

The Scouts of Stonewall  
A Story of the Great  
Valley Campaign  
*Book 3*

by Joseph A. Altsheler



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ISBN 978-1-933573-84-7

Revised & edited by Zeezok Publishing, LLC  
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Cover Art by Yuriy A. Yeremenko  
[www.yuriystudio.com](http://www.yuriystudio.com)

Published by:  
Zeezok Publishing, LLC  
PO Box 1960  
Elyria, OH 44036

[www.Zeezok.com](http://www.Zeezok.com)  
1-800-749-1681

*Books by Joseph Altsheler*  
*available through Zeezok Publishing, LLC*

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Lieutenant Colonel Hector St. Hilaire, Second in Command of the Invincibles.

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## Chapter 1

# In the Valley

A young officer in dingy<sup>1</sup> Confederate gray rode slowly on a powerful bay horse through a forest of oak. It was a noble woodland, clear of undergrowth, the fine trees standing in rows, like those of a park. They were bare of leaves, but the winter had been mild so far, and a carpet of short grass, yet green, covered the ground. To the rider's right flowed a small river of clear water, one of the beautiful streams of the great Virginia valleys.

Harry Kenton threw his head back a little and drew deep breaths of the cool, crisp air. The light wind had the touch of life in it. As the cool puffs blew upon him and filled his lungs, his chest expanded and his strong pulse beat more strongly. But a boy in years, he had already done a man's work, and he had been through those deeps of passion and despair which war alone brings.

A year spent in the open and with few nights under roof had enlarged Harry Kenton's frame and had colored his face a deep red. His great ancestor, Henry Ware, had been very fair, and Harry, like him, became scarlet of cheek under the beat of wind and rain.

Had anyone with a discerning eye been there to see, he would have called this youth one of the finest types of the South that rode forth so boldly to war. He sat his saddle with the ease and grace that come only of long practice, and he controlled his horse with the slightest touch of the rein. The open, frank

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1 Dirty, shabby or worn

face showed hate of nobody, although the soul behind it was devoted without any reserve to the cause for which he fought.

Harry was on scout duty. Although an officer on the staff of Colonel Talbot, commander of the Invincibles, originally a South Carolina regiment, he had developed so much skill in forest and field, and such acuteness of eye and ear, that he was sent often to seek the camps of the enemy or to discover his plans. His friends said that these forest powers were inherited, that they came from some far-away ancestor who had spent his life in the wilderness, and Harry knew that what they said was true.

Despite the peaceful aspect of the forest and the lack of human presence save his own, he rode now on an errand that was full of danger. The Union camp must lie on the other side of that little river, not many miles farther on, and he might meet, at any moment, the pickets of the foe. He meant to take the uttermost risk, but he had no notion of being captured. He would suffer anything, any chance, rather than that. He had lately come into contact with a man who had breathed into him the fire and spirit belonging to legendary heroes. To this man, short of words and plain of dress, nothing was impossible, and Harry caught from him not merely the belief, but the conviction also.

Late in the autumn, the Invincibles, who had suffered severely at Bull Run and afterward had been cut down greatly in several small actions in the mountains, had been transferred to the command of Stonewall Jackson in the Shenandoah Valley. Disease and the hospital had reduced the regiment to less than three hundred, but their spirits were as high as ever. Their ranks were renewed partly with Virginians. Colonel Talbot and Lieutenant-Colonel St. Hilaire had recovered from small wounds, and St. Clair and Langdon were whole and as hard as iron. After a period of waiting they were now longing for action.

There was some complaint among the Invincibles when they were detached from the main army to the service of Jackson, but Harry did not share in it. When he heard of the order, he remembered that dread afternoon at Bull Run when all seemed lost, and the most vivid of his memories was the calm figure riding back and forth just beyond the pines among which he stood and gathering for a fresh charge the stern ranks of his men who were to turn almost sure defeat into absolutely sure victory. The picture of the man in the heart of that red glare among the showers of bullets had been burned so deeply into Harry's memory that he could call it up, almost as vivid as life itself at any time. Surely that was a leader to follow, and he, at least, would wish to ride where Stonewall led.

But action did not come as soon as he had expected. Jackson was held by commands from Richmond. The great army of the South waited, because the great army of the North, under McClellan, also waited and temporized<sup>2</sup> while the autumn was passing fast.

But Jackson, while held in the bonds of orders, did not sleep. The most active youth of his command rode day and night toward the northern end of the valley, where the forces of the Union were gathering. The movements of Banks, and Kelly, and the other Northern commanders were watched continually by keen eyes trained in the southern forests. Slim striplings<sup>3</sup> passed in the night through the little towns, and the people, intensely loyal to the South, gave them the news of everything.

Harry had seen the whole autumn pass and winter come, and the war, save for a fitful skirmish now and then, stood at a pause in the valley. Yet he rode incessantly<sup>4</sup>, both with the others and alone, on scouting duty. He knew every square mile of the

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2 To act evasively in order to gain time or postpone a decision

3 Adolescent youths

4 Without interruption

country over a wide range, and he had passed whole nights in the forest when hail or snow was whistling by. But these had been few. Mostly mild winds blew, and the hoofs of his horse fell on green turf.

Harry was intensely alert now. He was far from his command, and he knew that he must see and hear everything or he would soon be in the hands of the enemy. He rode on rather slowly and amid continued silence. He saw on his left a white house with green shutters and a portico. But the shutters were closed tightly and no smoke rose from the chimneys. Although house and grounds showed no touch of harm, they seemed to bear the brand of desolation. The owners had fled, knowing that the sinister march of war would pass here.

Harry's mood changed suddenly from gladness to depression. The desolate house brought home to him the terrible nature of war. It meant destruction, wounds, and death, and they were all the worse because it was a nation divided against itself, people of the same blood and the same traditions fighting one another.

But youth cannot stay gloomy long, and his spirits presently flowed back. There was too much tang<sup>5</sup> and life in that crisp wind from the west for his body to droop, and a lad could not be sad long, with brilliant sunshine around him and that shining little river before him.

The thrill of high adventure shot up from his soul. He had ceased to hate the Northern soldiers, if he had ever hated them at all. Now they were merely brave opponents, with whom he contended, and success demanded of either skill, daring, and energy to the utmost degree. He was resolved not to fail in any of these qualities.

He left the desolate house a mile behind, and then the river curved a little. The woods on the farther shore came down in dense masses to the edge of the stream, and despite the lack of

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5 A sharp odor

foliage, Harry could not see far into them. The strong, inherited instincts leaped up. His nostrils expanded, and a warning note was sounded somewhere in the back of his brain.

He turned his horse to the left and entered the forest on his own side of the river. They were ancient trees that he rode among, with many drooping and twisted boughs, and he was concealed well, although he could yet see from his covert<sup>6</sup> the river and the forest on the other shore.

The song of a trumpet suddenly came from the deep woodland across the shining stream. It was a musical song, mellow and triumphant on every key, and the forest and hills on either shore gave it back, soft and beautiful on its dying echoes. It seemed to Harry that the volume of sound, rounded and full, must come from a trumpet of pure gold. He had read the old romances of the Round Table, and for the moment his head was full of them. Some knight in the thicket was sending forth a challenge to him.

But Harry gave no answering defiance. Now the medieval glow was gone, and he was modern and watchful to the core. He had felt instinctively that it was a trumpet of the foe, and the Northern trumpets were not likely to sing there in Virginia unless many Northern horsemen rode together.

Then he saw their arms glinting among the trees, the brilliant beams of the sun dancing on the polished steel of saber hilt and rifle barrel. A minute more, and three hundred Union horsemen emerged from the forest and rode, in beautiful order, down to the edge of the stream.

Harry regarded them with an admiration which was touched by no hate. They were heavily built, strong young men riding powerful horses, and it was easy for anyone to see that they had been drilled long and well. Their clothes and arms were in perfect order, and every horse had been tended as if it were

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6 Shelter; place of concealment

to be entered in a ring for a prize. It was his thought that they were not really enemies but worthy foes. That ancient spirit of the tournament, where men strove for the sake of striving, came to him again.

The Union horsemen rode along the edge of the stream a little space and then plunged into a ford. The water rose to their saddle skirts, but they preserved their even line, and Harry still admired. When all were on his own shore, the golden trumpet sang merrily again, and they turned the heads of their horses southward.

Harry rode deeper into the ancient wood. They might throw out scouts or skirmishers, and he had no mind to be taken. It was his belief that they came from Romney, where a Northern army had gathered in great force and would eventually march toward Jackson at Winchester. But whatever their errand, here was something for him to watch, and he meant to know what they intended.

The Northern troop, youths also, the average of their age not much more than twenty, rode briskly along the edge of the little river, which was a shining one for them, too, as well as Harry. They knew that no enemy in force was near, and they did not suspect that a single horseman followed, keeping in the edge of the woods, his eyes missing nothing that they did.

As for themselves, they were in the open now, and the brilliant sunshine quickened their blood. Some of them had been at Bull Run, but the sting of that day was going with time. They were now in powerful force at the head of the great Virginia valleys, and they would sweep down them with such impact that nothing could stand before them. The trumpet sang its mellow, triumphant note again, and from across a far range of hills came its like, a low mellow note, faint, almost an echo, but a certain reply. It was the answer from another troop of their men who rode on a parallel line several miles away.

The lone lad in the edge of the forest heard the distant note also, but he gave it no heed. His eyes were always for the troop before him. He had already learned from Stonewall Jackson that you cannot do two things at once, but the one thing that you do you must do with all your might.

The troop presently left the river and entered the fields from which the crops had been reaped long since. When the horsemen came to a fence, twelve men dismounted and threw down enough panels for the others to ride through without breaking their formation. Everything was done with order and precision. Harry could not keep from admiring. It was not often that he saw, so early in the war, troops who were drilled so beautifully and who marched so well together.

Harry always kept on the far side of the fields, and as the fences were of rails with stakes and riders, he was able by bending very low in the saddle to keep hidden behind them. Nevertheless it was delicate work. He was sure that, if seen, he could escape to the forest through the speed of his horse. But he did not want to be driven off. He wished to follow that troop to its ultimate destination.

Another mile or two and the Union force bore away to the right, entering the forest and following a road, where the men rode in files, six abreast. They did not make much noise, beyond the steady beating of the hoofs, but they did not seem to seek concealment. Harry made the obvious deduction that they thought themselves too far beyond the range of the Southern scouts to be noticed. He felt a thrill of satisfaction, because he was there, and he had seen them.

He rode in the forest parallel with the troop and at a distance of about four hundred yards. There was scattered undergrowth, enough to hide him but not enough to conceal those three hundred men who rode in close files along a well-used road.

Harry soon saw the forest thinning ahead of him, and then

the trumpet sang its mellow, golden note again. From a point perhaps a mile ahead came a reply, also the musical call of the trumpet. It was not an echo but the voice of a second trumpet, and now Harry knew that another force was coming to join the first. All his pulses began to beat hard, not with nervousness, but with intense eagerness to know what was afoot. Evidently it must be something of importance, or strong bodies of Union cavalry would not be meeting in the woods in this manner.

After the reply, neither trumpet sounded again, and the troop that Harry was following stopped while yet in the woods. He rode his horse behind a tall and dense clump of bushes, where, well hidden, he could yet see all that might happen, and waited.

He heard in a few minutes the beat of many hoofs upon the hard road, advancing with the precision and regularity of trained cavalry. He saw the head of a column emerge upon the road and an officer ride forward to meet the commander of the first troop. They exchanged a few words, and then the united force rode southward through the open woods, with the watchful lad always hanging on their rear.

Harry judged that the new troop numbered about five hundred men, and eight hundred cavalry would not march on any mere scouting expedition. His opinion that this was a ride of importance now became a conviction, and he hardened his purpose to follow them to the end, no matter what the risk.

It was now about noon, and the sun became warm despite the December day. The turf<sup>7</sup> softened under the rays, and the Union cavalry left an immense wide trail through the forest. It was impossible to miss it, and Harry, careful not to ride into an ambush of rear guard pickets, dropped back a little and also kept slightly to the left of the great trail. He could not see the soldiers now, but occasionally he heard the deep sound of so

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7 Surfaace layer of earth

many hoofs sinking into the soft turf. Beyond that turfy sigh no sound from the marching men came to him.

The Union troop halted about two o'clock in the afternoon, and the men ate cold food from the knapsacks. They also rested a full hour, and Harry, watching from a distance, felt sure that their lack of hurry indicated a night attack of some kind. They had altered their course slightly, twice, and when they started anew, they did so a third time.

Now their purpose occurred suddenly to Harry. It came in a flash of intuition, and he did not again doubt it for a moment. The head of the column was pointed straight toward a tiny village in which food and ammunition for Stonewall Jackson were stored. The place did not have more than a dozen houses, but one of them was a huge tobacco barn stuffed with powder, lead, medicines, which were already worth their weight in gold in the Confederacy, and other invaluable supplies. It had been planned to begin their removal on the morrow to the Southern camp at Winchester, but it would be too late unless he intervened.

If he did not intervene! He, a boy, riding alone through the forest, to defeat the energies of so many men, equipped splendidly! The Confederacy was almost wholly agricultural and was able to produce few such supplies of its own. Nor could it obtain them in great quantities from Europe as the Northern navy was drawing its belt of steel about the Southern coasts. That huge tobacco barn contained a treasure beyond price, and Harry was resolved to save it.

He did not yet know how he would save it, but he felt that he would. All the courage of those border ancestors, who won every new day of life as the prize of skill and courage, sprang up in him. It was no vain heritage. Happy chance must aid those who trusted, and, taking a deep curve to the left, he galloped through the woods. His horse, comparatively fresh after easy

riding, went many miles without showing any signs of weariness.

The boy knew the country well, and it was the object of his circuit to take him ahead of the Union troop and to the village which held a small guard of perhaps two hundred men. If the happy chance in which he trusted should fail him after all, these men could carry off a part of the supplies, and the rest could be destroyed to keep them from falling into Northern hands.

He gave his horse a little breathing space and then galloped harder than ever, reckoning that he would reach the village in another hour. He turned from the woods into one of the narrow roads between farms, just wide enough for wagons, and increased his speed.

The afternoon sun was declining, filling the west with dusky gold, and Harry still rode at a great pace along the rough road, wondering all the while what would be the nature of the lucky chance in which he was trusting so firmly. Lower sank the sun, and the broad band of dusky gold was narrowing before the advance of the twilight. The village was not now more than two miles away, and the road dipped down before him. Sounds like that made by the force behind him, the rattle of arms, the creak of leather, and the beat of hoofs, came suddenly to his ears.

Harry halted abruptly and reined his horse into some bushes beside the road. Then he heard the sounds more plainly. They were made by cavalry, riding slowly. The great pulses in his throat leaped in quick alarm. Was it possible that they had sent a portion of their force swiftly by another route and that it was now between him and the village?

He listened again and with every faculty strained. The cavalrymen were riding toward him, and they could not be a part of the Union force. Then they must be of his own South. Surely this was the happy chance of which he had dreamed! Again the great pulses leaped but with a different emotion.

Scorning every risk, he reined his horse back into the road and

rode straight forward. The heads of men were just topping the rise, and a few moments later they and the horses they bestrode<sup>8</sup> came into full view. It was a thankful thrill that shot through him now. The sun, almost sunk, sent a last golden shower across them and disclosed the dingy gray of their uniforms and the lean, tanned faces.

Uttering a shout of joy and holding up a hand to show that he was a friend, Harry galloped forward. A young man at the head of the troop, a captain by his uniform and evidently the leader, gave the signal to his men to stop and received the boy who came alone.

“Who are you?” he asked.

“I’m Harry Kenton, a lieutenant in the army of Stonewall Jackson and an aide on the staff of Colonel Leonidas Talbot, colonel of the regiment known as the Invincibles.”

“I’ve heard of that regiment. South Carolinians at first but now mostly Virginians.”

“The Virginians filled up the gaps that were made on the battlefield.”

Harry spoke proudly, and the young captain smiled. The boy regarded him with increasing interest. Somehow he was reminded of Jeb Stuart, although this man was younger, not having passed his boyhood long.

It was evident that he was tall. Thick, yellow curls showed from under the edge of his cap. His face, like Harry’s, had turned red before wind and rain. His dress was a marvel, made of the finest gray without a spot or stain. A sash of light blue silk encircled his waist, and the costly gray cloak thrown back a little from his shoulders revealed a silk lining of the same delicate blue tint. His gauntlets were made of the finest buckskin, and a small, gold-hilted sword swung from his sash.

“A dandy,” thought Harry, “but the bravest of the brave, for

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8 Sat on with legs straddled

all that.”

“My name’s Sherburne, Captain Philip Sherburne,” said the young leader. “I’m from the Valley of Virginia, and so are my men. We belong to Stonewall Jackson’s army, too, but we’ve been away most of the time on scouting duty. That’s the reason you don’t know us. We’re going toward Winchester, after another of our fruitless rides.”

“But it won’t be fruitless this time!” exclaimed Harry, eagerly. “A Union force of nearly a thousand men is on its way to destroy the stores at the village, the stores that were to be moved to a safer place to-morrow!”

“How do you know?”

“I’ve seen ‘em. I was behind ‘em at first and followed ‘em for a long time before I guessed their purpose. Then I curved about ‘em, galloped through the woods, and rode on here, hoping for the lucky chance that has come with you.”

Harry, as he spoke, saw the eyes of the young captain leap and flame, and he knew he was in the presence of one of those knightly souls thrown up so often in the war, most often by the border States. They were youths who rode forth to battle in the spirit of high romance.

“You ask us to go back to the village and help defend the stores?” said Philip Sherburne.

“That’s just what I do ask—and expect.”

“Of course. We’d have done it without the asking and glad of it. What a chance for us, as well as for you!”

He turned and faced his men. The golden glow of the sun was gone now, but a silver tint from the twilight touched his face. Harry saw there the blaze of the knightly spirit that craved adventure.

“Men,” he said in clear, happy tones, “we’ve ridden for days and days in quests<sup>9</sup> that brought nothing. Now the enemy is at

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9 Searching or pursuing something

hand, nearly a thousand strong, and means to destroy our stores. There are two hundred of you and there are two hundred more guarding the stores. If there's a single one among you who says he must ride on to Winchester, let him hold up his hand."

Not a hand was raised, and the bold young captain laughed.

"I don't need to put the other side of the question," he said to Harry. "They're as eager as I am to scorch the faces of the Yankees."

The order was given to turn and ride. The "men," not one of whom was over twenty-five, obeyed it eagerly and galloped for the village, every heart throbbing with the desire for action. They were all from the rich farms in the valleys. Splendid horsemen, fine marksmen, and alive with youth and courage, these men found no deed too great for them. Harry was proud to ride with them, and he told more of the story to Sherburne as they covered the short distance to the village.

"Old Jack would order us to do just what we're doing," said Sherburne. "He wants his officers to obey orders, but he wants them to think, too."

Harry saw his eyes flash again, and something in his own mind answered to the spirit of adventure which burned so brightly in this young man. He looked over the troop, and, as far as he could see, the faces of all were flushed with the same hope. He knew with sudden certainty that the Union forces would never take that warehouse and its precious contents. These were the very flower of that cavalry of the South destined to become so famous.

"You know the village?" said Sherburne to Harry.

"Yes, I passed there last night."

"What defense has it?"

"About two hundred men. They are strangers to the region, drawn from the Tidewater country, and I don't think they're as good as most of General Jackson's men."

“Lack of discipline, you think?”

“Yes, but the material is fine.”

“All right. Then we’ll see that they acquire discipline. Nothing like the enemy’s fire to teach men what war is.”

They were riding at good speed toward the village, while they talked, and Harry had become at once the friend and lieutenant of young Captain Sherburne. His manner was so pleasant, so intimate, so full of charm, that he did not have the power or the will to resist it.

They soon saw Hertford, a village so little that it was not able to put itself on the map. It stood on the crest of a low hill, and the tobacco barn was about as large as all the other buildings combined. The twilight had now merged into night, but there was a bright sky and plenty of stars, and they saw well.

Captain Sherburne stopped his troop at a distance of three or four hundred yards, while they were still under cover of the forest.

“What’s the name of the commander there?” he asked.

“McGee,” Harry replied. “Means well, but rather obstinate<sup>10</sup>.”

“That’s the way with most of these untrained men. We mustn’t risk being shot up by those whom we’ve come to help. Lasley, give them a call from the bugle. Make it low and soft though. We don’t want those behind us to hear it.”

Lasley, a boy no older than Harry, rode forward a dozen yards in front of the troop, put his bugle to his lips and blew a soft, warning call. Harry had been stirred by the first sound of a hostile<sup>11</sup> trumpet hours before, and now this, the note of a friend, thrilled him again. He gazed intently at the village, knowing that the pickets would be on watch, and presently he saw men appear at the edge of the hill just in front of the great warehouse. They were the pickets, beyond a doubt, because the

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10 Stubborn; headstrong

11 Pertaining to an enemy

silver starshine glinted along the blades of their bayonets.

The bugler gave one more call. It was a soft and pleasing sound. It said very plainly that the one who blew and those with him were friends. Two men in uniform joined the pickets beside the warehouse and looked toward the point whence the note of the bugle came.

“Forward!” said Captain Philip Sherburne, himself leading the way, Harry by his side. The troops, wheeling back into the road and marching by fours in perfect order, rode straight toward the village.

“Who comes?” was the stern hail.

“A troop of Stonewall Jackson’s cavalry to help you,” replied Sherburne. “You are about to be attacked by a Northern division eight hundred strong.”

“Who says so?” came the question in a tone tinged with unbelief, and Harry knew that it was the stubborn and dogmatic<sup>12</sup> McGee who spoke.

“Lieutenant Harry Kenton of the Invincibles, one of Stonewall Jackson’s best regiments, has seen them. You know him; he was here yesterday.”

As he spoke, Captain Sherburne sprang from his horse and pointed to Harry.

“You remember me, Captain McGee,” said Harry. “I stopped with you a minute yesterday. I rode on a scouting expedition, and I have seen the Union force myself. It outnumbered us at least two to one, but we’ll have the advantage of the defense.”

“Yes, I know you,” said McGee, his heavy and strong, but not very intelligent, face brightening a little. “But it’s a great responsibility I’ve got here. We ought to have had more troops to defend such valuable stores. I’ve got two hundred men, captain, and I should say that you’ve about the same.”

It was then that Captain Philip Sherburne showed his

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12 Authorative or arrogant assertion

knightly character, speaking words that made Harry's admiration of him immense.

"I haven't any men, Captain McGee," he said, "but you have four hundred, and I'll help my commander as much as I can."

McGee's eyes gleamed. Harry saw that, while not of alert mind, he was nevertheless a gentleman.

"We work together, Captain Sherburne," he said gratefully, "and I thank God you've come. What splendid men you have!"

Captain Sherburne's eyes gleamed also. This troop of his was his pride, and he sought always to keep it bright and sharp like a polished sword blade.

"Whatever you wish, Captain McGee. But it will take us all to repel the enemy. Kenton here, who saw them well, says they have a fine, disciplined force."

The men now dismounted and led their horses to a little grove just in the rear of the warehouse, where they were tethered under the guard of the villagers, all red-hot partisans<sup>13</sup> of the South. Then the four hundred men, armed with rifles and carbines<sup>14</sup>, disposed themselves about the warehouse, the bulk of them watching the road along which the attacking force was almost sure to come.

Harry took his place with Sherburne, and once more he was compelled<sup>15</sup> to admire the young captain's tact<sup>16</sup> and charm of manner. He directed everything by example and suggestion, but all the while he made the heavy Captain McGee think that he himself was doing it.

Sherburne and Harry walked down the road a little distance.

"Aren't you glad to be here, Kenton?" asked the captain in a

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13 A member of an unofficially organized body of fighters

14 A light shoulder rifle with a short barrel

15 Forced

16 The ability to do or say the most fitting thing

somewhat whimsical<sup>17</sup> tone.

“I’m glad to help, of course.”

“Yes, but there’s more. When I came to war, I came to fight. And if we save the stores, look how we’ll stand in Old Jack’s mind. He’s a strange man! You’d never take any notice of him, if you didn’t know who he was, but I’d rather have one flash of approval from those solemn eyes of his than whole dictionaries of praise from all the other generals I know.”

“I saw him at Bull Run, when he saved the day.”

“So did I. The regiment that I was with didn’t come up until near the close, but our baptism<sup>18</sup> of battle was pretty thorough, all the same. Hark! did you think you heard anything, Kenton?”

Harry listened attentively.

“Yes, I hear something,” he replied. “It’s very soft, but I should say that it’s the distant beat of hoofs.”

“And of many hoofs.”

“So I think.”

“Then it’s our friends of the North, coming to take what we want to keep. A few minutes more, Kenton, and they’ll be here.”

They slipped back toward the warehouse, and Harry’s heart began to throb heavily. He knew that Sherburne’s words would soon come true.

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17 Playful

18 Initial trial