

# THE DESERTER

DECEMBER, 1862. Rosecrans, recently assigned to the command of the Army of the Cumberland, lay encamped on the Nashville turnpike almost within hearing of the church bells of Murfreesboro. Directly in front and shielded by the dense cedar thickets rested the army of the Confederate General Bragg. The rebel defense described a semicircular line between Rosecrans and Stone River in a country admirably adapted to a running fight toward Murfreesboro, the rebel base. Simultaneously the commanders of the opposing forces were planning attack. Rosecrans desired to gain possession of Murfreesboro. Bragg's plan was defensive and night after night he made weak demonstrations on the Union front, which were recognized by Rosecrans at their true value. Unless Bragg dislodged the Federal troops massing in front on his right Polk's corps must be withdrawn behind the river and Murfreesboro abandoned.

War slumbered in the air. The soldiers, fatigued by continuous campaigning, lay stretched about the camp in resting thousands, nor did the crack of the outposts' rifles nor the volleys of cavalry carbines cause so much as the blink of an eyelid nor the raising of a head in the camp. Familiarity had bred contempt for the musket shot and the roar of the cannon in the distance may have caused a curl of the lip—no more. The powder-stained hordes felt the breath of coming battle, but it gave them no concern, and they huddled snugly together in their blankets, for they feared the shivering blasts of December more than the puny bullets of the enemy.

Back in the cedars in a house whose portico raised its head above the shivering bare branches, General Rosecrans pored over his plans of campaign against Bragg. It was essential to drive the rebel general beyond the river and gain possession of Murfreesboro and the Union commander knit his brows and pondered over his contemplated plans of attack.

The door opened and a young and intelligent looking officer stepped inside. His shoulder straps showed the rank of first lieutenant. For an instant he paused at the entrance. He seemed to know his superior was worried and he hesitated to advance. The general was unmindful of his presence. For an instant longer the young officer waited, then as a determined expression appeared on his face he stepped resolutely forward.

"General," he said, "Rosecrans looked up and a smile broke through the clouds on his face. "Ah, lieutenant," he said with a sigh, pushing aside his troublesome maps, "glad to see you. Sit down. What's on your mind?"

He leaned his head on his hand and looked dreamily from the window. He was more interested in his own thoughts than in what the young officer was saying.

"Eh, what!" he exclaimed, suddenly arousing like one from a dream, "what is that you are saying?"

The lieutenant looked him in the eye and replied: "I was asking permission, general, to absent myself from camp for perhaps forty-eight hours."

General Rosecrans stared at him in amazement. "I cannot comprehend the meaning of such a request," he said, finally. "In less than forty-eight hours I expect to engage General Bragg. I haven't a doubt in the world he is planning a similar attack on my forces. A fierce conflict is inevitable. And yet you have the temerity on the threshold of battle to ask for leave of absence. I repeat I cannot understand it, and, moreover, I am doubly surprised that such a request should come from a trusted officer like you."

A flush mounted to the temple of the lieutenant. He felt the sting of the general's reply. "Pardon me, general," he said, with just a touch of resentment. "Your suspicions do me injustice. You have never known me to flinch from duty or to tremble in the face of the enemy."

The general measured him closely and a worried look passed over his face. "I have spoken of no suspicions," he said, testily.

"But your manner, sir," said the other. "Pardon me, your manner was quite convincing."

"But such a request at such a time," said his chief. "It is peculiar, not to say amazing. Why do you, an officer of my army, desire leave of absence when we may be hand to hand with the enemy at any hour?"

He looked sharply at his subordinate and his question was freighted with significance. The young officer was not unmindful of it and flushed again.

"You are hard on me, general," he said, coldly. "But let me explain. You contemplate an attack on Murfreesboro and it's possible, my more than probable, destruction. Murfreesboro holds all that is dear and dear to me—"

The general raised his head in interested inquiry. The lieutenant went on: "In one of the hospitals there lies my young wife, who has just this very day given birth to our first child—"

"Why, how—?" the general began.

"Here, in this paper," cried the lieutenant excitedly. "It is published in Murfreesboro and contains the story of the birth of a Northern child and gives its mother's name and mine. It is my wife and my child, General Rosecrans, and it is to save them that I ask leave of absence."

The general took the paper from the excited man and read the account with interest. When he laid the paper down there was a look of grave concern on his war-bronzed face.

"Lieutenant Henry," he said sternly, "you are deserving of the severest con-

sure for bringing your wife to this part of the country at such a time. I am surprised that a man of your sound sense would do it."

"I could not help it," was the impulsive reply. "I wanted her where she would be near me. She wanted to be here. I could not withstand her appeals and so let her come with my faithful old negro servant. Can't you see, General Rosecrans, I want to move her from Murfreesboro? It means death to her to remain. The roar of the guns, the shriek of the shells, the crash of the walls and the whole awful roar of war would kill her. I only want time to remove her to a place of safety. I will ride like hell, general, and—still if you think it is only cowardice that makes me ask you this favor, then I withdraw the request, for better her death and mine than that."

Flushed and excited, he drew himself up proudly and turned to go, but a word from his chief arrested him. Evidently his earnest eloquence had made an impression.

"Lieutenant," said the general, rising and placing his hand kindly on the young officer's shoulder. "I appreciate your position and sympathize with you. Were it at any other time I would not only gladly give my consent, but send a mounted escort with you. As it is," and he paused, while the lieutenant, anticipating refusal, closed his eyes. "As it is, I cannot refuse your appeal. You may go."

For an instant their eyes met. For another instant the lieutenant seemed incapable of action, then suddenly he sprang forward, grasped his chief by the hand and exclaimed fervently: "Thank you, general, from the bottom of my heart."

"Waste no time," said his chief, seriously. "Ride for your life. Think what it means to be absent when your comrades are engaged in battle. Think of your future if you fail to return in time."

It was a warning kindly expressed and Lieutenant Henry grasped its full significance.

Twenty miles on his journey that night through the woods and jambies that beset his path young Henry was thrilled with the thought that he had to run the outposts of two armies. What would become of him if he ran into the lynch-eyed sentries of either line? Musing thus, he was awakened by the sharp cry of: "Halt!"



"THE SHARP CRACK OF A RIFLE SOUNDED CLOSE BY."

His only reply was to crouch low over the saddle and dig his spurs fiercely into the flank of his mount. The horse responded gallantly and shot obliquely into the gloom. The sharp crack of a rifle sounded close by and a bullet whistled over the young rider's head, followed by the shrill cry of the guard, which grew fainter and finally died out as Henry plunged through the cedar thickets. Long before the first faint streaks of dawn illumined the sky a song of joy arose in his heart, when his eyes caught the flickering lights of Murfreesboro. With only thoughts of his suffering wife and newborn little one in his mind, he rode boldly forward and plunged headforemost into a squad of Confederate infantry. There was no chance to return. A dozen long squirrel rifles were leveled at his head and the husky voice of the first sergeant in gray commanded him to advance. He rode forward with his head erect, but his heart sinking within him. On the very threshold of success he saw his mission fluttering idly to the ground.

"Well, who in— are you, anyhow?" demanded the sergeant gruffly, surveying the hated blue uniform that Henry wore.

"Lieutenant Henry of the— Ohio," was the proud response.

"You've got a pile of nerve, I reckon, hain't ye, fer runnin' through these lines in that cussed blue suit? What y' doin' yer, anyhow?"

"I'm here to see my wife, who is dangerously ill at the hospital," he answered, hoping to stir the sympathy in their hearts if they had any.

A laugh greeted the reply.

"Mebby y'ar and mebby y'ain't," said the sergeant, slyly. "but I want t' tell yo' that I've saw Confedrits in blue clothes afore an' I hant been fooled on 'em nuther."

Hope sprang up in Henry's breast. He was quick to act. Smiling knowingly, he said: "You've got sharp eyes, sergeant. Think I'm a spy, don't you?"

"Some folks call it that and some don't," said the sergeant with a grin, "but I'll tell yo' I hain't never seen th' Yank at'll git so dauger fer away from home by hisself."

The others nodded assent when he tur-

ed toward them and they all looked with friendly eyes on Henry. The sergeant laughed coarsely at his own shrewdness.

"Stands to reason," he said slowly, "thet he wouldn't be derned fool enough to stumble into a gang like this if he was a Yank. Why say, we was makin' noise enough to scare Rosecrans outen his boots, wa'n't we, boys?"

They all laughed their assent.

"Yo' air perty good," he said, turning to Henry. "ah' yo've got a nerve. Where's the enemy at?"

"Thirty miles south, Rosecrans in command," he answered promptly, "but he is not likely to remain there long."

"Yer danged right, lieutenant," said the sergeant, "and—"

"And," interrupted Henry sharply, "the old man would be tickled to death if he knew I was making my report to the first outpost I happened to run across."

He spoke impatiently, and it had its effect.

"You're right," said the sergeant suddenly, "but we're only doin' our duty. Go along and give th' old man a good word fer us."

Henry gave the rein to his horse and shot away into the morning fog. Ten minutes later he drew up in the rear of the dimly lighted hospital. The good sister gazed in mute astonishment at the uniform when he half staggered into the hallway, then led him silently into the little room. As he bent over the white cot a pair of eyes opened wide. There was wonderment in them for an instant, then they lighted up with love and welcome and with a faint cry.

"Rob!" she stretched forth her feeble hands to him, while the young soldier's tears rained down on the pillow. Shining through the film of suffering the glad eyes gazed admiringly on the stalwart figure of the soldier husband and the faded, dusty suit of blue. With a glad, happy smile the thin hands raised the coverlet, and for the time being all thoughts of the grim struggle between the North and South faded from his mind as he gazed in mute wonder on the face of his sleeping first born. A light, reverent touch of his lips to the little one's forehead and a similar loving salute to the flushed and smiling mother, then the serious look returned to Henry's face as the exigencies of the hour crowded back into his mind.

Briefly, tenderly, lest he bring alarm to his suffering young wife, he told her of the necessity of immediate flight, and, brave spirit that she was, she trusted everything to him and bowed acquiescence. The nurse, dismayed, protested, but at length gave way. It was the only thing to be done. As he stood watching the rapid movements of the nurse as she prepared for the trip the practical needs aroused him, and as he stopped the nurse and inquired, "Where's Jeff?" there was a touch on his shoulder, and, turning, he

looked into the grinning black face of his trusted negro servant, whose eyes were aglow with welcome and running with tears. The two men so oddly contrasted warmly grasped each other by the hand, then briefly the young officer directed Jeff to secure an ambulance, if he had to steal one, and told him what to do. Jeff hurried away and an hour later, as the town clock pealed the hour of 4, the young officer lifted his frail wife into the primitive vehicle, while the good nurse came along with the slumbering infant. The ambulance bore the big red cross on its side, which was sufficient to carry it through any lines, and Jeff sat on the front seat with the reins.

Henry kissed his wife and child a hurried good-by and then turned to say good-by to the nurse, but there was a surprise for him. She was dressed for traveling, and as he comprehended that she meant to go too he took her face in his hands and reverently touched her forehead with his lips. She seemed not displeased at the courtesy.

"To the Bascom farm, Jeff," whispered Henry hastily. "Twenty miles northwest. You know the road. No one will stop you. Remain there until you hear from me. It can't be long before our forces reach Murfreesboro. Good-by and God bless you all."

Jeff pulled on the lines and the wagon rumbled away. Henry mounted his impatient steed and clattered noisily down the streets. He didn't care a pickyune now if the whole army charged down on him. The great weight was lifted from his mind, for his wife and little one were rapidly borne to the fresh country air and health. He whistled almost as blithely as a schoolboy as he made for the picket post where he had entered the city. It was easier to pass there than by making new and probably sharper acquaintances. The increased thunder of the distant guns admonished him that he had no time to lose. Twenty minutes were gone when he reached the post and saluted the sergeant and his squad.

"All's well, boys," he cried, cheerfully, "I saw the old man and put in a good word for you."

"Thank you, lieutenant, thank you," was the hearty response, "don't let none o' them Yanks git hold on ye or it's all day."

"All right, boys, I guess there are not many in that gang that can trip me up," he replied.

"All right, all right, good-by, and God bless you."

He waved his hand in adieu and shot down the road. What a wild ride it was. Through brush and cedar and swamp and over hill, and down dale he drove his panting steed and the farther on he advanced the louder grew the roar of war's grim cry. Daylight was coming and his heart beat high as he strove to reach the front. To be absent when the grand charge was made meant disgrace—perhaps death. And now to his mind came the words of his chief:

"Think what it means to be absent when your comrades are engaged in battle."

He urged on his weary horse and uttered a prayer that he might be there on time. For what? Possibly death from a rebel bullet.

The morning of Jan. 3 found the forces engaged in deadly battle. Breckinridge made a fierce and desperate assault, but it proved ill-judged, and he was hurled back with fearful loss. In vain the Confederate forces rallied and pressed forward again and again, only to be repulsed by the hot fire from the Union barricades and rifle pits. Rosecrans and Sheridan on the left were hurling shot and shell into the main body of the enemy, while Davis and Johnson, swinging in from the right, moved down the half-formed rebel left under Breckinridge. The battle waged with fearful loss on both sides, and slowly but surely the rebel defense gave way and Polk was forced behind Stone River. During a lull in the battle a mounted officer rode hastily to Gen. Rosecrans and reported the desertion of a brigade commander and three other officers in the face of battle.

"What are their names?" Gen. Rosecrans demanded, with a vague fear tugging at his heart.

The officer ran over the list and concluded with: "Lieutenant Henry of the— Ohio."

For an instant the chief bowed his head.

"My fault," he muttered to himself in sorrow, "and yet I felt in my heart he would return in time." Then a hard look swept over his face, and, turning to the officer, he said stiffly: "We will attend to that a little later, if we live."

He turned his attention then to the battlefield, with its hurrying, scurrying hosts of blue and gray. Suddenly his attention became riveted to the left of the line.

Charging down the slope into the very jaws of death it seemed was one of Sheridan's regiments, evidently bent on sweeping down the rebel wall that had stood invincible for hours. The attack was planned so suddenly and put into execution with such dispatch that the rebel skirmish lines barely had time to fall back and take up a position to withstand the shock when the rushing, screaming horse was upon them. A thrill ran through the old warrior on the hill and for an instant he closed his eyes. Another instant and the crash must come. As he opened his eyes again a sheet of vivid fire shot from the rebel line, then was borne to his ears the dull crash of valley after valley and he dimly saw the Union ranks thinned out by the storm of hail. The advance was checked. The Union line staggered and stopped.

Out from the shivering, crouching front rode a gallant young officer who, with his saber swinging wildly over his head, struck down half a dozen muskets leveled to work his end, then turned in his saddle and waved his men on to renewed effort. It was a daring thing to do and Rosecrans marveled at the man's recklessness. The move put new life into the broken ranks. As if by magic they formed again, and with a hoarse yell of rage moved rapidly on the living breastworks and swung again into a seething fire. Now it was hand to hand and the crash of arms was borne distinctly to the listening ears on the slope.

Rosecrans was entranced. He seemed lost in a dream. The charge was the most daring he had ever seen. He vainly tried to follow the movements of the young officer, but the rolling lines of smoke obscured his vision and he caught alternate glimpses of the blue and the gray as they struggled for the mastery. A long, low cloud of smoke came between the watchers on the hill and the fighters below just as the climax seemed to come, and impatiently they waited for a friendly wind to lift the dense curtain of haze. Then as the fog lifted they bent eagerly forward in their saddles and joy welled into the heart of the chief as he saw the rebel lines waver and break.

Now in from the left and right pressed masses of others in blue swinging along like automatons, halting every now and then to pour a volley into the confused, straggling ranks of the men in gray. Joining together with a beautiful precision, they formed a solid wall in front of which the rebel defense gave way completely, and rout pervaded their ranks. The last line of a gallant defense shivered into clouds of smoke and when Rosecrans looked again the Union troops were throwing their caps into the air in their frenzy of joy, while the scattered remnants of the gray forces hurried down the bank of the river and disappeared from view.

As the smoke again dropped down and obscured the vision Gen. Rosecrans awoke as if from a trance and, riding hurriedly to a staff officer, who had been intently watching the battle through a powerful field glass, he exclaimed:

"That was the grandest charge, sir, I have ever beheld. Who led it?"

"Lieutenant Henry of the— Ohio," was the answer.—Chicago Chronicle.

**Vesuvius' Lava.**  
It is computed that all the houses in London and New York could be built of the lava thrown out by Vesuvius since the first recorded eruption in A. D. 79.



Lord Kelvin holds that the intensity of heat of the earth has nothing to do with the climates. The earth, he says, is 2,000 feet below the surface, or at a freezing point fifty feet below, without at all affecting a climate.

To lessen, if not to abolish altogether the noise of a train when crossing a bridge, a German engineer has devised a scheme which has proved surprisingly successful. He puts a decking of planks between the cross girders, and on the planks a double layer of felt is placed. In this way, any noise is prevented.

In the French navy it has been found that the electric search light employed on men of war injuriously affects the eyes of seamen who have to work about the light, and dark-blue spectacles are supplied to them for protection. Human eyes are less affected than green or blue ones, the reason suggesting that the former are more heavily charged with pigment.

In Russia a horse that is addled to the habit of running away has a cord with a running noose around his neck at the neck-stay, and the end is tied to the dashboard. When a horse bolts, he always takes the bit in his teeth, and the skill of the driver is less; but the moment the pressure of the cord comes on the windpipe the horse is conquered.

A single tree, according to a computation in Knowledge, is able, through its leaves, to purify the air from the carbonic acid arising from the respiration of a considerable number of men, perhaps a dozen or even a score. The volume of carbonic acid exhaled by a man being in the course of twenty-four hours is put at about 100 gallons, according to Bousingault's estimate, a single square yard of leaf-surface, counting both the upper and the under sides of the leaves, can, under favorable circumstances, decompose at least a gallon of carbonic acid in a day. One hundred square yards of leaf-surface area would suffice to keep the air pure for one man, but the leaves of a tree of moderate size present a surface of many hundred square yards.

Engines used in electric lighting are required to run with great regularity. An interesting device for detecting with extreme accuracy, any change of speed in such an engine is employed in an Elizabethport factory. Two metal plates are pierced with corresponding slits and placed one in front of the other so that, when the slits are in line, the spokes of the fly-wheel of the engine can be seen passing them. One of the plates is caused to oscillate, by means of an electro-magnet, at such a rate that the two slits are in line every time a spoke is passing. If there are six spokes in the wheel, and the wheel turns 400 times in a minute, the movable slit must oscillate 2,400 times in a minute. If the speed of the engine be perfectly regular, a spoke will always be seen directly in line with the slit; if the speed varies the spoke will appear ahead or behind its proper place, according as the rate of the wheel's revolution is increased or diminished.

**An Anecdote by Mark Twain.**  
Mark Twain writes for the Century a tribute to his fellow-townsmen, the late James Hammond Trumbull. Mr. Clemens relates the following anecdote:

Years ago, as I have been told, a widowed descendant of the Audubon family, in desperate need, sold a perfect copy of Audubon's "Birds" to a commercially minded scholar in America for a hundred dollars. The book was worth a thousand in the market. The scholar complimented himself upon his shrewd stroke of business. That was not Hammond Trumbull's style. After the war a lady in the far South wrote him that among the wreckage on her better days she had a book which some had told her was worth a hundred dollars, and had advised her to offer it to him; she added that she was very poor, and that if he would buy it at that price, it would be a great favor to her. It was Eliza's old Bible. Trumbull answered that if it was a perfect copy it had an established market value, like a gold coin, and was worth a thousand dollars; that if she would send it to him he would examine it, and if it proved to be perfect he would sell it to the British Museum and forward the money to her. It did prove to be perfect, and she got her thousand dollars without delay, and intact.

**The Tiger's Great Strength.**  
The tiger's strength exceeds that of the lion. Five men can easily hold down a lion, but nine are required to subdue a tiger.