

IN BATTLE AT STONES RIVER

From *Up From Corinth*, book two of *Journey Into Darkness*



Duanne Kindade



Johnny Applebee

* * *

Christmas day became a day of planning. During the early part of the day, attention was focused on preparations for Taylor's recovery. It would be many weeks before he would be up and about, yet each passing hour brought increasing strength in spirit and voice.

Evening saw a different sort of planning. General Rosecrans announced that he was ready to move on the Confederate Army. All were to be on the road by dawn the next morning. Heavy rain fell during the night. In the cold grey pre-dawn, the army began to move.

General Sheridan's division was underway before sunup, moving with those under Major-General McCook along the Nolensville Pike in route to Triune. Daylight had hardly come when the first encounter with the enemy occurred. At 7AM upon arriving at Nolensville, an attack was ordered against a detachment of Confederate Cavalry.

Throughout the weekend, the advance of Rosecran's army continued, but was slowed by encounters with the enemy.

In the early hours after midnight into Tuesday morning, General

McCook's divisions arrived outside of Murfreesboro. Miserably drenched from hours of marching in the rain, the soldiers were maneuvered into position on the south side of the Wilkinson Turnpike. But the Confederates disputed the arrival. Skirmishing in the inky wet blackness of night pushed Rebel pickets back into their own battle lines as the Federals forced their way into position. Finally an uneasy quiet settled around four in the morning as the soldiers of both armies lay upon the wet ground for a few short hours of sleep.

No fires were permitted. No comfort from the cold wet was possible. Daylight came and there followed hours of troop movements while the generals kept their soldiers occupied as they set their battle lines in preparation for the forthcoming conflict. Skirmishes were a continuing harassment, yet no general battle evolved. A long day passed slowly. Evening fell to darkness. McCook was ordered to extend his right and to build many campfires in order to deceive the enemy and give the impression that his troops were greater in number and to cause the enemy to believe that his divisions would be the main thrust of attack.

Duane and his friends stood with a company of soldiers, warming themselves by one of the fires. The brigades had been placed in line along a wooded ridge overlooking an expanse of open ground widening from 200 to 500 yards toward a dense cedar thicket beyond. Fields of cotton and corn lay scattered about the open ground. The Union line stretched a mile further to the right with the brigades of two more divisions adding to those of Sheridan's -- a total of nearly 7000 men. There was little talk. The dominant sound was the loud cracking of the fire.

It was nearly time for TATTOO when one of the regimental bands broke the mood of the evening. YANKEE DOODLE, HAIL COLUMBIA, and other tunes drifted on the night air. After a while the band fell silent as it yielded to a Confederate band playing DIXIE and a number of its own favorites. Other bands joined in the exchange which continued back and forth for more than half an hour. Finally a Federal band struck up HOME SWEET HOME and was instantly joined by a Confederate band. Soon one band after another joined the tune until every band from both armies was playing HOME SWEET HOME.

For a short time the music soothed aching hearts. Gradually the bands ceased to play as the refrain echoed in the frosty night, then died away to silence.

* * *

The men of the 36th Illinois slept on the ground in line of battle. Their muskets stood racked in rows along the line, loaded and ready. Horses remained under tack, tied near their riders or harnessed to wagons or artillery limbers. What rations and ammunition the soldiers carried were all they had. General McCook's supply train of 300 wagons had been threatened the previous day by a Confederate cavalry raid and forced to withdraw to safety.

Duane and his friends had settled in for the night at the base of a tree behind the lines. Captain Tomlin was with other senior surgeons of the division at a house a half mile to the north where a temporary hospital was to be set up. Lieutenant Marshalton and other assistant surgeons would set up first aid operations just behind the battle lines. Their horses and extra pack mules carried the barest of supplies, mostly bandages, splints, tourniquets, some stiptics.

The boy lay wrapped in overcoat and blanket, tucked in the ground pocket between tree roots. His head rested on his pack. Jeremiah was tethered nearby with the other horses and pack animals of the medical group. Duane slept lightly. Nervous tension kept him awake as an eerie stillness hung over the sleeping army. Others, he noticed, were likewise restless and might toss about uneasily or sit up to watch and listen. Some of the officers walked about, talked quietly, drank coffee, or leaned against a tree and gazed through the darkness toward the enemy.

Sometime around midnight, Duane drifted into a light sleep. About two hours later he was awakened by the sound of nearby whispered conversations. General Sill was talking to some of his officers as they looked intently toward the enemy lines.

"There's movement behind their fires," one whispered.

"It looks like whole brigades moving to our right," another agreed.

"I'll alert General Sheridan," Sill stated. He turned from the group and disappeared in the darkness.

A half hour passed. When the general finally returned, Sheridan was with him. For a moment the two studied the distant movements.

"I think you're right," Sheridan spoke. "Pass the word quietly for the men to rise, eat breakfast, and be ready. I'll alert the others."

General Sheridan moved on to his left to alert Roberts and Haughtaling to prepare their infantry and artillery while General Sill went about alerting his regimental commanders.

"Dan! Johnny!" Duane whispered as he shook the others to wake them, "it's time ta git to."

"What's happening?" Johnny yawned.

"The oth'r army's movin 'bout," Duane explained. "We're ta eat 'n be ready."

The hot embers of fires were used to boil coffee and cook breakfast. When finished, each wiped down his utensils with dirt and grass before returning them to their packs. Infantrymen took up their weapons, placed percussion caps, and checked their loads. To the right, Captain Bush of G Company 2nd Missouri checked his artillery and prepared his men. The horses were unhitched, taken to water, then returned to their limbers.

Sheridan's division was ready. Further to the right the other two divisions were following the same routine. But they had gotten a later start.

As the dark of night was about to yield to predawn light, distant sounds of battle rode the breezes from the far right. Rising like an incoming tide, it crept ever closer.

In the grey mist of the dawning day the Confederate Army came out of the cedars in front of Sheridan's division and began to assemble in lines of battle. They stretched over a distance of nearly two miles with a strength of more than 10,000 men in formation six lines deep. Silently the lines were formed. Silently they began a slow forward movement across the half mile of cotton and corn fields. Gradually they quickened the pace, then broke into a double-quick rush. Suddenly the morning tension was shattered by the blood-curdling Rebel yell as the picket lines fired and fell back. Sheets of flame cut the fading darkness as cannon and muskets roared into pitched battle.

The non-combatants with the surgeons lay low in the cover of trees and watched as the first defenders in blue fell. Bullets whined through tree limbs and rang off rocks. Their buzzing picked at the ground or thumped into wood or bodies of soldiers and beasts.

As Duane and others moved forward to aid the wounded, they gazed in momentary awe at the vast sea of humanity rushing toward their position. Cannon roared to the immediate right and the distant left as the batteries of the Second and First Brigades tore great gaps in the oncoming tide. The devastating crackle of Sill's infantry line firing in unison, combined with cannon shot to slow the Confederate charge. Artillery from the third battery in reserve behind the lines added to the first two. The enemy was being mowed down like acres of wheat, but still they came. The infantry reloaded. At fifty yards the soldiers of the four regiments fired in lines. Sheets of flame spit forth in repeated series along the Union front as soldiers fell by the score. The grey line held momentarily, then fell back to regroup.

Thousands more were thrown onto the field and again the Confederates attacked. They continued to fall in vast numbers before the deep shattering roar of artillery and higher-pitched clattering crush of musket fire. The new charge faltered as the line slowed.

"This is it, Men!" General Sill shouted. "We've broken their charge. Forward to drive them back to the river!"

The general fell dead as a bullet tore into his brain. Colonel Greusel took command.

"You heard the general, Lads! Forward!" he ordered.

The brigade charged from the woodline and broke the Confederate momentum. They, in turn, withdrew in good order to the cedars. Under continued firing from the protection of the cedars, the Union line fell back to its position on the wooded ridge.

Far to the right the Union line had collapsed and was in full retreat. As the full dawn broke and the morning light was nearly an hour old, the debris of broken brigades began to pass along the back side of Sheridan's position. The panicked ran by in their haste to find safety. Officers rode at full gallop to try and stop the retreat. Couriers rode to inform Rosecrans and his staff. Wagons rushed pell-mell, some without drivers, toward the rear. Riderless horses and runaway mules ran wildly amidst the confusion. The wounded who could, made their own way

toward safety, their blood flowing fresh or caked on skin or clothing. Some needed help. Others ran out of strength and paused to rest at a tree or collapsed from exhaustion.

Through this mass of retreat, the Third Brigade was brought forward in the brief pause in the action, and placed on line in anticipation of another assault. Duane found himself with all he could do to help the wounded who could not get on their way toward one of the hospitals to the rear of the line. Those who couldn't travel on their own were assisted to safer positions behind the trees. Thousands lay dead or dying or wounded on the fields between the lines. Other hundreds lay along the wooded line of the Union positions.

The brigades of the far right continued to retreat as the Union line began to fold back on itself. Sheridan's division had been under fire for nearly three hours as the Confederates launched still another charge. Artillery was brought up within a hundred and fifty yards in front of Sill's brigade. Some of the brigades of Davis' division to the far right ran out of ammunition and were forced to retreat. They did so in orderly fashion, leaving Sheridan's division with little extra support.

The attack came. A furious explosion of shot and shell tore into the Union line. Men fell to bullet and mini ball. Some were torn apart with fragments from exploding shells. A company commander fell dead as a cannon ball tore away his head. Several soldiers were blown down by an exploding shell. The horses that pulled the artillery were shot dead in their traces. Many who were wounded fought on, the blood flowing from a wound or slowed by a makeshift bandage.

In the deafening din of battle, the non-combatants suffered, too. Johnny was grazed by a bullet. A bandsman bandaged him up and he was back to work. Clothing was riddled by bullets from many close calls and stained with the blood of the wounded. Some were killed trying to help their comrades, or wounded too badly to stay on.

Duane knelt by an older corporal who sat on the ground leaning against the backside of a tree. Expert fingers were wrapping a bandage around a rapidly bleeding scalp wound.

"Ya hold this here tight whilst I tie off at the back, here." He placed the man's hand where he wanted it, then tied a tight knot at the back of the bandage.

"Damn, Boy. You sure put a man's head to hurtin." The soldier winced in pain. "Is it stopped bleedin?"

"Ain't quite," Duane answered. "But 'tis a heap less flow."

"Thanks. You be careful. I'll be fine now."

The soldier picked his musket up from where it lay beside him while Duane moved off to help the next casualty he found.

General Sheridan rode up from the right. An artillery shell burst in front of the infantry and fragments clattered through the tree branches. Musket fire from the brigade clattered like a thousand giant woodpeckers while the guns from Captain Bush's battery roared in rapid succession like a hundred speeding locomotives. The din of battle was deafening.

"Private Kinkade!" the general called, barely audible in the crushing thunder of battle. "Your horse nearby?"

"Yes, Sir," the boy replied, shielding his face from a shower of tree bark.

"Then ride over to Captain Haughtaling at the artillery on our left and take a message." The general swung his horse as a miniball buzzed past his shoulder. "Tell him to look sharp. There's a build-up of infantry off by that brick kiln and it looks like he's in for it."

"I'm on the way, Sir!" Duane acknowledged as he dashed toward the supply mules.

Yanking the reins free of the hitching line, the boy swung into the saddle then turned the horse to open ground. As an afterthought he reached for a pack of medical gear from a pack mule and draped it across the front of his saddle. Then, kicking his heels into Jeremiah's flank, the two headed through the trees while cannon shells exploded about the battleground and bullets buzzed through the air. Without warning, the boy felt a back leg give way. His mount faltered, almost went down, caught his balance, and continued on. Tripped, the boy thought.

Passing quickly along the backside of the brigade, Duane approached an area of open ground between defensive positions. There was a brief moment when the air about him stopped vibrating from the constant concussion of gunfire. The boy approached the artillery position and once again was enveloped by the penetrating roar of battle.

"Captain!" Duane called closing on the officer and his lieutenants. "A message from the general."

Shells were falling every fifteen to twenty seconds. Their range was off. They tended to strike in front of the battery or in the open area across which Duane had just ridden.

"What is it, Boy?" the captain asked.

Duane reined his horse to a sliding halt near the officers. "General says ta look ta the brick kiln yonder," he pointed. "Ther's a heap a troops gatherin an he figgers yer in fer it."

"Thanks, Boy," Haughtaling acknowledged.

A shell burst nearby, throwing dirt and fragments. Jeremiah jumped as a fragment struck the saddle leather with enough force to imbed itself into the leather and send shock waves through the horse's ribs. Another ripped through the coat sleeve of one of the junior officers.

"Best get your horse to cover and yourself closer to the ground," the captain advised. "Don't know how bad he's hit, but . . ."

"Where?"

"Behind you, on his flank. Hurry and take cover. I see you're with the surgeons. You can help here. We're a bit short."

"Yes, Sir."

Duane glanced back to see where his mount was wounded and was surprised to see the track of blood caked with dirt, but still flowing. He guided Jeremiah into a

thicket of cedar and underbrush. There he dismounted and tied his horse. Returning to the battle line, he found all six guns in rapid fire.

"Fire!" a corporal commanded.

One of the guns belched forth flame and smoke as it roared and jumped back. The crew quickly rolled it back into position and prepared to reload.

"Load!" the corporal commanded as he stepped into position behind the barrel to aim the gun.

A crewman swabbed the barrel with a large sponge as another stepped forward with the next round of ammunition. The gun was ready to fire again within half a minute. With enemy shell-fire bursting around them, the gun crews returned fire with each field piece firing from six to ten rounds every five minutes. Their thunder was deafening.

The enemy's shells began to take their toll. Fragments flew forcefully from their explosive impacts. A private was leaning into the trail handspike, shifting his gun as the corporal sighted and called directions, when a shell fragment slammed through his arm, tearing it off above the elbow. There was an eruption of blood from his severed artery as he turned in shock and walked away from the cannon.

"Give me a hand!" a lieutenant called, rushing to help his gunner.

Duane rushed forward, pulling a splint from his pack. Another crew member took over the handspike as the lieutenant attempted to aid the wounded private. The man collapsed unconscious.

"Squeeze it tight!" the boy called. "Make the bleedin stop!"

The man did as he was told. Duane hurried to wrap the bleeding stump with a bandage. Slipping a splint under the bandage, he twisted the wrap tight until the bleeding stopped. Then he tied the stick so that it couldn't untwist itself. A driver rushed over from a limber to assist.

"Quick," the officer instructed, "get him back to cover as soon as you can."

As the man and the boy turned from their work, each wiped the blood from his face and hands on his shirt sleeves. The air continued to explode with battle. The lieutenant turned and moved back into the commotion.

"They're forming up!" the captain called. "Load canister!"

The artillerymen at the limbers quickly traded the shells in hand for canister loads and passed them to be loaded. In the field below, the Confederate infantry began to advance.

"Fire!"

"Load!"

Cannon roared. Enemy shells descended. Duane worked to help the wounded. The enemy infantry advanced. Great holes were torn in their ranks by the battery's canister shot. Federal infantry moved up to help protect the guns. A shell fragment shattered a gunner's face. A cannon ball took a foot from another. The infantry closed. Enemy artillery fire ceased as the infantry charged.

"Fire!"

"Fire!"

"Fire!"

Cannons belched forth flame, smoke, and a hail of shot. Screams of pain were heard as the roar of the cannon faded and the leading edge of the oncoming tide wavered and fell. The ranks of the enemy closed and the charge continued as gunners hastened to reload. A sheet of flame erupted all along the Confederate front. The air buzzed with a hail of bullets.

"I'm hit!" a young private screamed.

"Damn!" another shouted, and fell mortally wounded, his life blood pumping through a hole in his chest.

A seasoned private fell by the wheel of the gun nearest Duane.

"Hurry!" he called. "Here's the pick, Boy! Punch the powder bag!"

Duane took the pick from the man's hand and passed it to the corporal. Jamming it through the vent hole in the breech of the cannon's barrel, he ripped open the powder charge within. The man beside him followed up by inserting the primer, then stepping back with lanyard in hand to await the command to fire. Meanwhile, the boy had knelt beside the soldier lying by the wheel.

"Yer leg's bin hit," he informed the wounded man. "Most likely broke. I'll wrap a splint fer now."

"You best just stop the bleedin. They're gonna hit hard and we're gonna be too busy fer bandagings."

"Here they come!" someone shouted.

"The captain's been hit bad!" another exclaimed. "Help me get him out of here!"

Several walking wounded and others rushed to help. The captain was carried to the rear, trailing blood across the rocky landscape.

"Hold the guns!" a lieutenant ordered.

"Charge!" the enemy officers ordered.

"Fire!" the corporal commanded.

The enemy charged across the last fifty yards, their blood-curdling yell joining with the rapid clatter of their musket fire, then folded into the thunder of cannon. Flame and smoke and death and agony erupted in an extended instant of insanity. Suddenly, the first of the attackers were on the gunners.

Artillerymen fought savagely with revolvers, sabers, and ramrods. The soldier Duane was assisting defended them both with his revolver. Many of the attackers had already been wounded but still they came like demons possessed. They fired their weapons and charged with bayonets. A ball splattered on the iron of the cannon and cut the boy through his shirt sleeve.

"Take cover, Boy!" the wounded man shouted as his revolver dropped a grey-clad soldier on top of them.

The bayonet of the falling enemy pierced Duane's boot and cut his ankle. "Ow!" he cried in surprised pain.

The wounded artilleryman caught the falling body with his good foot as he lay on his back beside the cannon's wheel, and shoved it to the side.

"Give me his musket," the man called. "Then get behind the gun carriage and help stop them!"

The wounded man pulled himself up beside the wheel and fought with the bayoneted musket while the boy crawled behind the gun and drew his revolver. Dozens more rebels seemed to appear from nowhere.

For a brief moment, Duane stared at the oncoming enemy and felt fear. His stomach knotted and he wanted to run. Then, as if from habit, he raised his revolver and fired. The shot dropped one soldier even as his musket fired. The bullet passed harmlessly through the boy's shirt. Fear passed for lack of time to dwell on it, replaced by the immediate need for action. The revolver spoke several times. Another attacker was wounded before being brought down by a saber.

"What's with yer gun?" Duane asked as he ducked to load a live cylinder.

"Empty," his wounded comrade replied, slamming aside an oncoming bayonet and knocking its bearer senseless with the butt of his musket.

"Same make's mine?" the boy spoke as he dropped the empty cylinder into his cartridge pouch.

"No."

The ring of steel on steel, the clatter of ramrod and empty musket, the shouts and screams of orders and agony, punctuated the confusion and chaos of fierce hand-to-hand combat. Some combatants resorted to fists or improvised clubs of handspikes, ramrods, or other tools.

On the far right, Schaefer's brigade was out of ammunition. Sheridan ordered them to hold with bayonets while the last brigade from Davis' division retreated for lack of ammunition. Sill's brigade continued to pour a heavy fire into the Confederate attack. Roberts' brigade had lost its general, killed in the action. Its men, too, were running low on ammunition.

Suddenly the fight for the artillery stopped. No more Rebels came to press the attack. The soldiers of Haughtaling's battery were momentarily stunned by the calm.

"We're pulling back!" a sergeant called. "The horses are down! Grab the prolongs and let's drag the guns out!"

But the terrain was too rough. The guns could not be moved fast enough. As the regiments of the brigade began to work back toward the Wilkinson Turnpike, it became necessary to abandon the guns in order for the men to save themselves and their wounded.

While preparations were being made for the withdrawal from the battle line, Duane took time to finish the work he had begun before the assault. Kneeling once more beside the wounded gunner who stood leaning against the wheel of the gun carriage, the boy retrieved wood pieces of the splint and tied them firmly to support the damaged leg.

"Thanks, Boy. I'm sure glad we both made it so's you could put that thing on."

"Ya wait here a bit," Duane instructed. "I'll git ma horse 'n ya kin lean on him ta be leavin this place."

The boy limped off to the underbrush behind the battle line and returned shortly with Jeremiah. The horse, too, limped slightly, favoring his hind quarter where the blood had caked from his earlier wound. Duane helped some of the wounded who

could stand with assistance to join the injured gunner and hold on to either side of the horse's saddle.

As the divisions withdrew across the pike a fresh division under General Rousseau moved forward to strengthen the right wing of the Union line. Many of the wounded became separated from the rest of the army as they were gathered at the hospital which had been set up at the Blanton house along the north side of the pike.

Duane assisted the wounded with his horse to find assistance at the hospital, then mounted and rode on to catch up with his retreating brigade. The sharp pain from the cut on his ankle, relieved from the weight of walking, became a dull throb as the foot relaxed in the stirrup. The boy became aware of a dizziness in his head and the warmth of his blood seeping into his boot. It had to be cared for as soon as possible.

An hour before noon the division was finally pulled out of combat to resupply cartridge boxes. Duane took the opportunity to attend to his wounded ankle and to reload his spent cylinders. They were back within the hour, just behind the front point of the Union center. General Rosecrans had directed the artillery to the high ground behind the center and the infantry brigades to support the line to the right of center.

All along the new right line which had been folded back at right angle to the center and in line with the Wilkinson Turnpike, the Confederate Army continued to press the attack. The Union Army had withdrawn from the roadway to the protection of dense cedar forest.

Near the corner where the center of the Federal front met the right wing, Duane found himself in heavy combat once more. Confederate re-inforcements were brought up for a charge on the center. Federal cannon on the high ground and the line of infantry poured such a concentration of shot and shell into the attacking regiments as to tear them to shreds. More than half were cut down on the field without ever reaching the Union line.

At about one o'clock there was a lull in the battle while General Bragg maneuvered troops for yet another charge. General Rosecrans took the opportunity to mass all available cannon on the high point. A heavy Confederate fire from artillery was kept up through the lull in the fighting and the non-combatants were kept occupied in their attempts to aid the wounded.

By mid afternoon a quiet began to settle along the right. The field of battle was littered with piles of dead and wounded where charge after Confederate charge had fallen, one atop the other. The Union line stood ready, but the enemy was tired. All attention was on preparations to attack the Union center.

It was nearly four in the afternoon when the Confederate Army moved on the center. Attacking in two waves, they were torn apart first by the massed artillery, then broken and stopped by scathing infantry fire at close range.

Daylight faded. The conflict ended. The armies ceased hostilities.

Rations were short in the Federal Army. Most of the supply trains had been delayed. Soldiers ate what little they carried with them if they chose to eat at all. Many settled for coffee and perhaps some hardtack, dunked to soften.

For Duane, it was a lonely night. Hundreds had been lost from the brigade. His friends were among the missing. He huddled by a large fire where many from the regiment had gathered for warmth. In the gathering darkness a cold wind came up and it began to rain. The distant night was filled with the moans, the screams, the pleadings of the wounded and the dying. Some begged for help, for a warm fire, for water. Others called for their mothers, begged for God's mercy, pleaded for someone to end their suffering.

Inside, the boy ached with worry for Johnny and the lieutenant. He guessed they were busy with wounded, probably in one of the hospitals scattered across the field of battle. They could be hurt or dead, but that wasn't too likely. Pulling his overcoat up at the collar, he opened his blanket and draped it across his head and shoulders to help keep off the rain and keep in some warmth. The weight of the blanket folded the brim of his hat down around his ears. He huddled closer to the fire's heat. The movement reminded him of his aching ankle. Pain had been overcome for the most part by numbing cold. Yet, still, movement brought it back in a dull, subtle reminder.

The first hours after sundown had been quiet as the stunned soldiers of the army recovered from the shock of battle and their officers contemplated what to do next. A new kind of effort began behind the lines as supply wagons were loaded with the wounded and sent back to Nashville in long trains to deliver the casualties and return with food and other supplies. Preparations were begun to regroup the army and redeploy the lines to prepare for the expected attack from the Confederate Army on the following morning.

A figure approached the fire from the darkness.

"It's the general," someone advised quietly.

The men stood respectfully.

"Who?" another asked.

"General Rosecrans."

The officer approached. "Good evening," he greeted.

"Evening, Sir," several replied.

"You're my men," the general began as he put his hand on the captain's shoulder, "and I don't want you hurt. But when the enemy sees a fire this big, he figures there must be a score or two gathered there. It's a good mark for a cannon shell. You should move away or make it smaller."

"Yes, Sir."

"That's my men." He stood a moment, quietly looking over the gathering of battle-weary soldiers, then turned to go. "Stay alert. We'll be moving about during the night to be ready for them come tomorrow."

"We will, Sir," the captain saluted.

The general returned the salute and was gone.

A moment passed as the men began to knock down the fire and gather their gear. The air hissed overhead as a shell fell nearby and exploded. No one was hurt.

Captain Olson had assumed command of the brigade. Colonel Greusel had commanded the brigade and had been replaced by Major Miller. But the major had been wounded and separated from them during the day's fighting, so command had passed to the captain.

"Come on, Men," the captain ordered. "Let's break this fire down into several smaller ones and scatter them a bit."

"Captain Olson," Duane asked, "have ya learned enythin 'bout Lieutenant Marshalton 'r eny a the doctorin people?"

"I'm sorry, Dee," he explained. "Our wounded and hospitals are scattered over three miles behind the enemy lines. I don't know any more than you do at present."

"Thanks." As he spoke, the boy worked on building a fire from burning fuel out of the first.

He remembered the general lay of the land across which they had retreated. There were two hospital locations of which he was aware -- the one he'd passed and another a half mile west on along the road behind the original battle line. The waiting and the cries of the wounded were unnerving. As soon as he could, Duane slipped away to find Jeremiah, gather his gear, replenish his water, and check his medical supplies.

Duane left his comrades by the fire and started to work his way through the mass of men from the rest of the division. The horses were gathered with some of the wagons and artillery vehicles, where horse lines had been set on a treeline near a field. But as soon as he was away from the fire, the raw dampness cut through his blanket and clothing, chilling him to the bone. The boy changed his mind. He would go on foot. It would be much colder on horseback. Besides, on foot he was less likely to be seen.

Using the many fires as a guide, Duane followed the Union line to the edge of the clump of cedars. Once among the trees, he felt his way from trunk to trunk, listening to the cries of the wounded to guide him toward the field of combat. Several times he tangled in branches or brush and tripped over roots or stones. Nearing the edge of the cedar stand, he could see the fires of another troop line. It must be the other army.

The boy's foot caught on something and he fell. Landing with a thump on a cold hard mound, he felt the strange form beneath him. It was neither rock nor ground. His fingers detected frozen fabric. It was a corpse. No. It was a pile of dead, frozen together in their own blood. A sudden sickness surged through his gut and the boy vomited where he lay.

"Oh, God," he thought to himself, "I ain't never been sickened at seein soldiers hurt 'r kilt. But froze up in piles as this jest turned ma insides. I ain't feelin too good. Maybe ya could see yer way ta gittin me on ta findin Johnny an Dan. I sher would be oblidgin."

Wiping his mouth with his sleeve, Duane pulled himself back on his feet with the aid of a tree trunk, then carefully climbed across the pile of dead. He had to be nearing the earlier line of battle. Picking his way carefully so as to move away from the fires of the enemy line, the boy found his way through the stand of cedar, tree by tree. The dead were everywhere in the inky silence. Eventually Duane came out on an empty dirt road.

Listening carefully, he detected distant sounds of bivouacked troop lines and units in movement. Cautiously he proceeded down the open lane, always ready to dive into the cover of the underbrush. Judging from the earlier retreat and his initial direction to avoid the enemy, the hospital should be less than a half mile to the right.

Voices! Quickly Duane stepped into the underbrush and crouched by a rough-barked tree trunk.

"Easy, Justin," a deep voice spoke softly, "we's gonna make it. The docs'll git ya fixed."

"Jezes it hurts," a pained voice complained. "Ma head's gonna explode like as ta a cannon shell. Oh, God, jest let me die right here 'n take out this hurtin."

"Hey, Justin, we's got help ahead. Jest keep on 'n lean to ma shoulder. Yer gonna be fix'd right soon."

They were good friends, Duane thought to himself as he listened to their slow and painful passing. He had to find Dan and Johnny. They were his good friends. The voices faded into the distance. The boy returned to the road and continued on his way.

Continued rain and cold wind drove damp misery through the layers of blanket, coat, and clothing. And, oh, did that foot ache. But it was getting better. It was losing its feeling to numbness. The deepening dark of night grew gradually colder. A warm fire would be a welcome relief. Even better would be the dry inside of the hospital house or barn.

As he walked along, Duane became aware of the nearing noise of activity and talk in a large body of troops. Pausing, he searched the darkness for fires. He found them off to the right, about fifty yards in from the road's edge. A whole brigade or more, he thought. There were bound to be pickets and activity on the road.

Considering his options, the boy decided to cross to the corn fields on the opposite side of the road. He would work his way along the frozen furrows until he passed the line, then return to the road. The stalks would provide some cover. The troop line was soon behind him. But a quarter mile further, the road ended onto a crossing road. Judging from the new road's width and well-worn surface, it was a major pike of sorts.

Duane was confused. He had expected to find the hospital, not the end of the road. He was forced to make a hasty move as the sound of approaching horses signalled the rapid approach of many riders.

Crossing the pike, the boy found himself in another stand of forest. He paused in the cover of the trees to watch the passing of cavalry. It was a large Confederate

unit riding up the pike in the same direction Duane was considering to travel. He would circle through the trees instead.

The silence of the trees was quietly disturbed by a strange and eerie noise from ahead. After a couple hundred yards, Duane found himself stumbling through an area of uniformly round boulders. They were slippery with a frozen rain-slicked crusting, yet soft as though moss-covered. Picking his way carefully across the uneven terrain, Duane made slow progress.

Suddenly he lost his footing and slipped on one of the rocks. Landing hard, he lay where he had fallen, waiting to catch his breath and listening to the eerie sounds which had grown louder and more distinct. They were the wounded. There must be hundreds, maybe thousands. It sounded as though they were scattered for miles. The boy moved to get up. His hands felt a freezing slush, too sticky to be frozen rainfall. Feeling about, he realized he wasn't on a rock. It was a pile of dead soldiers, frozen in their own blood and gore, bonded to the earth on which they had fallen. The woods were full of them.

The churning in his stomach came again. But this time he fought it and it passed. Regaining his feet, Duane realized he was hopelessly lost. He was also exceedingly tired from the events of two days with little sleep. The boy determined there was nothing else to do but make the best of the situation. At least he might be able to help some of the wounded.

It was a short distance to the edge of the trees. Duane crossed a rutted lane and found himself on the battlefield of the morning's conflict. There was much more activity than he had expected. Many moved among the wounded, offering water, comforting words, an extra blanket from the dead. Most of those offering assistance were themselves wounded. Army of origin made no difference. Federals and Rebels helped each other to try and survive the misery of the night.

Duane joined the efforts. In a protected hollow among the trees he built a fire. Others joined to help.

"Nice going, Boy," a corporal spoke. "Could ya help me move some of the wounded nearer?"

"I'd be likin thet fine," Duane replied.

Building up the fire first, he took his blanket from where he had dropped it and spread it across a tree limb near the blazing warmth. The boy then helped to move several wounded to the ground near the fire. There was very little conversation among those offering aid. Each did what he could without instruction. Many fires had been built during the afternoon and evening since the fighting had shifted. Duane eventually recognized the area as the site of the morning's conflict. He was on the ridge where the Union lines had been located. The war-ravaged landscape was littered with broken pieces of artillery equipment and wagons, dead and wounded mules and horses, as well as the soldiers from both armies.

Wave after wave of charges had left layers of bodies on the open fields where they had crossed. The boy was helping a Confederate youth work through one of these piles toward a moaning from within. Prying with bayonet and musket stock, the two broke through the outer crust of frozen bodies and pulled away rigid

corpses. Somehow, a pocket of air and the thawing of the wounded man's own breathing, had offered a protected cavity for survival. Buried within was a grizzled soldier in his late twenties. His leg had been shattered by a shell fragment in the first charge and others had fallen around him, killed by the same shell. Within minutes, continued slaughter had covered him with more dead and wounded. Another was found alive and unconscious. The right side of his head was bloodied and a wound in his chest was caked with dried blood.

"Yer God's own angels," the older man whispered.

"Jest hang on," the Confederate rescuer comforted. "We gonna move ya up ta a fire."

Others came to help and the two were moved to the warmth of the fire. Duane shook the water from his blanket and covered the unconscious man with it.

As the night wore on, temporary protection from the weather was improvised by moving a wrecked limber near the fire and resting the beam of the tongue on a stack of empty cartridge cases. A second beam from a broken wagon was added to extend the rail. Then a wagon canvass was spread across and staked to form a lean-to shelter. The more serious wounded were moved into the protection of the canvass.

Blankets were gathered from the packs of the dead to help protect the living. Bandages were created from whatever fabric could be found, usually torn from the clothing of the wounded or found in among the contents of the wounded man's haversack.

Duane felt a permanent chill creep into his body. As midnight approached, he began to shiver in the dampness of his clothes. A slight cough became more persistent. And a deep sense of exhaustion began to take control of his mind and to fog his understanding of what he was doing. There were moments when he felt momentarily dazed and slipped into a brief unconsciousness. Yet it passed and he went on with his work.

The firelight dimmed as the fuel was consumed. The boy went to a broken wagon which lay unsteady on its side, resting against a fallen tree limb. Some of the broken crates within would offer good material to use for the fire.

Duane was so tired and he couldn't stop shivering. He crawled under to pull out some broken wood, but paused a moment to rest. Shaking violently from the cold, he curled up against the furthest side of the wagon bed and fell asleep.

