



# The Rebel Speaks

## GOVERNMENT ANTAGONIST AND HUGENOT

I'm going to take you someplace special this Memorial Day. Someplace dear to my heart. A place where my own family was directly involved!

The clouds of winter still hang above you; it's damp and cold. Scouts pass you on the road at break-neck speed, headed for command. You start to think this doesn't look good. General Grant has come up the river on gun boats and his troops are now disembarking onto land. In the distance you can hear the crack of rifles. It has started... can't run, can't hide; you're new at this and your breakfast suddenly has enough forethought to leave and, so, leaves your body in about four or five good heaves! "Oh, well," it was just weighing you down, in case you had to suddenly retreat.

By the way, I had a Great Uncle watching this one from a perch high in a tree across the river, and a cousin said to have fired the first shot. They are there, with you now, and maybe a few of your own relatives, too... all to be in sheer terror for their lives. This is going to be a big one. The stray bullets are already tearing through the woods, artillery blowing the tops of trees out. Your division has been ordered forward at double time. Up the road you go!

Did you make sure your rifle is loaded? You've written out your will, leaving your goods to your best friend, and he to you! We're getting close now; the wounded that can be routed to medical help are now being moved in the opposite direction, to a small log church you passed this morning. Cavalry and cacons tear down the road at break-neck speed. Suddenly, a stray bullet takes a private standing next to you; he drops like a rag doll and never moves! And the question is, who's bullet was it – ours or theirs... doesn't really matter.

We're moving through the woods and, there, on the other side, a clearing... or better yet, the ground you may be buried in soon. The noise is ear-splitting: explosions, men screaming, officers yelling orders at the top of their voices, "Forward, Forward!" Your friends are dropping like flies. There is so much smoke, you can't see twenty yards. You stumble over piles of bodies; the grass that was once over one's head is cut, as with a mower. More like a .577 caliber

mower. There is no such thing as toe to toe fighting here. You aim and fire at a dark line behind a fence, across the road, now in sight. There, they are returning fire at a horrendous rate. A bullet smashes through your canteen; another takes off the end of your bayonet while you try to reload and another hits your left hand and blows off two fingers (it's a good thing God gave you some spare fingers).

It's late afternoon and you are still fighting your way forward. Then their line begins to crumble and fall in on itself. They begin to run. You wrap your hand and give chase. The day is yours! The enemy is in full retreat. The call comes to stand down. You stop and lean against a tree and, in sheer fatigue, slide down and sit. Looking up and around, thousands lie dead; it's not possible to go back the way you came, because there is no where to walk, due to of all the dead. White peach blossoms fall, like snow, upon the corpses in a surrealistic scene. Nearly sixty thousand soldiers – fathers, sons, cousins, uncles – lie in bloody heaps, torn to pieces by the machines of war. Some even recognizing the other across the line of battle, watching as they fall. Wasn't that your brother-in-law that fell?

The enemy force of twenty eight hundred has just annihilated ten thousand of your comrades during these awful hours in what used to be a peach orchard. Somehow, you are still alive. You just survived the final of ten assaults on the Hornet's Nest at the battle of Shiloh, April 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>, 1862, Savannah, Tennessee! Isn't it funny that the Hebrew word Shiloh means place of peace? Well, if you ever get a chance to go there, it is peaceful, now!

Well, time for this old Reb to ride again, The enemy is regrouping.

See you on the bridge!

P.S. That Great Uncle of mine was knocked from his perch by a cannon ball that struck the tree in which he was sitting. In two pieces, the ball still serves well as a pair of door stops to this day!

P.S.S. Have a great Memorial Day. Remember those who fell.

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