



The GUNS Alexander B. Rossino
OF SEPTEMBER

A novel of McClellan's Army in Maryland, 1862

SB

Savas Beatie
California

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Maps by Gene Thorp

Proudly published, printed, and warehoused in the United States of America.

Dedicated to the late Ted Alexander.

You are not forgotten.

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Dramatis Personae

Joseph J. Bartlett: Colonel, Commander of the Second Brigade, First Division, Sixth Corps, Army of the Potomac. Instigator of Slocum's attack on the right at Crampton's Gap, September 14, 1862.

Ambrose Everett Burnside: Major General, Commander of the 'Right Wing,' Army of the Potomac, until September 15, 1862. Nickname: "Old Burn."

Samuel Carey: Private, Twenty-Third Ohio, First Brigade, Kanawha Division, Ninth Corps.

James M. Comly: Major, Commander of the 23rd Ohio, First Brigade, Kanawha Division, Ninth Corps, Army of the Potomac. Promoted after the wounding of Rutherford B. Hayes.

Jacob D. Cox: Brigadier General, Commander of the Kanawha Division, Ninth Corps, Army of the Potomac. Promoted to commander of the Ninth Corps on September 15, 1862.

George Crook: Colonel, Commander of the Second Brigade, Kanawha Division, Ninth Corps, Army of the Potomac. Promoted after the capture of Colonel Augustus Moor in Frederick on September 12, 1862.

George A. Custer: Captain, Aide-de-Camp for General McClellan.

Abner Doubleday: Brigadier General, Second Brigade, First Division, First Corps, Army of the Potomac. Promoted to command of the First Division on September 15, 1862.

James C. Duane: Captain, engineering battalion, and aide-de-camp to General McClellan, Army of the Potomac.

Hugh Ewing: Colonel, Commander of the First Brigade, Kanawha Division, Ninth Corps, Army of the Potomac. Promoted to brigade command after promotion of Scammon to division command.

William B. Franklin: Major General, Commander of the Sixth Corps and the 'Left Wing,' Army of the Potomac, until September 15, 1862.

John Gibbon: Brigadier General, Fourth Brigade, First Corps, Army of the Potomac.

George H. Gordon: Brigadier General, Commander of the Third Brigade, First Division, Twelfth Corps, Army of the Potomac.

George S. Greene: Brigadier General, Commander of the Second Division, Twelfth Corps, Army of the Potomac.

Rutherford B. Hayes: Colonel, Commander of the 23rd Ohio, First Brigade, Kanawha Division, Ninth Corps, Army of the Potomac. Wounded in action September 14, 1862.

Jacob Higgins: Colonel, Commander of the One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Pennsylvania Volunteers, First Division, Twelfth Corps.

Joseph Hooker: Major General, Commander of the First Corps, Army of the Potomac. Nickname: "Fighting Joe."

Thomas J. Kelly (fictional): Private, Twenty-Third Ohio, First Brigade, Kanawha Division, Ninth Corps.

Henry W. Kingsbury: Colonel, Commander of the 11th Connecticut, Third Division, Ninth Corps, Army of the Potomac. Killed September 17, 1862.

George Love: Private, Twenty-Third Ohio, First Brigade, Kanawha Division, Ninth Corps.

Joseph K. F. Mansfield: Major General, Commander of Twelfth Corps, Army of the Potomac. Mortally wounded September 17, 1862.

George G. Meade: Brigadier General, Commander of the Third Division, First Corps, Army of the Potomac, after transfer of John Reynolds to Pennsylvania.

George B. McClellan: Major General, Commander, Army of the Potomac. Nickname: "Little Mac."

William H. Medill: Major, Commander of the 8th Illinois Cavalry, First Brigade, Cavalry Division, Army of the Potomac.

Dixon S. Miles: Colonel, Commander of Federal garrison at Harpers Ferry.

David Parker (fictional): Private, Twenty-Third Ohio, First Brigade, Kanawha Division, Ninth Corps.

Alfred Pleasonton: Brigadier General, Commander of the Cavalry Division, Army of the Potomac.

Fitz John Porter: Major General, Commander of the Fifth Corps, Army of the Potomac.

Jesse L. Reno: Major General, Commander of the Ninth Corps, Army of the Potomac. Mortally wounded September 14, 1862.

John F. Reynolds: Brigadier General, Commander of the Third Division, First Corps. Assigned to command of Pennsylvania Militia and transferred to Harrisburg.

Israel B. Richardson: Major General, Commander of the First Division, Second Corps. Mortally wounded September 17, 1862.

James B. Ricketts: Brigadier General, Commander of the Second Division, First Corps, Army of the Potomac.

Isaac P. Rodman: Brigadier General, Commander of the Third Division, Ninth Corps, Army of the Potomac. Killed September 17, 1862.

Delos B. Sackett: Colonel, Aide-de-Camp for General McClellan.

Eliakim P. Scammon: Brigadier General, Commander of the Kanawha Division, Ninth Corps, Army of the Potomac. Promoted from colonel after Jacob Cox took over command of the Ninth Corps from Jesse Reno. Nickname: "Old Granny."

John Sedgwick: Brigadier General, Commander of the Second Division, Second Corps, Army of the Potomac.

Lucy Settle (fictional): Women's rights advocate, spinster, resident of Middletown, Maryland.

Simon Sutherland (fictional): Slave, friend of Lucy Settle, resident of Middletown, Maryland.

Truman Seymour: Brigadier General, Commander of the First Brigade, Third Division, First Corps, Army of Potomac.

Henry W. Slocum: Major General, Commander of the First Division, Sixth Corps, Army of the Potomac. Nickname: "Old Slow-Come."

Samuel D. Sturgis: Commander of the Second Division, Ninth Corps, Army of the Potomac.

Edwin V. Sumner: Major General, Commander of the "Center Wing," Army of the Potomac, until September 15, 1862. Nickname: "Bull."

George Sykes: Brigadier General, Commander of the Second Division, Fifth Corps, Army of the Potomac.

Jacob Szink: Lieutenant Colonel, Lieutenant commander of the One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Pennsylvania Volunteers, First Division, Twelfth Corps. Wounded September 17, 1862.

Orlando B. Willcox: Brigadier General, Commander of the First Division, Ninth Corps, Army of the Potomac.

Alpheus S. Williams: Brigadier General, Commander of Twelfth Corps, Army of the Potomac until September 15, 1862. Resumed command September 17, 1862, after the wounding of General Mansfield.

Emma Wilson (fictional): Widow, former member of U.S. Sanitary Commission, resident of Frederick, Maryland.

Prologue

Late summer, 1862.

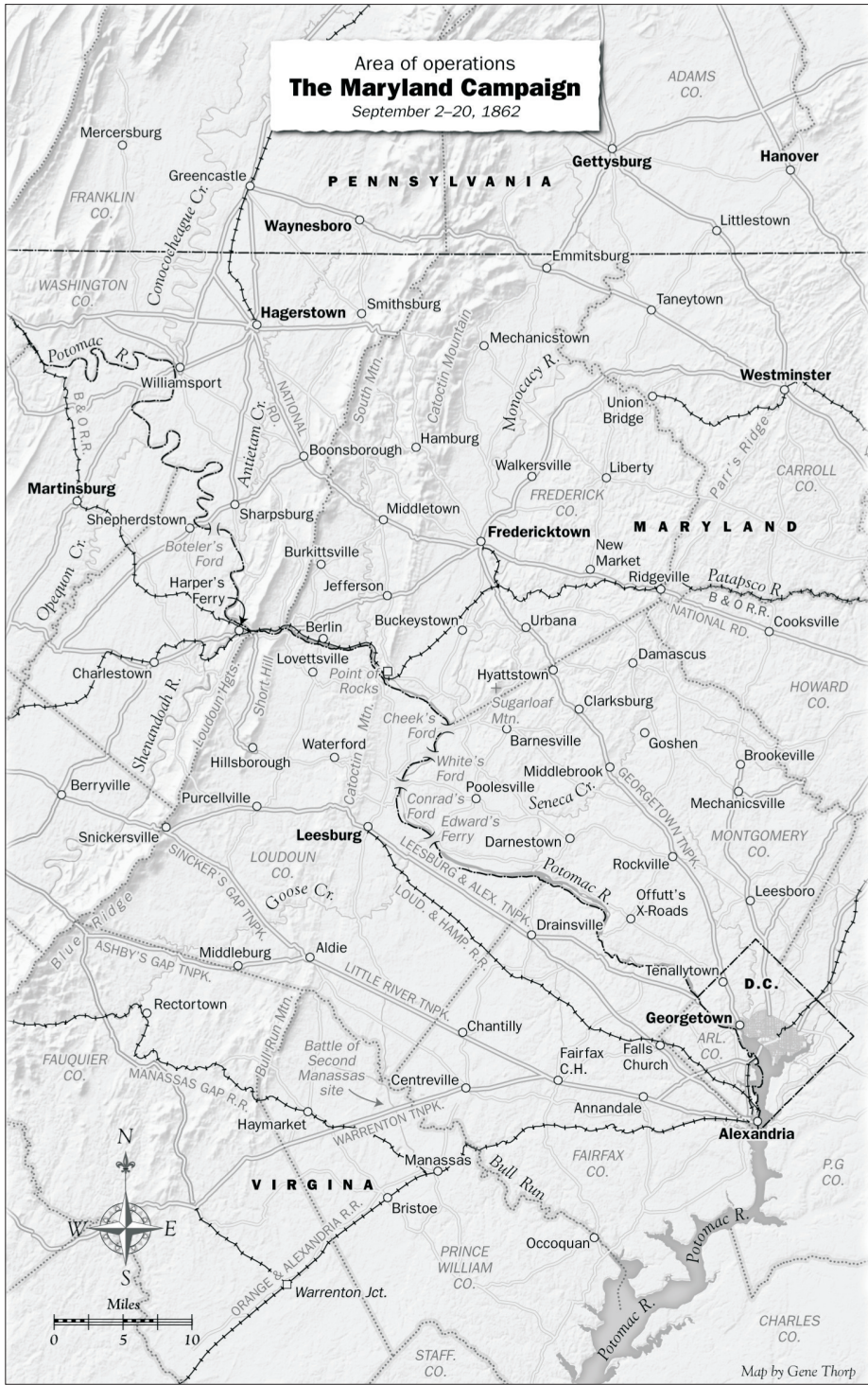
Major General George Brinton McClellan's 87,000-man Army of the Potomac is sprawled across the hills and valleys of west-central Maryland.

Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia crossed north of the Potomac River eight days earlier in the hope of rallying Marylanders against the national government in Washington, D.C. When no such uprising occurs, Lee shifted his operations west to the region between Hagerstown, Boonsboro, and Harpers Ferry. He divided his army to capture the 14,000-man Federal garrison at the ferry, and planned to reassemble his force for a battle with McClellan that he hopes will end the war. Lee is awaiting the outcome of the operation.

Miles to the east, "Little Mac," as his troops fondly call McClellan, knows the Southern army is operating in western Maryland. He does not know the enemy's ultimate objective, nor has he discerned Lee's purpose for advancing north of the Potomac. He is certain, however, that the Harpers Ferry garrison is in grave danger and that his army is the only hope for its salvation.

He therefore pushes his army west toward Frederick and the inevitable clash with Lee that he knows must come.

Area of operations
The Maryland Campaign
September 2-20, 1862



Map by Gene Thorp

Friday, September 12, 1862

(Near Sundown)

Headquarters of the Army of the Potomac

One mile southeast of Urbana, Maryland

Luning

in the ankle-high grass outside of his tent, General George McClellan unbuttoned his dark blue coat and stared into the orange-tinted sky. To the southwest, located out of sight beyond the mountains, lay Harpers Ferry, Virginia, its garrison threatened with capture by Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson. All that day, news had come in hinting at the Confederate noose tightening around the Ferry, yet McClellan remained powerless to stop it.

Time, he imagined, was slipping away from him like grains of sand in an hourglass, each minute bringing Colonel Dixon Miles and his men closer to their fate. Digging into his vest pocket, the general drew out a round gold watch and studied its face: a quarter past six. Time to rescue the Ferry that day had run out. Would tomorrow bring another opportunity?

A drop of perspiration trickled down McClellan’s temple, and he lifted his kepi to wipe it away. “Marcy, that parlous fool, Halleck, has doomed those men,” he muttered to the balding older man standing over his shoulder.

General Marcy scratched at his blonde mutton chops, remaining silent out of professional courtesy. McClellan often spoke acidly of the general-in-chief of the army. While Marcy, McClellan’s chief of staff and the father of Little Mac’s wife, Ellen, remained loyal to his son-in-law, it made him uncomfortable to discuss Halleck in so negative a tone.

McClellan slapped his kepi against his thigh as he warmed to his subject. “Just today, Halleck gave me command over Miles’s garrison at the Ferry. Just today, Marcy! More than a week ago, I pleaded with the man, and with the president, for that matter, to order Miles to evacuate the trap in which they’ve left him. Halleck denied me, claiming I need not worry as everything was in order. Rubbish! Old Brains indeed,” spat the general. “The man couldn’t think his way out of a blind alley. Lee commands an army of more than

one hundred thousand men. Miles is but a morsel waiting to be gobbled up. Now, I am supposed to rescue him? How might that be accomplished, I ask? How?"

"I'm sure you will think of something, general. You always do," observed Marcy, hoping the simple platitude would steer McClellan away from the disagreeable topic.

The general pulled the kepi back onto his head and turned toward his canvas tent in the day's failing light. His gaze did not meet Marcy's as he called for his orderly to light the oil lamp on the table. Ducking under the flap, Little Mac nodded his thanks and sent the man to find him something to eat, pulled off his coat and hat, and draped them over the back of a chair. He then fell heavily into the seat, while rubbing his eyes and leaned over the table to ponder the latest intelligence. General Marcy entered to stand beside him.

A newly arrived message from Lincoln confirmed information from other sources that Rebels had been seen crossing back into Virginia at Williamsport. *Probably the whole Rebel army will be withdrawn from Maryland*, Lincoln had written.

Perhaps. Other sources placed strong Rebel forces around Hagerstown, just miles from the Pennsylvania state line. "What are you after, Bobby Lee?" Little Mac whispered, his brown eyes drifting to the area between Pennsylvania and Virginia encompassed by Washington County, Maryland.

"General, may I enter?" McClellan looked up to see Colonel Thomas Key, his judge advocate, and confidant, standing just outside.

"Yes, yes, Key, by all means, come in," waved McClellan.

Tall and thin with a dark mustache, pince-nez glasses, and a goatee, Key stepped into the yellow light beside Marcy. Ordinarily, McClellan shared little with his subordinate's concerning strategy, but Key was an exception. The general admired his expertise in law, literature, and mathematics, so he kept the clear-thinking Key close. If one man could be another man's shadow, mused Marcy gazing upon the two, Key acted the part of McClellan's flawlessly.

"If I may say so, general, you appear . . . vexed," observed Key.

"I've been placed in a difficult position thanks to the feeble brain trust at the War Department," confirmed McClellan. "They have given me command over the garrison at Harpers Ferry, but I fear it may be too late to save Colonel Miles and his men."

"Is there nothing that can be done?" asked Key in a quiet tone the general found soothing.

Rising to his feet, Little Mac pointed to a line on the map depicting the road from Frederick City to Harpers Ferry. "I sent instructions to General Pleasonton this morning to have his cavalry explore the approaches to the Ferry and open a route, if he is able. Pleasonton, however, remains in Frederick proper and I have heard no firing from the direction of the river."

"What does this tell you?" inquired Key.

"It tells me that at least some Rebel troops remain between Pleasonton and Miles's garrison. It also tells me that the main Rebel force is still in Maryland. Just this morning, I

learned that Lee's army departed Frederick in two columns. One moved southwest toward the Ferry. The second moved northwest toward Hagerstown. This afternoon, news arrived of Rebel troops crossing south into Virginia from Williamsport. I am almost certain that Harpers Ferry is Lee's objective, and that he sent a column to accomplish its capture. What his overriding goal might be beyond that remains a mystery."

"I see," nodded Key thoughtfully. "Governor Curtin thinks General Lee may wish to invade Pennsylvania. This was your opinion also, until recently, I think?"

A scowl brought together McClellan's thick eyebrows as he peered at the Mason-Dixon Line on his map. "I no longer think that, Key. Governor Curtin is edgier than a cat on hot bricks. He cries continually that his state is the Rebel goal, but I have yet to see evidence of it. Lee could move north, but at present I am rather sure he will not. After all, my objective this entire campaign has been to reduce Lee's options for maneuver."

Key moved around the map, contemplating McClellan's observations while rubbing the hair on his chin. Some aspects of military science still evaded him, although he always appreciated its reliance on geometry. Opposing forces jockeyed for position by leveraging angles of approach and lines of march. Lee's army rested within a large triangle, with Harpers Ferry forming one corner to the south, Hagerstown a second to the north, and an as yet indistinct third point to the east. McClellan sought to understand how the triangle might change shape so he could shift his army to meet the Rebels.

"You moved General Burnside's right-wing of the army north from Washington to cut Lee off from Baltimore, didn't you, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, and then Lee moved northwest," replied Little Mac as he tapped a point on the map. "This leaves only the northern and southern routes open to him, practically speaking. General Reynolds and the Pennsylvania militia guard the northern path. Should Lee move in that direction, Reynolds could delay him long enough that we might come up and take the Rebel army from the rear. I did not agree when Washington ordered Reynolds away days ago, but I have since come around to the advantage of having him at Harrisburg. If anyone can put backbone into raw militia, it is John Reynolds. South is the path Lee is most likely to take. Supplies in the Shenandoah lie that way, as does Miles's command at the Ferry. Lee can take it, strike a blow for his cause, and seize the arms and supplies there without meeting us in battle. It's what I would do, were I in his place."

"Sounds reasonable," agreed Key.

Marcy nodded as well, asking, "But what can you do to frustrate him?"

"This is the question, isn't it? My fear is that Secesh will skedaddle too quickly for me to catch him." McClellan took up a pencil, placed it on the map, and slid it point-first toward the north. "If Lee moves this way, I will order this army to Hagerstown to cut the Rebel line of supply from Virginia. That will force him to turn and fight. If he moves south, which he presently appears to be doing, we will punch a hole at Harpers Ferry and overtake him near Winchester."

McClellan pulled the pencil back to Urbana, their present position, and slid it southwest to Winchester for emphasis. "The difficulty will be pushing through at Harpers Ferry," he added, waving the pencil as he did so. "The way there is very narrow and can be easily defended."

"Hence the importance of holding it," volunteered Marcy.

"Precisely!" exclaimed McClellan, tossing the pencil onto the table.

Key watched the instrument roll to the edge and fall out of sight. "Knowing this, general, what will you do?" he asked.

Little Mac rubbed the underside of his nose to wipe away a knot of mucus. "I—blast this hay fever! Pardon me, colonel," he replied, drawing a handkerchief from his pocket. "I intend to wait for more information before deciding on a final course. General Burnside's command is moving on Fredrick City. I will go there tomorrow to confer with him and plan our next move. Sooner or later, we must march to the rescue of the Ferry, but I must hear from Pleasonton before deciding how we should proceed."

Key stared down at the map, thinking he might have an idea worth voicing. "Respectfully, general, could you not open a direct route to the Miles through Knoxville on the Potomac?"

"No, Key! Have you not heard a word of what I've said?" McClellan shot back. "Do you recall the ancient Battle of Thermopylae?"

Embarrassment reddened the colonel's face. "No, sir. Military history is not my strong suit."

"Ah, no matter, Key. I am here to tell you," skylarked McClellan. "At Thermopylae, a small force of Greeks led by the Spartan general Leonidas delayed the advance of a much larger Persian army under King Xerxes by occupying a defensive position in a narrow pass between the sea and the mountains. The geography of Knoxville is similar. The path there between the river and the mountain is so narrow the enemy could stop an entire corps with a single brigade. If Lee covered the road there with artillery posted on the heights across the river, it would be flat suicide to send troops through that passage. We cannot go that way. We must instead force the pass at Crampton's Gap and open a path into Pleasant Valley."

McClellan thrust an outstretched finger at a pass on the map near a village named Burkittsville several miles north of the Potomac. "In the meantime, we must clear a path for General Pleasonton to approach the Ferry. I'll order him and Burnside to have General Reno's Ninth Corps seize the pass where the National Road crosses Catoctin Mountain west of Frederick City."

Marcy nodded in agreement. "Clearing that range will let Pleasonton enter the valley and determine the strength of any Rebel command there."

"It will," continued Little Mac. "General Franklin's Sixth Corps will move to Buckeystown, just south of Frederick, where it can wait to advance on the outcome of tomorrow's operations. General Sumner will move his Second Corps closer to Frederick at Monocacy Junction. If Pleasonton can open the route to the Ferry, I will send Franklin

in that direction and use Sumner to support Burnside. Either way, I will drive the Rebels back across the Potomac and rescue our cause.”

“And raise your reputation, general,” suggested his judge advocate.

McClellan cocked an eye at Key. “Not this again, colonel. We will consider the issue of what to do about my enemies in Washington after we have secured the country.”

“But general, the issues are one and the same, are they not? A victory vindicates your leadership in the eyes of the people. The radicals in Congress seek to make this war about the abolition of slavery. The administration now also leans this way. In doing so, they reject our policy of conciliation toward the South, guaranteeing the war will continue and grow even bloodier and more bitter than it is now,” explained the passionate Key. “If we can only show—”

“If we can only show that further armed resistance is futile,” interrupted McClellan, “and that the national government seeks to restore the Constitution as it existed *before* the outbreak of war, the people of the South might be reconciled to our reunion.” The general sighed heavily and shook his head. “I know well the issues at stake, Key, and there may come a time when, for the good of the country, we need to turn our attention from the Rebels to my enemies in Washington. Now is not that time. Let us win first and then seek to restore peace.”

“Of course, sir,” demurred the colonel, slipping his hands into his coat pockets.

The small gathering fell silent when an orderly appeared carrying a tin plate. Waving for the man to enter, McClellan dismissed Key and Marcy. He chewed a crust of bread and looked over a letter he had begun writing to his wife a few hours earlier:

My dearest, I have been interrupted here by news that we have Frederick. Burnside and Pleasonton are both there. The next trouble is to save the garrison of Harpers Ferry, which is, I fear, in danger of being captured by the Rebels. If they are not taken by this time, I think I can save them; at all events, nothing in my power shall be left undone to accomplish this result. I feel sure of one thing now, and that is that my men will fight well. The moment I hear that Harpers Ferry is safe I shall feel quite sure of the result. The people here cheer the troops as they pass.

McClellan sat back to muse on his last sentence. Union sentiment in Maryland was stronger than he had expected. Slavery, after all, remained common in the state, and only one year earlier, a mob had attacked government troops in the streets of Baltimore. Fighting in the company of a friendly populace made an important difference to the ranks, and McClellan could sense the improvement of morale in his men. Everything seemed to be coming together, even though the Army of the Potomac he now led had been cobbled together from pieces of its previous incarnation and from those of John Pope’s short-lived Army of Virginia.

Pope. A repulsive individual, thought McClellan. *What Lincoln and Halleck saw in him is beyond me.*

The general tore off another piece of bread and popped it into his mouth as his thoughts flitted to accusations in the press that he had dallied in reinforcing Pope, allowing Lee to whip the Army of Virginia on the old battlefield near Bull Run. Congress had even launched an investigation of the matter and relieved Fitz John Porter from corps command just when the army needed the man most.

“The fools!” he muttered. “I am beholden to a squawking gaggle of imbeciles and half-wits in Washington.” Perhaps Key’s advice made sense. With the army once again firmly in his hands, he could turn it back on Washington and force the national government to sue for peace.

Would America laud me as the man who brought an end to the war, or would they call me a latter-day Julius Caesar? McClellan cast a furtive glance about the tent to ensure that he was alone. Using the army against the administration amounted to treason. No one could hear him considering it.

McClellan listened to Marcy giving orders outside. *I am fortunate to have Marcy with me*, he thought. *Reliable friends are few and far between.*

The twilight passed into night, and the hum of activity around McClellan’s tent subsided. Inside, the general brooded in solitude amid a hush pregnant with hope for the following day.

2

Friday, September 12, 1862

Mid-Afternoon

Vanguard of the Ninth Corps, Twenty-Third Ohio Volunteer Infantry Regiment,

Kanawha Division

Monocacy River, near Frederick, Maryland

The shriek of a rifled artillery shell startled Thomas James Kelly awake. Bleary-eyed after marching along the National Road since sunrise, the private had long since succumbed to the stupor that overtakes men on the move; hour after tramping hour of seeing only the stain of perspiration spreading down the back of the man directly ahead of him. Now the vanguard of Brigadier General Jacob Cox’s Kanawha Division had come under fire, bringing the ranks to a fitful halt.

“Can you see the gun?” asked David Parker, Kelly’s closest friend in the veteran Twenty-Third Ohio Volunteers. One of three regiments in the division’s First Brigade,

the all-Buckeye Twenty-Third served alongside volunteers with the Twelfth and Thirtieth Ohio. A battery of six guns, also manned by Ohio crews, completed the roster.

Standing on the outside of the column, Kelly struggled to catch a glimpse of the action above the rows of indigo caps lined up ahead of him. Unable to see, he stepped out of the ranks to get a better look. "Give me a minute, laddie, and I'll tell ye," he replied to Parker in a Gaelic lilt.

Craning his neck, Kelly spied water sparkling off to the left. A tall stone bridge over the river stood at the base of the valley in front of them, the gravel turnpike beyond the bridge continuing straight up a sloping ridge between fields of wheat, corn, and clover. Past the farms, on the valley's far side, Kelly made out the steeples of Frederick City, their division's objective for the day.

A puff of smoke appeared in the distance. "I see the gun!" he yelled. "It's in the road ahead of us!" A second projectile slammed into the hillside off to their right. Dirt and rocks pattered down as the men clutched their caps.

"One piece? That's it?" marveled Parker.

"That's it, boyo. Tis all I—wait!" The Irishman paused a moment. "There are two more off to the left about two hundred yards away, along with . . . well, it could be a Reb skirmish line." Iron rounds carved a deep "whoosh" as they sliced through the still air before crashing into the ground well behind them.

Kelly's gaze settled on Lieutenant Colonel Rutherford B. Hayes, the regiment's commander, who had wheeled his mount from the front of the column and was trotting back down the ranks.

"Colonel's a coming, Davey."

"Twenty-Third Ohio, step to the right of the road, if you please!" shouted Hayes.

Captain John Skiles paced out from the ranks and drew his saber. "Alright, boys, you heard the order. C Company, right face!" he pointed with the blade before taking a moment to shove the curious Irishman back into the column. Kelly, Parker, and their comrades took firm hold of their Springfield rifled muskets and shifted eyes right. "Front rank! Take down that fence!" The order sent men scurrying up the embankment toward the sturdy rail fence crowning the top.

Working the posts to and fro, the Ohioans tore the rails from their seating as another Rebel shell landed near the First Brigade. An unintelligible order from the front of the column redeployed part of the brigade to advance to the bridge at the double-quick behind a squadron of cavalry already sprinting toward the span. Cries rang out as the rows of musket-carrying men lunged ahead.

"C Company, forward march!" bellowed Skiles, sending the Buckeyes up the embankment.

Once in the grassy field beside the road, the regiment stopped to reorganize into columns. Then it trotted off after the Thirtieth Ohio, which was already advancing on the right. The enemy guns continued booming as Colonel Augustus Moor's Second Brigade slowly closed the distance on the far side of the bridge. The Federal batteries rolled onto

the crest of the ridge near the Twenty-Third as the men of C Company descended the long grade toward the river. Arriving at the steep bank, the head of the tidy column dissolved into a tangled mass as the men wearing flat-soled brogans slipped awkwardly into the water. Kelly's turn soon arrived, and he plunged with both feet into the Monocacy beside Davey Parker and several others. Someone behind them cursed at the uneven footing.

After getting across, Kelly, Parker, and the rest of the regiment scaled the embankment and moved into a field of clover, where they paused to suck in gulps of air. The Irishman peered over his shoulder at the guns deployed on the ridge they had just traversed. It never ceased to amaze him how loud artillery was or how the gunners could ever stand it. The shells screamed above Moor's brigade, which had formed a battle line astride the National Road off to the left. A bugle call focused everyone's attention back on Lieutenant Colonel Hayes.

"Captains, form up your men!" called Hayes from atop his horse.

Kelly and his well-drilled comrades shifted to the spot where Captain Skiles directed them, and each man straightened the line by reaching out his left hand to touch the man beside him. Off to the right, Kelly spied the ranks of the Twelfth and Thirtieth doing the same. "Davey look—it's the whole damned division!"

Parker took in the sight for a few long seconds. "All this for a few mangy Secesh? Our regiment alone could have cleared them out."

"Better safe than sorry," Kelly shrugged. "We can't see what's on the far side of that ridge, lad."

Shots cracked from the guns of Rebel skirmishers positioned along the road, the minié balls sizzling past above the Buckeyes' heads. "Sure, they're shootin' high! Bully for you, ye grayback bastards!" cried Kelly, his voice joined by the hoots of other men shaking their caps to egg on the enemy.

Regimental buglers blew the call to advance, and Moor's brigade stepped off. The colonel, followed by several riders, thundered toward the enemy gun position on the ridge now just a few hundred yards in front of them. The southern troopers, though, knew their craft. In less than a minute, the gunners had limbered their pieces and lashed their horses westward over the crest.

"Twenty-Third, on at the quick step!" cried Hayes, prompting a guttural cheer from his boys.

The men of the Old Northwest surged forward, skirting homes, and leaping fences until the outbuildings of Frederick hove into view. Smoke rose from the streets, and the blast of an artillery piece rang out among the houses. As quickly as they had moved to attack, Hayes bellowed the order to halt, and the blue tide rolled to a stop in a field outside the city.

"Rest arms," shouted Hayes as he spurred his horse in the direction of General Cox. The Kanawha Division's commander sat atop his mount next to Eliakim Scammon, the chin-bearded sporting general in command of the Second Brigade.

“Ho, that was good craic!” gasped Kelly to his friend.

“What?” puzzled Parker.

“Fun,” Kelly wheezed back.

“Well . . . it was easier than Carnifex Ferry . . . for sure,” Parked replied, referencing a fight in western Virginia one year earlier when the Twenty-Third had attacked a line of Confederate works. “Just skirmishers, though,” he continued, still catching his breath. “Driving the next line might not be so easy.”

When Captain Skiles ordered the men to fall out, Kelly, Parker, and the rest eased their packs off their backs and slumped to the ground. Pulling off his blue kepi, Kelly wiped the perspiration from his brow and smoothed his greasy black hair.

“Davey, have ye been here before?” he asked.

Parker removed his cap and shook his head, letting the late summer air cool his wet, sand-colored curls. “Nope. Never ventured east of the Ohio River before the war. You?”

“Aye, I have,” nodded Kelly as he stared off at the spires of Frederick. The sight of church steeples warmed his heart. Without thinking, his hand moved to a strand of rosary beads inside his tunic pocket. Collecting the beads in his palm, Kelly worked them one-by-one between his fingers out of firm Catholic habit. “Didn’t stay long. Our wagon train passed here back in fifty-two, just after I came to this country.”

“I remember now. You entered at Baltimore City, didn’t you?”

“I did. Full of Paddies the city was then, all of us fleeing the old sod for a new start. The hunger, ye know?”

Parker watched Kelly’s gaze grow misty, as it always did when he spoke of his home country or coming to this one. He and his people had suffered in ways Parker could never imagine.

Kelly let his mind drift to the tidy front of a whitewashed cottage with a thatched roof, his lips forming a slow smile as the scent of heather and cut grass filled his nostrils. Just then, a light breeze washed over them, tousling the raven strands on Kelly’s head. His imagination soared at the feeling, taking him far away on a touch of the North Atlantic wind.

HOME!

The word boomed in Kelly’s thoughts, filling him with such a deep longing that his bones ached. A stout woman in a humble linen dress, her head covered with a hand-woven shawl, exited the cottage. She peered about calling his name, which brought Kelly, not yet a teenager, scrambling to her down a rocky lane. His mother held open her arms, and Kelly threw himself into her embrace, his head nestling against her bosom and nostrils taking in the scent of lye soap. The memories filled Kelly’s thoughts, quickening the pace of his fingers over the rosary. He felt his mother’s arms around him, cradling him, loving him, infusing him with a tenderness and contentment that he had nearly forgotten. The seconds ticked by as he willed himself to remain in the past, holding on desperately to what once had been.

“Thomas James Kelly, you’re the light of me life,” she said, her eyes sparkling. “I thank the good Lord above for sending ye. Tell me you’ll never leave, for if ye do I’ll be miserable the rest of me days.”

“I promise, Ma, I’ll never leave. So, help me God,” Kelly vowed, gripping his mother all the tighter. Her question and his loving reply never changed. Neither did the painful memory of his kindly, quiet father, taken too soon by malnutrition. Or his sister, who had never possessed a strong constitution, a few months later.

The vision began to fade, elbowed out of his mind by the sound of men arguing, talking, laughing, and singing around them. The cottage and the cool ocean breeze fell away, leaving Kelly with the emptiness he had felt since he left. All that remained before him was the face of his dear mother, who had lived long enough to apologize with her dying breath for being the one to leave him alone in the world.

A loud shout close at hand jarred Kelly fully back to the present. His eyes shot open, and he squinted when the sunlight proved too bright. Captain Skiles was yelling at someone as he passed by. When his vision cleared again a few seconds later, Kelly found Parker staring at him.

“You alright? Where’d you go just now?”

“A place I ain’t been in donkey’s years.”

Parker frowned. “Donkey’s years?”

“A long while, boyo.”

Kelly felt a tear running down one of his cheeks, and he quickly wiped it away. “For Christ’s sake, Davey, keep this quiet, will ye?” he hissed. “The lads’ll give me no end o’ trouble.”

A mischievous grin spread across Parker’s face. “Sure, old friend, I’ll keep still . . . at least ‘til you cross me next. Then the whole world’ll hear about it. I promise.”

Kelly grimaced as Parker poked the sore spot in his soul. “Some mate you are, Davey Parker.” Then Kelly paused. “Look sharp! Captain’s coming back.”

Skiles strode past as the two friends sat up in the grass. “Into column now, boys,” he hollered. “We’ve got orders to move.”

Hefting his Springfield, Kelly rose beside Parker while the regiment gathered around them. The other regiments lined up in the surrounding fields until General Cox, brown-bearded and seated atop a muscled charger, emerged from the city with orders for the division to move. The men of the Twenty-Third stepped across the field to enter the road near the outskirts of town. The road there forked left, and they entered the town proper.

“Why, Davey, would you look at that!” Kelly laughed. “They’ve decorated the place for us.”

Parker’s lips parted into a grin as he took in the red, white, and blue bunting hanging from the open windows. Joyous townspeople flooded the streets waving star-spangled flags and hats. Some even held up their babies, who fussed and cried in fear of the strange

noises. Ladies laughed and called to them from the street sides. One blew a kiss in Kelly's direction, and with a wink he reached out to catch it.

"This here's a different kind of war!" he exclaimed. "Never seen a city come out to cheer."

"It's a damned sight better than western Virginia!" marveled Parker.

Images of that place flitted through Parker's mind. For nearly a year, the Twenty-Third Ohio had fought Rebel guerrillas in a dismal wilderness. The western part of the Old Dominion remained Union loyal, but the local populace rarely greeted Yankees with the enthusiasm of Frederick's inhabitants. The war there had disintegrated into a bitter cycle of ambushes and manhunts through the forest, leaving many of Parker and Kelly's friends dead or gravely wounded. "The only good bushwhacker is a dead one," thought Parker, but he refused to let cloudy thoughts dampen his spirits on this glorious September day and he dismissed them from his mind.

The crowd grew into a deep throng yelling deafening cheers. A young woman, overcome with joy, rushed from the side of the street to throw her arms around the man in front of Parker. She kissed his cheek with eyes sparkling and then grabbed Parker by the collar of his jacket to plant her lips on his sweat-slickened face. Parker giggled like a schoolboy as the woman pulled at him. "Thank God you've come!" she cried. "You heroes have saved our poor town from those filthy Rebels!"

"You're welcome!" he shouted back at her, tipping his hat.

Then a toothless man with a scraggly white beard and open shirt scuttled up carrying a half-empty bottle. "You boys want a slug?"

"Aye!" Kelly called to him, his mouth salivating for a taste of the cure.

The besotted stranger lurched to Kelly's side. "It's rye whiskey, of course." He belched before handing over the bottle. "This country's famous for it."

Kelly poured a long hot stream of rye into his mouth and gulped it down. "Ah, that's grand!" he declared. "Davey this is good whiskey! Not exactly in the style of the old country, but I'll not be turning it down! Have a swallow."

Parker grabbed the bottle from his friend and tilted it back for a long drink. The rye coursed down his gullet like a torch, his eyes watering as he gasped with approval.

The stranger snatched back the bottle, showing his gums in a wide toothless grin before taking a swig and staggering drunkenly toward the crowd. Looking back along his regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Hayes spotted the souse and wheeled his horse into him, knocking the drunk hard to the ground.

"Aieeee! What do you mean by this?" cried the man as his bottle skidded off into the street.

"By God, I'll not have you plying my men with spirits," growled Hayes. "Off with you!" Taking a moment to find his feet, the old sot shot a hateful stare at Hayes and disappeared.

“Oy, the colonel needn’t have done that,” grouched Kelly, sucking the taint of rye from his mustache. Warmed by the whiskey, Parker threw a playful elbow at his friend and tried to look serious when Hayes trotted past staring hard at them.

The column marched through the town center and up a low slope beyond the city, where a large meadow beckoned. Orders came for the regiment to fall out, and Captain Skiles sent men to pull down the roadside fence. Kelly and Parker participated in the work before finding a comfortable resting spot on the sprawling clover.

Scanning the growth, Kelly looked unsuccessfully for one with four leaves before turning his thoughts to food. “Jesus, Davey, I’m so hungry I’d eat the balls off a skunk,” he grumbled, easing himself down onto his knapsack.

Parker cocked an eye at his friend. “Good grief, that’s wretched, Tom. I’ll never understand half of the things that come out of your mouth.”

“That may well be, but I’ll never understand your Protestant ways either! A miserly, tight-arsed lot ye are.”

Parker ignored the taunt and rose to collect firewood from a stand of trees across the turnpike. With luck, the commissary wagons would be up soon, and they could procure something more to eat than hardtack crackers. The division’s other regiments flooded into the fields around them, and in the gathering gloom, Parker watched as men sought out rocks to pile into fire rings and others hauled fence rails to burn. Sergeant Bill Lyon organized a detachment to do the same for C Company, and before long, they had several healthy blazes crackling inside fieldstone circles. A few men produced potatoes they had dug during the march and commenced slicing them up. Others gathered empty canteens and left to fetch water. One of the men emerged from the twilight with a whole roasted chicken in his hands.

“Christ almighty!” gasped Kelly, his mouth watering at the sight of it. “Where on God’s green earth did ye get that?”

“In Frederick City,” the man beamed. “The ladies was handing out all manner of eatables. Didn’t you get any?”

Parker and Kelly gaped at one another and shook their heads. “A swallow of whiskey is all we got. Is there more food to be had?” asked Parker.

“Sure is,” declared Sam Carey, another comrade from C Company. Carey walked into the firelight gripping a small sack in his hand. “I got some salt pork, a wedge of hard cheese, raspberry jam, half a loaf of bread, and a newspaper. All from one family!”

“Golly, Sam, that’s a haul!” declared Parker. “Care to share?”

“Of course. Here,” he offered, extending the bread. “Cut this up and pass it around.” Carey handed over the loaf and Parker tore into it with his pocketknife.

The hoped-for commissary wagons never arrived, but the men shared what they had, and thirty minutes later, they rested easy in the clover. While Parker removed his boots and rubbed his aching feet, Kelly adjusted his seating position and reached into a small leather pouch to draw out a large pinch of finely cut tobacco. He studied it for a moment before stuffing it carefully into his white clay pipe, tamping it softly with his

little finger as if it was a lost art. Once satisfied, he lifted a long stick he had set into the edge of the fire and used the flaming end to ignite the dried leaves, puffing clouds of smoke from the sides of his mouth as he did so. George Love, sitting next to Sam Carey, produced what Kelly had silently longed for the most—a bottle of the famed local rye he had tasted earlier in Frederick. Eagerly taking the bottle from Love, he gulped down a mouthful. Then he passed the bottle to Parker with a long “ahhhhhh.” The liquor made its way around the circle, the men doing their best to keep it out of sight lest some officer came by and took it from them.

At length, Carey pulled out his newspaper and held it up in the flickering light.

“The *New York Tribune!*” grumbled Parker sitting up from his repose. “That’s an abolitionist rag of the worst sort, Sam. Couldn’t you find anything more agreeable to read?”

Carey shrugged. “I didn’t have much of a choice. The man who gave me all the food pushed this paper onto me, too. I’m hoping to learn something about what’s going on elsewhere. This one’s a bit dated, being from August, but all news is new to them who ain’t read it before,” he declared. “Mind, I ain’t in sympathy with abolition, though. That’s a nest of vipers, I say.”

Kelly plucked the pipe from between his lips and spat into the grass. “Well said, Sam. I’ll wager not a man here joined the army to free the nigger, did he?” No one within hearing distance disagreed.

“Well now, here’s Old Abe Lincoln saying the same thing,” remarked Carey as he angled the paper to get better light. “Says here he wrote a letter to Horace Greeley.”

Hisses sang out around the fire.

“Someone ought to do the world a kindness and hang that man,” grumbled Parker, his thoughts tainted dark by the rye. “Without his kind, we’d have never taken up arms. I don’t care much for darkies, mind, but I sure as shootin’ won’t stand by while the Johnny Rebs ruin our nation through armed rebellion. That’s treason, as sure as I’m sitting here! Men like Greeley pushed them to it.”

Heads nodded in the flickering firelight.

“What’s Uncle Abe have to say?” asked Kelly, scratching an itch under his light blue trousers.

Carey cleared his throat. “Says here, ‘dear sir . . . I have just read yours of the nineteenth addressed to myself through the *New York Tribune*,’ and so forth. ‘I would save it the shortest way under the Constitution,’ et cetera and so on . . . ah, here we go. ‘My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union and is not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that. What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help to save the Union.’”

Carey looked up at his comrades. "About says it all, don't it? Old Abe says the Union is what we're fighting for, not the darkies."

"It didn't sound all that clear cut to me," grumbled Parker. "Sounded more like a bunch of 'I'da done this if not for that' politician chatter. Guess a man's gotta 'spect double talk out of that sort."

"Did say saving the Union is utmost, though," contributed Carey.

Parker shrugged. "Good enough for me, I guess."

"It's one reason I signed up to fights with ye boys—in addition to the healthy bounty," winked Kelly as he exhaled a pungent puff of smoke. "You don't know how good it is here. Where I'm from, the English treat us common folk no better'n dogs. We can't own land. We can't hold public office. Heck, our churches can't even have steeples, or display the cross."

"That's because you're Papists," shot back George Love. "If I didn't already know you and where your loyalties lie, Tom Kelly, I'd reckon you can't be trusted, either. Papists swear allegiance to Rome, not to their home country."

The words lifted Kelly into an upright position as if invisible hands had yanked him off of his knapsack. He pulled the pipe from his lips and gripped it tightly between his fingers. "Tis a good thing I know *you*, George Love, because if I didn't, I'd come over there and make ye eat those hateful nativist words. I joined this man's army to prove me loyalty to the flag of me new homeland. Don't ever question me motives, or so help me God, I'll put ye on yer backside."

"Alright, that's enough!" declared a tipsy Sergeant Lyon. "Every man here knows Tom Kelly's a loyal man and a good fighter to boot. Why, he even saved your life once, George, when that filthy gang of bushwhackers came at us by the Gauley River. Remember? Old Tom here shot one of 'em down just as he took a bead on you. The man had you dead to rights, too." Several men who had witnessed the event murmured in agreement. "Kelly's a Papist, sure, but he's not the kind of Papist you're yapping about. He's loyal to the colors and hates rebellion as much as any man here."

Exasperated, Love slapped his knee. "I ain't questioning anyone's loyalty; leastways yours, Tom, and I'm sorry I said it. All I meant by it is that Papists take orders from the Pope. Everyone knows it. Why, I reckon even old Tom here would admit the importance of Rome to his church. But I've served with you boys for more than a year now, and I can say without hesitation that I trust and respect all of you to a man, Tom Kelly included. That acceptable to you, Tom?"

Sucking contentedly on his pipe, Kelly reclined on his knapsack. "It is," he replied, discharging a stream of bluish smoke. "It is, indeed."

"Good, then that's settled," confirmed Sergeant Lyon. "We'd best bed down now. Today we took Frederick, but the Rebs ain't far off. I 'spect we'll find 'em again tomorrow. Until then, rest up. Today was a good day. Tomorrow we might not be so lucky."