

# ANGEL'S GLOW

Shiloh! It is the bloodiest battle the nation had ever experienced. Men from both sides had their notions of gallantry ripped away by ragged shrapnel and hot lead in the woods of Tennessee. For Corporal Alisdair Peacock, among the torn bodies was waged another battle, one to save the stricken from their wounds. Wielding a terrible bone saw and using his pocket sewing kit, the young preacher-turned-surgeon fought through the battle and the dreadful disease-filled days that followed to stave off the reaper of death.

Against him fought the creeping malevolence that plagued armies in war throughout time called disease. But this foe was not some unseen creature in the air or water, but a bizarre man lying mere feet away among the stricken. Filled with malice, the nameless stranger killed his prey with a mere touch, spreading fevers and plagues with hateful abandon. Would Peacock discover his vengeful enemy and his wicked plans before time was out? Would he discover God's true mission for him? Would he discover the truth of the Angel's Glow?

April, 1862.

"Who are you!!??"

The slender, smooth faced man lifted his head from the dirt and wiped his hand across his face. Panting heavily, he rolled onto his back, keeping his head as low as he could. Overhead he heard the whistling zoom of bullets arcing through the air and the thud as they impacted trees or the ground nearby. Not far away he heard the incessant roar of cannons. More than all those sounds, he heard the pathetic wails of the wounded, the shrieks of those hit by every manner of death-dealing devices from rifle rounds to shrapnel to canister shot, or the desperate shouts of their comrades.

"I said, who are you!" demanded some voice from the din.

He looked to his left and saw its owner, a bearded, dirty man in brown pants, a plaid shirt, and some kind of wool hat with a wide brim. The man was leaning against the dirt bank, his rifled musket in hand, staring wide-eyed at him. An explosion mere yards away forced both of them face-first against the bank for a moment. Debris rained down, covering the two with a fine layer of powdered silt. They lifted their heads and brushed

themselves off. The old warrior raised his brow, showing he expected an answer.

"Peacock..." the slender man stammered, "A.P. Peacock."

"Not much good without a musket," replied the other man.

Peacock drew a small revolver from the billows pocket of his coat. "I have this."

"Better wait till they get close with that," replied the other man.

"I'm not here to fight," offered Peacock, "I'm a doctor."

Another explosion drove them back into the dirt. A hot piece of metal landed on Peacock's neck and he quickly brushed it off. He looked over to the other man, who was slumped over his musket. He crawled over and pushed him on his back. The man's grey eyes stared blankly into the sky, his forehead now a gaping mess. Peacock closed the man's lifeless eyes and said a quick prayer. Poking out of the man's shirt pocket he saw a slip of paper. He pulled it out and on it was written 'F. Hart, Texas'. Peacock committed the name to memory and slipped it back into the man's pocket. At least they would know who he was when they buried him.

Peacock rolled onto his stomach and lifted his head above

the bank, peering into the fog of war that had descended into the Tennessee forest. Not far away stood a log church named Shiloh. Further away lay Pittsburg Landing, where the federal army was being pushed back to the Tennessee River. Their commander was a man named Grant, but Peacock knew nothing more of him. Though he did not fully appreciate it, the battle that raged about him would soon go down in the annals of history as one of the bloodiest on the American continent, far worse than was experienced in the Revolution, the War of 1812, or even in the wars in Texas and Mexico.

A bullet whizzed by, forcing the young man back down the bank next to the dead man. Peacock regarded him, reminding himself of why he was in that part of Tennessee near the Mississippi border. He told the man he was a doctor, which wasn't exactly true. He was a seminary student, preparing to become a Methodist minister when the terrible war broke out. From Alabama, he saw it as his duty to enlist for the cause, though he wished cooler heads had led both nations in 1861. Perhaps a treaty could have been signed that would have prevented all of this.

No coward, Peacock had enlisted to fight and was a good

shot with the Enfield given to him when he joined Company F of the 27th Alabama Infantry Regiment. His first engagement was the bloody fight for Fort Donelson. He was seasoned by the bitter smell of powder, the cries of the wounded, the smoky din that overtook the doomed defenders. When that battle was over, the federal forces took him, and more than thirteen thousand of his comrades prisoner. He handed over his musket and prepared to march into some prison camp in the North.

But fate, or the Lord's blessing, gave him the opportunity to escape imprisonment as the soldiers were marched into captivity. In the cover of night, he made his way out of captivity and into unfamiliar lands in Kentucky. For more than a month he had traveled south by foot, hoping he would be able to return to his regiment. At Corinth, Mississippi, he fell in with troops there under General Johnston, a name he knew.

Unable to find another musket, Peacock acquired a small Colt pocket pistol, a 5-shot 31 caliber affair that was better than carrying a long stick. While marching northwards to surprise the federal army at Pittsburg Landing, Peacock knew that armed as he was, the only way he could fight would be to wait until one of his comrades died and pick up his musket. He doubted it would

take long.

Yet, something tugged at his soul. Perhaps he was meant for something else in this battle. During his days at seminary, Peacock had taken numerous medical courses so that he might be able to make a living while he served as a pastor. His goal was to work in the frontier woods as a circuit rider, aiding multiple flocks. As a physician, he could minister to both their spirits and their bodies at the same time. When the war started and he enlisted as a corporal, he had not finished either his medical nor spiritual training.

What he had was enough to help troops in camp and he treated many of his comrades on their march. He had gotten pretty good at it, and some of the men had started calling him Doc. It was far from the truth, but perhaps there had been a message in their words. On the way to his present destiny, Peacock decided that since he could not beg, borrow, or heaven forbid steal a musket, God wanted him to treat the wounded rather than fight. Indeed, given the grisly wounds he saw at Fort Donelson, he would certainly be fighting his own battles against the ministers of death.

So Peacock had marched into what would soon be called

the Battle of Shiloh armed only with a small revolver, filled with the steely resolve to do what he could for the wounded. Someone had to serve, to patch the men in what ways they could, and it seemed God had decided for him his role in the fierce theatre of death. He knew he would be very busy.

"You the doctor?" demanded a voice.

Peacock turned to his right. A man, out of breath from a mad dash through the withering fire, threw himself against the bank. He was dressed in a cavalryman's uniform. His face was clean-shaven and his eyes bright. In his right hand was a large revolver and a sabre hung from his left side, pinned between his body and the earthen wall. A single, large bullet hole was in the top of his rakish hat.

"I am," replied Peacock, "I'm trying to get to the aid station".

"Name's Captain Masters," replied the cavalryman, "I'm gathering men for General Breckinridge's assault to the right."

"Sir, where do I need to go?"

"You follow me," replied Masters, "We've cleared the Hornet's nest. We'll need you with us."

"Yes, sir," replied Peacock.

He followed as the officer scrambled past the earthen bank and along the edge of a fog-covered field. The sounds of battle seemed to be further away, though the woods were still filled with the crack of bullets flying through the air and the splintering of wood as they struck trees. The two had run perhaps a hundred yards when the captain suddenly jerked to the right, straightened upwards, and then crumpled to the ground. Peacock dropped beside him and rolled him onto his back. His shirt was a bloody mess and his once bright eyes now seemed dull and glassy. Peacock leaned in to listen to the man's breath and heard only one, last exhalation as the man's soul fled his broken body.

"E. Hart and Captain Masters," Peacock said to himself. A bullet impacted Masters' dead body, startling him. He looked up but could see nothing but fog. This man had said the Hornet's Nest had been cleared, wherever that was. The corporal was sure he was still in it. He scurried further into the forest, continuing in the direction the doomed Captain had led them.

The peel of a trumpet's blast through the hazy forest, distant and faint, gave him an objective. Men would rally to that call, would prepare to charge into the ranks of death. Those

whose lives did not fall into death's cold grasp would need him. As he made his way, he passed here and there the bodies of fallen men. Some were Confederate, many were from the invading federals, left behind as their comrades retreated towards the river landing. They all lay still, their bodies in cruel and bizarre contortions as if posed for a grisly portrait of the reaper of death's great deeds.

He was keeping to the edge of a grassy field when a giant blast flung him through the air like a rag doll. His body slammed into the ground, tumbled a few feet, and he lay still. *My turn*, he thought to himself and was for a moment stricken with panic. Not afraid of dying, he realized to his horror that he had nothing that would identify his body when it was discovered. He would end up in some unmarked grave, just one more pitiable soul whose family would never learn where to mourn.

Strong hands grasped his shirt and he felt himself being pulled roughly across the ground. Dazed, he felt his body as it slid into a hole or depression, the bottom of which was filled with dank water. A moment later, he felt himself being raised until his back was against an earthen mound or perhaps the bank of a stream. He opened his eyes as the ringing in his ears

began to fade.

"Surely you was saved by an angel," came a voice.

"No angel would drop him in this cursed hole," declared another, strained voice.

Peacock turned to the first voice, its owner an older, bearded man. He was a soldier, like the many he had seen, lacking any kind of uniform. His cotton trousers were well worn and caked with mud and his shirt was little different. Over one shoulder was slung a leather cartridge box while leaning against the bank was an archaic flintlock musket - presumably his.

"Name's Hiram," said the bearded man, "1st Missouri Regiment. You?"

"Peacock, 27th Alabama," he replied.

"27th?" asked Hiram, "I knew the 25th and 26th was here, but not the 27th."

"I fought at Donelson. I was captured in the surrender but managed to escape," answered Peacock to what seemed a challenge. "I was trying to unite with the 27th but fell among the Tennessee regiments at Corinth. I came to do what I could."

"What are you supposed to do?"

"I'm a doctor. I'm here to care for the wounded at the