the upper left corner of an entire page of ads. Actually the ad appeared twice. It was present on both page 2 and page 3. He engaged with it enough to shake his head in mock dismay, but then he returned to the front page, where the entire left column of the six columns, all of which contained text only, consisted entirely of headlines in alternating fonts, font sizes, and capitalization styles, separated from one another by horizontal lines, each with a diamond shape in the center.

These headlines told a great deal about how the war was being presented to the public.

The first headlines were as follows:

**THE GREAT CONTEST.**

News from Grant on Sunday Morning.

Then came the following headlines:

**PETERSBURG NOT YET OCCUPIED.**

**OUR ARMY PROGRESSING SURELY.**

REBEL OUTER WORKS CAPTURED.  
 INNER LINES ASSAULTED BUT NOT TAKEN.  
 Our Position Strongly Held and Fortified.  
 Gen. Butler Moves Toward the Railroad.  
 GOOD NEWS FOR SHERIDAN.  
 HIS OPERATIONS UP TO LAST TUESDAY.  
 The Most Brilliant Cavalry Fight of the War.  
 THE REBELS BEATEN AND ROUTED.  
 370 PRISONERS TAKEN FROM THEM.  
 Railroad East of Gordonsville Destroyed.  
 OUR LOSSES IN ALL ABOUT 625.  
 LATER NEWS FROM SHERMAN.  
 JOHNSTON RUN OFF ON SATURDAY NIGHT.  
 OUR ARMY IN RAPID PURSUIT.  
 WAR DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL DISPATCHES.  
 Secretary Stanton to General Dix—General Grant's  
 Dispatch—Our Forces not yet in Petersburg.

Then came the dispatches themselves, as provided to the newspaper by Edwin Stanton, the Secretary of War.

Lincoln did not proceed to these details, however. He cared only for the general view, and thanks to the frequent reports he had received from Stanton in person, he already had a general sense of what had happened since Cold Harbor; namely, that Grant had hardly paused after the left flank movement that had brought his army to the outskirts of Richmond; within a week, he had begun another,—this one of prodigious proportions, and by all accounts, taking his opponent, Lt. Gen. Robert E. Lee, by surprise.

This last left flank movement had taken Grant's entire force across the James River without arousing the attention of the Confederates, though it had taken place only about 25 miles from downtown Richmond. It had involved building a pontoon bridge over 2,000 feet long, moving across it more than a hundred thousand men with equipment and animals, and sinking stone-filled ships and barges upriver of the bridge to prevent the Confederate ironclads from attacking.

Soon afterward, in another surprise, Grant had attacked the eastern defenses of Petersburg, the seaport 60 miles to the south that Richmond depended on for many of its shipments from overseas.

The Union army had not succeeded in capturing Petersburg, the president knew. That was one reason, he suspected, why Grant had proposed the upcoming meeting.

The attack on Petersburg had not been without gains,

however. The Union had improved its position with respect to the center city. Key railroad lines had been damaged. But the Northern and Southern forces in the area of Richmond remained stalemated in the “trench warfare,” as the press was calling it, that characterized the present conflict in southeastern Virginia.

Passing to the fourth page of the eight-page newspaper, as a meal was set before him,—which Lincoln acknowledged with a “thank you” and a nod,—he turned his attention to an article under the headline, “The Vote on the Extinction of Slavery.”

The article began as follows:

We herewith reprint the division of the House of Representatives on Wednesday last on the question of amending the Constitution so as to put an end to Human Slavery in the United States. There were some errors and omissions in the first report. The list below is correct according to the record in Washington papers. Had every member been present, the division would probably have been, Yeas 107, Nays 75—making a full house of 182 members. It would have required 122 votes to have made the two-thirds necessary to carry the measure. The list below should be preserved for reference, as there will be frequent occasion to know who voted to ‘break every yoke and let the oppressed go free,’ and who, on the other hand, voted to perpetuate and defend the accursed system and support of the gigantic Rebellion.

Lincoln had, of course, already heard of these results from other sources; still he read the article word for word, and pondered on the “RECAPITULATION” at the bottom of the article where the votes were summarized per party, showing that all the 91 Union Republicans present (Lincoln’s own party) had voted yea, (with ten absent who had been assumed as yea’s in the estimated all present vote tally of 107 yea’s). By contrast, only four of the Democrats had voted yea, with 64 voting nay and ten absent. Clearly, that was where the additional votes would have to come from. He would have to lobby harder.

The Senate had already passed the bill, Lincoln knew. He needed only to win over the House and sign the bill, for the amendment process to begin in the states.

How all of this tied into the war had been a matter of deliberation for Lincoln, also, and he pondered that as he strolled along the deck.

The war and the status of the slaves were intricately interwound, and the blacks themselves understood this, Lincoln

acknowledged to himself, as indicated by the readiness of some of them to serve as soldiers. Though these “colored troops” had initially been held back due to the political complications of using black men as combatants, the colored troops had lately become more active in combat roles.

The Army of the James, recently active in the assault against the rebel defensive trenches east of Petersburg, was an example of that. Two of the corps within that army, Lincoln knew, had USCT (United States Colored Troops) divisions, and a colored cavalry division of 3500 men under a white commander, Maj. Gen. (Bvt.) Edward Winslow Hinks, had taken part in the initial assault.

The colored troops had fought in gallant style, Lincoln had heard, capturing an area of rifle pit trenches and several of the fortified triangular battery positions called “redans” that connected them. They had sustained more than 20 casualties, he had learned from Stanton. They were no longer being kept in the background as a rear guard.

A balmy breeze had risen up, bringing a fishy scent of rank water and ripe vegetation that Lincoln recalled from an adventure of his young manhood, his trip on a raft down the Mississippi to arrange the purchase and shipment of items for the store he had been managing at that time in his home town in Illinois.

Lincoln recalled, also, the perception of blacks from that trip that several months before he had described to his wife Mary after his meeting with Frederick Douglass. As he recalled, the perception, as he had recounted it to his wife, had been that those Negroes in chains, as they had bandied jokes and made beautiful music, had seem possessed of a happiness that all of the others on the same journey had envied. By contrast with that, Lincoln had reflected to his wife, Douglass had no chains upon him, but he had burdened himself with the obligations that he had assumed. How like Douglass in that were these black soldiers, Lincoln thought. Given freedom without the respect and privileges that went to free white men, they were no longer possessed of such a joyful spirit; rather, they were as burdened in appearance and reality as everyone else.

This Lincoln mulled over as he went off to his private cabin on the starboard side of the ship opposite from the churn wheel. The rhythmic sound of it, as of water falling, continued in the background as he laid his head on the pillow.

These men were now fighting and dying like white soldiers, Lincoln thought, yet they were not allowed to mix with them, they

were paid less for the same service, and they were treated as mentally inferior. They were proving their fullness of humanity through valor.

It did not make sense, and it could not be justified, Lincoln thought, on a societal basis, but the society of the nation was in trench warfare as was the war itself, never as noble as it ought to be, so often messy and mean, while, nevertheless, proceeding in the right direction. That was what mattered after all, the right direction.

### **37. Grant and Lincoln discuss the changing dynamics of the war**

As first order of business, President Abraham Lincoln heard from his commander-in-chief the next morning the news that Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant had himself just heard, that Confederate Lt. Gen. Jubal Early was in Lynchburg with an entire corps, and that his Union opponent, Maj. Gen. David Hunter, owing to a lack of ammunition, had retreated with his XI Corps into the West Virginia mountains, thereby leaving the route open toward Harper's Ferry and Washington City.

Lincoln understood at once the ramifications that this development could potentially have on the push to end the war and on his entire political agenda. After much fanfare,—from the perspective of the public and the press,—the spring campaign had ended in an apparent stalemate on the James Peninsula with the Southern capitol still untouched. Now a Confederate army could possibly invade a Union state again and place the Northern capitol in jeopardy. The cries from the Copperheads would grow more strident, asserting that he could not win the war, and ought, therefore, not to be re-elected.

“What do we have between Lynchburg and Washington?” Lincoln inquired in a manner more contemplative than severe.

“We have the Potomac, sir,” Grant replied in his plain manner. “I have sent an order already for the Harper's Ferry bridge to be destroyed if Early moves down the valley. We have Wallace in Baltimore with the 1st Brigade of the VIII Corps and a cavalry detachment, 6,000 men but raw recruits.”

Grant was referring, Lincoln knew, to Maj. Gen. Lew Wallace.

“And, as you are aware, Mr. President, we have the defensive line at Fort Stevens.”

“How many men has Early?”

“We think he has the entire 2nd Corps, Rode’s, and McCausland’s cavalry. About 16,000 men in total.”

“We will be outnumbered then.”

“Sir, General Meade has been directed to find a division to send if we need to. We have a contingency plan to send a corps. In addition to that, the IXX Corps from Louisiana is on a steamer bound for Fort Monroe and that corps has been ordered to move directly to Washington.”

“So it is urgent, General, though no more urgent than the matters we are accustomed to.”

“Early will be dealt with, sir, and he lacks provisions to remain a threat for long.”

“There was a boxer in our weekly matches in the town square, when I was a boy,” Lincoln said. “The others would knock a man down and wait to see if he would go skulking off. But this fellow would not wait for that. He would keep on knocking until his opponent stayed on the ground.”

“And so shall we, Mr. President. And not just Early wherever we find him. We will knock them down for good in Georgia and on this peninsula, too.”

All of this transpired between the two leaders while still on the City Point dock, not far from the black hull of the ship from which Lincoln had debarked. An honor guard was on hand with the U.S. flag and the flags of the armies of the Potomac and the James flapping in the wind, while, behind a rope cordon, was a group of hundreds of soldiers and workers from the dock and hospital.

Lincoln, upon turning and regarding these onlookers more closely, went across the dock to acknowledge them. The people in the facially darker side of the group began clapping, hurraing, and waving, while those in the facially lighter side of the group greeted him with restrained applause and, in some cases, with what appeared to be muted suspicion.

Those in the dark side of the group, Lincoln saw as he drew closer, included field uniformed soldiers with the blue page boy caps and red arrow insignia that he had been told were those of the colored division that had fought so hard in the recent attack on Petersburg. Beside them were other black men in cook hats and white uniforms, big-shouldered stevedores in blue bib overalls, and women with their heads covered with scarves.

On this dark side of the crowd, also, were trim, lovely black women dressed as for Sunday church in bright dresses and broad

hats with bows, with black soldiers in dress uniform beside them. One woman in an ankle length gown bore a sign saying "Liberator."

The joyful faces of all of them indicated their collective joy at greeting him.

One of the "colored" soldiers, a young man with a face not dark, and yet not quite white, and with Caucasian features, pushed forward. "Mr. President, my mama told me, if I sees you, 'You tell 'im we'se all prayin' for 'im. And we is good pray'ers!'"

To this the president, visibly moved, responded in his tenor voice, which carried across the crowd: "I expect our Lord, with all His experience of prayer, has encountered few better at prayin' than your dear mamma! You tell her, ol' Abe will be praying for her, too!"

The man grasped Lincoln's outstretched right hand with both of his own. "Oh, I will tell her! Yes!"

Grant, on Lincoln's right side, saw much in this encounter from his own experience as the commander of an army in which these "coloreds" were now serving with whites. This man who spoke so like a Negro, he noted, revealed in his mulatto skin and non-Negroid features that he was a product of miscegenation. Yet, owing to his not completely white skin color, to his black mother (judging by the son's description of her), and to a white father who either had ignored him or had chosen not to bring him up among whites, this individual had grown up with a slave dialect and was fighting in the colored troops. Of course, it was not just, Grant thought.

Later, in a tent with one side rolled up, opening a view toward the gleaming water across which the president's steamer had traveled the day before, Grant began the one-to-one report the president had requested, using a table map as a prop.

"As you know, sir, at present, all of our operations here are oriented with respect to this axis between Richmond and Petersburg, a line of 60 miles length extending north and south. Along this axis runs the Richmond & Petersburg Railroad, one of Richmond's main supply lines. About two miles east of this railroad, all the way between the two cities, are defensive lines of trenches," --

"And those I would like to observe, General, on my visit here."

"Of course."

"We had dire results against the trenches at Cold Harbor, as you know, and since then, as you know, also, we have moved the

entire Army of the Potomac south across the James River.”

At this, Grant gestured to the blue line of the river on the map. It wound from west to east below the grid labeled Richmond, then coursed south for about 20 miles to an upside-down U about five miles long on a north-south axis, ending at the grid labeled City Point.

“Yes, I heard from Stanton about that movement of troops, a marvelous achievement, he said.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Now what are the respective numbers?”

“Lee has about 40,000, we estimate, with Breckinridge already in Lynchburg and the Second Corps sent off with Early. We have about twice that many, but we count as soldiers all engaged in logistics. Lee’s logistic task is smaller. We must transport our supplies, load our wagons, and move them to more extended positions on a daily basis.”

Lincoln and Grant rode up the James River on a steam-powered ship to view the pontoon bridge constructed for transfer of troops across the river. The entire landscape beside the river had been militarized, with troops everywhere in view and guns and ammunition ready in ordered configurations.

About five miles upriver, the two leaders pulled up to a dock beyond which, in the distance, a triangular fortification, about ten feet high, jutted out with rebel flags and soldiers on top of it. It was reinforced with timbers laid horizontally along the sides and razor wire coiled up just before the timbers.

“This is a ‘redans,’ sir,” said Grant, “a fortified connection in the rebel trenches. There are 13 redans in all. We have captured six. The trenches are miles long and they are deep enough throughout for the rebels to defend them out of reach of direct fire. They fire through narrow openings.

“And I see they have cannons on top the redans,” Lincoln replied.

“Yes, they have the best that they can produce at the Richmond iron works, and for that, also, the railroad connection with Petersburg is essential to them.”

“It is a new kind of war, as they say,” the President remarked later as he stood on the dock at City Point, preparing to leave. “No glorious charges.”

Even as Lincoln pronounced this, an image flashed again in his mind of the proud black soldiers who had cheered him on the dock. He recalled the mixed blood soldier who had professed that his black mother kept the president in her prayers.

“Still we can charge with good results when there is a pre-calculated chance of success,” Grant remarked.

“What is our strategy then?”

“Here by Richmond we will wait for such chances while attacking the railroads. In Georgia we will keep attacking Johnston. Hunter has left the Valley open for Early, but we will intercept Early, and push him back, as you and I discussed. We are not relenting, sir, we are refining and improving our methods.”

“And is one of our refinements, as the papers now say, ‘rampant destruction of the countryside,’” Lincoln said.

“Sir, as you and I have discussed, we must not shrink from destroying anything that can support their army, just as we must fight in the trenches, inglorious or not.”

Later before boarding the ship for his return to the capitol, Lincoln paused. “General, earlier I spoke in anecdote about running down the enemy and you understood. I think you understand, also, we have another enemy not dressed in gray, and this enemy is Time...”

“Mr. President, I am well aware we must move with all dispatch. We will not just knock the enemy down so he will stay down, we will do it faster.”

With that exchange having accomplished satisfaction on both sides, the two men shook hands and the home-spun president turned to walk up the plank to the ship.

### **38. Early’s army pushes north amidst more scenes of “rampant destruction”**

One hundred and thirty-two miles southeast of Harper’s Ferry, an austere and taciturn figure, with his deliberate face set northward, was riding along behind his ragged army, many of whom were still barefoot, with their feet wrapped in cotton cloth, despite requests for shoes to be found and sent from Richmond.

Lt. Gen. Jubal Early, commander of the reconstructed army of his hero, Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson, had a different view of the war than Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant and President Abraham Lincoln had exchanged in City Point.

Early was not aware, as Grant had reported to Lincoln, that Maj. Gen. David Hunter had retreated in Lynchburg due to a lack of munitions and supplies. Early believed that he and his men had achieved this victory through employing the old Confederate tactic of feigned movement of troops to make his army seem larger, loud

orders shouted to no one to give the impression of someone there to hear them, and running of empty trains to feign the arrival of new troops and supplies.

This general born and raised in the Shenandoah Valley was aware, however, of the “rampant destruction of the countryside” that Lincoln had told Grant the Northern press was reporting.

Indeed, there was evidence of such damage done by Hunter all along the route that Early’s army was following (from Lexington to Staunton), damage similar to what Hunter had done on his retreat into the mountains, but on the greater level that might have been expected with the greater amount of time available during his advance: not only barns and outbuildings but houses burned; women and children left without shelter, food, or clothes (except for what they wore); furniture and bedding cut to pieces; ladies’ trunks rifled, their finest dresses torn to pieces.

“The old barbarians were savage and cruel, but they at least had the manliness of soldiers,” Early said to an aide. “Hunter’s deeds are those of a coward better qualified to make war on women and children than upon armed soldiers. Had they not delayed for destruction, they could have had Lynchburg with its foundries and factories so important to our army!”

Early heard of something else, also, as his army drew near to the south end of the so-called “middle mountain,” Massanutten, which was outside the main routes, a place of dense woods and steep, narrow roads where troops from either side seldom entered. “Marauders,” as the local people called them, had emerged from Massanutten to take advantage of the disorder left behind by the Union army. These people were worse even than the Union troops, Early believed. They came to steal not destroy, focusing on patches of countryside left untouched by the Union troops or on peripheral farms just outside the swath of destruction.

“Who are these people, Cousin?” Col. Hiram Stone asked when, as requested, he stopped by the general’s tent on the fourth evening out of the march.

Owing to Hiram’s explorative duties with the cavalry, he and his cousin had not talked since Hiram had reported for duty a week before, but on this evening they were present in the same place, Staunton, which had been selected for consolidation and evaluation of the army because of its accessibility both to the Shenandoah Valley and to Richmond and the Piedmont. The plan was to count troops, gather in new units, evaluate wagons and artillery, and collect supplies arriving by rail from Waynesboro, 30 miles southeast at Rockfish Gap.

“These are the worst of people, Hiram,” Early answered. “These are people without the conviction to fight for either side. They are deserters, stragglers, and fugitives from the battle fields, and it is not difficult to imagine what kind of women they would find to live with them.

“It is a world plunging into disorder, as if disorder could achieve momentum and carried the whole of society with it,” Early went on. “The federals have broken a bedrock principle of our society, in no longer honoring that government must arise from the people and not be forced down upon them.”

For this, Hiram had no response. Over the past few days, following the first evidence of the destruction left by Hunter’s army, he had mulled over this development with a troubled mind. His concept of chivalry was such that he had found it difficult to believe that his pre-war fellow U.S. Army officers, like Josiah Derr, would accept for the troops under them to do such damage; apparently they were under pressure to comply. Now, add to that the complete lack of decency of these marauders from the Middle Mountain, it was beyond the pale of what he had imagined the war would bring.

He understood, also, that the South would be called on somewhere soon to wreak revenge through a like level of destruction upon the people of the Northern states. He hoped not to be part of it, and he hoped that revenge would not be attempted in Harper’s Ferry which at its present rate the army would pass near in about a week’s time.

As for Early, sight of the destruction encountered in the past few days had intensified his ever growing hatred of the federal government and of anyone,—even among fellow soldiers and friends of the past,— who had subscribed to such practices. Upon arriving at Staunton, he had been given a telegram from Lee in which the commander of the Army of Northern Virginia had once again given him the option of deserting the attempted invasion of the North if supplies or troops were found to be insufficient for such an undertaking. Early had refused at once, in his telegram sent back.

Instead Early had spent the evening writing out instructions for the next day. All supplies would be inventoried and consolidated. Any gun or wagon in questionable condition would be left behind. Horses sent out for pasture would be re-secured for use by the cavalry troops currently without them. Wagons would be left for the requested shoes if they had not yet arrived when the march resumed.

At dawn the next day, Early inquired whether his sub-commander, Maj. Gen. John C. Breckinridge, had arrived with the troops that had started from Lynchburg three days before. On hearing Breckinridge was camped two miles away, Early mounted his horse at once and rode to see him, his mind brimming with ideas for the march ahead.

Early found the former vice president,—clean-shaven (in keeping with his lifelong public image), his long brown hair swept back like a pioneer woodsman,—seated outside his tent, with a plate on his lap, on the noll of a hill overlooking the tents occupied by his soldiers who had arrived late the previous night. He had given them a morning of rest so not much movement was visible in the camp, though a dozen or so men stood by a wagon where breakfast was being cooked on request.

“General Early, it’s a delight to see you!” Breckinridge said, rising. “Would you care for some breakfast? No eggs and ham, but we do have some excellent oatmeal!”

Early, ignoring that, replied, without a nod of greeting: “John, with your consent, I will take command of all the cavalry. In return, you can take Gordon’s infantry.”

“Of course, Jube,” the other replied. “So Jackson and Johnson will report to you then?”

“Yes, and the Maryland cavalry just arrived.”

In this exchange, Early trusted in the other’s geniality, which he was well aware of, to mitigate the slight indignity of the minor loss in authority for someone who, prior to Early’s arrival, had been the top commander in the region. By the same token, Breckinridge, knowing well of Early’s brusqueness and relentless attention to the task at hand, was not surprised by the abruptness of the announcement. They both knew that the request for consent was offered out of politeness, as Early, under the present arrangement, had no need to acquire consent.

“Now how about that breakfast?”

“Yes, thank you, John. Please send for it.”

“Breakfast for the general, and coffee at once!”

“Yes, sir,” said an aide, going off.

“My sense of our situation is this,” Early continued as he sat down holding the cup of coffee just placed in his hand. With the stick already at hand for use in such explanations, he drew a circle an arm’s reach directly in front of him. From that circle, he dragged the point of the stick back toward himself in a straight line.

“The circle is Sigel,” he said. (He was referring to the first

Union commander to attempt a march up the valley, Maj. Gen. Franz Sigel, defeated and routed the previous spring.) “He is in Martinsville somewhere, and we must get rid of him and break all the railroad and canal connections from the West before we can move on Washington City.”

“Hopefully, we can rely on him to live up to his reputation to retreat at the first sign of conflict,” Breckinridge threw in.

“That is my reason for wanting to direct the cavalry,” Early proceeded with no acknowledgement of the attempt at humor. “I want to be able to monitor closely this general plan. Imboden will sweep up on the left” (he pointed to its location in his map drawn on the ground) “across North Mountain to destroy the bridge there across the South Branch of the Potomac. McCausland will follow over the mountain to destroy the bridge on Back Creek where it meets the Potomac, and he will proceed to destroy the Antietam canal. On the right, Bradley will go by Leetown to cross the railroad at Kearneysville, east of Martinsburg, and unite with McCausland at Haynesville, to cut off the retreat of Sigel from Martinsburg.

“You will move direct for Martinsburg preceded by Gilmor's cavalry, while I will move, with Rodes and Ramseur, over the route taken by Johnson, to Leetown.”

Early drew all the lines converging together at Martinsburg.

“We will have him boxed in.

“If he retreats, he will flee to the east, I think, and that is where, after dealing with Sigel, all of our lines will converge and point toward Shepherdstown and Harper’s Ferry, and to what lies beyond, as we both know.”

He drew an arrow from Martinsburg in that direction.

“It is our arrow of righteousness,” Breckinridge remarked as he considered the earth drawn map. “General Early, we shall project this arrow together, God help us.”

### **39. Sherman falls short in a frontal assault at Kennesaw Mountain**

In northern Georgia,—on this same morning, Monday, June 27, 1864,—another arrow of righteousness was pointed, this one toward the five-mile-long ridge of the Kennesaw range, which crossed the landscape there in a southwest to northeast direction. The pointer was Maj. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman, his target the same he had attacked for the entire spring just passed, the

Army of Tennessee under Gen. Joseph E. Johnston.

Since April 24,—65 days before,—when Union scouts had first probed the Confederate strength south of Ringgold, Georgia, the pursuit of Johnston had gone on. Seven battles, spread out over the two months' time, had whittled down the Confederate force and had brought the Union army 70 miles closer to Atlanta.

Now, the "Gate City of the South," as the Yankee press called it, was within a day's march with its factories, warehouses, and four railway connections. Some in the press had presented the fall of this city of 22,000 as the object of Sherman's campaign, and he knew that its timely capture was important in the calculus of President Abraham Lincoln's re-election; but Sherman had not forgotten that the primary object of his assault was to destroy Johnston's army.

At Rocky Face Ridge, Resaca, Adairsville, New Hope Church, Dallas, Pickett's Mill, and Kolb's Farm,—the main battles that had occurred,—Sherman had used flanking maneuvers to wedge Johnston's army out of the successive strongholds it had occupied to delay the Union advance; but, on this day, plagued by steady rains that had made many roads impassable, Sherman had determined to box the enemy in and launch a frontal assault.

Sherman stood looking out with binoculars as an artillery barrage opened on the western slope of the range, still obscured by morning shadows. Amidst the smoke and flashes of explosions, he could see the dark form of the topography he had contemplated for the previous 24 hours.

To Sherman's left, at ten o'clock, a half mile distant, was the tree-covered dome of Kennesaw Mountain. At an elevation of 1,600 feet, it loomed 900 feet above his own position. Just to the right of that, at 11 o'clock, Little Kennesaw Mountain presented a smaller, tree-covered dome. Further to the right, at 2 o'clock, a spur called Pigeon Hill completed the silhouette in immediate view. Between Pigeon Hill and Little Kennesaw Mountain lay a wooded gorge, directly in front of and about 500 feet above Sherman's own position.

Sherman could not see, at the moment, where the opposing soldiers were located, but, on the previous day, he had scrutinized their positions. In forming a defensive line along the entire ridge, he knew, the Southern army had spread itself thin. He had encouraged this configuration by moving his right flank further south to a creek and road that led south of the ridge toward the town of Marietta. The weakest place in Johnston's thin line, Sherman had concluded, would be in the gorge in front of him

where rough terrain made for poor entrenchments.

Sherman had, therefore, decided to advance in column formation directly up this gorge and then around the side of Pigeon Hill where a road, though muddy, would provide faster movement. To prevent the Southern army from concentrating at that point, another frontal assault would be launched at Cheatham Hill, two miles south of the gorge.

Now, with the battle beginning, the Confederate and Union forces were arranged in two huge, shallow C's, facing southeast. The smaller, Confederate C followed along the top of the ridge, Marietta and the tracks of the Western & Atlantic Railroad. The Union C followed along the base of ridge, extending from Stiles Road, north of the ridge, to the southern extension of his right flank that Sherman had ordered, an arc of more than ten miles.

Looking to both sides across the farm fields and woods, Sherman could see his blue-coated regiments, each with a flag, waiting or advancing for battle. Amidst them, artillery squads beside rifled guns were lifting shells to the muzzle, or tamping down powder, or turning aside as the muzzle flashed.

The Army of the Tennessee, most northward of the three component armies of Sherman's command, had begun the battle with a demonstration by two of its corps against the north side of Kennesaw Mountain. Now, an hour later, the order had been given for a third corps to begin the frontal assault on the gorge and Pigeon Hill.

The soldiers charged with a hurrah toward the slope of the mountain. They scrambled upward through the trees as shells burst around them. A gangly straggler whirled and fell from the impact of a direct hit. A soldier beside him crouched down and was pushed forward by the man behind as the visible mood of the soldiers became more frantic.

Further south, about midway on the visible landscape, more flags and columns rushed forward in the second attack, conducted by the second component of the command, the Army of the Cumberland,

Sherman's binocular view, however, was fixed upon the slope in front of him. The main attack into the gorge, after a rapid initial push, had floundered under withering enfilade fire. The men in front fell back only to be pushed ahead by men stumbling forward in an attempt to escape fire from behind.

Now it was Sherman's turn to witness a slaughter such as Grant had witnessed at Cold Harbor. Wave upon wave of desperate men, trapped in the trees and rocks of the gorge, with

shells bursting all around them and their opponents hidden in the crags of the landscape, careened and fell. Reserve troops sent in behind them could not reach them. All the reserves could do was to provide a safer route for the forward units to retreat,—those who were able. Disordered groups of soldiers emerged from the woods, many of them wounded and bloody.

Meanwhile, a courier had brought news of other activities along the long line. The attack at Cheatham Hill had bogged down, as expected, but a feint attack by the Army of the Ohio, the third component of the command, on the right flank, had turned the enemy line.

Soon the Confederates were reported to have begun an evasive tactic such as they had employed throughout the campaign. Protected by a rear guard, they were moving from the northern end of the ridge onto a road that led toward a railroad crossing on the Chattahoochee River and the trenches already prepared just five miles from Atlanta.

With that news came the last piece in the final result of the battle for the Union side,—a horrible loss in men, but a strategic draw in that Johnston had again been dislodged and pushed back toward Atlanta.

Later, Sherman toured the battle field and saw there the results of the battle for those who had given their lives in it,—fresh-faced young men from the Midwest, many from his own state of Ohio, staring up at him; bodies and pieces of bodies piled up and intertangled. It was a scene such as he, then new to combat command, had been sickened by at Shiloh Church two years before; now he felt no emotion.

That night, as he lay in bed, the weary general composed a letter in his mind to his wife, Eleanor (whom he called “Ellen”).

“It is enough to make the whole world start at the awful amount of death and destruction that now stalks abroad,” he set out the words in his mind. “Daily for the past two months has the work progressed and I see no signs of a remission till one or both armies are destroyed... I begin to regard the death and mangling of a couple thousand men as a small affair, a kind of morning dash.”

The recognition had long grown in him that in becoming greater in authority in the long war he had become diminished in human qualities. To a great extent he did not care, and he had told friends like Grant that he did not care, but he did care with this one person with whom he had grown up almost as a sibling.

Pieces came to his mind from the many articulate and tender

letters, sometimes elaborated with hand-drawn illustrations and maps, that he had exchanged with Ellen since he at age 17 and she at 12 had first developed a romantic interest. For more than 40 years, he had focused on her as the person to whom he reported his intellectual and moral understanding and evolution.

His mind settled on a “pictorial letter,” as he had called it, that he had sent Ellen as a young man of 26,—four years before his and her marriage,—while on a military visit to the quaint village of Valparaiso, California. What care and attention he had put into that sketch by which he had tried to convey to her the scene he had encountered! What longing he had felt for her, what hope and optimism for the future!

He thought of something he had said to her, not in a letter, but with her lying beside him, cupping her hand over his as she often did, while saying nothing, though awake and ready to listen: “Once, Eleanor, in taking up the life of a soldier, I thought I would be ennobled by fighting, but there is no nobility in it.”

“There is if the cause is noble,” she had replied.

He had not answered, as he recalled, though he had known then, two years before, what he could have said to reject that assertion. Neither did he, at this moment, say those words of rejection in his mind. Rather, he acknowledged to himself that his nobility, or lack of it, was irrelevant in face of the reality that he was, indeed, a soldier and obliged to do the work of a soldier in making or withstanding war.

In the morning, as he watched one of his armies preparing to exit the scene in pursuit of Johnston again, he saw that the town of Marietta was within view, a town he had heard had been in active communication with the enemy.

“What has been their involvement?” he asked.

“They have been willing suppliers. Our scouts reported wagons leaving from the town and headed for the mountain.”

“Let them rest tonight,” he said. “But, mark my words, before we leave Georgia, we shall burn that town to the ground.”

#### **40. Word comes to Harper’s Ferry a Confederate army is approaching**

Word came to the people of Harper’s Ferry in late June of 1864 that a Confederate army was operating in the northern part of the Shenandoah Valley and maybe headed in their direction.

What and where was this army? Who was leading it? What

was its intent? Emily Derr, sister of Col. Josiah Derr, was one of those who wondered. She still lived in Harper's Ferry, worked there at her family's store, and made daily trips to the contraband camp to teach in the school for which she as the de facto education director, though she had assumed no titles. Indeed, her interactions with the freedman teacher, Jefferson Banner, were part of her self-defined activities. She was teaching him to do accounting and other director jobs.

Finally, five days after hearing the first unofficial accounts, Emily encountered a semi-official one in the *New York Tribune*, which was delivered to the store a day later than it was sold in New York.

Emily sat reading the paper in the corner area that she had converted into a reading room. The store had flourished from the demand for its goods fueled by the military presence in the town. Coffee was available for patrons to enjoy, with a pastry if desired, as they sat looking at the street scene of storefront shops and the colorful display within the store of wooden barrels, glass jars with candy, china, silverware, books, towels, sturdy clothes, and wall hangings. The store was, in effect, lately, Emily's own store in design, due to her father's recent ill health, which had kept her parents absent.

Emily read the report out loud to her pretty, blonde assistant, whose name was Dorothea Rice.

"From the Shenandoah Valley

"Rumors of a Rebel Raid—The Rebels are approaching Martinsburg—Ewell in Command

"Rumors have been circulating here that a large Rebel force, under the command of Gen. Ewell, has attacked the Union troops at Martinsburg, and compelled the evacuation of that place.

"The following information in regard to the matter has been received at headquarters, based principally upon dispatches from Harper's Ferry:"

"Hah! From here!" Dorothea exclaimed. "And we know less than they know in New York!"

Emily continued:

"About daybreak this morning, intelligence reached headquarters at Martinsburg to the effect that the Rebels were actually approaching in three separate columns—one by way of the turnpike, toward Shepherdstown; the other toward Martinsburg, not far from the line of the railroad, --"

"Towards here then!" said the assistant.

"-- and the third west of it. It will be remembered that the

department of the railroads is that of Gen. Hunter assisted by Gen. Sigel.”

Emily read quietly for a moment. “Sigel determined the ‘force of the enemy was largely superior,’ it says, and decided to ‘evacuate Martinsburg.’”

“Up to his old tactics.”

“Yes.”

“Well, whoever and whatever they are,” Dorothea remarked. “I am concerned now they will come into our town.”

She was a war widow with three children and a memory of her house destroyed in the Confederate attack in June of 1862. Her husband had died in the Battle of Fredericksburg.

“I doubt they will do that,” Emily replied. “They would come in range of the cannons.”

“They have attacked the town before.”

“Yes, but the guns were not there at that time,” Emily replied. Like many in the town, she had become a near expert on military tactics. “It would be possible for a small force to come in, perhaps. They could spread themselves thin to avoid the guns.”

Emily was not certain on this score, however. Lately, she had heard second-hand accounts of the deliberate damage of such non-war nature that the armies had done on both sides

“They say the Negroes are all astir,” Dorothea said.

“Yes, I’ve heard that,” said Emily. “I plan to go down there when I leave here.”

Going outdoors later, in the late hours of the evening, Emily saw the very scene she had discussed with her assistant.

There, at the end of the street, above and beyond the iron trestles of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad bridge, was the sheer cliff of Maryland Heights, and, about a third of the way up the timber access road on the non-cliff side, a table of rock with Union flags flying and guns glinting in the sunlight. Below that again, on the town side of the river, near where the bridge was anchored, were the white tents of the contraband camp with their crude improvements of loosely piled bricks or wood salvaged from the river. Smoke swirled up from the brick chimneys. Black women, dressed in white cotton dresses, with headwraps and kerchiefs of various colors, bent over the bright spots of fires, tending to pots hung from metal stands. Children with sticks held like rifles ran amidst the ramshackle structures.

The scene had the look of a wilderness outpost with the dense woods all around and the two rivers rushing between the sharp rocks at their juncture that made the white water

downstream a perilous corridor for boats.

As Dorothea had noted, there was a general commotion in the 500-person camp. The residents had gathered in a half dozen or so groups scattered throughout the camp.

Coming across the parklike plaza at the base of the bridge, Emily Derr was a familiar and welcome sight to all of those, both black and white, who looked toward her. Trim and erect in posture, with plain, tasteful clothes,—at the moment, an ankle-length green dress with a waist band and a small floral pattern,—she maintained her pensive expression beneath her shoulder-length hair, which was dark brown, almost black, in color, like that of her officer brother

She grew animated when the children came across, her dark eyes growing larger with interest and sympathy as she leaned down to them.

“Miss Derr! Miss Derr! They say the soldiers are coming!”

“I know they say it, children, but I’m not so sure that’s true. There are several different ways they could go,” she answered.

“But this is the onliest place where they’s niggers. And they hate niggers! You know that!”

“Some do, I imagine. But they do have good people among their soldiers, just as we do, and the good ones may hold the others back.”

“Some peoples gonna leave.”

“I’m sorry to hear that.”

Jefferson Banner, the freedman teacher, came across from the camp as this was said, and he acknowledged with a dignified nod that this news from the children was true.

“I’ve been telling them all, if the soldiers come, they will go on right through,” he said, contemplating the scene with his pinkish hued eyes that often seemed troubled and cautious.

“Yes, I think so, too” Emily answered. “They might set some fires. But I don’t think they will try to hurt anyone or take anyone captive to bring them back down south. They won’t have time for that.”

“That does make sense,” Banner replied.

Nonetheless, as he spoke, he peered toward the cleft on the south horizon the Southern army would approach from if it came toward Harper’s Ferry.

Emily went on into the camp where she was greeted by everyone who saw her. She stopped by one of the fires where an older woman called “Ma Hazel” was cooking a stew with carrots and greens taken from an area down river where the contrabands

had a communal garden.

Just beyond the wrought iron fence at the edge of the camp was the stone and mortar engine house where John Brown had made his ill-fated stand. A Union flag flew beside the engine house. The muzzles of the nearby rifled guns pointed toward the brick buildings and smokestacks of Virginius Island.

“I been tellin’ them all, just stay put and stay calm, Miss Emily,” the old woman remarked. She was “black as coal,” as the saying went, and, despite cooking food all day for anyone to eat who wanted it, especially the children, she was bone thin herself. “Them soldiers got ‘nuff mean to deal with to want to come here, be mean to us.”

“I think that’s true,” Emily said.

“Still some is going down river by the garden. They been taking their tents down there, and they ain’t building no fires.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. I agree with what Mr. Banner just told me, if the soldiers do pass through, they will be here less than a day, maybe just a few hours.”

“Uh huh, that’s what I been telling them.”

As Emily sat on a bench, holding a cup of coffee the old woman set in her hands, she watched the contrabands moving between their tents and shelters.

From her frequent presence among the contrabands, she had come to know many of them firsthand. As a private project, she had begun taking notes on their personal stories. Her previous, limited experience of slavery, through the Stone family, had given her a sense that the slaves, in many cases, had not been abused, as she knew had been true on the Stone plantation. The stories she had heard, however, had brought her around to a realization that, many slaves had, in fact, endured great indignities and injustices. Especially, this had been the case, she had learned, when non-owner, white overseers had been placed over work crews, with productivity quotas affecting their own reimbursement.

Amidst the stories that Emily had collected, moreover, were plain atrocities. One slave targeted for recalcitrance had been whipped so repeatedly his entire back was covered with scars. Some women, especially the most beautiful, had been repeatedly raped; others told of isolated cases of being pressured into sexual compliance in exchange for favors or for exclusions from reprisals for themselves or for husbands and children.

In addition, many families were beset with turmoil, spousal infidelity, and with problematic children that they could not bring into line. Their stories told of parents forced out into the fields,

thereby separated from their children, and of children deprived of education. The strong women who often led families told of a constant struggle to maintain family bonds.

True, some former slaves spoke with affection for their past situations and masters, and seemed often nostalgic about their former, worry-free lives, with occupation and sustenance secured. Even the simplest of these people, however, understood that freedom was superior to any form of servitude, and had brought a new status to them as human beings.

#### **41. Emily enters the Confederate lines to meet with Louisa Stone**

Two days later, an agent who sold to the Derr family store relayed some news of great interest to Emily Derr. He said that in Martinsville, 25 miles southwest of Harper's Ferry, he had seen an ambulance wagon driven by two nurses who had told him they were from Powhatan, near Richmond.

"What did they look like?" Emily asked.

"Very young, considering these are unescorted women, traveling with soldiers. And one of them was,—well, the only word I can think of, is 'striking'."

"Striking how?"

"Very pretty. Red hair and green eyes. Sweet face. But she had the most determined expression."

Emily laughed at that. This nurse was none other than her long-time dearest friend, Louisa Stone! Who else could fit such a description?

"Did you get any sense of where they were headed?" she said.

"They didn't say but there were no signs that they were preparing to leave. I saw wagons and tents in the woods behind them. There were no signs of movement."

An idea came into her mind,—a preposterous idea; yet she knew she would attempt it.

"You will ride into the enemy lines? You would place yourself in jeopardy, Emily!" her father protested when Emily came into the family house and announced that she would head towards Martinsville with a white flag and ask to be allowed to visit Louisa somewhere outside of the location where other troops could be seen.

Elias Derr was seated in his favorite chair, in a corner where

windows faced out in two directions, toward the north, where the town and bridge were located, and southeast toward Virginius Island, the canal that bypassed the Shenandoah rapids, and the water inlets to the mills (many of which were idle, though the Beecher flour mill was still running).

Elena Derr, Emily's mother, stood by with a concerned expression. She stayed home lately as her husband's nurse, not because the family was too poor to afford one, but because she felt she could assist him better than anyone else. Just a week before, Elias had suffered a stroke that had left him paralyzed on the left side.

"It may jeopardize me, Father, but it is my only chance to see my dearest friend," Emily replied.

There was a neighbor's chestnut mare available for her use and used by her so often it was regarded as nearly her own. Less than a half hour later, she was leading it to the back door of the house to say goodbye to her parents.

"Please be careful," her mother said.

Soon Emily was on the horse, following the road that wound down the hill and then paralleled the Shenandoah River.

There again, to the north of her, was the line of guns on the lower table on Maryland Heights that she had discussed with her assistant in the store. She observed that blue-coated soldiers were standing in formation by the single-chimney arsenal and the wooden trestle causeway that the train tracks rested upon after turning from the town center. There had been a rumor going around that the soldiers were about to construct a defensive line on Bolivar Heights, east of the town where a line had existed in the previous battle in 1862.

The thought that she was perhaps on her way for a meeting with Louisa sent Emily in a more personal direction, however. Memories overwhelmed her regarding the foursome of her college years: Louisa, Hiram, Josiah, and herself. To the southeast, behind her, a familiar road led down to Virginius Island and the Beecher's house, where she had first met Hiram 15 years before.

She recalled how he had looked at her then, so young and bright with his impish blue eyes, which had been always so full of mischief and good will. That was before the seriousness of the war had clouded his visage.

Soon she was above the rapids of the Shenandoah River on a winding road that she had traveled on many times in her youth. Then, an hour later, she saw two gray-coated pickets riding toward her. She raised her white flag.

“Who is this woman?” asked a senior officer when one of the pickets reported to him.

“Emily Derr, sister of a Northern officer.”

“What is her purpose?”

“She wishes only to speak for old time’s sake with her childhood friend, Louisa Stone.”

“Louisa, the nurse?”

“Yes, sir. She offers to be taken blindfolded to some place from which she may see nothing of our people and condition.”

“If Louisa is an informer, then our cause is lost! She is as true and brave in what is permitted her as any man bearing arms.”

“Yes, sir. I can say for myself, she saved my brother’s life, and braved cannon fire to do it!”

“Does Louisa wish to see this woman who asks for her?”

“Yes, sir. Louisa says that Emily Derr is a dear friend.”

“Blindfold the visitor then and take her to Louisa. Let them meet for one hour.”

A half hour later, when Emily was allowed to take off the blindfold, she saw Louisa coming toward her in an ankle-length blue dress, over which was a white bibbed apron. Her red hair was covered by a white bonnet. Behind her was a tent and the covered wagon the nurses had brought from Powhatan.

“Emily, I hardly know what to say! How are you?” she called.

“I am just fine,” Emily said, “and very glad to see you!”

“And your parents?”

“They are fine, too.”

In this exchange, as recognized by both, there was a holding back from what might have been further talked about: in Emily’s case, the ill health of her father (a burden, in being known, that she did not wish to place upon her friend at this time); in Louisa’s case, the well-being of other members of Emily’s family, which would have led to an exchange regarding Josiah, which she instinctively held back from, because her attitude toward him had become for her a matter of great confusion and sensitivity.

There was also a holding back on both sides of any allusions to the war itself, by which they had both been so greatly affected. Emily had determined not mention her private research into the situations from which the contrabands that she had worked with had come from, and Louisa had decided at once, upon her old friend, that this was not an occasion in which she should raise the bitter accusations against the Yankee government that were increasingly present in her mind.

“Should we go for a walk together, as in the old days, just to the summit there?” Emily asked. “We could forget our differences for a moment.”

“We have no differences, Emily.”

“Would your duties allow you an hour of leisure?”

“We have nothing urgent now.”

They headed out in a direction away from the troops, after obtaining permission to do so.

Louisa gave an account of the present trip.

“I was hoping to be closer to the troops. I have pushed the idea that medical intervention if done sooner would save many lives. I don’t care about the proximity when there is no battle going on, but when there is, I hope to move us forward. There is much in the way of propriety and of animosity toward women in general, on the part of some, that affects what we have been able to do. For the time being, you see what our situation is, we are far behind our troops, kept under guard like prisoners, almost, although I know the intention is to protect us. These are good men around us. They have been kind to us, and attentive to our needs, and sympathetic to what we are trying to do.”

“Louisa, in the North, I have read, the very idea of having nurses so young so close to any soldiers would not be considered,” Louisa said, repeating what Louisa had already heard many times, that in the North only older women only were accepted as nurses because of suspicions regarding contact with men.

“Yes, Emily, believe me, I am aware of that,” Louisa replied softly, “and I have taken great care regarding any circumstances affecting us in a deleterious manner...”

“How many of your nurses have you here?”

“Now, just Marcia Loudon and I. We had two others. But they left at Staunton and returned by the railroad to Charlottesville.”

“Marcia from Powhatan?”

“Yes, you met her once, when you visited us on the plantation.”

“I do recall! A splendid, godly creature!”

“Oh, yes. Beautiful in every aspect.”

“As are you, Louisa.”

“I just hope to be worthy of this task I have undertaken.”

Only later did they talk of Josiah, and at Emily’s initiative, as she was quite sure that Louisa wanted to know about him. “He thinks of you often,” she said.

“I saw him after the Battle of Santa Ana,” Louisa answered

with relief at having the topic introduced. "Is he a command officer now?"

"Yes."

"How did that come to be?"

"He asked to be assigned to battle."

"Not out of a lust for killing, I know," Louisa remarked.

"No, knowing him, that would be incomprehensible."

"Such an absurd world these men live in!"

"We would be in it, too, acting as absurdly, I think, Louisa, if we were allowed."

"I had hopes we were better."

"We may never know."

So went their meeting, establishing nothing so much as a sense that their long friendship had not diminished, and Emily knew her friend well enough to know how precious the news of Josiah had been.

It being, at this time, only mid-afternoon, when a soldier informed them the allotted hour had passed, Emily mounted her mare again and headed back along the same road toward Harper's Ferry.

Once again her thoughts turned toward the other reality of her present life, that the great armies of the North and South were about to clash again, with death and anger spewing around them in destruction of civilian structures that could be interpreted as lending in any way to the opposing side.

Arriving back near sundown, Emily saw that the rumor she had heard was true. Union soldiers had dug a long trench along the crest of Bolivar Heights, with dirt and felled trees piled high on the side of the trench where the Confederates were expected to approach if they sought to occupy the town.

## **42. Early plots his options as his army crosses the Potomac**

Since leaving Cold Harbor 24 days before, Lt. Gen. Jubal Early, commander of the Confederate Army of the Valley, had been aware of his own part in the grand dynamic of war that had taken place since the previous spring. As he saw this dynamic, the Union army under Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant had conducted an unrelenting aggression, bringing it so close to the Southern capitol, Richmond, that many on both sides now assumed the Confederate cause was nearly lost. His own part was to threaten the Northern capitol, Washington, surprising all by the continued vigor of the

Southern forces.

Of course, there was an aspect of his endeavor, also, related to the possible result of causing federal troops to be diverted from the Yankee stranglehold on Richmond, but Early's imagination and his ever-growing anger against the Union juggernaut had focused him on the symbolic act of marching to the very walls of the city that housed "the odious despot," as he called Lincoln.

In fulfilment of this mission, much had gone right,—indeed, much more than he could have hoped for,—Early acknowledged as he watched the rear guard of his army crossing Boteler's Ford on the Potomac River on Tuesday, July 6, 1864.

At Staunton, ten days before, the supplies available to his forces had consisted of five days' rations in wagons and two days' in haversacks. A Union army of unknown size, under Maj. Gen. Franz Sigel, had blocked the route toward Maryland. Sigel had retreated, however, leaving behind a week's more of rations. Early's cavalry had severed the tracks of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad in two places, —in the west at Winchester, in the east at Grand Junction,—impeding the ability of Union troops to approach by rail from either side.

The Army of the Valley had, therefore, arrived at this ford on the border of Union territory with more supplies than when they had left Lynchburg. Early could see evidence of that about a quarter mile from where he sat in the more than a hundred wagons queued up for crossing. The mules and work horses hitched to the wagons were snorting and stamping as they waited to pull.

Below where the general sat on the trunk of a fallen tree, the motley-uniformed soldiers of Ramseur's Division, the current rear guard, were wading across a channel about 50 yards wide. They were part of the Second Corps of the Army of Northern Virginia that Early had brought from Cold Harbor. Rodes' Division, the other division of the same corps, had crossed earlier, and had already set out on a reconnaissance mission down along the Potomac, by way of the Antietam Canal Road and Harper's Ferry Road, to determine where Sigel had wound up following his evacuation of Harper's Ferry two days before.

Breckinridge's Corps, the other half of Early's army, combined with the Second Corps in Lynchburg, had crossed the ford the day before. They were already encamped in Sharpsburg, five miles east of the river. The remaining units in the combined armies, consisting of artillery and cavalry, had completed the crossing, also.

What the route of that future march would be was still to be

decided, with the decision depending upon the findings brought back by Rodes. For the purpose of discussing this route, Maj. Gen. John C. Breckinridge was due to arrive for a meeting near sundown, by which time word would have come back by courier from Rodes.

The courier, traveling alone, and Breckinridge, with several aides, arrived at about the same time on the other side of the river. Forming a single group, they crossed the ford as the horizontal rays of late afternoon were falling on the poplars that edged the river.

Soon the clean-shaven General Breckinridge was seated beside Early on a log just above the river, on the Virginia side, as the line of wagons pushed through the shallow water.

"It is as we expected," Early said as he read the note sent back by Rodes, "Sigel has taken a position on Maryland Heights above the river road and tracks. Some of his men were outside, but Rodes drove them back into their works."

"Seems we cannot take time to confront him, and risk the loss of men," Breckinridge remarked. "Better to go around and box him in."

"A longer route," Early replied. "But we have no other choice."

"Which means we must go by South Mountain."

"Yes. Tomorrow we will send McCausland with the cavalry in three columns through the three gaps, to seek out whether the enemy is there in any force."

"Yes," Breckinridge replied.

"Then, assuming a good result on that, let us move our whole force on Thursday at daybreak, Ramseur through Turner's gap, you through Fox's, Rodes through Crampton's. With good speed we will be below Frederick on Thursday afternoon."

"Yes."

"Meanwhile, we will send a detail back to Harper's Ferry, to burn the trestle works along the river. That will make it more difficult for Sigel to rebuild the railway connection to Ohio. We will be looking also for stores left behind."

"Has there been word of the shoes?" Breckinridge asked.

"Yes, the shoes will be here tomorrow."

"Thank God for that. Where are the Yankees though?"

"There is the army in Baltimore under Lew Wallace," Early said. "And they are sure to come out, I expect. If we can get ahead of him, we can pass with a glancing blow."

"But what of Grant?"

“There are rumors of a division coming from Jamestown,” replied Early with a thoughtful nod. “If they do come, that will relieve the weight on Lee. But, there, too, if we can get ahead...”

“It is conceivable we could push through Ft. Stevens into the capitol,” Breckinridge remarked, seeming astonished himself at the possibility.

“Someday, John, historians will note what we have accomplished. From Charlottesville to Lynchburg, from Lynchburg down the valley, and our lads without shoes.”

After Breckinridge left, Early noted that the last wagon in the train was the covered wagon driven by his cousin, Louisa Stone, her red hair covered by a shawl. Beside her was Marcia Loudon, her fellow volunteer from Powhatan, also from a family that Early knew.

The general watched as the wagon approached, considering his own interactions with Louisa over the years, which had been quite substantial. As his mother’s youngest sister’s child, 22 years younger than he himself, she had seemed more like a niece than a cousin. At family gatherings, she had often come up to him as to an elder to ask him some question in a respectful manner. In this she had always shown understanding in advance of her years. For a while, she has been interested in law, and knowing that he was a lawyer, she had sought him out as an expert. He had been glad to answer her inquiries, and often. After receiving an answer to her initial question, she had followed with others, indicating the remarkable extent to which she had grasped the concepts he had attempted to explain. Thus he had come to know her more than the other children in his extended family.

In her teenage years, Louisa’s attention had turned to science and medicine. Early had noted that with interest. She was a work in progress he was curious to see occurring. She was maturing as a flower of human beauty of the special red-headed kind her family was remarkable for throughout, and she was maturing with an intellectual and moral flowering that made her all the more astounding.

As earlier described, Louisa had come on her own volition to volunteer her services to the besieged forces in Lynchburg, and, as most of the officers knew, she had come with the endorsement and praise of the matron of the Chimborazo Hospital at Richmond, where Louisa had worked as a nurse for more than three years. Early was impressed by the extent to which Louisa had developed and promoted her early response approach at the sides of several battlefields where she had managed to obtain permission to be

present. Unlike on the Union side, where nursing was centralized and tightly managed, nursing on the Confederate side had not developed with such a coherent approach. Groups of women had simply gone out to wherever they had heard a battle would be. Neither had there been restrictions of age. Knowing this, the general had seen no reason to turn back his own cousin, as he had never heard any complaint about her. She was universally admired and praised, and as a nurse she was extraordinarily efficient in assessing and assisting the wounded on the battlefield, where she worked under the supervision of the chief surgeon.

In the initial exchanges of gunfire in Lynchburg, Louisa had impressed everyone by rushing out to a grove where a soldier had fallen and was within view. She had stopped a wound from hemorrhaging and, with the aid of others, had brought the man behind the lines on a stretcher.

Louisa glanced at him as she passed and her pretty face lit up in a smile.

“Good morning, Cousin!” she called.

“And the same to you, Louisa,” Early replied. “Have you been able to secure everything you need?”

“Yes,” she answered. “Everyone has been so helpful.”

“Well, I’m very glad of that.”

“There is only one issue, as you know,” she said, adopting a more business tone.

He knew at once what she referred to, as she referred to it whenever asked how she was faring. She wished to be permitted to move closer to the battlefield.

“I do know,” he said, “and I believe you are correct, Louisa, that proximity might well save lives.”

“There is no doubt of it!” she replied.

“Louisa, I will give the word for you to be granted more access, so long as you do not place yourself in the line of fire. Is this agreed? I would make the same restriction on any essential service. Your life is worth many lives. Keep this in mind.”

“Yes, Cousin. Thank you.”

Early watched her driving off, thinking she was the embodiment (though only one among many) of the selflessness and courage with which Virginians had carried forth the ideals of liberty and independence since the days of the American revolution.

He resolved to be worthy of her and others like her as he went forth to venture a strike upon the despot himself.

### 43. Hiram prevents the Harper's Ferry contraband camp from being destroyed

Col. Hiram Stone, sent to Harper's Ferry with a cavalry brigade on the next day, Wednesday, July 7, 1864, sat on his horse just after sunset, regarding a sight so spectacular that many of the townspeople had come out to look at it: flames leaping high from the mile-long span of trestle works that Hiram and those with him had set on fire.

Hiram reassured himself, as he watched, that he had done nothing wrong in ordering his soldiers to set fire to the trestle works. This railroad was a legitimate military target as a possible route allowing Union soldiers to approach from Ohio, or from Maryland if the bridge across the Potomac was rebuilt.

Aside from this, however, Hiram had been vigilant in assuring that nothing else in this town would be burned. Since hearing of the "rampant destruction" inflicted by the Union army in the Shenandoah Valley, he had been keen, to the extent he was able, to prevent his own army from employing a similar approach. Especially, Hiram did not wish to see such damage inflicted on this town that evoked so many precious memories from his boyhood.

Hiram was situated at an overlook just above the Potomac River. From this vantage point, he could see the fires burning all the way to the red brick buildings in the lower town area about a half mile in front of him. Hiram knew, also, landmarks that could not be fully seen in the dark, including the point of land, beyond that, where the Potomac and Shenandoah rivers merged, and, out in the water of the Potomac, the stone and mortar piers of the bridge that had recently been destroyed. He was aware, too, of the dark cliffs of Maryland Heights on the other side of the river, where earlier he had observed Union flags flying.

Also visible between the lower town area and the confluence of the rivers was the contraband camp of the former slaves with its rows of white canvas tents. Something was going on there, Hiram noted, a confrontation of some kind between soldiers with torches and a group of contrabands standing by the iron fence that bordered the camp. Seeing this, Hiram headed over the hill toward the waterfront. Close behind him came his aides, who had stopped near him on the hilltop.

In front of those confronting the soldiers, Hiram saw, was Emily Derr. She stood out in being the only woman in the groups confronting each other. More strikingly, Emily had a statuesque

elegance, though dressed in a simple cotton dress.

Beside her were several dark-skinned men, including one wearing a brown suit jacket. It was the freedman teacher, Jefferson Banner, Hiram realized, whom Emily had pointed him out to him on his surreptitious visit the previous spring. Further back, in the camp, groups of the former slaves were silently watching the interaction and listening to what was being said.

Hiram heard Emily saying, as he came near: “Nothing can be gained by this. It is motivated by meanness.” Her voice was soft in tone, while, also, seeming full of conviction and tempered by the assumption that the soldiers she was addressing had the same level of conviction for their own cause.

All in all, it was a strange scene, illumined by the flickering light of the fires on the waterfront. Off to the right of the fence was the stone and mortar firehouse where John Brown had made his stand, with its wagon doors and its lookout deck perched like a bell tower on a church. Just behind that, on the opposite side of the Shenandoah River, was the dark form of a cliff-terraced, tree-edged ridge rising at an incline from right to left. There, too, amidst the trees, the surreal light of the waterside fires carried across from the town.

No one looked at Hiram and his aides at first, apparently thinking he was just passing by. There was a general commotion on the street, with cavalry details moving back and forth.

Coming closer still, Hiram heard Emily say: “Such meanness is not worthy of your cause—if the spirit of ‘76 is your cause as I’ve heard some say. That was a noble cause, not a mean one.”

He recognized that these were his own words that Emily was quoting; he had said them to her on the same visit just three months before.

Soon, however, Hiram approached close enough to the groups in confrontation for everyone to take note of him in his officer’s frock coat with its two rows of seven buttons indicating his rank of colonel. The soldiers pulled back while Emily, the school master, and the former slaves next to the school master, all reacted to his appearance.

There was much for Hiram to observe in this reaction. The soldiers saluted and stood erect, awaiting an indication of why a high-ranking officer had showed up on the scene. Emily swung around and her dark eyes grew wide with the recognition that this impressive figure was her childhood friend. She looked surprised by his appearance and confident that he could be none other than

an advocate of her own position. Her face was beautiful in the traditional sense, while strong and determined in the new way that Hiram had lately noticed in women of his own generation. The school master, in the meanwhile, was displaying what happens on rare occasions when an entire personality is revealed in an instant in the eyes and posture and whole attitude of the body. He was autonomous and strong, it was clear to see; he was a free man and proud of it. As for the several young black men standing beside the school master, in them Hiram saw something he had seldom observed in the slaves at home. He saw a look of passionate resentment that clouded their eyes, strained their powerful torsos, and made them seem about to strike out from pent up anger.

Emily made no show of recognition of Hiram, and neither did Hiram show any of her. Instead, he looked toward the soldiers with torches.

“What is your object here?” he inquired.

“Sir, we were about to destroy this camp.”

“Have you orders to do so?”

“We were given discretion, sir,” one of the soldier replied. “I was informing the lady, sir, under Virginia law, this camp is illegal. These coloreds here are fugitive slaves.”

“If this area comes under our permanent control, sergeant, we will attend to that. Until then, leave this camp alone and proceed with your other tasks.”

“Yes, sir,” the sergeant answered with a salute, turning toward the burning trestles behind him. Those with him turned, also, and moved away with their flaming torches.

“Ma’am,” said Hiram, speaking in view of other soldiers nearby, “our rapid progress will not allow us to remand these slaves.”

“For that, sir, I am glad,” Emily replied, “and grateful for your part in it.”

“I have no part other than to do what is expedient for the Army of Virginia.”

“Well, thank you just the same.”

At this, Hiram spun his horse around with his aides beside him and headed with them back up the waterfront along the line of leaping fires. Soon, though, he paused in the very spot from which he had departed just minutes before, with his aides again a short distance from him. It was not a random spot, but a spot that had been a favorite lookout for him and Josiah as boyhood playmates.

He felt greatly affected by his meeting with Emily. How strong and beautiful she was! The Emily he had known in

boyhood and college, always ready with some idealistic opinion, had projected herself with integrity into what she had become in her present role as supporter and defender of the contraband camp and in her obvious acceptance by the people she had chosen to serve.

Had he as truly projected himself from those heady years when he and Emily, and Josiah and Louisa, had exchanged their ideas with such fervor, Hiram wondered as he rode away through the familiar scene.

No, he had not, Hiram acknowledged to himself, for he had professed ideas to Emily regarding the eventual freeing of his family's slaves that he had, in fact, accepted inwardly, but that he had never brought forth into reality. He had never even expressed his ideas before his schoolmates at VMI, and only recently had expressed them at home.

How was it that he had come to have such different opinions about slavery from his peers at VMI? Silhouetted against clouds tinted with the flashing colors of the fires below him, Hiram could see, over to his right side, physical reminders of how it had all come about,—in the Derr house, which had always been so welcoming to him, and in the chimney stacks of the mills on Virginus Island where his Aunt Luellen and Uncle Jacob Beecher lived. He had come to have such ideas because of this town, because of his summer stays with the Beecher's and, through them, his interactions with the Derr family.

With Turner Ross, also, Hiram acknowledged to himself further, he had not projected himself truly from his ideals. Turner had done a great service to his family. Turner deserved the free status and dignity so visible in Jefferson Banner, but, Hiram admitted to himself, he had not carried through with that, either, though he had presented the case, at least, to his mother.

Upon thinking of that, Hiram recalled his mother's objections to have a freed slave living on the family plantation, and he thought to himself that that did make sense from her perspective as a woman trying to manage a work force of partly men. But something she had said another time loomed up at the moment more fearsomely. She had said, did he realize that there were thousands of slaves in Virginia and that, if all of them were made free, they would be without work, wandering around, and perhaps some of them with anger inside over what they had endured in the years of slavery.

"We have not abused them," his mother had said. "But many have abused them."

Thinking of that, Hiram recalled the sullen faces of the contrabands who had stood beside the school master on the riverfront, and he was beset with a deep uneasiness over what the future held for his own family.

#### **44. Early races against time to assault the center of power**

As the three columns of the Army of the Valley emerged from the three wind gaps of South Mountain on Saturday, July 10, 1864, Lt. Gen. Jubal Early was aware of the continuing success of his advance and of the importance of timeliness in achieving the outcome that no one, even he, had expected: that his ragtag army would arrive at Fort Stevens, on the northern defensive ring of Washington City, with the Union army caught off guard.

Would federal troops from Baltimore or Richmond arrive in time to confront him?

South of Frederick, Maryland, at the junction of the National Road and the Georgetown Pike, which led directly to Washington, Early received a partial answer to his question. A calvary brigade, under Brig. Gen. John McCausland, moving ahead of the three Confederate columns as they turned to the southeast, encountered skirmishers that the brigade drove ahead toward the railway junction at the Monocacy River.

There Early rode over a knoll to discover the mile-long line of blue-coated soldiers behind earthworks that awaited his arrival. On each side of the line, a block house jutted up, one by the trestle bridge of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, the other by the covered bridge that the Georgetown Pike crossed on. Near a red brick railway station were three batteries with six-inch guns, where sat the mounted Union commanders watching his advance.

Early considered the situation from the perspective of time. It was 10:13 A.M. Already that day, his men had marched 14 miles. Fort Stevens was 22 miles beyond. He had hoped to arrive there on the following day, despite the dust and heat plaguing his advance. That schedule was no longer feasible. He would have to contain the loss of time and men as best he could.

Militarily, also, Early appraised the situation with his experienced eye. His forces were in a cross-shaped formation about two miles wide, with himself at the intersection of the two axes. In front of Early about a half mile was the First Division of his own corps, under Maj. Gen. Robert E. Rodes, centered on the Union earthworks. On Early's far left, at the junction of the

Baltimore Pike and the National Road, was the Second Division of his own corps, under Maj. Gen. Stephen D. Ramseur, confronting the Union troops entrenched on the low bluffs lining the other side of the river. To Early's right and behind him, at the other two axes of the cross formation, were the two divisions composing the corps led by Maj. Gen. John C. Breckinridge: the First under Maj. Gen. John B. Gordon and the Second under Brig. Gen. John Echols.

"We cannot approach directly or on our left," Early remarked to his adjutant. "Right is the only option. Where is McCausland?"

"He seems to have heard you, sir," the adjutant said, offering the binoculars. "See, he is down by the river there where it bends out of view."

Early saw McCausland's cavalry emerging from the trees about a mile below the Union lines. They were searching along the river for a place to ford.

As the general and adjutant were speaking, the Union guns by the railroad station commenced to fire. The Confederate artillery behind them answered with a barrage of its own. Despite this, there was no movement on either side, and Early's attention stayed on his cavalry as they forded the river, dismounted, and moved through the riverside saplings toward the Union left flank.

Early's hoped for report was not forthcoming, however, telling of the raw recruits that he had heard were in the Baltimore army being pushed back by his battle-tested men. Instead came word that the Union troops encountered in the area out of sight were fighting under the battle flag of the Third Division of the VI Corps from the Army of the Potomac on the James Peninsula. Reinforcements had arrived.

"These men are not giving way," the adjutant said.

"No, I would not expect so," Early answered. "Send at once to Breckinridge and tell him to send in Gordon."

It was the same General John Gordon as he who had saved the Confederates at the Battle of the Wilderness, as earlier described

Hours went by with Gordon's three brigades moving on the recalcitrant Union left flank. Then came word that the brigade led by Brig. Gen. William Terry (all Virginians) had broken though to a protected area on the river bank, permitting them to direct enfilade fire into the Union regiments that had not given way. That development caused panic in the veteran Union lines, forcing them back into the troops at the base of the covered bridge.

For the first time in the battle, the Union side of the bridge was left undefended. Ramseur's regiments, in the front center of the Confederate cross, charged across the bridge, compelling the Union troops gathered there to begin a chaotic retreat.

The battle had turned. With several units left behind to slow the advance upon them on their Confederate pursuers, the Union troops all along the riverfront were converging into the road that led back toward Baltimore.

An entire day had been spent in the battle. The river front, from the corn fields to the railroad bridge, was strewn with bodies of wounded or killed men.

Soon later, Early saw his red-haired cousin and her fair-haired fellow nurse crossing the deserted railroad bridge with packs of supplies. On the other side, they moved amidst the fallen men.

Louisa had kept her promise to stay out of the line of fire, Early noted, but she had pushed to the limit of what had been allowed.

What would happen now with regard to the objective of reaching Fort Stevens before it could be fully manned? A day had been lost. More than 4000 men had been put out of action. The rest were exhausted by the relentless marches and hard-fought battle. In addition, another obstacle had presented,— heat so oppressive that many of the men were unable to sleep.

Still, the next day after two extra hours of rest, the Confederates were moving again toward Fort Stevens, which straddled the Georgetown Pike near Rocky Creek, just eight miles from the White House. After two weeks without rain, the movement of thousands of men along the dirt roads threw up a cloud of dust that the men in the back ranks had to walk through. They were falling to the side, overcome with heat and unable to breathe the dust-filled air..

“Those who cannot keep up can fall to the rear,” Early directed his lieutenants. “We must push forward.”

Next day about noon, moving again in the same conditions, Early received word that a cavalry detail sent ahead to reconnoiter the fort, had found it lightly manned. At once he set out at a gallop with his personal guard and flag.

Traversing in an hour a distance for which his infantry would require a full day, Early rode to where he got his first view of Fort Stevens and there he saw the most formidable fortification he had yet encountered in his four-year experience of the war. First came a swath about a hundred yards across in which a forest

of large trees had been cut down and left where they had fallen with branches splaying up into the air left and right of his position as far as he could see. Then came a mound of earth about 20 feet high with a steep incline forming an earthen wall, and on top of that was a wooden wall about ten feet higher upon which were gun positions and artillery.

But something else was evident at once. There were no soldiers at the gun positions. The fort was ripe to be captured, Early thought, if only his men could arrive before the Union troops that were surely on their way from somewhere at the very moment.

“We have one day, perhaps,” Early said to the officers on horses beside him. “If we are all here by tonight, we can strike at dawn.”

“The trees will prevent us from moving close with cannons,” one of the officers replied. “But they will protect us as we approach on foot.”

Just then, a clamor of marching feet and shouted commands was heard and an immense cloud of dust rose up beyond the embattlements.

“Could it be, they are arriving at this very moment?” someone asked. “Is it all of them or just the lead elements?”

In answer to these questions, soldiers were soon observed on both ends of the mile-long rifle deck, their blue caps and the barrels of their hand-held rifles visible above the chest-high, log-fortified wall as they filed in, a process that continued until the whole rifle deck was packed with men.

That night, with his entire army camped within striking range of the fort, Early held a battle council with his commanders down to the brigade level,—twenty-three men with facial expressions acknowledging the grim situation.

“We have in total now, we figure, about 8,000 muskets,” Early said, “full half of our force that we left with from Lynchburg. Against us now, we figure, are more than 15,000 men, and they are, I have been informed, from the remainder of the VI Corps from Richmond, battle-tested troops. We are faced with a fortification where, manned as it is now, a frontal assault would have no chance of success. We do not have the time or supplies to probe for another angle of approach.

“So what we must do now is clear. We must retreat as quickly as we have advanced, to the other side of the Potomac. But let us be clear about this, also, we have pressed to the very walls of the federal capitol, we have demonstrated for all in both North and

South the capability of our army and our dedication to our nation and to liberty.”

Next morning, as his troops were moving out, Early rode up to the line of felled trees to look one last time at the fort that had been his objective for the past six weeks. Just five miles beyond it, he knew, were the white walls of the Capitol and the White House.

He had done his utmost to reach them, Early thought to himself, but more battles were awaiting on the other side of the Potomac in the strategic cities and farms of the Shenandoah Valley.

#### **45. A humbled Lincoln questions his own leadership after Early withdraws**

Unknown to Lt. Gen. Jubal Early, the very man toward whom he had aimed the psychological brunt of his advance, the 16th president of the United States, Abraham Lincoln, had arrived at the scene the day before, when Early had first ridden up to the perimeter of Fort Stevens. The president had not seen the Confederate general at that time, but early the next morning Lincoln ventured out upon the parapet and happened to spy his adversary at the same moment when the general came forward to take a last look at the defenses put into place to prevent his further advance.

Not sure at first on the precise identity of the figure in the distance, beyond the defensive abatis of fallen trees, Lincoln was enlightened by the gritty sergeant on duty at that time, “That is the very man, sir, the gen’ral hisself, and, if you will permit me, sir, he is an ornery sight, even from this distance.”

“Yes, he is, indeed,” Lincoln replied as he looked through the binoculars placed in his hand.

The man visible in the binocular view was small in stature and erect in posture, with a frizzled beard covering his face up to his eyes. He wore a double-breasted gray frock coat, with the customary two rows of nine buttons, in groups of three, down the front from shoulders to waist. He held the reins firmly with gloved hands, the aprons of which extended up his forearms; and held them in a tensed position, pulled back, as if ready to bolt forward. He raised binoculars to his own eyes and looked in the president’s direction.

Lincoln thought to himself then that the general recognized who he was. He knew himself to be a person unique enough, with

black suit coat, unusual height, and tall black hat, to be identified.

“Ol’ Early he come along faster’n we expected, sir,” the sergeant remarked.

“Yes, that was the case surely,” Lincoln responded in his kindly manner. “We are glad for the like of you between us and him.”

“Yes, sir, and glad to do it,” the sergeant answered.

Lincoln had, indeed, been aware of the progress toward Washington of an army that had been a subject of speculation in the press as to its composition and intent. He had several times telegraphed Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, not giving orders, but offering suggestions as to what should be kept in mind. He had been relieved to learn that Grant had sent up Maj. Gen. Horatio Wright and the First Division of the VI Corps from the Army of the Potomac by Richmond.

Lincoln stared at the figure in his binocular view as the figure stared back. There was scrutiny in the squinting eyes, as in those of a hunter who has discovered the object of his hunt and had raised his rifle to his shoulder.

“We had a man like that back home, sergeant,” Lincoln remarked, “in the little town where I grew up. When he was offered ham and eggs for breakfast, he insisted on fried porcupine.”

“Is that the case, sir?”

“Yes. And he asked to sit with me, but I declined.”

Enough people had seen Early’s approach for a story to go around that his appearance within view of the fort augured a bitter battle soon to begin, but word came around that the Confederates had withdrawn from their closest line.

The president, with many a cordial bow at those who looked toward him, withdrew to a room set up for him and his wife, Mary, who had accompanied him to the fort. From the window he could see the tree-shaded cottage by the Soldiers’ Home where he and his family had been living in the summer months to escape the bustle of the White House.

Mary was seated with her hands in her lap and an agitated expression on her face, as if sinking under the weight of some invisible burden. She wrung her hands, folded out the wrinkles on her voluminous skirt, and looked at him.

“Well, what is the case, Mr. Lincoln, are they getting ready to attack?”

“I don’t think so, Mother, though they would like to.”

“What is holding them back?”

“Common sense, I suppose. Before them they see more men than they are themselves, with more and bigger guns.”

“Let’s hope they have the common sense to return to where they came from.”

“That is like hoping for a bird dog to leave the bird he has finally found.”

“I’ll leave the bird dogs to you.”

Lincoln sat down and considered his wife’s sensitive eyes, which betrayed every subtle change in her volatile emotions. The other features of her once pretty face had been muted by her growing plumpness.

“As you know, Mother,” he said, “I was ever so briefly a semblance of a soldier, back home in the Black Hawk War, as now they are calling it. I carried a gun one day, crossing a swamp in pursuit of something or someone that turned out to be not there. I never once lifted that gun to my shoulder; I had done more damage in corn fields, to pheasants; and now look what I have become, ‘commander in chief,’ as they call it, of thousands of men,—men with guns, telling them to go shoot. And they do, as they must. Why has the Lord chosen me?”

Mary drew back and gazed steadily at her husband, seeming to settle into a different mood. “Because with or without a gun, Father, you have wisdom,” she replied softly, “and because, as I can see most of all, Our Lord has bestowed upon you not only this task but the strength to do it.”

In response the president sighed.

“I wonder at times, Mother,” he went on, “I confess this to you in confidence, what will become of it all? We started, three months ago, with, all said, the most powerful army in history, assailing the Southern capitol again. With a man as leader of our army who is willing to fight, and who has fought, making the hard decisions to keep sending the boys in.—I can sympathize with the hardness of that. —We have fought and we have not let off. Now, consider what I witnessed today, the rebel army pressing upon our own capitol, just ten miles from the city center. Had they an army such as ours, I must admit,—to you, Mother, and no one else,—had they an army such as ours, they would prevail.”

“They do not have such an army because their society is not such as ours, but built upon the injustice of slavery. They cannot marshal the weapons or soldiers to fight on an equal basis with our society of farmers carving out their own farms, as they have, and our workers making marvelous inventions of wood and iron.”

“I must say, Mother,” Lincoln remarked, “you are more

eloquent sometimes than our greatest senators.”

“Am I, Father? I grew up with slaves, and profited from their labor, but also I saw the injustice firsthand among colored people I loved.”

“If Sumner had your sensibility, what speeches he could make!”

“You are the one who has spoken most truly, Mr. Lincoln. God has placed this task on you, and he has placed me beside you, to be a strength to you as best I can, although I have been so often a frilly, vain woman!”

“Mother, at this moment, I do not see before me such a woman. I see the First Lady of the United States.”

Mary’s eyes teared up at that.

“This bitter war will end, Abraham,” she said. “We will see it through together.”

He went across to a dusty window, and looked out at the lengthwise lying timbers and snarled wire north of the fort, thinking of the letter he had received two days before from Horace Greeley of the *New York Tribune*. The letter had conveyed that a man had written to Greeley claiming to represent a peace initiative offered by the Confederate president, Jefferson Davis.

The words sent in response to Greeley repeated in Lincoln’s mind: “If you can find any person, anywhere, professing to have any proposition of Jefferson Davis in writing, for peace, embracing the restoration of the Union and abandonment of slavery, whatever else it embraces, say to him he may come to me with you.”

Beyond these minimal goals, the president thought, the ability to reconstruct the nation into a strong union providing social justice for all was important. There 38th Congress, just ended, had sent him, on the last day of its session, a reconstruction bill that he had pocket vetoed. He would soon have to attend to the aftermath of that, as well as to the aftermath of Early’s incursion.

“What a state we are in, indeed!” Lincoln repeated, turning toward his wife, still seated in the same chair with her hands still clenched.

“It will happen as the Lord wills,” his wife returned.

That consolation was not enough for the president at this moment, however. The Lord could not be blamed for everything, he reflected, and there was no doubt that the national push to end the war, started with his own blessing the previous spring by his commander in chief, Ulysses S. Grant, had been set back. It had not been set back to the extent that the Confederacy could never be

defeated, but in the sense that many ordinary Americans would again view the South as undefeated and as seeming as if it could not be defeated. There could no doubt the Copperhead press would soon take advantage of these developments.

How had this happened? Was this not the possibility that he and Grant had discussed a month before, in City Point, that, with Early in Lynchburg, and Hunter fled from the scene, the route had opened down the Shenandoah Valley toward Harper's Ferry and Washington City? Had not he and Grant agreed upon an immediate response, which was that one division of the VI Corps, and then, if needed, the entire corps, would be sent to Maryland to stop Early's advance?

That had happened,—another division had been sent. But he and Grant had still, somehow, been caught off guard! Now the Shenandoah Valley,—where the middle pincer of the Union's national push was to have pressed upon Richmond from its western side,—was again in Confederate hands.

#### **46. Lincoln pauses to reevaluate the war and his political objectives**

With Early's army having withdrawn below the Potomac, and with many members of the 38th Congress having left the capital at the end of their first session, eleven days before, President Abraham Lincoln took a full day, on Friday, July 15, 1864, to consider the state of the war effort and the effect of the Congress on his own political objectives.

Lincoln informed the military contingent that accompanied him to the White House each day that he would remain at his two-story cottage by the Soldiers' Home, which for the past few years had been his summer home.

Newspaper reports in the days following the Battle of Fort Stevens had informed the beleaguered president of the widespread confusion and alarm inflicted upon the populace of the triangular area formed by the geographical points of Washington, Boteler's Ford (where the Army of the Valley had crossed the Potomac), and Baltimore on the northern shore of Chesapeake Bay.

Telegraph lines between Washington and Baltimore had been cut and, after being repaired, had been cut again, by the Confederate cavalry, causing a break in communication between the two cities. The city of Frederick had been occupied, and its leaders pressed to collect \$20,000,—which they had,—in

exchange for a guarantee that private property would not be damaged. Cavalry details returning from raids had filled the streets of the town with horses, cattle, swine, and sheep, which had thereafter been herded across the Potomac at Edward's Ferry. The Falkland residence of Montgomery Blair, Lincoln's Postmaster General,—in Silver Spring, Maryland, just six miles north of the White House,—had been burned to the ground, and the plantation estate of Montgomery's father, Francis Preston, had been commandeered as a hospital.

The number of rebel soldiers had never been known. Estimates had ranged from 15,000 to 45,000. Lt. Gen. James Longstreet had been rumored to be on his way to Washington from Gordonsville, Virginia, with his First Corps of the Army of Northern Virginia, but he and his corps had never arrived.

In the *New York Times*, as he sat in his quiet study with a cup of coffee before him, Lincoln found a summary of what Early and his army had accomplished:

They have produced a great scare throughout all the country covered by their operations, and far beyond... From Martinsburg, Hagerstown and Harper's Ferry to Baltimore, and even north of that, they have spread terror wherever they or the report of them has gone. In Baltimore especially, the exhibitions have been pitiful.

There has been no evidence that it has ever been threatened by anything more than a cavalry party, and a small one at that. And yet this squad of men has been able to coop up a force strong enough... to chew up ten times their number, body and boots, while they have devoted themselves to burning houses in the suburbs, and have even captured parties of our men within the city limits themselves.

They have been able to relieve their lines in front of Petersburg, for a brief period, at least, from the pressure of a goodly number of Grant's army.

They have given a practical demonstration of one of the standing dangers of putting our army out of position to cover Washington (as it is before Petersburg), namely, that the enemy can, by a vigorous feint toward the capital, throw the whole country into alarm respecting its safety. This is a dangerous state of facts, for it induces a pressure which it becomes difficult for any Executive to withstand. "How true," thought Lincoln when he read that.

The president continued reading as the article ("Review of

the Rebel Raid” by William Swinton) followed with an account of Early’s withdrawal across the Potomac, and terminated at a final paragraph that said:

Thus abruptly ends the boldest, and probably most successful of all the rebel raids. There is much in the whole affair that time alone can clear up. It is too early yet for a verdict. That ‘some one has blundered,’ is obvious; but who he is must be left for time to disclose.

Probably true, also, Lincoln acknowledged, and possibly this “some one” was himself. Grant bore some of the blame, Lincoln supposed, if anyone deserved it. In the final analysis, though, the raid had not been successful. Washington had never realistically been in jeopardy. Confederate resources and men had been expended in a demonstration that had been in great part a show only. Grant had delivered to the defense of Washington,—and on time, though barely on time,—the units that at City Point, during his visit with Lincoln, he had promised to send, including the First and Third Divisions of the VI Corps from the Jamestown Peninsula, and the First and Second Divisions of the XIX Corps from Louisiana (sent on to Washington without disembarking, directly upon their arrival at Fortress Monroe, as Grant had promised).

In any case, the *New York Times*, in which this critical article had been encountered, was a newspaper friendly to his own political faction, Lincoln knew. The *New York Tribune*, also friendly, had likewise spared him from severe censure. But, as expected, the *New York World*, the *New York Journal of Commerce*, the *Chicago Times*, and other Copperhead newspapers, had seized upon Early’s raid as evidence that, as said one editorial, “this war will never be won under Lincoln’s inept leadership; the only hope for the nation is a negotiated peace, and, yes, it must be based upon a true negotiation that admits that the seceded states have legitimate interests.”

With a sigh at confronting again this tired argument, as he saw it, Lincoln headed out of his cottage to the sprawling, parklike grounds. There, the castellated stone building housing retired and war-crippled soldiers was visible across from the winding lane where his own two-story, Victorian style dwelling sat amidst the similar cottages of the adjutant general and other administrative officers of the soldiers’ home and hospital.

From this vantage point, on a hill above the city, Lincoln could see off to the southwest toward the recently completed dome of the Capitol. Above it, in the morning sunlight, glinted the

colossal bronze sculpture called the *Statue of Freedom*, 20 feet tall, in weight seven tons, hoisted on top of the dome the previous year. It was a classical rendition of a female warrior, wearing a Greek chiton and a military helmet, with in one hand the hilt of a sheathed sword and in the other, a laurel wreath of victory and the Shield of the United States.

That statue and the dome upon which it was mounted, completed in his administration despite the war, were not just reminders of freedom, Lincoln reflected, but reminders also of the function of the Capitol as the center pinion of the Union and guarantor of its perpetuity. From this thought, by a twist of association, he turned to an examination of the Congressional session just ended, as absent-mindedly he followed his son Tad, who ran past him into a little woods of a dozen or so maples on a shallow slope.

“Let’s play Indian!” the boy shouted. “You have to come find me!”

The president followed into the woods, whereupon the boy charged with a stick. For a moment the tall, somber figure became playful as he wrestled the boy off. Then he continued on with his head bent in thought as the boy charged off again in front of him toward another stand of woods.

The 38th Congress had accomplished a great deal that he had hoped for in terms of western expansion, Lincoln thought. West Virginia and Nevada had been admitted to the Union. The Montana Territory had been organized. Unionists in the formerly Confederate states of Louisiana, Arkansas, and Tennessee had become “restored” in the Union (albeit through elections marred by low turn-outs). In the northern part of the Dakota Territory and in the new states of Minnesota (admitted in 1958) and Wisconsin (in 1948), a treaty had been signed with the Chippewa Indians, opening the area for orderly settlement after the tragedy of the Dakota war.

It was in their core concern with eradication of slavery, however, that the Republican leaders of this congress had made their distinctive mark; and in this, too, Lincoln thought, he had made his own mark, also, in terms of how he had interacted with them in their main objectives of passing the 13th amendment and passing a reconstruction bill (which, as he was aware, presumed future victory in a war not yet won).

In general, as this interaction had taken form, he had been in accord with Congressional leaders on the 13th amendment; and he had lamented with them when it had failed in the House after

passing in the Senate. On the reconstruction bill, though, he had been in contention with them since proposing his own “ten percent plan” seven months before. In the end, when they were still exulting in passage of their bill (called the Wade-Davis Bill after its sponsors, Sen. Benjamin Wade of Ohio and Rep. Henry Winter Davis of the 3rd Congressional District of Maryland), Lincoln had declared that he would not sign it.

What else could he have done? Lincoln continued in his mind. The Wade-Davis Bill, if signed into law, would set into place a harsh regime under which reconciliation, after the war, would be harder to achieve. In his own “ten percent plan,” he had stipulated that states formerly within the Confederacy could be readmitted to the Union when ten percent of the eligible voters swore allegiance to the Union. By contrast, the Wade-Davis Bill permitted re-admittance only after a majority had taken an “ironclad oath” that they had never supported the Confederacy. States already restored to the Union under his own plan would need to start over under martial law; he could not accept that, having set forth the conditions under which they had been re-admitted.

Having rejected their bill, Lincoln had added their resentment about that to their indignation at watching as Early’s invasion had advanced toward Washington; they charged that to the same incompetency they ascribed to his administration in general. There were rumors they would seek to replace him as candidate of the National Union Party, also, which many had remained in while waiting to see whether Grant’s national push would regain its original promise before the stalled war diminished his chances of reelection if nominated.

#### **47. Sherman faces a new bolder adversary in John Bell Hood**

Maj. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman, commander of the Military Division of the Mississippi, which was still in northern Georgia, advancing ever so slowly toward Atlanta, was as aware as the president of how the stalled war augured poorly for the upcoming election, and of how crucial to Lincoln’s prospects it was to obtain visible success in the national push in order to shore up support for the war in the Northern states.

General Sherman was keenly aware, also, of his own part in the national push, as impeller of the western prong of the coordinated movement; and he was aware of the progress of the

other main prongs, including the eastern prong of Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant and his combined armies, which were presently stalled on the James Peninsula, outside of Petersburg and Richmond, and the middle prong, in the Shenandoah Valley, which the Confederate lieutenant general, Jubal Early, with his advance on Washington, had thwarted. Early's Union counterpart, Maj. Gen. David Hunter, following the Battle of Fort Stevens, had been sent to Monocacy, where he was poised to re-start the middle prong, but with no apparent sense of his opponent's location.

For weeks, since embarking from Chattanooga in March, four months before, Sherman had pulled along behind him his complex logistical apparatus for supply of his 100,000 soldiers, an apparatus that included a wagon with telegraph wire unwinding directly to him wherever he went, a long caravan of hundreds of supply wagons, assigned individually to specific companies in specific regiments following the scheme initiated by Grant at Chattanooga, and a railroad track built out as needed behind the advancing army and resupplied with rolling stock as needed from the immense metal production and factory capacity of the industrial North.

Sherman emphasized to himself at times that his mission had not changed since articulated four months before by Grant; his mission was, most crucially, to destroy the Army of Tennessee, and that meant continuing to press close upon his battle-wise opponent, Gen. Joseph E. Johnston, who had continued to slow the advance of the Union army by taking well-selected and well-entrenched defensive positions which he abandoned as soon as Sherman's armies pressed upon him. Atlanta, although close at hand and endowed with symbolic value by the Northern press, remained a secondary target.

It was Tuesday, July 19, 1864, three weeks exactly after the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain, and, during those three weeks, only one other battle had been fought; such had been the effectivity of Johnston's dilatory tactics and the complexity of repositioning the Union's huge composite army to renew the attack.

During this time, Sherman had advanced his three armies around the west end of the Kennesaw ridge, forcing Johnston either to meet them there, in order to protect the western extension there of the Western & Atlantic Railroad, or else to withdraw to the southeast to protect the bridges on the Chattahoochee River. As Sherman had expected, Johnston had taken the latter option; and, in response, Sherman had moved his armies ponderously in that direction behind Johnston, with an order to Maj. Gen. John

Schofield, commander of the Army of the Ohio, to attack as soon as he made contact with the enemy.

Soon, however, after hearing that Schofield had not done that, General Sherman had ridden to the battlefield and there he had discovered, in his first view, what the problem was. Along the river ran a formidable defense consisting of dirt-enforced rifle pits and artillery pads fortified by an abatis of newly felled trees with the branches extended out toward his own troops. It was another example of a phenomenon Sherman had gotten used in dealing with his wary opponents, the combined effect of the thorough preparation of an anticipated site and the amazing ability of the gritty Southern soldiers to harden the site within hours when needed.

“There is no way to attack directly, sir,” Schofield informed when Sherman rode up to him.

“It will require another movement from the flanks,” Sherman replied.

Once again, Johnston had shown his capacity for foiling his opponents and safeguarding his own smaller army.

The three Union armies composing the Division of the Mississippi, continuously provided with new soldiers to replace those lost in battle, still consisted in total of more than 100,000 men; the Confederate Army of Tennessee, despite being judiciously protected by Johnston’s tactics, had been whittled down from its original 60,000 to about 45,000. Word had come across the lines that Johnston was being criticized by some of his own officers and perhaps by the government in Richmond, for being too cautious.

Then, word came by way of some captured Confederates that Johnston had been removed from command and replaced by Maj. Gen. John Bell Hood.

Hood was well known to both sides and had, in fact, achieved almost legendary status, because he had returned to combat after the Battle of Gettysburg with a paralyzed left arm and had then returned to combat again following the Battle of Chickamauga after losing his right leg. Deprived of the service of those two limbs, Hood had continued to monitor the battle line mounted, sometimes traveling more than 20 miles in a single day. In addition, he was the stuff of stories owing to the gallant, reckless charges he had led in numerous battles through three years of warfare.

Hood was known, also, to be a close friend of the most popular of the Union star rank officers, Maj. Gen. James B.

McPherson. For this reason, Sherman summoned McPherson when he heard of the Confederate change of command.

“General McPherson, I’d be curious as your assessment of Hood. He has a reputation as a gambler, I’ve heard,” Sherman ventured, speaking briskly as always, with his characteristic look of being fed up with the long, grinding war, though none could doubt his determination to win it.

“As I have known him, Hood is as impetuous as Johnston is cautious,” replied the 35-year-old commander of the Army of the Tennessee. In his amenable features was no hint of weariness such as Sherman displayed. His intelligent eyes suggested good will and ready comradery.

McPherson, as earlier described, had been first in his class at West Point. He had graduated in the same year, 1853, as Maj. Gen. Philip Henry Sheridan, as well as Hood. Schofield had also been a classmate. Maj. Gen. George Henry Thomas, commander of the other components of the Division of the Mississippi, the Army of the Cumberland, had been Hood’s artillery instructor at West Point.

“That is apparently the logic of this change in command,” Sherman observed. “Ol’ Jefferson, in Richmond, is tired of hearing no news, I suspect.”

“Well, ‘Sam’ will give him some news, I think,” McPherson answered, using the nickname Hood had received at West Point. “No news would surprise me.”

“How was it he wound up on the other side?”

“He served in Texas before the war, and swore allegiance to that state when it seceded.”

Unknown to Sherman and McPherson, John Bell Hood was at this moment meeting with his staff less than ten miles away. As might have been expected for a man who had kept fighting despite the bodily damage he had sustained, Hood had a jaunty air as he joked with his subordinates.

“Now they will see how ol’ Dixie can fight like,” he said. “Gentlemen, we are through with ducking and dodging.”

Though many assumed that Hood had risen to his new rank simply because he had been at hand when Johnston had been removed, the truth was that Hood had lobbied behind the scenes to have Johnston removed and to have himself selected as Johnston’s successor. To this purpose, he had written to President Jefferson Davis, and he had met with the representative from Richmond sent out to investigate his charges. Hood’s argument had been that Johnston’s hesitance was destroying troop morale, and that

decisive action should be taken by a more aggressive officer such as himself. No one doubted his temerity, or suspected personal vanity as the motive behind these events; everyone knew that Hood cared deeply about the reputation and pride of the Confederate army.

In the next ten days, all learned the result of the change in command when Hood sent his troops into two successive, costly battles, later to be called Peachtree Creek and Atlanta.

At Peachtree Creek, north of the main city grid of Atlanta, with the Military Division of the Mississippi's largest component army, the Army of the Cumberland, under Thomas, lined up directly across from the formidable defenses put in place there by Johnston before his removal from command,—and with the Confederate army under Hood behind those defenses,—Hood directed the bulk of his two corps out in front of the defenses, hoping to surprise and isolate the Union divisions, still forming into position, so as to be able to attack them at approximate numerical parity of 20,000 on each side.

At the same time, Hood separated off one division (under Maj. Gen. Benjamin F. Cheatham), and sent it five miles to the east to attack the Union Army of the Tennessee under McPherson.

Hood had said that the days of holding back and being cautious had come to an end with his predecessor's removal; and he had been true to his word in presenting his entire army at once in a new aggressive posture. In the ensuing battle, he ordered his soldiers into nine successive assaults.

In all of these, due to faulty execution of supposedly coordinated movements, and due to the refusal of the Union generals to send their troops out to meet Hood's on the open field, the rebel army suffered losses numbering in the thousands of casualties. The Union has also sustained large losses but in lesser numbers and with greater numbers of reserves to replace those who had been lost.

Hood paused his armies briefly when word came at Decatur that McPherson had been killed. Hood wrote an elegy to him and mourned his death as did many on both sides.

Hearing three days later, however, that the entire Union composite force was wheeling to the southeast to strike the bridges and railroad southeast of the city, Hood committed his forces to battle again, and again with huge losses.

Only two weeks after taking command, Hood had already lost almost 20,000 men, a third of his entire army, while those opposing him still numbered more than 80,000.

#### 48. Grant sets in motion his plan to respond to Early

Since the Battle of Ft. Stevens, Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant had been following the subsequent events involving Lt. Gen. Jubal Early and his Army of the Valley in the Shenandoah Valley.

This was, of course, just one of Grant's many concerns as he also monitored the progress in Georgia of his friend Maj. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman and the progress of his own direct command on the James Peninsula, outside of Richmond and Petersburg. Like President Abraham Lincoln and Sherman, Grant was also focused on the need to make some definite progress in the national push to shore up the National Union ticket in the upcoming election.

The whole situation with Early could be summed up in the statement that Early and his army had been hard to predict and hard to find. Early's army of three infantry corps and one cavalry corps had retired west of the Shenandoah River, striking now and then in unexpected places. On Sunday, July 24, 1864, at a time when Early's entire army had been reported to have withdrawn to Strasburg, a single Union corps (the VIII, aka the Army of West Virginia), under then Brig. Gen. George Crook, had been surprised by two Confederate corps at Kernstown, 15 miles north of Strasburg, suffering 1,200 casualties compared to 600 on the Confederate side.

In seeking to understand how this had happened, Grant had turned his attention to the Union commander who had just set up his headquarters in Monocacy, Maj. Gen. David Hunter. This was the same Hunter who two months before had exited the Valley further south because of lack of ammunition, thereby permitting Early to make his advance upon Washington. Now Hunter, though in many respects a capable commander, in Grant's opinion, seemed unable to decide where to turn next.

Privately, Grant had already determined that he wanted to replace Hunter with a more aggressive commander, and he already knew whom he wanted that commander to be, the same that he had brought out East from Tennessee, Maj. Gen. Philip Henry Sheridan.

Grant had broached this idea already to Edwin Stanton, the Secretary of War, but Stanton had objected that Sheridan, at age 25, was too inexperienced to take on such a large force.

All of this was still in flux when Grant heard that Early had done something else unexpected; he had sent Maj. Gen. Robert Ransom with his cavalry corps around the west side of Harper's

Ferry and across the Potomac into Pennsylvania to demand a ransom in exchange for not burning the town down. The people of the town had refused and Chambersburg had been destroyed.

The Union papers made it sound as if the North was on the verge of being invaded again. An article in the *New York Times* on July 31, announced under headlines: "NEW INVASION, Chambersburg in Ashes, Breckinridge Making a Raid Toward Wheeling, Early to Hold the Shenandoah Valley."

Grant, after taking this in, decided that he needed to act at once. He called in Sheridan to his headquarters in City Point and watched as the youthful general came forward at a rapid pace and saluted sharply. Sheridan's face was sharp in structure, to which was added the effect of his mustache, which angled down on both sides in Manchurian style, suggesting defiance and determination, the exact quality, when directed at the enemy, that Grant found appealing.

"General Sheridan," Grant asserted. "I am sending you to Harper's Ferry to go against Early. He is still there somewhere. I think you are the man who can find Early and root him out."

"Yes, sir," Sheridan replied, never relaxing from his upright stance of attention. "Like the varmint he is."

"There's a second part of this, too," Grant continued. "You must destroy anything in the Valley that would welcome Early's return. I don't mean civilians, but everything else."

"Here are your orders. I've written them up." (They were actually the same orders that Grant had written up for Hunter the previous day.) "Get ready all you need to get ready. I expect this will happen within a week."

Grant did not go over the instructions as the same time, but Sheridan, glancing at them, saw the words, "put your army south of the enemy and follow him to the death."

Grant did not send a copy of the instructions to President Abraham Lincoln, but four days later, Grant received a dispatch indicating the president had somehow wound up with a copy of the dispatch, and had taken a particular interest in the directions for Sheridan to put his army south of Early and "follow him to the death."

"This, I think, is exactly right as to how our forces should move," Lincoln wrote, "but please look over the dispatches you may have received from here, ever since you made that order, and discover, if you can, that there is any idea in the head of any one here of "putting our army south of the enemy," or of following him to the "death," in any direction. I repeat to you, it will neither

be done nor attempted, unless you watch it every day and hour, and force it.”

As soon as he had read this letter, Grant informed his staff that he would at once travel by train to Monocacy where Hunter was bivouacked with the amalgamation of armies that had been assembled to fight against Early.

En route on the train, between Washington and Baltimore, Grant had some time to reflect on other developments affecting the nationwide configuration of armies under his command.

Grant had taken note at once when Maj. Gen. John Bell Hood had replaced Gen. Joseph E. Johnston in Georgia, knowing of Hood's impetuous personality. Grant's sense of the events since then was that, for the sake of a vainglorious victory, Hood had unwisely sacrificed too many of the precious troops of the Army of Tennessee. Once conquering that army and taking the city of Atlanta had seemed like impossibly distant prizes, now they seemed within reach.

When Grant's thoughts turned to his own immediate area of command on the Jamestown Peninsula, he thought at once of the ill-fated engagement, of less than a week before, that the press had been calling the "Battle of the Crater." Acting on a scheme proposed by a group of coal miners from Pennsylvania, the Union IX Corps (the detached corps under the separate command of Maj. Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside) had dug a mine under the Confederate lines and had used it to detonate explosives that had caused the entire area to cave in, leaving the "crater" referred to in the battle name. But execution after that had been botched and men had charged into the crater instead of along its edges and had been fired upon by the Confederates above them. More than two hundred Union soldiers had fallen.

A catastrophe had occurred; but the public was getting used to catastrophes; the outcry had been muted.

Looking out at the fields of wheat and oats on one side of the train, Grant thought of something else he had heard, that the Shenandoah Valley was "the bread basket of the Confederacy." That was why Grant had stressed so strongly to Sheridan that the secondary aim of Sheridan's soon to come attack on Early would be to destroy the infrastructure of the area, where, Grant had heard, mills lined the river for hundreds of miles.

At Monocacy, General Grant disembarked to find the tents of thousands of soldiers in the fields from which Early's army had advanced upon the Union defenders two weeks before. Beyond the railway station, hundreds of railroad cars stood on side tracks out

of reach of rebel raids.

Hunter stood below the steps and saluted. He was 45 years old, with brown hair, a brown beard, and unemotional features like many officers of a similar age, though presently Hunter betrayed uneasiness at the abruptness of Grant's unheralded visit.

Grant, as he approached Hunter, was reminded of an elitist quality that he did not like. Hunter was an intellectual known for his uncompromising views with respect to slavery, and he had, in several commands, issued commands to effect an immediate end to slavery in the area around his army. In this respect, Hunter had been bold, but often as Hunter had given his attention to his principled stands, he had left his army idle.

"General Hunter," Grant said at once, "where is Early now?"

"Sir, I don't know," Hunter replied. "I must admit I've been going left and right in pursuit of him."

"I will tell you how to find Early," Grant shot back. "Order for an engine to be steamed up at once, and have a train made up for an entire corps. At daybreak, proceed to Halltown, below Harper's Ferry, and from there send your army down the valley toward Lynchburg. Early will be before you with his entire army before you go 20 miles."

"Yes, sir," Hunter replied, upon which he turned to his adjutant. "Proceed at once to effect what the general has ordered."

"General Hunter," Grant continued. "If you wish, you will remain in command of this army. You may set up headquarters in Baltimore or Cumberland, or wherever you deem best. But for any action in the field against Early's army, I am replacing you with General Sheridan."

Hunter paused and then replied in a prickly manner, "If that is your desire, sir, with due respect, I think it would be better for Early if I give up the command entirely."

"You may be relieved, if you wish, General Hunter, and in everything I shall say regarding you it shall be with distinguished service."

Sheridan, when he bounded down the steps from the train the next morning, by his whole bearing conveyed that he was eager to assume the responsibilities described in City Point.

"We have a train set up for Halltown, south of Harper's Ferry. You will assemble your army there," Grant said. "It will be the same Army of the Shenandoah that presently exists, but with two cavalry divisions added. You have an important job to accomplish and you will have an army capable of succeeding."

“Yes, sir, we will,” Sheridan replied

It was done, Grant observed to himself as he returned to Baltimore. The valley initiative that had been part of his original plan would be restarted with the drive and energy it deserved.

#### **49. Josiah travels to his father’s funeral reflecting on the war**

In the immense Camden Station of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad in South Baltimore, in an area set aside for soldiers traveling for duty assignments or leaves, stood a handsome young officer that Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, on his return from Monocacy, recognized at once as his former aide de camp, Col. Josiah Derr.

Josiah, dressed impeccably in his crisp blue uniform and polished knee-high boots, noticed the train as it pulled into the station with its American flag suggesting official use. When the train stopped, he saw a senior officer at an open door beckoning him to come forward.

He did so at once.

“Are you Col. Derr?” the senior officer said.

“Yes, sir, I am.”

“Gen. Grant is on this train. He requests for you to come aboard for a brief interview.”

“Yes, sir, of course.”

Josiah followed the officer through a passenger car where several others in window seats nodded at him as he came by. The next car, he saw, was set up as an office, and there, at the desk on the far end of the car, sat Grant with paper and a pen in front of him.

Grant did not wait for Josiah coming to come forward and salute him. Heedless of the formalities of rank, he jumped up and came forward himself, extending his hand.

“Josie,” he said in his plain Midwestern accent. “Saw you standing there, thought I had better say hello.”

“Yes, sir,” Josiah replied. “I’m glad you did.”

He looked at the man in front of him and saw that Grant had not taken on any new airs as a result of his new status. Same plain brown hair and beard, of medium length, and presented in such a manner, it seemed, as to be deliberately unremarkable, as was the case, also, with the plain blue uniform which bore the minimum indicators of rank and no embellishments of honor, though Josiah knew Grant would have had plenty to display if so inclined. The

face was gritty in the set of the steady eyes and firm chin, but the expression was congenial and unaffected.

“Been a while,” said Grant in the same brief way that the farmers of his boyhood had addressed one another.

“Yes, sir, it has.”

“About three months, I reckon.”

“Yes, sir. I think that’s so.”

“I’ve heard good reports about you, Josiah. Good leader, valiant in battle (and I do not say that lightly). One of our most excellent soldiers.”

“Thank you, sir, for your kind assessment.”

“You asked for combat duty, and you have shown yourself equal to it. As your former commander, and to some extent, your mentor, you have made me proud.”

“Thank you, sir, many thanks, again.”

For a moment, they paused as another train pulled up, with a whining of metal wheels on metal rails.

“That’s yours, I think,” said Grant. “Are you on your way to Harper’s Ferry?”

“Yes, sir, though not for a happy event. I am on my way to my father’s funeral. He died the day before yesterday.”

Again the general showed his capacity for engagement and his native generosity of spirit. The intransigence of bearing that so characterized him as a soldier wholly disappeared from his eyes.

“I am very sorry to hear that,” he said with obvious sincerity, touching his former aide on the arm. “I know how much he meant to you, and schooled you in your religious sentiments, especially. He was a minister, was he not?”

“Yes, sir, and you are right, he inculcated me in most of what is good in me.”

“He did an excellent job, then. My sympathies to your mother and other family members.”

“Thank you.”

The other train had drawn to a complete stop, and was about to board passengers as the general and the colonel acknowledged with movement toward the door.

“Josiah,” said Grant as they reached the exit door of the train, “we will have an offer going out looking for officers with a good knowledge of horses for a cavalry force being formed near your home town of Harper’s Ferry. You might consider it; it would bring you closer to your family.”

General Grant was, of course, familiar with Josiah’s knowledge of horses from their several discussions about horses

while Josiah had been Grant's aide de camp,"

"I will, sir," Josiah replied. "Thank you. In fact, I am certain I will apply."

"Is that so? Then Maj. Nystrom here can submit it for you. If it goes through, you will receive word by mail."

"Thank you, sir, again."

Seated at a window on the train a short time later, Josiah recalled the compliments that he had just received,—in light especially of the moral inculcation that he had attributed (and rightly so, he knew) to his father,—and the result, as the train rolled on, was not empty pride, but a detailed self-criticism regarding his own conduct in the war.

This self-criticism had little to do with Josiah's fulfillment of his own duties as a soldier, however, for he assessed that he had not shortchanged his duties and had striven, in all personal matters over which he had any control, to be a strong and brave soldier, an intelligent leader, and an understanding commander of men; he believed, also, that he had succeeded, on a substantial level, in being the model officer that years before, as a student at VMI, he had resolved to be, if ever entrusted with a battle command, as, indeed, he had been.

No, Josiah thought, his self-criticism had to do, rather, with his entire ethical and philosophical thought system, and with the extent to which, as a soldier, he had been able to act in a manner consistent with the principles that arose from this thought system; and, of course, being on the deepest level a Christian, as Josiah was, this had to do, also, with whether, as a soldier, he had been a follower of Christ, which he felt was his fundamental moral imperative.

He had never expected, as a boy, that his soldierly duties and his Christian duties would be at odds with one another, but in the course of the bitter war he increasingly had come to believe in fact that they were. He had spoken to no one about this though, he acknowledged in his mind, he would surely have spoken to his father about this if death had not prevented it.

In this connection, as Josiah looked out of the window of the train toward the familiar banks of the Potomac downriver from Harper's Ferry, he thought of the book that his father had given him prior to his departure for the spring campaign, the book about the New England chaplain, Arthur Buckminster Fuller, who had died in battle a year and a half before.

Josiah had brought the book with him, though it was by no means an inspiration, but rather an indication of his ongoing issues

regarding being both a Christian and a soldier. Recalling this, he drew the book from his bag. It was a hardback book with a brown leather cover upon which was a gilded design like a medieval coat of arms. The design featured a sword and a scepter crossed into a wide “x” behind which was a crown bearing a cross.

The implication was clear: the cross, the sword, and the scepter were complementary parts of the same domain. Christ as the principal figure identified with the cross, was identified with the sword, also, by virtue of this design. Then, in turn, the scepter (governmental authority) depended on the cross in the same way as in a medieval kingdom; governmental authority was sustained by the might of the sword.

Josiah opened the book and considered a passage in a letter the chaplain had sent to his family from his battle location: “We worship, as did our Pilgrim Fathers, with arms in our hands, ready to pray or fight, as God and duty may require, and believing one not inconsistent with the other in a holy cause, such as is our country's.”

Was this truly the case? Was this a proper attitude for a Christian? Josiah had noted that in the book, with its Northern point of view, those being accosted and controlled by the sword were dehumanized by being called “the enemy;” and it had not been lost on him that among those being thus deprecated were his countrymen from his native state of Virginia, among whom were Hiram and Louisa Stone.

Often still, Josiah thought of the red hair and green eyes and tender hand touches of Louisa. He recalled how she had listened sympathetically to his expressions of his military and Christian ideals. Only when those ideals had turned him against Virginia had she turned against him.

Often, too, he remembered, how, at the Battle of the Wilderness, as it was being called, he had thrust his bayonet into a young man barely out of his teens and how he had then knelt beside him as he died praying the Our Father over him.

Josiah had thought that this, his first killing, would become easier for him to live with, but it had not. Rather, a memory of his first killing had reasserted itself each time he went into battle; and each subsequent time he had killed in such a manner as to see face to face the person he was killing, the new experience had revived and multiplied the horror of his first deed.

The mix of conflicting ideals and emotions was an overwhelming burden at the time. It left him weary and confused, and yet he had pushed on like a hollow man.

Josiah did not think that his own self-inspection,—and self-indictment,—were representative of his entire generation or of all his peers in the war, on either side. He was aware, to the contrary, that he was alone in his judgements, and that he was perhaps too rigid in his assessments of what it meant to be a soldier and of what it meant to be a Christian.

But what else could he do? He had to be true to his ideals, Josiah affirmed in his mind; and he had to be honest with himself, even if alone in his quandaries.

He could not allow such considerations to remain in a state of indecision, Josiah told himself. He had to decide where he stood.

### **50. Emily considers her legacy from her father, her growing autonomy**

As Emily Derr stood at the Catholic church of St. Peter, in Harper's Ferry, where the Episcopal service for her father, Elias Derr, was being held, she acknowledged to herself that she owed her father a debt of gratitude for many things, but most of all for the lessons in management of the family store that he had given her in his last year. More importantly for her own development, her father had encouraged her steps toward independence; he had never taken the attitude that her growing autonomy would place her at odds with the traditional feminine role that he had known she aspired to, also.

The store had been a starting point to vast changes in her life overall. Owing to the military presence in the town, which had brought in soldiers and, in some cases, their wives and families, the store had been busy and profitable. In part, this had resulted, Emily knew, from her aesthetic changes to the store and marketing initiatives. Through the store, even after giving part of the profits to her parents, she had acquired enough personal wealth to engage in philanthropy and other activities in connection with the contraband camp, where she still managed the school and taught on a daily basis.

Further changes in Emily's professional activities had followed fast upon one another. Her interest in the contrabands had led her to a project of taking down their personal stories, as earlier described. That, in turn, had led her to writing an article about the contrabands that she had been surprised to get published in a women's journal. From there she had written other articles

that she intended to submit. She had joined an organization called the National Women's Loyal League, dedicated to pressuring Congress to pass the Thirteenth Amendment, which would outlaw slavery. The organization had a goal to collect a million signatures in favor of the amendment. Emily had herself collected several dozen, thereby meeting women who had since become friends. Like many of the women's abolitionist groups, the Loyal League had a suffragette past, and some of the women Emily had met had recruited her in an anticipated future effort to follow the ending of slavery with an amendment that would give the freed slaves the right to vote, and also black and white women.

Emily contemplated all these changes as she stood in the sanctuary of the church. She was the only one who had questioned her own autonomy, she went on in her mind. By contrast, her father had acted as though he had foreseen that her life would require her eventually to accept such new roles. Even so, much as she had respected her father's thoughtful evaluations of the changes in American culture that had come about in the wake of the war, Emily had not been entirely convinced with respect, especially, to her possible future with Hiram Stone.

Beside her in the sanctuary were her two brothers, Josiah and Ebediah, and her half-sister, Lydia Beecher (her father's daughter through his first wife, Charlotte Stone). In the four years of the war, Emily had not changed much in appearance from the young woman of 22 who had followed with alarm as Virginia had seceded from the Union. She was still as dark haired and dark eyed, and as trim in figure, as she had been then. But the simple but elegant gown that she wore on this occasion, lavender in color, with tufted sleeves, was indicative of her new status as a full member of Harper's Ferry society. Her face, though still fresh with youth, differed notably in the brow and eyes, which were more serious. Indeed, in these serious eyes were her most striking resemblance to her deceased father.

After the funeral, Emily talked with her soldier brother in her room, catching up on matters that he and she had touched upon in their frequent exchange of letters. Her room was on the second floor of the house, in the northeast corner, with one window looking out toward Maryland Heights and the other toward the smoke stacks of Virginus Island.

"Lately I went to New York City, did I tell you?" she said.

"No. In connection with the store?"

"Yes, to visit places Father told me about, where there were things to consider to buy."

“He took me on a similar trip,” said Josiah, looking out the window toward the Union flags fluttering on the fortified ridge of Maryland Height. “Do you remember, when I was at VMI?”

“Yes, I do recall that.”

“Did you go alone?”

“No,” said Emily, “with Dorothea Rice, my assistant at the store. And we were just in Manhattan by the Astor House and City Hall.”

“That was the case for me, too.”

“These books here are a new part of that,” Emily remarked, pointing to the book shelf on her wall. “We brought many books like these back home, and we have set up a reading area with tables and free coffee in the store beside the big windows.”

Josiah scanned the authors’ last names and saw some he recognized, including Mott, Stanton, and Anthony, but for him they represented simply the idea that women should be equal to men, which he had no issue with, though he had never thought much about it.

“I’ve been corresponding, also, with some women I met in New York, in a shop I stopped in. Suffragettes and abolitionists. They are so substantial. I want to be substantial.”

“Well, Emily, you are.”

“So much is happening for me, in my little world. I feel at times as if my mind is exploding.”

She stood by the bookshelf with her hands clasped in front of her, a typical pose with eyelids lowered. Then she looked back toward him with a steady gaze, also a trademark.

“I felt something there I have never felt before, as I looked out the window from the hotel, looking out toward the park.”

“I recall that view exactly,” Josiah answered. “Father and I stayed in that same hotel. What was this feeling you refer to?”

“I felt that I wanted to go out into that world and see for myself what it was. I wanted to, but I could not because as a woman I am constrained. I had never felt such a feeling of constraint before that.”

“Ah, yes,” he said. “Well, maybe on a subsequent trip, you can address that, to some extent, at least.”

“Yes, I hope so. Are you aware, Josiah, some of the people from the contraband camp have gone to live up there?”

“No, I was not. Where have they gone?”

“To an area in Manhattan, on the West Side. where there is a Negro church that has helped them. Jefferson Banner has gone with a group of them, trying to arrange a place for them to stay.”

“Jefferson, the freedman teacher?”

“Yes, and that is another reason I would like to go back to New York, to see how they are doing. Many here are looking for a place to go when the camp is closed down. Families, too, with children. They will need work and a place to live.”

Ebediah, the younger brother, came to the room at this point to inquire whether Josiah wanted to go for a walk in the beautiful sunlight outside. Emily remained, going on in her mind regarding the changes in her life that she had contemplated at the funeral and with Josiah.

There was one topic she had not touched upon, and that she knew Josiah would only touch upon himself if she brought up the subject first, and that was her current state of mind regarding Hiram Stone.

All that Emily knew about Hiram’s situation and his present attitude toward her was contained in two letters on her dresser within the envelopes they had arrived in, and from which they had been carefully extracted so as to preserve the envelopes as much as possible. These letter had not arrived by mail, but had been hand delivered by a supplier to the family store who transported goods along the Shenandoah and James rivers.

Though Hiram, except for these letters, had been absent from her life, he had not been absent from her thoughts. For each letter received, she had sent back a letter of her own, written the same day, so as to be within the window of time while the supplier was still present to be given her return letter to take back with him.

Hiram never wrote about military matters or about issues arising in slavery.

He had said in his first letter, however, that “after the war, there may be a time of social and political confusion. I must tell you, Emily, I do not know how my own family will fare in this time. It may well be a time of rearrangement when much will be lost that we have taken for granted. I want you to know, though, that my affection for you will not change, and has not changed. I love you now as much as I did when you were at Hollister and I at VMI.”

She had replied to this as follows: “Dearest Hiram, I will be extremely sorry if any hardship falls upon your family, but please know my affection for you has also not changed, and will not change on account of any such hardship.”

In all of this, however, her own personal changes and her newly assumed roles had not been discussed. Emily was aware that Hiram’s mother Anne and his aunts, including Louisa’s

mother, though educated in the North in the most cosmopolitan and liberal manner, yet lived in the South in a conservative manner. Louisa had not lived that way, exactly, but Louisa would have insisted, Emily knew, that she was serving as a nurse for whatever the Old South stood for.

In his second letter, Hiram had curiously inquired about the Derr family tradition of an autumn trip to the shared Derr and Stone family orchard, Charlotte's Grove. Had he meant that as a possible way for him and her to meet?

To this, she had replied: "Yes, of course, if circumstances permit, we will go to the orchard at the usual time to gather apples for ourselves and for sale at the store, and, of course, if we can arrange it, we will send half of what we pick to your own family."

### **51. Josiah addresses his father's spirit regarding being a Christian soldier**

Col. Josiah Derr headed out from the family house with a premonition that, following from the reflections that had occurred to him on the train two days before, regarding the influence his father had had on him, his quandary regarding his participation in the war was about to be resolved.

In an unacknowledged memorial to their father, understood as such without words by them both, Josiah and his twelve-year-old brother, Ebediah, headed over the top of the town hill toward Virginus Island and the bypass canal where they had both gone on walks with their father.

From the boy's expressive face, it was clear that Ebediah was still within the gloom and wonder of his father's funeral and absence; yet visible there, also, was the importance to Ebediah of his hero elder brother, whose soldier occupation, nearness to death, and stoic willingness to accept death had been a matter of speculation for him, also.

Josiah gazed out to the vast scene extending from the hilltop of this town of his boyhood, which everywhere he looked reminded him of the part it had played in the ongoing war.

There were the two great rivers converging. The Potomac, on the left, flowed to the Northern capitol of Washington City, where Josiah knew President Abraham Lincoln was contemplating the advance against the Confederate Army of the Valley that was soon to begin, and that he, Josiah, would be part of. The other river, on the right, the Shenandoah, flowed through the Great

Valley of Virginia to the axis of Lynchburg, Richmond, and Petersburg that composed the stronghold of the Confederacy, presently under attack by the Union armies under Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant that Josiah had just left the week before.

There below, also, amidst the picturesque brick buildings of the town, was the former arsenal from which John Brown, eight years before, had attempted to launch a revolt of slaves; and there, extending from the town center to the flag-lined bluff from which Union cannons pointed out, was the trestle bridge of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, thrice destroyed and rebuilt by the contending armies. In the opposite direction, to the southeast, he could see, amidst the wooded hills, the wide corridor of the valley, within which, he knew, the Confederate army was waiting.

For the moment, however, Ebediah was eager for his older brother's attention.

"When will you need to leave again?" he asked.

"As I understand, Ebbie, next week sometime. I expect to receive a formal transfer at any time."

"Will you still be a colonel?"

"I expect so. Yes. Though of a different kind of battalion. A cavalry battalion."

"With horses."

"Yes."

"Where do you think you will report to?"

"In Halltown, I've heard, by the train station there."

"Just over the hill, down the river?"

"Yes."

"That will be nice, to have you so close."

"Yes, I expect to see you all now and then. At first, at least, before we move out."

There was much for the brothers to talk about, including Ebbie's plans to follow his brother to VMI, if he could. By all accounts, he was an excellent student.

In keeping with their unstated purpose, they walked along the canal road where they had often walked with their father and reminisced about a time when Elias Derr had explained the water works to them both.

Soon they were interrupted by two of Ebbie's friends who were on their way to a row boat that they intended to use to cross the still water section of the Shenandoah River to a trail on the other side that led up to the top of the bluff.

It was a trail that Josiah had often gone on himself with Hiram Stone in his boyhood days.

“You go on, Ebbie, if you want to,” Josiah said. “We can talk more this evening.”

The boy went off.

Later as Josiah continued by himself along the canal road by the river, his unresolved issues regarding the war and his military service came back into his mind; and, with this, his premonition of being able to communicate with his father regarding the matters he had been thinking over since the spring campaign had begun four months before.

“Father,” he said out loud, “I know you are now with Our Divine Master, and so you cannot be here with me, and yet maybe He in His mercy will allow for you to be here. I am going to speak with you now as if you were, and I trust that somehow my words will reach you, the Lord will allow it, somehow you will hear me.”

Having declared this, Josiah had a powerful perception that his request had been granted and that his father was, indeed, beside him.

“Father, Father,” he said, “let us be truthful in this moment when you are a spirit here beside me and I am about to embark upon another grim session of war.

“Father, I told you once that in thinking much about our great civil war and how it is that our merciful God deems to allow it, I came to the conclusion that the struggle for life or death brought about by the war is meant as a providential test of our resources and ideals. But I must tell you now, also, I took this line of inquiry one step further,—in the very midst of a battle, when I had a moment of pause,—and I arrived at the conclusion right then, the inescapable conclusion, that if implored to fight beside me, Christ would not fight.

“And why is it that I concluded that our dear Savior, who endured the great pain of the cross without complaint, would not fight? Because I know that he said so quite clearly in his teachings on many occasions and thus instructed his disciples, also. He told them, ‘Resist not the evil doer,’ ‘turn the other cheek,’ and ‘if someone steals your coat, do not seek to get it back but give it to him.’ When surrounded by Roman soldiers in the Garden of Gethsemane, he admonished his disciples to put away their weapons. There can be no doubt for anyone who honestly reads the Scriptures, that Christ would not fight.”

Josiah walked down along the river, as he recalled having done with his father as a child, and, with a continuing sense that his father was with him, and looking with him.

“We must first admit this, Father,” he declared aloud, “there

is no way to conceive of our Lord Christ, our great Teacher, as brandishing a weapon of any kind, other than the weapon of just example and just words, the weapon of Truth.”

Josiah looked toward a water-borne branch of a tree, still bearing green leaves, and riding swiftly through the Shenandoah rapids toward the confluence of the rivers about a mile north of where he stood.

“Father, I must go forward divided, knowing that I am divided, accepting that I am divided, and yet in this senseless state of division I must do my best to fulfill all of my duties in each of these irreconcilable worlds, for this war will not allow me the luxury of stepping aside from it, I will be in the midst of it with an incomplete conception of how it can all fit together.”

Josiah walked a little further down and stopped to watch the water pouring into the inlet valves of the old mill.

“Yet, Father, I can do this, I can be merciful, can kill even with a sense of mercy and deep regret...”

But he left off on this without being able to complete his thought.

“Father, when I was a boy,” Josiah began again, “you imbued me with a vision of moral excellence,—and how you did walk in that love, also! What an example you were of moral excellence, of a good man!”

Here Josiah walked along the canal that had been used to pull boats from the Shenandoah falls to the Potomac, a canal along which he had often walked with his father as a boy.

“The truth of the matter is,—let us be honest once again!—we live in an imperfect world, and this great man, who was and is our Lord and God, also, did not provide us with a way to live within imperfection, or, maybe, being truthful once again, he did not provide us with a way that we can follow. Father, father! He did not provide us with a way to make war!

“He was an essentially and completely gentle man who displayed his gentleness in every encounter, in his regard of the flowers of the field, in his forgiveness of sinners. He did not provide us with a way to make war!”

He walked further his head bent in thought.

“At the same, Father, we are involved in a great war which, though it has set brother against brother, is yet for the just cause of freeing our brethren slaves from bondage. I have been trained to be a soldier, and relegated by place and time to be one in this war. It seems without dispute that I must be a soldier in all respects of the word and must fight with all of my strength to win victory in

this war, and that it cannot but involve taking of human life.

“And so, as I go forward, let me say this,—for my own sake, and with you as witness, and with God as my witness,—I will fight this war to the end with all my strength.

“But let me say, also, I will fight this war as a split person, as a divided soul, for I know well there is nothing Christian in this endeavor.”

Josiah paused, thinking his remarks were over and his father had heard them. He peered out over the water rushing by through the jagged rocks, with the steep incline of the bluff rising up beyond. Then, suddenly, as he did this, Josiah had a sense that another person was on the scene, and had been listening all along as he had spoken to his father. This person had a determined expression, lovely red hair, and sympathetic green eyes.

Louisa could not have heard what he had professed, Josiah thought. He realized, though, that what he had said had been meant as much for her ears as for his father’s.

## **52. Josiah reports to Philip Sheridan to join the Valley re-invasion**

Divided though he was between his roles as a soldier and as a Christian, Col. Josiah Derr felt no less of a sense of mission and duty when he reported to Halltown, three miles west of Harper’s Ferry,—on Thursday, August 4, 1864,—to begin his cavalry tour with the Army of the Shenandoah under its new commander, Maj. Gen. Philip Henry Sheridan.

In his first official function, Josiah led his new regiment in an impressive review during which the newly minted army, with its fresh horses, rifled guns, and thousands of alert soldiers, paraded before Sheridan, who watched the parade mounted with his staff officers beside him.

The setting was a flat, unplowed, 40-acre field just north of the brown brick depot of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, which passed through Halltown in a crescent-shaped curve, following a southeastward-facing bend of the Shenandoah River. Passing through this town, also, on a more direct southeasterly course, was the Charles Town Pike, which had afforded convenient transport for the people who had come from Harper’s Ferry and other towns further east to view the parade.

It was late afternoon with dark shadows etching the fissures of the limestone bluffs, called Loudon’s Heights, originating at the

confluence of the Potomac and the Shenandoah River (the same bluffs that Josiah and Hiram Stone had played on as boys), and on the cliffs of the wind gap that severed the ridge just across from where Josiah sat. He was in full uniform with a yellow sash on his hat and a sword at his side, and mounted on his newly assigned horse, Valor. Behind him were his 1445 soldiers, also mounted, and formed into two side by side columns, each with eight companies.

Assembled on this field a quarter mile wide and a quarter mile deep, alongside the cavalry division that Josiah's regiment belonged to, were the three corps summoned a month before to arrest Early's advance toward Washington. These were the VI Corps under Maj. Gen. Horatio Wright, the XIX Corps under Maj. Gen. William H. Emory, and the VIII Corps (aka the Army of West Virginia) under Maj. Gen. George R. Crook. Despite being nominally part of the same army, however, they had never fought in a coordinated campaign. Now, united in fact on this field, and pointed toward the valley before them, where all knew that Lt. Gen. Jubal Early and his Army of the Valley were awaiting their advance, they were united for the first time as a single working unit.

As for the objective of the unified force, Sheridan himself, tall in the saddle despite his smallness of stature, and erect in full uniform on his black horse "Rienzi," 16 hands high, defined that objective in terms clear to the soldiers before him.

"Let Early hear this, if he is listening somewhere in yonder hills," the general declared, "this army will destroy him."

In response to this, a chorus of hurrahs went up across the field and from hundreds of people watching from the side lines.

"As for the farms and mills that provide forage and grain for the enemy,—Jubal, hear this!—your retrograde army will find no sustenance there when we are done with you!"

Another hurrah went up.

"And let me say this to you dedicated men who stand here today, this great war we have been engaged in is nearing its final hours, but it will not reach that final triumph until we complete the great task entrusted to us of clearing this valley to Lynchburg. So long as this valley remains in enemy hands, the rebel army will have the means to hold out. The future of our Union is upon us. The obligation of at long last freeing our bondmen brethren is upon us. We cannot and we will not fail."

When this speech was concluded and the applause had faded off, a military band of more than a hundred men, a prize

group selected from the smaller bands of each regiment, came forth with bugles, fifes, and drums.

For Josiah, this was the emotional height of the ceremony, as he led his regiment in a column right and then around the field with the beat of the drum. He remembered some of the songs being played from VMI. He had always felt such pride in marching to them on the VMI parade ground.

Here, in this single place, the vastly superior ability of the Northern states, in contrast to the states of the Confederacy, in securing men, material, and horses, was evident. Whereas Early's invading army, when occasionally viewed by the citizens of areas through which it had passed, had consisted of ranks of poorly and inconsistently uniformed, undernourished men, some limping or showing other effects of their forced marches, this army of the North consisted of column upon column of newly uniformed, hearty men, their passing feet protected by sturdy, polished boots, the rifles on their shoulders new and well-maintained, while those upon horses rode upon the finest, largest horses available, transported across from the Midwest on railroads that, unlike the disputed railroads of the South, had never been in disrepair. Finally, the well-maintained gun carriages of the artillery came past, bearing newly oiled rifles.

For almost an hour, the proud regiments filed past, led by regimental officers and flags, as orders were called out sharply,—in total, more than 25,000 men, 852 carriage-borne rifles, 5200 battle ready horses, and, over in the distance, not brought into the parade, more than 4000 wagons sat in long rows, impressing by the exact order of their arrangement on the field.

None of this was lost on young Josiah. The obvious strength of the army seemed itself testament to the rightness of the Union cause. What other society in the world, he asked himself, could muster such an army?

In the setting, also, Josiah saw much that was indicative of the great national struggle of which he was part. He was being carried along, he thought, despite his own small spiritual qualms. How it figured in within the theater of God's own's purposes at work, was undiscoverable to men, he went on in his mind. The larger plan was beyond his comprehension.

After the parade, as the soldiers, relieved from duty, mixed in with the friends and family who had watched, Josiah handed off his horse to an aide, and walked across the field, looking for his own family.

He saw first his dark-haired sister Emily, marked by her

distinctive sculpted features and slender form. She was dressed in a dark blue dress, mid-calf in length, tied at the waist. As usual, her face looked serious and contemplative. She was alone when he first saw her, then she turned to the crowd behind her, and Josiah saw there his fair-haired sister, Lydia, daughter of Charlotte Stone, and true cousin of Hiram and Louisa. Lydia was with her husband Maj. Darren Beecher, who was dressed in uniform as he was a member of a unit that had been in the parade. Darren, also a graduate of VMI, was an adjutant in an infantry regiment that had been stationed at Winchester until that city had been taken over by the Confederate army. Close behind them was Josiah's mother, Elena, dark-haired like Emily, although she had started becoming gray and had made no effort to arrest the process since her husband's death. At her side was young Ebediah, who was up to her shoulders in height.

Ebediah was the first to see Josiah coming toward them. He waved and went running toward his brother.

"You and your soldiers were tremendous!" Ebbie said.

"Thank you," Josiah replied.

"Yes, it's all so grand," Emily added, though her own thoughts had been clouded by the realization that this was not just a ceremony. These soldiers were forming as a first step toward advancing upon the Confederate army, she knew, and she suspected that Hiram, with his knowledge of the valley, would be among those who were attacked.

Josiah joined in beside his brother-in-law, Darren Beecher, who he had lately seen on several occasions since they had both wound up in this same army.

He had heard that Grant had promised Sheridan "three brigades of the best of cavalry," Josiah remarked to Darren. "Five thousand men and horses, and you can see Grant was good on his word in that. This is probably the best cavalry assembled for any campaign so far in this war, or at least it rivals the best."

"Yes, they are superb horses," Darren replied. "You'll get no argument from me on that."

"We are going to run at them, I heard," Josiah, though not so much boastfully as with a note of concern much like that of his sister. "Keep them in retreat until they are pushed up the valley to Lynchburg, There will be no place for them to rest and their horses by all accounts are worn down from their long journey down the valley."

"Well, Early managed to get some more horses in Maryland, I heard," said Darren. "Those horses at least will be

fresh.”

“Yes, but they are just a fraction of their total force. They are greatly underhosed, I have heard, and some of their cavalry units are without horses entirely.”

Four days following the first review at which Josiah Derr had been present, at a subsequent review called for the purpose of unit discipline, the situation was more grim than had been the case at the first.

Three members of the infantry, captured after deserting their duties and fleeing toward the North, were brought before the group for punishment. They were young men, in their mid-20's, and though two of them showed no emotion as they came forward, the third, tall and gangly in build, with the coarsely cut blond hair of a farmboy, flailed and sobbed as he was dragged forward to the pole before the firing squad. Three men were required to restrain and tie him.

General Sheridan was present again, this time with a grimmer message, as he read the order of execution:

“Gentlemen, you are convicted of desertion, the greatest crime committable by a soldier,” he declared in a loud voice. “Desertion cannot be permitted because good men who remained in the line of duty have sacrificed their lives. Desertion must, therefore, be punished with a like loss of life.

“May God have mercy on your souls.”

### **53. Sheridan brings years of preparation to the task at hand**

Philip Henry Sheridan, the commander appointed at this time to the key strategic task of clearing the Shenandoah Valley of Confederates, had not become a soldier by accident or under duress, but rather as the result of what he would later describe as his “sole wish” as a teen, and this was to experience “stirring events” such as he had read had been experienced by the American soldiers in the Mexican American War.

He was just 33 years old, and only five foot five in height, but in the saddle, with upon his shoulders the two stars of a major general in the volunteer army, “Little Phil” gave the impression that he could accomplish any task, and would do so with the vigor engendered by his present closeness to his boyhood ambition.

Educated in a village school in Perry, Ohio, Sheridan had never been expected to become a West Point cadet, but he had obtained the endorsement of a U.S. representative who had been a

customer at the country store where he had worked from the age of 14 onward.

Later, after graduating from West Point, Sheridan had found himself in southeastern Texas in the very terrain through which his heroes had passed on their way to Mexico less than a decade before. There, on the border of the United States and Mexico, the energetic young officer had displayed the enthusiasm for exploration that would characterize his early career. Observing the plenteous game,— “immense flocks of ducks and geese, ... herds of deer, and ... droves of wild cattle, wild horses, and mules,”—he had become good enough at hunting to supply his entire regiment with a diet of fresh meat. Meanwhile, he had experienced for the first time the raw beauty of the expanse of unsettled lands seemingly within reach for those bold enough to chart and conquer them.

Subsequent assignments had taken Sheridan into the heart of this frontier country, providing him with the topographical skills so valuable at this time. Assigned to Fort Carson in northern California, he had scouted a route for connecting, by railroad, the Sacramento Valley of that state with the Columbia River in the Oregon territory, a survey commissioned by U.S. Congress. In 1855, he had served in the Yakima War and Rogue River Wars, gaining experience in leading small combat teams. Assigned to rescue an Army detail lost in forested land, he had been able to find and follow a trail even across hard rock. His feel for terrain and his ability on horseback had contributed to his success in finding and bringing back the lost detail.

Then had come news of the Battle of Fort Sumter, from which time, Sheridan wrote, he had been “deeply solicitous as to the course of events.”

Intensely loyal to the Union, Sheridan had paid close attention to each new development in the developing confrontation between the Union and the Confederate States, accounts of which had come to him and his fellow soldiers in Yamhill, Oregon, by way of a courier from Portland. For that courier, Sheridan wrote, he had watched from an observation point, waiting “with anxiety for his coming, longing for good news,” and “earnestly wish(ing) to be at the seat of war.”

Finally, in September of 1861, after the First Battle of Bull Run, Sheridan had received his summons for duty, an assignment with the 13th U.S. Infantry in Missouri; he had then gone east via a steamer and an overland route across the Panama Isthmus, expecting that his experience in topography, Indian warfare, and

scouting would lead to a combat position in the new war.

On the way, however, the young captain had stopped to pay a courtesy call on Maj. Gen. Henry Wager Halleck, commander of the Department of the Missouri, of which his new unit was part. This call had changed the course of his career for the next year.

Nothing affecting Sheridan's duties had transpired in that meeting. Halleck had merely questioned Sheridan about his boyhood job in the country store. But, four days later, Halleck had called Sheridan back to St. Louis.

"I was thinking about your accounting duties as a boy," the general declared. "That is the skill I will call on now. I have set up a committee to audit this department, which my predecessor, Gen. Fremont, has left with a 12 million dollar debt. You will be president and author of the committee's report."

Sheridan had completed this assignment to the satisfaction of all, and had then been assigned by Halleck to be quartermaster and commissary of the Army of the Southwest, under Brig. Gen. Samuel Ryan Curtis, with the responsibility of setting up a supply process as the army advanced from Rolla to Springfield, Missouri, to push the Confederates out. In this campaign, Sheridan had demonstrated that he could withstand the complaints of regimental commanders who lost wagons in the re-apportionment of wagons he insisted upon, and that he could stand strong in fiscal propriety by arresting officers who were stealing local horses and selling them to the Army. Sheridan had demonstrated, also, that he was stubborn enough to keep pressing charges even when ordered to desist under threat of court martial. But he had not gotten closer to the active duty he longed for.

Ironically, it was the threat of court martial that brought Sheridan at last to the battlefield. To avoid the court martial, he had requested Halleck to take him back at the department headquarters in St. Louis, out of the control of General Curtis; but, granted that, Sheridan found that Halleck had gone to Corinth, Mississippi, where a siege had been put into place. After obtaining permission, Sheridan had followed, assigned as assistant to the topographical engineer, and soon he had found himself among old acquaintances, including then Brig. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman, whose family Sheridan had known from childhood. Sherman had offered Sheridan the colonelcy of an Ohio infantry regiment, an offer that had fallen through due to political interference, but Sheridan had then been aided by others at Corinth in being appointed by the governor of Michigan to be colonel of the 2nd Michigan Cavalry.

When Col. Sheridan had reported then,— on Tuesday, May 27, 1862,—still in his captain's uniform, to lead his new regiment, his self-preparation for command, eagerness to demonstrate his capabilities in battle, and undampable zeal for the Union cause, had launched him into what would turn out to be an astounding period of energetic display of the duties he had longed for.

In his first combat deployment, Sheridan had been sent as part of a two-regiment brigade in pursuit of a Confederate division withdrawing from Corinth. Ordered to destroy a railroad bridge that he had discovered did not exist, and being without tools to do other damage, he had organized his men into details to lift off sections of rails and timbers intact to be destroyed through bending rails heated in a fire of timbers. He had intercepted and destroyed 26 carloads of supplies and ammunition, and captured thousands of fleeing officers and men, so many that he had had to let the enlisted men go. Continuing in the pursuit, with his brigade leader summoned away for another mission, Sherman had acted as brigade leader, in the process of which he had hand mapped the entire region. Attacked by a Confederate force twice his size, he had sent soldiers by train past one side of the enemy, brought them back by a back road, and then attacked them from the front while bringing in a partial force from his left flank.

As a result, Sheridan had become the subject of a letter sent from a group of senior officers to Halleck requesting his promotion to brigadier general.

Granted that promotion, Sheridan had soon participated in a subsequent battle as a division commander. In this battle, Sherman had anticipated where the enemy was about to advance and had met them with an advance of his own, enough to force them back. Told to draw back, he had heard gunfire from in front of the Union line and seeing there another Union cavalry regiment that had become stalled, he had ordered in his men at once from the other flank, causing the retreat of more than 4000 Confederate soldiers. Sheridan's reward was promotion to major general in the volunteer army, a promotion received in April of 1863 but backdated to December when the battle had occurred.

Sheridan had risen in rank from captain to major general in less than a year. He had come into this rank at the height of the war, two months before the Battle of Gettysburg.

In subsequent actions as a major general in the Army of the Ohio, Sheridan had performed competently in several key battles while inspiring the imagination of the nation in two related battles at Chickamauga and Chattanooga. At Chickamauga, he had held

off a Confederate charge; at Chattanooga, he had led the charge up Mission Hill that had overwhelmed the enemy lines. Thereby, Sheridan had enhanced his growing reputation with an image soon to be promoted by the press throughout the entire nation, of the indomitable commander charging up the hill with sword in hand on his black horse Rienzi.

Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, seeing the effect Sheridan had on his men and the favorable attention Sheridan had received for the army from the Northern press, had called him from Chattanooga to the Army of the Potomac, as earlier described, when the national push began.

Again, Sheridan had led in many battles and had managed to excite the national consciousness in the widely heralded ride of his cavalry corps around the entire Confederate army, passing between their lines and Richmond. Somehow he had brought his men back unharmed, while defeating the Confederate cavalry at Yellow Tavern and striking a mortal blow at their commander, Maj. Gen. J.E.B. Stuart.

Thus had Philip Sheridan arrived at Halltown to lead the Army of the Shenandoah, having experienced many “stirring events” such as he had read about as a boy, while being mindful of his own part in the three-pronged pincer of the original national plan put into action by Grant six months before. The middle prong had failed previously, Sheridan knew, and, for the grand plan to be finally successful now, he had to resuscitate the middle prong and accomplish the destruction of army and infrastructure that Grant had originally intended.

#### **54. Sherman unleashes the fury of war upon the city of Atlanta**

As for his own part in the national push, the western prong, Maj. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman understood, in early August of 1864, that he was on the verge of achieving two of his most important strategic goals: defeat of the Army of Tennessee and capture of the city of Atlanta with its foundries, arsenals, machine shops, and symbolic value.

Sherman knew, also, as earlier described, that the timeframe in which he would achieve these goals was of key importance in the re-election prospects of President Abraham Lincoln, and, therefore, in the ultimate winning of the war. The presidential election was by this time just three months away and the national

push was yet to produce a major breakthrough.

Since the Battle of Pace's Ferry, on Tuesday, July 5, 1864, and the pontoon crossing of the Chattahoochee on July 8, the three armies of Sherman's Military Division of the Mississippi had remained dug in, about two miles west of Atlanta, in a J-shaped line extending from north to south for about a mile and then, on the bottom, from east to west for about a half mile. Across from them was a section of the Confederate entrenchments surrounding the city.

The entrenchments on both sides consisted of splayed up branches of felled trees, bunkers of piled up dirt, reinforced by logs, rows of coiled up wire, and elevated parapets with guns. Pickets in forward positions watched for troop movement. Any unit trying a frontal assault was likely to sustain losses that neither side wanted to absorb.

Another face off the two armies existed along a secondary Union line north of the city and as far east as Decatur, where the activity between the two forces had been reduced to skirmishes.

Confronted by the resulting stalemate, Sherman had sent cavalry details south and southeast of his main line to attack the two railroads still in operation: the Atlanta & West Point, which ran from Atlanta southwest 86 miles to West Point at the Alabama state line on the Chattahoochee River; and the Macon & Western, which ran southeast 102 miles to Macon on the Ocmulgee River.

In addition, Sherman had begun wheeling the XXIII Corps from the left flank of his north-to-south line to the right flank, with the object eventually of straddling the Macon & Western Railroad in the vicinity of East Point southwest of Atlanta.

The results had not been satisfactory. Brig. Gen. Edward M. McCook, whose First Division of the Cavalry Corps of the Army of the Cumberland, had been assigned to disable the Atlanta & West Point Railroad, had returned with the railroad left intact and 600 lost of his 7,000 men. Maj. Gen. George Stoneman Jr., commander of the Cavalry Division of the Army of the Ohio, had been captured with an entire brigade about 20 miles northeast of Macon. Col. James Reilly,—sent out from the right flank of the main Union line with the Third Division of the XXIII Corps,—had become entangled in the felled trees, and had withdrawn with the Confederate defenses left intact.

Meanwhile, though, Sherman had placed into action another resource, the siege artillery of his three armies, consisting of more than a hundred batteries, each with two 4.5 inch siege rifles. Since July 20, the big guns had been firing from the Union lines west

and north of the city, at times at a rate, per rifle, of one shell each five minutes.

Sometimes in the evening Sherman watched as the shells lofted in their shallow arcs above the Confederate entrenchments and into the city buildings beyond. Lately, he had ordered “hot shots,” shells filled with molten iron and intended to break on impact, setting fire to any combustible material present.

Sherman was aware of the historical changes in warfare, and of American conduct in war, that such methods represented. Since walking amidst the entangled bodies of his farmboy soldiers at Kennesaw Mountain, however, he had felt increasing anger at the continuing resistance of the South, which, as he saw it, had led to such horrors, while many in the South had escaped the same level of terror. He had resolved to even that score. Sometimes, too, Sherman thought of his son, Willy (the one lost to camp fever), whose death symbolized for him the horror of war and how unavoidable it had become.

Still the stalemate continued with the victory still kept at bay that Sherman needed to advance the Union cause.

On August 19, after a month cavalry initiatives, right flank movements, and bombardment, Sherman wrote to Maj. Gen. Henry Wager Halleck, the Army Chief of Status:

“I do not deem it prudent to extend any more to the right, but will push forward daily by parallels, and make the inside of Atlanta too hot to be endured. I have sent back to Chattanooga for two thirty-pound Parrott rifles... I am too impatient for a siege, and don’t know but this is as good a place to fight it out on, as farther... Whether we get inside of Atlanta or not, it will be a used-up community when we are done.”

The “two thirty-pound Parrott rifle” that Sherman referred could hurl a shell of the same size as the siege rifles (weighing 25 pounds) nearly twice the distance. They would, therefore, put into range of the guns the southeastern sector of the city where the remaining citizens of Atlanta had found a safe haven and where munitions and supplies had been stored in railroad cars out of range of the guns.

Sherman was on hand as the sleek, black, carriage-mounted guns were pulled into position by work horses, ten for each 30 ton gun. Maj. Gen. George Henry Thomas, having heard of the arrival of the guns, came out to watch. The two men had been friends for years, going back to their days as roommates at West Point.

In the Sherman of the current day, Thomas saw a latter rendition of the red-haired, exuberant youth that he had known

then and who now looked toward him from a grizzled visage. The eyes alone had not changed greatly; they still showed a determined idealism despite the dark realism that the war had imposed.

“More gun means less loss of life on our side, as I see it, Tommy,” Sherman remarked. “If I can take Atlanta without too large a sacrifice, I may then allow my friends to clamor for another kind of general, but thus far I have striven to use the big guns, immoral or not, to substitute for men in battle.”

The gun was the latest from the West Point Foundry in Cold Spring, New York. It had a gun tube 131.5 inches long, straight in profile with no muzzle swell, and with a 19-inch, 500-pound breech band composed of wrought iron. Its five-groove, rifled, 4.2-inch-diameter bore imparted a right-hand gain spin, thus air-stabilizing its deliveries, and giving it precision in addition to range.

The generals watched at the first shell lofted into air and soared above the Confederate line into a group of brick buildings in the area of the city that had previously been out of range.

That evening Sherman watched the Atlanta skyline as the explosions, smoke, and fire created a staccato of flickering orange light on the long low line of gray clouds that at that moment hovered over a dusk gray landscape.

“Horror though it be, it will not be horror enough,” Sherman said in his mind. “We will have to tie the final knot.”

Without drawing it out in his thoughts, Sherman knew what that shorthand meant. With the cavalry having proved ineffective in severing the railroads, and time moving relentlessly on, he would soon have to move his entire composite force across to the east outside of their protective trenches to straddle the tracks. Lives would be lost in it, but it was the only way.

With that determined, Sherman decided to give the cavalry one more chance after reports came in of two of the key Confederate cavalry units being involved in unsuccessful attacks as far north as Tilton and Altoona. After sending out two cavalry divisions to make sure the Confederate cavalry was still operating in that vicinity, Sherman sent the most promising of his other divisions, under its enthusiastic commander, Maj. Gen. (Bvt.) Hugh Judson Kilpatrick, toward the railroad junction south of the city at Jonesboro.

That would take time, Sherman thought, but it would maybe forestall the exposure of his entire army.

Kilpatrick with his Third Division of the Cavalry Corps of the Army of the Cumberland, did, in fact, get to Jonesboro, where

they damaged the tracks before encircling the entire city and coming back unharmed with a claim that the railroad had been so severely damaged that it would be out of operation for at least ten days.

Two days later, however, Sherman heard a locomotive off to the southeast and saw a plume of black smoke moving into the city along the line that Fitzpatrick had claimed was destroyed.

Next morning Sherman called a war council attended by his three commanders, Thomas, Maj. Gen. John Schofield, and Maj. Gen. Oliver Otis Howard, who had taken over the Army of the Tennessee after the death of Maj. Gen. James B. McPherson.

“Gentlemen,” Sherman said, “as you all know, we can wait no longer. We must act at once with a combined movement.”

Next morning the joint force moved in three parallel lines, per the order given. Schofield, with the Army of the Ohio, was two miles north of the other two lines, his object to entrench at the station at Rough n’ Ready, in order to prevent a Union assault along the railroad. Thomas and Howard, with the armies of the Cumberland and Tennessee, respectively, moved toward Jonesboro. By late afternoon they had overwhelmed the Confederate force at Jonesboro and were digging in.

Then came word that a lead patrol there had discovered that the Army of Tennessee had left.

“Atlanta is ours, and fairly won!” was the official report.

Soon also came the news that the victory had been officially trumpeted by the Lincoln White House.

“The national thanks are rendered by the president to Major General W. T. Sherman and the gallant officers and soldiers of his command before Atlanta, for the distinguished ability and perseverance displayed in the campaign in Georgia, which, under Divine favor, has resulted in the capture of Atlanta.”

## **55. Sheridan proceeds methodically to entrap the Army of the Valley**

Maj. Gen. Philip Henry Sheridan had not forgotten the clear, two-part mission given to him by his general-in-chief, Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant: first, destroy the Confederate Army of the Valley (currently under the command of Lt. Gen. Jubal Early); second, destroy the valley itself in whatever features it held that could provide support and sustenance to future Confederate armies.

“Little Phil” had followed the news of the victory achieved by the Union armies under Maj. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman in the Confederate “gate city” of Atlanta; and he had heard, two weeks before that, of the capture of the Confederate port of Mobile, Alabama, by the federal navy under Adm. David Farragut. The national push was working and gaining momentum, the ambitious young general was keenly aware; his own contribution could result in the next great victory.

Sheridan was aware, also, of the constraint of time and, set against it, as he saw it, his need to obtain more information about the enemy before he acted.

Time was constrained, as earlier described, because of the looming event that everyone on both sides had in view, the United States presidential election just two months away. A newsworthy victory over Early needed to be achieved as soon as possible, as Grant had emphasized six weeks before in Monocacy.

Sheridan knew, however, that, in doing so, Grant had not been fully aware of another component of his own character, in addition to the boldness lionized in the press. This component was Sheridan’s cautious thoroughness and determination to act only when he had on hand the information that he regarded as the necessary prerequisite to action.

In this case, as Sheridan told his friend and lieutenant commander, Maj. Gen. George R. Crook, commander of the VIII Corps (aka the Army of West Virginia), soon after the Union victory in Atlanta: “Everyone is waiting, but I am determined to do things right, and the first thing is, find out where Early is and who is with him. I think, George, though I expect some will call it too slow, I will set up a separate battalion for scouting. They will go out in reb uniforms and will get extra pay commensurate to what they find out.”

Subsequently, despite rumors of official discontent with his slowness of action, Sherman set into place his apparatus for reconnaissance while readying his army for the master battle by which he planned to encircle all or a known part of the Army of the Valley.

Meanwhile, by way of a reporter traveling through on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, Sheridan happened upon a Southern newspaper that contained excerpts of letters exchanged between Sherman and Maj. Gen. John Bell Hood following Sherman’s formal announcement on Thursday, September 8, 1864, that the Union army would require all civilians in Atlanta to evacuate the city under a proposed arrangement for safe passage.

Hood, on September 9, had agreed to Sherman's terms and had added, "Now, sir, permit me to say that the unprecedented measure you propose transcends, in studied and ingenious cruelty, all acts ever before brought to my attention in the dark history of war."

Sherman had replied on the following day: "You style the measures proposed 'unprecedented,' and appeal to the dark history of war for a parallel, as an act of "studied and ingenious cruelty." It is not unprecedented; for General Johnston himself very wisely and properly removed the families all the way from Dalton down, and I see no reason why Atlanta should be different. Nor is it necessary to appeal to the dark history of war, when recent and modern examples are so handy... You defended Atlanta on a line so close to town that every cannon-shot and many musket-shots from our line of investment, that overshot their mark, went into the habitations of women and children."

Sheridan resolved, after reading these letters, that he wanted not only to achieve a victory on the scale Sherman had achieved, but also to evince the same toughness of mentality that Sherman had demonstrated in not only this order requiring evacuation of the city but also in the relentless bombardment that had brought the Southern army and city to their knees.

Sheridan also, at this time, heard that, two days before the fall of Atlanta, the Democratic Party, meeting in Baltimore, had adopted a resolution declaring that the war was unwinnable and that, therefore, a cease fire should be established followed by a Constitutional convention to restore the Union. Presumably the seceded states would re-enter the Union with the right to decide themselves whether slavery would be continued in their own sovereign domain.

The very thought of it filled Sheridan with anger.

"These Democrats are worse than the enemy," he remarked to General Crook. "They would nullify the sacrifice of thousands of lives!"

"Yes," Crook replied, "and McClelland is among them."

Crook was referring, they both knew, to Maj. Gen. George Brinton McClellan, the nominee of the Democratic Party, who, as the first commander of the Army of the Potomac, had withdrawn from the James Peninsula, in August of 1862, after being outmaneuvered by then Maj. Gen. Robert E. Lee.

Within a week, Sheridan's surveillance began to pay off. Word came in of a slave who had a Confederate permit to go down to Winchester once per week to sell vegetables. Winchester

was in the heart of the country under Confederate control. Crook then informed Sheridan that he had heard of a young Quaker teacher, Rebecca Wright, who was loyal to the Union and who, with her mother, operated a boarding house in Winchester frequented by Confederate officers.

Through his scouts, Sheridan arranged to have the slave contacted, and the slave was sent with a note wadded up into a small pellet carried in his mouth.

"I learned from Major-General Crook that you are a loyal lady, and still love the old flag," the message, signed by Sheridan, said. "Can you inform me of the position of Early's forces, the number of divisions in his army, and the strength of any or all of them, and his probable or reported intentions?"

The Quaker sent a note back: "I will tell you what I know. The division of General Kershaw, and Cutshaw's artillery, twelve guns and men, General Anderson commanding, have been sent away, and no more are expected, as they cannot be spared from Richmond... the force is much smaller than represented."

Sheridan, upon receiving this, decided to wait until the identified division commander, Maj. Gen. Joseph B. Kershaw, had gone so far as to preclude his return. On September 16, he received from Miss Wright the information that Kershaw was in march toward Front Royal to Richmond.

Sheridan resolved to throw his whole force into Newtown the next day.

At this time, however, the slowness at which the operation was taking form was gaining the attention of the Army Chief of Staff, Maj. Gen. Henry Wager Halleck, who wrote to Sheridan advising that "a positive success," as he put it, was necessary to counteract the "political dissatisfaction existing in some of the Northern States."

Grant was also getting impatient. He sent a note requesting to meet with Sheridan at Charles Town, on a spur of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad about 30 miles south of Halltown.

"General Sheridan, we do not have the luxury of time," Grant began in his plain manner when Sheridan debarked from the train. "That is why I said to you two weeks ago, start toward Richmond and Early will appear in front of you."

Sheridan understood that Grant was on the verge of taking the command away from him, and maybe Halleck was in on it, too.

"Sir, I do have a plan," Sheridan said, "and we are ready to move. The parts of it are in ready posture."

Grant and Sheridan reviewed the plan at once, and two days later, having obtained Grant's approval, Sheridan launched the offensive that he had described.

Begun at 4:30 A.M. on September 19, the Union advance, viewed on a grand scale, had two main lines of thrust. One line, approaching Winchester from the east on the Berryville Pike, consisted of the three infantry corps of Sheridan's army, the VI and XIX in the lead, and, in reserve, the VIII Corps (aka the Army of West Virginia). In all, this line consisted of an advance of more than 30,000 men. The second line, approaching Winchester from the North, consisted of the three cavalry divisions of Sheridan's joint command, over 20,000 men and horses.

Complications unforeseen by Sheridan resulted in a slower and more costly advance. The lead unit approaching from the east, the VI Corps, found that their planned route led through a narrow gorge where elements of the rebels rushed in to impede them. Having fought through that, the VI and XIX Corps, traveling side by side, as instructed to do, found that, unanticipated by all, their two roads diverged, creating a gap, through which the Confederates rushed, subjecting them to enfilade fire.

Amidst heavy losses, the two sides fought through the entire morning.

Later, however, the tide of the battle turned when the VIII Corps, ordered forward from the rear along the Union right flank, combined with the Union cavalry pouring in from the North to roll up the Confederate left flank.

Then came the glorious denouement that Sheridan had longed for, as thousands of Union horsemen in fresh uniforms, on unjaded horses, swept down upon their ragged opponents as they fled the scene.

The heavy losses on both side had cost the Union army a fifth of its 50,000 men, but Early's army of less than 15,000 had lost a fourth of its total.

Congratulations from the president were soon forthcoming: "Have just heard of your great victory. God bless you all, officers and men. Strongly inclined to come up and see you."

Sheridan, however, was not done. In the next week, he pushed after Early's remaining force, engaging him in two subsequent battles called Fisher Hill and Tom's Brook.

This done, Sheridan saw that the result he had hoped for had been secured. His army had seized control of the lower area of the Shenandoah Valley from the Potomac River to Strasburg and from Strasburg east to Washington, an area of about 4,000 square miles.

The wounded Army of the Valley still remained in the area above Strasburg, however, a continuing threat that could not be ignored.

### **56. Josiah comes upon Hiram within the chaos of “The Burning”**

The moral accommodations that Col. Josiah Derr had made, with respect to the disparities he felt between his Christian duties and his duties as a soldier, underwent another adjustment, after the third Battle of Winchester (as it soon came to be called), when Josiah took part in the subsequent pursuit of the Confederate Army of the Valley and the action that followed upon that,—per the orders that Josiah’s commander, Maj. Gen. Philip Henry Sheridan, had received from Sheridan’s commander, Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, and that Grant, in turn, had presented to President Abraham Lincoln, and that Lincoln, as commander-in-chief, had accepted as a necessity in a morally incumbent war,—the destruction of the infrastructure of the Shenandoah Valley, which, thus far in the war, had sustained the Confederates in their invasions of the North.

Josiah was at this time a regimental commander in the 2nd Brigade of the Second Division of the Cavalry Corps of Sheridan’s Army of the Shenandoah.

With the Union army close upon them, the Southerners took up a defensive position straddling the narrow mouth of the main valley between the northern point of the Massanutten range and Little North Mountain, a distance of only three miles, but across which, to cover that distance, Lt. Gen. Jubal Early was forced to deploy his less than ten thousand men in an attenuated line. Sheridan, with three times that many men, (and with more than ten thousand of cavalry alone,) sent his VIII Corps (aka the Army of West Virginia), under cover of darkness, into the woods by Cedar Creek, and sprung them at daybreak against Early’s left flank, while wheeling his own left flank into Early’s right. As a result of being thus pressed upon from both sides, the Confederates fell back in a rapid withdrawal, stopping repeatedly to fire their artillery against the advancing Union forces.

Josiah led his regiment in this battle as part of the force that attacked from Cedar Creek. Before him, in the open expanse along the Valley Pike, he could see the Confederates retreating in a wide battle line with their carriage-mounted cannons amidst them, and

with their wagon train moving on the other side of the battle line, and thus protected. Seasoned soldiers that they were, they maintained a remarkable discipline despite their view of the enemy approaching.

A week later, at Harrisonburg, the largest town in this area of the valley west of the northern mountain of Massanutten, with Early's army having retreated out the range of the army in pursuit, Josiah attended an assembly of the Union officers (of regimental rank and higher) in which he observed the commander of the Army of the Shenandoah at close range (from a distance of about ten yards) as Sheridan explained the mission of destruction upon which the Union soldiers were about to embark.

"We will destroy more than buildings and crops," Sheridan declared in his tough manner, "we will destroy the will of the people to continue in their support of the rebellion."

Hearing this, Josiah recalled a similar statement made by General Grant in Chattanooga, Tennessee, on the evening when Grant had received his official nomination to be a three-star general. Josiah recalled how Grant had referred with similar words to the need to destroy the spirit of the Southern people, and he recalled with what regret Grant had expressed that sentiment.

Now the time had come to actually do the destruction, Josiah acknowledged in his mind, and the officer standing before him, Josiah thought, lacked the common man decency that had led Grant to speak of such work with reluctance.

Sheridan's eyes, as compared to the often congenial eyes of Grant, had a contemptuous gleam. From time to time, he glanced at someone as if annoyed. His thick mustache, sloping down on both sides, hid the corners of his mouth if ever shaped in a smile. The mustache seemed affected, as did the "pork pie hat" that Sheridan wore aslant on his head.

At this meeting, Sheridan displayed a detailed map provided by his chief engineer, Maj. (Bvt.) John Rodgers Meigs, who was also his aide-de-camp and only 22 years old. Son of Brig. General Montgomery C. Meigs, the Quartermaster General of the United States Army, Meigs had graduated from West Point at the head of his class. His map showed the four counties of Shenandoah, Page, Rockingham, and Augusta that were the targets of the upcoming campaign.

"These are the four counties directly up the valley from our present location," Sheridan informed. "Composing an area of more than 200,000 square miles, these counties have been called, for good reason, 'the bread basket of the Confederacy.'

“What makes the Shenandoah worthy of such a description? Barns, farm buildings, mills, foundries, forges, cooperies, wagon factories, tanneries, cobbler shops... And this valley has cattle, sheep, pigs, and chickens! Geese, ducks, and turkeys! And apples for pies! Everything ol’ Grandma had for Thanksgiving.”

That brought a laugh.

“Well, there will be no Thanksgiving for the johnie rebs this year!”

Josiah, traveling on horseback up the Valley Pike the next morning, saw before him, and far behind, the miles-long column of his fellow soldiers. Here and there, in the parched landscape of the current drought, he saw neat farms with well-kept outbuildings and flour mills set on limestone shelves beside the rapid channels of streams.

It was a scene he recalled from his many trips through the valley back and forth from VMI.

Reflecting on Sheridan as compared to Grant, Josiah thought that his transition from one leader to another reflected his current transition philosophically to resigning himself to the ever more compromised situation that his life as a soldier had required. There was no way to make personal peace with what he had to do as a soldier, and no way to make sense of the task of destruction ahead of him. He felt increasingly hollowed out by his duties, but his moral speculations were doing him no good, he acknowledged in his mind. Many of his fellow officers, including some of the best of them, displayed no scruples regarding their duties. In any case, the matter was out of his own hands, just as the requirements of the war were beyond his power to change.

In Shenandoah County, up the valley from the south end of Massanutten, Josiah settled into the place appointed as a temporary camp until ordered to go northward burning.

Meanwhile, word came around that Sheridan’s engineering assistant John Meigs, the bright-futured West Point graduate, had been killed when riding alone, no one knew by whom. Sheridan had ordered for all houses to be burned within a five mile radius of where Meig’s body had been found, precipitating a wave of panic throughout wherever the word of mouth could carry this news. Sheridan, however, had relented after three houses had been burned.

Soon after that, Josiah’s own unit had been ordered forward. Following behind his men, as directed, Josiah checked to make sure that all buildings had been burned as directed. While doing so, he came upon an excited young woman with three clinging

young children pale with fright.

“All our oats and flour have been burned,” the mother said. “What do you think these children should live on?”

“Captain,” Josiah said to the leader of the company that had burned the woman’s barn. “Ensure that this woman has supplies. Give her some of the animals we are herding out.”

“Yes, sir,” the man replied, with an expression that suggested relief at being told to help her.

Later Josiah heard from an old man on the road that houses had been plundered by contemptuous soldiers taking advantage of the defenselessness of the families whose other property was being burned. The men who had done this were not from his own regiment, Josiah determined, but there were many such stories of brazen injustices.

Women, children, and sometimes old men, looked toward him with indignation or alarm. Some of the residents, he learned, had herded cattle and horses into the woods to hide them. Local guerillas, called “bushwhackers,” fired at Union soldiers as they passed, never showing themselves and withdrawing afterwards into wooded areas.

Leaving Shenandoah County, as ordered, Josiah’s regiment headed down the valley further into Page County and then Luray Valley, through country rough with bottoms and ravines. There a post was set up above Thornton’s Gap, which led to Richmond, to ensure no rebel reinforcements had been sent from the main Confederate army.

Here, as he traveled alone behind his regiment, Josiah saw a gray-uniformed officer who had been separated from his horse somehow.

Going closer, he saw that the officer was a person he knew well.

“Hiram, is that you?” he said.

“Yes, it is I, cousin, and with no words to say to you unless you intend now to engage me in combat.”

“I do not,” Josiah replied. “I will not fight you. I would sooner give up my own life than to take yours.”

“Once you were an honorable man,” Hiram called, “and look, Josiah, what you and your soldiers have done to these brave people! You have left them with nothing, and winter soon to arrive!”

“Hiram, what my heart tells me to do, I cannot do,” Josiah answered, “while fulfilling the orders I have been given. I am sorry for what I have done.”

The soft words from his boyhood friend had an immediate effect on the Confederate officer.

“We will meet then, I expect, at some later time, Josiah, and I hope it will not be as soldiers.”

“So hope I,” Josiah answered.

A half mile down the road, Josiah, riding alone, spied a cavalry horse by itself with no rider. He brought the horse back within view of Hiram, and waited to be sure Hiram had seen it.

Three days later, Josiah led his regiment around the northern point of the Massanutten and headed west to merge with other components of the Army of the Shenandoah as they returned to Winchester. To the south, along the Valley Pike, gray spires of smoke, some emitting tongues of fire, rose from the trees. Closer at hand, a column of blue-coated soldiers trudged past, amidst which was a wagon train of uprooted civilians, mostly women, children, and old men, and a long column of former slaves set free by the invading army and from whom they were now seeking safe passage to the North.

### **57. Lincoln acknowledges the valor of the “colored troops” at Chaffin Farm**

On Tuesday, October 4, 1864,—one day after the day on which the Union officer, Col. Josiah Derr, had had his chance encounter with his former boyhood friend, the Confederate officer, Col. Hiram Stone,—President Abraham Lincoln, emerging from the back door of the White House, saw approaching, along the stone wall of the walkway between the War Department and the White House, his friend, the pugnacious Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton.

Stanton was proceeding along with his head bowed as if in thought, a characteristic pose for him, his forehead furrowed in a frown above the bare cheeks and bare upper lip surmounting his straight Quaker style beard. He did not see the president until he nearly collided with him.

“Ah, you!” Stanton remarked as if in anger, though both men were aware that the show of anger was often there without any actual anger behind it. “So you are not always in that chair in your study?”

“Not always,” the president replied softly. “Were you on your way with some news?”

“Not news, just contemplation. I’ve been following some

more details on the battle in the Deep Bottoms,” the secretary returned.

“At Chaffin Farm, you mean?” Lincoln inquired.

“So you know of it then?”

“Just that a battle was fought there, and that the colored troops were involved, four regiments of them.”

“Involved with great valor,” Stanton said.

“That I had not heard.”

“There was one man there, a sergeant major who took up two falling flags and rallied the troops to follow after him directly into enemy fire.”

“Was he killed?” asked Lincoln.

“No, miraculously, he came through it all intact!” Stanton answered with a sudden show of emotion. “Though half the men, they say, were cut down.”

To this, the president nodded thoughtfully, as he and his secretary friend, having doubled back toward the White House, entered the back door and ascended the stairs in the area of the house known to be outside of public intrusion.

“Ah, yes, there is more to this, Edwin, than patriotism alone, though I don’t doubt the intensity of patriotism, also.”

“There is a desire to be acknowledged as equal to the task,” Stanton concurred, “as possessive of the qualities that others have said they could not possess.”

“Yes, and so much is in it!” Lincoln declared.

“Yes, I know. And this same man of whom I speak is no ordinary Negro, raised up as a servant of some kind of another, as often reported in the papers. No, this Negro grew up in the home of a sugar merchant where he was treated like a son. He attended college, in Pennsylvania, at one of the few schools in the country where that is possible, a special college for blacks. He has been involved in a colonization society of some kind and even went briefly to Liberia and Sierra Leone, though he seems to have lost interest in colonization.”

“As have they all, or so many,” Lincoln returned.

“And he was publisher for a while of a newspaper, said to be the ‘first African American newspaper in the upper South,’ as I recall,” Stanton said.

“Is that so?” Lincoln returned with a homespun shake of the head in amazement. “What wonders have our life journeys brought us, Ed! So much we did not expect, and, in part, I suspect, because of having turned our hearts against the possibility of such changes as this war has brought.”

Later, as he sat in his study, with Stanton having returned to his own office in the War Department, the president reflected on the remarkable evolution by which American black males, both freedmen and former slaves, had taken a place amidst the white troops of the Union army.

Prior to promulgation of his Emancipation Proclamation,—on January 1, 1863, twenty two months before,—there had been just one instance, Lincoln figured, of the full-fledged participation of African Americans in the armed forces of the United States as not just as laborers but soldiers with weapons.

That had been in Montgomery, Alabama, in October of 1862, when 200 freed slaves had taken part in an assault on the Confederate fort there, by all accounts performing well in approaching and overrunning the enemy ramparts. Some in the press had objected to their involvement, saying that news of it, passed by word of mouth, could have ignited an uprising of slaves with unknown consequences for the white citizens of the area.

He himself had been among those who had been relieved to have heard that such a development had not occurred, Lincoln admitted in his mind. That had been one factor in his decision to ensure that freed slaves should have a path through which to wind up as participants in the general scheme of the army chain of command rather than as free agents accused of revenge and destruction.

Lincoln reached into the side drawer of his desk, where he kept papers of private importance to him, and, with his large, rough hewn hands, secured a copy of the proclamation, looking at once to the two sentences near the end whereby he had set in motion the increasing participation of African Americans in the Union army.

He re-read these sentences: “And I further declare and make known, that such persons of suitable condition,”—here he had been referring to the slaves that, by virtue of the proclamation, had had been set free,—“will be received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service.”

The mere annunciation of this intention to receive former slaves into the ranks of the army had not instantaneously caused it to happen, however, Lincoln acknowledged in his mind; the first black troops had not become a reality until the formation of the Bureau of Colored Troops, five months later, had paved the way for blacks to become soldiers. Even so, blacks had at first been relegated to labor only (and to being paid as laborers, receiving

\$10 monthly versus the \$13 paid to combat soldiers). Finally, just four months before the present day, in July of 1864, the colored troops had participated in combat.

By all accounts, they had performed well as soldiers in that battle, as they had at Chaffin Farm; and, at the current time, there were 12 regiments of “colored troops” (numbering more than ten thousand) within the Army of the James, the army that had been the attacking force at Chaffin Farm; but they had continued to receive the salary given to laborers.

There was no prospect for a change to that, Lincoln noted to himself, despite all the clamoring lately for a change among the Radical Republicans and others of a similar mind. The colored troops, despite their gallantry, would continue to receive their ten dollar wage.

Later, in his living quarters on the second floor of the White House, the tall, weary president sat down beside his wife, Mary, who was adorned as often in one of the flounce dresses that she wore for special occasions,—in this case, as honorary national chairwoman of a volunteer group that had met downstairs.

Lincoln described to his wife the news and discussion that he had just had with Edwin Stanton.

“They want it all, Mother. They want to be full humans, full Americans,” Lincoln said.

“As did we, did we not?” his wife replied, taking a position, as she often lately did, that surprised him, though he knew that, as a child and teen, Mary had befriended and defended the black servants in her father’s home in Lexington, Kentucky. Most likely, owing to her native kindness and emotionality, young Mary would have done even more, Lincoln was aware, had her own mother not died, leaving her and her siblings as unwanted extra children in the home of her father’s second wife.

“And we assumed it was our birthright as Americans,” the president replied. “Which the Negroes are, also, as people born and raised in America.”

“The birthright has been denied them,” Mary said.

“There are all extents to it,” Lincoln went on, folding his hands on his lap. “I was reading an article in one of the freedman papers, the *Weekly Anglo African*, I think it was, in which someone, a black I assume, was raising the argument that rebel plantations, when taken over by the Union army, ought to be doled out to the freed slaves, to give them a means of financial independence.”

“And that is the very heart of it, we both know,” Mary

replied. "There is no real freedom if you must depend on others for every scrap. You are forced to sell yourself. And is that not slavery again in a different form? And what of the rebel planters, Father? Do we have the right to take the land that has been in their families for generations?"

To this the president sighed.

"Well, that is where the times have overtaken me, Mother. That is where I am an agent of the times, rather than the author of events. As you know, I have strived all this while for a gradual approach, a generation in length even, that would give the rebels time to re-arrange their personal affairs, and that would give the freed slaves the time to acquire land or to acquire skills through some process, agreed to by all and legislated by our Congress, that would avert the catastrophe of hundreds of thousands of freed slaves thrown adrift.

"What can I do, though? It is beyond my power to hold back the march of events."

"You can ensure at least there will be no danger of the slaves being captured into slavery again, or of slavery being introduced again with other people, or a new class of people, another race even, enslaved. I know that is why the amendment is so important to you."

Lincoln was impressed, again, as he listened, by his wife's understanding of the situation thrust before the nation, and he resolved again in his mind that in his second term he would address the issues she had raised of justice to the conquered class of planters as well as to the Negroes who had been held by them unjustly, and who now had an understandable expectation that they would be full Americans.

Yes, he would do them all justice, if he could.

## **58. Early strikes with hungry troops, then absorbs a crippling blow**

On the morning of Sunday, October 13, 1864, Lt. Gen. Jubal Early, commander of the Confederate Army of the Valley, moved with a part of his force to Hopp's Hill, just north of Strasburg, Virginia. From this vantage point, he could observe a sprawling camp of white tents, sequestered horses, and neatly parked wagons and artillery carriages, amidst which flew the red, white, and blue flag with its presumptuous 35 stars.

After having heard, a week before, that Maj. Gen. Philip

Henry Sheridan, commander of the Army of the Shenandoah, had plans to send the VI Corps back to Richmond, Early had moved his army down the valley to Harrisonburg, 15 miles south of his current position, intending to engage Sheridan's army there to prevent this transfer of troops. In Harrisonburg, however, Early had found that the Union army had withdrawn and was moving down the valley in its systematic burning of barns, mills, and other resources deemed capable of sustaining a future Confederate invasion of the North.

Much was of interest to General Early in the camp before him. The camp was two miles across, with what appeared to be two corps-sized forces (each consisting of around ten thousand men) side by side along the bank of the creek. Rows of white tents, visible with binoculars, marked what appeared to be a third corps, about a mile behind the other two. The combined Union force was a major part, and maybe the entirety, Early figured, of the huge army that in the past month had several times defeated his own army.

Of great interest, also, to Early and the officers beside him, were the long lines of men queued up by chuck wagons or seated nearby eating food.

"They are well-fed and apparently not concerned about our presence," Early remarked. "We have just two things they do not have, our wit and a chance of surprise."

The topography in which such a surprise might be executed was in view from where Early stood. The Union camp was to his left beyond the flat land between the hill and the creek. Over to his right, where a line of trees marked its course, the creek fed into a larger stream. That larger stream was the North Fork of the Shenandoah River, flowing eastward toward its confluence with the South Fork to form the combined river that flowed north to Harper's Ferry. Just beyond the section of the North Fork in view was the steep slope leading up to the northern peak of Massanutten Mountain. The thick woods at the base continued right up to the river, providing a possible low visibility approach to the Union camp. About a mile behind him, Early knew, was the Valley Pike, a macadamized road that continued to the center of the camp. Upon its smooth surface, artillery carriages could be moved near to the camp, he noted, if the rumbling of the wheels did not occur until after an attack had been sprung on the sleeping enemy soldiers. On Early's far left, he had been told, most of the Union cavalry was located. There would need to be a simultaneous attack there,—perhaps through the woods extending from another peak

in view, the Little North Mountain,— to hold the Union cavalry in that position

Early's army, thinned by the losses inflicted in the previous month, was organized at this time into a single corps consisting of what was left of the five divisions and cavalry that had composed the two original corps under Early and his previous co-commander Maj. Gen. John C. Breckinridge. The latter, following the death of Brig. Gen. John Hunt Morgan, had been returned to command of his previous outfit, the Department of East Tennessee and Southwestern Virginia.

Early's force now numbered only about 3,000 cavalry, with spent, underfed horses, and ten thousand infantry, restricted to one cooked meal per day and protected against the autumn cold by threadbare clothing and worn boots.

As the reconnaissance proceeded, Early consolidated his force on Fisher's Hill, about two miles south of Cedar Creek, along the old line, extending from Massanutten to the North Mountain, from which his forces had been driven three weeks before. It was the only tenable position at this location in the valley. Behind it was the undefendable open country that extended to Lynchburg.

A plan took shape by which the rebels would advance from two directions to move upon the camp just before daybreak when the troops would be sleeping. A third line with artillery would move out a half hour later, when the noise of the artillery-carriage wheels would not be noticed in the melee of battle.

Early rode down from his headquarters on the top of Fisher's Hill to a road designated as an emergency exit, if needed, for the supply wagons and medical wagons. His purpose was to check firsthand the state of supplies, but on seeing his red-haired cousin, Louisa Stone, seated by a fire next to her wagon, he went across to her at once.

"General Early!" Louisa called out. "So pleasant to see you, Cousin! Would you care for some tea?"

It was her one luxury, he knew, now selling, in the dearth of the war, for twenty-two Confederate dollars per pound.

"Yes, thank you," he said, settling down on a log. "I was looking at you, and saw much of our shared family."

Indeed, Early was always impressed by how this determined woman had the bravery of an ideal soldier and yet maintained her exquisite femininity. In her womanly warmth and familiar phrases and accent, he took comfort in the familial resemblance to his own mother, who had had red hair, also.

From her perspective, as Louisa regarded his stern, bearded face, she saw not an unapproachable general but a person she knew from his past kind attempts to answer her girlhood questions about law and other matters.

She made a ceremony of setting out the tea, complete with a flower-patterned cup and saucer. Knowing he took his tea with sweetener, she added a teaspoon of brown sugar (another luxury) before handing him the cup and saucer.

He took the saucer with both hands, and looked to her, serious as always.

“You must be tired,” she ventured. “We each of us have our obligations here, but you have the obligation of watching out for all of us.”

“My gift is I can see the totality and can give directions,” he responded, “but you give hope and sweetness, the greatest gifts of all.”

“Often I don’t feel that,” she said. “I feel only that I must act quickly, every second matters.”

He nodded. “And in those precious seconds, you save lives. Many are indebted to you.”

Having made this good start, in the opinions of both parties, they settled into a quiet moment, amidst other wagons where fires burned.

“Louisa, we will have another battle soon,” Early continued in quiet voice, leaning forward. “I tell you this in all confidence, as to another soldier, as you deserve.”

“Thank you.”

“One more chance to do what we can here with our wit and skill! But against us is a superiority in material and machinery that we cannot match. And a machinelike mentality!”

“Yes,” she responded, “while often accompanied with the loftiest of purpose, to hear it told.”

She was thinking of Josiah Derr, and his lofty purpose,—a true loftiness that she did not doubt,—and yet it was combined with the heartlessness her cousin described.

“Well, let me tell you something,” the general answered with emotion, “—and I say this to you as a descendant of the same people,—these other people, against whom we fight, the same who started this war, have made a fuss about freeing the Negro people from slavery, and some among them do believe this, I know, but there are others among them who have pushed the war in order to gain our land and our wealth. What they really want is to lead us on like ignorant people incapable of our own government.”

“I cannot state an opinion on all this, Jubal,” she continued, dropping the formality of his rank for a moment. “But one thing I can tell you, to the extent I am able, I will not let our people be defeated.”

Early was on the Valley Pike before dawn on the morning of the attack. As the day grew and the sounds of battle sounded around him from the locations where he knew his troops to be advancing, he learned that the enemy had indeed been successfully caught off guard.

Only on the far left, near the base of the Little North Mountain, had the enemy mounted a weak defense, but the Union forces there had also been pushed back.

“They are falling back in a rout, sir!” Early’s adjutant informed him. “We have taken the entire camp. We have captured twelve cannons and hundreds of men.”

From all appearances, his army had achieved a great victory, Early acknowledged; he could lock in the victory by a strong pursuit. That was the next object upon which his attention was focused.

Riding forward into the camp, however, the general saw a startling sight. Hundreds of his hungry, raggedly clothed men were ripping through the tents gulping down foods with their bare hands and ripping clothes and boots off the Union bodies strewn over the ground.

Seeing one of his division commanders, he rode up to him in the dense morning fog, and saw that his brave and efficient commander was in an agitated state and unable to bring his men back into formation. Such was the case across the scene, while reports had come that Union divisions were re-forming two miles away.

With the coordinated advance of the Union divisions and their massive cavalry brigades on fresh horses, the Confederate lines had soon lost their advantage. The confused Confederates brought back into line were pressed upon from all sides as they retreated, ignoring Early’s own exhortations to stand fast as he rode among them shouting.

With his army consolidated again at Fisher’s Hill a half day later, Early took cognizance of the incredible sequence of events by which his desperate men had achieved at first a marvelous victory only to suffer at last a defeat of a magnitude leaving him no choice except to retreat up the valley with no hope of another attack with like promise.

### 59. Hiram happens upon Turner's handwritten testament of his intellectual goals

Among the wounded in the Union rout of the Army of the Valley was the Confederate officer, Col. Hiram Stone, who had received a non-crippling musket shot in his left arm. Released by the medical team, with the blessing of the head nurse, his cousin, Louisa Stone, he was directed to take a month-long furlough for the purpose of recuperation, and then to report to wherever he was assigned at the end of his furlough.

During this month, which ran from the middle of October to the middle of November of 1864, Hiram returned to the sprawling plantation in Powhatan County where he had grown up.

While roaming nostalgically through his family's grand, old house at this time, Hiram knocked into a pedestal at the bottom of the stairwell leading up to the slave quarters, causing the cap of it to fall off. Inside of the pedestal, he discovered a notebook with an account assumed by him to be written by his boyhood companion, the educated slave, Turner Ross, with whose simple, concise handwriting he was quite familiar.

"I was born branded, though not with a human-made insignia or scar, but rather branded with the design of creation, as put into place by my Lord and Creator," the account began. "My branding was in the color of my skin, which, even within the range of the dark skin coloration of my own people, is exceedingly dark. I am a black man."

Having read this far, Hiram paused, thinking he should stop himself from reading; even so, he could not prevent himself from going on, in part out of curiosity, but more so because he believed his better knowledge might help him to protect his slave. Surely, he had no conscious motives, as he did this, of any thought or action of criticism or censure of the extent of self-expression indicated by the carefully enunciated words.

"Being a black man now," the account went on, "I was, of course, also a black child, while my life circumstances were such, as I shall herein explain, that I was a child of this dark color living in a household of white people, the family of my masters, who generations before had bought my own ancestors as they would have bought horses or cattle."

Here Hiram paused. The account was of exceeding interest to him, and he felt, also, strangely and great affected by the lucidity of the words, which at the same time had a tone of meekness and absence of resentment.

“Would that these white people,” the neat words continued, “had been dismissive or cruel in their treatment of my mother and those others sharing my brand that they dealt with everyday. Then it would have been easy on my own part to summarily condemn them. But no! These white people were, and, to this very day, are exceedingly kind! They are, in fact, more than kind; they are noble and good, and these are words that I would not lightly apply.

“How was it that I came to live amidst these people, in their own house? A simple answer is that my mother was reputed to be the best cook of any black or white woman in our county, and as far beyond it as was known by stories passed between plantations and households. All of the slave women who lived in the camp were quick to heap my mother with praise, for all of them had firsthand knowledge of my mother’s roast pork, fried chicken, bacon and greens, corn muffins, the list goes on. And what is more, my mother learned as a result of her contact with the gentility of the white culture (let us give due credit where it is deserved), and as a result of her natural sense of dignity and natural graciousness of manner (some say, in our ancestral lands in Africa, she was daughter of a king), an elegance of personality, which she displayed in such an unpretentious manner that she became highly regarded as a grand and gracious person, even among the white women.

“My own goal, as a boy, however, was not to achieve a like degree of excellence in service, through perhaps being a butler of impeccable poise and social fluency, or through being a craftsman of some kind, as are many of my people, for example, in making of furniture. No, what I wanted then,—and, truth be told, what I still want now,—was to be an intelligent man. Oh, more! Let the whole truth be told! I wanted to be a man as intelligent as any of my masters! Or more intelligent still! I wanted to be a craftsman of the mind, an author or poet such as I heard being talked about by my masters’ family, where learning was extolled.

“Looking back at that now, I hardly know anymore what I had hoped to achieve when I set out upon this intellectual journey. Did I wish to be acknowledged for my intellectual achievements? I suppose, being honest, I did. Did I hope for others to come to me in awe of my intellect, to ask me for intellectual advice, or to describe how I had come to produce such a treasure of words? Yes, I suppose I did. I must admit it. But, at the heart of it, I must admit, also, was a desire to rise above my blackness, to prove that out of my blackness could come jewels as shining as from a man with white skin.

“This was,—and has been, throughout my life,—my secret goal, which I have disclosed to no one, and against which I have stored up my creations of the mind, hoping someday to publish them, though I know not when or how. I can remember the first time, as a young boy, that I felt the power of intelligence, felt it in myself. What a great change came inside of me with that recognition, what great ambition, harbored secretly within me!

“How was it that I came to have such ambitions?

“Part of it, I know, came from being given a chance to learn reading and writing as a boy, and wanting so much to prove equal to that, and then, having proven equal and earning praise, wanting to be worthy of that praise. I must admit, it became a selfish enterprise in which the love of learning that I had started with was lost in the hope to earn praise. That flaw, however, I managed to correct over time because a true love of learning was present, also, and would have been had I received no praise at all.

“In any case, I continued to flourish until I was given a chance to learn more difficult subjects like Mathematics and Accounting and in all these I excelled, becoming a clerk and accountant on my masters’ plantation, and more accomplished and efficient, I have heard, than anyone before me.

“There was another reason why I excelled at learning, however, and I think this was the most important reason, my fellowship with, and admiration of, my boyhood companion, Hiram Stone, who was my master’s son, and lived in the same house with me, and often studied beside me. Hiram was not my brother, but he was like a brother to me, though across the chasm of our different races. He was never mean to me, and never sought to prove himself better. Hiram was a true lover of learning, also, and he took great interest in everything I wrote, which he kindly pronounced to be of great merit.”

Upon reading this, Hiram paused, and he was surprised to find himself welling with emotion.

“I must say, however, though I truly admired Hiram always and regarded him as a companion, I was never able to regard him as a true friend. Even as we played together, and studied together, we moved in worlds so different that neither of us was able to bridge the difference.

“Still, I persisted, wishing to be a craftsman of words and thoughts, as I have said, though understanding still that the walls around my world might prevent me from ever breaking through.

“And I became aware, also, eventually, that such walls were bigger in significance than pertaining only to me. As a young man,

just 15 years of age, I had in fact come upon texts, passed in secret among Negroes in the South, calling for rebellion against our masters. The text, as I understood, was from a proclamation agreed upon in a convention in New York, in 1850, and attended by Frederick Douglass, David Yules, and other great Negro leaders. The proclamation said in part:

“When the insurrection of the Southern slaves shall take place, as take place it will unless speedily prevented by voluntary emancipation, the great majority of the colored men of the North, however much to the grief to any of us, will be found by your side, with deep-seated and accumulated revenge in their hearts, and with death-dealing weapons in their hands...

“Break your master’s locks and take all their money... For you are prisoners of war in an enemy’s country—and, therefore, by all the rules of war, you have the fullest liberty to plunder, burn or kill, as you may have occasion to do to promote your escape.’

“Reading this, contemplating it, I could not accept this attitude, however; I could not take it to me as my own, and I do not mean to minimize the great struggle of my people for freedom. I know I have been blessed. And that is why, at age 17, I asked to leave the big house and move to the slave camp, because I wanted to express my sense of kinship.

“I do wish to participate in this struggle, at the appropriate time, but to do so somehow through my words and to do so without malice toward people like my dear Hiram whom I will continue to love despite what we both know is the basic injustice of our relationship. I see him struggling with this and I will struggle with it, also.”

Hiram, after reading this, stood in silence with his head bowed. Making sure no one was near, he reached for the top of the pedestal to replace it, noticing then that other notebooks were there, below a cardboard divider. He replaced the top of the pedestal without looking at them.

## **60. Hiram and Emily reprise an old tradition at Charlotte’s Grove**

There was another place to which Hiram Stone felt now compelled to travel, a place familiar to him from childhood that he knew to be of great importance to both his own family and the other family associated with his own family through his uncle, Elias Derr. This place was Charlotte’s Grove, bought and started

as an apple orchard by Elias's first wife, Charlotte, sister of Hiram's father, Caleb.

Hiram was aware that at this time of year, in late October, members of both of the two biological families connected through Charlotte Stone and Elias Derr had often come to Charlotte's Grove to pick, cut, and dry apples, a practice that had led to an unarranged, though expected, meeting of the unofficially defined, extended Stone-Derr family as they had settled into the lodging available in the large house with any overflow relegated to the bunk house next to the corral.

Should that practice be carried into the present, despite the war, Hiram knew that one of the guests might be Emily Derr. For this reason, as Emily had suspected, he had mentioned the autumn tradition in his last letter to her, which she had received just prior to her father's death.

Charlotte had died of scarlet fever when Hiram had been only two years old; therefore, he had no memory of how she had looked, but he had many times studied the portrait of her that hung at Charlotte's Grove on the wall above the fireplace. From that, he had confirmed what he had often been told, that Charlotte, his aunt, had been a near lookalike to his red-haired, green-eyed cousin, Louisa, daughter of Hiram's uncle, Nathaniel Stone, whose family had been central in Hiram's life as occupants of the other of the two big houses on the Stone plantation.

As soon as he came over the hill above the orchard, Hiram saw the familiar wagon from the Derr family store. Beside it was the dark-haired, slender figure he had hoped to see. Elena, the second wife of Elias, was there, also, and the 12-year-old Ebediah, and Emily's blonde assistant, Dorothea Rice. They had apparently just arrived.

"I had an idea you might show up!" Emily called when she saw Hiram approaching on his chestnut mare. "I was hoping you would!"

He was dressed in civilian clothes,—a red coat, black pants, knee-high boots, and a small rimmed hat,—with his left arm still in a sling.

"Thanks to being grazed in battle, I was given a furlough, though I had planned to ask for one anyway."

"Oh! Is it serious?" she said.

"No, they say I will recover completely."

Hiram took both of Emily's hands and pressed his head against hers, but he did not embrace or kiss her. Emily then broke through his hands and pressed into his chest with a full embrace.

Later, Hiram and Emily went for a walk together, absorbed in one another but not touching. Though he and she had been intensely attracted to one another since they had met as boy and girl, and throughout the years they had kept in contact, they had never taken their physical interaction beyond hugs and kisses. Neither had either one of them had such interaction with anyone else.

“There is something I would like to tell you, Emily,” Hiram ventured, “and I would tell this to no other. I have observed the recent turns of the war. Sherman has defeated Hood in Atlanta. Sheridan, with his huge force, had pushed my own small force, under Early, up the valley to Lynchburg. Grant has pushed back Lee to within 30 miles of Petersburg and Richmond. It is now quite clear, we of the South cannot win this war.

“I think, especially, of my own family. I know I touched on this briefly in one of my letters to you. If the slaves are set free, we will have no means by which to bring our cotton from field to market. I once had a plan, as you know, to offer the slaves employment as free workers. Had that happened, there would have been a choice for my family to free itself of the economic necessity of slavery. But I have heard recently of demands made in the United States Congress for seizure of plantation lands, to be given in plots to the freed slaves. If this were done, my family would be financially ruined.”

To this long explanation, Emily listened attentively, with her face set in thought.

“In other words, Emily, though I have been, all the while you have known me, a person with an assured future position and income, I am no longer such a person.”

“Hiram,” Emily said, “if you say all of this in reference to me, thinking it will affect my opinion of you, I must tell you, the economics and materiality of such an outcome, on anyone, would be of no importance in my relationship with a man. My interest is in a good person, in a plantation or in a little house. You are such a good person. I have known this from the first time I met you when you were a boy and I a girl.”

They passed around the outside of the corral, where several horses were standing, to a path known to both of them that led up to a stand of maple trees on a hillside.

“There is something I would like to tell you,” Emily said.

He smiled. “And what is that?”

“I once thought, Hiram, I would grow up to be a family woman, adept in the affairs of the household such as my mother is,

and your mother, Anne.

“Well, this horrible war that has done so much to you, and that has required so many changes from you, has made demands on me, also. It has formed me into a person directed to the outer world beyond the family more than I ever imagined I would be. I am speaking of the contraband camp, where I have the lead role, and our family store, where I oversee all aspects of buying, selling, and workforce. Then, too, in my own private intellectual life, I have become so much more of a thinker and writer, and I want so much to advance in all of these roles.

“I have thought a great deal about this, Hiram, I cannot go back to what I was before the war laid claim to me.”

They reached the top of the hill and stopped by the maple trees, which had a partial foliage of red leaves, the rest having been lost to the autumn winds.

“Well, Emily,” Hiram said, “if you say all this in reference to me, and thinking it will affect me somehow, in my opinion of you, I will tell you, for me such changes would only add, not detract, and these changes in you make you all the more formidable.”

“And lovable?”

“Yes.”

Here they both laughed, and Emily leaned forward with merry eyes. “How quaint we are, Hiram! So utterly formal!”

“Yes.”

They sat together on the fallen trunk of a tree. Below them the valley extended for about a half mile on either side of the fruit-laden trees in the orchard. In addition to Charlotte’s Grove, there were three other farms, each with a house and barn.

“So much has happened within me, also.” Hiram went on. “When I was a youth, Emily, as you know, I grew aware in increments to the basic injustice of my family’s position. We have been more beneficent than most, as you know, but slavery must be judged as immoral because it takes away freedom; no excesses of cruelty or meanness are required to condemn it. By a long process, as you know, I became aware of this, resisting the full implications, and imagining that I would be the one with sufficient nobility and morality to bring an end to slavery with the plan you know of, though which I never published or promoted to anyone, of converting the slaves into free workers.

“Now the times have overtaken me. My nobility and morality, if ever they existed, were just figments in my mind, and our slaves will leave, at least some of them, thinking I was no

more than any other oppressor. Still, what does it matter, they shall have their freedom."

"Yes," Emily answered after a moment of reflection. "Truth is, though, Hiram, I fear for their well-being. What will happen to them? Where will they go?."

"I also have many apprehensions," Hiram declared. "Can they be as we are? My mother said to me this summer that she doubts that they can. She said Turner is a genius among them, whereas among us he is just another bright person."

"What do you think?"

Hiram gave this careful thought, remembering back to the documents he had discovered in the stairway banister.

"With respect to Turner, I think he may indeed be a genius, Emily. And among any people. We don't know the full story of what he has created. Turner has the intense focus of a genius. He may require a period of independence to mature. He was my boyhood companion. I would like to help him in any way I can including financially, if I am able.

"With respect to genius in general, I have come to think it is a product of culture. Brightness leads to genius when a culture is there to recognize and nourish it, and culture is the product of generations."

"Yes, I agree," said Emily. "Generations of freedom may be required for genius to come forth more fully in the colored people. And I say this not in opposition. I want it to come forth."

"Yes, I know you do, Emily, and so do I."

She rose and took his hand and led him toward the point of the hill where they could see Elena and Dorothea in the orchard below, placing apples in a basket. Ebbie was high in the branches reaching down apples to them.

"In this, too, we can be kindred spirits," Emily said, "in our hopes and bright expectations for the Negro people."

"Yes."

"As to the charges you direct against yourself, Hiram, I can only say, the future will carry forward not only our mistakes,—and I have made mine, too,—but also the best of what we have been. Let us carry it forward together."

## **PART III: THE FINAL THRUST**



## 61. Lincoln learns that the nation has re-elected him as president

The verdict of the nation was at hand as President Abraham Lincoln stopped to visit his Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, in Stanton's home on Saturday, November 5, 1864. The arguments, the speeches, the exhortations for unity, and, of course, the bitter war, the resistance to it, and the discontent, had all contributed to whatever would now be the result of the national election due to be held in four days.

"Ed, we gave it our best," Lincoln declared. "We have run down and tree'd this ol' coon of an election, and if he won't die properly, he will die in some way."

"Yes, he will, Abe," Stanton replied, the dry lips above the long, grizzly beard not bending in the least toward a smile, "and let us hope it will be with love for us in his heart."

The war weary but tirelessly consistent secretary had gotten used to communicating in this way, when his laconic commander-in-chief spoke through a similitude, by remaining within the similitude and extending it to respond.

"Let us hope so," Lincoln replied, "since we have pressed upon him with so much love in our own."

Stanton had been feeling ill, however. He had little more to say on this occasion than to acknowledge his friend's kindness in stopping to see him. Even so, the activities of the past half year, attempted by him, the president, and their allies, in pursuit of victory in the war and imminent election, passed through his mind. When Grant had failed to take Richmond by the end of the previous summer, as many had expected him to do, and when Atlanta and the Shenandoah Valley had remained in Confederate hands longer than planned, the common wisdom had held it that Lincoln would suffer the same fate as all presidents since 1832 in being unable to secure a second term. Lincoln himself had begun to believe it. But the recent victories in Atlanta, Winchester, and Cedar Creek, combined with Grant's advance on Petersburg, had changed that just in time. The prospect of a once doubtful victory had grown.

"I will be watching for the telegrams late Tuesday. You can be sure of that," Stanton said as the president left.

Lincoln had something else on his mind, also, warnings of election day riots in New York City, a stronghold of the Peace Democrats. That was a concern he and Stanton had discussed. At the request of Governor Horatio Seymour of New York State, Maj.

Gen. Benjamin Butler had been sent with a Union corps from New Orleans to keep order if needed, though there remained a dispute about who would be in charge, the state officials or the federal chain of command.

The riots did not materialize on the night of the election. Lincoln waited for the telegrams alone, with his young secretary John Hay coming in to update him as each dispatch was received at the War Department, the center for all information of strategic importance.

About 6 P.M., reports came in from the Manhattan wards in New York City, known to be Democratic, anti-war, and anti-draft. Only in the 15th and 9th wards, encompassing Chelsea and the Madison and Union squares, had Lincoln won. In the other 20 wards, he had lost decidedly, for a cross-city loss of 73,769 to 36,912—a margin of nearly two to one.

Though expected, these results brought dour expressions to the faces of the beleaguered president and his assistant as they sat in Hay's office together, which was the usual scene with reports stacked up on the long table.

“Well, let us hope it is not a bad omen,” Lincoln remarked.

If New York went to the Democratic candidate, Maj. Gen. George Brinton McClellan, that would be 31 electoral votes lost, nearly a seventh of the 230 votes total. 145 electoral votes would be required to win.

Soon reports came in from the other boroughs of New York City and from other New York counties. The votes were roughly one to one, split between Lincoln and McClellan, but with a slight advantage to Lincoln in the state described as the most critical of the major Union states.

Then, from Pennsylvania, where the results were likewise expected to be close, came a “special dispatch of the National Union Committee” saying “Philadelphia gives Lincoln 11,000 majority, 4,000 gain on October” (when the previous election had been held). “Lancaster 5,400 majority, 1,400 gain on October. Pittsburgh, large gains.”

“By God, it's happening!” Hay remarked. “Mr. President, it is going our way!”

On this note, the evening continued, as dozens more of the one sheet reports came in.

From Maine, a report came in at 9 P.M. of 28 towns giving Lincoln 13,264 and McClellan 7,994, a Union gain of 380 on the previous election. Portland gave Lincoln 2,856 and McClellan, 1,679, a Union loss of six votes since the previous election.

Soon to follow were Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maryland, Delaware, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. All had gone for Lincoln. Then came Kentucky. It was the first state to go for McClellan. Louisiana and West Virginia had not yet come in.

Next day Lincoln rode in a carriage up Dupont Street to see Stanton again. He came in with a newspaper in hand.

“Here is the headline,” he exclaimed. “‘Victory! Glorious result yesterday. Election of Lincoln and Johnson.’”

“Three cheers for that!” Stanton cried. “I knew it already. I’ve been following the wires.”

“And then there is this,” Lincoln went on. “‘Terrible Defeat of McClellan. The Union Triumphant.’”

Lincoln leaned back on a padded chair and took the glass of wine the butler brought him. He raised it, to which Stanton raised the glass of water that the doctor had restricted him to.

“Well, I must confess there were days when looking ahead I did not hope for this result!” Lincoln said. “Listen to this, for Illinois! ‘Cook County gives about 4,000 Union majority. Leading Republicans claim a majority of 20,000 in the state.’”

“Now comes the task of bringing it all to an end in the best of our capacities,” Stanton replied.

Lincoln thought of that “task ahead” as he rode back to the White House. In his methodical, orderly manner, he enumerated the parts of the task in his mind.

First of all, he would need to forge a new relationship with Congress, Lincoln acknowledged to himself. He could address several concerns at once, he imagined, with the lame duck congress. The new congress would not be sworn in for several months, as would be the case for him, too, for his second term. He would state his objectives in his state of the union letter, due to be delivered in about a month’s time, he decided. When he arrived home, he sat in his study, jotting down pieces of his future letter as they appeared to his mind.

“The war continues,” Lincoln wrote in the lamplight. “Since the last annual message, all the important lines and positions then occupied by our forces have been maintained and our arms have steadily advanced, thus liberating the regions left in rear, so that Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, and parts of other States have again produced reasonably fair crops.”

After a pause, he wrote again, “Important movements have also occurred during the year to the effect of molding society for durability in the Union. Although short of complete success, it is

much in the right direction that 12,000 citizens in each of the States of Arkansas and Louisiana have organized loyal State governments, with free constitutions, and are earnestly struggling to maintain and administer them.”

Next Lincoln considered what many, he imagined, would likely ascribe to be the most important change brought about by the war, the abolition of slavery. To secure that gain constitutionally, the 13th amendment would be an absolute requirement of his efforts going forward.

“At the last session of Congress,” he wrote, “a proposed amendment of the Constitution abolishing slavery throughout the United States passed the Senate, but failed for lack of the requisite two-thirds vote in the House of Representatives. Although the present is the same Congress and nearly the same members, and without questioning the wisdom or patriotism of those who stood in opposition, I venture to recommend the reconsideration and passage of the measure at the present session. Of course the abstract question is not changed; but the intervening election shows almost certainly that the next Congress will pass the measure if this does not. Hence there is only a question of time as to when the proposed amendment will go to the States for their action. And as it is to so go at all events, may we not agree that the sooner the better?”

Lincoln mused on what the future would hold for the union, if victory could indeed be secured. As indicated by the number of total votes cast, the population of the United States (including the Confederacy) now stood at 31,443,321, a gain of more than 100,000 since the previous election. The prospect was that, assuming the victory secure, the transcontinental railroad, spanning the nation from ocean to ocean, would be built. The nation would thrive with new states admitted in the organized territories and the rebel states reconstructed and admitted.

That was a concern, also, Lincoln resolved in his mind, as he had earlier considered after the valorous service of the colored troops at Chaffin Farm. He would promote as best he could a new system that would be just all around, both to the freed slaves and the former planters that would be losing the product of their labor of generations (albeit buttressed by the exploited labor of slaves). Four million former slaves would be looking for a new place in society. The prospect of this made him think of Emily Derr, the bold young woman from Harper’s Ferry who had come to see him in the White House.

Thus he would write, Lincoln resolved, but one last thought

he would enunciate in his mind for himself only. The war, though close to being finalized, had not yet been completed. It had been a horrible war, surely, and the horror was not done. A final thrust would now be required to bring an unchallenged victory to a divided nation. Only then, with victory secured through this last sacrifice of the additional hundreds who yet would die, could the process of reconciliation begin.

## **62. Sherman creates a path of destruction from Atlanta to Savannah**

Among those who most recognized the need not to flag in the final thrust of the national push, in order to add to the political victory of the presidential election a military victory of equivalent national impact, was Maj. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman, commander of the Military Division of the Mississippi.

In late October, 1864, Sherman proposed to his commander, Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, and, through Grant, to President Abraham Lincoln, an idea that had been simmering in his mind during the final days of the Atlanta campaign: with their approval, he would march in a southeasterly direction across Georgia to the Atlantic Ocean, destroying all infrastructure that could in any way sustain the government in Richmond. Thereby he would split the Confederacy into two pieces, further undermining its continued claims of nationhood.

On Thursday, November 9, 1865, having gained that approval, Sherman inaugurated the campaign with a speech from horseback delivered just outside of Atlanta to his assembled army.

“Gentlemen, know this. Circumstances and the vagaries of our time have placed you in this field on this historic day, as they have placed me, also. We are federal soldiers obliged to do our duty in this war that our democratic nation has freely adopted for the lofty purpose of liberating our brother slaves, a cause for which many of our comrades have died.

“We shall not rest in the field of battle while that victory is still in sight but not yet attained. Our present mission is simple; it is this. With firm heart and resolve, we shall destroy all resources we encounter that may sustain our enemy. With sword and fire, we shall bring the scourge of war to those, as of yet unaffected, who would impede us in our mission.”

That same day, Sherman sent out a directive to his troops regarding how the destruction would be accomplished.

Part of the directive read as follows with respect to the behavior of the army with the populace and country that it would pass through.

IV. The army will forage liberally on the country during the march. To this end, each brigade commander will organize a good and sufficient foraging party, under the command of one or more discreet officers, who will gather, near the route traveled, corn or forage of any kind, meat of any kind, vegetables, corn-meal, or whatever is needed by the command, aiming at all times to keep in the wagons at least ten day's provisions for the command and three days' forage. Soldiers must not enter the dwellings of the inhabitants, or commit any trespass, but during a halt or a camp they may be permitted to gather turnips, apples, and other vegetables, and to drive in stock of their camp. To regular foraging parties must be instructed the gathering of provisions and forage at any distance from the road traveled.

V. To army corps commanders alone is entrusted the power to destroy mills, houses, cotton-gins, &c., and for them this general principle is laid down: In districts and neighborhoods where the army is unmolested no destruction of such property should be permitted; but should guerrillas or bushwhackers molest our march, or should the inhabitants burn bridges, obstruct roads, or otherwise manifest local hostility, then army commanders should order and enforce a devastation more or less relentless according to the measure of such hostility.

VI. As for horses, mules, wagons, &c., belonging to the inhabitants, the cavalry and artillery may appropriate freely and without limit, discriminating, however, between the rich, who are usually hostile, and the poor or industrious, usually neutral or friendly. Foraging parties may also take mules or horses to replace the jaded animals of their trains, or to serve as pack-mules for the regiments or brigades. In all foraging, of whatever kind, the parties engaged will refrain from abusive or threatening language, and may, where the officer in command thinks proper, give written certificates of the facts, but no receipts, and they will endeavor to leave with each family a reasonable portion for their maintenance.

VII. Negroes who are able-bodied and can be of service to the several columns may be taken along, but

each army commander will bear in mind that the question of supplies is a very important one and that his first duty is to see to them who bear arms.

Sherman's forces moved out the next day, reorganized into a Left Wing (called the Army of Georgia) formed from the XIV, XX, and Cavalry Corps of the former Army of the Cumberland; and a Right Wing formed from the XV and XVII Corps of the Army of the Tennessee.

In total, the two wings consisted of about 62,000 men, with no army-size enemy units before them. As instructed in Sherman's directive, they took whatever they needed for food and forage; while often finding reason to "order and enforce a devastation" of "mills, houses, cotton-gins, &c." in response to the bushwhackers who plagued them as they advanced. The local inhabitants, never forming into organized resistance, merely watched.

The Left Wing, under Maj. Gen. Henry Warner Slocum, moved along the Georgia Railroad to Milledgeville. The Right Wing, under Maj. Gen. Oliver O. Howard, followed the Macon & Western Railroad to Macon. Both wings, as they advanced, tore up the railroad tracks and heated and bent the rails to make them unusable for repairs.

On the third day out, Sherman saw approaching a delegation of citizens led by an attractive woman attired in an full-length blue gown in the current style of the elite planter class, and with finely-styled dark hair. In a dignified manner, she advanced directly to him.

"General Sherman," she said in a finely cadenced Georgian drawl, when he turned toward her on his horse, "the reason we have come out is because we have heard of the damage you and your soldiers have inflicted in other towns. You have decency in your face. Surely, you have no wish to make war upon our common people who have not taken up arms."

Sherman looked at the petitioner with no sign of emotion. "What is in my face, ma'am, I cannot know," he replied, "but what I do know is this. I am here as a soldier, making war upon the enemies of my country."

"We are not your enemies. We have no enmity in our hearts against you. We feed and care for our own, including our soldiers, as you also do."

"That may well be true, ma'am, what you say regarding your lack of enmity," the general answered, "that this is your attitude in this war. But we do not make war against attitude, we make war against flesh and blood, and steel."

“You Yankees say you have brought a new era of justice, even for the colored man. I beg to submit to you, sir, is this justice or unjustified destruction?”

“You Southerners began the war, ma’am, and we fight in it, as we must, destruction and all.”

“Is there no room in it then for the goodness and mercy your mother taught you?”

“My mother, if pressed upon, could not have brought herself to do what this war requires, and I suspect that you, ma’am, in your kindness, could not bring yourself to do it, also. War is a thunderbolt that strikes where it may. It turns not aside even if the virtuous stand in its path.”

“To do, sir, is in violation of our Christian teachings. You must know, being yourself a Catholic, as I have heard.”

“I was a Catholic in my youth, as you say. What I am now, I do not know. I merely say, ‘If God does not want war, why does He allow it?’”

Drawing away with his column of soldiers, Sherman saw that the sun was low on the western horizon above the village from which he had just come.

“Shall we rest here until morning?” the officer asked who was leading the advance. “There is a stream down by the woods and a wide, dry field with good ground.”

“Yes, colonel, and announce to the people in this village that they have until tomorrow midday to remove their personal possessions from all buildings except their houses.”

Within several weeks, the armies were traveling on parallel paths north and south of the Ogeechee River, as behind them rose up the flames and smoke of destruction. Several minor battles did not arrest the relentless march as hundreds of slaves set free by the columns followed behind.

Meanwhile, General Sherman, despite his show of not being affected, returned in his thoughts to the woman who had entreated him to remember the goodness and mercy that his mother had taught him. So full of good intention the woman had been, like his wife Eleanor, and seeming not to understand why the world was not run by such noble qualities.

Goodness and mercy. Yes, his mother had taught him that, in his early years before she had been widowed into poverty with nine children, and had entrusted him to his future wife’s family, the Ewing’s, where he had heard of goodness and mercy again.

He felt, as his forces spread out on either side of him, like the wings of a fury flying forward, that he himself was severed, a

part of him in the center of this angel or demon of fury, the other part of him back with the gracious woman who had implored him for mercy. Through her, also, he was back with his mother, whom she had invoked; and, on a closer, more real basis, back with his wife and with all of the sweetnesses that, in his upbringing and marriage, had blossomed forth on the gentle hands of women.

No doubt, the embattled leader thought, women such as the woman who had implored him for mercy, and women such as his mother and his wife, were of the past somehow, relegated, like the concept of noble warfare, to a dreamier reality that could stand no more in the stark world to come. He knew there were new women now, harder women. For the time being, let them stay far off and let the tender-hearted women of old remain as attendants of the past noble world.

But what was all this? he asked himself. His world was before him. He would do in it what he must, and push through to the day when the war would be done.

### **63. Josiah attends the Derr family Christmas weighted by war memories**

*Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother;  
And in His name all oppression shall cease.  
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,  
Let all within us praise His holy name.*

Thus sang the choir of the Episcopal congregation, once led by Elias Derr, who by his second wife, Elena Fordham, was father of Emily, Ebediah, and the Union officer, Josiah (all of whom were in the congregation at this time); Elias Derr, who by his first wife, Charlotte Stone, was father of Lydia, married to the Union officer, Darren Beecher; Elias Derr, who, by Charlotte, also, was uncle of Hiram Stone, an officer in the Confederate army, and of Louisa Stone, a nurse in that same army.

“Lord, we beseech Thy blessing,” Josiah said, when, as a deacon, he was asked to pray, “not only for those who are beside us on this holy day, but for those, also, who are separated from us by the continuing war. We ask for victory in this war, Lord, but we do not ask for misfortune for those on the other side of the war who are dear to us still, our sisters and brothers. We believe they are mistaken in their loyalties, Lord, but we bear witness for them for their deeper loyalty to Thee.”

In saying such a prayer, Josiah knew, he had expressed

sympathy for people that others regarded as “the Enemy.” He had detected such an attitude, of a world divided into Christians, on one side, and the Enemy, on the other, in the book about the New England chaplain, Arthur Buckminster Fuller, that he had read on the train on his way to his father’s funeral. In that book, the symbols of the cross, the sword, and the scepter had been reserved for Union soldiers. Those same symbols had been withheld from Confederate soldiers. The pastor, in a letter home, had, in addition, deprecated Southern women. He had called them “secession females.—women, misnamed ladies, disgracing womanhood itself, and continuing to insult our soldiery.” From that sort of attitude, Josiah felt removed. It was a snide attitude, he thought, and mean-spirited despite its sanctimonious assumptions. He did believe, though, that God willed for the South and slavery to be defeated.

Josiah was still with the Calvary Corps of the Army of the Shenandoah, in the 2nd Brigade of the Second Division, which had three Virginia regiments, of which he commanded one. Only the Cavalry Corps remained at Josiah’s present location. The VI Corps had returned to the Army of the Potomac on the Jamestown Peninsula. The VIII Corps (aka the Army of West Virginia) had been split into some components sent to West Virginia and some reassigned to the Army of the James, also on the James Peninsula.

The war came up again as Josiah walked with his 12-year-old brother Ebediah along the bypass canal of the Shenandoah rapids where Josiah had addressed his father’s spirit and had felt that his father had heard and considered his remarks.

“There is something in the communality of the experience that makes it not a personal choice,” Josiah replied in answer to Ebbie’s most basic question of how his older brother had brought himself to take part in it. “The large scale of it removes the action from the individual level. Forgive me, Ebbie, if I use big words.”

“I use big words myself,” the boy replied.

To this, Josiah smiled as he kept pace with his younger brother, aware of the buoyancy and hope that the boy brought into every movement of his strong, young body. Josiah knew that his brother believed that the world was full of goodness and good people, and that good people never compromised to act in any other way but in a wholly good manner.

“Yes. I’m aware of that, Ebbie,” he said. “I didn’t mean to underestimate you.

“Imagine this, a big field as large as these grounds here by the mills, and soldiers lined up all across it, against which are lined

up an equal number of men, all with guns and some with cannons and horses. And an order is given to charge, to a group including you. Of course, you must charge, and not so much to kill as to not let down those who are beside you, your fellow soldiers. And if you are in a position of leadership, you can't let down your men; they are looking to you for direction and as an example of how to be brave. So, of course, you rush forth."

"Have you killed someone?" the boy asked.

"Of course, Ebbie, yes. I have been in many battles."

"Face to face?"

"Yes, one. If I had not killed him,—with my bayonet,—he would have killed me."

"Did you watch him die?"

"Yes, it happened so quickly. I prayed for him, Ebbie, and to this day, I see him and pray for him, and I pray for forgiveness for what I did."

"But what you did was not a sin."

"Yes, I know, but still I pray, if not for the sin, then against the horror that encompassed him and me. In any case, you are too young, Ebbie, to worry about war. I have prayed for you, also, and will continue to pray for you, that you will not experience war and be forced to deal with its choices."

Josiah had a Christmas talk with his sister, Emily, also. He had not seen her since he had taken part in the Union destruction of the Shenandoah Valley.

Standing in her room, at the window overlooking the Harper's Ferry downtown where he had stood on his visit home for his father's funeral, he studied his sister's dark eyes, and he detected that a great change had occurred in her bearing and mentality. Had he asked her the reason for this change, she would have told him, in her open, honest way, that the change was due to the optimism and hope for the future that had come over her following from her joyous meeting, about six weeks before, with Hiram Stone at Charlotte's Grove. Josiah had no idea that his sister had met with Hiram and had exchanged professions of love with him.

From his own side, Josiah had not told Emily that he had encountered Hiram amidst the flaming buildings of the Shenandoah Valley three months before.

There was a further change, however, to which he and Emily were immediate witnesses as they stood in her room, a change which he had already noticed two days before when debarking from the train. This change was that, at the town end of

the railroad bridge that spanned the Potomac River to Maryland Heights, the white tents and lumber and brick shacks of the contraband camp had expanded into a shantytown at least half again as large as the camp had been just a half year before.

From where Josiah and Emily stood, they could see the former slaves, some in the white cotton clothes of their former servitude. Scores of black children played exuberantly in every area that permitted open passage, and some had encroached onto the downtown sidewalks attracting some looks of disapproval from the white people passing there.

“Where will they all go?” Josiah said.

“That is something I’ve been wondering, too,” Emily replied.

She reached to her desk for a small book, about three by five inches in size, upon which was printed the title, “What Will Become of the Contrabands?” Below that was a line in smaller type, “by Emily Derr.”

“This is your own handiwork?” Josiah asked, taking it in hand.

“Yes, all respects of it, including distribution.”

“And where is it distributed?”

“On the trains. Free for the taking. Edmund Lanis, the station master, is a friend of mine.”

“Who pays for it to be published?”

“I do, and that is another part of it. The same upheaval that led to these new contrabands coming down the valley in the wake of the federal troops brought also hundreds of people burned out of their livelihoods. Some came with money enough to buy supplies as they headed further north, bringing a huge business for the store. We have had a huge taking, an explosion of profit such as I could hardly keep up with. Some of it I have funneled in this direction.”

“And what will become of the contrabands?” Josiah said, referring back to the title of the booklet.

“It is a hugely complex problem, Josie,” Emily answered. “Many who left have come back with stories.”

“Stories of what?”

“Stories of problems encountered in seeking to establish a new life. Stories of being unwelcome.”

Josiah found that troubling as one more unforeseen outcome of a war that he knew, from personal experience, had required so much on all sides.

Later, he sat with Emily and other family members in the

living room with the splendid Christmas tree lit for the supper time with candles.

Present, also, was his sister Lydia, who had facial features common to the red-haired Stone family women (most strikingly green eyes) but with hair of a flaxen color. She was 12 years older than Josiah and had left home before he had been old enough to really get to know her.

After the meal, Josiah talked with Lydia's husband, Maj. Darren Beecher, about the recent battle of Winchester in which he and Josiah had both taken part.

"Josie, wasn't that an amazing sight," Darren said, "when our cavalry on their strong, giant horses,—the very best of Morgan horses!—came charging through the square with the ragged troops and scrawny horses of the rebels scrambling to get out of their way! I could see right there, we would win this war, we cannot lose it, for what is their hungry army against ours with our new guns and wagons advancing on them?"

"There is no doubt of that," Josiah replied. "They have been worn down, though I have been impressed with how bravely they continue to fight. They fight with conviction, Darren. They fight as if they believe the right is on their side."

Darren left that comment fall, but Josiah continued to mull over the effects of the war, with the contrabands so ill equipped for the future, and with the war now appearing to be headed for a successful military result, while indicting him so harshly for his own involvement.

#### **64. Hiram considers his family's slavery past and well-intentioned moral complexity**

One hundred and fifty-six miles from Harper's Ferry, in Powhatan County, just forty-three miles from the Confederate capital of Richmond, the Stone family had gathered for Christmas, also. This was the family of the Confederate officer, Col. Hiram Stone, and of his cousin, the Confederate nurse, Louisa Stone. This same family, by extension, included Maj. Caleb Stone, father of Hiram, killed in the Battle of Fredericksburg in 1862; Capt. Nathaniel Stone, father of Louisa, killed in the Battle of Antietam in 1862; and Charlotte Stone, first wife of Elias Derr, who had succumbed to scarlet fever at age 24 in 1828. This was also the extended family of Luellen (née Bonnard) Beecher of Harper's Ferry, who was the sister of Hiram's mother, Anne (née Bonnard)

Stone. Luellen, as earlier described, was mother of the Union officer, Maj. Darren Beecher, who was married to Lydia Derr, the only child of Elias and Charlotte. This was also the extended family of Lt. Gen. Jubal Early, first cousin of Caleb, Nathaniel, and Charlotte Stone. Their common grandparents were Julia Carpenter and Harlan Early, both born before the “First War for Independence,” as the Stone family had called that war since the current war began.

As the family gathered around a 12-foot-high Christmas tree in the gilded ball room of the house where Hiram had lived all of his life, the only family members present, in addition to Hiram, were Louisa, Louisa’s sister, Jessica, their mother, Eliza, and Hiram’s mother, Anne.

Louisa was dressed such as she had seldom been in the war years, in a full skirted velvet day dress with tufted shoulders, tight long sleeves, and a pointed bodice.

Louisa, her nurses, and their Powhatan-donated ambulance were still associated with the Army of the Valley. She had taken a leave to return home for the holidays.

The atmosphere was muted, compared to years past. The Stone family, once overstocked with food, had not escaped the lean times. But three Christmas hams had been saved in the ice house, one of which was the meal for the current day. Two had been sent to the slave camp as a Christmas present.

“Louisa, how pretty you look!” Hiram said. “I forget at times what a beautiful cousin I have.”

“Yes, you look just fabulous, Louisa,” Anne remarked. “When will you tell us about some wonderful new beau?”

That remark fell flat, however, as everyone knew, that, despite Louisa’s denials, her heart was reserved for her Northern soldier, Col. Josiah Derr.

Hiram, after the group had separated for the night, went for a walk, thinking of the family history that had been so important to him as a boy and that still occupied his thoughts often despite the war.

As earlier described, the Stone family in America went back to colonial Jamestown. Joshua Stone, the first forefather known to the present generations, had crossed the ocean in 1764 with his new wife, Elizabeth Donne.

Joshua Stone had not arrived with slaves, the family story went, but three years later, after becoming established, Joshua had purchased two African men and an African woman, and thereby had started the slave owner legacy of the subsequent generations

whose wealth and social status would depend greatly upon the labor of their slaves.

The early Stone family generations had lived on the James River road between Richmond and Willamette. But a part of that original family, led by Hiram's great grandfather, Jacob, had split off in the late 18th century and, with inherited wealth and slaves, had started the plantation that Hiram had come up in, on the James River in Powhatan County.

As had been the case in the subsequent generations, those early slaves of the Stone family plantation in Powhatan had been treated as well or better than on any other plantation in Virginia, due to the benevolent disposition of Jacob Stone, which had been notable enough to have been brought down in family folklore. In that long history of slavery, also, a few slaves, like the latter day Turner Ross, had been educated, Hiram had heard, in defiance of Virginia law, though none had risen to the high level of education and verbal adroitness that Turner had achieved.

In the romantic idealism of his boyhood, Hiram had felt a great interest and personal pride in the industry of the generations that had preceded those known to him from firsthand experience. That there was a possible negative cast upon those generations on account of their having owned slaves, Hiram had been unaware at that time in his life. Family stories had inculcated him with the attitude that the history of his family was something to be proud of, owing to how his predecessors had been so diligent and such stalwart defenders of faith and country. Slaves had been part of their life, in his boy's eyes, as part of a social structure beyond questioning.

Hiram had watched with keen interest when the second big house had been constructed (for Louisa's family) in his early teen years. He had regarded the house building as an example of the resourcefulness of the people before him who, with like industry, —as he imagined it,—had hewn a place in the New World from the primordial forests of Virginia.

The original house featured a wooden internal frame clad with blocks of white granite stone, each 3 feet wide by 2 feet high by 2 feet deep, hauled in from the immense open quarry in Mount Airy, North Carolina, in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Also of granite were the six Doric columns, each 30 feet high, that rose from the house-wide veranda on the front of the mansion, as were the capitals that supported the roof. The house to be constructed would have these same features except it would have five instead of six columns and would be 40 feet wide compared to

the 60 foot wide original house. The central 20-foot-wide entry hall and ballroom of the original house would be shared between the two families and not duplicated in the house being built.

Hiram had ridden from the house with the slave crew responsible for the pine woods across the river to watch them peer up at the trees, which were 60 feet high, to select the straightest ones for the floor and wall timbers of the new house. He had watched as the pine trees were cut down, sawed into 20 and 30 foot lengths, and trimmed into rectangular boards, each a foot wide and a foot high, by a radial saw powered by a mule team. The 20-foot-long timbers were laid side by side across the foundation stones to form the sub-floor. Then the 30-foot-long timbers were hoisted up to serve as the vertical members of the house frame.

Hiram's sense of the whole process was that it was, indeed, an example of the idyllic community of owners and workers that he had convinced himself existed in the small world into which he had been born. Whites and blacks were there together in the bright sunlight, mingling happily in the building activity, which had been a festive affair. Jokes and kindly remarks had passed between the white and black men in what had seemed, through his boy-filtered view, to be a model of accord, as timbers and stones were put into place through the common application of straining muscles. The white and black women had mixed freely, also, preparing food for the long tables. Along the edge of the scene, white and black children had played amiably together.

Soon, though, at about age 14, Hiram had awakened to the dark side of slavery he had not witnessed on his own plantation. This had started with an incident involving his father Caleb and the family slaves that had made a great impression on Hiram. When a newly married slave couple were sold from the Stone plantation, and then sold again, separately, they had both escaped in an effort to stay together. Pursued by dogs, they both had separately made it back to the Stone plantation, hungry and bitten up by bugs. Caleb Stone had taken them back and had paid twice what he had sold them for to repair relations with the other planters.

"You can stay here now as long as you want," the elder Stone had told the returned slaves.

Another incident had made a greater impression on Hiram. On an excursion to the town center, he had witnessed a slave being punished for theft. First the man had been beaten with a flat board with quarter-size holes that caused welts, then he had been lashed

with a leather whip to cut across the welts and make them bleed. Even so, the man had not begged to be let off and had not cried out in pain.

After Hiram had beheld this event, an image had formed in his mind of a stain of sweat and blood falling upon the world that previously he had imagined as unassailable.

Emily Derr had visited the plantation at this time for a birthday celebration for Hiram. She and other guests had been with Hiram when the whipping occurred; thereby she had become part of his awakening, also.

“You are in a place to make a difference. You ought to care, Hiram!” she had told him, holding both of his hands and shaking them for emphasis.

Although Hiram had been with Emily on several occasions, and had always liked her and paid attention to what she said, this had been his and her first prolonged meeting of eyes.

Hiram had been amazed, when he had looked at her, at how her pretty face had seemed to glow from within with health and radiant energy. Her dark girlish eyes, welling over with goodness, earnestness, and innocent wisdom, had seared a presence in him that he wanted to be worthy of.

This intervention of Emily Derr, her continued interest in him, and her faith in his desire to establish a just situation, eventually, combined with the other incident revealing to Hiram his father’s well-intentioned moral complexity, had started the process, already described, through which Hiram in his further young manhood had harbored plans of being someday the one who would turn the page on slavery through exchanging it with a pay-for-work system,—the plans he had never actually espoused and had never put into practice, only to be overtaken by the secession and war.

## **65. Hiram offers Turner his friendship amidst concerns of impending chaos**

There was an additional concern related to Hiram Stone’s longstanding struggle to come to terms with his own part in his family’s history of being slaveowners, and this was to seek an understanding with the educated slave who had been like a brother to him growing up. Hiram had decided to ask Turner Ross to be his friend, a matter that he had contemplated using these exact words in his mind.

These words were significant to Hiram because he been brought up thinking that a true friendship was impossible between a white man and a black man. Also, owing to his deep understanding of Turner's mentality, Hiram knew that the slave would understand the words in the same way.

The time best for broaching the subject of friendship, Hiram felt, would be on January 7, the Feast of the Epiphany, when the slaves, by an old tradition on the Stone plantation, held a musical service in the slave camp church attended by all members of the owner family.

Aware that the old way was passing, Hiram took careful note of the scene of the slave camp as he, his mother, his aunt, and his cousins Louisa and Jessica, walked to the camp led by five men from the camp, including Turner, who accompanied them through the woods to the event. Candles had been set alongside the path, for about a half mile, to the church. The little church itself was decorated with pine branches, holly leaves, red and green ribbons, and flickering candles. Some of the beautiful dark children were dressed as angels, shepherds, and as Joseph and Mary. Then, with the Stone family members seated in a place of honor, the plaintive, elaborately harmonized chorus sang the traditional tunes as the deep-voiced minister, dressed in a white and purple robe, expressed the meaning of the event while three boys dressed as wise men came forward with nine children arranged into three brown blanket camels.

Later, Hiram and Turner sat alone in a corner pew of the church speaking.

"Turner, I have done you an injustice, I know," Hiram began. "I should have pressed for you to have your freedom. I should have pressed for you to be allowed to be recognized for your intellectual expressions. But, most of all, Turner, I should have asked you for your friendship. I have never done that, and now, I can understand how you would see in it nothing but hypocrisy, for I only speak of this when our old order is crumbling. Yes, I can see as well as you that it will crumble, though I say this in utter confidence, and would never say it to anyone else, for it would be taken as giving in to defeat and discouragement."

To this, the slave replied: "Master Stone, I shall be honored to be your friend."

Moved by the simplicity of this reply and by the absence in it of any indignation or reproach, Hiram reached forward his hand. "So shall we be, Turner," he declared, looking into the dark face

with a sense of kinship he had never shown before, with respect to him, though he and Turner had always been close in their own way.

“And, Turner, I request for you to call me by my first name. I know it is an odd request. We have always been so formal with one another. It would be a pleasure for me if you would do this. Indeed, it would be a great honor.”

“Yes, Hiram, I shall,” the slave answered in his sincere, sober manner.—Never, on any occasion, would he allow his personal dignity to be compromised by levity or self-deprecation.—“We were like brothers, you and I, growing up, and your respect for me and your interest in my thoughts were a source of encouragement for me always.”

They stood for a moment in silence, beside a wood-plank shed where as boys they had practiced with bows and arrows, contesting on who could best direct his arrow to a target nailed on a tree that still bore the marks left by the arrowheads.

“Shall we walk, Turner?” said Hiram. “Let us walk to some of our old places together.”

They walked further down the path to a pool of quiet water, created by a loop of the river and bypassed by the main current, where they had fished together as boys. In this place, also, they had engaged in long philosophical discussions that Turner had taken part in with a great energy in his ambition to prove himself an intellectual equal with his playmate and master. Hiram had taken note of this, and had never been offended by it, as he had come to love Turner so much that he had wanted him to succeed in his quest for equality.

“Hiram, I have come to the conclusion lately that after the war many of these people I came up with will leave Powhatan,” Turner mused as they looked out. “I have heard them talking. It is not that they feel any antipathy toward you or anyone here, but they feel that, if offered freedom, they must seize it. They must seize it to show their own worth as people.”

“Yes, of course. I think this is how I would feel myself in such circumstances,” Hiram answered. “I would strike out.”

“In contemplating this,” Turner continued, “I have realized that, wherever they go, I must go with them, because increasingly they see me as their leader, and because the Lord has given me a breadth of understanding in excess of what they have been given. It is my obligation to accept this leadership.”

“Yes,” said Hiram.

“I must be their advocate,” Turner declared, nodding as if at

this very moment accepting this leadership that he knew would be extended to him.

“Yes, I can see that,” Hiram remarked. “I greatly respect you, Terner, for taking this upon yourself.”

They were quiet for several minutes as they continued along the river path, and then Hiram proceeded to express the further matter that he knew they were both thinking about and that he knew Terner, for the moment, at least, would not himself directly express.

“Terner, my own present predicament is this,” Hiram went on. “I feel I must explain it to you. I want you to know. The truth is, I hardly know at the present time, with so much in flux, how we will make financial arrangements after the war is over, assuming it will end with the end of slavery, as you and I, being forthright at this moment, can both foresee. As you know from your accounting duties, we have had few liquid assets in the war years due to the paralysis and dire state of our general economy. To obtain revenue from the crops and turpentine orchard in the future would require the labor of your people, which will no longer be available. Much of our remaining wealth is tied up in the big houses and buildings, which cannot be readily sold, and in the cash value of you slaves, which will presumably be lost.”

The slave listened to this intently, to hear Hiram’s sense of it, but he did not need to learn new details of the financial makeup of the plantation as he had kept account of it in every detail since before the war.

“I tell you all this,” Hiram went on, “because I feel that in justice I must in some way help you and the others with financial assistance when you leave. I want to do this and will seek to help you. At the same time, I must fend for myself and my own family. If I fail to do this, my family will simply go down in ruin. I owe it to my mother, my aunt, and to Louisa and her sister to provide a basis for a stable future for them to the extent I can.”

“I know this,” Terner declared with his typical restraint and empathy, despite how, in this case, the circumstances being explained affected in great extent his own future and the future of his own people. He perceived that the explanation Hiram was putting forth could have easily been attacked with a logical argument such as he and Hiram since their boyhood together had both aspired to employ. But Terner did not put forth that argument. Instead, he said gently, “Please understand, though, Hiram, I do not regard our friendship as dependent on such arrangements. I trust that you will do what is just as you see it. I

will not be another force pressing upon you at this time.”

Soon after this, the two men shook hands and the black man headed back to his cabin in the slave camp. Hiram turned and returned up the familiar path to the big house.

That evening, by the tall tree, as the candles were lighted a last time, the conversation among the Stone family members (with Turner not present) shifted to the “marauders,” as they were being called, who had taken advantage of the confusion of “the Burning” to sweep down upon untended farms in the Shenandoah Valley.

“Every breakdown of order brings out these marauders from somewhere, I’ve heard,” Hiram declared.

“They are a particular band, or group, of some kind, do you think?” Anne Stone inquired.

“No, I don’t think so, Mother. They are a type of people, rather, —desperate, cowardly people who took up with neither side. They never presented to fight the war, or they are deserters. They have hidden away in places like the middle mountain in the Great Valley, or further west in West Virginia.

“There maybe is no cause for concern, at least for the time being. These marauders strike out from their hideouts and retire back to them. I would not expect them to travel down here so close to Richmond. If our army gives way, though, and our government falls, there may be a time of disorganization, of nearness to chaos, when others attempt this. Later, let us discuss what we could do in such a situation.”

As he said this, Hiram felt overwhelmed by the new reality fast descending upon him, with the old sources of wealth for his family giving way and new obligations looming. These “marauders” seemed like harbingers of a new world in which everyone would be contesting for scraps as the old world crumbled.

## **66. Elon Sievers organizes a secret society “to act when needed”**

Elon Sievers, sheriff of Powhatan County, although white by color of skin, had not shared in the elitist world of the white planters whom, as a young man, he had observed from a distance. Neither had this officer of the law arrived at his current position with any compassion for black people, despite having seen them in conditions of servitude and as victims of violence, or, in the case of some of the black women, as victims of sexual abuse. Sievers

was disengaged in sympathy both from the white elite who held social and political power and from the black underclass who served them but not him.

For whom then did Sheriff Sievert feel regard? Based on his shows of concern and level of ease with members of the public, it was clear that he thought of himself as part of the white people of Powhatan county who were neither rich nor poor, people such as the non-plantation-based carpenters and drivers of wagons who did most of the manual work done outside plantations. His father, at this time deceased, had been a blacksmith with his own shop located in the same area, just outside the town of Powhatan where stood the small, tidy house that Elon had lived in in his late teens. In the same neighborhood, nearby, was the beige, pine-plank house where Elon presently lived alone; his wife had died in childbirth just before the war, and the child, a girl, strangled by the umbilical cord, had died soon later. Elon had not remarried; he showed no interest in women, even for those who showed an interest in him.

Elon Sievers had not lived all of his life in Powhatan. As a child, up to the age of 15, he had lived in Newport News, Virginia, on the Atlantic coast, where his father had worked in the ship yards, and there he had come into contact with blacks much different than those he had later seen in Powhatan. Some of these blacks were huge, insolent men who spoke back to white people. In some cases, they had acquired education and spoke in a refined manner that he was not capable of himself and that his own family did not speak in. At times, too, he had heard of black men having sex with white women. They were reputed to have gargantuan sex organs, and, once, late at night, in a dark area of the city, he had seen one such encounter, where an immense, muscular black man was bent over a white woman, alternately cooing to her and speaking in a rough manner, fondling her and slapping and choking her, while she exhorted him to be rougher. This was at a time when, as a pubescent teen, he had been in a stage of romanticizing and elevating sex and of idolizing girls his own age that he had known only from a distance. Her obeisance to him, and how she seemed to revel in being humiliated by him, filled him with a fury such as he had never known before.

With this attitude toward blacks, Elon Sievers had moved with his family to Powhatan, glad to see that most of the blacks in his new locale were kept on plantations and held in line through whippings and other forms of corporal punishment. By this time, he had developed a conviction that a vigilant enforcement of the

proper order was required in society overall. The people he admired were law officers who enforced order with guns. After talking often to the local sheriff, Elon was offered a position as a deputy, at age 21. He accepted, resolved that, if he had his way, no blacks would break out in Powhatan to become menaces of the kind he had seen in Newport News.

At this time, at age 25,—this was five years before the war began, when he had just gotten married,—he came upon a black man and white woman in a secluded area of the sort that he often passed through in his work, following routes ordinary people never used. The interaction between them was similar to what he had seen as a boy in Newport News. Filled with rage, he shot the black man in the groin and then in the head, and then, alarmed by the woman's screaming, he swung at her with the gun still in his hand, intending just to knock her out, but when she fell like a rock and did not stir, he knew he had killed her. He found a shovel in an abandoned shed that he knew of from his frequent passings by, and buried his victims in separate graves in dense woods, covering the ground with leaves, and brushing away his footprints as he left the scene.

He had thought, then, that it would not be long before his misdeed was discovered. But all he had heard, a few months later, was that a slave called Big Jud had run off and could not be found. There were no reports of a white woman being missing, and he had observed, as he buried her, that her freckled face was that of a mere teen and her clothes threadbare and of poor quality. Maybe she had escaped from someone else. He had never heard the least word about her.

Following this incident, Elon had lived with this secret festering in his mind, never suspected for the crime he had committed, which he did not regret in the least in the case of the black man, but which he regretted greatly with respect to the unmissed girl. When alone sometimes, he recalled her freckles and her red eyebrows, the color of red cedar bark. His wife became pregnant, bore his and her child to full term, and died with the child in her womb, never knowing of this act committed by her husband.

Let it not be thought, though, that Elon Sievers had been without tenderness toward his wife. No, to the contrary, he had treated her with the utmost sweetness. It was this unbroken devotion to his wife that had prevented him ever from starting new relationships with women. Neither had Elon been without empathy for other white people of the kind he had grown up with. Often he

stopped to lend a hand to someone needing help in a manual task such as carrying a heavy object. When he came upon a wagon stuck in mud, if that wagon was being driven by his own kind of people, he bent his shoulder into the wagon or hitched up his horse to help pull it out.

For the other group of white people of the area, however, the genteel people of the plantations, Elon did not feel such kinship; especially, this had been true when, as an infantry soldier in the war, doing service expected of him as a man familiar with guns, he had come into closer contact with the planter class. In this situation, he had observed that these self-important men, presumably his brothers in combat, had privileged positions as commanders,—as usually they were,—in addition to better clothes and food, good liquor, better tents, and less exposure to death (though some of them did die, but not as many, proportionately). This had added a new resentment to his increasingly bitter inner thoughts, and this bitterness he had carried with him back from the war. As a wounded veteran, unable to continue as a soldier, he had been selected again as a law officer, this time as a full sheriff.

“Chaos is coming, if you ask me,” Elon told a friend at this time, one of a group of likewise bitter men that he had begun to associate with at a local bar and in places like a mechanics’ shop where they could vent their opinions without being heard. “Armageddon. The Yankees are going to win this war. Plantations are going to be broke up. I heard some want the land given out to niggers.”

“Over my dead body,” the friend replied. He was employed as a “patroller,” riding through the rural areas at night in search of blacks who were moving from place to place without the required passes. Those that were found were taken to a jail in town where they were kept until reclaimed by their masters. Anyone offering any show of insolence was whipped.

“Jimmy, in all seriousness, just between you and me,” Sievers continued, “there will be a time for people like us to act. There will be a time when we should take some of what is falling apart, and keep the niggers scared.”

This conversation was the start of what would become a secret society called the “Brothers of the Old South.” Sievers was chosen as the head of it and the plan agreed upon by the men of this society was that, if the Union moved to seize the plantations, they would move first to take by force as much as they could, not of land, but of any money or property that could be carried off. Also, if the local blacks sought to create discord or mate with

white women, then some black men would be selected as examples, and dealt with in a manner that would prevent the members of the society from becoming known.

“We have to keep in mind what happened in Nat Turner’s rebellion,” Sievers said in one of the meetings. “The niggers got hold of guns. They went around killing white people and getting other niggers to join up with them.”

“It all started with the printings, I heard,” said the other man, ‘Jimmy,’ the patroller that Sievers had recruited at the beginning. “The niggers got to where they could read and write, then they were writing about how to get in control, and how to kill the white people.”

“Learning for them is another one of our enemies” Sievers went on, “as much as a nigger with a gun. If they act smart and start writing and talking up in public places, that’s the beginning of the end.”

Usually, when he proclaimed his causes for alarm, Elon had no one in particular in mind, but this time he did have someone in mind, the educated slave at the Stone plantation. He had been brooding upon this since seeing Turner Ross exchanging notes with the other impressed slaves at the Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond.

## **67. Lincoln promotes the 13th amendment and contemplates full racial equality**

“You and I were old Whigs, Jim. Both of us were followers of that great statesman, Henry Clay. And I tell you, Jim, I never had an opinion upon the subject of slavery that I did not get from Henry Clay.”

So said President Abraham Lincoln on Tuesday, January 9, 1865, seated at his desk in “the president’s room,” as it was called, in the United States Capitol. Across from him was Rep. James Rollins of the 9th Congressional District of Missouri, a Constitutional Unionist who, like Lincoln, had been a member before the war of the Whig Party.

“Yes, sir, I know Henry meant a great deal to you,” Rollins replied, “as he did to me also.”

Rollins had a grizzly beard reminding of the abolitionist John Brown, but Rollins had been no abolitionist; to the contrary, he had once owned slaves. In addition, Rollins had a purist perspective regarding the Constitution that Lincoln was familiar

with from past interactions.

“And I know, Jim,” continued Lincoln, leaning forward in a kindly gesture, “you have taken the position in Congress that the Emancipation Proclamation, since based on military necessity, will become legally void once the war is over.”

“Yes, that I have, since shouldn’t the law be our basis if we are going to turn so much asunder?”

“I believe that as well, Jim. Then consider this, can we go back from where we are now? Un-liberate the freed slaves? Or take some vote on them that will be subject to the vicissitudes of future votes of Congress? Locking this in the Constitution, by your own reasoning, is the only measure that will hold, and the only one that will give the nation stability after the war.”

For several days, the president had been making such pleas to congressmen identified to him by the House leadership. The object was to get the 13th Amendment passed in the current lame duck session of the 38th Congress, convened on December 6 and in session until January 31. Those being targeted were either War Democrats or members of the Constitutional Union faction who had voted against the amendment the previous summer, when the amendment had passed in the Senate but had narrowly failed in the House. The strategy being employed was that which Lincoln had contemplated in the evening after his election, as earlier described; all the representatives that he was contacting were from districts he had carried in the election just completed, with the argument being put forth to them that the amendment was bound to be passed anyhow by the next session of Congress, why not go down on record as supporting it to register a position obviously in keeping with their constituencies?

Coming out later in the rotunda chamber of the Capitol, Lincoln saw limping toward him a large, distinguished looking man with a dark mane of jaggedly cut black hair, a broad, resolute face, and raw, bony features of a type common on the Frontier. This man was Rep. Thaddeus Stevens of the 9th Congressional District of Pennsylvania, House leader of the Radical faction of the Republican Party, whose limping was due to a right club foot that had to be lifted up stiffly on each step.

“I believe I have some tentative commitments,” Lincoln replied to the congressman’s inquiry.

“It will go down to the wire, I think,” Stevens replied.

Later this same day, just after dark, Lincoln waited in his carriage for his secretary John Hay to fetch a briefcase forgotten inside the Capitol. While thus idle, and unnoticed by most of the

people around him, the president observed an interesting tableau of Washington City life such as he had lately not been able to observe as much as before becoming somewhat isolated by his compelling duties in the White House. The tableau was composed of a group of serious, dignified women whom he recognized as abolitionists. Among them was Susan Anthony, conspicuous by the earnest set of her clean facial features and her dark hair parted equally to both sides and pulled back into a bun positioned low on the back of her head behind her neck.

The women were holding signs, some of which said, "NOW IS THE TIME" and "VOTE FOR JUSTICE."

Lincoln, as he watched this tableau, recalled a remark Anthony had made in a speech in opposition to his own attempts, a few years before, to establish a program for freed slaves to ship them to colonies in Africa: "Let us open to the colored man all our schools... Let us admit him into all our shops, stores, offices,... and extend to him all the rights of citizenship."

Off to the side of Susan Anthony, Lincoln observed another curious sight, a younger, quite pretty woman with dark hair and a refined appearance, that he thought he knew from somewhere, though from where he wasn't sure.

Next Lincoln saw limping into the midst of all this, from a street-level door in the Capitol, the jagged-haired, craggy-faced Stevens, who, after hobbling in front of the demonstrators all the way across the courtyard, entered a carriage parked just in front of Lincoln's carriage, at an angle permitting the leather interior of the carriage to be seen when the door swung open. Seated there was a dark-skinned woman, with dark hair parted like that of Susan Anthony. She extended her hand to him and smiled.

"You know, Mother, I was watching Congressman Stevens departing from the Capitol today," Lincoln observed later to his wife, "he just happened to come out to meet his own carriage as I was sitting in mine, and I saw there waiting, inside his carriage, the woman called his household manager who everyone knows is in fact his common law wife. And she is a colored woman, not a whole Negro, but a quarter blood, a quadroon, as it is called; and the look between them, a look of obvious affection and regard, made a great impression upon me."

"How so, Mr. Lincoln?"

"Because this is the new way, the future toward which we are headed, Mary, not just that the Negroes will be freed, not just that they may be freed from fear of further slavery by our 13th amendment soon to be, Lord willing, passed in our Congress;—no,

much more; what Stevens desires, I think, and feels wholly comfortable with himself, is that there be no distinction between people based on color, even in the most intimate relationships.”

“And you recoil against this?” said Mary.

“Yes, to be honest, on some level, I must admit I still do, though my arguments against it have gotten less convincing in my own mind. And you?”

“Do I recoil? Yes, truth be told, I do. It is something rooted deep in me, and even now, that white and colored people should commingle seems against the Bible somehow.”

“So, too, I have heard,” the president answered, “and, as I recall, I claimed so myself in my debate against Douglas, but now, I understand that such a claim can only be brought out by tortured reasoning. What kind of God would make a distinction?”

“Yes, and what would Sumner say? He would impugn us both as behind the times.”

She was referring, her husband knew, to Charles Sumner, the abolitionist senator from Massachusetts, who was a frequent guest at the White House and Mary’s close friend.

“We have done our best in it, Mother,” Lincoln said, “I as president and you as First Lady. With the Lord’s help, we have borne our mantles of leadership well, but the Negro people have borne their own burden well, also, and lately on the battlefield. It seems to me now they are gaining what their excellence of character has brought to them.”

“Let us hope so.”

“Still, though, the question arises,” the president went on, “and I say this to you, Mother, in utmost confidence, is the result of this, the child of mixed blood, a better result than the child of pure blood, or are the qualities of the stronger diluted somehow?”

“Well, you know, Mr. Lincoln, this is done sometimes with trees, I have seen it done through grafting, and the object is to create a better quality tree.”

“But aren’t some also of lesser quality?”

“Yes.”

“It is something that, if it is done, must be done carefully, in other words, and yet has not this occurred all through history? The Saxons and the Normans, the Normans and the French, there are many examples.”

“Yes.”

“I must admit, in seeing whites and coloreds together now on an equal basis, as I sometimes do, I no longer recoil against it. I feel a pride in it. And, on an intellectual level, I perceive this is a

further step toward which we will eventually go. We must not resist it, Mother, we must accept it.”

“Yes.”

“We must welcome it.”

As he stood at the window then, Lincoln thought again of the refined-looking, dark-haired young woman he had observed at the Capitol, and he realized who she was.

“Mother, remember the girl from Harper’s Ferry, the teacher, that you sent books to, for the contraband camp?”

“Yes, I do. Emily Derr,” Mary responded with a show of obvious interest. “She will make a difference!”

“I saw her at the Capitol with a sign.”

“Is that so? Now she is the type that would do something like that!” Mary said.

A week later, Lincoln read that James Rollins had spoken in the House supporting the 13th amendment, saying in part: “If we can march safely through the dark and dreary wilderness of rebellion and civil war, and if we can come out of it with the American Union as formed by Washington and his compatriots, if we can come out of it with our free and matchless Constitution maintained substantially in all its parts, ... and further boast that we have caused the sun of freedom to shine on an additional four million of human beings, where is the man who feels a just pride of country and who cannot bring himself up to the standard of realizing the great influence which the American Republic ... shall exert on downtrodden humanity in every land?”

On January 31, 1865, the House held another vote. With black observers allowed into the House gallery for the first time, the amendment passed by a vote of 119 to 56, narrowly reaching the required two-thirds majority.

## **68. Sherman distributes land to Carolinian slaves liberated by his march**

Coincident with the events in Washington just described, related to the efforts of the 38th Congress to forever end slavery in the United States through a Constitutional amendment, Maj. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman underwent a process of his own related to the de facto ending of slavery taking place as a result of the advance of his armies into areas previously under control of the secessionist states. In this same timeframe, also, Sherman was in contact with his general-in-chief, Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant,

regarding the next move of Sherman's forces, then bivouacked in Savannah.

The advance from Atlanta of Sherman's Military Division of the Mississippi,—begun in Decatur, Georgia, on Wednesday, November 9, 1864,—had culminated in Savannah on December 15, after a march of more than 200 miles.

Sherman had barely settled in, in the sumptuous mansion offered to him as an official residence by the wary residents of Savannah, when the issue of proper treatment of the freed slaves was raised in a letter from Maj. Gen. Henry Halleck, the Army Chief of Staff.

In part, the letter said: "While almost everyone is praising your great march through Georgia, and the capture of Savannah, there is a certain class having now great influence with the president, . . . who are decidedly disposed to make a point against you . . . They say that you have manifested an almost criminal dislike to the Negro, and that you are not willing to carry out the wishes of the government in regard to him, but repulse him with contempt!"

Further down in the letter, Halleck continued: "Some here think . . . it is of the greatest importance to open outlets by which . . . the slaves can escape into our lines, and they say that the route you have passed over should be made the route of escape, and Savannah the great place of refuge. These, I know, are the views of some of the leading men in the Administration, and they now express dissatisfaction that you did not carry them out in your great raid.

"Now that you are in possession of Savannah, and there can be no further fears about supplies, would it not be possible for you to reopen these avenues of escape for the Negroes, without interfering with your military operations? Could not such escaped slaves find at least a partial supply of food in the rice fields about Savannah, and cotton plantations on the coast? I merely throw out these suggestions."

To this, Sherman responded with his typical, complex self-assessment. He had believed in abolition in his youth when the idea had been abstract, but later, as an adult, he had become more skeptical as a result of experiences with real blacks. Like many, however, he had been dragged along into the new relation of the races brought about by the war, and he had had his moments of being affected by a dawning sense of his prominent role in the seemingly inexorable procession of his peers into this new equalitarian era

In addition, the general had witnessed a remarkable event while marching from Decatur. Of their own accord, the men had begun singing a rendition of "Brown's Body." Hundreds of men had joined in. Seldom had Sherman been so affected by an event, except as a boy in the great moments of his childhood.

Three weeks later, a more extensive inquiry on the freed slaves began with the visit to Savannah of Edwin Stanton.

The stern-faced, long-bearded U.S. Secretary of War began his visit in a congenial manner, walking with Sherman to visit a Union camp where the men had improved their tents with scavenged lumber and bricks. The sight brought a brief show of amusement, but soon the secretary returned to the no-nonsense mentality for which he was known.

"General," Stanton said, "there are many on our side who supported the war to liberate the slaves. Now these same people are watching closely."

This one sentence, delivered as the two men dined in the high-ceiling dining room in the general's residence, was enough of a hint of what he knew about Washington for Sherman to extend the secretary's remark to the infighting that he despised.

"Whatever concerns you have, or are representing, I will respond to if I can," he replied, "or, lacking that, I will place at your disposal any resources you need to obtain the answer yourself."

Over glasses of wine,—brought in, ironically, by an African-American butler,—the men then bent to the task.

Stanton's first expressed concern was whether a claim made in the newspapers was true, that Maj. Gen. Jeff Davis, commander of the XIV Corps, assigned to the newly coined Army of Georgia, had pulled up a pontoon bridge prematurely, somewhere in eastern Georgia, leaving behind a group of former slaves who were trying to follow the Union troops eastward. Some of them, the press had claimed, had drowned in a frantic attempt to swim across the stream that the pontoon bridge had been removed from.

"Secretary," Sherman said, "I think maybe you are unaware of what the situation was in this incident. I have inquired about it. We had behind our columns a long train of hundreds of Negroes, not in a formation of any kind, but in a loose bunch, hard even to address as a single entity. As we moved forward between the swollen streams of the season, we needed to keep moving forward our pontoons. And, sometimes, as we moved forward, some of those trailing would be left behind. It was never done from meanness or disregard, but to complete our march within our

agreed upon timeframe.”

“Yes, I understand,” Stanton remarked, “but how the press presents this, General, is that the very purpose for which we are fighting the war is thereby disregarded.”

“Secretary, here is what I think, really,” Sherman returned, “a false conclusion is sometimes drawn by idealizing these people as is the case in Washington sometimes. There was an element of these Negroes always bickering and complaining. Some of the women were trying to take up with our soldiers. Some of them were so intent on saving themselves, they would leave behind their own children. Our officers are trained in military discipline and warfare; they are not prepared to control social conditions that they have never before experienced.”

This latter fact drew a troubled expression to the bare upper lip and cheeks of Stanton’s oddly bearded face. He seemed taken aback.

“Well, what say of this?” he offered, after a pause. “Let us do something that will answer some of the issues, at least, for those looking on. Let us select a group of black ministers,—the finest, most intelligent we can find,—and let us submit to them to a list of questions,—substantial questions,— regarding their loyalties and expectations. Then, let these preachers select a spokesman, who will meet with us to present their answers.”

“Secretary Stanton, we will start at once to set into place this process,” Sherman replied.

Twenty preachers, mostly Methodist and Baptist by congregation, were selected the next day and invited for an afternoon of answering questions.

The questions submitted to them were, indeed, substantial, having to do with their understanding of slavery, their loyalty to their old masters, their willingness to fight for the Confederacy if asked, and their expectations of what they would do with their new freedom.

Sherman was impressed with the dignity of the delegated spokesman, a short, compact, and muscular man with troubled eyes, lacking in pretense, and humble in demeanor despite his obvious intelligence. The spokesman emphasized that he desired a situation in which he and his people would be given a fair chance to live independently and care for themselves and their families.

In answer to the question, “in what manner you would rather live —scattered among the whites, or in colonies by yourselves?” this man said, “I would prefer to live by ourselves, for there is a prejudice against us in the South that will take years

to get over; but I do not know that I can answer for my brethren.”

In answer to the question, “what is the feeling of the colored people toward General Sherman, and how far do they regard his sentiments and actions as friendly to their rights and interests, or otherwise?” the man responded, “We looked upon General Sherman, prior to his arrival, as a man, in the providence of God, specially set apart to accomplish this work, and we unanimously felt inexpressible gratitude to him, looking upon him as a man who should be honored for the faithful performance of his duty... We have confidence in General Sherman, and think what concerns us could not be in better hands. This is our opinion now, from the short acquaintance and intercourse we have had.”

The next day, January 16, 1865, Sherman issued a special field order (No. 151), setting aside a broad area along the coast consisting of “the islands from Charleston south, the abandoned rice fields along the rivers for thirty miles back from the sea, and the country bordering the St. John’s River, Florida.” In this area, the order proclaimed, the “Negroes now made free by the acts of war and the proclamation of the president of the United States” could take up residence, and there no white person whatever, unless military officers and soldiers detailed for duty, (would) be permitted to reside.”

With this order issued, Sherman threw it off with relief at leaving behind the political infighting that he had been so forcibly involved in. He had matters more appropriate, he acknowledged to himself, with what he properly was: a soldier, not a legislator or reformer.

Earlier in his Savannah stay, Sherman had received an order from Grant to prepare his troops for transfer by ship to join the armies on the James Peninsula. In response, he had proposed an alternative plan, promptly accepted. Instead of traveling by sea, he would march with his armies through the Carolinas as he had marched through Georgia, destroying everything that could provide logistical support for any Confederate armies that still remained.

Sherman was engaged now in preparing for this campaign, and astounded at times by the inner fury and righteousness he felt in doing this as a form of punishment for the Carolinian society that in the early days of the Confederacy had sounded the clarion call of the rebellion and had coaxed other states into line against the Union.

**69. Grant considers what is still outside of his national push**

Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, throughout the vicissitudes of the military initiatives under his command that had transpired in the ten months since he had been named commander-in-chief of the Union forces, had never lost contact, mentally, with his dynamic sense of the national push closing its arrowlike pincers upon the forces of the Confederacy.

By this time, also, Grant had perfected the intricate process by which the enormous industrial capacity of the North had been brought to bear upon the ongoing process of the war, following behind the arrows of troop movement with the arrows of supply. This capacity, ever chunking away in the background like a great machine, was sending toward him continuously all that his armies required to persist in the national push unabated by shortages of any kind.

Food, clothing, and medicine were in the forefront of this supply chain. Then came weapons to replace any destroyed in battle and ammunition to replace any spent. From the twentyfold advantage of the North in iron ore supply and conversion came railroad engines, cars, and rails; iron-wheeled caissons; telegraph wire, transmitters, and operator devices; iron-trellised sections of bridges; and wheel-borne rifled guns;—all doing their part to sustain the momentum of the ongoing assault.

Indeed, on a national map such as Grant from time to time peered at, the large composite arrows of military advance and supply had, by this time, assumed the real configuration that in the preceding months the assiduous commander had seen only in his mind.

The real arrows at the present time formed a three-pointed, claw-like pattern.

The first arrow, the longest, began in Chattanooga, where Grant had routed Gen. Braxton Bragg. It extended to the south from Chattanooga to Atlanta, where Maj. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman had defeated Gen. Joseph E. Johnston and Maj. Gen. John Bell Hood; and then angled to the southeast across the state of Georgia to Savannah and the Atlantic Ocean: a great arc of conquest.

The second arrow went south from Harper's Ferry up the Shenandoah Valley and back again in the loop of destruction called "the Burning," earlier described; this arrow showed the route traversed by Maj. Gen. Philip Henry Sheridan, who at his furthest advance had been just 120 miles from Richmond.

This second arrow, although on the map it appeared to be continuous, had started and stalled, as earlier described. Maj. Gen. Franz Sigel, assigned to march up the Shenandoah Valley to Lynchburg, had failed. After being defeated by the VMI schoolboys at New Market, he had withdrawn. Maj. Gen. George R. Crook, assigned, with his VIII Corps (aka the Army of West Virginia), at the other end of the Valley, to destroy the Virginia & Tennessee Railroad and then march north to join Sigel, had succeeded in destroying the tracks near Dublin in southwestern Virginia. But he, too, in that initial attempt, had failed. Lacking supplies, Crook had withdrawn.

After this shaky beginning, however, the second arrow in Grant's national plan, had been projected as Grant had originally planned, and by this time, in March of 1865, as Grant considered his mental map, that second arrow was present as if nothing had thwarted it.

As for the third arrow, projected by Grant himself (after relocating eastward from Chattanooga), it started at Washington, cutting north to south through eastern Virginia, while moving from Culpepper through the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, Yellow Tavern, Meadow Bridge, Wilson's Wharf, Santa Ana, Cold Harbor, and other locations immortalized by bloody battles. This arrow had brought Grant's combined armies, numbering more than 150,000 men, just 25 miles from Richmond, where Lt. Gen. Robert E. Lee still held out in a tenacious defense, skillfully employing his dwindling forces, which, by this time, consisted of less than 60,000 men.

The result of Grant's trans-continental, months-long pincer movement could be realized in a moment when contemplating the claw-like configuration of arrows just described: the Confederacy was under assault from within.

In addition, a fourth arrow could be conceived of as having extended around the secessionist states. Adm. David Dixon Porter, assigned to seize control of the Gulf ports of New Orleans and Mobile, had at last succeeded, just before the fall of Atlanta, in the previous October. The United States Navy had, indeed, completed its "anaconda" of the entire Confederacy. All the former entry ports for smugglers had been closed down.

Beyond the overall picture summarized by these four main arrows, however, there remained developments that needed still to be responded to.

Maj. Gen. Nathaniel P. Banks, commander of the Army of the Gulf, assigned to attack the Confederate Army of the Trans-

Mississippi under Lt. General Edmund Kirby Smith, and the District of Western Louisiana under Maj. Gen. Richard Taylor, both located by the Red River in Louisiana, had followed a loss at Mansfield and an unnecessary retreat at Pleasant Hill with an inglorious withdrawal plagued by arguments with fellow officers.

Significantly, also, a corridor under Southern control remained in the middle of the South, extending from Petersburg north through Richmond and then in a northwesterly direction, along the line of the Virginia Central Railroad, to Lynchburg, then further, in a southwesterly direction, down the Great Valley between the Blue Ridge and the Appalachian Mountains, along the line of the Virginia & Tennessee Railroad, to the area where the Army of Tennessee held out under the executor of the rash charges at Atlanta, Maj. Gen. John Bell Hood. There, two months before, the originally conceived pincer movement had not closed as planned. The actual dynamic that had come into play had been more like a barb on the pincer. The Army of the Cumberland, under Maj. Gen. George Henry Thomas, directed by Grant to advance upon the post-Atlanta Army of Tennessee, had not projected its arrow point to its assigned end point. With Grant waiting impatiently, Thomas, advancing in his sure but plodding manner, had at last moved forward against Hood near Franklin, Tennessee, 15 miles south of Nashville, and then Hood, with his opposite personality type, had reacted with yet another rash and bold frontal assault, a show of ill-conceived aplomb that had left him with 1,200 men dead on the battlefield and 3,500 incapacitated in field hospitals (according to Grant's account) compared to two dead and 105 wounded on the Union side. From that catastrophe, Hood had escaped again, this time across a rain-swollen river, destroying the bridge behind him. Two months later, he was not entirely defeated, but his army of once more than 50,000 had less than 15,000.

There was another remnant, also, of the once so formidable Confederate Army. In North Carolina, Gen. Joseph E. Johnston, Hood's predecessor in Atlanta, and by this time most senior of all Confederate officers, had resurfaced as leader of two combined departments, the Department of North Carolina and Southern Virginia, and the Department of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida (including eventually the units of the Army of Tennessee just mentioned).

In total, Johnston had, in his immediate area, about 30,000 men. Thousands more, however, in disparate locations, were under his tenuous control,—perhaps tens of thousands,—and this was no

commander to expose his soldiers in a whim of vanity. Moreover, Johnston's main force was only hundreds of miles from Lee's army in Virginia, and connected to it by the Richmond & Danville Railroad, which could be used to move troops in either direction to combine into a larger army.

In addition to this, completely outside of the dynamic of the pincers, ranger bands, loosely organized and traveling lightly and widely, with no geographical basis of command, hiding in wooded areas and springing out unexpectedly, like bolts of lightning, in rapid attacks, continued to plague rural communities in states like Missouri and Tennessee. There was no efficient way to deal with them, Grant had learned. A band of 10,000 men required a corps to track it down and surround it, or to keep it on the move, less able to attack.

Brig. Gen. John Hunt Morgan, commander of the 2nd Kentucky Cavalry Regiment, mortally wounded the previous fall, had led a stealthy force of this type. Throughout the middle years of the war, Morgan, a descendant of the Revolutionary War hero, Brig. Gen. Daniel Morgan, but an officer with no formal military training, had menaced the supply lines of the Union troops fighting further south. In a celebrated campaign memorialized as "Morgan's Raid," he had crossed the Ohio River and raided settlements and military targets all across southern Indiana and Ohio.

Morgan was no longer active, but comparable factions, including such well-known units as the rangers under Col. John S. Mosby in Virginia, and the Cavalry Corps of Lt. Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest in Tennessee, continued to demand the attention of the federal rear guard.

Grant was keenly aware, also, of the continued favoritism, as he saw it, of the Northern press to the Southern army.

"What you don't understand," he noted to one journalist in a rare moment of defensiveness, "the South is like an armed camp. They are fighting from where they live. They do not have a separate society still functioning, as we do in the Northern states."

"Some have said they do better with less because they believe more in their cause," the journalist replied, looking in Grant's face for a reaction that did not appear there.

"All the accounts I have heard is that that is not true, and I know from my own experience of the zeal of our soldiers, the belief in our objectives."

Grant did not say, though, at this time, what he had told General Thomas when he had traveled out to see him in Tennessee

just after the Battle of Franklin.

“I think, George, the morale of the Southern armies is declining greatly. We are seeing, every night, in Virginia, men crawling across from the rebel lines in the darkness, raising white flags.”

“What is the extent of it?” Thomas asked.

“In one night, George, we took in 232. That was the biggest night of it. All in all, on the average, looking across all of our armies, the rebels are bleeding close to a full regiment once a week.”

“It is a process that will only increase, don’t you think, as we gather in strength?” Thomas ventured.

“They see the end is near,” Grant replied. “They are brave men, but not so devoted as to give up their lives when they perceive their cause cannot prevail.”

## **70. Early watches as his remnant army is captured at Waynesboro**

Among the remnant armies that Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant had contemplated as lying outside the pincers of his national push was the battered Army of the Valley, still under the command of Lt. Gen. Jubal Early.

Early’s army at its peak had consisted of two infantry corps, a cavalry with four brigades, and an artillery division with three battalions, composing in total more than 14,000 men. In late February of 1865, Early’s army on hand, available for battle, consisted of just two infantry brigades and a single artillery battalion, less than 2,000 men in total. This army on hand was bivouacked near Fishersville, on the Virginia Central Railroad between Staunton and Waynesboro. Early was in his headquarters in Staunton with a local provost guard and a reserve company of boys under 18 years old under orders of the Conscript Bureau of the Confederate government.

What had happened to the Army of the Valley to reduce it to its shrunken size?

First, major encounters with the enemy had taken their toll as follows (in approximate numbers): 1,500 men had been killed or wounded in the invasion of Maryland, 4,000 more in the Battle of Winchester, and 3,000 at Fisher Hill, Tom’s Brook, and Cedar Creek, for a total of 8,500. Adjusted for return to service, that was half the original force.

Second, lack of forage for horses,—owing to the drought of the previous summer and the Union “Burning” of early fall,—had compelled Early, as winter neared, to send off horses to locales where hay could be obtained. He had sent one of his four brigades west into the counties of Pendleton, Highland, Bath, Alleghany, and Greenbrier. Two brigades had been returned to Richmond. The remaining brigade had been directed to go to their homes with their horses to sustain them. Some small units of cavalry had been sent into the lower valley to monitor activity south of the Union camp in Winchester.

Third, the horse-borne artillery of the Army of the Valley had undergone a similar reduction. One of the three battalions had been sent to southwestern Virginia. Many of the horses of the two battalions had been sent to disparate locations under care of men assigned to forage them until spring. Some of the artillery soldiers, lacking horses for guns, had been assigned to stationary batteries in Richmond. Carriage-mounted guns without horses had been sent to Lynchburg by railroad.

A fourth reason for the shrinkage of Early’s force was that several infantry brigades of the original Army of the Valley, much reduced by battles, as described, had been sent back to Richmond. The three units that had remained with Early were two brigades of “Wharton’s Division,” as it had been called throughout the war, under Brig. Gen. Gabriel C. Wharton, and “Nelson’s Battalion” under Col. William Nelson, with a few pieces of artillery.

After the Battle of Cedar Creek, Early had kept his forces close to his enemy to respond to any Union attempt to repair the Manassas Gap Railroad, giving the Yankees a link to Richmond. Early had dispatched cavalry brigades to force back enemy forays at the western edge of the main valley and in the Luray Valley between Massanutten and the Blue Ridge. A cavalry raid in Western Virginia had captured 800 men and direly needed supplies.

With the morale of his men seeming low, Early addressed them at their winter camp in Fishersville—to acknowledge them, he said, for what they had accomplished.

“Six months ago, when the Second Corps detached from Lee’s Army in Richmond and joined with Breckinridge’s Corps in Lynchburg,” Early began, “Hunter was advancing with a considerable force on that city, threatening General Lee’s communications with a serious danger. By a rapid movement, our force was thrown to Lynchburg just in time to arrest Hunter’s march, and he was driven back and forced to escape into the

mountains of western Virginia.

“Then came our march down the valley, in the execution of which few on either side believed we could succeed. But all were witness to the result: Maryland invaded; Washington threatened and thrown into frantic alarm; Grant compelled to detach two corps of infantry and two divisions of cavalry from Richmond; five or six thousand of the enemy captured; and the enemy deprived, for more than three months, of the use of the Baltimore & Ohio railroad and the Chesapeake & Ohio canal.

“Then came our third phase of operations, during which we confronted Sheridan. In this, we have faced an army three times our size, with a cavalry greater in number than our entire army. Yes, we lost at Winchester and Cedar Creek, but, note, with our operations of the fall completed, the enemy holds precisely the same portion of the valley which he held before the opening of the campaign in the spring, and his headquarters are at the same place, Winchester. But at the start of the campaign, he held it with a small force; now he is compelled to employ three corps of infantry and one of cavalry, and to guard the approaches to Washington, Maryland, and Pennsylvania.

“What can we do now? Is our part in this war completed? As some of you know, last month I traveled to Richmond and spoke to our great leader, General Lee. I want you to know that he expressed his satisfaction with what you have done against great odds. He told me this army can still do a valuable service. How? By continuing to do what we have done in the past, which is to hold our position by making ourselves seem large, though our forces, as you all know, are diminished.”

“We have no choice except to wait,” Early told his cousin, Louisa Stone, when she returned to the army from Powhatan at this time at the first sign of warmer weather. “They will try us to sense whether we are able to resist. Without cavalry and artillery, we can only withstand them by holding a line, and a long line is impossible.”

The frankness of the exchange showed the extent to which the commander had come to value and trust his cousin as both a lifelong family connection and a respected fellow soldier. She was like any young member of an extended family who grows into adulthood and who then is treated as such by other family members such as he. Only in the case of him and her, Early and his cousin shared their soldierly fortitude, and their idealism with respect to the war, in addition to their family background.

General Early admitted to himself, after conversing with

Louisa about the need for his soldiers to hold the line, that there was a new factor operating, in this late stage of the war, that he would mention to no one even her.

This factor was the same as the Union commander-in-chief, Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, as earlier described, had discussed in Franklin, Tennessee, with Maj. Gen. George Henry Thomas: the Confederate soldiers had begun to calculate whether their lives were worth what might be gained by losing them.

Then, on the morning of Tuesday, March 1, 1865, word came by way of the signal station on Massanutten that a division of Union cavalry was advancing on Staunton. There was no need to issue the details of a command. A simple acknowledgement was enough to set into motion the plan of defense that Early and his lieutenants had decided upon weeks before, which called for his army on hand to evacuate their winter camp and travel by rail ten miles east to Waynesboro at the entry to the wind gap that led through the mountains toward Richmond.

Early headed there himself after sending word to Maj. Gen. Lunsford Lomax, commander of the cavalry division that had been sent to forage in southwestern Virginia, to prepare to intercept the Union forces north of Lynchburg if they broke through the defenses at Waynesboro.

The site of Early's prepared defensive line at Waynesboro, was within a backward C curve of the South River, with the town and river behind the line, protected from the anticipated direction of approach of the enemy along the road from Staunton. The line extended from south to north for about a mile and a half within the full extent of the backward C, with Early's left flank adjacent to a wooded ravine that he thought would form an impenetrable barrier. His right flank was on the South River at the top of the backward C.

Early rode to the crest of a wooded ridge above his left flank, where he could see the advancing column of mounted, blue-shirted men in rows of four behind their battle flags.

His plan, thoroughly discussed with his commanders, was to hold the Union along his defensive line, looking as formidable as possible despite their thin ranks. Then, if the line held, but the Union appeared determined to attack again, he would withdraw his force at nightfall across the single road bridge and single pedestrian bridge behind the town into the mountains just beyond above the wind gap that led to Richmond.

With intense attention, with his face set resolutely, Early watched the enemy approach and open fire with their artillery on

his line, the puffs of smoke and debris spraying up where shells landed amidst them.

“They are holding,” he said to his adjutant. “I think we can hold.”

Just then, however, Union soldiers charged out with hurrahs from the wooded ravine on his left flank that Early had thought impassable. The flank began to buckle as the men withdrew to the center to escape the enfilade fire. At the same time, a third unit of the enemy suddenly appeared on the far side of the river to the north, moving in beyond the bridge assigned for retreat.

His men were surrounded, Early understood, and they had experience enough to perceive in a glance that their situation was hopeless. There was no resistance, just raised hands and white flags of surrender, as they were herded into a group with blue uniforms all around them.

General Early could see that nothing could be gained from remaining with his men to surrender with them. His instinct was to save himself to fight another day. With his cohort of staff officers, he rode through the woods around the battlefield and forded the river downstream into the wooded slope of the mountains.

## **71. Louisa sets up in Petersburg despite the specter of defeat**

Following the capture, at Waynesboro, Virginia, on Thursday, March 2, 1865, of her cousin Maj. Gen. Jubal Early's 2000-man remnant of the Confederate Army of the Valley, as just described, Louisa Stone and the only other nurse remaining with her, Marcia Loudon, despite being recognized as in service to that army, had been given leave to go wherever they wanted, though without their ambulance wagon. They had then gone to Powhatan, where they had enlisted the local citizens to furnish another wagon.

Actually, a Union brigade commander at Waynesboro had decided at first to hold Louisa and Marcia captive, not knowing how exactly that could have been done. But the next highest in command, the division commander, Maj. Gen. George Armstrong Custer, upon looking into Louisa's face, had been so impressed with the force of character evident in her green eyes, that he had declared: “Ma'am, whatever has brought you to your conviction, I cannot pretend to understand, but it is not in my province to deny it. I have no desire to deprive you of your freedom.”

Many people at Powhatan, including Louisa's mother and

aunt, had begged Louisa then, when she and Marcia had returned to Powhatan, to accept that their service was done, saying that many of the remaining Confederate soldiers were said to be deserting.

But Louisa would hear nothing of such negative talk.

“Our concern is not victory,” she replied to such entreaties. “Our concern is to save lives. As long as our men are fighting and being wounded, we will be beside them.”

In saying that she was not concerned with victory, Louisa knew, she was not admitting the full extent of her sympathies. For the truth was that, though she was not in any way political, she did care that the Confederacy would not be defeated. The war that was still going on, she believed, was a war between two different ways of life; and the difference between these two ways of life was far more comprehensive than simply in the existence of slavery in the South and its non-existence in most of the North (except here and there in the border states). The more important distinction, Louisa felt, was between, on the Southern side, a gracious, rural society in which people were kind to one another, and had time for one another, and made their own decisions; and, on the Northern side, a crass, commercial society in which powerful people sought to domineer others and in which decisions were made from the top down by the federal government, the same government that had invaded the country of her childhood. Louisa did think of the Confederacy as a separate country; as, likewise, all of her life she had thought of herself as first and foremost a Southerner and only then an American. Many of her thoughts on what was at stake in the war had never been formulated precisely in her non-political mind, but they were nonetheless a matter for her of great loyalty and emotion.

Louisa, by this time, though through no self-promotion, had become generally known and talked about, both by soldiers she had served beside and by those who had never seen her but who had heard about her beauty and selfless service. Her bravery had become the stuff of respectful stories. Marcia Loudon, by this time, had also earned the unanimous regard of the soldiers; but Louisa was more known because of her more visible advocacy of the idea that going close to the battle would save lives.

On occasion, when Louisa happened into a group of soldiers that she had never been with before, she would be recognized and pointed out because of her beauty and red hair.

“There you got Louisa Stone!” one soldier would say to the others, and they would stop to watch her passing by.

“Thank God for you, Louisa,” someone else would say, and a cheer would go up as she passed.

At Powhatan, for two days, Louisa considered the lovely setting in which she had grown up, with the two white, granite-walled houses side by side amidst the magnolia trees and bedded flowers. She visited with her mother Eliza and with her younger sister Jessica and her aunt Anne, laughing with them as if the war no longer existed. She sat in her room, looking out to the fields and, beyond them, the James River and the tall pines of her family’s turpentine orchard.

Louisa also walked along the path that led above the river to the slave camp and stopped another time at the overlook where she had stopped with Josiah Derr,—which seemed to have happened such a long time before,—and she thought once more of the argument she had had with Josiah that had led to her and his break in communications. She repeated in her mind the words of his letter that she could recite as fluently as if he were speaking them to her in person.

Ignoring the renewed pleas of her relatives, Louisa reunited with her faithful Marcia and together she and Marcia departed with their new wagon for Richmond.

They stopped at the Chimborazo Hospital to consult with Matron Phoebe Pember to secure her permission to go from there to Petersburg, where the long line of Confederate defensive trenches was under constant assault from the Union army under Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant.

For a moment there, as they waited for Matron Pember to meet with them, they stood in the open air entry area of the camp, which consisted of rows of identical 20x40 foot white tents. From here, they could see over the cliffs that bordered the camp to the war-damaged landscape and buildings several miles distant, near to where the armies were dug in facing one another.

Soon Matron Pember appeared, dressed in a long sleeved, floor length, dark blue cotton dress, over which was a white apron, as long as the dress, and secured at the neck. She was, at the time, 41 years old, with dark hair, parted in the middle and discretely pinned back. Her dark eyes, steady and dignified, showed the strain of her two years as administrator of a hospital housing thousands of wounded men.

“Louisa, you have been such a steady and prudent servant of the wounded,” Matron Pember said in a meeting she requested with Louisa alone, in the corner of a tent, next to the camp kitchen, that served as her office. “I have not the slightest doubt in your

capability, and in your judgement in any situation you choose. You have won and greatly deserve your independence. I am just amazed that you still are determined to save lives when so many are giving in.”

Later, with Marcia with them, the three women talked about supplies as they headed through one of the 20x40 foot tents (each of which was a single ward) to where Louisa and Marcia had left their wagon.

“As you have probably heard, ladies, there is a shortage of everything now,” the matron said. “There is no beef on the market. Not even for President Davis and the highest officers. A pair of chickens is 35 dollars. Butter and lard are 15 dollars a pound. The pigeons on the cliffs have disappeared.”

“And how about medicine?” Louisa inquired.

“We have only rum to give for pain. There is no aspirin. The blockade has stopped everything. But we will give you what we have.”

In the ward through which they were passing were many unoccupied beds.

“As you can see,” the matron said, “there have been rumors of the Union army taking over this hospital. Many of our patients have left.”

“Of their own accord?” Louisa asked.

“Some made arrangements to be carried off. Some got up and walked off whom I thought immobile.”

That same day, amidst the sound of shelling, over on the west somewhere of the Confederate defensive line, the two nurses parked their wagon amidst the protective, still standing walls of bomb-shattered buildings in the Petersburg downtown. They found an intact cellar under one building and moved their belongings into a protected corner under fallen timbers that had wound up parallel to the floor forming a reinforced roof with a dry area below.

That evening, after announcing themselves to the chief surgeon, who had a tent about a hundred yards away, Louisa and Marcia made a fire and, in the flickering light, Louisa prepared her precious tea.

“We have come a long way since we talked together as we walked in Powhatan,” Marcia said softly.

“Yes, I know,” Louisa replied. “And I cherish that moment, Marcia, because it is when we became friends.”

“We have talked of such dreams.”

At such moments, with her fair hair unpinned and tumbling

down on her slender shoulders as her blue eyes sparkled with innocent good will, Marcia seemed very young, Louisa thought. She was reminded of how much she wanted to help her faithful companion get situated with something after the war.

“We can still have our dreams,” Louisa said. “This war will end soon, and it appears with a sad outcome,—through no fault of ours,—and then there will be a new day in which death is not always on our shoulders.”

Next day, the exploding shells came closer, and the two nurses went closer, also, right to the edge of the shells to tend to several young men, boys almost, who had fallen. One of them, from whom blood was pulsing uncontrollably, died in Louisa’s arms while she managed to assuage his pain slightly with rum. “No deal, I guess,” he said as he died.

The day after that was quiet, giving Louisa a moment to contemplate the bleak setting of bare, chopped up dirt and torn up buildings where she was sitting.

She could not help thinking that the entire situation was an indication of the utter meanness contained within the relentless Union assault. There was more in it than war, she thought; there was hatred, the hatred of a civilization that intended to have its own way through brutal force.

And yet, thinking of that, she could not prevent herself from thinking, also, of the Union soldier that she loved,—yes, she had admitted to herself fully that she did indeed love him. She could not stop herself from repeating the words of his question to her in his letter and the words of her response.

## **72. Emily learns of an invisible line in New York City**

On Friday, March 2, 1865, the day before Lincoln’s second inauguration, Emily Derr departed on her long anticipated trip to New York City, with two objectives in mind: first, to attend a meeting of the suffragettes she had demonstrated with at the United States Capitol; and, second, to visit her former colleague, the freedman teacher, Jefferson Banner, and the group of former contrabands that he had moved with to New York.

Beginning with her work promoting the 13th amendment on behalf of the suffragettes, Emily had increasingly seen that the disparate worlds of abolitionists and suffragettes were built around the common goal of full citizenship for everyone. She had come to wholly personalize with this goal.

Emily traveled by steamer from Baltimore, docking on the Lower East Side near the Brooklyn Ferry. New York City, at this time, had a population of about 500,000, concentrated in the lower half of Manhattan.

By horse-drawn cab, Emily rode from the waterfront to the Astor House, where she had arranged a room looking out to City Hall Park and a cityscape of the great metropolis.

At her request, the bellhop pointed out the main areas of the city in view, including the squalid Bowery and a green area that he said was a “graveyard for de coloreds,”

“And dat over der is all kin’ a’ tenemen’s. Dat where I lives m’self.”

“A lot of coloreds live there?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Emily had many similar questions inside, but she held back from asking them. She noted the man’s deferential manner, similar to that of blacks in the hotel lobby, where they were in roles of servants.

Next day, Emily sat in the front room of a sunny, spacious apartment with a high-windowed view of the dock where her ship had landed.

When asked to speak, she introduced herself as a teacher in a contraband camp and asked for help setting up welcome houses for former slaves moving to New York “as they will face many obstacles,” she noted.

“Yes, they will face obstacles,” one of the women promptly replied. “But I implore all of you to consider, so have we. I have heard talk lately of a new amendment to secure voting rights for black men. What about us women? Let us focus instead for a while on our own issues that we have set aside.”

Emily exited the meeting next to a woman with gray hair pinned tightly back under a black bonnet above a waistless, black, ankle-length dress.

“You and I are in the same business,” the woman ventured with gentle eyes.

“And how is that?” Emily returned.

“We both work with colored children.”

“You are a teacher, too?”

“Close to it. I work at the Colored Orphans Asylum.”

“Isn’t that the one that was burned down?” Emily asked.

“Yes, but we are in temporary quarters.”

Soon Emily and this woman, who introduced herself as a Quaker, Abigail Wade, were standing on the waterfront amidst

pedestrians bound for restaurants identified by gaslight signs.

“Ms. Wade, would you consider eating together at my expense?” Emily ventured. “I would be grateful for the experience and company.”

“Please call me Abigail,” the woman said. “And, yes, Emily, with pleasure, yes.”

Thus began an enjoyable meal at which Emily obtained the kind of information she had hoped to uncover on her trip.

Emily learned, to begin with, that slavery had been outlawed in New York State since 1827, more than thirty years before, and yet less than 5000 blacks had the right to vote. This was because black-specific property requirements had been passed by the state legislature, making it impossible for most blacks to qualify.

Emily learned, also, that most of the children in the Colored Orphans Asylum were not true orphans, but had a single living parent, usually the mother, who had ceded them to the asylum. Most of these women, Abigail said, were employed as live-in domestics in homes of wealthy whites, the most common occupation for blacks of either sex in the city. Black women outnumbered black men two to one, and were heads of most families.

“Where are the men?” Emily asked.

“Many are at work at sea,” Abigail answered. “Being a sailor is one of the few occupations available to uneducated black men.”

“What of those remaining?”

“They are employed, if at all, in the lowest occupations,—garbage collectors, janitors, street sweepers, sewer workers, — jobs not wanted by anyone else.”

“And there is an educated group of blacks, also?”

“Yes, there has been an effort to cultivate a group of blacks who are educated and more restrained in behavior and language. There have been so called ‘African Free Schools’ to pursue this objective. Our asylum is part of this; we teach behavior that will permit our students to be accepted into American society.”

“And have some of these educated blacks achieved better positions?”

“I know of several preachers and one physician.” Abigail answered. “But you must remember, Emily, New York City is a Democratic stronghold. Many white people here have opposed the war. They did not desire for the slaves to be freed because that would result in blacks moving here.”

Next day Emily traveled, by cab again, into the heart of the city, to the Greenwich Village site, at the intersection of 10th and Bleeker Streets, of the Mother Zion AME Church, known as "Freedom Church" due to its connections with the Underground Railroad and African American notables including Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, and Frederick Douglass.

In a lobby hung with banners in African colors of gold, black, red, and green, upon which were printed Mosaic texts such as often referred to in Deliverance hymns, Emily saw approaching the four former contrabands led by a man humble in demeanor but marked as their leader by their deference toward him. This was Jefferson Banner, the dignified teacher from the Harper's Ferry contraband camp. He was wearing his familiar outfit of brown sport coat, white shirt with no tie, tan slacks, and brown polished shoes, with his gray head bare and his green hat in his hand.

The freedman had arranged this meeting place. The women of the church had prepared a meal for Emily in recognition of her known service to the children of the contraband camp.

"Emily, we are all so very glad to see you," Banner said. "Many people are here to meet you. They have all heard about you."

"Thank you so very much, Jefferson," Emily replied. "You look splendid! I am so gratified to see you doing well in these new circumstances."

"I have been blessed to debark here in this promised land and to have strength still to help others," the former slave answered.

Introductions followed, and then many discussions as Emily sat at the head table in a hall with about a hundred black men, women, and children, seated at tables. She learned then that much of what Abigail had claimed was true. After weeks of applications, the men from Harper's Ferry had found employment, but in the lowest occupations. One man was a porter at a hotel, two worked in the garment district, pushing carts from tailors to stores, and one was a shoeblick plying his trade on the streets. Jefferson had been unable to find work as a teacher; he worked as a janitor at one of the colored schools where he hoped to eventually move across into teaching.

Capping the evening was a medley of songs sung by the church choir, old spirituals such as the contrabands of Harper's Ferry had sung at the celebration of the books received from Mary Lincoln, the event at which Emily had given her first public address. Among the songs were "Oh, De Dyin' Lamb" and a

rousing rendition of the “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” which all in the hall rose to sing.

It was a meal at which the richness of the American Negro culture was displayed, to the pride of the beaming guests, yet on the street later, when Emily walked crosstown with the former contrabands to see their new lodging, the darker side of their condition came into view. The streets were like tunnels and cluttered with trash. The men lived on the same floor of a grim brick building, each with a separate room, with windows looking out to a draftway.

While one of the contrabands went to secure a cab, Emily sat with the others in Banner’s room, which was just large enough to seat the five of them in a semi-circle around a metal frame bed. The window view, beyond the draftway, was of the windowless brick wall of the adjacent building.

“I meant to ask you all,” Emily inquired. “Is there much mixing of the races here? Do you socialize at all with white people?”

“Oh, no, Miss Emily,” one of the men replied. “Ain’t none of that. They don’t want no coloreds comin’ round.”

“And why do you think that is?”

“Jes’ plain n’ simple, they don’t like coloreds.”

“Now that a fact,” another said.

“Amen.”

“How about the neighborhoods?” Emily asked. “Are they shared?”

“The way it is, Miss Emily,” one of the men said. “They is kindly a line. Not a line you can see, but they is a line.”

“Amen, we all know dat,” one of the others added.

Next day, as the great metropolis faded behind her, Emily looked out from the steamer bound for Baltimore, reflecting on what she had learned from her just completed trip.

There was a component of the Northern populace, she acknowledged to herself, at least in New York City, that was not inclined to welcome the freed slaves and that from bias, or simply reflexively, was inclined to keep them at arm’s length and, in case of the working class, away from resources they had struggled to secure for their own.

These were people who, as she had found out, had opposed the war, and were not inspired by the fine language and ideals of emancipation. As for those who had led the long drive for freedom of the slaves, from the white side, the intellectuals and suffragettes that Emily had been part of her herself, she had seen firsthand that

many were growing tired of that effort.

Put it all together, and warning signs arose when Emily Derr pondered how additional freed slaves like the Harper's Ferry contrabands would fare if they followed into Northern cities seeking housing and jobs.

### **73. Lee confers with Davis as Grant extends his line westward**

Gen. Robert E. Lee,—as he had been called since being named commander-in-chief of all the Confederate forces on Wednesday, February 8, 1865,—surveyed the current deployment of his Army of Northern Virginia,—soon thereafter,—in defense of Petersburg and Richmond; and beheld a meagerly defended line, battered with continual drizzle and rain, along which his ragged, hungry soldiers had persisted in their dogged resistance against the well-supplied soldiers of the Union armies, who, ever more expectant of victory, were aligned against them.

Lee was aware, also, of the plain numbers that summarized the odds against his army. The two armies under Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant (the Army of the Potomac, and the Army of the James) amounted in total to 125,000 men. Lee's own army numbered less than 60,000. Moreover, these numbers did not take into account the Army of the Shenandoah, which, with its 65,000 men, was larger than Lee's entire force. If that army, under Maj. Gen. Philip Henry Sheridan, transferred to Richmond, the odds against Lee would be three to one.

There was another factor increasingly posing a threat to Lee's army, also, the same that, as earlier described, Grant had discussed with Maj. Gen. George Thomas. This factor was that hundreds per day of Lee's soldiers were crawling across the no man's hand between the armies, or slipping off into rural areas, to abandon what they saw as a hopeless enterprise. One day after assuming his new position, Lee had addressed the deserters in an official communication giving them 20 days to return after which they would face "such punishment as the courts may impose, and no application for clemency shall be entertained."

From the other side, in an attempt to bolster the Confederate numbers, an act of the Confederate Congress, signed by President Jefferson Davis on March 13, 1865, authorized him "to ask for and accept from the owners of slaves, the services of such number of able-bodied Negro men ... to perform military service in whatever capacity he may direct."

As a result of this initiative, two new companies, amounting together to about 200 black men, commanded by white officers, would, within a fortnight, deploy as combatants on the Richmond defenses. An entire division of black former hospital workers would follow, as combatants, before the end of the month.

These developments had happened despite fierce opposition in the Confederate Congress since the idea had been proposed the previous spring by Maj. Gen. Patrick Cleburne of the Army of Tennessee (an Irish-born former British soldier). Prominent in the opposition was the former governor of Georgia, Howell Cobb, who was, also, like so many Confederates, a former official of the United States (former congressman from the 6th Congressional District of Georgia, former Speaker of the House (19th), and former Secretary of the Treasury). Speaking for the intransigents who would accept no less than the completely race-separated society that Alexander Hamilton Stevens had called for (in his acceptance speech as Confederate vice president, as earlier described), Secretary Cobb had declared, "If slaves will make good soldiers, our whole theory of slavery is wrong."

Fighting would not guarantee that black soldiers drawn from slavery would obtain freedom, however; the language specified that "nothing in (the) act shall be construed to authorize a change in the relation which the said slaves shall bear toward their owners, except by consent of the owners and of the States in which they may reside, and in pursuance of the laws thereof."

Lee himself had entered the debate. "We must decide whether slavery shall be extinguished by our enemies and the slaves be used against us," he had said, "or use them ourselves at the risk of the effects which may be produced upon our social institutions."

Lee knew, however, that any slaves added to his army would be untried soldiers. They would have to be trained and supplied with equipment and clothing.

Indeed, supplies for the Confederate army were a matter of urgent concern. The only supply lines remaining were the Southside Railroad, linking Petersburg to the farm area south and west of Richmond, and the Richmond & Danville Railroad, linking Richmond to Danville, 144 miles away, near where Gen. Joseph E. Johnston was the new commander of the Department of North Carolina and Southern Virginia, an amalgamation of the former Army of Tennessee and other troops from the Carolinas, in total about 25,000 men.

It was in connection with these two remaining railroads that

General Lee arranged a meeting with President Davis in Richmond, telling the president in a dispatch that a development on the lines required prompt action.

Although Richmond was just 20 miles from Petersburg, where Lee had his current headquarters, and although Lee's wife Mary Anna and his daughter Agnes lived in Richmond, Lee only went to Richmond on official duties, not wanting to take liberties denied to his men. He lived in a farmhouse and ate the same daily rations as provided to his soldiers, distributing to others any food items received as gifts. Despite the availability of a carriage, he rode his gray horse, Traveler, greeted with hurrahs by all who sawing him passing.

In Richmond, Lee sat with Davis in the library, same that had been used for war councils in the preceding years.

"Grant, as you know, has continued to extend his life to his left," Lee began. "We have attempted to extend our line westward with him despite its being thereby thinned. But, sir, I must formally inform you, it is just a matter of time before Grant will straddle our railroads. The Southside first. It is our only source now of forage for our horses. With the horses weakened, we could not escape if we seek to withdraw to the west as we have discussed."

Davis sat forward with his hands clasped together, listening intently with an expression of concern to Lee's presentation. He had complete trust in the general's judgement.

After a moment of contemplation, he said, "Then, much as we deplore the prospect, General," he said. "Does this not mean that we should withdraw at once when our horses are able?"

"I would agree with you, sir," Lee answered, "except for the condition of the roads. The roads are too muddy for the horses to pull our wagons through them. Better to wait until dry weather has allowed the roads to drain. Meanwhile, let us make a concentrated effort to build up the horses and put out supplies as we can along our escape route."

"Then we are back to our discussion of where to withdraw to, though in a more urgent light," Davis remarked.

Indeed, the prospect of withdrawal and the possible ways to do it, had been much discussed between Lee, Davis, and John Breckinridge, who, following his departure from the Army of the Valley, was the current Confederate Secretary of War. Most recently, the main choices considered had been the fortifiable cities within reach by railroad, Lynchburg and Danville. In addition, there was a third option, suggested by Maj. Gen. John

Bell Hood, to abandon the Atlantic states and regroup in Tennessee.

“I think our best choice is Danville,” the president declared. “We have facilities there, in the warehouses, that have never been under Union guns, and there is a line of defenses we could rely on, once the army arrives.”

As they both knew, the logic of the move was that firstly, if Grant chose to follow, it would place a strain on the Union supply lines, which relied on sea and railway ties to City Point; secondly, such a move, if it went well, would enable Lee to consolidate with Johnston, wheel to defeat the Union army already there under Maj. Gen. William Sherman, and then turn to meet Grant.

If no city could be held, then the Confederates could withdraw into the mountains and splinter into ranger bands such as had been deployed successfully by Brig. Gen. John Morgan in the middle of the country and Col. John Mosby in Virginia.

“When we do withdraw, sir,” General Lee added, “we will be set upon hard. We will have to move fast.”

“Let us move out then, as we must,” said Davis, “when the roads permit and other factors are favorable.”

Lee returned to his headquarters, struggling within himself regarding the decision that he and Davis had agreed on, to withdraw from Petersburg and Richmond at the appropriate time. He recalled the day, during the first Union approach toward Richmond, under the cautious Maj. Gen. George McClellan, when he had taken over the Confederate command due to an illness that had disabled his commander, Joseph Johnston. Lee was aware of the new stratagem of bold and quick action that he had brought to the stalemate that had existed at that time between the armies. That stratagem, he knew, had given the South a new chance for victory at that dire time.

A week later, Lee was back in Richmond, presenting a new plan that, as he described it, could result in a possible (though not probable) delay in withdrawal and maybe even a new offensive. This plan was that in the vicinity of the Union fortification called Fort Stedman, just south of Petersburg, sharpshooters and engineers masquerading as deserting soldiers would crawl under cover of darkness across the no man’s land between the opposing lines in an area where the lines were only about two hundred yards apart.

The lead men, after clearing away the Union pickets and removing obstacles like wire, would be followed by three patrols each of 100 men, which would capture Fort Stedman and the three additional forts behind it, gaining an advantage through surprise. If

this initial attack was successful, the entire Second Corps would pour through the breach directing enfilade fire in both directions to split the Union line. They would then push eastward to turn the eastern half of the Union line back toward City Point. The movement would involve nearly half of the entire force defending Petersburg and Richmond.

The Confederate president listened with great interest as Lee presented his plan.

“General,” President Davis declared with emotion, “you have presented what was in my own heart and intention, I believe, as much as in yours, that we should not assume defeat, but given this opportunity now, should strike out with all our strength, God help us, catching the Yankees in their false security to save our young country.”

#### **74. Breakthrough fails; Davis bids farewell to his wife and family**

President Jefferson Davis visited the Petersburg defenses a few days later to view the site,—called Colquitt’s Salient,—from which the Southern lead units would embark on the breakthrough attempt that he and Gen. Robert E. Lee had slated to begin just before dawn on Sunday, March 25, one week away.

From a hidden position in the Confederate trench, Davis looked off with binoculars, noting, as Lee had informed him, that the opposing lines at this location were only about 200 yards apart, so close that the soldiers from the two sides yelled back and forth, and often in a friendly manner, despite being ready to convert to a hostile mode, if required.

In the binocular view, the front line on the Union side could be seen to be constructed of adjacent vertical logs sunk deep in the ground, sharpened on top, and linked with a dense mesh of telegraph wire. The wall of logs was about five feet high, and thus not to be easily surmounted. It would have to be chopped through with axes. Muskets and hats of soldiers extended above it.

Beyond the Union line was a low rise called Hare’s Hill on which sat Fort Stedman. It looked like a log cabin with dirt piled up behind it. Between the Union line and the fort spread an abatis of fallen trees and sprawling branches. On higher ground about a quarter mile behind the fort were the log and dirt platforms of three Union batteries with flags and guns.

As the president looked off, Maj. Gen. John Brown Gordon,

commander of the Second Corps of the Army of Northern Virginia, offered details about the upcoming assault that Davis had not yet heard.

“Mr. President, the lead soldiers are our most stalwart men. They have been training to hack through the logs in a minute’s time. The units behind them, each of a hundred men, will have empty muskets with bayonets. Once the line is broken, they will rush the fort, killing, or sending back as captives, all found there. Our larger force will follow to assault the batteries,—three divisions of the Second Corps and four brigades from the Third and Fourth, led by guides to find the batteries in the dark. Speed will be crucial. We will fire west and east along the Yankee bank to divide the line and then push east to City Point.

“It can succeed, Mr. President. We are determined it shall, so help us, God.”

Davis returned to Richmond, feeling on an intense personal level the beleaguered state of the government that he had struggled to prop up and sustain through the bitter years of war. He recalled how strenuous had been his attempts to win for his government the status of an independent nation, particularly in the eyes of the mother country of both sides, the United Kingdom.

In pursuit of this object, as Davis reconstructed his efforts in his mind, he had, starting in 1862, during a stalemate in the war, prior to the Union victory at Antietam, exchanged letters with the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Lord John Russel, Earl of Derby, seeking denunciation of the Union blockade and recognition of the Richmond government. Continued Union victories had resulted in refusal of British action, however, leading to reassignment of James Madison, the Confederate Secretary of State, from London to Paris.

Davis had been unsuccessful, also, in obtaining recognition and diplomatic courtesies from the Union Administration. Lincoln and his emissaries had visited upon Davis every possible affront, leaving the Confederate agents to languish without recognition in the repeated efforts to gain a negotiated settlement.

Most shocking of United States actions for the Confederate president on a personal basis had been the raid conducted a year before (on March 2, 1864). Papers found on the body of the killed raid leader, Col. Ulric Dahlgren, had revealed the official federal intention, which was “once in the city it must be destroyed and Jeff. Davis and Cabinet killed.” From this, Davis had understood that, if the Union forces broke through, he would be in personal jeopardy and perhaps his family, also.

At his residence, Davis found his diligent wife seated in the office upstairs where he and she in their close working relationship often consulted with one another. In reality, he knew, she could have acted as his second self, so familiar was she, and so in accord, with every aspect of his beliefs and duties.

Indeed, in the many facets of their shared life, Varina née Howell Davis, had surprised her husband, and had continually increased in her value to him, and compatibility with him. When he and she had first met, Varina, living at that time with her family on their Mississippi plantation, had been just an 18-year-old schoolgirl (though grand-daughter of a governor of New Jersey and a product of intense tutoring by a prominent local judge). Davis, 18 years her senior, had already had, at that time, a wide experience of the real world, as a West Point graduate, veteran of ten years of military service on the Western frontier, husband, widower, and plantation owner. Davis had thought of Varina then as simply a lively and attractive young woman, but, when she had accepted his offer of marriage and returned with him to his Brierfield plantation, she had displayed other sides of her complex personality. After learning that Jefferson and his brother had a large barn and 30 horses, some of them bred for racing, she was soon contesting with him down the shaded dirt roads on the plantation. She had joined, also, in his botanical interests, helping to create hybrids for their extensive rose garden and orchard. The slaves of the plantation had drawn out another side of her, her caring disposition, as she visited the slave quarters to ask questions of the slaves and interacted with their children.

Later, when Davis served as congressman, then as senator from Mississippi, and then as Secretary of War under President Franklin Pierce, Varina had revealed her ability to edit, organize, and, if needed, to compose his correspondence, speeches, and reports. Transported into the social world of Washington, she had interacted smoothly with members of the different parties and their spouses. As a mother, she had shown the qualities of a devoted and efficient parent. When war with Mexico intervened, and Davis, commander of the Mississippi volunteers, had returned disabled from wounds in his hip and foot, she had become his devoted nurse, assisting him in retaining his mobility. She had attended to the chronic eye inflammation he later developed, bringing him poultices as he worked at night, unable to bear the light of day.

Now, however, a threat loomed as great as any Davis and his family had yet confronted. He had warned his wife that she and

the children would soon have to leave Richmond without him, an announcement she had accepted without opposition, though while building a case against it in her mind.

Before dawn on the assigned morning for the attack, Davis, up early, noted the dense fog in the direction of Petersburg. Then came the courier he awaited, and news such as he had hoped not to receive. The initial attack had gone without incident; the fort had been captured and 500 prisoners sent back to the Confederate lines; but the second phase attempt to capture the Union batteries had floundered in the fog.

“The guides could only find Battery I, which was captured,” the courier said. “Then the other batteries started firing against the battery we had occupied.”

The men had been pushed back and many killed as they attempted to return across the open area between the fort and Confederate lines.

The failure of the breakthrough was a catastrophe, Davis knew. He needed to speak to his wife at once.

“Varina,” he said, “when I first met you, I was a shell of a man, emptied from Sarah’s death and absence.” (She knew that he referred to his first wife, whom he had married at age 28 and who had died six months later.) “You came into my life and showed me again what life is for and could be. You have given me a home and children. Through you and your beauty and intelligence, and your sense of what matters in life, I have been many times blessed.” He took her hand. “But now the time has come. The Yankees are on our doorstep. They will come for me and likely not just to capture me but to kill me. I cannot bear to see you go; and yet I cannot bear to keep you here, knowing you will be in danger, also, and the children, because of me.”

She then presented the argument ready in her mind.

“Jefferson, I love you with all of my heart and I know you are acting out of love for me and the children, but we will really be safer apart from you? There is nowhere we could be safer than with you because you more than anyone will protect us. And you need us, also. We sustain you. We love you. We give you courage to proceed.”

The three oldest of the Davis children, sensing what was transpiring, came into the room. Margaret, at ten, the oldest, and Jefferson Jr., eight, hung on their father, begging him not to leave. William, four years old, cried, causing the ten-month-old baby “Vinnie,” in a maid’s arms, to cry, also. But Davis would not relent.

Later, when the children were absent, he brought out a small pistol which he placed in his wife's hands.

"Varina, it is not your way, I know. But there are stories of armed groups roaming the countryside. You must take this and use it if you are accosted."

She protested but accepted it at last in the same spirit in which she had accepted every earlier challenge in their married life.

Davis then brought to his wife a cloth bag containing gold pieces, which composed most of his and her wealth that was portable. Their silver plates and silverware would have to be left to whomever ransacked the house.

That afternoon Davis accompanied his wife and children as they boarded a coach in a line of more than 20 coaches, many of them occupied by families of other officials. Again, there was an exchange of tearful caresses, and then they were gone.

## **75. Lincoln visits City Point with the war's end in sight**

Anxious for how and when the long war would be ended at last, President Abraham Lincoln traveled to City Point, Virginia, on Monday, March 26, 1865, at the invitation of his general-in-chief, Ulysses S. Grant. With Lincoln was his eleven-year-old son, Tad, and his wife Mary, who was full of apprehension regarding the social obligations of the trip.

It was the day after the desperate and disastrous attempt of the Army of Northern Virginia to break through the Union line at Fort Stedman; and the battle site was less than 20 miles from the waterfront where the *River Queen*, the steamer that had brought Lincoln, had docked; but the president only learned of the battle a day later still, when, with General Grant, he passed the site where the Confederate dead were sprawled amidst the mud and potholes of the no man's land that they had crossed over before daylight untouched, only to be slaughtered on the same ground as they retreated in midday.

This unplanned passage through the battlefield happened as Lincoln and Grant were on their way by train to the headquarters of Maj. Gen. George Meade, Grant's sub-commander. The train paused as several bodies were cleared from the track. Soon came a view of hundreds more, in a sunken field where the fallen were being carried off the field on stretchers. Some were still alive, Lincoln observed; he saw two female nurses passing amidst the

sprawled bodies applying bandages and splints.

Unknown to Lincoln, these two women were Louisa Stone and Marcia Loudon from Powhatan. Had he been reminded of the story Josiah Derr had told him in the White House, a year before, of the four former college friends split by conflicting sympathies into opposing sides of the war, Lincoln might have viewed the scene in a more personal light. With or without such knowledge, however, he was deeply moved. His ongoing concern, not just for obtaining victory, but for reducing the number of casualties, had marked his gaunt face with dark shadows beneath his eyes and furrows from cheekbone to jaw.

Lincoln's stay in City Point had included events, planned by General Grant, that had provoked his wife's social obsessions. On the day before (same on which he had learned of the attack on Fort Stedman), Lincoln had traveled by horseback to review the Army of the James, accompanied by Grant and the commander of that army, Maj. Gen. Edward Ord, with Mary Lincoln and Julia Grant following behind in a carriage that bogged down on a muddy road. Arriving late, Mrs. Lincoln had found her husband on the review stand with beside him the two generals and Ord's wife, Mary, a woman known for her beauty. At the sight of that, Mary Lincoln had flown into an indignant rage at the self-perceived slight. Her protests, continuing into the evening, had embarrassed everyone present and had involved several officers that she had called upon to affirm before her husband that she should have been on the review stand before Mary Ord had been allowed there.

The president had reacted to his wife's outbursts with the patience and calm for which he was known, looking on sadly as she shouted at everyone present, and, at times, softly reproving her while never raising his voice.

Meanwhile, there were military developments and strategies to consider as interactions, informal on the surface but seeming highly consequential, occurred between Lincoln and the Union officers present in the complex of steamers and encampments between City Point and the Confederate defenses.

The first interaction for Lincoln occurred on the same evening of Mary Lincoln's tirade when Lincoln and Grant met in the after-chamber of the *River Queen* while fiddle music carried back from the square dance on the main deck.

"Mr. President, as you know," Grant remarked, "our plan is to dislodge Lee from Petersburg and cut him off before he can escape to the west, toward Lynchburg or Danville."

"I trust in your judgment," Lincoln replied. Indeed, he and

Grant had achieved by this time a complete understanding and mutual respect. "I can express as simply my own wish, which is for an end with as little bloodshed as possible."

"And that I think will be possible," Grant answered, "if Lee discovers the hopelessness of pressing on. Sheridan will be moving toward Five Forks at once. Our entire army is moving west and pushing to the north to box Lee in."

The following afternoon, a more extended meeting happened in the same after-chamber as Maj. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman, newly arrived by steamer from North Carolina, visited Lincoln with Grant, soon to be joined by Grant's old friend from the siege of Vicksburg, Admiral David Dixon Porter, whose flagship, the *USS Malvern*, was anchored in the harbor beside the *River Queen*.

The meeting began informally with Sherman regaling the president with stories from his celebrated march, but, when the three officers positioned themselves around Lincoln and looked toward him, he addressed them in a formal manner.

"Gentlemen," he began, "I will say a few words since we are all here together.

"Had we been here two years ago, on this ship, conferring on the status of the war, as we do this evening, what a different prospect we would face!

"Then, as you will all recall, the war that had seemed at first as if it would be short had proven to be long beyond our ability to foresee its ending, and then, too, the war had become a series of disconnected battles, each horrible in its own way but seeming to be leading nowhere overall.

"Gentlemen, what since then has changed?"

"I submit the first thing that has changed, thanks to the like of our admiral here, is the tightening ever more inescapably of the cordon of the naval 'anaconda' around the South, stopping all shipments. So thanks are due to you and your fellow officers, Admiral Porter, for that."

At this Grant and Sherman nodded in agreement.

"I submit, further, that another great thing that has changed came from my friend here," Lincoln went on, pointing to Grant, "and this was the idea that our military effort as a nation needed to be coordinated in a national plan. General Grant, you established and executed this plan, and for this I and our nation are grateful. Your plan has brought us to the present moment."

To this, Sherman and Porter voiced assent.

"Finally," Lincoln continued. "would we be here at all were

it not for the timely capture of Atlanta and the glorious march that captured the imagination of our nation? Had these triumphs not happened, I suspect, I would not be addressing you today as the re-elected president and we would not be, as we are, so near to victory! The man who achieved this may have done more than any other to secure our imminent victory, and he is seated right here, General Sherman.”

“That is the truth, Cump,” asserted Grant. “You are the one who most deserves credit for our success.”

Sherman was deeply touched. “We have all done our part, as have our many fine soldiers,” he said.

“Now let me say this,” Lincoln went on. “I know, as do you all, also, I am sure, that this war has not only been bitter and long; in addition, it has required for us all to be authors of damage such as we never imagined, years back, ourselves inflicting. As for your own part in it, I can only say, with the donkey’s jawbone, like that of Samson, in your hand, you have done what the Lord’s work of righteousness required, and have borne therefrom a burden of sorrow that few understand or acknowledge.

“On behalf of our nation, I thank you for having borne this burden.”

At this juncture, the tall, care-worn president leaned over with his elbows on his thighs, and, meeting directly the earnest eyes of his commanders, he pled in a soft voice: “Now I know, gentlemen, you are all great military men, far more than I could ever be, but there is one more thing that I now implore of you: end this war without delay, end it with a minimum of further loss.”

“Mr. President, with all due respect,” Sherman returned, caught off guard, “my men have marched for a considerable time. I would be inclined to give them a fortnight to rest. Johnston will be waiting. I don’t expect he will attack. If he does, he will be defeated.”

“General,” the president replied, “we should know by now these men are like critters that can be caught in a trap, and yet, if the trap is relaxed, off they will flit into the brush unseen.”

“Yes, sir, I understand.”

“I would like you to return as quickly as you can and begin at once to press the case with Johnston.”

“Yes, sir, I will.”

“As for our southern cousins,” Lincoln continued, “when the time comes for them to surrender, let us require no more than that they promise allegiance. There is no need to humble or punish them. They can keep their animals. They can keep even their guns

for hunting. Once they plant their crops and have popcorn by the fire, they will again be our friends.”

Lincoln, after leaving the after-chamber, returned to his quarters, where his thoughts turned at once to his wife. Her outburst had not surprised him; he was familiar with her volatility from years of accommodating to her swings of mood. Lincoln knew, also, that his wife was obsessive about how she appeared in her public role. She had brought to City Point her seamstress, Elizabeth Keckley, a former slave who had bought her own freedom, but whom some still referred to as a “servant.” Lincoln knew that “Madame Keckley,” as he addressed her, was his wife’s confidante, and that through her his wife had opened up to causes such as improving the plight of freed blacks.

Yes, Mary, too, had responded to the war in seeking to transcend her “hellcat” image to become the selfless leader of an embattled nation that she aspired to be. The war had forced Mary into uncharted seas, Lincoln acknowledged, as had been the case with many women. Their lives had not been affected to the extent of the commanders he had just addressed, but still the worlds of many women would not return to what they had been before.

## **76. Sherman talks with his wife Eleanor in an imagined reunion**

Maj. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman left that evening on a steamer returning him to North Carolina, and there, though he had already had a drink on the *River Queen*, he ordered another to sip on by himself; for the general was in an odd, contemplative mood; he felt as if he was on the cusp of his post-war return to normal, non-war life, and on the cusp of returning again to his family home.

For months he had harbored a hope of meeting with his wife, Eleanor, hoping she could be brought to City Point to meet him, a visit that had never been arranged. As Sherman sat in his chair in his cabin, however, he imagined in his mind (as of a scene unfolding, action by action,) the reunion with his wife in which he had planned to reveal to her the contemplations that he would express to no one else.

The scene in which Sherman imagined this meeting taking place was his family house in St. Louis, Missouri. Actually, his family no longer lived in that house in St. Louis; his wife, in the past year, had moved with the children to South Bend, Indiana,

where she wanted them to attend college. The house that Sherman imagined, however, was the St. Louis house where his wife and children had persisted in their schedule of family, school, and church throughout the war years.

In the imagined reunion in his mind, the tired soldier paused to look again at his wife. He had not seen her in a half year.

She was five foot six in height. When she stood directly in front of him, he could reach his hands straight out and grasp either side of her shoulders, which, like her entire body, were lean and firm with her characteristic solidity. She had black hair, separated at the center of her forehead, and combed down and to the back of her head, where it was gathered and arranged into curled braids, three on either side of her neck. Her face was oval in shape and clean-featured, her dark eyes intelligent. When spoken to, she made eye contact and maintained it. This was the feature that had most drawn him in as a boy, for already as a girl, although eight years younger, she had looked at him in this way with never a sign of impatience at how long he had dwelled on pessimistic details, which he was inclined to do. With a precocious sensitivity, she had gathered that he was predisposed to melancholy moods. Despite this, years later, she had agreed to be his wife.

“I suppose you are still taking the children to church every Sunday,” he said in his imagination, after taking her in, while all the while before she had stood waiting for him to speak, which she did often with the patience so unique to her.

“Of course. You know I would never neglect to do that,” she answered.

“And I am glad that you do it,” he remarked, “though I would lack the faith to do it myself.”

“You will regain your faith” she insisted softly. “I am sure that you will regain it. I pray every day that you will.”

Having grown up with “Ellen,” as he often called her, in the same house, on account of having been adopted by her family, Sherman had come to recognize that, in a remark such as this, she displayed a quality in which was not the least of counterfeit: her spiritual faith and piety. He knew her to be a genuinely religious person; and, much though he doubted the reality of God’s existence, yet had the general no doubt that, if God did exist and was accessible for a personal connection, then Ellen would have,—and deserved to have,—as profound a connection with God as could be obtained.

In the living room, in Sherman’s imagined reunion, he saw a likeness of his son Willie, and at that the whole story of his son

came back with the attendant recollections and emotions. The likeness showed Willie's hopefulness, and the general recalled how that hopefulness had not left his son even when informed of imminent death.

Later Sherman, in his imagined scene, stood by an open window that looked out to the backyard. Sherman had memories associated with this view, also. Willie and Sherman's other son, Tom, had used to play in the trees beyond the porch, pretending to be explorers. After finding imaginary Indians, Tom, the younger son, would play priest, saying Mass at a makeshift altar to convert the Indians to Christianity.

Despite the general's disapproval, this son Tom was being encouraged by his mother to follow through on those aspirations of becoming a priest. Sherman had protested that he wanted his son to be a "useful man," rooted in the real world, not someone preaching of otherworldly punishment and rewards. In face of such entreaties, however, which the boy,—by this time, nine years old,—had heard, he held firmly to his priestly ambition. He was capable of absorbing all kinds of warnings and admonitions without ever being affected or annoyed by them, a priest in spirit already, endowed from birth with a mentality like that of his mother.

Thinking of that, Sherman felt sorry that he had not found a better way to communicate with his son. He thought again of how he had lost so many of his former inclinations to kindness,—his former gentleness, really,—under the stress of the war.

"How did I ever become this, Ellie," Sherman asked his wife abruptly, "a man whose success in life has been built upon dead and mangled bodies?"

"You have been a good and noble soldier."

"I hear sometimes lamentations,—families crying out to me for sons, husbands, and fathers."

"William, you chose a life where good and evil are in stark relief, where the horrors of life are confronted in order to bring a better life to all, in this puzzling world which Our Father has given us as the place through which our souls must journey in search of Him. You have taken the burden of that starkness upon yourself. I know how you have suffered for it!"

"To whom, though, Ellen? To whom has this war brought a better life?"

"To begin with, to the former slaves who now have their freedom. Have you forgotten, dear, how much you believed in that as a boy, and how you spoke of it to me?"

“No, Ellen, I have not forgotten it. I had many ideals then that did not conform with reality.”

“Yet your ideals have persisted in a toughened form. You believe enough to jeopardize your life.”

He moved out onto the porch and, for no obvious reason, at that point, found himself thinking back to the meeting just concluded in City Point of him and his fellow commanders with President Abraham Lincoln. What had made the greatest impression on him was not that he had been praised for his leadership in the war, not that Lincoln had worried aloud about ending the war quickly, and not that the president had shown a plainly authentic remorse over the loss of life; but rather that Lincoln had so clearly acknowledged the psychological burden of causing the slaughter and destruction that had been required in achieving victory.

This was the same realization, Sherman thought, that he and Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant had arrived at,—as if with a common mind,—in their meeting in Cincinnati before the national push had begun, that the war could only be won by accepting and increasing slaughter and destruction.

Lincoln, though, had gone a step further, Sherman thought; Lincoln had claimed that the slaughter and destruction had been “the Lord’s work of righteousness.” The president had asserted something to that effect, also, as Sherman recalled, in his second inaugural address.

Thinking of that, Sherman turned to his imagined wife and said in his mind: “There was a God for me when you and I were children, Ellen. There was a dear and kind Lord that I prayed to and who seemed then to incline toward me to hear my words and listen to what I would in my innocence say to Him,—which was always not to gain this or that, but only to love Him more, as I then did love Him. Now that God, that dear Lord, is gone. There can be no God in this horrible world that I have witnessed, and should there exist such a God as once I thought existed, then I, as one of those who has authored such horrors, could find no voice with which to address Him.”

His wife came over to him, took his hand, and looked into his face with the dark, luminescent eyes that he had admired as a boy, thinking of her then not in any male or sexual way but simply as an unfathomable “girl,” while awed by her effect upon him, which had seemed to him then like the splendor of an angel or super-terrestrial being.

“William, William,” she said softly, “let me tell you then,

again, there is such a God and He loves you as you are despite how many you have slain with your righteous sword. He loves you because you have been a fierce soldier of His wrath in avenging and bringing to an end at last the many sins of our nation against the colored people.”

“I cannot believe that this is so,” he replied, with a glance toward her of his stern, sad eyes, “but I believe that you believe it is so, and your belief in me is my great sustainer, Ellen. Amidst the horrors of the war, you have given me the unquestionable goodness of human love.”

“So shall I continue to do.”

He took her arm and walked with her into the parlor, where windows looked out to other houses, a scene with no soldiers or guns.

“When I was in Savannah,” he said, “I used to go down by the fountain, where the water shoots up beside flowers and trees, and I would walk along Bay Street, past shops and corner parks with their views of the Savannah River. I would have such a feeling, Ellen, such as I have not had in a long time, such as you and I used to have!”

“We shall have it again,” she replied.

## **77. Davis contemplates his legacy as the chief apologist for slavery**

Among the contemplations that claimed the attention of President Jefferson Davis, as he sat in the executive mansion in Richmond following the departure of his family, was the thought that, with the fall of his government, he would go down in history, most likely, as the chief apologist for slavery in the South.

Davis did not need to go far into this contemplation to encounter, in a mentally abbreviated form, the pro-slavery argument that he had repeated for more than 20 years. This argument was that the “African slaves,” before being brought to America, had lacked “civilization,” and, therefore, had benefitted from exposure to the culture of the South. Slavery had brought them Christianity and an experience of an ordered existence able to sustain the material well-being of a community working together.

Sitting at his desk, looking out the window to the depot below (terminus of the Richmond & Danville Railroad, upon which he would soon exit Richmond), the Confederate president

read over the speech, delivered 15 years before, as junior senator from Mississippi in the 30th United States Congress, that had brought him national attention as a spokesman for slavery.

“Compare the slaves in the Southern states with recently imported Africans as seen in the West Indies,” he had said at that time, he noted, “and who can fail to be struck with the increased improvement of the race? Compare our slaves in the Southern states with the free blacks of the Northern States, and you will find the one contented, well provided for in all physical wants, and steadily improving in their moral condition; the other miserable, impoverished, loathsome for the deformity and disease which follow after penury and vice, covering the records of the criminal courts, and filling the penitentiaries.”

Eleven years after that speech, the president recalled, he had listened to a similar speech by Alexander H. Stephens,— selected to be Vice President of the provisional Confederate government,— on the topic of relation of the “races” (which was the word used at that time).

The most striking part of that speech, as Davis remembered, had been Stephens’ assertion that the claim that the white race was superior to the black would be explicitly stated in the Confederate Constitution. That claim, Stephens had said, had not been so stated in the United States Constitution, thereby leaving that “principle” open to attack by abolitionists in the subsequent decades.

“Our new government is founded... upon the great truth that the Negro is not equal to the white man,” Stephens had said, “that slavery subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition.”

Davis recalled that he had confessed to his wife afterwards that he had felt Stephens had gone too far. “It is enough to say that in our own time, slavery is a good for the South in that it provides a better life for the slaves and for us, also,” he had told her, as he recalled. “But we must also say that our sincere, greater wish is for the conditions to be accomplished for the slaves to be freed and to thrive in freedom.”

In making that statement,—as, by all accounts had been the case in any statement he had ever made on any sociological or political topic,—Davis had sought to be true to a quality that he had felt was of paramount importance for the civic leader he had aspired to be; this quality was to be consistent in believing what he professed and stating the same conviction to everyone regardless of opposition or disapproval.

He found the exact statement that he had made in the 1850’s

speech: "The slave must be made fit for freedom by education and discipline," he had said, "and thus made unfit for slavery."

Davis walked out of his office and down the stairs through the empty rooms. Going into the storied study where so many war councils had been held, he recalled how he had warned, prior to secession, that the North would not accept secession, and would seek to prevent it with military force and with industrial might the South would be unable to match.

He recalled how he had first been introduced to slavery by his much older brother, Joseph (22 years older), who had been like a father to him. Far from being a cruel master, such as caricatured in the North, Jefferson felt, by critics who had never lived in the South, Joseph Davis had been a social crusader intent on creating a beneficent slavery system based on the writings of the English factory reformer, Robert Owens, to whose writings Joseph had introduced his younger brother.

"I have striven to create a community where our slaves can experience a purposeful, efficient life," Joseph had told his brother. "Those who can lead are given a chance to lead. Those who can get ahead are encouraged to do so and to become independent."

Together the brothers had walked through the slave camp, and Jefferson had been impressed then by the seeming harmony and contentment on his brother's plantation. Sturdy cabins, made of pine, were lined up along a road bordered with trees. Each cabin had a fireplace and a back yard. Many families had vegetable gardens, and some raised hogs or chickens, taking grain as needed from a free granary. The work week was just, the younger brother had thought: five full days a week, a half day on Saturday, with Sunday off for church and visitation. Corporal punishment was forbidden. Disputes between slaves were settled by trials of peers. Slaves were allowed to sell their own produce, to accrue wealth, and to buy free days for themselves by reimbursing the plantation for the value of lost labor.

Jefferson Davis had been 28 years old at this time, when he had toured the plantation with his brother. He had been born on a farm without slaves, and had spent his boyhood in well-connected boarding schools, learning the qualities of a Southern gentleman, but never in contact with slaves. After attending West Point, he had spent ten years as a frontier soldier, noted for self-discipline, temperance, congeniality, and fairness with everyone, including the Indians with whom he had negotiated treaties. What had brought him to Mississippi eventually had not been the prospect of

an easy life, but the opportunity to lease land from his brother, being able, thereby, to provide a settled home for his new bride, Sarah, whose father (Jefferson's commanding officer at that time and future president, Zachary Taylor) had insisted she should not live the life of a soldier's wife. This, plus the prospect of doing a service through slavery, as Davis had sincerely believed he could, was what had brought him with conviction to his new life.

In all their interactions with their slaves, observers said, the Davis brothers observed the utmost courtesy. They would not allow abbreviation of the Christian name each slave was given. A self-educated slave named James Pemberton, manager of the plantation workforce, was put forward as a model of what slaves could achieve. He had taught himself to read and write, and to do mathematics and engineering.

A tragedy at the time had soon added another dimension to Jefferson's new life, however. Sarah had died from typhus fever, and that unforeseen calamity had overwhelmed young Jefferson with loneliness and sadness. His brother and his brother's family went north each summer. Jefferson remained, the only white person on the plantation. By all accounts, during that time of mourning, he had been comforted by the simple wisdom of the slaves and had grown deeply affectionate toward them. Pemberton had become his closest friend. Davis, in reconstructing that experience in his mind, recalled with what interest and solicitude he had explored his first experience with a black person able to engage his own intellect on an equal basis.

In the slaves, in general, however, Davis recalled, he had not been able to find the same level of intelligence. In the future that level might be there, he had concluded, but it was not within reach in the current state of development of the typical slave. The majority of the slaves, if set free, he had decided, would not have been able to prosper. The plantation could provide a living for everyone, but only because efficient management provided an income that sustained the entire community.

The slaves did supply the plantation with an essential asset, however, Davis understood, a workforce able to tolerate tropical heat (owing, he thought, to their adaption, as a people, to Sub-Saharan Africa). This was the source of the "providential arrangement" that Davis, with no dissemblance, claimed for the slavery system; not only could masters and slaves live together peacefully and comfortably, but also, in the meanwhile, the slaves could be educated to the higher state of culture and understanding that would permit them to thrive in freedom.

Davis, considering his self-education with respect to the position of blacks on the plantation, remembered how his second wife, Varina, married a decade after the death of his first wife, had fitted perfectly into the give and take of the plantation and his ideals regarding it. He remembered how from the start, Varina,—at that time, as earlier described, an attractive, likeable, warm-hearted teenage girl,—had shown qualities such as fairness and generosity that had won her the ardent regard of the slaves. She had never been a mean master.

And neither had he, Davis acknowledged to himself, as he continued in his contemplation regarding the part he had played in defending slavery. Occasions when he and his wife had walked through the slave camp, greeted warmly by the slaves and their children, came into his mind. He and his wife had reciprocated that feeling, regarding the slaves as like members of their extended family. He recalled the sad day when he had left the plantation to accept the Confederate presidency. He had spent his last evening visiting the slave cabins to say goodbye and deliver blankets to the older or infirm slaves.

Following the fall of Vicksburg, in 1863, federal soldiers, after seizing his plantation, had driven off the Brierfield slaves, including some who Davis had heard had wanted to remain. Many of them had wound up in nearby cities, he had learned, homeless, unemployed, and maltreated. That was proof, Davis thought, that the lives of his former slaves had not been improved thus far by their foray into freedom.

## **78. Hiram reads a Richmond editorial defending “The Southern Lost Cause”**

Col. Hiram Stone was in downtown Richmond for dealings with respect to his plantation, on Tuesday, March 28, 1865, when he came upon a newspaper editorial under the title, “The Southern Lost Cause.”

Under the influence of the beautiful spring morning, Hiram walked with the newspaper in hand down Broad Street, looking for a place to read it. His stroll brought him to a bench with a view of the white tower of Saint John’s Episcopal Church. There, Hiram knew, the Virginian colonialist and founding father, Patrick Henry, had delivered his famous speech, “Give me liberty or give me death,” at the Second Colonial Convention in 1785. A setting appropriate for the sentiment he expected to encounter in the

editorial, Hiram acknowledged, though he had not walked to this temple of his forbears with that in mind.

“For those who would deprecate the conduct of Virginians in the leading up to and prosecution of our long and difficult war,” began the article, “those who would deprive our brave and good people of their due gratitude and honor for their generous defense of our society and government, let us set the record straight for any American, in North or South, in this or any future generation, who would consider the true history of the war with an intelligent and open mind. We say to all of you, do us justice as Virginians and Americans.

“First, be aware, we Virginians did not seek or instigate this war. Rather, in fellowship with the citizens of the other States who decided to secede from our former Union, we left with regret and sadness. For, though much divided us from our former compatriots of the United States, much had endeared us to them, also, in our common history and heritage as Americans.

“Consider, also, there were no coups of power in the States that formed the Confederate States of America. Our duly selected representatives in each of the several States voted to secede from the Union using the same authority and process by which a prior generation had voted to join it.

“Take note, as well, we citizens of the States that seceded from the Union, did not seek to alter the Constitution of 1789, the compact signed by us all which had defined our original Union. To the contrary, we sought to continue the Constitution in the exact form in which it had been handed down by our Founding Fathers. We called ourselves the ‘Confederacy’ to signify that we have sought to maintain the confederal structure of that original compact.

“Had the United States continued in the confederal spirit of that original compact, the United States Congress would never have considered the two issues, depriving the Southern States of our rights guaranteed in the Constitution, that led us down the road where secession,—much though we sought to avoid it,—was unavoidable.

“The first divisive issue that arose, despite the contravention of the Constitution, was whether slaves were property and could therefore be brought into territories owned in common by all States of the Union. We rightfully claimed that the Constitution, in Article I, Section 9, Clause 1, in guaranteeing that ‘the Migration or Importation of such Persons shall not be prohibited by the Congress’ prior to the indicated year (1808), and in stating, in

addition, that ‘a Tax or duty may be imposed on such Importation, not exceeding ten dollars for each Person,’ clearly indicates that the ‘Persons’ referred to were slaves and were regarded as property by the signers of the Constitution. Indeed, many of the signatories of the Constitution were owners of slaves.

“The second divisive issue that arose,—and, again, despite the contravention of the Constitution,—was whether a fugitive slave had to be returned to the slave’s owner. This question was debated in the United States Congress as if unanswered in the Constitution, though, in Article IV, Section 2, Clause 3, the Constitution says: ‘No Person held to Service or Labour in one State, under the Laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in Consequence of any Law or Regulation therein, be discharged from such Service or Labour, but shall be delivered upon Claim of the Party to whom such Service or Labour may be due.’

“How was it that, despite the Constitution, these two issues came to be the subject first of debate and then of national division? The answer is that, in the years leading up to the war, the United States ceased to be ‘united’ and became a sectional country, with the Northern and Western sections predominating, despite what the Constitution said. This sectionalism could be seen in the last presidential election, in which a so-called ‘Republican’ Party, representing not the entire republic, but only the North and West, brought into power a President who as a candidate had promised to continue the denial of the right of transfer of property to the citizens of the South. The same election saw the division of the once national Democratic Party into Northern and Southern factions, the Northern faction promoting a concept of ‘popular sovereignty’ giving to squatters, in an area not yet a State, the right to deny the Constitutional rights of the States in the South; while the Southern faction, the domain of the South, was shrunken into the 13 state block, from Texas to Florida to Virginia, that would compose our Confederacy.

“To put this claim in another form, we were Slave States when we entered the Union, and the compact signed between us and the other States recognized us as Slave States, and guaranteed that our slave property would be respected and safeguarded. Under this understanding, agreed to by all, we Southerners fought in the War for Independence, the War of 1812, and the Mexican American War. How could these guarantees be taken from us except by an amendment, duly ratified, of our foundational compact?

“More ominous even than the assault on our Constitutional

rights, however, was the emergence of abolitionist extremism, advocating for the armed uprising of the slaves, and supported not only in hateful words, but in monetary contributions by many in the North who in private conversation had claimed to be our friends.

“Leaders claiming moral superiority in the North have laid the problem of slavery upon us alone, ignoring that the slaves, brought to America by Yankee ships, were a primitive people lacking culture or hope of amelioration. We say their race has been improved by involvement in our culture and in efficient work that makes possible their security and sustenance. In every advanced society, a similar work force exists. Such was the case, for example, in New England, in the textile mills, where young women, tricked into indebtedness, worked 12 hours a day in conditions less humane than our slaves have endured.

“Moreover, there is another principle established in the compact signed between the States in 1789 which is of central importance in a discussion of slavery. This is that, as Thomas Jefferson and others have asserted, the Constitution ordains a democratic flow of authority proceeding from the Individual up through the Local Community and Sovereign State to the Federal Government, which, as stated in the Constitution, has only the authority surrendered by the States.

“Exercising our power as Sovereign States rooted in Local Communities, we have claimed our right to apply our own moral compass in assessing slavery in our own society, with all the attendant issues of how this institution in our midst might be improved or discontinued.

“In view of this same principle of authority rising from the Individual through the Sovereign States, we of the Southern States have condemned the abrogation of power by the Northern and Western States in the levying of an army—in effect, a sectional army,—to be used against us Southern States to compel us to continue in a union no longer in our self interest.

“In the system of State Sovereignty that we subscribe to, our soldiers acted on their loyalty first to their Local Community, then to their State, and then to our new Confederacy to which our States pledge allegiance. They fought for the same principle that the heroes of the Revolutionary War fought for, that a central power (whether King George or Federal Government) must never intrude upon the rights of the Individuals from whom all governmental authority arises.

“As our president Jefferson Davis declared in his Second

Inaugural Address: 'The tyranny of an unbridled majority, the most odious and least responsible form of despotism, has denied us both the right and the remedy. Therefore we are in arms to renew such sacrifices as our fathers made to the holy cause of constitutional liberty.'

"There were those in the North who expected some in the South to rebel against their own States and take up with the North. But no such insurrection happened.

"Throughout this war, the world has witnessed the spectacle of Southern armies, outnumbered two or three to one, and lacking proportionally, in material, ammunition, and guns, yet defeating the Northern armies. In the invasion last year of Maryland, our barefoot soldiers threatened the seat of despotic power.

"For those who would still be doubtful, however, we say to you, tell us this:

"Was it 'rebellion,' as some have declared, when a group of States representing a third of the Union, having been deprived of their Constitutional rights by the other States, sought to disengage from this deleterious band?

"Were they 'traitors,' as some have called them, the men who rallied to the defense of the States of their childhood,—and who, in many cases, in this service, sacrificed their lives,—when the States which had deprived them of their rights invaded their ancestral lands and assaulted their communities and families?

"Was it 'acceptable' war when the Yankees engaged in destruction of private property, in Atlanta and Charleston, leaving no choice for women and children except to desert their homes? Was it 'moral' war when the attackers left a wake of destruction in the Shenandoah Valley, with fatherless families confronting a winter without food and fuel, their farm buildings destroyed and animals wasted?

"Was it 'victory' when a sectional, not truly American army prevailed with blunt force and with disregard for the lives of their own men,—in an ignoble attempt at triumph by attrition,—while seeking, through destruction of our inhabited cities and our means of livelihood, to break the spirit of our people, their former compatriots?"

### 79. Early, removed from command, leaves his wife and family behind

Lt. Gen. Jubal Early,—who had been a soldier for more than four years, living the life so thoroughly he hardly knew anymore how not to be a soldier,—after having been witness at Waynesboro to the routing and capture of his army,—had traveled to southwestern Virginia, seeking to attach himself to the troops collected there. Early had received a brief message at that point, however, from his commander, Gen. Robert E. Lee, instructing him to return to his home and wait for further instructions. The real meaning of the message, Early thought, was clear; he was a soldier no more; his military career had come to an end.

Early had headed back at once toward Hardy in Franklin County, Virginia, where his common law wife lived with his and her four children; but he had gone no more than 20 miles when he had fallen ill with a fever and cough so severe he could not go on. For more than two weeks then, at the home of a fellow officer, the war-fatigued general had lain in bed in a feverish sleep, thinking that death was at hand.

During this twilight time, as Early had tossed and turned in bed, often sweating profusely, the events of his soldier past had paraded and stormed through his mind.

In the first memory to rise in his imagination, Early, still a colonel, was back on the Jamestown Peninsula with his 6th Brigade during the first Union assault on Richmond. He recalled the sudden jolt of the bullet that had thrown him off his horse. He felt himself spinning and falling, and then re-mounting his horse. Then he was charging off again amidst smoke and shells, and in a clear insight he understood that the freedom of his young country was more important than his own life; he understood that if death would come, he could it accept it fully. He recalled his resolve to keep fighting, struggling against faintness, and collapsing into a medic's hands.

In a second memory that rose up in his mind, Early was riding along in the oppressive heat and choking dust of the road that led from Monocacy to Washington, with his column of ragged troops beside him, shouting hurrahs to him when they saw him. Surrounded by the sprawling branches of the Fort Stevens abatis, Early saw again the lean, tall figure, in black suit and top hat, of the man himself, Lincoln, that he had traveled 300 miles to confront.

Early also found himself in a camp swarming with his own

men as they scavenged for food and clothes, ignoring his pleas to re-form their lines. He saw his gallant soldiers at Waynesboro surrounded by blue uniforms.

Then, as mysteriously as it had begun, the fever had ended. Following that, Early had traveled alone, following remote roads, to the little town near Roanoke where he saw again the white pine-board exterior and gray roof of his two-story family home, which was about three times as wide as it was high, with an open porch with white railings all the way across, a brick chimney on each side, and, in the distance, a wooded mountain.

Julia McNealy and his four children, ranging in age from 8 to 15, had seen him approaching. They were waiting in the yard when he rode up, seeming puzzled by his unheralded appearance. Without questions, they accepted his announcement that he was between assignments with the army and might have a prolonged leave.

Julia was not so easy in acceptance. After the family had eaten together quietly, she came out into the yard where he had gone to remove the saddle from his horse.

She was still young in appearance and, in fact, was only 33 years old. As earlier described, she had first had relations with him when she had been only 17. She was about five foot four in height with light brown hair and the pale complexion common among the Celtic folk of the valley. She was dressed in a pleated blue skirt and a blue woolen sweater. As she talked to him, she folded her arms in front of her, and made steady eye contact with him. She had hazel-colored eyes. Her hair was braided with the braids pulled tightly around her head.

“Jubal, I need to know, what is your intention now? Will you be living here again as the father to this family?”

“Julia, I think, now their war is won, the Yankees will be out to arrest me as a criminal for the burning of Chambersburg.”

“Why did you do that, Jubal?”

“Surely you must know that we did it in retaliation for what they did to us.”

“That is the problem. It never ends.”

“What they did to us was worse and more comprehensive. They destroyed this entire valley.”

Julia looked toward the east northeast, along the southeast slope of the Blue Ridge. She recalled seeing there, about ten miles distant, by the Roanoke River, the smoke rising up from the houses and farm buildings that the Union army, under Maj. Gen. David Hunter, had set on fire in that area when retreating from

Lynchburg along the Virginia & Tennessee Railroad. She had heard that the Yankees had slashed clothes from the lines where they had been hung out to dry.

“Yes, I do know,” she said. “They have no sense of honor. As I know you do.”

“It is not just that I wish to avoid imprisonment, Julia. I feel it is incumbent upon me to make the case for what has happened. Many brave men have died. We were assaulted by a civilization of money and machines under the false pretense of freeing the slaves. I feel it is up to me to explain what happened.”

“So where will you go?”

“Toward Texas to join the forces there that are still resisting or to be close to a means of escaping if I must.”

“By steamer?”

“Yes, and if I could, I would take you with me and the children. But I have no choice.”

“Jubal, I know you are brave and would do no action of any kind out of cowardice. I am proud of you that you will do this,” Julia said. “When you go, you will go with my blessing.”

In her eyes Early saw an unchanged regard for him, while, at the same time, she made no move toward him and gave no indication she wished to be embraced.

The next day, as he prepared to leave, Early received a letter by post. He saw at once it was from General Lee. With the letter in hand, he walked into the yard beyond some trees to read it.

The letter went as follows:

Hd. Qrs., C. S. Armies,  
30th March, 1865.

Lt. General J. A. Early, Franklin Co., Va.

General,— My telegram will have informed you that I deem a change of Commanders in your Department necessary; but is due to your zealous and patriotic services that I should explain the reasons that prompted my action. The situation of affairs is such that we can neglect no means calculated to develop the resources we possess to the greatest extent, and make them as efficient as possible. To this end, it is essential that we should have the cheerful and hearty support of the people, and the full confidence of the soldiers, without which our efforts would be embarrassed and our means of resistance weakened. I have reluctantly arrived at the conclusion that you cannot command the united and willing co-operation which is so essential to success. Your reverses in the Valley, of which the public and the army judge chiefly by the results, have, I fear, impaired your influence both with the people

and the soldiers, and would add greatly to the difficulties which will, under any circumstances, attend our military operations in S. W. Virginia. While my own confidence in your ability, zeal, and devotion to the cause is unimpaired, I have nevertheless felt that I could not oppose what seems to be the current of opinion, without injustice to your reputation and injury to the service. I therefore felt constrained to endeavour to find a commander who would be more likely to develop the strength and resources of the country, and inspire the soldiers with confidence; and, to accomplish this purpose, I thought it proper to yield my own opinion, and to defer to that of those to whom alone we can look for support. I am sure that you will understand and appreciate my motives, and no one will be more ready than yourself to acquiesce in measures which the interests of the country may seem to require, regardless of all personal considerations. Thanking you for the fidelity and energy with which you have always supported my efforts, and for the courage and devotion you have ever manifested in the service of the country,

I am, very respectfully and truly,

Your obedient servant

R. E. LEE,

General

After Early read this letter, he placed his head in his hands and wept without tears, his shoulders shaking in an upheaval of the emotions that for four years he had kept inside.

It would soon be over, —the long, harsh war, the beautiful new country he had fought for, the gallant comradery and bravery of his comrades in arms. His family life, also, had been swept up in the war, he admitted in his mind, lost to him by the mistakes he had made through his negligence in pursuit of victory for the Confederate cause.

Now what could he do? He knew already what he had as of yet articulated to no one except his wife, just before; his next task would be to defend the honor of those who had died, defend them and the cause they had fought for, and reveal how they had fought from the start against such great odds. To do that, wrenching as it would be, he would have to leave at once to escape the grasp of the Union agents when they came looking for him, which could be at any time.

That night, dressed in clothes such as before the war he had worn as a lawyer, Jubal Early was on his horse alone, without his wife and family, without his troops, and without the stars and bars flag that had been beside him for the past four years.

## 80. Josiah finds Louisa wounded as the Union troops overrun Petersburg

In early March, 1865, Col. Josiah Derr had been transferred from the Calvary Corps of the Army of the Shenandoah to the VI Corps of the Army of the Potomac, on the Jamestown Peninsula, that latter corps having been one of the components of the Army of the Shenandoah throughout the previous fall.

This transfer from cavalry to infantry, an unusual change, had happened owing to the request of a division commander who had served with Josiah in the fall campaign and who had asked for Josiah, specifically, to replace a commander removed due to illness. As a result of this transfer, Josiah had become a regimental commander in the entrenchments southwest of Peterburg, about two miles west of where the Battle of Fort Stedman was soon to occur, and on the eastern edge of the area where the two sides were expected to clash in the near future.

In his new situation,—serving, as Josiah was, with members of his former command, including cavalry soldiers re-deployed to infantry positions near his own,—Josiah was privy to information, not generally known, regarding the movement, from Winchester, Virginia, to City Point, of his former parent unit, the Calvary Corps of the Army of the Shenandoah, under its energetic commander, Maj. Gen. Philip Henry Sheridan.

Josiah had become aware, for example, almost as soon as higher level Union officers like Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, that the cavalry had made its way down the James River road to the White House depot, about 15 miles north of City Point, and that there many of the horses had had to be re-shoed or abandoned as a result of the wear on them of the forced march. He was aware, also, as the month of March came to its final week, that the corps had crossed the James on a pontoon bridge southeast of Richmond (an operation, Josiah had heard, that President Lincoln had watched, with Grant and Sheridan, from a steamer that had brought them upriver from City Point).

Josiah was also aware that, in the days just past (the last days of March), Sheridan and his entire cavalry had passed a few miles south of Josiah's location, moving in a western direction. Moreover, Josiah had heard a discussion among his fellow officers of what this movement presaged.

“Sheridan has been told to get around to the right of Lee's line,” opined one of the dismounted officers who had served with Josiah in the Valley Campaign. “He's out to cut off the railroads.

If that succeeds, Lee will have to desert his works and try to escape, likely to the west somewhere.”

“Surely Lee will move to defend the railroads,” Josiah replied.

“No doubt. The rains and mud are maybe giving him a little time.”

The news came by word of mouth the next day, March 29, that Grant had contemplated stopping on account of the rain, but that Sheridan had ridden through 20 miles of mud to convince Grant not to delay the offensive.

“If that is true,” said another officer, “and Sheridan pushes, as only Sheridan can, then we will see some action real quick,”

Perhaps the time was at hand when all five of the Union corps south of Petersburg would be set into motion to drive Lee out of his trenches.

Orders came that same day that the VI Corps, including Josiah’s regiment, would attack at about 5 A.M. on April 2, moving directly on Petersburg. An artillery barrage would start at 4 A.M.

With a period of slightly more than one full day ahead of him, between the present moment and the scheduled hour of the attack, Josiah found himself highly mentally active, his mind racing along in the mental process that had seemed to him as if he had followed it, more than caused it, as the process had projected its own seemingly independent course within him. That process, Josiah knew, had encompassed and affected all the elements of his life of the past year, including his complex sentiments regarding being a soldier in the war, his sense of his ever more irresolvable conflict between his duties as a soldier and his religious duties (as he saw them, in a pacifist light), his grief at witnessing the damage to his native state of Virginia that he had been inescapably a part of, and his ongoing emotional and spiritual attachment to Louisa Stone, who remained the center and anchor of everything he regarded as good, despite her alignment with the other side of the conflict.

Josiah knew when and where exactly this mental process had started. It had started on March 5 of the prior year, in Chattanooga, Tennessee, on the day when General Grant had received the telegram informing Grant of being named commander-in-chief of all Union forces.

Josiah, as he recalled in his hyper-active mind, had listened then, as Grant’s aide-de-camp, to the general’s tempered exposition of the parameters of the coming contest.

Grant had said, as Josiah recalled: “With a unified command, we can win this war, indeed,—providing we attack and keep attacking until it is done. It will require the best we can be in duty and valor and the worst as makers of war.”

He had had experience enough already at that time, Josiah reflected, to understand what “the worst as makers of war” could be; and experience enough, also, to understand “the best we can be in duty and valor.” He had known that people in the North and South who loved one another would be pushed to different sides of the conflict, especially in his home state of Virginia; he had known what he might be required to do.

Josiah had seen, also, in his firsthand experience, the horror that the war,—although, in his mind, ultimately righteous,—had created.

His infantry regiment was lined up for battle just west of the artillery brigade assigned to support of the VI Corps, of which his regiment was part.

Being in the position, he found himself side by side with the brigade commander, Stuart Mertz, also a colonel, and also a graduate of West Point.

“There will be a new day after this war, Josiah,” the colonel remarked at one point, with no obvious relation to anything they had been discussing before.

“And how is that?”

“A new day for our American nation. We will realize ourselves westward. We will be the great nation we are destined to be. ‘The Manifest Destiny,’ I’ve heard it called.”

“Are you yourself from the West?”

“I am from Indiana, but I mean to go west as soon as this war is over, if the Good Lord grants me to live.”

“Where will you go?”

“I don’t know. Maybe Dakota. Maybe even Oregon. What about you? What will you do yourself?”

“Well, first thing, there is a lady I hope I can win over, if not to my sympathies, at least to my heart.”

“None like her, in other words.”

“Yes, as they say, and I know everyone says that, but, with her, it’s true.”

A sudden report from a near by artillery sounded then, per the time order already given, and Mertz saluted and went over to be with his own unit.

Josiah, as he waited for the order to move forward, watched the guns down the line from him as their precision crews loaded

shells, tamped in the powder, and bent aside with hands over ears. In front of him, the scene shook with flashes and dancing shadows as the shells exploded amidst the jagged ruins of the buildings in the Petersburg city center.

Then came the order to move forward and Josiah, feeling as in a dream once more, raised his sword and exhorted his men through the gray smoke and pot holes of the battleground.

Josiah, coming over a trench that had been deserted, continued onto a flat area where wounded were sprawled on the ground, some of them still moving and shouting out in pain. Among these bodies he saw an unmistakable sight, the body of a woman who looked directly at him as he approached.

It was Louisa Stone lying on her back with her hand on her stomach where her clothes were soaked with blood.

“Louisa, I can help you,” Josiah said, springing forward. “Tell me what to do.”

“It is too late, Josiah,” she replied. “I am struggling to remain.”

“Direct me, Louisa!”

“It is too late, Josiah. Trust me, I know.”

“If only I could help you, I would give up my own life in an instant!”

“I am just glad I am whole for you to see.”

“You are beautiful, Louisa, as you have always been, and as I will always see you in my mind.”

Her face showed the effect of that in a welling of emotion in the dazzling green eyes below the voluminous red hair, but, even as she reacted to what he had said, she began to pale.

“Josiah, I do love you. I shall always love you,” she whispered, and then fell silent.

“As I do you,” he replied, but he could see that she was no longer capable of hearing his words.

Josiah covered Louisa with a blanket that he found near by and called for a medic who came across to him. The medic was a teenager in appearance, and in rank just a corporal, so he was attentive at once to the wishes of the senior officer who had called for his services.

“Soldier, remain with this woman, please, and see that she is placed somewhere secure until I return. I am her relative and will see that she receives the proper treatment.”

“Of course, sir. I will.”

“Do not leave her even for a moment until I return.”

“Yes, sir. I understand.”

Josiah realized, as he headed off to take up the pressing obligations of the attack and his command, that the words Louisa had said were from his own letter to her,—an exact quote of the words that he had said he would wait to hear her say,—and this realization filled him with wonder over what had transpired. He understood that throughout the time when he and she had not spoken to one another, when she had remained a presence in his mind, he had been a presence in her mind, also. He understood that she had loved him as much as he had loved her.

### **81. Still resolved on victory, Davis withdraws his government from Richmond**

Time was the crucial factor as President Jefferson Davis, in late March and early April of 1865, considered the ever evolving state of the Confederate lines.

As earlier described, Davis and Gen. Robert E. Lee, prior to the failed attempt to break through the Union line at Fort Stedman, had agreed that Petersburg and Richmond would soon have to be abandoned on account of the gradual movement of the Union line westward toward the key railroads providing the Confederates with food and forage.

Davis and Lee had also agreed that the withdrawal could not occur until cessation of the constant rains and drying of the roads gave the exit a better chance of success.

No exact timetable had been agreed on; but, in a meeting at the executive mansion on Saturday, April 1, 1865, Davis told Brig. Gen. Isaac M. St. John, Commissary General of the Confederate Army, that a fortnight remained before St. John would be called upon to distribute rations to the depots along the selected route of the Confederate withdrawal.

John C. Breckinridge, Confederate Secretary of War, was at this meeting, also. This Breckinridge was the same as he who, ten months before, had combined his Department of East Tennessee and Southwestern Virginia with the Second Corps of the Army of Northern Virginia to form the army that, under the command of Lt. Gen. Jubal Early, had marched upon Washington City.

St. John, at this meeting, summarized the current reserve of “meat and bread” rations, each of which consisted of one pound of hardtack, made from cornmeal, and one pound of a durable meat, usually salt pork.

“We have ample supplies of rations stored in depots along

the railroads identified as routes,” St. John said, “the Richmond & Danville; and, west to Lynchburg and Knoxville, the Virginia & Tennessee; and the Southside railroad to Greensboro. All down these line, we have sent out appeals to our people to donate supplies. The response was as great as we could have hoped for. At all of our collection stations, there are boxcars packed with supplies and ready to be rolled where needed.”

The commissary general was respected for his level of expertise in these areas. He was a native Georgian who as a child had moved with his parents to Pennsylvania. Graduate of Yale University, publisher, lawyer, and civil engineer, he had worked for 12 years before the war in railroad construction, winding up in South Carolina, where, when that state seceded, he had declared his Confederate sympathies.

He listed the amounts and location of the stores including: 300,000 rations of bread and meat in Richmond; 500,000 rations of bread and 1,500,000 rations of meat at Danville; 180,000 rations of bread and meat at Lynchburg; and 1,500,000 rations of bread and meat at Greensboro.

“General, as you have indicated, these rations demonstrate the sacrifice and loyalty of our people,” Davis remarked. “Thank you for your own part in collecting them.”

“Glad to be of service,” the general replied.

“Now our greatest concern,” Davis added, “is to have these rations ready to be transported when needed to depots ahead of the corps when they must withdraw.”

“We cannot know now exactly which depots will be in need of shipments,” Breckinridge added. “That will depend on General Lee’s assessment from the field, communicated by telegraph ahead of him.”

When the meeting ended, the estimate continued to be that the rations would not be needed for a fortnight, but, later that same day, with Breckinridge still present conferring with Davis, a courier arrived with the news that conditions on the front had deteriorated in the matter of a few hours.

“Sheridan has not heeded the mud,” the courier said. “He has pressed an attack on Five Forks. The VI Corps has broken through to the Boynton Road and on toward Petersburg.”

“What is the state now so far as you know of it?” the president asked.

“Pickett was sent to counter Sheridan. I understand that he is pressed on from both sides. The force that assaulted Petersburg is inside the outer line, I have heard.”

The overall dynamic involved in these movements was clear to everyone. Maj. Gen. George Pickett, commander of the Third Division (aka Pickett's Division) of the First Corps of the Army of Northern Virginia, had been sent from his previous position, in the center of the Petersburg defensive line, out ten miles to the west to counter the attack being mounted there by Maj. Gen. Philip Henry Sheridan with his cavalry of the Army of the Shenandoah and the Union V Corps, temporarily attached. With no Confederate troops available to fill in the hole left by Pickett's redeployment, the center had been vulnerable to the assault of the Union VI Corps at that location just west of Fort Stedman.

"There are simply not enough men to cover the entire line," Davis said. "Please tell General Lee we are waiting to hear when exactly we will need to withdraw to coordinate with his movement as much as possible."

Many preparations had been made assuming the eventual withdrawal, but the preparations had not been finalized due to the mistaken assumption that a buffer of time remained before the withdrawal would begin.

Later in the afternoon, further news arrived, more dire than before. Pickett had been surrounded and forced to surrender en masse with more than four thousand men including all four of his brigade commanders. The Union II, V, and IX corps were assembling in a battle order of massive columns facing the Petersburg lines.

Davis sent out word to his cabinet secretaries that the government would have to withdraw as soon as word to that effect was received from General Lee.

On the next day, while attending worship service at St. Paul's Episcopal Church (same church as where Col. Hiram Stone had read the newspaper editorial earlier described), Davis was handed a telegram from Lee.

The telegram said: "I see no prospect of doing more than holding our position here until night. I am not certain I can do that. If I can I shall withdraw tonight north of the Appomattox, and, if possible, it will be better to withdraw the whole line tonight from James River. I advise that all preparations be made for leaving Richmond tonight. I will advise you later according to circumstances."

Within a half hour, the cabinet secretaries were all on hand in the executive mansion to finalize the evacuation plans that had been already discussed.

Instructions were dispatched for the final disposition of the

subsistence reserve in Richmond, as described, amounting to about 350,000 rations. Railroad cars were designated for the bullion of the government and government records already collected and packed by department. All that remained to be done was to fill every car and accessible army wagon per the priority of the material being sent.

“Please prepare your own affairs so that the train can leave on time,” Davis declared. “We will debark after midnight when the moon sets.”

After the cabinet officers left the executive mansion. Davis summoned the officer in charge of the tobacco warehouses located along the James River.

“Nothing of value to the enemy should fall into his hands,” Davis said. “All our cotton bales must be burned, but not until the last moment tomorrow after the trains have left the city and all of our troops have left.”

Davis also summoned the officer in command of the war ships in the James River, Brig. Gen. William M. Gardner.

“All of our ships must be destroyed,” Davis declared, “but not until the last moment. You will direct all Navy personnel to travel by whatever means available to Danville.”

Danville was still the destination to which all military units were still assumed to be heading.

“Mr. President,” Garner replied, “the other day I noticed several old engines and some old cars parked on a side track. Obviously they have not been used lately. With your permission, I think some of our steam engineers could get those engines working, to pull the old cars for our means of conveyance.”

“Major, you are more than welcome to do that. Best of luck in it.”

“We will try.”

About an hour later, Davis saw a crew of about a dozen sailors in the railroad yard visible from a window in the executive mansion. He watched as one group of them with huge wrenches disassembled the engine and replaced several parts with those removed from another engine. At the same time, another group was assembling a train of cars on a spur track with a link to the main track to Danville.

Late that night, Davis, with briefcase in hand, walked down from the executive mansion to the railroad yard and took his seat on a car occupied by other members of his cabinet.

“This is not the end, gentlemen,” he announced. “This is the start of a new day.”

“Here’s to ol’ Virginia!” someone called out.

In the portion of the yard visible from his window, Davis observed, the Navy engineers were bent over the old engine they had been working on, which was now sending out puffs of smoke from its black metal chimney. Other sailors were re-building a second engine.

That engineering skill and determination was another proof of the resilience of the Confederate people, Davis acknowledged in his mind.

The streets were crowded with package-laden civilians and families fleeing the war zone on horses, wagons, and foot. Others had retreated to their houses.

Where was his own family? He had heard that the train carrying them had made it as far as Charlotte, North Carolina, hundreds of miles removed from the ongoing fighting.

Three days later, on April 5, 1865, having not been kept informed of the rapidly deteriorating state of the Army of Northern Virginia, President Davis would issue a proclamation from Danville, Virginia, 200 miles from Richmond. In part it would say:

“It is for us, my countrymen, to show by our bearing under reverses, how wretched has been the self-deception of those who have believed us less able to endure misfortune with fortitude than to encounter danger with courage.

“We have now entered upon a new phase of the struggle. Relieved from the necessity of guarding particular points, our army will be free to move from point to point, to strike the enemy in detail far from his base.

“Let us but will it, and we are free.”

## **82. Emily visits Mary Lincoln seeking ideas for helping former contrabands**

Emily Derr learned of the changing state of the war through the sound of cannons firing on Monday, April 3, 1865 as she walked down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington City.

“What is all the commotion about?” she asked a soldier.

“Richmond and Petersburg have fallen!”

“Where did the Confederates go?”

“They are running, I heard.”

The reason Emily was in Washington City was because, at the encouragement of her brother, Josiah, she had written to the

First Lady, Mary Todd Lincoln, asking for ideas on how to help former contrabands heading to Northern cities like Washington. This was a follow-up action on her part after returning from her trip to New York City.

To Emily's astonishment, the First Lady had responded at once: "How nice to hear from you, Miss Emily! Could you make a visit to Washington to talk? I would be delighted to see you and hear your news on your work with the contrabands. Their fate is of great concern to me and my husband."

Mrs. Lincoln had, also, in this letter mentioned her former slave seamstress Elizabeth Keckley and offered to extend the meeting to her.

"Madame Keckley has been active in helping the contrabands," Mrs. Lincoln wrote.

On the prior evening in the National Hotel, Emily had looked through the research she had done to get a handle on the contrabands problem.

The most basic question Emily had considered was how many former slaves would seek to take up a new life in the North. At Harper's Ferry, there were about 2,000 contrabands. The largest contraband camp she had heard about, located in Virginia City, Virginia, had about 10,000 contrabands. Scores of camps existed across the South. Assuming that 100 such camps existed, which seemed about right, and assuming each camp had 1,000 residents, that would come to about 100,000 contrabands. In addition, there were caravans of former slaves moving north, with the presumed intention to settle in Northern cities. It appeared, though, that the vast majority of freed slaves would try to make a living somehow in their native rural areas or would crowd into nearby cities. Even so, if only one in ten of the four million former slaves moved north, that would amount to 400,000 displaced blacks moving north.

In the foyer of the White House, Emily met a soldier who led her to a door at the end of a long hall and called inside, "Madame Mrs. President, here is your guest."

Inside the door Emily saw the First Lady seated at a family-sized table next to a black woman Emily assumed was Elizabeth Keckley, the seamstress.

Mrs. Lincoln rose at once and approached with both hands extended. She was dressed in one of Mrs. Keckley's creations, a three-piece pleated blue gown. The seamstress herself was dressed in one of her own gowns, also, but of a simpler design.

"Miss Emily, welcome!" the First Lady said. "You are the

highpoint of our day!”

“Thank you, ma’am. It is an honor to be here.”

“Have you heard about the war?”

“Yes, what glorious news!”

“This is the dear friend I told you about, Elizabeth Keckley. She has had a very interesting life! After 25 years as a slave, she bought her own freedom!”

“What an astounding accomplishment!” Emily said.

“Certainly, it was one I was glad to achieve. But we can talk about my story some other time,” Madame Keckley replied.

“For now, Emily, please come in and set yourself down. I have sent for tea already.”

“Thank you, ma’am, for your kindness.”

Then followed a pleasant, and yet detailed discussion at which Mrs. Lincoln displayed the mental adroitness for which she was known among her friends.

Elizabeth Keckley was the first to speak, at the invitation of Mrs. Lincoln, but she did not take the tack that Emily supposed she would, of talking about former slaves who had yearned for freedom and were now ready and deserving to assume it. Instead, she talked about how different the circumstances were from what they had expected.

“Emily, you must understand,” she said, pronouncing her words distinctly as if to emphasize that she knew the exact words and used grammar as complex as that of any white person, “there are many coloreds who grew up in the South in a small world that was everything they knew, a world with a master and a mistress upon whom everything depended. In their new, more complicated world of the metropolis, they have looked for that simple kind of authority. They cannot understand the vast difference between their old world and the new.”

“Ah, yes,” said Mrs. Lincoln, nodding thoughtfully. “Some of them even think of Mr. Lincoln and me as their new master and mistress.”

“Yes, and some cannot relate to a city at all,” said Madame Keckley. “They search for a country setting such as they grew up in, and they are bitter and nostalgic until they find it. We have an entire community like that outside of the city here, with chickens and hogs, but it would take hundreds of such communities to absorb the numbers we expect.”

“We do have efforts to help the arriving travelers,” the First Lady said. “Is that not so, Lizzie?”

“Yes, we have what we call the ‘Contrabands Assistance

Association.” Madame Keckley said. “We have set up welcome centers. On behalf of this organization, we go off to Negro churches speaking and asking for financial assistance. Perhaps white people could be addressed, too.”

“If you mean, with my assistance,” said Emily, “I would feel privileged to do so. Could you help me to start?”

“Oh, yes,” replied the dignified freedwoman. “Let up keep in touch about it.”

At this juncture, Madame Keckley excused herself and left briefly to speak with someone from her apparel firm, which had ongoing business outside the White House with elite women from Washington. Mrs. Lincoln then, leaning toward Emily, revealed details from her early life.

“Many think I grew up on a plantation. But that was not the case. My family lived in Lexington, in the heart of the city, but we were wealthy and had slaves. When my mother died when I was only 8 years old, a colored woman became in effect my new mother. Her name was Mammy Sally. Because of her I developed a great understanding and affection for colored people, and that feeling has much to do with why Madame Keckley has grown so dear to me. She has all the old qualities I loved as a child, and she is a person of the future who, on her own, by an application of her own will, has overcome her slavery past, and has become not just free, but successful in the white world. She is an inspiration to black people, and, besides, such a good friend, and so full of sound wisdom.”

“Yes, Mrs. President, I can see that,” Emily replied. “I am much impressed with her, although my acquaintance thus far has been brief.”

“Well, hopefully, that will not continue to be the case. She is a person you can draw upon in your own efforts, and you and she, though different colors, have much in common in your concern for the freed slaves.”

“I hope that will be so, and thank you for the kind words.”

“Emily, you are most welcome. You know, some people in the press have made me out to be a sympathizer with the South, and even a spy, and it is true I have three brothers who are rebel soldiers, but my allegiance is firmly to the cause of the Union and freedom for the slaves that my husband has devoted himself to so fully.”

When Elizabeth Keckley returned to the room with a nod and smile, Mrs. Lincoln remarked: “Then, to go on, we have had made another effort, Lizzie and I,—have we not, Lizzie?—to

obtain the help of people in authority here who could assist with jobs. We have a manager working with us at the National Hotel. He has found jobs for the contrabands as porters, janitors, cooks, and room maids. Good steady jobs.”

“Ah yes,” said Emily, “I learned of the same being done in New York City. But what of the plea I heard there, that what is really desired for blacks are more professional positions?”

“Yes! Yes!” Madame Keckley replied. “And that is the crux of the problem! These positions require education and being able to do the positions as only educated people can do them. How can our former slaves acquire this education? And can they acquire it to the extent to apply it? And will they be accepted to apply it, or will they be turned aside because of the color of their skin? With successes ignored, and failures magnified as examples of how the whole race is deficient!”

“It is a daunting problem!” Mrs. Lincoln threw in. “But how could it be other when four million slaves have been set free, with many white people not inclined to accept black people except in the lowest roles? There will need to be a great time of adjustment and amelioration! We are now just on the cusp of it despite all our good intentions. What can we each do, except to play our own small part?”

Following from this, there was further discussion over tea. Could better education be set up for the blacks able to go beyond the lower level jobs to which they were being assigned? Could Emily help in launching a program on a higher level, such as had been provided by the elite “colored schools” in New York?

Could some of the freed slaves move out to the newer states out West? Emily was surprised to learn that some Union states like Oregon and Iowa had laws banning or discouraging settlement of non-white people within their own territory. This was one reason why their legislatures had banned slavery; they did not want blacks in their midst, slave or free.

Could the former slaves go West to homestead as white immigrants were doing? Technically, they would be eligible as homesteaders, but there were stories of widespread resentment against them.

The problem was daunting, Emily thought as she headed toward her hotel. Again the cannons were firing. Indeed, it was clear that, as the great war was winding down, the problem of adjusting the country to the freed slaves was just beginning.

### 83. **Terner leads his fellow slaves in defending the Stone Plantation**

Throughout his life, in his unique situation as an educated black man, a slave, in a world controlled by the white people who owned and managed the plantation on which he had grown up and had worked his entire life, Terner Ross had had inquiries, and conclusions made from these inquiries, that he had kept to himself, and that he never alluded to, either within his own family, among other slaves, or with members of the Stone family, including his boyhood companion, Hiram Stone.

At the same time, owing to his bookkeeping and account management abilities, his habitual thoroughness, and his access to the plantation books, Terner had acquired a comprehensive view of how the plantation was set up and functioned as a business, as well as of how the slave workforce of the plantation contributed to the annual income of the plantation and the accumulated Stone family wealth.

Over against this view of the plantation business, however, which lent to the interpretation that the business had flourished at the expense of the slaves, Terner had observed that the financial state of the plantation had, in fact, steadily deteriorated during the war years. The inability to plant crops, owing to the impressment, and the high cost of all needed supplies within the shortage created by the Union blockade, had contributed to this decline. Terner had also noted, over the years,—as his own life had taken him, at times, outside the Stone family domain,—that the slaves of the Stone plantation lived and worked in better conditions than the slaves on most other plantations.

Against a solely negative view of the plantation, also, was what Terner, through his calm and non-confrontive temperament, had brought to his understanding of the plantation world in which he had grown up and prospered, in his kind. As the result of much quiet observation, he had come to the conclusion, beginning in his teen years, that he lived in a complex, ordered society in which everyone had a place, including himself and his kindred slaves. Terner had observed that, in this ordered world, status and wealth did not correspond, necessarily, to reputation and happiness. For example, he had been impressed as a youth with the slave called “Uncle Artie,” a cheerful carpenter, dignified and respected by everyone. Other slaves had worked their way to their own special occupations, Terner had observed; while some who seemed capable of only manual labor were nonetheless content, and

vibrant with sunlight and health.

Not that Turner took lightly, or was in any dismissive, of the slavery condition of his own people. Indeed, as he had stated in his intellectual testament, hidden in the banister of a stairway in the big house (the testament discovered by Hiram Stone), Turner was keenly aware of the inherent injustice of slavery; and he had come to the conclusion, also, by a like exercise of his calm and non-confrontive mind, that part of his future role would be to help and inspire his own people in the journey into freedom that would surely follow the looming Confederate defeat. This new condition of freedom, he believed, would bring a new life to the slaves, but with new and formidable challenges that would not be easily surmounted.

There was an emotional aspect of this, also. Turner loved the Stone family, and Hiram, especially, such that he continued to cherish the one development that rose higher than everything else in his estimation; and this was that Hiram had asked him to be his friend. He trusted that Hiram was, indeed, now his friend, with the color barrier shattered that had stood so long between him and this person whom he had grown up with like a brother.

Meanwhile, along with everyone around him, Turner waited to see what the fall of the Old South would bring to Powhatan County.

Evidence of the imminent change began on the same day as news came around that the Confederate army had withdrawn from Petersburg. Turner and 22 other slaves of the Stone plantation, upon being told that their work was ended at the Tredegar Iron Works, returned to Powhatan at this time.

The first concrete news,—and alarming for some members of white planter families,—was that the slaves had risen up at the Clayton plantation, where the slave boy Joey had been killed several years before. They had set the big house on fire and had killed Bart Harris, the overseer who had shot the boy. Clayton and his family had escaped. The slaves had departed the scene and were nowhere to be found.

Then came the alarm, in the midst of the night, on Monday, April 3, 1865 (same night that Emily Derr was departing from the White House in Washington), that riders had entered the Stone plantation and were visible along a ridge above a dark field as hooded figures holding torches and guns.

There was no need to devise a plan of defense, as it had all been pre-arranged and was anchored in the trust and respect with which all on the plantation, from the big houses to the slave camp,

regarded the gentle-mannered, educated slave.

Acting on that pre-arranged plan, Turner announced at once in the slave camp, when the news came to him of the hooded men looking down from the ridge, that the time had come to act. Then, with the men he and Hiram had pre-selected, he walked to the largest of the big houses, where Anne Stone awaited him.

“Let us proceed,” she said. “If these men with hoods were as bold as they pretend, they would not hide their faces.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Turner replied. “We are ready to do whatever is required.”

In the lower area of the house were the muskets hung along a rack that Turner and the others had already been taught how to use. Together the slaves filed out under cover of the foliage and darkness, across a wide area of the yard into the protective positions already prepared.

Having done so, they waited, with Anne in the center and Turner beside her, musket in hand, at a respectful distance. Anne was not a person to show fright, he knew. Her attention was steadily on the figures on the ridge.

The hooded men were dressed in white gowns with red crosses. Their hoods, white, also, covered their entire faces with holes cut for eyeholes.

“Hello, there! We see you. Answer or we will attack. There is no need for anyone to be harmed,” one of them called.

“What is it you want?” Anne asked.

“We want you to back off. We will take what we want.”

“Back off where?”

“Over in the shed there, everyone.”

“We have men with guns here, soldiers from Powhatan,” Anne replied. “We will not comply.”

The answer to this was a gunshot from one of the hooded men while the others moved a few paces nearer. But Turner then fired back, and, as previously instructed, all of the slaves fired once, all along the defensive line.

There was a moment of silence after this, some huddling together of the hooded men, and then the entire group turned and withdrew out of sight.

The sound of the horses’ hooves hitting the ground could be heard for several minutes lessening in volume.

“They were not brave,” Anne said. “They were expecting an easy triumph.”

Turner called on the other slaves to stack their guns and all complied. Two were left watching but without guns.

On the next day, Anne went down to the slave camp where Turner lived in a cabin of the larger size afforded to larger family units. The cabin was 20x30 feet in dimension with a pine plank exterior and three inner rooms. It had a stone fireplace and a hearth in the largest room.

Turner did not live in this cabin alone, but he had a separate room. His sister also lived in the cabin, her two children, and his aunt, who slept by the fireplace.

“Turner, I came for a specific purpose,” Anne ventured.

In response to this, Turner looked intently toward her. “Yes, ma’am,” he said.

“I’ve been thinking about you and your brave assistance when we were under attack from whomever those people were. I still do not understand their design.”

“They meant to steal only, I think.”

“There was hatred, also.”

“Yes, ma’am, I could see that.”

“What I meant to tell you,” Anne continued, “and what I now wish to tell you, Turner, completely explicitly, is when I was standing beside you there, by our little rampart of defense, I realized that you are a man like any man, and more than that, you are an excellent man.”

“This means a great deal to me,” Turner said. “It means more than anything else you could give me.”

“Such a simple thing to say. I regret that I have failed to acknowledge it for so many years.”

Anne extended her hand at this point and Turner extended his, also. She and he shook hands.

“When you are ready to go, Turner, we can furnish wagons and as much food as we can spare. We can find bedding and clothes, if you need them.”

“Thank you kindly.”

“I think you will have a great future wherever you go, Turner. I hope you will have an opportunity to use your talent.”

“Thank you, ma’am, and thank you for your visit,” Turner replied.

Again, Turner Ross saw this interaction in the context of the small society in which he had lived all his life and in which Anne Stone was a kind of queen. From having lived as a boy in the same house as she, watching her interact with her own family, with the slaves in her household, and with those in the shops and fields, he knew her to be a kind and gracious mistress. At the same time, she had been, also, as might have been expected, dignified and proud,

keeping what she had felt was the proper distance from those in her service. For her to act as she had, therefore, in response to the slaves' defense of the plantation, struck Turner as an act of sincere self-examination, self-correction, and humility. He knew how hard it had been for her to apologize, and to tell him so forthrightly that she now regarded him as like any man and more than that as an excellent man.

#### 84. Lincoln tours Richmond feeling beset by "the primal eldest curse"

The previous two days had brought exciting events for President Abraham Lincoln. Gen. Robert E. Lee had deserted Petersburg. President Jefferson Davis had deserted Richmond. Indeed, as the president stepped out from his cabin on the *USS Malvern* on Tuesday, April 4, 1865, the war appeared to him to be progressing rapidly to a close, thanks to the leadership of someone whom he felt to be a grand soldier, Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant.

Before Lincoln, at the moment, however, was a soldier just as grand, dressed in a blue uniform with the yellow epaulets of a lieutenant on his shoulders and on his head a stiff-visored blue cap. This soldier had a sword, too, in a braided scabbard, a buckled belt, and yellow gloves.

"Well, Tad," Lincoln said, "how does it feel to be 12 years old?"

"Just the same, Pappa Day!" the boy replied, and with that he was off, leaving the gloves beside his father. The boy leaned over a nearby railing, the sword clunking, an inconvenience he didn't seem to mind.

In the direction the boy looked toward, a bigger, brighter steamer, the *River Queen*, was approaching with smoke puffing up from its black iron chimneys.

"Ad'mral says we goin' to Richmond," Tad exclaimed.

He was speaking of Adm. David Dixon Porter. The *Malvern* was the admiral's flag ship, where Lincoln had been staying in a small cabin to escape public access.

"Once again, Tad, your scouts are better than mine!"

"When we going?"

"I think very soon. I will need your protection."

"Haw! I can't do nothing," Tad called back from the metal ladder he had climbed on to get a better view.

"Maybe in Richmond, we can find you a birthday present."

“Okay, Pappa. I goin’ for breakfast okay?”

“You go on, Tad. Be polite when you ask.”

“Yes, Father.”

An hour later, the president and his son were on the steamer the boy had been awaiting, the *River Queen*, watching the *Malvern* steaming ahead of them and the low Richmond skyline ahead of that, where black smoke billowed up.

Lincoln had been informed that the smoke was from fires set by the Confederate themselves as they exited the city less than two days before. The fires, starting at a tobacco warehouse, had swept downtown and into an area of shops and poor people’s houses, causing explosions of fuel tanks and unexploded shells. Four large booms had also sounded when the Confederates had destroyed their four ironclads docked near Richmond.

Later, the president and his son, and his bodyguard, William Crook, wound up, after both of the steamers had grounded, riding the final distance to the Richmond docks in the admiral’s barge, powered by nine sailors with oars.

As no one knew for sure where to land, the crew aimed for a dock where there was a crew of blacks working with spades.

One of the blacks, an old man, (as Admiral Porter was later to recount,) upon seeing Lincoln in his tall hat, called out: “Bress de Lord, dere is de great Messiah! I knowed him as soon as I seed him. Glory, Hallelujah!”

When the man knelt before him, Lincoln pulled him up, saying: “That is not right. You must kneel to God only, and thank Him for the liberty you will hereafter enjoy.”

The blacks gathered around Lincoln, singing:

*Oh, all ye people clap your hands*

*And with triumphant voices sing;*

*No force the mighty power withstands*

*Of God, the universal King.*

The sound of the singing soon attracted a crowd of other bystanders, almost all of them black. They joined in the singing and reached out their hands for Lincoln to touch.

With the admiral on one side, and Crook and Tad on the other, and four sailors with carbines before and after, Lincoln proceeded up onto a street crowded with curious blacks. There were some white people present, also, peering out from windows with curtains drawn.

“Sir, if you would care to, we can visit the Southern White House, as it is called. It is in the hands of our soldiers now and all the Davis’s are gone.”

“Yes, I would like to see that.”

In the executive mansion, Lincoln approached a chair which he was told had been used by Jefferson Davis. He sat back into it with no appearance of gloating and accepted the glass of water offered to him.

The group was met by an ambulance large enough to accommodate the admiral, the president, and Tad, with Crook accompanying them on a horse outside.

The ambulance paused at the edge of the burning buildings where the flames had carried across into some houses beside some railroad tracks. The houses were shattered as if from shells and the street was cluttered with broken furniture. A boy of about six was standing alone with a look of sorrow and confusion.

“Where is your mother, child?” Lincoln said as he stood with his own son.

“Dead.”

“Right here?”

“Yes, by that house.”

The president looked and saw bodies of two women and three children.

“Where is your father?”

“Dead in the war. They say he was brave.”

“As indeed he must have been!”

Obviously, there had just occurred an explosion of some kind that had killed the entire group at the same time.

“Soldier!” called the president to a young soldier passing near him.

“Yes, sir!” said the man, drawing at once to attention when he saw who had beckoned him.

“I want you to remain with this child until you secure some situation of protection and comfort. If anyone questions what you are doing, say you are fulfilling a direct order from the president.”

“Yes, sir, I will, Mr. President.”

“The Lord will assist you in your task.”

“Yes, sir!”

“The Lord will assist us all,” Lincoln continued, though the soldier had turned away, bent down over the child, with his hands on his shoulders. “Even in this, His goodness and mercy are present.”

“Papa, I keep thinking about that boy,” Tad said when the president and his son were traveling back to City Point on the ship on which they had come.

“Yes,” said the president. “I do also.”

“What will become of him?”

“If you mean, will he remain an orphan, I don’t think so, Tad, especially since we asked for that soldier to attend to him. I think he will wind up with a good family, though he will remember his real family that died in the war.”

“Let us pray for him every evening.”

“Tad, that is a good idea. We will pray for him together.”

“Thank you, Pa.”

Back at City Point, a man with a walking staff and a long white beard appeared shipside and asked to speak to Lincoln, introducing himself as a “true rebel” and an old acquaintance. Lincoln, seeing him below, knew at once he was “General Duff Green” (so called because he had been a brigade commander in the War of 1812). He was a school teacher, journalist, and a railroad builder, and had continued in his business dealings without taking a side in the war.

“I did not come to shake your hand,” the man retorted when the president extended his hand.

“Please, then, take a seat, General Green. I am not offended that you express your sentiments.”

“Mr. Lincoln, I don’t know what can possibly be in your soul. But let me say something that can be said on the level of our day-to-day world. You have caused the deaths of thousands of bright, young men, your brothers, deprived them of promising lives. You have caused suffering and destruction of families! You have ruined the Old South! You have brought total war!”

“I assure you, sir, that was not my intention.”

“All to convince yourself that you have done something good for the Negroes!” the man ranted on, so angry he could hardly contain himself. “And for what purpose? You have thrown them out into circumstances they will not understand, in which they will be treated with contempt!”

To this Lincoln took affront.

“Stop,” he said, “you have been the aider and abettor of those who have brought this ruin upon your country, without the courage to risk your own person in defense of the principles you profess to espouse! A fellow who stood by to gather up the loaves and fishes, if any should fall to you! Go, before I forget myself and the high position I hold!”

“Then with your permission I will go back to my true friends.”

“Go.”

Despite the show of dismissal, however, Lincoln pondered

over these accusations after Green left, and to this assessment he added the impressions of the day, including the sad plight of the boy who had lost his family. Lincoln consoled himself that he had not ordered anything to be burned in Richmond, and yet horrible incidents such as these were part of a chain of events that he himself had had a great part in starting, a chain of events that had carried over into the civilian sphere. Indeed, the war had been a “total war” as Green had claimed; moreover, in addition to its deleterious effect on non-combatants, the war had brought death to many “bright young men,” as Green had called them, or had brought them injuries more maligning than the wars of the past had brought.

“I have long told myself that in this war I have done what the Lord set in place for me to do,” Lincoln reflected. “It was what He required me to do. Yet how awful to acknowledge my part in the devastation.”

That night the president listened to the water lapping on the metal hull of the ship. On the table beside his bed, he had a leather-bound collection of plays by William Shakespeare, who since his boyhood school days had been one of his favorite authors.

There, in *Hamlet*, Lincoln found the soliloquy spoken by Hamlet's uncle, King Claudius: "Oh, my offense is rank, it smells to heaven; it hath the primal eldest curse upon't, a brother's murder."

Lincoln read these words as he considered how complicated his private morality had become under the burden of leading the nation through the war.

“At last, it is done!” he said out loud. “Dear God, forgive me if I erred! And I beg you, dear Lord, do not allow my personal failings to dim the future of the American nation.”

### **85. Sheridan cuts off the withdrawing columns of Lee's starving army**

Maj. Gen. Philip Henry Sheridan, well known by this time for his decisiveness, his infectious impetuosity, and the rapidity of movement of his mounted men, had been directed by the Union commander-in-chief, Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, even before the start of the Confederate withdrawal, to move out to the west of the Confederate forces so as to cut off the routes that could lead to a safe haven in Danville or Lynchburg.

At first, in early April of 1865, when the Army of Northern Virginia, under Gen. Robert E. Lee, had still been in a fixed position south of Petersburg, the reason for the Union attacking on the west of the line had been to force the Confederates to extend and thus attenuate that line, preliminary to a Union attack on its center by the five corps positioned to the south and east of Petersburg. This strategy had been tried, and had succeeded, in Sheridan's first large engagement since returning to the Jamestown Peninsula, at the key location called Five Forks. Indeed, this attack, followed by advances of the II and VI Corps into Petersburg, was the development that had forced Lee to withdraw, as earlier described.

General Sheridan had also shown, in the events surrounding the Battle of Five Forks, that he understood, and was eager to act upon, the wish expressed by both Grant and President Abraham Lincoln, that the Confederate forces should be pressed and not allowed to escape. When informed, two days prior to the planned attack on Five Forks, that Grant, due to rain, was about to delay it, Sheridan had ridden through 20 miles of mud to Grant's headquarters in order to plead, in person, his case that the advance should proceed. When given permission to attack, Sheridan had attacked at once with a trademark swift attack of cavalry on his left flank, followed by a wheeling motion of infantry on his right flank,—that being the V Corps, then under his command,—to box in and force surrender of the entire division, under Maj. Gen. George Pickett, that had been sent out to meet him, as earlier described.

Despite this victory, however, Sheridan had pronounced that the V Corps commander, Maj. Gen. Gouverneur K. Warren, had not moved fast enough. Warren, he had observed, had "taken three hours to move his corps two miles." When informed of the urgency of getting behind Pickett's men before they could escape, General Warren had shown "decided apathy," Sheridan had claimed. As a result, in a show of his justly feared anger, Sheridan had dismissed General Warren on the spot, replacing him with Warren's subordinate, the First Division commander, Maj. Gen. Charles Griffin.

The town of Jetersville, 15 miles further west, was the next location where Sheridan was determined to execute a rapid attack. By this time, the Confederates were on the run, moving west to escape the Union pursuit. Sheridan arrived at Jetersville on Tuesday, April 4, 1865, the same day on which Lincoln was touring Richmond. Jetersville was located on the Richmond &

Danville Railroad, six miles southwest of the Amelia Courthouse, where the three columns of Lee's army were reported to be joining. Beyond Jetersville, five miles further to the southwest, was the Burkeville junction where the Richmond & Danville Railroad intersected with the South Side railroads, providing a decision point, if the Confederates made it that far, to move either toward Danville or Lynchburg.

Within 24 hours of arriving at the scene, proceeding on his self-imposed expedited schedule, Sheridan had the V and VI corps, still under his direction, dug in across the road, while his Second Division of cavalry, under Maj. Gen. George Crook, headed southwest along the tracks to tear them up. Then, when a handwritten note was intercepted, asking for Confederate facilities down track to send supplies, Sheridan realized that Lee's telegraph link was broken. At once, he sent scouts to the nearest working station to transmit the same message, hoping that the Confederates would send their rations into Union hands.

That night, when Maj. Gen. George Meade, commander of the Army of the Potomac, arrived at Jetersville, and soon after, General Grant, Sheridan paced as his seniors, Meade and Grant, discussed the plan of attack that Meade already had devised. He would move on Amelia Courthouse at dawn, Meade said, with his entire army (including the V and VI corps, which he insisted should be returned to him from Sheridan). When Grant, in his quiet manner, remarked that Lee was maybe slipping away as they talked, Sheridan forced down the restless impatience rising within him. He agreed with Grant but out of protocol held back from challenging the older, more senior Meade.

At dawn, however, when the Confederates were no longer at Amelia Courthouse, Sheridan had his cavalry already collected from its disparate locations. He set out at once toward the road along which Lee was escaping.

Moving at a gallop, with two divisions, comprised of more than 10,000 mounted men, thundering behind him, Sheridan saw in the distance a wagon train followed by a rear guard that turned toward him to check his progress. Sheridan, however, did not stop for that. Leaving a brigade there to keep the rear guard occupied, he led his main column cross country in a direction parallel and about a half mile removed from the Confederate column extending across the entire visible landscape for more than ten miles from Amelia Springs to Rice Station.

From this vantage point, as his progress across the rolling fields brought occasional unobstructed views, Sheridan could also

see, behind him, the massive columns of the Union V, VI, and II Corps, with their horse-drawn wagons, gun carriages, caissons, and colorful flags more plodding in movement than the Confederate column, but moving steadily forward.

Seeing that a break of about a hundred yards had developed in the column in an area where the terrain was broken, leading to a creek and a steep bluff, Sheridan directed Maj. Gen. (Bvt.) Wesley Merritt, commander of his Third Division, to attack at once, which it did, from south of the road, cutting off the trailing group from the lead group, which, unaware, had passed out of view.

Hours of frantic fighting occurred as the Confederates in the isolated group dug in on the bluff above the creek and attempted with a gallant charge to break out. Two Confederate corps were involved, under separate commanders, but jammed into the same area, back to back. Soon two of the Union corps that had been following behind Sheridan, the V and VI, came up on the north side of the battle field and boxed the Confederates in. The result was the surrender of the entire surrounded group, which included the Fourth Corps under Lt. Gen. Richard H. Anderson and the Third Corps under Lt. Gen. Richard S. Ewell. A total of 7,700 men had surrendered including Confederate major generals, Joseph B. Kershaw and George Washington Custis Lee, the commanding general's son..

Meanwhile, an attack against the Confederate Second Corps under Maj. Gen. John Brown Gordon had been initiated by Sheridan's Second Division, under Crook, in combination with an attack by the II Corps under Maj. Gen. Andrew A. Humphreys, on the other end of the Confederate column. There, soldiers and wagons had bogged down trying to pass over two nearby, broken down bridges in the valley floor, at a location where two branches of Saylor's Creek converged. Under the pressure of the relentless attacks, Gordon retreated to the west side of the valley leaving behind 1,700 captured men and 200 wagons.

In the combined actions of the day, almost a quarter of the remaining force of the Army of Northern Virginia had been killed, wounded, or captured. Hundreds of wagons filled with direly needed supplies had also been seized.

Despite the size and significance of this surrender, however, Sheridan's cavalry was up and off at dawn the next day, heading for Appomattox, only 30 miles short of Lynchburg, where the remaining Army of Northern Virginia was now reported to be heading. Sheridan had not forgotten his mission.

Hardly had the Union column got under way when scouts

returning from Appomattox brought news adding urgency to the present advance; the rations requested by telegraph had arrived from Lynchburg, and were waiting in four trains just west of the Appomattox Station.

Sheridan dispatched Maj. Gen. (Bvt.) George Armstrong. Custer to race ahead to Appomattox, with his Third Division of the Army of the Shenandoah, in order to get between the supply trains and the advance guard of the Confederate army, and, if possible, to trick the engineers into parking the trains in a controlled location. Custer was then to send out details behind him to break up the tracks west of Appomattox, making it impossible for the trains to return to Lynchburg. Meanwhile, Sheridan sent out a courier to Maj. Gen. Edward Ord, commander of the II Corps of the Army of the Potomac, which was force marching in an effort to arrive on the west side of Appomattox, where Sheridan would entrench before the Confederates arrived.

Soon later, Sheridan heard back from Custer that Custer had arrived and taken control of the trains when the Confederate advance guard had appeared on a hill top several miles away. Ord was still about six hours out, but his intention was to march all night to get to Appomattox before the Confederates had time to form up their remaining troops for an attempt to break through Custer's line.

Sheridan himself arrived at sunset and at once walked to an observation point where he could see the Confederate regiments in the valley below, faced in a battle order toward the east, where the Union V and VI Corps had come up behind them.

Taking up a temporary headquarters in a cabin, Sheridan told his sub-commanders to hold off until Ord arrived. All night long, the cabin was a hub of excitement as officers passed back and forth speaking excitedly about the prospect that Lee would soon find himself boxed in and be forced to capitulate.

About 3 A.M., the II Corps arrived, with Ord joining Sheridan on the hill in clear view of the Confederate scouts. There was no attempt on the part of the Confederates to set up a second defensive line on the west side of their forces, and soon word came around that Lee had raised a white flag.

## 86. Josiah watches Lee surrender to Grant and reunites with Hiram

Still reeling from the death of Louisa Stone, an event he had revealed to no one, Col. Josiah Derr continued with his duties as a regimental commander in the VI Corps, which had been among the corps chasing the Army of Northern Virginia as it fled westward. Josiah had been present at the Battle of Saylor's Creek, within one of the columns that had closed in on Lt. Gen. Richard S. Ewell.

Soon word came that Sheridan's cavalry had advanced to Appomattox and was positioned to cut off the route from there to Lynchburg.

Josiah was surprised at this time to be summoned to the headquarters tent of his division commander, Maj. Gen. Horatio Wright.

"Col. Derr, I want you to bring this to General Grant. It is a summary of our position," the general said, reaching forward a folded note.

"Yes, sir. At once."

"You were his aide, weren't you?"

"Yes, sir, until about a year ago."

"He will be glad to see you then."

Josiah rode up to the Union lines to find Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant in front of him, seated on a log in a grove of trees beside a stream. With him were several members of his staff.

"Josiah!" called Grant. "What brings you here?"

"I have a message, sir," Josiah replied, handing him the note, which Grant read it at once.

"Thank you, Josiah, and please remain. We are waiting for word from General Lee. This may be the end."

Two mounted Union pickets came through the trees into view. Between them was a Confederate soldier carrying a note. Lee had agreed to a meeting, Grant announced, and would meet him at a house in Appomattox, five miles away.

"Come with us, Josiah," Grant said. "You may see an event that you will remember for many years."

Thus it was that when Grant arrived at the brick house where Lee's gray horse was tied outside, Josiah was within the group that followed Grant inside.

General Lee was dressed in a neatly pressed gray officers coat with hat in hand and sword at his side. By contrast, Grant was dressed in a private's coat, dusty and worn, with on his shoulders

the three stars of his rank.

When Grant approached, Lee, with a congenial expression, extended his hand.

“General Grant,” he said. “It has been a long time.”

“Yes, it has,” Grant replied. “Please excuse my appearance, sir, I am just from the field.”

“I met you once in Mexico, I think,” Lee said, “when you were a junior officer.”

“I am surprised you remember me, General, though, of course, as you were my senior, I remember you.”

“Sir, we have prepared a place for each of you,” an aide remarked, indicating two chairs, one by a writing desk and one by a small table, about five feet apart.

Grant, seeing that Lee was already next to the writing desk, moved to the table and with a nod sat down.

“General Grant,” Lee then said, “I must tell you at the start, I could not countenance any arrangement that would dishonor my officers and men.”

“General Lee,” Grant answered, “I assure you that will not happen if you will just write down the terms that you consider honorable.”

All watched then as Lee wrote at his desk. Grant, upon receiving Lee’s note, wrote down the terms of surrender, which were what President Abraham Lincoln had asked for. The officers would be paroled on their own promises of not taking up arms again, their swords would not be surrendered; the soldiers would agree not to take up arms again, and would then be released to return to their homes, keeping any private animals.

“These terms augur well for the future amity of our people,” Lee commented as he signed his name.

Meanwhile, the men in the room were all aware of the high drama and significance of the meeting taking place before them and of the contrast between the two officers.

General Lee, with his single aide beside him, was, without a doubt, the loser in the clash of arms that had ended with his presence in this room; General Grant, the undoubted winner, was there as testament of that; yet Lee seemed to all around him to be, in this assemblage, the one person of classical stature. Grant, in his native humility, was aware of that, and not inclined to challenge it. Grant had the victory he had scabbled for; Lee could remain the model soldier so important still to the contesters on both sides.

Indeed, it was clear to everyone,—and admired by all,—that Lee had fought by the old ideal, maintaining the code of chivalry

passed down to him by his storied father. At West Point, the son Lee had been the only cadet ever to complete four years without a demerit; he had been an example of rectitude, and in no sense, in this, posed; all that he was on the surface had been known by his soldier peers to permeate through his entire being.

Grant, by contrast, was cut from coarse cloth. He had no elegance such as that of Lee, and he did not seem to care. He was all grit and practicality, and all knew that what he had brought to the war was not finesse, but a sledge hammer that threw off sparks as it hit the dull stone but never wore down. Grant had brought to the war a method and a mechanical persistence that had chipped away the Old South until its people and resources had been exhausted.

When the signing was over, the Union officers walked outside with Grant and watched as Lee turned on his horse with a final wave of his hat. Hurrahs could be heard as Lee passed through his men.

Later, Josiah was one of the dozens of officers who rode out to the Confederate camp to meet with friends from past days of service together. There he met Hiram Stone.

“Hiram, the war is over,” Josiah said, “and I am sorry for whatever pain or dislodgement it brought to you and your family.”

“Josiah, you and I were both soldiers,” Hiram answered. “We did what we were told to do as soldiers. Let us forgive one another and be friends again.”

“Thank you, Hiram. So much has changed for me, also. We won the war, but I have destroyed everything that was beautiful and good for me.”

“You refer to Louisa, I know,” Hiram answered, “and I know her death is a great loss to you, but I believe Louisa has not left you, and will never leave you. If your love for Louisa was as great as you say, and as I know it was, then think now of what she would want you to do after the war. She would not want you to be left embittered. She would want you to find a new life to live as purely as you have lived your life as a soldier.”

Next day word came that the Confederates would gather by the courthouse to surrender their arms. Maj. Gen. (Bvt.) Joshua Chamberlain, who had led the men of Maine in their valiant defense at Round Top, had been selected to accept the arms. Josiah Derr was named as adjutant for the ceremonial surrender.

“You are a native Virginian, I understand,” Chamberlain said as he greeted Josiah, “and personally know some of these people we fought against?”

“Oh, yes.”

“Then, Colonel, I leave it to you to conduct this event as you see fit for your native state.”

“Thank you, sir. I will.”

“I would just say, colonel, for my own part, I would wish that we treat our former enemies with respect for what they have been as valiant soldiers, and for what we trust they will be in the future, our fellow Americans.”

“Yes, sir, that is my fond hope, also.”

“Then Col. Derr, please proceed.”

Union troops stood in ranks on both sides of the road while the 12,000 Confederate soldiers waited, about a hundred yards away, on the small hill above the valley in which the Appomattox Court House was located. Many were in ragged clothes, but all were in some semblance still of a gray uniform.

Before the Confederate soldiers was a color guard carrying the square stars and bars Confederate flag and the oblong wide-stripe flag of the Army of Northern Virginia with its blue corner field containing 13 white stars in an A-like pattern.

About two units behind the Confederate color guard, Josiah saw Hiram mounted before his regiment with his staff beside him.

Everyone was silent as the flags snapped in the breeze and Josiah saw one of the Confederate leaders, on horseback, ride to the front of the ordered ranks. Who it was he could not tell.

“Soldiers of Virginia!” the officer said in a loud voice that carried across the quiet square where the Union brigades stood in formation. “This is the last time we will march together. You have been brave soldiers. You have fought a good fight. You are the pride of our yesterday! You are the hope of our tomorrow!”

An officer that Josiah did recognize, from pictures he had seen of him, then came forward on horseback to direct the troops to the courtyard to stack their arms. It was Maj. Gen. John Brown Gordon, commander of the Second Corps, known by all for his gallant charges in the Wilderness.

“Forward!” Gordon called.

The call passed down the line and the Confederate soldiers waited in silence.

“March!”

The Army of Northern Virginia stepped off in neat military order behind their red and blue battle flags with their muskets on their shoulders.

As Gordon approached to a distance from Josiah of about fifty yards, Josiah ordered, “Band, sound adjutant’s call!” and the

band replied with a drumroll and the 17 notes of the trumpeters' call to ranks.

Josiah commanded: "Bring the units to shoulder arms!"

As that command echoed down the line, the Union soldiers snapped into position, with their muskets in their right hands and perpendicular to their shoulders, in what everyone knew to be a gesture of respect.

In response, General Gordon wheeled with his horse, facing the Union commanders, and, with a touch of his spur, directed the horse into a graceful bow as he dropped his sword point to his toe in a final salute.

### **87. Turner is captured and lynched as he leaves Powhatan County**

With the defense of his boyhood home completed, the educated, articulate, and now former slave, Turner Ross,— as previously agreed upon with Hiram Stone's mother, Anne, and with Louisa's mother, Eliza,—began his preparations to depart from the plantation with the 83 former slaves who had decided to travel with him down the Shenandoah Valley to a new life in Washington City or Baltimore.

First, though, Turner went about making his personal farewell, which was a farewell to places and objects as well as to people and memories of people he had grown up with.

Turner went first to a pine-board shed on the far side of the sprawling yard, where there was a line of pine trees on a ridge overlooking the river.

After knocking on the door of this shed, he heard a familiar voice inside. He entered into a sunlit, pine-paneled room 20x30 feet in dimension, in which the principal feature was a long work table, upon which were sitting the components of a cabinet currently being built.

Along the wall, hung on numbered latches, were various tools, each of which, Turner knew, had one place only when not being used.

"I'll be, if it ain't Turner!" chimed the gray-haired black man standing at the table. He was dressed in canvas coveralls with a carpenter's belt around his waist. The belt held on one side a hammer and on the other side a rasp.

"How y'all doin' son?"

"I am well. Thank you, Uncle Artie," Turner replied.

As earlier described, Turner was frugal in expense of facial expressions, but in this case he smiled and nodded approvingly as he moved his fingers across the finely sanded cabinet doors lying on the table near him.

“Hear’d y’all be fixin’ to leave,” said the old man, pausing in his work.

“Yes, and we are all sad that you will not be coming with us,” Turner remarked.

“Well, I got my workshop here, and Missus says I can keep it, so I reckon I will. I ain’t much without my tools.”

“Uncle Artie, you are a grand man with or without your tools.”

“Guess I jes can’t live without ‘em.”

“I came to tell you, Uncle Artie, you were an inspiration to me always when I was coming up, and you are an inspiration still, because everything you do, you do well.”

“I appreciate that, Turner. I truly do.”

“So many times, Uncle Artie, you were so kind and good to me.”

“Well, praise the Lord then. I gotta say for myself, you the one I gonna miss most.”

“Can I give you a hug goodbye?”

“Yes, son, of course.”

For a moment then, the gentle scholar, with the muscular shoulders, chest, and arms of a laborer, settled into the old man’s arms.

Turner went next to the big house to visit his mother’s second floor room, and, on the other end of the long hall, the desk and alcove that he had been assigned at age 14 in recognition of his excellence in his studies. Up until the present day, he had continued to use the alcove, entered by a back door and stairway, though he had been in his mother’s room not even a handful of times since he had moved to the slave camp by his own decision at age 17 following his mother’s death.

“Just for memory’s sake,” he explained to Anne Stone as she greeted him inside the parlor.

“What I remember myself, Turner, is you were always such a bright, solemn boy,” Anne remarked. “So full of duty and such a delightful presence.”

“Thank you, ma’am, and I will remember you always as a kind and gracious mistress.”

“I am touched and honored that you regard me in this way.”

“Ma’am, there are some writings, in notebooks, that I mean

to find and take with me, with your permission.”

“Of course, Turner,” she said, touching his shoulder, “and I hope you do well by them, whatever they are.”

In his mother’s bedroom, Turner gazed out the window at the familiar stand of pine trees on a hill above the river. Off to the left, at about 11 o’clock from his point of view, the slave cabins could be seen and the white paneled bell tower of the slave camp church.

During the time Turner had grown up, this bedroom had been his and his mother’s “house;” his father had died shortly after Turner’s birth rescuing a child drowning in the James River (before drowning himself). Turner recalled sitting at a table by the small fireplace with his mother looking over his shoulder as he did his studies. He recalled feeling proud when she had praised his “beautiful, beautiful writing,” as she had called it. By which she had meant not the words themselves, but the penmanship, Turner reflected; but eventually she had praised his words as well.

Going up the hall, and down the steps to the back door, Turner took from the banister his notebooks, same that Col. Hiram Stone had noticed but had not opened. These notebooks contained an autobiography, stories of camp events and fellow slaves, and a book of poems, his most treasured product.

With his notebooks in a satchel, like a schoolboy, Turner continued his contemplative visits to other places, including a path where he had walked with Hiram. Turner watched the fast moving water of the spring swollen river, recalling the stories he had heard of his father’s valor in saving the child.

Turner also visited an overlook of the river where he had gone often alone to recalibrate his life in his deeply intentional manner. In this spot, unknown to anyone, Turner had decided at age 16 that he would renounce a married life in order to reserve himself for his self-defined literary vocation. Since his religion forbade sex outside of marriage, Turner’s decision had amounted to a commitment to lead a celibate life, which he had persisted in doing except for one occasion that he regretted.

On the following day, Turner stood beside one of the five wagons given to the former slaves by Anne Stone, who had also stocked them generously despite the scarcity that had affected the entire county. The scene was one of excitement and expectation as the newly free former slaves of the Stone Plantation,—all of them except for the five men and three women who had elected to remain,—assembled for the journey to a new life in the North.

From the plantation, the caravan of former slaves headed

northwest along a road that led to the Shenandoah Valley. Many of them knew that their journey would take them through some of the great battlefields of the war. None of them had read precise reports of those battles in newspapers and books, but through oral accounts the battles had obtained epic proportions.

The movement of the former slaves, with adults marching in a column, and children playing and laughing on either side, was attended with jubilant singing and dancing, a chorus of beautifully blended voices sailing over the tree tops of the nearby countryside as the caravan, with torches and lanterns, sought a place to set down camp for the night.

Little did the group know, however, that another group was watching them from a nearby hilltop. This second group, mounted on horseback and dressed in white gowns with white hoods, was the same that had attacked the Stone plantation.

Terner was at the lead as the group crossed the James River at a ford shallow enough to be waded across. He was not singing, but listening thoughtfully to the beautiful words, which he recalled from his childhood.

It was at this time, in response to cries of alarm, that Terner saw the hooded men on horseback approaching the rear of the caravan. They rode directly through the column, causing the former slaves to scatter to both sides.

Leading this group was someone who Terner remembered had also been in the lead of the group at the plantation. He had not recognized the man then, but as the man came closer, revealing a wooden prosthetic on one leg, Terner recognized him as the Powhatan sheriff, Elon Sievers.

The satchel that Terner had handed to the woman beside him, his niece, was of immediate interest to Sievers. With several armed men beside him to render support if needed, he wrenched the satchel from her grasp and pulled from it one of Terner's notebooks.

"You know, Terner, don't you, writin' by a nigger is against the law?"

"By slaves, yes, sir," Terner replied. "But I am now a free man."

"Well, I ain't hear'ed that."

The dignified Negro made no reply. Neither did he cower or make any hint of begging.

Everyone by this time understood that there was a malice implicit in the whole proceedings and that the meeting between these hooded men and their party was not accidental.

“Burn the papers,” Sievers said.

Some of the young black men pressed forward at this time and one of them was shot dead with a single shot into his face. The woman at the side of the man who had been shot rushed forward with a wail, and was butted with a rifle, hurling her back.

The entire group drew back as the hooded men, all with rifles in their hands, and all on horseback, pointed their guns toward them.

Terner raised his hand to caution his people to not risk a further encounter.

With his arms being held by two men on each side, Terner watched as one of the hooded men beside the sheriff picked up the satchel with Terner’s notebooks, dumped the notebooks out of it into a pile, set fire to them, and threw the satchel back to Terner’s niece. The precious notebook containing his poems, stuffed into a side pocket, Terner observed, had not been found.

“String him up,” the sheriff ordered.

“The Lord God is witness to what you do,” Terner said.

While flames leapt up from the notebooks that had been set on fire, Terner saw his niece retreating back into the group of freed slaves. At the same time, he saw that one of the hooded men was coming forward with a noosed rope, and he accepted that his life would be ended.

“God will assist you in your new life,” Terner Ross said to his fellow travelers. “Thank you all for all you have given me.”

## **88. Lincoln promotes prompt and compassionate reconstruction leaving behind secession legalities**

Abraham Lincoln, 56 years old and newly elected to a second term as President of the newly confirmed United States of America,—including now the eleven states that had composed the Southern union,—could see, on the one hand, the bright personal future ahead of him and the bright national future ahead of the government that he had striven so hard to save,—and had saved,—in its intact form; on the other hand, he could see that the damage of the war lingered still, and was present all around, not only in the damaged buildings he had witnessed in Richmond, and in many like them in both North and South, but also in the countless families who had also suffered damage (like the family of the fire-dazed orphan of Richmond), in the widows who had come forward, petitioning for themselves and their children, and in the

Union veterans who had emerged from the war with the horrors of battle haunting their minds.

Many veterans in the conquered South had, likewise, been affected, Lincoln knew. Thousands of the Confederate soldiers had suffered injuries that they would carry forward into their post-war years. These valiant men,—as many of them had been, Lincoln believed,—also deserved compassion.

In the South, also, plantations, businesses, and fortunes had been destroyed, and few of those who had lost them had been bad people, Lincoln in his generosity supposed. In fact, many of them had been good people, the president thought, entangled in the social ill of slavery that the war had ended. With that ill relegated to the past, Lincoln believed, the basic good of these people ought, in their new future, to be taken into the balance,—with “malice toward none, with charity for all,” he acknowledged in his mind, (repeating that admonition of his second inauguration);—the elusive goal of “just and lasting peace,” which had been often on his mind throughout the war years, would insist upon his fuller attention now that the war was over.

Of course, for justice to be done, a just recompense would need to be exacted from those who had perpetrated the ill of slavery that had now been ended; and, without a doubt, those who had deprived the Negro people of their freedom and exploited their labor, had committed a crime;—moreover, in a Christian sense, they had committed a sin, Lincoln believed; there was no other correct definition of their conduct except to use that old word denoting a moral lapse;—but the planter class of the Old South, the former owners of slaves, had been punished already, to some extent, by the loss of their slaves; for them defeat had brought a diminution of fortune and social status, and a condemnation that they would carry forward into the future. What more should be required from them? What more could be claimed without leaving behind an economy that had lost all its mechanisms and engines of past prosperity?

“I know, Ed, you disagree,” Lincoln said to his longtime ally and sometime protagonist, Edwin Stanton, his Secretary of War, “and we have been through so much together to bring us at last to such a moment as this, when we can have this conversation, but I don’t see what could be gained from reducing the former leading families of the South to impoverishment and shame.”

Stanton had no response to this, at once. He had come to the conclusion that, with the war done, the vitriol of disagreements of opinion should be relegated, for the historical moment, to the

official chambers of state where protocols were in place to prevent disagreement from lapsing over into personal attacks.

“What of the freed Negroes, then, those whose labor built the wealth of the South?” Stanton declared. “Should they be left with not even a plot of land such as given to our white pioneers?”

“They can go west like them and stake out a claim,” the president replied, “and let us proceed, Edwin, to provide other ways for them to improve themselves. Do you imagine a new South where the entire old structure of fealties is gone? A society of dirt farmers, the bulk of them lacking education and skills?”

To this, Stanton had no response, either, though the lingering expression on his face of stubborn resistance indicated that he was not satisfied with the opinion expressed by the president.

“Reconstruction will be the great national project, I believe, that follows from the war,” Lincoln said, “coincident with the expansion of the nation westward.”

“Reconstruction has been a word with many meanings as you will recall, sir, since we first started using it, before the war,” Stanton replied.

“Yes, I know that.”

“Some people used it not to buttress the Constitution but as a way to get around it,” Stanton went on. “They thought of ‘reconstruction’ as a subterfuge through which to invent a new arrangement that would allow slavery to continue. Then along came the claimed continuation of ‘states’ under rebels who took over the state governments and declared them seceded. You have insisted, Abe, and rightly, I think, that the rebels lacked the authority to do that, that the pre-existing Union states continued to exist, and would be ‘restored’ once the true representatives of the people were given a chance to reestablish their governments.”

“That is the only way, Edwin, that the Union can be re-established. We must accept them back as soon as they are ready, per our requirements, and one of those requirements must be the cessation of slavery.”

“On that we agree.”

“And they must swear allegiance to the Union.”

“Indeed.”

With these considerations in mind, on the evening of Tuesday, April 11, 1865, two days after the Confederate surrender, Lincoln delivered a speech to the celebratory crowd gathered on the White House lawn. He spoke from the North Portico, reading from the text that he had carefully prepared.

“By these recent successes,” he said, “the re-inauguration of the national authority—reconstruction—which has had a large share of thought from the first, is pressed much more closely upon our attention. It is fraught with great difficulty. Unlike the case of a war between independent nations, there is no authorized organ for us to treat with. No one man has authority to give up the rebellion for any other man. We simply must begin with, and mould from, disorganized and discordant elements. Nor is it a small additional embarrassment that we, the loyal people, differ among ourselves as to the mode, manner, and means of reconstruction. . . .

“I have been shown a letter on this subject, supposed to be an able one, in which the writer expresses regret that my mind has not seemed to be definitely fixed on the question whether the seceded States, so called, were in the Union or out of it. It would perhaps, add astonishment to his regret, were he to learn that since I have found professed Union men endeavoring to make that question, I have purposely forborne any public expression upon it. As it appears to me, that question has not been, nor yet is, a practically material one, and any discussion of it, while it thus remains practically immaterial, could have no effect other than the mischievous one of dividing our friends. . . .

“We all agree that the seceded States, so called, are out of their proper practical relation with the Union;” Lincoln went on, “and that the sole object of the government, civil and military, in regard to those States is to again get them into that proper practical relation. I believe it is not only possible, but in fact, easier, to do this, without deciding, or even considering, whether these states have ever been out of the Union, than with it. Finding themselves safely at home, it would be utterly immaterial whether they had ever been abroad. . . .

“And yet so great peculiarities pertain to each state; and such important and sudden changes occur in the same state; and, withal, so new and unprecedented is the whole case, that no exclusive, and inflexible plan can safely be prescribed as to details and collateral. . . . Important principles may, and must, be inflexible.”

Rep. Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania, the Radical faction leader in the United States House, had pressed for a more general inflexibility, however; he continued to insist upon unnegotiable reorganization of Southern society so as to provide the freed slaves with land parcels obtained from seizure and division of the old plantations.

“Mr. President,” Stevens said in a visit to the White House the next day, “we must now secure the ultimate justice of the war, which, with due respect, you do not see. Their world is gone; it must be gone.”

It was the same policy and presented with the same urgency as that which Lincoln had encountered in his Secretary of War, and his response was just as kind and just as firm: “Stevens, our goal is a united nation, is it not? The white people of the South are our fellow citizens. We cannot take from them all they have worked for and give it away, leaving their world in ruin. Let us build a new society together, fair for everyone.”

Lincoln remained alone in the Green Room after Stevens left, thinking that in Reconstruction he would encounter a challenge as important as the war had been. Later his son Robert stopped by to show his father an item he had found in a bookstore, a likeness of Robert E. Lee in his gray uniform looking into the point of view, with his hand on his sword.

“It is a good face, a noble, noble face,” Lincoln remarked to his son. “Our sad task as a nation was to face men like this. I understand their argument that they were only defending their own society, as they believed it to be.”

“Why then did you press the fight, Father?”

“Robert, I did what I swore to do, which was to defend the Constitution of the United States, but I deplore that the war made enemies of us and such fine soldiers as this.”

The president went to the window and looked out toward the Capitol dome, completed under his stewardship despite the competing requirements of the war.

“Now a great healing will begin,” Lincoln said. “Not just reconstruction, but reconciliation, with our errant brethren of the South. I will be the first to extend my hand.”

### **89. Hiram talks with his mother about family prospects and obligations**

Throughout the latter part of the war, Col. Hiram Stone had followed the same issue that, as just described, had garnered the attention of President Abraham Lincoln, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, and Rep. Thaddeus Stevens in the United States House of Representatives. This issue was whether the federal government of the United States, in the conquered areas of the South, should and would seize the land property of planters and distribute the land to

the freed slaves. Hiram's sense of this issue,—to the extent he had been able to follow it, reading the occasional Northern newspapers that made it to Richmond,—was that seizure and distribution had been promoted only by the Radical faction of the Republican Party (Steven's faction), while being opposed by the remainder of the Republican Party, the allied Unconditional Union parties in the border states, and the Democratic Party in entirety (both "War" and "Peace" factions).

Hiram returned to the Stone Plantation, therefore, after the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia, anticipating that he and his family would remain in possession of their plantation after the war and that the plantation would thereafter function as an agricultural business of some kind, but without the labor of the slaves. To this challenge, as he formed it in his mind, Hiram had added the concern of how to do justice, in some way, to the needs of the freed slaves, which he sincerely intended to do, in keeping with his promise made to Terner Ross on the previous Epiphany, when he had asked Terner to be his friend.

Hiram had heard of Terner's death, but he had not been involved in any of the related subsequent events. He had, also, as earlier described, heard of the death of his cousin, Louisa Stone, and had spoken about her at Appomattox with Josiah Derr.

The two deaths had merged within his mind into one great loss that he had described to a peer as "more than emotional, a blow to the soul."

At home, when Hiram entered the granite-walled big house, in civilian clothes, he was surprised to be met at the door by the usual butler with two of the usual house servants watching from behind.

"Charles, you are still here?" he said, as the butler bowed.

"Yes, Master Stone. Missus Stone, yo' mama, say'd us kin stay if us want to."

"You, too?" Hiram asked the two others behind.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, you can indeed all stay, if you wish, but you are free to go at any time. We will pay you for your work as soon as we are able."

Anne Stone came into the room at this time, and Hiram went over to hug her as the former slaves left the room.

"Well, Mother," said Hiram with a sigh, "it is a different time for everyone."

"Yes."

"Are any more still here?"

“Oh, yes. Twelve came back that were with Turner. They say they want to live here as before.”

“And what did you say?”

“I said that they can stay and earn a living here until they figure out what to do, but they are not slaves.”

“So they are back in their cabins?”

“Yes.”

Hiram looked out to the idle fields.

“Perhaps then we should simply give them their cabins. But the situation is a tangle of problems. Both for us and for them. Have you heard anything about the others?”

“I heard they continued down the valley.”

“Maybe I will see them in Harper’s Ferry.”

“You will go there soon?”

“Yes, Mother. I have asked Emily to marry me and she has accepted.”

“Congratulations, Hiram! She is as good a woman as can be found. You have always loved her.”

“I will live there part of the time, I don’t know how much.”

“How sad it was what they did to Turner!” Anne Stone remarked.

“Do we know who did it?”

“No. They were wearing hoods like the men who attacked us here. No one knows if they are from around here or from the mountains.”

“Turner had some of his writings with him, I think. Did they survive?”

“I heard all were burned except for one book with poems. Beulah hopes to get it published, though she has no idea how to go about it.”

“Maybe Emily and I can help her. I think Emily has some connections.”

“I hope you will succeed in that, Hiram. When our place was assaulted and Turner led our defense, I learned that he is in all respects an excellent man. I did know that before, to some extent, though I had made him less on account of his color.”

“We have all been learning.”

“What will we do, Hiram? What will become of us? Our world has been broken.”

Hiram looked out to the unplanted fields visible through a window beside him.

“Mother, I have thought a great deal about this,” he declared, “and it falls into two matters, how do we survive as a

plantation, and how do we do justice to our former slaves.”

“And do you realize, Hiram, that these two matters, as you call them, are potentially diametrically opposed?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Then let us have tea together. What do you say? We will sit on the veranda in the beauty of these surroundings we have lived in for so many years, and we will talk about what we can do, and then talk to Eliza and the others.”

“Yes, let us do that.”

They sat at a table from which they could see the fast water of the James River.

“I think our best strategy is to focus on the turpentine orchard this year,” Hiram remarked. “That will give us revenue to meet our bills. We can leave the fields fallow except for corn and vegetables to meet our own needs.”

“What of the justice you mentioned?”

“The justice is to give money to the slaves to help them with their future lives.”

“Hiram, let us be honest.” Anne Stone replied with a look of concern. “These people have worked here as at any company. Did the mill girls in New England get pieces of the mill? I attended the academy with the pampered daughter of a mill owner, and stayed with her once in her huge family estate, across from dormitories with two mill girls per room. Anywhere you go there is a labor structure of some kind.”

Hiram sighed. “The conclusion I have come to, Mother, is rather than building up a defense to do nothing, let us accept and forgive our reluctance. Let us compromise with ourselves and try to be fair.”

“I can agree to that, Hiram. But prior to this compromise, we should have a discussion. Because I saw how hard your grandparents and uncles and aunts worked to build this plantation. We have no right to give away what others have earned for us and for our descendants. You will have children, too, when you get established.”

“I said ‘compromise,’ Mother.”

“And I said, ‘agree’. It is a different time, Hiram, as you say. I will do my best as I have always done.”

“There is just one more thing, Mother,” Hiram said. “Josiah Derr asked me if he could stop by to visit Louisa’s grave. Of course, I said he is welcome.”

“I am so glad to hear that. He was Louisa’s true love.”

“That he was, surely, and from his side, also.”

“We have made further arrangements for Louisa, a gravestone with words.”

“I am very glad to hear that.”

“Many from the town were in on it.”

After this conversation, Hiram went to the slave camp to speak with those who had returned.

“As my mother told you,” he informed those present, “you can remain here as long as you need, and, if you wish to work here, we will pay you for what you do as long as we can.”

“Massa,” said one woman, “how we get food?”

“It will be as before, Hana. Only, please, do not call me master anymore. You are now free people. We owe you a great deal for your labor, and we shall seek to make it up to you to the extent that we can, while seeking to rebuild this plantation, which has been so direly affected by the war. We will strive to do you justice, and we ask the same from you.”

Lastly, Hiram arranged for a funeral to be held for Turner Ross, whose body, after being brought back to the plantation and embalmed, had been placed in a pine casket in the little church in the slave camp.

After a ceremony in the church, the coffin was carried out to the graveyard behind the church, where deceased members of the Stone family and slaves were buried in separate areas within the same grove of trees.

“Many showed courage, in the great war now ended, by charging into battle and laying down their lives,” Hiram said, looking out to his relatives and the former slaves. “In both the Northern and Southern armies, this was so. But Turner Ross, whom we honor today, as we stand beside his body, freed from the tree where cowards hung him, showed such courage by daring to think and crafting treasures of the mind.”

Hiram left the next day by steamer from City Point to visit Emily Derr in Harper’s Ferry.

Emily had a business, also, he knew, and she had managed it well. That would be a source of income. He still felt, however, that his own main task would be to put the plantation back on solid footing.

Gradually, as Hiram traveled, however, a sense of panic overwhelmed him. Despite what he had said to the former slaves, he doubted that all their needs could be met in a substantial manner. In addition to the slaves who had returned to the plantation, there were those who had continued north.

To them, too, his family would have an obligation going

forward, would it not? What of his mother's charge that he had an obligation as well to maintain what his ancestors had built? Would this be another case where his lofty ideas would not withstand reality?

The prospect of such a clash of obligations filled Hiram Stone with alarm. He could feel his inner tension mounting. How far could he go, without bankrupting himself and his family, into substantial support of the former slaves?

## 90. Josiah visits Powhatan to pay his respects to Louisa Stone

On another road that led from the scene of the final battles of the Great Civil War, as some were beginning to call it, Josiah Derr, dressed in civilian clothes, moved at a slow pace toward Powhatan County.

The date was Sunday, April 16, 1865, one week after the surrender ceremony at Appomattox.

Josiah was, indeed, a handsome figure such as might have drawn the attention of young women. But he had no thought or inclination toward anyone who would displace Louisa Stone from the height he still reserved for her.

Josiah was in no hurry, either, his slow pace indicated. Indeed, the future now seemed laden with his dear Louisa's death. All for him still was mixed in with her memory,—how he had met her, walked with her, talked to her, and looked into her eyes as she spoke,—and to this mix of her in his memory were added his lingering memories of the war.

Often he recalled the youth he had struck with a bayonet while the youth had moved toward him with a thrust that had missed its target. He remembered kneeling beside the crumpled body as the youth died.

In the trees, the birds were singing. The sun had come up, brilliant above the verdant scene, but Josiah Derr, the recent man of war, saw not that, but the many buildings burned or plundered. He saw fields that had been abundant, not yet planted.

In one place, however, by a cottage, a young man on a crutch and a young woman, with two small children beside her, were bending over a newly planted small garden. The children were laughing and playing.

On the road were many refugees, both black and white. The white refugees appeared to be poor people moving from one home to another as they bent under bundles propped on their shoulders.

The blacks were in groups usually, as if just departed from the same plantation.

The initial exhilaration of freedom had for the most part vanished. There was no jubilant singing and no indication of a definite purpose.

One group resting at a spring regarded him with curiosity when he stopped for a drink.

“Where are you all going?” he asked them.

“We’se lookin’ for de army, suh,” answered a sturdy young man who looked as though he could have worked from sundown to sunset without resting.

“The Yankee army?”

“Yes, suh, we hear’ed dey got work.”

“If you go down to Petersburg, there are armies still there, I’m sure.”

“Which way dat?”

“This road here will take you in the right direction. It is a long way, more than 20 miles.”

“Thank you, suh. Much obliged.”

Josiah watched them go off. They went slowly as if not sure they were doing the best thing. An old woman whose face bore an expression of infinite sorrow could hardly keep up with the others, as she limped with a cane.

Down further on the road, Josiah saw another group amidst which were two women begging a white passer-by for food.

At the Stone Plantation, Josiah was met on the entry road and greeted as a long-lost family member.

That evening he talked to Anne Stone and her sister-in-law Eliza about the blacks he had met on the roads.

“They are confused, Josiah,” Anne said. “They think the army will take care of them. Many are simple people. All they know is what they experienced in their plantation world. Many of them encountered cruelty and abuse. Where can they go? No one welcomes them. Everyone wants them to go somewhere else.”

“I saw a group of them by the river. In a camp like Indians. “I think some of them are without food.”

“Oh, yes, some of them have come begging here. But what can we do? We cannot feed all the four hundred thousand former slaves of Virginia. Some went to Richmond. They settle wherever they can find shelter and do whatever work they can find, which is always the meanest, dirtiest work.”

Josiah sighed so audibly that Anne paused for a moment and studied his clear dark eyes.

"It is not your fault, Josiah. You have acted always with a good heart."

"Thank you."

"That is one reason why Louisa loved you. Louisa could not have loved anything coarse or selfish."

"Thank you."

"Do not think we people of the South lack sympathy. We want goodness and fairness as much as Northern people."

"Yes, I know."

"Louisa had quite a following here, you know. It grew slowly for a while with admiration for her service, but in the end she became almost a legend. You are going to see her grave?"

"Yes."

"I think she will feel your presence. Her spirit is waiting for you to greet you."

Pausing in the town of Powhatan the next day, at the general store, Josiah heard that President Abraham Lincoln had been shot and had died in the White House.

"He will be mourned in the North, maybe," the store owner said, "but we will remember he brought calamity and ruin."

"Do you know what were the circumstances?" Josiah asked.

"He was in the theater and someone came up behind him. An actor, I heard. He has not been caught, I heard, but they are searching for him."

Josiah let the matter go at that point. He had not identified himself as a Northern soldier, and he had an accent similar enough to the local people to be taken as a native.

The matter struck Josiah as the manifestation of an ultimate justice, a moral wrapping up, as the bloody war came to end. Of course, Lincoln had been a just man; of course, Lincoln, like so many others, had only done what the position assigned to him by history had required; yet Lincoln had been the center pin of the great machine of war that had brought death and destruction to so many.

So many fathers with children,—such as Lincoln himself had been,—had died. It was only fitting that Lincoln, who had sent those men to their deaths, should die, also, and with a full night of fading off,—as had, in fact, occurred,—to impress upon him how the grand events of the war had come down, for so many, to the loss of the small universe of their own consciousness.

Loss of this world, at least, Josiah thought.

Before the war, he acknowledged to himself, he had been a man of God. Now with the chaos and brutality of battle behind

him, he hardly knew anymore if such a consciousness as his own,—or that of any person,—was, indeed, simply lost.

He did not really believe that, Josiah thought, that a consciousness as great as that of Lincoln, or as great as that of any of the brave soldiers he had seen die, was simply lost. But he no longer had something firm to hold on to, he admitted, in order to reassure himself that consciousness was not extinguished when a human body died.

Thus Josiah Derr, the former Union soldier, now a soldier no more, continued in his mind.

But the purpose of the day, Josiah reminded himself, had not approached yet. This day he had set aside to pay his respects to Louisa Stone, whom he had first met at age 15, when her green eyes and their earnest engagement with his own had made an impression on him that since then he had cherished.

Josiah had learned from Anne Stone that a gravestone with words engraved on it had been placed above Louisa's grave. He had not asked what those words were, but he knew the location of the cemetery in Powhatan where Louisa had been buried alongside the graves of her father and uncle, who had both died in service of the Confederate cause.

Louisa had not started the great war, Josiah said to himself as he walked. She had not wanted it. She had acted simply out of her nobility of character to save the lives of those fallen in combat. She would have helped Northern soldiers as well. But Louisa had loved the Old South in which she had grown up. She had loved the grace and generosity of her family's plantation. And, like the many soldiers who had worn a gray uniform, in her case with a red cross, she had loved the proudly flown stars and bars flag.

Had Louisa loved him as well? Josiah asked in his mind. Had she pined for him as he had pined for her? Yes, she had! Her final words had told him that she had loved him as loyally and as uniquely as he had loved her. And if life beyond death existed, if spirits of the dead continued on, then his spirit and hers would someday be joined.

Josiah thought, also, of Hiram's words to him at Appomattox: "If your love for Louisa was as great as you say, and as I know it was, then think now of what she would want you to do after the war. She would not want you to be embittered and defeated. She would want you to find a new life to live as purely as you have lived your life as a soldier."

Josiah had thought a great deal about this. His thread of reflections about it, leading somewhere, but to where he did not

know, had been the intellectual focus of his brief post-war existence.

Then it came to him: "What Louisa would want would be for me not to give up hope and to find meaning, if not based on the old sureties, then based on what seems the best good. Without knowing what good is for certain, I must strive to do good."

He walked forward a ways more and then said aloud: "What Louisa would want would be for a new America to rise from the war, representing the best of what both the North and the South have stood for."

Later, as the sun lowered to the horizon behind a scene of neglected mansions and fields, Josiah Derr stood with bowed head in a graveyard canopied with magnolia trees in bloom. Before him was the gravestone that he had traveled to Powhatan to honor. The words on the gravestone said: "Here lies our dear daughter and sister, Louisa Stone, the very heart of the South. May we be worthy of her courage."

THE END



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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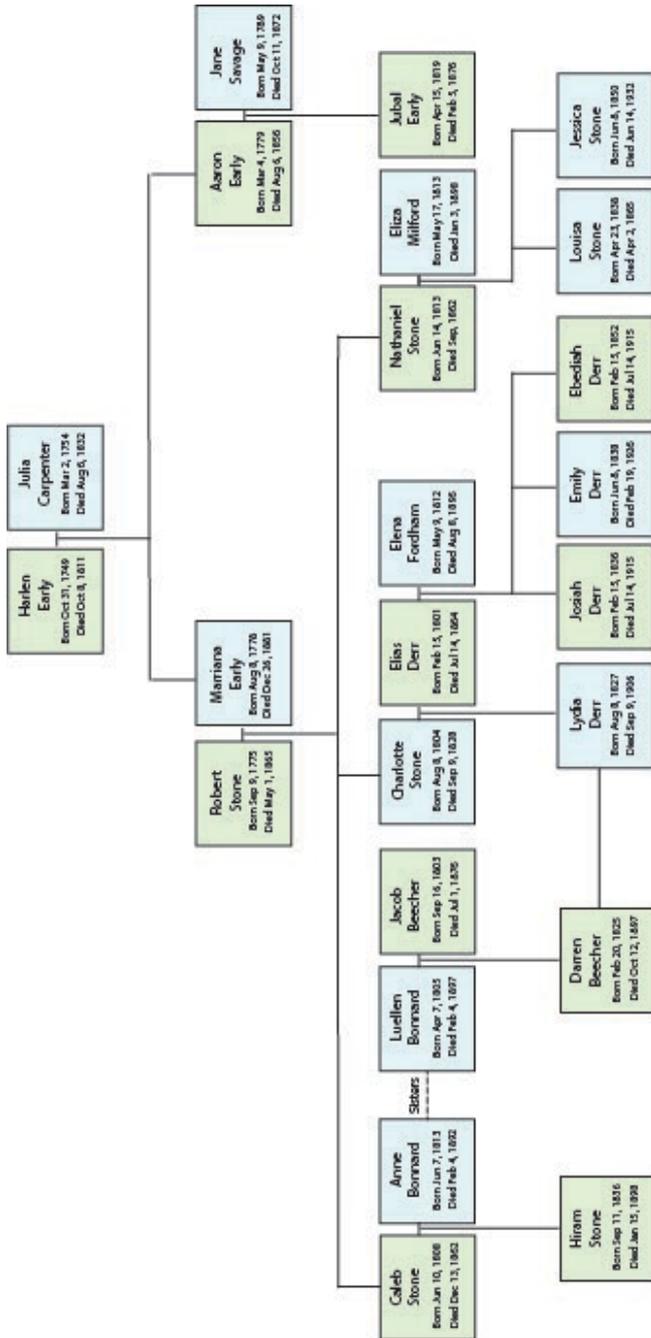
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DERR AND STONE FAMILY TREE





**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Roland Menge grew up in St. Paul, Minnesota, and graduated from the University of Minnesota in 1967. For the past 30 years, he has been employed as a technical writer. As a literary writer, he has tried to create realistic fiction with characters who are examined for how they develop and apply their principles and beliefs. Often his stories take place in vast historical and cultural settings, such as, in *Against the War* (2013), the Vietnam War and its counter-cultural response. His novel *Push to Appomattox* (2021) tells the cross-societal story of the last year of the American civil war. He is currently working on a book of stories on religious behavior.

Roland Menge has also written: *Ex Tertio Quartus* (1976), *A Bad Relationship* (1978), *Seven City Stories* (1982), and *Symbolic Poems* (2016).

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