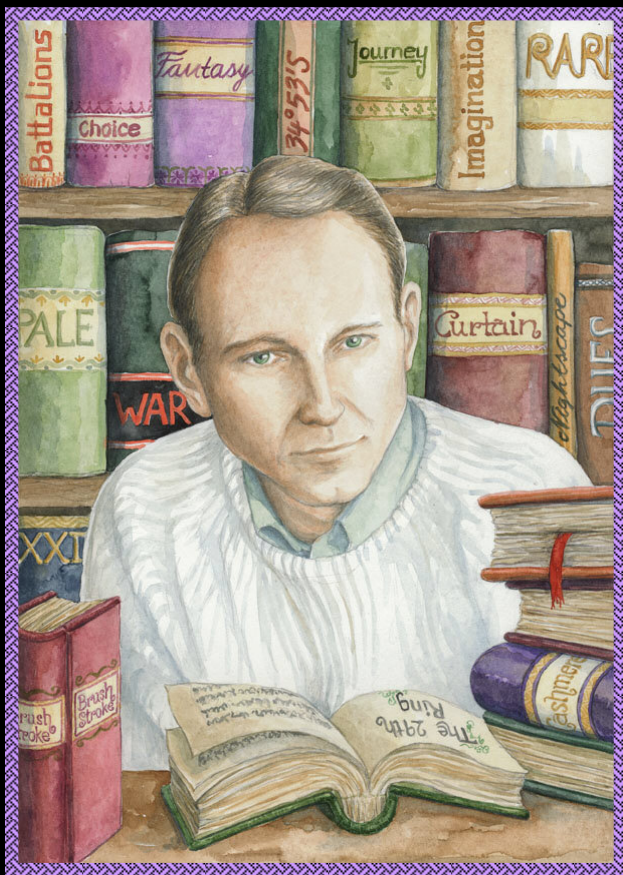


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Then, Now and Always

My DARLING and DEVOTED WIFE
You of Starlit Nights Come and Gone

My LOVING and FAITHFUL DAUGHTER
You're the Best!

My BELOVED WIFE and ALLY
You in the Autumn Blush of All the Afternoons Yet to Come
having been the First to Cross Over the Threshold into the
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Battalions

Join me now for *A Story I'm Beginning™*. Savor *aBitof Mystery and Adventure™* from *Battalions—Epilogue and Postscript™*.

"In my book, war is mentally and physically enduring. It is also morally tolerable—but just barely that, and no more."

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THE ELEVATION OF WAR to a national pastime for its own ends is simply inexcusable. Even so, the selling of war to the general populace is exactly what politicians are guilty of—as well as the general officers who follow suit. When the private and public sectors join arms for the purpose of wartime profiteering, immorality is the constant in the equation of war.

Yet, as despicable as such cavalier recklessness and greed are, casual and careless glorification of war are at the very heart of half truths employed when recruiting the young and poor—just as they are when employed by psychological operatives in and around the battlefield.

Veneration of war is a leisure time pursuit for arrogant private sector aristocrats—they being the ones who are never at risk, and of and by whom neither risk nor sacrifice is asked or given by their fellows in the public sector.

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Acceptance of war as a measure of societal normalcy has its footprint all over the naïveté and desperation of the young and poor. These are the members of society who are in fact deployed to every conceivable hot spot—where they end up being the only segment of the population to actually *risk and sacrifice their lives and limbs, sight, hearing and physical and mental health*.

In addition to overseas theaters of war, there are the homegrown variety. This even-odds domestic side of war's coin refers to revolution and civil conflict—the latter not to be confused with a mere societal quarrel. Both are experienced by youth and the disadvantaged on behalf of the aristocratic elements who deploy them—not for the ideological complexities associated with freedom and liberty, but solely because of the financial partnership between the public and private sectors.

Blood is not spilt on the marble floors of hallowed halls, or around negotiating tables of fine, polished oak.

Rather, arenas of war are where the sacrifices of the young and poor are strewn. There, the full measure of their life's devotion pours forth in crimson blush—and hallows the battlegrounds upon which they last tread. Blood is not discriminating. It stains winter's ivory white, summer's emerald green, spring's precious flowery jewels and autumn's beaten gold leaf.

Absolutely pointless are the human costs of unanticipated and consequently unplanned battles—principally those spontaneous field encounters that in the end render definition to avoidable and needless wars in the first place.

This is particularly so, when the war in question is one glorified by privileged class cowards who invariably



lose their own way to the battlefield—this, even though the roads thereto are always well marked by the risk and sacrifice of the young and poor.

Rather, the wealthy, powerful and privileged spend their time nurturing character flaws such as personal cowardice—while also tabulating ill-gotten gains from war profiteering. It is they of human spinelessness who instigate and exploit conflicts of unwarranted moral tolerability.

CIVIL WAR CROSSROADS

NOW to the impromptu battle that unfolds within a matter of hours on the southern outskirts of a small Pennsylvania town of 2,500 residents.

The engagement begins and ends in July of the third year of national vetting and bloodletting. The year of 1861 saw the standard litmus test of war glorification being met—that of tears, flag waving and the marching of military bands around the public squares of mainstream America, mostly in the North.

By this time in 1863, however, a once glorified civil war is hemorrhaging the young and poor everywhere—and primarily in the South.

Unplanned, the battle is executed over a period of three days—mainly to the detriment of the young and poor who manage to still fill the ranks of the Army of Northern Virginia. They are emblematic of military loyalty, even though far from home—their trains becoming thinner and thinner the farther north into Pennsylvania they march.

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At the heads of the columns of this army's few corps are indecisive and even incompetent general officers—some of whom are not much older than the commissioned officers, noncommissioned officers and enlisted men whom they purport to command. This is the Confederate army to whose care 56-year old General Robert Edward Lee is entrusted.

Overall, the generals act or fail to act with little or no planning—this, when General Lee could have simply called the encounter with the Army of the Potomac a matter of bad timing, and then bypassed Gettysburg. What little Lee has at his disposal includes poor intelligence as to troop movements and terrain—as well as field communication that falls within a range between insufficient and non-existent.

Lee could and should have chosen another place to do battle. This, particularly after the opposing force gained the advantage over him and his subordinate corps commanders—by rapidly occupying the high ground of the defensive fishhook, both the northern barb and the western shank.

Lee will need to exercise far more than fatherly patience when the errant cavalry commander, 30-year old Major General James Ewell Brown Stuart, finally arrives on the scene.

Because of Stuart's incompetent truancy, the cavalry of Union Blue found and engaged the infantry of Confederate Grey. Naturally, this was not what General Lee had intended or ordered of the young General Stuart.



A STATE of FLUX

YESTERDAY FINDS TODAY—and the fourth dimension finds me it seems. My apparent state of flux is the result of some random bend in time, lying somewhere between the past and the present.

To the east is the wartime of yesterday, and to the west peacetime's present. I find myself somewhere at the midpoint of all of this. Yes, at the cycloramic middle of my nightly predicament is a nonstop dream—a marathon nightmare, as some might describe it.

In the vernacular of today, the silver screen flickers to life at the very moment I close my eyes—and goes dark only when my appetite for sleep is satisfied. The repetitive nature of it all means that I catch up with the projectionist every few hours or so—on the other side of the clock.

I'm at a point which encompasses a composite of the wartime and peacetime history of a country whose 18th Century hierarchal pyramid springs from a flawed foundation rooted in constitutional instability—one that is an utter contradiction as to human worth.

Each night I find myself looking up at a 19th Century socioeconomic pyramid. At its pinnacle is wealth, power and privilege—the tripartite web of control superimposed upon the many by the few.

More than that is the shadowy war that inevitably turns the fabric of the republic inside out—thereby pulling it apart at the seams.

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EPILOGUE

A FALTERING BREEZE occasionally brushes against my face—this, while the relentless summer sun of July beats down upon the back of my neck.

Standing as I am upon the quiet battlefield before me, I try hard to imagine the fiercely thunderous Confederate artillery barrage of a century and a half earlier.

I do imagine it, the sky thick with acrid, bitter clouds of smoke—at first black, and then softening to infinite shades of Confederate Grey. My upward gaze follows the trajectories of hundreds of projectiles, as they fall and then impact upon positions more than a mile away. Spewing shrapnel in every direction above the heads and shoulders of dug-in men and boys wearing Union Blue, they send a terrifying message—but otherwise little damage.

The din numbs my mind.

Slowly at first, I begin walking easterly—with every intention of crossing the wide expanse of flower laden, treeless ground, upon which my eyes are fixed. I pick up the pace—this, at the urging of an inner drummer, his mallets coming down hard on the twin tympanum residing and resonating deep inside my head.

Although I sense a certain anxious mood in the air around me, I comprehend more than that—far, far more as a matter of fact. I am now instinctively aware of all those who stand with me—they, of an undaunted courage that simply overpowers the heat and inherent fog of battle.

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I conjure up the hundreds of brave men and boys on my right—and likewise, the hundreds more on my left.

Silently falling are they—and noiselessly slipping away. I stretch out my arms to them, but they are gone in an instant—hidden from me by clouds of burnt orange dust and swirling black gunsmoke.

What had not even crossed the minds of mothers a mere 15 or 20 years ago—is now suddenly in the present. Yes, what has finally come to pass is the once future instant that mothers practiced in the birthing and suckling of a nation's sons could not then imagine or even recognize. That is, until their boys decided to take up and bear the streamers and pennants that personify the waging of war.

Banners and standards now fall by the wayside—along with their bearers. Few recover from the final and eternal grip that is all too familiar to these gritty men in Grey. Those who *do* remain on their feet are mightily resolved to reach the military objective which lies just west of several batteries of Union artillery. If they can only just *get* there it seems—all will somehow turn out well perhaps.

Yes, the equivalent of 1,500 abreast and 10 deep—many now just stumbling along. Yet they continue to push on. This, even as they remain the sole and full focus of a massive Union cannonade—even as they absorb the complete and irrevocable wrath of withering grapeshot. Yet, it is all at once a near and distant fury—one that as strange as it seems, is in some way absent individual anger and malice.

After what seems to be something of an eternity I, among a bare remaining few, finally reach the objective—

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that solitary corpse on the high ground of Cemetery Ridge
that is the shank of the fishhook.

Mounting the low stone wall, I look down to see
men and boys in Union Blue staring up at me with a sur-
real and surprised look in their eyes and on their faces.

Some raise their weapons in my direction.

Others are helpless to do so, their intentions now
lost somewhere far off—motives that are now reflected in
eyes consumed by an all too common peaceful stare of
eternal relief.

I ignore the weapons raised against me, while
slowly turning west in the direction from whence I came.

The afternoon sun's white hot brilliancy blinds me
for a moment.

I raise both hands as a sort of shade.

As I do, it no longer becomes a necessity to sum-
mon metaphor and simile from my imagination and
mind's eye.

I see them.

I see them each and every one.

They are the young and the poor—each of whom
only two years earlier left their youthful naïveté at a moth-
er's doorstep, and marched off to fight the rich man's war.

They are the disadvantaged youth who patrioti-
cally responded to the Southern call to arms that not long
ago so stridently echoed within a network of plantation
verandas. These remain the dishonorable portals to back-
door human bondage—where aging planters sit amongst



their wealth, power, privilege—and unrestrained control of human life and existence.

Yes, these are the gateways to a human contradiction that has existed for 87 years—when in 1776, aristocratic colonial slaveholders first expounded on the *self-serving* nature of the *theoretical* equality of all men.

Not long after today's carnage, the 54-year old Abraham Lincoln will speak of that same equality—somewhat less theoretically, but no less philosophically. Unfortunately, it will be too soon for anyone to emphasize the equality of the sexes—or in particular, that of the races.

I return from my thoughts of universal freedom and liberty.

To see the fallen young thus, causes fierce emotion to well up in my chest—and in my head and across my entire visage.

I try desperately to imagine the disconsolate and remorseful thoughts passing through the minds and souls that lie behind the anxious and animated brows of the un-fallen—a few unscathed, but most severely wounded by ball and shrapnel.

I do imagine it.

Yet I also see the reality of it.

Likewise, I'm sure that I'll see it yet again tomorrow night—this, when the silver screen once again sputters to life in my recurring dream.

For a few moments, I wonder at Lee's tragic frame of mind as the news filters back to him—sitting as he often is, astride his faithful Traveler, both their heads somewhat bowed.

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Can it be that an ill-fated Lee is quietly relieved that he might now return to his home on the outskirts of Washington—thus leaving behind the tactically deficient battlefield that has not lived up to an otherwise superb political and military strategy?

Can Lee see that the imperfect union reflected in "this Constitution for the *United* States" will struggle on into the future with a new generation of aristocracy? Or can he even begin to see that far down the road to Virginia, the broad Potomac and beyond?

More importantly, of course, can Lee see that an aging foundation of human inequality will lead to even more pain and suffering as time goes along?

Who can say?

To this day, my walk upon that fatal field comes to mind when I sit at my writing desk amongst a quarter century of my own uniformed memories.

It is then that I can't help but occasionally wonder about the inner thoughts of Robert Edward Lee.

There was the *strategic* Lee who might have severed Washington from the Army of the Potomac.

There was also the *operational* Lee who led the ghostlike Army of Northern Virginia into Union territory and behind enemy lines.

Finally, there was the *tactical* Lee whose faulty choices during that early July in 1863 led him to secure only the low terrain—and then cavalierly and seemingly offhandedly order an all out attack from the low ground to the high.



POSTSCRIPT

TURN AWAY from my poignant walk. Returning with my daughter to our waiting automobile—the long drive back to Maryland from Pennsylvania returns us both to the reality of the moment.

Even so, I find myself still shaken, and pondering my flashback to the turning point in the American Civil War.

The evening is humid.

Absentmindedly lowering my right arm, I wipe a damp palm across my pale green army shirt just above the waist. After some two and a half decades of uniformed service, it is only second nature to avoid smudging the otherwise mirror-bright brass buckle that habitually resides at the dead center of the traditional junction of horizontal black web belt and vertical gig line.

It won't be until later in the evening that I come to realize why other battlefield visitors were perhaps stealing sideways downward glances when they walked past me.

It is my charcoal socks, black spit-shined low quarters and my carefully pressed and creased, dark green, gabardine trousers and their vertical black piping that tell the story—this, with just a bit of routine scrutiny.

They are spattered and stained with the *Crimson and Grey* of a bloody and terrible afternoon.¹

¹The freewheeling imagination and evocative storytelling of D.H. Dale™ crown otherwise commonplace themes with aBitof Mystery, Romance and Adventure™—a bejeweled and magical coronet not shackled by convention. Herein lies the work of a self-styled painter of the written word—the full kaleidoscope of hues, blushes, shades, tones and tints flowing from the storyteller's inkwell to parchment. It is upon these leaves

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of paper so unselfishly bestowed by some mighty tree—that the teller has penned this **Miniature Story™** entitled **Battalions—Epilogue and Post-script™**.

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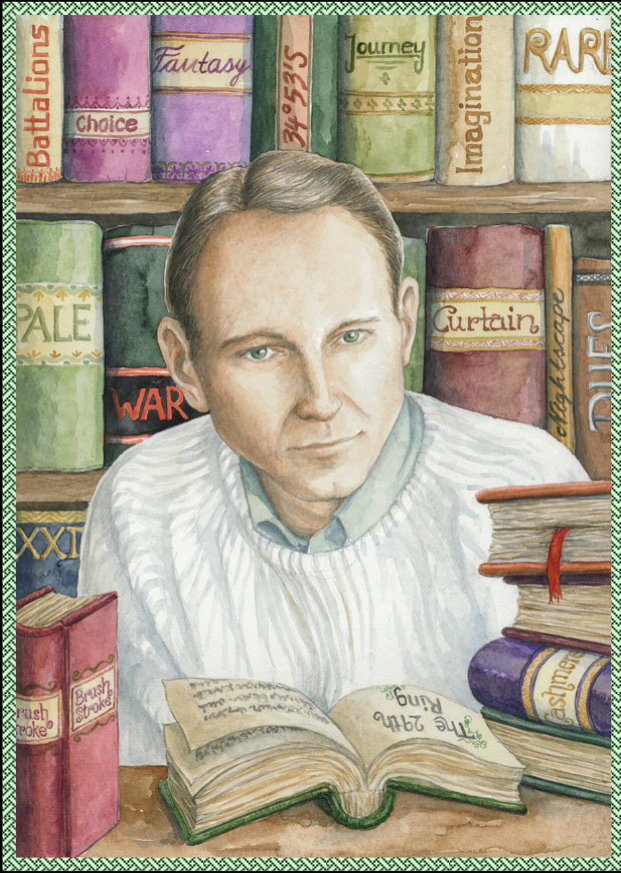
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