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FIRST BROTHERS

A CIVIL WAR NOVEL

By Craig Paulson

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BORN ON THE STEEP WESTERN BANKS of the St. Croix River, Alexander Johnson, like many boys, dreamt of adventure. He grew up to smell of wood smoke in winter and sawdust in summer.

After ice out rafts of white pine from the north filled the river, lumberjacks floated mile long rafts of timber into town from the northern Anishinaabe lands. Sawmills transformed the logs into lumber to build the burgeoning state.

Minnesota became a state on the eleventh of May 1858. Stories about the days before it was admitted to the U.S. fascinated young Alexander. Before statehood, friends visited the family's Stillwater home in the evenings. Over coffee, the talk turned to politics. Alexander listened. He heard many stories, including the tale of two separate state constitutional conventions, one Republican and one Democratic. The convention delegates refused to meet in a joint session. A committee of members from each party negotiated the details of the constitution. Republican party delegates signed the constitution written on white paper. Democratic Party delegates signed the constitution written on blue paper.

On many nights Alexander's mother, Francis, shared the latest news about abolition. She followed the writings of abolitionist Jane Gray Swisshelm. As the editor of the St. Cloud newspaper, Swisshelm

had a forum for advocating her views. Alexander's parents, their friends, and most Minnesotans favored abolition.

Francis was a schoolteacher educated in Massachusetts. Her father, Franklin, encouraged her to attend common school in Massachusetts. Upon graduation, she accepted a teaching position in the Minnesota Territory, where she met Peter Johnson. Peter worked at the Stillwater penitentiary. Looming over the north end of town, the Minnesota State Prison momentarily reminded lumberjacks that camp rules weren't the only laws to follow, something they soon forgot in the many saloons lining Stillwater's main street.

For reasons he never disclosed, Peter immigrated from Trondheim, Norway. A skilled horseman, Peter gained employment as a log skidder in the Wisconsin lumber camps. Through merit, he rose to become a skidder foreman. This led to a position as a stable master at the territorial prison. A married co-worker arranged for Peter and Francis to dine together at his home. They fell in love and wed. On Valentine's Day 1840, Alexander was born.

Alexander stood five-feet, nine-inches tall. He had a medium build, with a round face and his father's jutting square jaw, hazel eyes, light brown hair, and a pale, blotchy reddish complexion. Alexander had a trusting nature and pleasant smile. He worked as a bank clerk, dreaming of something more.

In 1861 Minnesotans yearned to assert themselves in national issues. When the war broke out, Minnesota was pro-Union. Gov. Alexander Ramsey volunteered a thousand Minnesota soldiers for the Union cause. Alexander Johnson enlisted.

After he enlisted, the family discussed his decision at dinner. His mother opposed his enlistment. She cried. His father, Peter, stated to his mother, "You taught him to think for himself, and that's what he is doing." The truth of Peter's words calmed Alexander's mother. And, despite her misgivings, she knew if no one enlisted, slavery would

not be abolished. Alexander and hundreds of young Minnesotans were the first to volunteer for the Union.

Alexander would be part of the Stillwater Guard in the First Minnesota Volunteer Infantry Regiment. The Stillwater enlistees selected Capt. Bradley as commander. He had earned a reputation for fairness and righteous judgment as manager of the largest hotel in Stillwater, The Potter House. Those elected as sergeant included Thomas Povich, who oversaw a construction crew at the prison. He knew Peter Johnson, Alexander's father. Sgt. Povich had a stocky build. With his large curled-at-the-edges handlebar mustache and booming voice, he was a natural choice for sergeant.

The town bid farewell to the Stillwater Guard with a picnic. A minister began the festivities with a prayer, encouraging the soldiers to gird their loins. Patriotic speeches followed. The mayor spoke: "I am supremely confident our brave soldiers will be victorious in short order. God is surely on our side. Freedom for all is a noble endeavor. Freedom prevailed in 1776 when we defeated the British tyrant. In 1812, freedom prevailed again when the British tyrant sought to impose his will upon us a second time. A few short years ago, in 1848, we freed the people of the Southwest. Texas, California, and New Mexico are now free of Mexican tyranny. Our brave soldiers marched straight into Mexico City, the enemy's capital. And soon, they will march straight into the capital of the Confederacy, Montgomery, Alabama. America will easily defeat the secessionists. Freedom for all shall be the law of the land. God bless the Union. And God bless our brave soldiers."

Officers received swords and horses. Alexander's father gave him a new Enfield rifled musket and a Remington Beals five-shot .31 caliber pocket pistol. The Enfield rifle was the primary firearm of the English Army.

One hundred Stillwater Guards marched through town headed to Fort Snelling. Ladies and men wore fine clothes and lined the streets,

singing patriotic songs. Loudest of all, they sang the famous “John Brown’s Body.”

John Brown's Body lies a-mouldering in the grave,
John Brown's Body lies a-mouldering in the grave,
But his soul goes marching on.

Glory, glory, hallelujah,
Glory, glory, hallelujah,
His soul goes marching on.

He's gone to be a soldier in the Army of the Lord,
He's gone to be a soldier in the Army of the Lord,
His soul goes marching on.

John Brown's knapsack is strapped upon his back,
John Brown's knapsack is strapped upon his back,
His soul goes marching on.

John Brown died that the slaves might be free,
John Brown died that the slaves might be free,
His soul goes marching on.

The stars above in Heaven now are looking kindly down,
The stars above in Heaven now are looking kindly down,
His soul goes marching on.

The soldiers marched to Fort Snelling, expecting glory and easy victory.

Fort Snelling sat on a bluff overlooking the junction of the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers. For a few short days, the Minnesota

First trained at Fort Snelling. Marching or drilling comprised their training. One morning Sgt. Povich addressed them:

“Understand what I am telling you today is for your own good unless you want to die, that is. In the heat of battle, you will get confused. You can’t hear. Sometimes, you can’t see. If you wish to survive, above all remember this—Follow the flag! Protect the flag! If the flag falls, pick up what’s left of it and carry it where you’re told. Remember this, and you just might live.”

As they stood in formation, the man next to Alexander pointed his musket at Alexander’s temple. He pulled the trigger. The empty musket clicked. Dry firing the musket, pretending to shoot him in the head, lit Alexander’s fuse. He elbowed the transgressor in the side. The disturbance caught Sgt. Povich’s eye. He stated, “Order, if you lads want to dance, do so on your own time.” Alexander responded, “We shall.” There would be a fight.

Behind Alexander stood Joe Braun. He witnessed the incident. From experience, Joe knew the instigator saw Alexander as someone he could take advantage of by trick, someone the instigator could use to gain influence among his peers.

After Sgt. Povich dismissed them, Joe walked over to the instigator, Russell, and said, “Let’s do this under the oak tree at six.” And thus was the arrangement established.

Alexander was given the name ‘Alec’ by the other soldiers. As one soldier put it, “Alexander is too long a handle, and we already have an Al.” At dinner, Joe Braun sat with Alec. Other men in the unit joined and sat with them. Alec had not expected this. They talked of nothing important. At six o’clock, Braun said, “It’s time,” and they left as a group. Alec did not know how to fistfight.

Alec’s mother had often discussed that violence begets violence. She left unsaid her other concern. Violence could cause injury to her son. Alec’s father saw too much fighting at the prison. He understood a fight determined the better fighter, nothing else.

As a result, no one had ever taught Alec how to fistfight. He knew how to wrestle. So, he planned to get in close and wrestle Russell to the ground. The dispute would not end as Alec expected.

Alec and his group of five gathered under the oak tree at six. Russell and his sergeant, Eric Black, waited, talking and looking over at the group of men. Russell had a slender build, black hair, dark eyes, and pale oblong face with red cheeks. He glared at people. Braun walked over to Russell, and Black and said, "Let's start the dance." After further discussion with Russell, Black approached Braun and said, "Not tonight."

Braun replied, "Any trickery later, and there will be retribution."

"This matter is over," Black stated. "Should you become aware of any additional shenanigans, advise me of such. Private Russell will think his first name is ditch and his last name digger."

While they walked to the barracks, Sgt. Black informed Russell that the regiment always needed men to move dirt. And if he wished for a permanent position on the detail, he need simply accost Pvt. Johnson a second time. After leaving Russell at the barracks, Sgt. Black reported the outcome to Sgt. Povich. Povich told Black, "Keep an eye on Russell. He may be an evil seed."

Braun had returned to the oak tree. "It's over," he said. Alec exhaled and relaxed. Braun muttered under his breath, "Channel walkon."

"What?" asked Alec.

"Something my mother says. It means coward."

"Where is she?"

"Maison."

Alec changed the subject. "We ride the train east."

"That's a long train ride."

"Maybe we'll see Lincoln."

"Maybe the rebs will dance like Russell."

Braun laughed. They left and went to bed.

The next day at sunrise, the Stillwater Guard received orders to relieve career soldiers at Fort Ridgely. The career soldiers would join

the Army of the Potomac in the east. Fort Ridgely was strategically located on the Minnesota River. A few miles west of the big bend in the river, it stood between the Dakota Reservations west of it and the settlements east of it. Towns such as Mankato, New Ulm, and St. Peter were east of Fort Ridgely.

The quartermaster issued smoothbore Springfield Model 1842 Muskets to the Stillwater Guard. Newer rifled Springfield Muskets were issued to soldiers joining the Army of the Potomac. The newer models had a rifled barrel, which increased range and accuracy. The rifled muskets fired the deadly .58-caliber Minié ball. Alec's rifled Enfield also fired the Minié ball.

As soon as they disembarked from the steamship at Fort Ridgely, they received new orders. Of the one hundred Stillwater Guard, twenty-five would remain at Fort Ridgely. Seventy-five would rejoin the Minnesota First on the trip east to Washington DC. Braun, Alec, and Povich were among the fortunate seventy-five. They traveled back to Fort Snelling on the same steamship. On the march from the steamship to the waiting train, Braun whispered to Alec, "I've never been on one."

When they boarded the train, Alec said, "Here, sit by the window." And they switched places. They sat with their guns between their legs and their bedrolls on their laps. Braun looked out the window, amazed at the thirty miles per hour speed they traveled. Near Stillwater, Alec asked if they could switch seats; he wanted to see his hometown. They switched seats, and as they passed the prison, he leaned over toward the window and searched, hoping to see his father. On the bridge over the St. Croix River, Braun stood up and leaned over above Alec. Alec stood up, turned sideways, and gestured with an open hand toward the window, signaling they should switch places again. The scenery mesmerized Braun. Alec smiled as he sat down, thinking military life was enjoyable. Alec and many other soldiers in the car leaned back, slid their caps over their eyes, and catnapped. Braun stayed awake, watching the scenery.

They arrived in Chicago after dark. Sgt. Povich told them, "It's time to get accustomed to your accommodations for the next three years." They slept on the ground. A lullaby of cattle mooing, trains clanking, wagons creaking, and faint fiddle music played through the night. They woke early, ate hardtack, drank coffee, and re-boarded the train for Washington.

In Indiana, when they stopped to water the train, Sgt. Povich walked in. He looked at Braun and Alexander and said, "Up top. Take your weapon, ammo, and canteen, leave the rest, you're on sentry duty. Stay awake. Watch for an ambush. In case of an ambush, shoot and duck."

Sitting up top, Alec contemplated the expression, "duck." Did ducks duck? Coots ducked when you shot at them, but he did not recall ducks ducking. When you shot at ducks, they flew away.

Sentries sat on top of every other car. The clickity-clack was spellbinding. The train traveled through a wooded area that was cooler and shaded. It was challenging to stay alert in the wooded area. Only when they stopped for water at a jerk water town was the spell broken. After the engine drank from the spout, the whistle blew, the throttle opened, and smoke billowed out of the beast's blowhole. The long-sectioned vertebrae of the beast's back swayed and squeaked forward. The spell was recast. After an hour, Alec noticed sentries in the front most car lowering their profile by climbing down the access stairs. Alec and Braun followed their lead. Alec saw the man two cars ahead bobbing with the motion of the train, sleeping. Over the sound of the locomotive, he heard faint yelling from the sentry behind the sleeping sentry.

Alec saw the danger ahead. A telegraph wire hung low over the tracks. Yelling did not wake the sleeping sentry. Alec fired his Enfield rifle at one of the poles holding the telegraph wire. The Minié ball struck the pole. The sentry woke up. He looked left at the pole the bullet hit and spotted the wire. He quickly extended the musket in his hand toward

the hanging wire in a blocking move while bending to the right in the same motion. The musket blocked the wire. The sentry lost his grip, and the musket went flying, spinning and shattering against a tree. The sentry's block loosened the wire. It snagged the corner of a car. As the train squealed to a stop, the wire became taut, followed by a loud *bing*. The wire snapped. It fell coiled on the ground. The train slid to a halt.

"Bang, boom, bing!" exclaimed a smiling Alec.

"You missed the wire," said Braun.

Alec laughed. "I wasn't shooting at it, jester."

An officer bolted from the train, followed by armed soldiers looking for a fight.

After a moment the officer yelled, "Who shot?"

Braun yelled, "Warning shot. A sleeping sentry was about to lose his head from the telegraph wire."

"Very good," the officer replied.

Braun turned around and whispered to Alec with an enormous smile. "Veryyyy goood."

A senior officer exited a train car and scrutinized the damage. Braun and Alec watched the two officers talking and pointing first at the pole, then at the wire, then shaking their heads up and down. They found the pantomime very entertaining, and every so often, Braun mimicked something he saw. Alec had to be careful not to laugh out loud. A local official arrived. After he inspected the damage, the train left the station.

Upon arrival in Washington, they were agape at all the activity. Union troops and equipment moved in all directions. First Minnesota received its orders to proceed thirty miles west to Centreville, Virginia. They packed up and marched west, confident they would win because of the activity, troops, wagons, and equipment they saw in Washington. All were in high spirits.

After they made camp, they built tepee-shaped fires and stayed up talking late into the night. Sometimes they heard gun shots, and they

would stop talking and listen. The next morning, the sixteenth of July, they marched southwest to Manassas, Virginia.

Another day later, the First Minnesota marched to many different positions. Heat and humidity drained their strength. As they marched, soles detached from the front of some boots, remaining attached only at the heel. They referred to these as talking boots or puppet boots. At night they repaired them by sewing with a leather needle and sinew. Uniforms came apart at the seams, creating targets for the evening onslaught of mosquitoes. Around the campfire, they joked about being bled to death by mosquitos. Many said they survived their first bloody engagement, the battle of mosquito hollow.

2



ON SUNDAY, THEY MARCHED THE SCANT distance from Manassas to Bull Run. As they neared Bull Run, they heard sounds of battle. Their pace increased. They arrived on the left of the Union lines. After a few minutes, the First marched quick-time, jogged, between the two opposing forces to the opposite side of the Union lines. No one shot at them. Confused by this dangerous maneuver, Braun and Alec looked at each other, searching for some insight. Alec shook his head. On the right of the Union lines, the First surrounded a Union artillery battery.

Less than a hundred feet in front of them stood a line of troops in blue. Alec stared at them. The troops facing them raised a blue flag with a single white star in the middle. A Union soldier yelled, “Damn, it’s the Bonnie Blue Flag.”

“So what,” came the reply.

“That’s a rebel flag over there,” yelled the unmistakable voice of Sgt. Povich.

Word spread down the union line. Union soldiers dropped blanket wraps off their shoulders. The First Minnesota raised the Union flag. Shooting commenced, reluctantly at first, then everyone fired across both lines. Puffs of black smoke rose above them, like the smoke around groups of boys lighting firecrackers at the village park on the Fourth of July. Bullets buzzed above their heads, thudded into the ground with puffs of dirt, and cracked into the trees. Incoming fire

increased from many different directions. Chaos ensued. Union men started running toward Washington. Union soldiers fell, stumbled, landed on one another, left equipment, some dropping their muskets.

Union soldiers died, shot in the back. Some stepped into holes in the ground. Alec saw one man's leg sink up to his hip. Without pause, he bounced up in a full run. Alec saw many others fall face down and arise running in the same smooth motion. More soldiers dropped rifles on the ground, turned, and ran full speed toward Washington.

Alec's head was on a swivel. He looked for a target. But bullets came in from every direction. He could not focus on a single direction in which to shoot. The confusion of not knowing where the bullets came from caused him to panic. Then he heard Povich. "Run, and I'll shoot you in the back; they'll give me a medal for it." And, "Your back makes a better, bigger target for the rebs."

Near him Braun pointed and directed and ordered men.

"Behind the stump," to one.

"Duck down when you reload," to another.

"You three get behind the fence."

The First Minnesota did not run. Following the regimental flag, the First Minnesota withdrew from the battle. They shot, reloaded, and moved back. Arms dangled from red mauled flesh, limp like a rag doll's arm. Fewer Union soldiers returned fire. Alec heard praying and moaning. Waves of gunfire poured in from the Confederate line. The ground shook from the Confederate artillery. Tree tops exploded. Through the smoke, Alec saw head wounds and arm wounds. Off to his right, he saw the regimental flag. The Confederates shot the spearhead off. Their musket fire had chewed up the staff. The flag had a big hole from a cannon shot and many smaller holes from musket balls. Those protecting the flag, the color guard, were bloody. One color guardsman fell, never to rise again. Someone else picked up and carried the flag, leading the First on its withdrawal from the field of fire.

From the right came the rebel yell from their cavalry. And farther off to the right side on a knoll, ladies from Washington dressed in their finery watched in horror. Alec saw the ladies, laid his gun down, and turned around. Alec felt Braun's hand on his shoulder, and their eyes met. Something in Braun's eyes gave Alec the courage to keep fighting. He picked up his Enfield and reloaded. And off to their right, the Firemen Zouaves of New York, in their bright red shirts and blue pants, repelled the gray cavalry. The Confederate cavalry withdrew, leaving the field littered with silent red shirts.

The First retreated from the battlefield. They joined the multitude on the road to Washington. People, horses, carts, and soldiers crowded the road. The mixed multitude crawled east toward Washington. The panicked civilian picnickers from Washington intermingled with the soldiers on the road. Abandoned buggies and carriages littered the side of the road. Everyone pushed forward.

Those on the road watched over their shoulders for the attacking rebels, fearful they would appear in mass on the horizon. At a crossroads, civilian Washington observers attempted to enter the major road to Washington. People jockeyed for position, one man offering twenty dollars for the right of way, to no avail. He gave up and jumped off his carriage and rode his draft horse. Others pushed the carriage off the road.

People looked behind them. If the rebels appeared, soldiers, picnickers, and animals would stampede. The jumping, whinnying, bolting, and jibbing horses and hot, sweaty soldiers and frightened civilians continued their slow and tumultuous return to Washington.

When they reached Washington, the First helped prepare for the Confederate attack. They barricaded streets with wagons, barrels, and furniture.

The Confederates never came. There would be no attack on Washington.

The losses at Bull Run left vacancies in the ranks. Because of his bravery at Bull Run, Braun was promoted to sergeant by Capt. Bradley. Sgt. Braun requested Alec serve under him as a corporal. Bradley granted his request.

The First received new orders to proceed west to Maryland. Across the Potomac from them was Virginia and the Confederates.

Two weeks after Bull Run, Alec received a letter from his mother:

Dear Son,

I hope you are well. With great trepidation, I have been reading accounts of Bull Run. We sustained over eighty killed or missing soldiers and over one hundred wounded. This dramatic news saddens many households. Friends and neighbors are searching for any news about the missing. Please correspond post-haste should you have any information about John Olsen, Pierre Dumont, or Ferdinand MacMillan. They are missing.

Also disturbing are the reports of retreat, although we are all pleased the First was one of the last to withdraw from the battlefield. The president requested 500,000 more men.

In other news, your father is now a Mark Master Mason, whatever that is he won't disclose. On the occasion of his installment, if that is the word, he returned smelling of spirits. Whether from the meeting or saloon, I know not. I have learned not to ask. Some night perhaps I will hide in a Mason closet. I wonder what the punishment would be for that grievous impropriety. Maybe I would be forced to stand outside the lodge with a sign around my neck, "Intermeddler."

Love,

Mother and Father In absentia (Mason Meeting)

Alec worked on the labor detail building barricades and digging ditches. One day he heard Capt. Bradley needed men who could write.

Alec found Sgt. Povich and volunteered as a writer. The captain, Alec was told, had a plan to reduce the monotony of camp life and wanted to publish a newspaper.

The paper contained humorous and patriotic articles. Most of the stories contained propaganda. One recurring story was that after Bull Run, the rebels were too scared to follow them to Washington. This was a popular story, and the saying around camp was, "Chicken secesh, scared to come after us." The most popular story was Alec's "Jenny the Mule."

Jenny the Mule

By Alec Johnson

Jenny's father, Jack, was a donkey from far-away Palestine. Jack was in the direct line of descendants from the colt Christ rode into Jerusalem. He was a Christian donkey. At a young age, Jack embarked on an ocean voyage to America to escape the religious intolerance of his homeland so he could worship freely in America. He was a romantic lad, as we shall find out later in our tale. Jack enlisted in our noble cause at the first call.

We freed Jenny's mother from bondage during a raid into Virginia to gather livestock for our noble cause. Her mother was a beautiful mare giddy to escape Virginia. She was corralled next to Jack, who was smitten by her beauty. After a brief engagement at the urging and encouragement of the quartermaster, they wed in holy matrimony. The first of many children, Jenny, was born. Jenny loved freedom. They educated her at the Mule School. At Mule

School, she was melancholy to learn she would bear no offspring. We shall learn later this was true for more than one reason.

At the battle of Manassas, as we were returning to defend Washington, a reb came behind her. Her driver yelled, "Secesh, Jenny," and Jenny kicked the poor lad with both legs back to Virginia. To which the woozy reb laying on his back looking up at Jenny's behind remarked, "Y'all ain't no farm hands, that's a dam John mule." Jenny or John makes no never mind as the rebs will be kicked back to Virginia if they ever cross the Potomac.

The soldiers overheard the officers talking about Bull Run. Word spread around camp in bits and pieces via the "camp telegraph." The rebels used trains to bring reinforcements from the West. Why the rebels did not follow the Union retreat remained uncertain. According to the camp telegraph, the Confederate soldiers were as green as the Union soldiers. The men came to believe the trains, not the rebels, defeated them.

Alec returned his mother's correspondence:

Dear Mother,

I have some pleasant news and some unpleasant news. The unpleasant news is Frederick MacMillan is missing. Amid the conflagration, I saw him clutching his leg, delirious from an artillery round. The consensus is he may be a prisoner. I suggest friends and family write to the War Department. Pierre Dumont is likely with his Maker. He disappeared never to be seen again with the same artillery blast

that injured Frederick.

John Olsen is well. He assures me he has written home. He got lost for a bit, joining up with the New York Firemen Zouaves. You know he is a volunteer fireman. He was in no hurry to return. He claims the New Yorkers are an entertaining lot.

I write for the regimental newspaper. Enclosed is my article about Jenny. I hope you enjoy it.

Love,

Alexander



EVERY EVENING AFTER SUNDOWN, A CONFEDERATE bugler waded out onto an island in the Potomac and played. He played “Dixie” and “The Bonnie Blue Flag,” referring to the very same blue flag they saw at Bull Run. The soldiers of the First Minnesota heard the Confederates loudly singing “The Bonnie Blue Flag.”

*We are a band of brothers and native to the soil, fighting for our
liberty with treasure blood and toil.*

*And when our rights were threatened, the cry rose near and far,
Hurrah for the bonnie blue flag that bears a single star,
Hurrah for southern rights hurrah
Hurrah for the bonnie blue flag that bears a single star.*

*As long as the Union was faithful to her trust, like friends and
like brethren kind we were and just.*

*But now when Northern treachery attempts our right to mar
We hoist on high the bonnie blue flag that bears a single star.
Hurrah for southern right hurrah
Hurrah for the bonnie blue flag that bears a single star.*

After the defeat at Bull Run, it was demoralizing. The Confederates were crowing. One evening during the serenade, Braun got up and left the campfire to see the captain.

“When is the next dark of the moon?” he inquired.

Capt. Bradley asked, “Why?”

“Sir, are you tired of the serenade?”

“Yes. But artillery won’t reach the bugler. Our side of the river is swampy. And there’s a logan.”

“A logan?”

“It’s a term for a cutoff or oxbow. The Confederate bugler is in a location difficult to reach. It is not possible to move a cannon into the area. If we attack they’ll be waiting. I fear we must endure this inconvenience.”

“Captain, we must show our resolve. They have got the best of us at Bull Run. They’re salting the wound. If I take care of it by stealth, is that permissible with you?”

“As long as we do not lose you, we need you.”

“I need a moonless night.”

“Just a minute.” The captain checked his almanac. “In two days, you will have your moonless night.”

“Can I take Alec?”

“Swear to me if you can’t do it, you’ll give up and come back. Your word, sir.”

The captain surprised Braun. He was serious. A captain did not address a sergeant as sir. “I swear, Captain.”

“Then you can take him with you.”

Braun returned to camp. He stood near Alec by the fire. During a lull, he signaled with his eyes and head to the left, meaning come over here.

Alec followed Braun.

Braun started, “Can you swim?”

“Yes.”

“We need a big green log.”

“What?”

“To cross the river.”

“Why?”

“To stop the bugle.”

“When?”

“In two days, dark of the moon.”

“Is this your idea?”

“Captain gave me his consent.”

“Mary, Joseph, and Jesus.”

“If we can’t do it, we come back.”

“Mary, Joseph and Jesus, and the twelve apostles... no eleven apostles.”

The next day Alec left camp to search for a pine tree near the shore of the river. He knew pine would float well. Away from camp, he found a suitable pine tree. He chopped it down with an ax and sawed off the ends to make them smooth. He rubbed black mud on the ends so they would not be shiny. He realized the log would spin in the water if they grabbed it. To make a hand hold, he tied rope around the log. He hid the log under a tree limb hanging over the river.

At the end of the workday, Braun told Alec, “I have some grease mixed with ash to make it dark, which we can rub on ourselves.”

Braun asked, “What color are your drawers?”

Alec replied, “I have a pair of blue drawers.”

“Blue drawers?”

“My mother made them.”

“I have oilcloth and string to wrap the rifles.”

“I have a pistol.”

“Good.”

In the twilight, they walked down to the river and assessed the log. After dark, they stripped down to their drawers and took the log out into the river. They practiced hanging on without rolling the log

over. The next day they made excuses to avoid work and rested. Before nightfall, they walked down to the river. Alec and Braun each drove a knife into their end of the log. Braun wrapped the oilcloth on the end of his rifle. He used a bowtie knot so he could remove the cloth with a simple tug.

They stripped down. Braun wore buckskin drawers. He painted his face black with red strips and rubbed black grease on his body. Alec also rubbed the black grease on his body and rubbed some mud on himself to further darken his pale white skin. He borrowed some black face paint, covering his lower face in black and rubbing some in his light-colored hair. They slid into the water, upstream about a mile from where the bugler played. They walked out into the river. Near the center they swam.

Alec saw the bugler, a solitary figure playing a nocturne. He paused and listened. It was a beautiful song, he had to admit.

The bugler had waded out to his waist in the river, off the end of an island. Campfires burned along the shore. Around one fire, across a narrow gap between the island and the shore, a dozen armed men stood guard. The large fire outlined their silhouettes. On the near shore surface, the firelight sparkled and danced. Farther away out on the main river, the darkness of the night absorbed the firelight.

Alec had sharp eyes, and as they neared the bugler, he spied an artillery piece in the shadows behind the fire. Its nose poked out of a gap in a wooden barricade.

Alec whispered, "See the canon; we won't escape."

"We will if we take the bugler with us. They won't shoot him."

The bugler finished his song as they came near him. Braun prepared his rifle by removing the oilskin. He crouched behind the log as he walked toward the bugler. Braun tripped and almost lost his footing. As he tripped, he held the rifle above his head out of reflex to keep it dry. No one onshore noticed, but the bugler noticed.

From a distance of twenty feet, Alec raised his pistol and said to the bugler, "Don't move."

Braun regained his balance. He whispered to the bugler, "Come to us." The bugler obeyed and waded into the river.

Alec looked at him, "Shucks, he's a boy."

"Good," said Braun. "You're coming with us. Get behind the log."

The soldiers on shore did not notice as Braun and Alec paddled out to the middle, and across to the opposite side of the river where they could stand waist-deep. Across the river Confederates yelled, "Roy boy. Hey, Roy boy," over and over.

Braun yelled back, "He's with us," followed by a lengthy silence. From across the river, someone yelled, "Don't kill him."

Braun hesitated and looked at Alec, who said, "We can't kill him."

"Count coup."

"What?"

The boy looked scared. Braun looked at the boy and Alec. "Take something from him."

Braun yelled across the river, "No more serenades."

A moment later, from across the river: "Agreed."

The boy handed the bugle to Alec. Roy boy touched his hair with his hand and said, "Please."

Braun told him, "There's no bounty on your hair."

The boy lowered his head and said, "You look like savages." Alec noticed the boy wore a blue jacket.

"You're one of those damn blue Virginians. Give me your jacket."

The boy complied. Alec yelled across the river, "We're keeping his jacket and the bugle. Blue is our color; you can have ugly gray with our blessing!"

"Just don't hurt the boy."

"You have our word." Braun looked at the boy and said without expression, "We're warriors, make sure they keep their word, Roy boy."

Roy glowered at Braun, “We will. We have *honor*.”

Braun looked him back in the eye and replied, “We counted coup tonight. Warrior honor dictates you owe us a life. Don’t forget to *honor* that.”

Braun could not walk. After some discussion, they instructed Roy boy to pull the log to shore while Braun held on. Once they reached the shallows, Braun sat down in the water. After removing the knives from the log and sheathing them, they told Roy to leave with the log. He did.

Alec grabbed Braun by the collar and dragged him to dry land. When they reached shore, Alec saw blood. When he fell by the island, Braun cut his foot on something in the river. His ankle swelled to the size of an Osage hedge apple. Alec placed his arm under Braun’s arm and helped him limp along on one leg. Braun placed his weight on Alec’s shoulder.

Alec asked Braun, “Why were you in Stillwater?”

“Now, you want to know now?” an incredulous Braun replied.

“Yes, we could have died, and I didn’t know why you were in Stillwater.”

“That’s what you want to know, fine, logging.”

“Logging! Why did you send me to pick the log? You’re the lumberjack.”

“River pig and a log jam man, if you please.”

“River pig?”

“Log driver, we ride log rafts down the river to the sawmill. When there’s a log jam we unjam it.”

“You’re an expert with logs.”

“If you showed poor judgment in preparing for our raid, I would have gone alone. A grateful nation thanks you for your service above and beyond that expected of a soldier of your standing and position.”

They both laughed. Alec helped Braun to the surgeon’s tent. They woke the surgeon’s assistant, who was sleeping near the entrance. He asked if they had the fever. He explained the fever was rampant, with no less than a hundred soldiers afflicted.

The surgeon's assistant placed Braun in the non-fever tent where he cleaned the cut and wrapped the ankle. When the swelling subsided, the surgeon would examine the ankle. Alec reported to the captain. But first, he hid the bugle in his tent. He gave the captain the blue jacket, missing a button for Braun.

The next day the surgeon examined Braun's ankle and found two breaks. Braun told the surgeon he broke it when he stepped on a rock in the river. It would take two months for the ankle to heal. Braun could not put any weight on the ankle until then. Braun would need an invalid chair, a rocking chair on wheels. The surgeon sent his assistant to Washington to get it and other medical supplies. He ordered Braun to return to Fort Snelling to convalesce. Braun would not be traveling alone.



The commander announced ten men would train at Fort Snelling for the Sharpshooters infantry regiment. The winners of a shooting competition would be selected.

Soldiers dug holes for ten target poles. They traced a circle on leftover newspapers and painted the circle red using a saucer as a template.

The next morning after breakfast, men lined up to shoot. When the commander arrived, the first ten in line took their positions and fired three shots. They received a point for each shot in the red. In the case of a tie, Sgt. Povich measured the distances of each shot from the center. The lowest total score in inches won the round. Povich recorded the name of the winner of each round.

Alec's father taught him to shoot by hunting squirrels. His father said, hit a squirrel with a small-bore musket, you will hit a larger target with a larger bore musket. Alec placed the meaty part of his index finger on the center of the trigger. Misplacement of the index

finger pulled the shot left or right. And he kept his head down and motionless when he shot. He had a bad habit of lifting his head when he shot to see where the bullet struck. He disciplined himself to watch the bullet hit the target through the gunsights. Only after he saw the bullet hit the target did he lift his head.

He fired an 1853 English-made Enfield, not the more ubiquitous 1842 smoothbore Springfield. The rifled Enfield used the new Minié ball, not a round ball like the smoothbore musket fired, but an unjacketed bullet. A rifled or twisted barrel imparted spin on the bullet, which significantly increased accuracy and range.

Alec won his contest. At the end of the first round, there were twelve winners and only ten positions. After completion of the matches, Capt. Bradley and Sgt. Povich engaged in a private discussion. Povich announced, "We have selected five winners who distinguished themselves at Bull Run. They are Nicholson, Johnson, Rothlismann, Bruhn, and Sullivan."

Someone yelled, "Which Johnson, there are a hundred of us."

Sgt. Povich replied, "Alec."

Another voice yelled in an unmistakable Irish accent, "And which Sullivan might be the lucky lad. There are two hundred of us."

When the laughter died down, Sgt. Povich announced, "The lucky lad might be one Christopher Demetrius Sullivan, a good Catholic lad from the St. Paulies regiment."

The remaining seven winners competed for the final five positions. Before sleeping, the winners and Braun packed for the trip to Fort Snelling, leaving the next day.

On the train, Braun and Alec discussed matters. Braun sat on the outside of the row in the invalid chair. Alec showed him the bugle and asked about counting coup.

Braun explained, "Bravery in attacking the enemy without killing the enemy is a coup. We took something of value from our enemy—his bugle. We took it from under the nose of his cannon."

Alec asked, "Why does he owe us a life?"

"Roy boy said they have honor. He looked at me as if I don't have honor. The boy has much to learn. Honor is a hard path. Honor is the mountain path. Let him prove he has honor and save a life. And his words of having honor will be true."

"He is a boy."

"He stood in the river, not by the fire. He may have courage. I gave him a challenge."

"I don't think their wealthy leaders have honor; they started the war because they are greedy. Their leaders did it for greed, not honor, the greed of owning a person to do their work so they can own fine things and have great power. People should do their own work."

"How do you know this?"

"My mother."

"Your mother, who made you the blue underwear, told you."

"Who made the leather underwear you wore, who made that?"

"My grandmother."

"Your grandmother, why does she think there is a war?"

"She thinks like your mother. Except for my father, she thinks all white men are greedy."

That ended the conversation. They gazed out the window, hypnotized as if looking into a fire at night. Alec realized Braun's grandparents were Dakota, although Braun looked as if he could be German. At six feet, Braun stood taller than Alec. He had dark straight hair, brown eyes, and a light tan complexion. He had a square face with an angular nose. His time as a lumberjack made him strong. Alec did not ask Braun if his grandparents were Dakota.