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# A Stillness at Appomattox

The Army of the Potomac Trilogy

Bruce Catton

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BRUCE CATTON

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*A Stillness  
at Appomattox*

THE ARMY  
OF THE  
POTOMAC



*Anchor Books*

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To my sister Barbara

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## *Glory Is Out of Date*

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### 1. A Boy Named Martin

EVERYBODY agreed that the Washington's Birthday ball was the most brilliant event of the winter. Unlike most social functions in this army camp by the Rapidan, it was not held in a tent. There was a special, weatherproof ballroom—a big box of a building more than a hundred feet long, whose construction had kept scores of enlisted men busy. Some of them had been sent into the woods to fell trees. Others had taken over and operated an abandoned sawmill, to reduce the trees to boards. Still others, carpenters in some former incarnation, had taken these boards and built the building itself, and it was pleasantly odorous of new-cut pine, decorated with all of the headquarters and regimental flags which the II Army Corps possessed. The flags may have been worth seeing. It was the boast of this corps that although it had suffered nearly 19,000 battle casualties it had never yet lost a flag to the enemy.

At one end of the ballroom there was a raised platform on which, to dazzle the guests, there was an idyllic representation of what the ladies from Washington might imagine to be a typical army bivouac—spotless shelter tents pulled tight to eliminate wrinkles, piles of drums and bugles, tripods of stacked muskets, mimic campfire with cooking kettles hung over it, and as a final touch two brass Napoleons, polished and shining until their own gun crews would hardly know them, reflecting the light of Chinese lanterns, as brightly festive as any instruments of pain and death one could hope to see.

Some of the guests—the wives of officers who had enough rank or influence to be attended by their womenfolk while in winter quarters—were more or less permanent residents of this highly impermanent camp. Others, who had come down from the capital by train just for the occasion, were quartered in wall tents, and since a woman in a hoop-skirted party gown could neither ride horseback nor walk on the muddy footways of an army camp, their escorts called for them in white-topped army ambulances.

The escorts were of course officers, both of staff and of line. They wore their dress uniforms, and they had their swords neatly hooked up at their belts, and even though they were to spend the evening dancing many of them wore spurs. It was remarked that both escorts and guests seemed to make a particular effort to be gay, as if perhaps the music and the laughter and the stylized embrace of the dance might help everybody to put out of mind the knowledge that in the campaign which would begin in the spring a considerable percentage of these officers would unquestionably be killed.

That knowledge was not easy to avoid. The war was just finishing its third year, the end of it was nowhere in sight, and what lay ahead was almost certain to be worse than what had gone before. Neither the officers who wore spurs and swords to the dance floor, nor the

women who swirled their voluminous skirts to the music without regard for their encumbrances, retained any romantic illusions about this war. Yet they still had the ability—perhaps there was a necessity about it—to create illusions for the moment; and this evening there seems to have been a conscious effort to enter into the Byronic mood, an eagerness to see a parallel between this ball and the fabulous ball given in Brussels by the Duchess of Richmond on the eve of Waterloo. The dancers tried to act the parts which the romantic tradition called for, and while the music lasted—the brave music of a military band, playing the swinging little tunes that would keep reality at bay—they could maintain their chosen attitudes, changing tragedy into a dreamy unobtrusive melancholy that would do no more than highlight the evening's gaiety. It was at one of these dances that a young woman found herself chatting with a general officer whose only son had recently been killed in some outpost skirmish up the river. She offered her sympathy. The general bowed: "Yes, madam, very sad! Very sad! He was the last of his race. Do you waltz?" <sup>1</sup>

The dance lasted until the small hours, and at last the ambulances went off through the sleeping camp, and there was a final tinkle of chatter and laughter and so-glad-you-could-come under the frosty stars as the guests went to their tents. And the next afternoon everybody reassembled in and around a reviewing stand in an open field for a grand review of the II Corps, with the commanding general of the Army of the Potomac taking the salute as the long ranks of veterans went past.

Like the dance, the review was an occasion: a quiet reminder, if anybody needed one, that the dances and bright officers and everything else rested finally on the men in the ranks, who went to no parties and who could be turned out to parade their strength for the admiration of the officers' ladies. It was noted that the major general commanding, George Gordon Meade, was in rare good humor. He was lean and grizzled, with a great hawk nose and a furious temper, and his staff had learned to read omens in his behavior. When the army was about to do something he gave off sparks, and those around him did well to step quietly and rapidly; but today the omens were good. He was light-hearted, making small jokes and telling stories, enjoying the review and the company of the guests, and acting the part of a major general who had nothing in particular on his mind. Staff observed and took heart; some weeks of quiet must lie ahead of the army.<sup>2</sup>

In this judgment the staff officers were wrong. There was a movement afoot, and General Meade did not wholly approve of it. He was at ease, perhaps, merely because the imminent movement would involve only a fragment of the army, and because it did not seem likely to have any great importance one way or the other. Visible sign that something was in the wind was the presence at this infantry review of the 3rd Cavalry Division of the Army of the Potomac, led by Brigadier General Judson Kilpatrick.

Kilpatrick was in his mid-twenties, young for a brigadier, a wiry, restless, undersized man with blank eyes, a lantern jaw, and an imposing growth of sand-colored sideburns; a man about whom there were two opinions. A member of Meade's staff wrote in his diary that it was hard to look at Kilpatrick without laughing, and the common nickname for him around army headquarters was "Kail Cavalry." His division fought well and paraded well—at the review it put on a noble mock charge, a thundering yelling gallop across the dead grass of the plain, troopers rising in their stirrups with gleaming sabers extended, all very stimulating for



the visiting ladies—but its camp was usually poorly policed and in bad order, its horses were overworked and badly groomed, the clothing and equipments of the men had a used-up look, and its carbines were mostly rather dirty.

Yet the man had a quality, somehow. In combat he was valiant, and he was afraid of nothing—except, possibly, of the final ounce of the weight of personal responsibility—and he was slightly unusual among the officers of this army in that he neither drank nor played cards. At West Point he had been noted as a gamecock, anxious to use his spurs. Born in New Jersey, he was ardent for the Union and against slavery, and he had had many fist fights with other gamecock cadets from the South. William Tecumseh Sherman, with his genius for brutal overstatement, may have summed him up when, a bit later in the war, he asked to have Kilpatrick assigned to him for the march to the sea, explaining: “I know that Kilpatrick is a hell of a damned fool, but I want just that sort of man to command my cavalry on this expedition.”

Kilpatrick had ambitions. It was his belief that if he survived the war he would become first, governor of New Jersey, and then President of the United States. At the moment, however, he was more concerned with the thought that he would presently become a major general, and various events hung upon this conviction.<sup>3</sup>

While the officers of the II Corps were having their ball, Kilpatrick had been having a party of his own—a lavish affair, held in a big frame house near Brandy Station, where Kilpatrick had his headquarters. The guests included a number of important senators—the Senate had to confirm the promotions of all general officers—and if the general did not drink he saw to it that any guests who did were taken care of. The party appears to have been loud, merry, and successful. One guest recalled that Kilpatrick had been “as active as a flea, and almost as ubiquitous.” When the review was held on the following day Kilpatrick, who had arranged to have his cavalry take part, saw to it that his guests had places in the reviewing stand.<sup>4</sup>

But the senators were only part of it. In his reflections on the road to promotion Kilpatrick that winter had thought of two other points. One was the anxiety of Abraham Lincoln to extend friendship and amnesty to any citizens of the Confederacy who would return to their old allegiance to the Federal government. Mr. Lincoln had recently issued a proclamation offering such amnesty, and he greatly wanted copies of it distributed in the South. The other point was the relatively defenseless condition of Richmond, capital of the Confederacy, where there were confined many thousands of Union prisoners of war.

Putting these two points together, Kilpatrick had evolved a plan. A well-appointed cavalry expedition, he believed, under the proper officer (who might well be Judson Kilpatrick) could slip through General Lee’s defenses, get down to Richmond before the Army of Northern Virginia could send reinforcements, free all of the Union prisoners, and in its spare time distribute thousands of copies of the President’s proclamation. Having thought of this plan Kilpatrick managed to get word of it to Washington, and in the middle of February he had been formally summoned to the White House to explain the scheme to Mr. Lincoln and to the Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton.

This summons Kilpatrick had obeyed gladly, amid mutterings on the part of his chief, Major General Alfred Pleasonton, who commanded the cavalry corps and who had a low opinion both of Kilpatrick’s plan and of Kilpatrick’s action in dealing direct with the White

House. Pleasonton remarked tartly that the last big cavalry raid—Stoneman's luckless expedition, during the Chancellorsville campaign—had accomplished nothing of any consequence and had cost the army 7,000 horses. He added that if the President wanted his amnesty proclamation circulated in Richmond that could be done by regular espionage agents without taking a single cavalryman away from the army.<sup>5</sup>

But Pleasonton was not listened to and Kilpatrick was. He may have owed a good deal to Secretary Stanton, who had a weakness for fantastic schemes. He probably owed more to Meade and Lincoln himself, who was forever hoping that the seceding states could be brought back into the Union before they were beaten to death, and who, from long dealings with officers of the Army of the Potomac, had come to look with a kindly eye on those who were willing to display a little initiative. In any case the project had been approved at the very top, and orders came down from Washington to give Kilpatrick 4,000 troopers and let him see what he could do. Simultaneously, whole bales of pamphlets reprinting the amnesty proclamation arrived at Brandy Station.

The enthusiasm aroused by all of this at army headquarters was tepid. Army intelligence was well aware that Richmond was lightly held this winter. There were strong fortifications about the city, but hardly any troops occupied them, the chief reliance being on militia—armed on the presence just below the Rapidan, far from Richmond but close to the Army of the Potomac, of the indomitable soldiers of the Army of Northern Virginia.

In theory, Richmond was open to a sudden grab. But headquarters could not help remembering that a plan not unlike Kilpatrick's had been cooked up a month earlier by the imaginative but incompetent Ben Butler, who commanded Federal troops around Fort Monroe. Butler had proposed that the Army of the Potomac make a pretense of an offensive to keep Lee busy, while Butler's own troops marched up the peninsula and seized Richmond, and after a good deal of correspondence back and forth the thing had been tried. The Army of the Potomac had done its part, getting into a smart little fight at Morton's Ford and suffering two or three hundred casualties, and with Confederate attention thus engaged the way had been open for Butler to do what he proposed to do. But somehow nothing much happened. Butler's troops advanced, encountered a broken bridge several miles below Richmond, paused to contemplate it for a while, and at last retreated, and everything was as it had been before, except that Lee had been alerted and now held the Rapidan crossings in greater strength.

Major General John Sedgwick, unassuming and wholly capable, who commanded the army just then in the temporary absence of General Meade, commented indignantly on the business in his dispatches to Washington, but he succeeded only in ruining his own standing at the War Department.<sup>6</sup> The administration still believed that Richmond could be taken by a bold stroke, and an officer who disagreed was likely to be considered fainthearted and politically unsound. Also, there were all of those pamphlets to be distributed.

Orders were orders, in other words, and Meade dutifully set about obeying them. His plan was to enable the cavalry to get through the Rebel lines along the Rapidan, and he devised a little stratagem: the army would make an ostentatious lunge toward the right, as if it meant mischief somewhere down the Orange and Alexandria Railroad, and while the Confederates were looking in that direction Kilpatrick's men could go slicing off to the left. If the trick worked, so that the expedition once got past Lee's army, the whole project might very well

succeed.

It was all top secret, of course, for everything depended on taking Lee by surprise. As far as headquarters knew there had been no leaks. And then one day, just about the time the ladies were gathering for the Washington's Birthday ball, there came limping across the railroad platform at Brandy Station a youthful colonel of cavalry whose mere presence here was proof that the story was all over Washington.

This officer was Ulric Dahlgren. In addition to a colonel's commission, he possessed, at twenty-one, much glamor, a wooden leg, and some extremely important connections. His father was Rear Admiral John A. D. Dahlgren, a world authority on ordnance and one of the Navy's hard-case shellbacks to boot. Inventor of the heavy bottle-shaped Dahlgren gun which the Navy favored so much, he was also a good friend of Abraham Lincoln. Currently, the admiral was in charge of the fleet which was vainly trying to batter its way into Charleston Harbor. A square-jawed, bony, tenacious Scandinavian, lean and sharp-cornered, he rode the front line of action in a hot ill-ventilated monitor instead of taking his ease in his admiral's suite on the flagship, and he was deeply proud of the son who freakishly had forsaken the Navy and sought fame in the hard-riding, headline-happy squadrons of the cavalry corps.

Young Dahlgren was tall and slim and graceful, with a thin tawny beard and much charm of manner. He was alleged to be the youngest colonel in the Army, and an admiring Confederate wrote of him that he had "manners as soft as a cat's." Born in Pennsylvania, he had grown up in the Washington Navy Yard, and when the war began he was studying civil engineering. Early in 1862 he decided that it was time for him to fight—he had just passed his nineteenth birthday—and he was forthwith given an Army captaincy by Secretary Stanton himself. A few months later he found himself on the staff of General Joe Hooker.

He may have been commissioned by pure favoritism, but he turned out to be a good soldier. In the fall of 1862 he won distinction by leading a cavalry raid into Fredericksburg—a stroke that accomplished nothing much but showed boldness and leadership—and the next summer, during the Gettysburg campaign, Dahlgren made his reputation.<sup>7</sup>

While the fighting was beginning around Gettysburg, Dahlgren took a couple of troops of cavalry and went prowling far around in Lee's rear, and he captured a Confederate courier coming up from Richmond with dispatches. The capture was important, for the courier bore a letter from Jefferson Davis telling Lee that the government did not think it advisable to bring Beauregard and a new army up to the Rappahannock to add weight to Lee's invasion of the North. The letter was promptly sent to Meade, who was thus enabled to campaign in the secure knowledge that Lee was not to be reinforced.

A few days after this, Dahlgren's outfit got into a fight with Rebel cavalry at Boonsboro, Maryland, and Dahlgren was badly wounded. His right leg was amputated, and he spent the next few months convalescing at his father's home in Washington. Then, in November, a one-legged army officer on crutches, he went down to the fleet off Charleston and lived on his father's flagship, going ashore now and then with the Navy in small-boat expeditions of one kind and another. Early in the winter he returned to Washington to receive a colonel's commission and to have an artificial leg fitted, and just as this was done he heard about the Kilpatrick expedition. (The bar at Willard's was abuzz with it.) Dahlgren hurried down to see

Kilpatrick about it, satisfied himself that he could ride a horse despite the handicap of wooden leg, and shortly after the II Corps review he wrote to his father:

“I have not returned to the fleet, because there is a great raid to be made, and I am to have a very important command. If successful, it will be the grandest thing on record; and if it fails, many of us will ‘go up.’ I may be captured or I may be ‘tumbled over’ but it is an undertaking that if I were not in I should be ashamed to show my face again. With such an important command I am afraid to mention it, for fear this letter might fall into wrong hands before reaching you. I find I can stand the service perfectly well, without my leg. I think we will be successful, although a desperate undertaking.... If we do not return, there is no better place to ‘give up the ghost.’ ”<sup>8</sup>

Kilpatrick gave Dahlgren a key assignment. When the expedition moved there would be an advance guard of 500 troopers which would swing west to strike the James River some miles above Richmond. While the main body approached the city from the north and east, the group would cross the river and come up to the city from the south. With the attention of the defense centered on Kilpatrick, it was believed that this party could enter Richmond almost unopposed. It would seize the principal prison camp at Belle Isle, free the 15,000 prisoners there, lead them out on the north side, rejoin Kilpatrick’s column there, and all hands would go romping back to the Union lines. And this advance contingent, on which the success of the whole movement would very largely depend, was to be commanded by Colonel Dahlgren.

So it was all arranged, and Kilpatrick got his formal orders on February 27. He was to “move with the utmost expedition possible on the shortest route past the enemy’s right flank,” and next day various cavalry commands were ordered to report at his headquarters where the men were issued five days’ rations and officers were ordered to see to it that all the horses were well shod and that the men’s arms and equipments were in order. The troopers obeyed gleefully, for this sounded like a raid, and as one man remarked, “It is easier to get a trooper or even a hundred for a raid than to get one to groom an extra horse.”<sup>9</sup>

Ponderously but surely, the army machine began to move. John Sedgwick took his V Corps upriver toward Madison Court House, and flamboyant young Brigadier General George Armstrong Custer, with his gaudy uniform, his anointed curls, and his hard, expressionless eyes, took his cavalry division off on a dash toward Charlottesville—wondering, as he rode, whether he might not be cut off entirely and so be compelled to ride all the way to Tennessee to join Sherman’s army. The bait thus dangled was taken, and the Army of Northern Virginia took thought for its left flank; and on February 28, a fine starlit evening with a moon putting a shimmer on the waters of the Rapidan, Dahlgren and Kilpatrick took their men down to the river at Ely’s Ford, rounded up the Rebel pickets there, and set off on their long ride.<sup>10</sup>

They were good men, and there was a chance that they might succeed. Yet they were pursuing a dream, because peace could not now be won by planting pamphlets about amnesia in the Confederate capital, and the thought that it might come so was essentially a romantic thought, however noble. This venture was a departure from reality, of a piece with the officers’ dances at which men and women quoted Byron to themselves and borrowed, for their own beset lives, the tag ends of implausible poetry describing a bloodless bookish war. It was born of a romantic dream and it was aimed at glory, and glory was out of date, a gauzy wisp of rose-colored filament trailing from a lost world. Victory could no longer be

imagined as a bright abstraction, lying like the sunrise at the end of a shining road. It was a ugly juggernaut that would crush and smash many values and many lives into the everlasting mud, and it was the only thing that counted nowadays. The longer the war lasted the more victory was going to cost, and a dazzling cavalry raid would not even be the small change of the final purchase price.

Still, for whatever it might be worth, the expedition rode on, and the men slipped safely past Lee's right flank, trotting at dawn through a sleepy crossroads town known as Spotsylvania Court House, where Kilpatrick reined in briefly to let Dahlgren's men go on ahead. The troopers were in high spirits, and they were in enemy country, and they reflected that the five days' rations issued to them did not include any meat, which indicated that they were expected to forage liberally on pasture and farmhouse. A Pennsylvania regiment came down a country road, and in a farmyard there was an old woman with a flock of geese, and she amused the soldiers to ride into the flock, sabers swinging, to see how they might decapitate the long-necked birds without dismounting or coming to a halt. The woman seized a brood hen and fought with them in frantic despair, and the men shouted and guffawed as they dodged her blows, and they advised her that "the Yanks are hell on poultry." At last all of the geese were killed, and the woman slammed the gate of her front-yard fence and screamed the protest of the defenseless civilian who lay in the path of war—"You 'uns are nothing but dirty nasty Yankees after all!" <sup>11</sup>

The column rode on, collecting foodstuffs as it rode, and a staff officer went through the regiments announcing that the Rebels had no troops in Richmond, no one but government clerks and bookkeepers to bar the way. It was a fine bright day and a pleasant war, and the march went on unbroken except for a very short breather now and then. But during the afternoon the sky grew cloudy, and when dusk came there was a cold, gusty wind driving ice rain into the men's faces. Twenty-four hours in the saddle, and no rest in sight, and the war began to look a little less like a rowdy picnic; and they came to Beaver Dam Station after dark, and while the rain turned to sleet, freezing on overcoats and scabbards and carbine barrels, the men set fire to station and freight house and boxcars and outbuildings, cavorting madly about their bonfire, pleased that they were laying a heavy hand on the republican enemies, making strange prancing silhouettes against the red flames in the smoky night. Then they went on again, leaving their fires as a great meaningless beacon, and they followed narrow roads in Egyptian darkness, and men in the outside files lost their caps to the low branches of unseen overarching trees.

Dahlgren and his party were off to the west somewhere, presumably, making for the James River crossing, and from time to time a signal corps officer who was riding with Kilpatrick turned aside to send up a rocket as a signal to the detached party. The rockets sputtered and climbed the wet black sky and went out, futile signals from nowhere to nobody, and there was no way to tell where Dahlgren was or whether he ever saw them. The blind column went on and on, everybody cold and soaked and exhausted.

There were Rebel skirmishers adrift somewhere in the night, and at intervals they spattered the column with bursts of fire, carbine flashes winking ominously in the surrounding blackness. Up ahead there were parties cutting down trees to obstruct the road, and the progress of the column became a maddening succession of confused stops and blind

gallops—sudden traffic jams as the regiments jangled to an unexpected halt, men swaying in their saddles with fatigue or clumping heavily to the ground to rest their horses, then going on again at top speed to catch up with the rest, and it began to be possible to see why the young general was known as Kill Cavalry. Horses foundered, and some of the troopers had to plod along on foot, carrying their saddles, getting help by clinging to a comrade's stirrup. The storm grew worse and no one could see anything, and whether a man collided with a tree or with his neighbor was entirely up to his horse.<sup>12</sup>

Sometime during the night there was a brief, unsatisfactory halt for rest. Then the column moved on, having more brushes with Confederate bushwhackers, and a gray cheerless dawn came in; and at last, around midmorning of Tuesday, March 1, the men came out on the Brook Pike within five miles of Richmond. Up ahead were the permanent fortifications of the capital, and by all information these could be held only by militia, and Kilpatrick flung out a dismounted skirmish line, brought up his six field guns, and prepared for his big moment.

Yet the war that morning seemed to be full of evil omens, and there was no way to tell where Dahlgren was. According to the plan, he should at this moment be in Richmond followed by a multitude of released prisoners of war, and Kilpatrick opened with his guns to let Dahlgren know that the main body was where it was supposed to be. But there came no answering sign from Dahlgren. Instead there were Confederate guns which opened a brisk fire, and from somewhere Kilpatrick heard, vaguely, that veterans from Lee's army had entered the lines, and it began to seem to him that he was in trouble.

The skirmishers crept forward, peppering the Rebel lines and getting peppered in return. Kilpatrick rode to the front, and a soldier heard him complain: "They have too many of those damned guns; they keep opening new ones on us all the time." What had begun as the prelude to a smashing attack slipped imperceptibly into a sparring match, with everybody waiting hopefully for some indication that Dahlgren had got into Richmond and would presently get out again. But the gray skies and the bleak countryside gave no sign. The Confederate trenches lay half a mile away across a level plain, the fields heavy with cold mud, chilly mist, and smoke lying low over all. The Rebel fire grew stronger, and the day dragged on toward evening.

Kilpatrick had imagined this expedition, he had pulled wires to get it approved and to take command of it, and now he and his division were here at the gate of Richmond, and his advance guard was lost off beyond the smoky flats and someone a good deal tougher than government clerks seemed to be manning the Rebel guns. The quick victorious assault that he had looked so possible back at Brandy Station seemed now an effort too great for worn-out, unaided cavalymen to make. At last the weight of responsibility was too much, and at dawn—feeling that "an attempt to enter the city at that point would but end in bloody failure"—Kilpatrick called in his skirmishers, wheeled his command about, and headed back to the north side of the Chickahominy River. There, beyond the Meadow Bridge, the command went into bivouac.<sup>13</sup>

The bivouac was not a success, although the expedition had been without sleep for six hours. The men had no shelter tents, and the weather grew much worse. One trooper recalled their woes, in a breathless expressive sentence: "A more dreary, dismal night it would be difficult to imagine, with rain, snow, sleet, mud, cold and wet to the skin, rain and snow

falling rapidly, the roads a puddle of mud, and the night as dark as pitch.” He added that was impossible to build fires to cook food, and anyway all of the poultry that had been taken so blithely had long since been consumed.

Late in the evening Kilpatrick partially recovered his grip on himself and determined to make one more try. He ordered two columns formed for a dash up the Mechanicsville Pike but it took time to get exhausted men and horses into line in the consuming storm, and before the columns were half ready a swarm of Confederate cavalry—no militia, now, Waco and Hampton’s veterans from Lee’s army—came pelting in through the slush and opened a heavy fire. Hampton had brought two fieldpieces with him, and these slammed case shot in a destructive range, and befogged soldiers found the inky woods full of flashes of fire and angry yells of “Git, you damned Yankees!” and there was great confusion and much shouting and fruitless cursing.<sup>14</sup>

In the end the attack was beaten off, but this clearly was no place to make a camp, and the troopers got on their horses again and went squelching off through the mud, with scattered Confederates following to prick them along with rifle fire from the dark. Finally, long after daybreak, the outfit made another camp some miles away from Richmond, and while the men got what sleep they could Kilpatrick waited for news of the missing Dahlgren.

He got it, late that day, when some 300 of Dahlgren’s men came stumbling into camp without Dahlgren. Their story made Kilpatrick no happier.

Dahlgren’s 500 had got down to the James River on schedule, burning sundry gristmills and canal boats on the way, and they stopped briefly at a plantation owned by James A. Seddon, the cadaverous-looking aristocrat who was Secretary of War in President Davis’s cabinet. Dahlgren went up to the big house, full of boyish charm and abundantly living the part of the dashing romantic cavalryman, and he found that Secretary Seddon was not at home. Mrs. Seddon was, however, and Dahlgren charmed her, and they sat in her drawing room and chatted. When he identified himself she confided, prettily, that his father the admiral had been a beau of hers, back in the old days, and now she and the admiral’s son sat there and pledged each other in blackberry wine out of silver goblets, and apparently for the young man and the older woman the war narrowed to the misty focus of something by Sir Walter Scott. Then Dahlgren took his leave, very knightly and courtly, and he rode down to the river to make his crossing.<sup>15</sup>

At the river bank the knightly pose vanished. Earlier in the day Dahlgren had picked up a young colored man, held in servitude on some looted plantation, and this man had said that he knew where and how the James River could be forded, and he had been the guide who led the party to this spot. But when the cavalcade came jingling down to the river bank at the place the guide had chosen, the water was deep and wicked-looking, swollen by rains and clearly not to be crossed save in boats, of which the cavalry had none. There was sudden wrath, a cry of treachery, and Dahlgren decided—apparently rather hastily, but a raider so deep in enemy territory as he was would hardly take a judicial view of things—that the guide had maliciously misled him. He immediately ordered the lad hanged to the nearest tree.

One can picture the business, after all these years: stern young colonel, coldly furious at this mischance breaking in on his bright dream of glory; befuddled guide, staring blankly at the river all black and foaming where normally a man could wade across; expectant staff, seeing

death in the young colonel's eyes and whipping a picket rope from the nearest saddle; oak tree with convenient branch overhanging the bank, quick flurry of movement and smothered cry of protest, tanned hard faces looking on expressionless—and then the finished deed, in body dangling at the end of a taut cord, and the law of war is hard and there is more to cavalry raid than laughing troopers splashing through the shallows in winter moonlight, more to it even than a bright young colonel drinking a toast to his father's old-time sweetheart with purple wine reflecting candlelight in a silver cup. Some echo of the colonel's anger seems to have reached the lower echelons, because the troopers went back and burned Secretary Seddon's barns.<sup>16</sup>

Unable to cross the river, Dahlgren and his men went trotting toward Richmond on the north side, things vaguely going wrong and the shadow of disaster rising on the cold dark sky. Far ahead they heard Kilpatrick's guns, and toward evening they got up close to the city defenses. But it was too late now; Kilpatrick had seen too many Rebel guns and had retreated, the Confederates in Richmond were waiting for them, and Dahlgren was in a desperately bad spot—cut off from the main body, men and horses ready to drop, the whole country roused against him, safety many miles away.

Dahlgren did his best to get his men out of it. He rode at the head of the column, and he got the command away from Richmond and north of the Chickahominy in a driving sleety storm, and it seemed as if all the soldiers in the Confederacy were buzzing around like hornets to sting the invaders to death. For a time the command had to fight its way along the road—miserable fighting in the dark, nothing to be seen but a ragged line of fire as unseen infantry assailed the outriders, quick spat-splash of flying hoofs as the troopers charged up the road, jeering taunts from the fields as the Rebels slipped away—with the whole business repeated, as likely as not, a quarter of a mile farther on.

Somehow, in the night and the storm and the weird intermittent firing, Dahlgren's column broke in half, the separated halves losing touch and stumbling on as best they could. The 3000 who had just come in to Kilpatrick's camp constituted one of these halves. The other half, with which Dahlgren himself had been riding, had vanished, and these survivors had no notion where it was or what had happened to it.<sup>17</sup>

Only one thing was clear, to Kilpatrick and to everyone else: the whole expedition was a flat failure, and there was nothing for it but to ride down the Virginia peninsula and get within Ben Butler's lines before disaster became absolute. This, at length, Kilpatrick did, and in the course of the next few days he learned about what had happened with Dahlgren.

Followed by some 200 troopers, Dahlgren had struck off for the northeast. All handicaps considered, his party made good progress, achieving a spectacular crossing of the Mattaponi River, with Dahlgren remaining on the southern shore in personal command of the rearguard, firing his revolver at Rebel pursuers, while men and horses ferried themselves across on some scows they had found. Dahlgren crossed last of all, moved up to the head of the column, and resumed the march. But the state was aroused, and the march was not unlike the British retreat from Lexington and Concord, with every bush, barn, and tree seeming to shelter a Confederate sniper.

The final catastrophe came at night. A body of Virginia cavalry had got around in front of the Dahlgren party, and these men and some home guards and embattled-farmer types laid a



ambush in a forest. Dahlgren came along with his men trailing out behind him, his revolver in his hand, and in the blackness beside the road he heard men moving. He raised his weapon and shouted his challenge: "Surrender, you damned Rebels, or I'll shoot you!" For answer there was a heavy volley from encircling foes. Dahlgren fell from his horse, dead, with four bullets in him, and his command dissolved in a bewildering sequence of shots, cries, confusion, riding, and hand-to-hand grapplings. Most of the men who were not killed outright were quickly run down and captured.<sup>18</sup>

So that was that, and the raid was over. For achievements, the men could count a number of barns, flour mills, railroad buildings, and freight cars burned, and some incidental waste and ravage on a good many farms—there had been, for instance, the demonstration that an agile mounted man could behead a goose with his saber. Also, thousands of copies of the amnesty proclamation had been thrust into the hands of dazed bystanders, left in homes and shops and churches, stowed away in books on the shelves of manor houses, and generally lying about so that any Confederate who felt like coming back into the Union might learn the terms on which his return could be negotiated. All of this, whatever it might amount to, had been done at minor cost, as such things were figured: one promising young cavalry colonel, 340 of other ranks, and about a thousand horses, plus some damage to prestige.

A fizzle, in other words, worth no more than a passing glance—except that the war had changed, and something hard and cruel and vicious was coming to the surface, and this raid was a dark ominous symbol of it, with bitterness and hatred visible behind it and growing out of it.

The men who killed Colonel Dahlgren (he himself had thought there was no better place to give up the ghost) had not been kind to his body. Someone cut off a finger to get at a ring he was wearing. Another took his artificial leg as a souvenir. Others got his watch, additional valuables, and his clothing. His body itself was carted off to Richmond in a pine box without a lid, and it went on display in a railroad station there, a show for the curious. And someone also took from his pockets the papers on which he had written down the objects of the expedition, and these papers seem to have been tampered with, so that they finally appeared to prove that his principal aim had been to burn and sack the city of Richmond and to murder Jefferson Davis and all his Cabinet; and these papers were openly published, to put a ramrod in the spine of Secession.

Braxton Bragg, chief military adviser to President Davis, forwarded them with an endorsement denouncing "the fiendish and atrocious conduct of our enemies," and Secretary of War Seddon sent them on to Lee, suggesting that since arson and assassination had been on the agenda the Yankees taken prisoner from Dahlgren's command ought to be hanged. Lee himself, who had sanity enough for three or four cabinet officers, agreed the papers were atrocious, but he doubted that executing the prisoners would help much. After all, he remarked, the projected murder and rapine had not actually taken place, the validity of the papers was in some question, and anyway the Federals held certain Confederate raiders who had looted a train along the upper Potomac and were considering accusing these men of plain highway robbery—and altogether if the business of hanging prisoners were started no one could be sure just how it would end. Lee sent the papers on to Meade under a flag of truce with a note asking, in effect: Is this the kind of war you are going to be fighting from now on?

A sensation, indubitably: possibly offsetting the effect of Mr. Lincoln's offer of amnesty and brotherhood. Kilpatrick reported bitterly that the Confederates had used bloodhounds to hunt down fugitives from Dahlgren's scattered command, Northern publicists fumed and foamed over the mutilation of Dahlgren's corpse, and the old admiral wrote to General Butler to say that he would appreciate it if, by any flag of truce negotiations, the body could be recovered and brought north for decent burial. Meade wrote to Lee that neither President Lincoln, himself, nor General Kilpatrick had ordered any cities burned or civilians killed, and a Richmond newspaper acidly commented that the chief casualty of the expedition had actually been "a boy named Martin, the property of Mr. David Meems, of Goochland"—he whom Dahlgren had incontinently hanged for leading him to a ford that was not a ford.

The newspapers had a field day. The Richmond *Examiner* urged its readers to realize that "we are barbarians in the eyes of our enemies," and called for reprisals, saying that the war now was "a war of extermination, of indiscriminate slaughter and plunder on the part of our enemies." The editor dilated on the wickedness of the Yankee design of "turning loose some thousands of ruffian prisoners, brutalized to the deepest degree by acquaintance with every horror of war, who have been confined on an island for a year, far from all means of indulging their strong sensual appetites—inviting this pandemonium to work their will on the unarmed citizens, on the women, gentle and simple, of Richmond, and on all their property." The New York *Times*, in its turn, exulted that the expedition had at least destroyed millions of dollars in Rebel property, and spoke zestfully of what the raiders had seen in war-racked Virginia—"the large number of dilapidated and deserted dwellings, the ruined churches with windows out and doors ajar, the abandoned fields and work shops, the neglected plantations." It mentioned Martin, the luckless colored guide, as a man who "dared to trifling with the welfare of his country" and it approved his hanging as "a fate he so richly deserved."

20

So in both North and South there was fury, and the propagandists righteously sowed the wind, and the war between the sections, which once seemed almost like a kind of tournament, had at last hardened into the pattern of total war.

Kilpatrick's cavalry got back to the Army of the Potomac, after a time, taking ship from Fortress Monroe and debarking at Alexandria. The men were supposed to have a few days of relaxation at the Alexandria rest camp, but there was an unfortunate incident. Alexandria was policed by colored troops just then, and the cavalry of this army had no use for Negroes in uniform, and one of the colored guards halted a Michigan trooper to enforce the rule that none but couriers, orderlies, and other persons on duty were permitted to ride through the town's streets. The Michigan soldier drew his saber and killed the man, on the spot, and punishment followed quickly: the whole command had to march back to its camp on the Rapidan at once, without a chance to rest or to draw new clothing.<sup>21</sup>

## 2. Turkey at a Shooting Match

The army had always been impatient of restraint, and even in its early days a provost guard which tried to arrest dashing cavalymen had to make a certain allowance for

breakage. Yet provost guards had not hitherto been cut down with sabers; nor had they ever before been men with black skins, recently elevated from property to manhood, wearing the national uniform and empowered to enforce the national will. The army was dubious about it. (A colored sergeant, about this time, given an argument by an unruly private, leaned forward and tapped the chevrons on his sleeve. "You know what dat mean?" he demanded sternly. "Dat mean *guv'-mentl*")<sup>1</sup>

The colored man had been part of the war from the beginning, to be sure, but in the early days nobody had to spend much time thinking about him. He was just Uncle Tom, or a blackface minstrel with a talent for slow humor, or a docile contraband who could be made to do chores for soldiers. If he was none of these things he was a mystery, and figuring him out might bring a headache.

A New York cavalryman remembered that back in 1862 he and a comrade made friends with a free colored man, an aged Negro called Uncle Jake, who had a log cabin not far from their Virginia camp, and one day the old man asked the two soldiers to come to dinner. They went, and found themselves in a neat little room with a dirt floor, dinner cooking at the fireplace, table set for two. They had never imagined a dinner at which host and hostess stood by and ate nothing while the guests sat and ate, so they insisted that Uncle Jake and his wife draw up chairs and dine with them. Uncle Jake flatly refused, and he appears to have been slightly scandalized. Never in his eighty years, he said, had he heard of a Negro sitting at table with a white man, and all of their entreaties would not move him. So the soldiers ate the dinner—a good dinner, the cavalryman recalled, with roast possum as the main course—and went away, puzzled and ill at ease about that queer line drawn between host and guest.<sup>2</sup>

But that had been in the early days. Nothing in all the world was the same now as it used to be—not the war, nor the army, nor for that matter the colored man himself. He was coming out of the shadows and a new part was being prepared for him, and although the army did not like the transformation it was nevertheless the army which had brought it to pass. For the army had created a myth and the myth held a kernel of truth, and no cruel misuse of sword or noose would quite kill it.

The myth rode with Custer's men, as they came sloping back from their stab at Charlottesville—rain frozen on weapons and uniforms, saddles creaking with ice, trees along the way all silver with frozen sleet, tinkling when the branches moved. They found themselves at the head of a strange procession. As they went along the Virginia roads the bugles sounded down the wind like the trumpets of jubilee, and the slaves laid down their burdens and came out by the scores to follow. Before long the cavalrymen were leading a outlandish tatterdemalion parade of refugees, men and women and helpless children, people jubilant and bewildered and wholly defenseless, their eyes on the north star.

Some of these had carts and wagons, some of them rode on mules or oxen, and some stumped along on foot, carrying their few possessions. They took their place just ahead of the rear guard, and in the struggle to keep up they endured great hardships. When the Confederates assailed the retreating Yankees, Custer's officers would ride through, shouting and pleading and threatening, and there was general bedlam—bullets in the air, crying children, livestock grown either panicky or balky, creating fearful knots and tangles in the traffic, troopers swearing and women screaming, weaklings here and there falling out by the

roadside and watching in despair as the column moved on without them. When they were storming with rage the troopers were braying with laughter. It struck them as very funny to see a desperately frightened Negro riding a runaway mule, holding onto one of its ears with one hand and its tail with the other. Despite all difficulties most of the refugees kept going, and as they plodded along in the cold rain and mud one of the soldiers felt that the Union Army was “the representative to them of the great idea of freedom.”<sup>3</sup>

For that was the myth that this army had created, and it had vitality, and it went like a bent flame down plantation roads and country lanes. When Kilpatrick’s division crossed from Richmond to Butler’s lines the colored folk greeted it with ecstasy, and the raid they accomplished so little was a light across the sky to many hundreds of people. As the division passed one big plantation house, forty or fifty slaves crowded down to the road to watch. A young woman suddenly sprang up on the fence, waving her sunbonnet and crying: “Glory! Glory hallelujah! I’s gwine wid you! I’s gwine to be free!”

The whole crowd came surging out in a moment, and Old Marster was running down from his veranda shouting fruitless threats, a helpless Canute berating an unheeding tide.<sup>4</sup> The scene was repeated, with variations, over and over, until presently the cavalymen were surrounded and followed by thousands of slaves whom no one any longer owned and for whom no one in particular was likely to be responsible: a devoted shuffling multitude, men and women carrying bundles, tiny children trudging along big-eyed, gray-haired old folks leaning on canes, scores and hundreds of people coming out of the past into the unknown.

All of this was stimulating to tired soldiers, for it was pleasant to be hosannahed and welcomed over as bringers of freedom. But finally the men got to New Kent Court House, and there for the first time the cavalry saw colored soldiers—some of Ben Butler’s men, trim and neatly uniformed, lining the roadside to greet the cavalry, cheering wildly as the head of the column came up, white eyes a chalkline in a long row of black faces. Cavalry returned the cheers, and one trooper wrote that “a mountain of prejudice was removed in an instant.” Yet somehow there was a catch in it, and prejudice had not been removed so far that it could not quickly return. Late that night it began to rain again, and Kilpatrick’s men were making a sodden bivouac without shelter, and they suddenly realized that these colored soldiers occupied a warm dry camp with wall tents standing. So along toward midnight the cavalry attacked the camp, driving the colored soldiers out into the cold with blows and angry words, and taking the tents for themselves, and there was no further exchange of cheers.<sup>5</sup>

The soldiers were not the same men they had been three years ago, and they dimly realized the fact. An Ohio soldier looked back wistfully to the time when they had all been recruited with knowledge ahead of them—to “those happy, golden days of camp life,” when each regiment eagerly awaited its marching orders and the only worry was the haunting fear that the war might end before a man got his fair chance to fight.<sup>6</sup> In those days there was a great difference between regiment and regiment, and between man and man. Western regiments derisively yelled, “Paper collars!” at Eastern regiments, which they considered dressed up and dandish, and the Easterners retorted that the Westerners were uncouth backwoodsmen. The city man looked and acted unlike the man from the country, and even a casual glance would show the difference between Hoosier and Ohioan, between Pennsylvanian and down-East Yankee. Now the distinctions were gone, and all of the volunteers looked very much alike.

An officer in a Maine regiment mused that the army was a great leveler, and he wrote how “rich men and poor, Christians from pious back-country homes and heathen bounty-jumpers from the slums of New York ... would bathe in and drink from the same stream, whether prior or subsequent to the watering of the brigade mules.”<sup>7</sup>

The army had put its stamp on all of its infinitely various members. It had produced a type at last, and the volunteer had become the old-timer—rusty in a worn uniform, wearing his forage cap with its broken visor tugged down over his eyes, tolerant of high authority but not especially respectful toward it (one fussy brigadier was greeted on all sides as “Old Bowels” taking eventual triumph for granted, but fully aware that he himself was the man who was going to pay for it).

Yet to say all of that is merely to say that the army had done to its members what armies always do to recruits. The men had changed and that was that, and if the gates of Eden had swung shut nothing had happened that does not happen to everyone sooner or later. But along with all of this, something had happened to the army itself. Once it had reflected what was left of frontier democracy, loose-jointed and informal, bound together by a sharing of traditions and ideals. Now it was becoming professional, and the binder was beginning to look like cold force. Old relationships had shifted, and the typical army campfire was no longer a little glow in the dark lighting the bronzed faces of sentimentalists singing sad little songs. Army life had an edge to it now. The word “comrade” was ceasing to be all-inclusive and because that was so the gap between officer and man was ominously widening.

In the beginning this gap had not been very impressive. Most of the men had known the company and regimental commanders before the war. They had been neighbors then and they expected to be neighbors again, and although they were willing to obey any orders which seemed to be sensible they saw no reason for anyone to be stuffy about it. Government was mostly by consent of the governed and discipline was casual and haphazard, which sometimes led to odd happenings on the march and in battle. It was getting ever so much tighter and sterner now, partly because loose discipline irked the army command but chiefly because the situation in which the loose discipline of a volunteer army could be tolerated no longer existed.

Except for the old-timers, the Army of the Potomac was not really a volunteer army any more, and it could not be conducted as one. The men who were coming into the ranks now were for the most part either men who had been made to come or men who had been paid to come. The former—the out-and-out conscripts—sometimes made good soldiers, for the principal shortcoming (aside from a certain reluctance to volunteer) was poverty; a drafted man with money could either hire a substitute and so gain permanent exemption, or pay a \$300 commutation fee and at least win exemption until his name came up in some new draft call. Unfortunately, however, not many of the new recruits were conscripts. Most of them were men who had joined up only because they got a great deal of money for doing it, and in the great majority of cases these men were worse than useless.

The number of men to be drafted in any state, city, or county always depended on the number that had previously volunteered. If many had volunteered, few or none would be drafted. Since nobody liked the draft, it was to everybody’s interest to promote volunteering and this was done principally by the payment of cash bounties. By the winter of 1864 the

were running very high. States, cities, and towns were bidding against each other—some were almost bankrupting themselves in the process—and the drafted man who wanted to hire a substitute was bidding against all three. The results were fantastic. The provision by which a drafted man could buy his way out of the service was a remarkably effective device for making young men cynical about appeals to their patriotism. When it went hand in hand with a system of bounties which often ran as high as a thousand dollars per enlistment, there was in operation an almost foolproof system for getting the wrong kind of men into uniform.<sup>8</sup>

This system had created the institution of the substitute broker—the man who for a fee would find potential soldiers and induce them to enlist. Some of these brokers may have been relatively honest, although there is nothing in any contemporary accounts to make one think so, but for the most part they seem to have inspired army authorities to some of the most glowing invective in Civil War annals. At times they operated precisely as waterfront criminals operated, making their victims drunk, getting them to sign away their bounty rights, and then rushing them through the enlistment process before they recovered. Now and then an authentic deep-sea sailor, congenitally disposed to being shanghaied, got caught in this net. Such men, when they came to, usually made the best of things and went on to become good soldiers.<sup>9</sup>

Most of the time the broker did not need to go to the trouble of drugging anybody. It was simpler to dredge in the backwaters of city slums and find human derelicts who, for a little cash in hand, would willingly assign their bounty rights and go and enlist. Hardly any of these men were physically fit to be soldiers, but the broker made such enormous profits that he could usually afford any bribery that might be necessary to get them past the examiner. Horrified medical officers in the Army of the Potomac were finding that new lots of recruits often included hopeless cripples, lunatics, and men far along in incurable disease. Of fifty-seven recruits received that winter by the 6th New York Heavy Artillery, seventeen were so completely disabled that even a layman could see it—some, for instance, had but one hand and a few were out-and-out idiots. Of recruits received by the cavalry corps in March, 32 per cent were on the sick list when they reached camp.

A Federal enrollment officer in Illinois wrote that the substitute broker's business was conducted "with a degree of unprincipled recklessness and profligacy unparalleled in the annals of corruption and fraud." Rising to genuine eloquence in his indignation, he protested that it put the uniform "upon branded felons; upon blotched and bloated libertines and pimps; upon thieves, burglars and vagabonds; upon the riff-raff of corruption and scoundrelism of every shade and degree of infamy which can be swept into the insatiable clutches of the vampires who fatten upon the profits of the execrable business."

Helpless immigrants speaking no word of English, some still wearing their wooden shoes, were swept up from the docks at seaports and hustled off to the recruiting officers. A veteran in a Massachusetts regiment said scornfully that more than half of one draft of recruits his regiment got that winter came in under assumed names, and that most of these men forgot what names they had used and were unable to answer at roll call. He remembered that the last set of recruits in whom the regiment felt any pride was a detail that came to camp in the fall of 1862.<sup>10</sup>

Even worse than the gangs sent in by the brokers, however, were the professional bounty

jumpers. These often were out-and-out criminals, who had found that their familiar arts of burglary, highway robbery, and pocket-picking were much more laborious and less rewarding than the racket which was made possible by the high-bounty system. They made a business of enlisting, collecting a bounty, deserting at the first chance, enlisting somewhere else for another bounty, deserting again, and keeping it up as long as they could get away with it. Since the authorities never solved the problem of checking desertion, they were usually able to get away with it about as long as they wanted to keep on trying, and if a few of them were caught and executed now and then the hazards of the profession were, on the whole, not worse than the risks they normally ran with the police.

These men brought into the Army of the Potomac an element the army had never had before, and of which it could not possibly make the slightest use. In camp they were valueless, and early in 1864 the army command stipulated that no bounty men could be used on picket or outpost duty. "If those fellows are trusted on picket," remarked one veteran, "the army will soon be in hell."<sup>11</sup> The mere business of guarding them to see that they did not desert or plunder their honest comrades took time and effort that should have been used in other ways. In battle they were a positive handicap. Under no circumstances could they be induced to fight. If by tireless effort a regiment succeeded in getting any of them up to the firing line they would immediately desert to the enemy, and their utter unreliability made any regiment which had them in its ranks weaker than it would have been if it had received no recruits at all.

A New Hampshire soldier reported indignantly that "such another depraved, vice-hardened and desperate set of human beings never before disgraced an army," and he pointed out how the bounty-jumpers and substitutes, simply by their presence in camp, corrupted the relationship between officers and men in the veteran regiments:

"Before their advent, common toil, hardship and danger, for months and years, had made them a band of brothers. Between the officers and men there existed the most perfect confidence and friendship. Punishment was uncalled for, as disobedience, demanding it, was unknown; and camp guard had long been a thing of the past. The men came and went almost at their pleasure."

But as the new men came in this idyllic situation changed:

"No pleasure or privilege for the boys in camp any more, for the hard lines and severe discipline of military necessity apply with a rigidity never before applied."<sup>12</sup>

A Connecticut soldier called the 300 recruits his regiment got that winter "the most thorough-paced villains that the stews of New York and Baltimore could furnish—bounty jumpers, thieves and cutthroats, who had deserted from regiment after regiment in which they had enlisted under fictitious names, and who now proposed to repeat the operation. And they *did* repeat it." Two hundred and fifty of the 300, he said, ran away within a few weeks.<sup>13</sup>

In three years of war the soldiers of the Army of the Potomac had seen many things, but they had never seen anything like the habits and morals of these new comrades in arms. One veteran remembered listening, dumfounded, to the tales the new men told: "They never tire of relating the mysterious uses to which a 'jimmy' could be put by a man of nerve, and how easy it was to crack a bank or filch a purse. They robbed each other as freely as they did

others. We noticed on their arrival that nearly every man had his pocket cut.”

The bounty-jumpers had plenty of money, and when they were not picking one another's pockets they spent their spare time gambling. Poker had always been a favorite diversion of the private soldier, but the games that developed now were played for huge stakes, with professional cardsharps sitting in: “Thousands of dollars would change hands in one day playing, and there were many ugly fights indulged in, caused by their cheating each other with cards.” A man in the 13th Massachusetts wrote indignantly:

“We often talked over, among ourselves, this business of filling up a decent regiment with the outscourings of humanity; but the more we thought of it, the more discontented we became. We longed for a quiet night, and when day came we longed to be away from these ruffians.”<sup>14</sup>

Some of the new men found army life pleasant—three meals a day, lodging taken care of, plenty of chance to loaf—and instead of deserting they became old soldiers, in the traditional army meaning of the term, pretending to be sick or disabled so that they could avoid drill and take their ease in the hospital tents. Some claimed to have rheumatism so badly that they could not bend their knees. The doctors would chloroform such men, and while they were unconscious would manipulate their legs. If this indicated that nothing was actually wrong with the men when they came out from under the anesthetic would be sent back to camp on foot with guards walking close behind ready to jab them with bayonets if they faltered. An Illinois soldier recalled a man who spent weeks in hospital, insisting that one of his hip joints was crippled by some obscure malady. In desperation the hospital stewards one day strapped him to his cot and applied red-hot pokers to the hip. After the third application the man cried out in pain and admitted that he had been shamming. He was allowed to stay in hospital until the burns healed and then was sent back to duty.<sup>15</sup>

An immense amount of work was required by the mere task of getting the new recruits from the enlistment centers to the army camps. Details of veterans were sent north to do guard duty at the recruit camps, and they quickly found that nothing but prison discipline would do.

In Boston Harbor there was an island on which new recruits were housed, uniformed, given some rudiments of drill, and assigned to different regiments. Men from the 22nd Massachusetts were sent up to guard this camp, and they found the work irksome. Day and night, every foot of the island's shore had to be patrolled to foil desertion. The shore was rocky and in winter the rocks were icy, and sentinels slipped and fell and wished fervently that they were back along the Rapidan. One man wrote fondly: “Large portions of Virginia are absolutely free from rocks.” The veterans guarded the steamers which brought recruits to the island, and at the wharf they had to search all of the new men as they came ashore, seeing to it that no liquor or weapons were smuggled into camp. They took each recruit's money from him and deposited it with the provost marshal's clerk, for delivery when the man finally reached his regiment. It was held unwise to let the men have any money while they were on the island, for fear they would bribe their way to freedom.

One of the men who performed this guard duty wrote that “Some of the most noted hardened and desperate villains in this country” were to be found among the recruits, and he said that to smuggle money past the guards these men would hide hundred-dollar bills



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