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Confederates in the Attic

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—Roy Blount, Jr., *The New York Times Book Review*

Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War



Tony Horwitz

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize

Virginia and Beyond

THE CIVIL WARGASM

War is the congress of adolescents.
—JOHN BERRYMAN, "Boston Common"

We were hurtling down the interstate somewhere near Richmond when Robert Lee Hodge poked me hard in the ribs.

"Don't farb out!" he bellowed. "You think the Yankees got any sleep at Gettysburg? On Burnside's mud march? Wake the fuck up!"

Rob clutched the wheel with one hand, wrestling a windblown roadmap with the other. Tobacco juice had dribbled down his beard and stained the collar of his butternut jacket. He'd taken off his brogans; I could smell putrid sock wool. Or maybe it was me. I groped in my sweaty blue pantaloons and pulled out a pocket watch. Ten o'clock; must be spring, 1864.

"Yellow Tavern's this exit," Rob said, tossing aside the map and swerving across two lanes of traffic. "If we don't get lost, we can see where Jeb Stuart got popped and still make Cold Harbor by lunchtime."

I'D RETURNED FROM Mississippi to a phone call from Rob, announcing that the time for our "Gasm" had come. It was June, the

days were long, and Rob had a brief window between a modeling date for a Civil War painter and a major reenactment at Gettysburg. "Are you ready to power-tour?" he'd asked.

In truth, I wasn't sure. I'd first heard about the Gasm while spooning with the Southern Guard months before. Rob and Joel Bohy, the wasp-waisted construction worker, told me how they'd first met several years ago at a Gettysburg reenactment. Striking up an instant kinship, the two decided to take a spontaneous tour of the War's eastern theater. They drew up a list of must-see sites; it ran to over thirty, many of them several hundred miles apart. Joel only had a week before returning to work in New England.

Where others might have seen a logistical nightmare, Rob glimpsed opportunity. "Everybody does the Civil War in a controlled way," he said. "We wanted something crazy." So the two set off on a high-speed trek from Gettysburg to Antietam to the Shenandoah Valley and dozens of battlefields in between. They traveled as hardcores, of course: clad in their fetid uniforms and camping on whatever battleground they happened to be near at dark. The one major concession to modernity was the car in which they raced between stops.

"We only had an hour or so at major sites and a few minutes at minor ones," Rob said. "So the whole War just washed over us at warp-speed." Fatigue heightened the thrill. "It was dreamy, religious, a holy trek." He and Joel read liturgically from soldiers' diaries and memoirs; at some battlegrounds, they scooped up clods of sacred dirt. It was Joel who had dubbed their ecstatic pilgrimage the "Civil Wargasm."

The two had vowed to repeat their hajj each summer. But after their second trip, Joel returned to Massachusetts, got a girlfriend, drifted away from the Civil War. So the next year Rob did the Gasm with another buddy. Now it was my turn. I was flattered that he regarded me as a suitable partner. But I was also apprehensive. My previous brushes with Rob's hardcore life had lasted only a day. This would last a week and come freighted with expectations. Could I measure up to the Gasm's transcendent standards? More worrisome, could I hack a week of sleeplessness and scratchy wool in Virginia's summer heat—not to mention the twenty-four-hour companionship of Robert Lee Hodge?

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On the Monday morning we'd chosen to begin our trip, I headed to Rob's apartment. He lived in the basement of his brother's place, a suburban town house beside Washington, D.C.'s beltway. Civil War gear lay strewn across the garage floor. "His brother doesn't like this stuff all over the house," Rob's girlfriend, Caroline, explained. It was easy to see why. The unwashed clothes and utensils were so rank that I was surprised his brother hadn't called an exterminator.

Rob had run off to do a last-minute errand, so Caroline offered me a cup of coffee. A comely twenty-three-year-old with oversized glasses and brilliant red fingernails, she seemed as remote from the nineteenth century as the IdentiKit town house in which we sat drinking mugs of Mr. Coffee. "I think Rob likes that his girlfriend isn't into the Civil War," she said, "because all the rest of his life is."

Caroline had first met Rob at a restaurant where he waited on her table. His long, pointed beard struck her as odd, but it wasn't until he turned up for their first date—clad in a Confederate jacket—that Caroline realized what she was in for. "I thought, 'Oh no, he's a complete dweeb,'" she recalled. "I told him, 'The Civil War may be cool to you, but for me it's, like, lots of names and dates and so what?'"

But Rob hadn't pressed his obsession on her, and gradually she came to enjoy his company—even to appreciate the Civil War. "Before, these people in the past seemed, like, not human. Something else. Now I realize they were the same as us, just in a different time." She'd gone to a few reenactments and had even sewed a rough cotton shirt for Rob. But Caroline drew the line at watching the interminable movie *Gettysburg*, in which Rob appeared as one of Pickett's men. "Anyone who just went to see it as a movie and wasn't into the Civil War, they'd like die," she said.

Rob's car pulled into the driveway. Caroline drained her coffee. "I tell friends, 'He's not as weird as he sounds,'" she said. "You just have to try hard to understand him."

"Do you?"

"A bit." She smiled. "But maybe that's because I'm a counselor for the mentally retarded."

Rob burst through the door, smiling triumphantly. "I scored some

sowbelly," he said. "This pork's so salty it'll bring tears to your eyes." He tossed the slab bacon in my lap, along with a potato and a wilted onion. "I didn't have time to make any hardtack," he added, apologetically.

I'd told Rob I wanted to go Federal this time, so he'd set aside pale-blue trousers, a checked shirt, a scrunched forage cap, and a navy-colored sack coat with a flaky yellow stain. "Some candles melted in the pocket," Rob explained. "Nice accident." Otherwise, I wasn't quite as disreputable as before, though no more comfortable. The pants were gargantuan, the jacket puny, and by the time Rob strapped on my bedroll, canteen, knapsack, tin cup and cartridge box, I felt like a snail toting an ill-fitting shell.

"I got this one in '81 and this one in '84," Rob said, tossing me brogans with huge holes in the soles. "It's peak tick season, and Lyme disease is a big problem this year. So keep an eye out."

"What about bugs?" I asked. "Have we got a tent, or a mosquito net?"

Rob frowned. "This is the Gasm, Tony. The holy of holies. Bug bites are spiritual. You're lying there listening to mosquitoes buzz in your ear, trying to sleep, and thinking, 'This is what They experienced. This is the real deal.'"

When I'd finally put on all the gear, Rob stepped back and nodded approvingly at my Union impression. "You look ready for Andersonville," he said.

Rob donned his customary Confederate rags. We made a strange pair: Johnny Reb and Billy Yank, stuffed into the front seat of my cramped sedan as we pulled into rush-hour traffic on the beltway. Glancing at the commuters in adjoining lanes, with their ties and jackets and stuporous expressions of Monday morning malaise, I felt suddenly giddy and burst out laughing.

Rob smiled, obviously feeling the same absurdist glee. "This is my true calling—a Civil War bum," he said, biting into the day's first plug of tobacco. "The Gasm's a Bohemian thing, like a Ken Kesey bus tour, except that we're tripping on the 1860s instead of the 1960s."

Actually, the Gasm struck me as a fusion of the two decades: a weird brew of road culture, rancid pork, and the quest for the elusive "period rush," the phrase hardcores used to describe the druglike high

of traveling through time. "This is day one, so I wouldn't expect too much," Rob cautioned. "But wait till we've driven a thousand or so miles with no sleep and not much to eat. Then it's goose-bump city."

For now it was mostly just city. We turned off the beltway and crawled along Route 29, known in the 1860s as the Warrenton Turnpike. Federal troops traveled this same route to Manassas in July 1861. They were trailed by politicians and picnickers who expected to see a festive afternoon spectacle that would quickly snuff the South's rebellion. Also along was William Howard Russell, a London *Times* correspondent, whose diary we'd chosen for our inaugural reading.

Russell traveled in better style than we did. Setting off from Washington in a horse-drawn carriage, he put "tea into a bottle, got a flask of light Bordeaux, a bottle of water, a paper of sandwiches, and replenished my small flask with brandy." Crossing the Potomac, Russell entered what he called "a densely wooded, undulating country" interspersed with fields of Indian corn and wooden homes skirted by slave shacks.

Today, the same route was studded with stoplights and franchise outlets: Staples, Subway, Blockbuster. Russell described our first stop, Fairfax Courthouse, as a village of forty houses girdled by gardens and fields. It now lay near the center of a suburban county of 900,000 people. Rob pulled off the road beside a few cannon aimed out at the swirling traffic. A plaque by the guns read: "This stone marks the scene of the opening conflict of the war of 1861–65, when John Quincy Marr, Captain of the Warrenton Rifles, who was the first soldier killed in Action fell 800 feet S 46 degrees W (Mac) of this spot."

Rob explained that Marr fell seven weeks before First Manassas, when his rebel riflemen encountered Union scouts. Some Southerners therefore regarded Marr as "the first Virginia martyr." But for Rob, the real significance of the site was sartorial. "We'll see Marr's uniform later on in the Gasm," he said. "His coat's olive-brown. That's because the Confederacy had weak vegetable dyes that oxidized quickly."

As we left Fairfax, Rob took out a notebook and pen, scribbling, "GASM, Day One. 10:00 A.M. John Quincy Marr memorial." Book-

keeping was a feature of the trip he hadn't told me about. "By the second or third day it all starts to blur, so you have to keep a tight record before you get totally tapped," he said.

A little later, we paused again, at a roadside plaque stating that Clara Barton "ministered to the suffering" at a hospital near this spot, now a clotted intersection. Rob scribbled in his notebook again. "Two hits in half an hour, not bad," he said. "That's why Northern Virginia's great Gasm territory. It's high density."

Since moving to Virginia, I'd often glimpsed similar markers in roadside weeds or beside petunia-pretified malls, recalling minor engagements and forgotten figures from the War: ACTION AT DRANESVILLE, THE GALLANT PELHAM, STONEWALL JACKSON'S MOTHER. It was nice to finally have an excuse to pull out of traffic and read the details. But I couldn't help wondering if we were the first in years to stop and read these signs—or at least since Rob had last passed this way on an earlier Gasm.

In late morning, we crested a low ridge and spilled into the "plain of Manassas," a broad basin whose western lip was formed by the Bull Run Mountains. At roughly the same spot, the *Times* reporter, William Howard Russell, described a landscape "enclosed in a framework of blue and purple hills, softened into violet in the extreme distance." To the Englishman, the view "presented one of the most agreeable displays of simple pastoral woodland scenery that could be conceived." These days, the view of the Bull Run Mountains was shrouded by smog and the plain had filled with one of the most disagreeable displays of suburban sprawl anyone could conceive.

Modern Manassas, a fast-growing bedroom community for Washington, was so hideous that some locals called it "Manasshole." The town had gained modern renown as the place where Lorena Bobbitt hacked off her husband's penis and tossed it in the grass outside a 7-Eleven. The town's historic railroad junction, which had caused North and South to clash here twice in the space of thirteen months, was now swaddled by miles of housing tracts, fast-food joints and car dealerships. Civil War entrenchments had been bulldozed to make way for bowling alleys, shops, offices and access roads, many of them named for the history they'd obliterated: Confederate Trail, Dixie Pawn, Battlefield Ford, Reb Yank Shopping Center.

We ran a four-mile gauntlet of neon before finally glimpsing a split-rail fence that enclosed a small sanctuary of trees and grass. This was the battlefield park, about the size of a suburban golf course. Parking at the visitors' center, we were instantly mobbed by youngsters gawking at our uniforms. "Cool," one boy exclaimed. "I didn't know you guys knew how to drive."

Rob fixed the boy with a stony rebel stare. "Didn't we drive them blue-bellies off this field, boy?" he growled. "Not oncet but twice?" The boy squealed with delight, then turned to me. I shrugged, tongue-tied, realizing what a long week it would be playing Yankee Doodle to Rob's fierce Dixie.

The boy and five others trailed us to the crest of a small knoll at the center of the park. It was here that the beleaguered Confederate, General Barnard Bee, famously declared to his broken troops, "Look men, there is Jackson standing like a stone wall!" Bee died of his wounds before anyone could ask if he meant this as praise or derision; after all, Bee's troops were fighting hard while Thomas Jackson's lay prone behind the hill's crest, holding their fire. But Jackson's men soon proved steadfast, the nickname stuck, and an equestrian statue of the famed Virginian now towered over Manassas.

"This is Arnold Schwarzenegger doing Stonewall," Rob quipped to his youthful audience, pointing to the rippling musculature of both Jackson and his steed. In real life, Rob explained, Jackson was a college professor of average stature. His horse, Little Sorrel, was described by one of Jackson's aides as "a plebian-looking little beast" whose gait was "always the same, an amble." Rob turned to me and whispered enigmatically: "We'll see Little Sorrel later in the Gasm."

From the statue we strolled to the farmhouse where a bedridden eighty-five-year-old widow, Judith Henry, became the first civilian casualty of the War when an artillery shell crashed through the roof. Beside the Henry house stood a small mound of bricks and artillery shells, dedicated in 1865, "In Memory of the Patriots who fell at Bull Run." This was believed to be the nation's first monument to Union soldiers.

First Manassas was littered with firsts, which explained why it was better known than Second Manassas, a far bloodier battle fought on roughly the same ground in 1862. First Manassas was, first of all,

the first major engagement of the War, which prompted one of the first great quotes of the conflict. When General Irvin McDowell warned Lincoln that his troops were raw and unready for battle, the president replied: "You are green, it is true. But they are green, also. You are all green alike." Northern troops proved not only green but yellow, fleeing toward Washington in a panicked retreat that William Howard Russell dubbed "the Bull Run races." To Southerners it became known as "The Great Skedaddle."

First Manassas was also the first battle where North and South adopted the annoying habit of calling the same engagement by different names. Southerners tended to name battles after nearby towns—hence, Manassas—while Northerners chose geographic features, usually a body of water: hence Bull Run, the stream on whose banks the fight began. This rule also prevailed at Sharpsburg (known to Northerners as Antietam, after a creek near the town) and Murfreesboro (Stones River), though not at Shiloh, which the South named for a log church, while Northerners originally referred to the battle as Pittsburg Landing, after a nearby docking place. Go figure.

First Manassas also marked the first use of the railroad to deploy troops for battle. Confederate reinforcements arrived in "the cars," as they were then called, just in time for the fight. And First Manassas was the first time the keening "rebel yell" was heard as Confederates burst from the woods. Rob walked our juvenile coterie to the spot where this occurred. "Since they didn't have tape recorders back then," he said, "no one knows for sure what the yell sounded like. There's at least three different versions."

"Let's hear them all!" several boys shouted.

Rob perched one foot on a cannon wheel and cleared his throat. Then he let loose a blood-curdling, full-throated caterwaul. The boys giggled and hunched their shoulders, as if spooked by a Halloween ghost. "That's one," Rob said. The second was a quick succession of high-pitched yelps, like a foxhunter's call. The third was a peculiar, apelike grunt that rose gradually into a piercing howl. "A mating call," Rob joked.

By now our small audience had swelled to a crowd, with kids imitating Rob in an unruly chorus of grunts, yips and shrieks while

their parents lobbed questions about Civil War arcana. As Rob patiently answered each query and voice-coached the children, I could see in their rapt, youthful faces a platoon of future hardcore reenactors.

It took an hour for Rob to finally break free. So we made quick work of Second Manassas, sprinting along the unfinished railroad bed where Stonewall Jackson's men threw rocks at oncoming Yankees when they ran out of bullets. We also visited a nearby field where musket fire had been so intense that lead residue still lingered in the soil. Second Manassas claimed 25,000 casualties, five times the toll at First Manassas. By the late summer of 1862, such slaughter had become almost routine.

There was a later battle of Manassas that I'd witnessed myself. A few months after my return to the United States, the Walt Disney Company unveiled plans for "Disney's America," an historic theme park within cannon-shot of the battlefield. Disney's "imagineers" concocted a fantasy Civil War fort, complete with pyrotechnic displays, "Disney's circle-vision technology," and daily reruns of the *Monitor* dueling the *Merrimack*. "It is going to be fun with a capital F!" a company spokesman exulted.

Disney's plans provoked immediate protest. Manassas lay along the *axis mundi* of Civil War remembrance, within an hour's drive of sixteen battlefields. Critics warned that the theme park would ravage this "hallowed ground" and substitute McHistory for the brutal reality of the Civil War. In the end, the park's foes prevailed in a rare triumph of high culture over low.

But as Rob and I sat in gridlocked traffic just outside the national park, the victory looked hollow; like the rebels at Manassas, preservationists had won the battle but seemed doomed to lose the war. Virtually every inch of the park we'd just visited lay within earshot of heavy traffic. At nearby Chantilly, scene of a bloody fight the day after Second Manassas, the battlefield had vanished beneath tract housing. A short way to the southwest, at Brandy Station, site of the largest cavalry battle in American history, developers planned to build a Formula One racetrack.

I felt relieved when we finally broke free from the sprawl around Manassas and drove west through Thoroughfare Gap, into the roll-

ing farmland of the Virginia Piedmont. As the azure Blue Ridge loomed before us, I dug into my pack for the second reading we'd chosen for our Gasm: Ambrose Bierce's first impression of Virginia as a young Union private in 1861. "Nine in ten of us had never seen a mountain, nor a hill as high as a church spire," Bierce wrote of his Midwestern regiment. "To a member of a plains-tribe, born and reared on the flats of Ohio or Indiana, a mountain region was a perpetual miracle. Space seemed to have taken on a new dimension; areas to have not only length and breadth, but thickness."

Rob had been raised in Ohio and shared Bierce's wonder at the scenery, though not Bierce's vocabulary. "I'm peaking," he said, gazing at the rolling hills and pastures verged by dry-stone walls. "It TKOs you, this one-two punch of history and landscape. You don't get that in Ohio, or almost anyplace outside Virginia."

For a while we drove in silence along the Snickersville Turnpike, a narrow road along which troops of both armies had marched. At one point I instinctively reached for the radio dial to hear the news; then, after a few headlines—Bosnia, the budget deficit, presidential politics—I turned it off. Our Gasm wasn't yet a day old but already I resented the intrusion of current events.

The day so far had also made me curious about Rob. I'd been struck by his rapport with the kids at Manassas and wondered who or what had sparked his own Civil War obsession as a boy in Medina, Ohio, a day's drive from anything connected to the conflict.

"Well, my name sort of marked me," Rob said. His father came from Alabama and a vague allegiance to the Confederacy had migrated with him to Ohio. So when Rob was born on Stonewall Jackson's birthday, an older brother suggested the name Robert Lee, apparently confusing the two commanders' close-by birthdays.

Rob's siblings also handed down their Sears Blue and Gray set, a collection of plastic soldiers. "They were about two inches tall," Rob recalled, "but the clothing really got me, particularly the rebels with their slouch hats and bedrolls. I used to talk to them." For his first-grade picture, Rob wore a Confederate kepi. "It was cheap," Rob said. "I was a farb back then."

Rob cut short his autobiography as we crossed the Shenandoah

River and rolled into Harpers Ferry, the scene of John Brown's famous raid on a federal arsenal in 1859. Brown hoped to arm slaves with pikes and guns and ignite a black rebellion across the South. Instead, he managed only to spark a local firefight which claimed as its first casualty a free black baggage-master, shot dead by Brown's men. Vengeful Virginians mutilated the corpses of insurrectionists killed in the raid, then tried and hanged Brown and six other survivors. It was on the gallows that Brown sealed his fame by handing a prophetic note to one of the guards: "I, John Brown, am now quite *certain* that the crimes of this *guilty* land will never be purged *away* but with Blood."

Brown, with his shovel-shaped beard and blazing eyes, had always seemed a spooky figure, and Harpers Ferry struck me as a spooky town. The main street pitched down an impossibly steep hill, dead-ending at a peninsula shadowed by sheer bluffs. An ancient, white-wash advertisement for Mennen's talcum blanched the rocky crags on one cliff, with only the gigantic word POWDER still legible.

The town's cramped streets bore the seedy cast of an unprosperous tourist trap, which Harpers Ferry had in fact been for 135 years. Merchants began hawking relics within weeks of John Brown's raid, even manufacturing pikes and selling bits of rope and pieces of wood allegedly taken from the gallows. Post-War speculators bought the engine house in which Brown and his men holed up during the raid, and carted it off to the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. Later, the engine house returned to Harpers Ferry, eventually coming to rest near its original location by the river.

Rob and I stood for a few minutes gazing at the peripatetic structure, a small brick oblong with stable-style doors and an empty cupola (Union troops swiped the bell during the War). It was dusk and the engine house and other sites were closed. We walked along the vacant streets and pressed our faces to the window of the John Brown Wax Museum: "88 Life Size Figures & Scenes. Life Story of John Brown Youth to Gallows." As we wandered back to the car, I felt oddly as though we'd broken into a museum after hours.

Driving up the hill to the modern part of town, Rob pulled over to pick up two hitchhikers with long hair, backpacks and walking

sticks. They'd just wandered off the Appalachian Trail, which snaked through the hills nearby, and were searching for a store to stock up on supplies. "It's like the Dead Zone, eh?" one of them said. As he and his friend clambered into the backseat, which was cluttered with gear—Rob's musket, sowbelly wrapped in a bandanna, a half-drained six-pack of beer—I noticed the two exchanging glances. Then one of them leaned forward and asked, "You guys part of the living history demonstrations here?"

"No," Rob said, flashing the hitchhiker one of his patented thousand-yard stares. "We're just living it."

The hiker glanced at his buddy again. "That's cool," he said.

When we'd gone less than a mile, one of the hikers announced, "You know, it's a nice evening. I think we'll hop out at that stoplight and walk it from there."

The two men dragged their backpacks from the car with a hurried "Thanks a lot, man," and sprinted down an empty side street. I recognized their paranoia from my own summers hitching around America, climbing into strangers' cars alert for any flicker of weirdness or trouble. Rob gave more than a flicker; he fairly broadcast wacko.

"What was wrong with those guys, anyway?" Rob asked, popping a beer and speeding out through the darkening town.

WE CROSSED THE POTOMAC into Maryland, as Lee's army had done after routing the Federals at Second Manassas. By carrying the War north, Lee hoped to demoralize the Union and convince Britain and France to recognize the Confederacy. He also wanted to steer the fighting away from Virginia's war-ravaged farms during harvest. But Lee's detour from his Virginia supply base forced rebel soldiers to live off the land. The Confederates who straggled through Maryland in September 1862 were as ragged as the Southern army would ever be until the last, desperate days before Appomattox.

"When I say they were hungry, I convey no impression of the gaunt starvation that looked from their cavernous eyes," Rob read from a Maryland woman's diary, as we sat by the river. "All day they

crowded to the doors of our houses, with always the same drawling complaint: 'I've been a-marchin' and a-fightin' for six weeks stiddy, and I ain't had n-a-r-thin' to eat 'cept green apples an' green cawn.'"

Unripe apples and corn caused diarrhea, draining the men still more. Many rebels also went barefoot. One Marylander described passing Confederates as a "ragged, lean and hungry set of wolves. Yet there was a dash about them that the Northern men lacked. They rode like circus riders." Rob became even more animated than usual as he read these accounts, which described the exact image of the Confederacy he sought so hard to capture in his reenacting: threadbare, famished, lice- and dysentery-ridden, yet for all that romantic.

It was ten o'clock when we reached Sharpsburg, the small Maryland town where Lee's northern push ended beside Antietam Creek, on September 17, the bloodiest day of the Civil War. Sharpsburg didn't appear much bigger now than it had been in 1862. Modest storefronts and shallow-porched houses clung to the main street. The only sign of life was an old tavern called Pete's, with a neon Coors sign flickering in the window and a Union and Confederate soldier posted on a placard by the door.

As soon as we stepped inside, I wondered if we'd made a mistake. The entire bar crowd turned to stare at us, and their gaze wasn't altogether friendly. Most of the patrons were young men with unkempt beards, cut-off T-shirts, menacing tattoos, and eyes red from hours of assault drinking and smoking. One of the men looked up from the pool table and mumbled, "Looks like we've got some Civil War boys here."

Ignoring their stares, I headed straight to the bar and studied a handwritten menu listing pickled eggs and something called a Jell-O Shooter. "What's that?" I asked the barmaid.

"A Jell-O and vodka slush," she said.

"Try one, Yank," the man beside me said. "It'll fuck you up good."

I ordered beer instead and slipped, reflexively, into the gee-whiz reporter mode I often adopted in awkward spots. "What do folks do here in Sharpsburg?" I asked my neighbor.

"Drink," he said.

"What else?"

"Fish."

I turned to the man on my other side and asked the same question. He, too, was cross-eyed from alcohol. "We fish," he said blearily. "And drink. I drank my breakfast. Lunch, too."

Rob stood a few feet away, listening to a long-haired man who wore leather chaps and a black T-shirt decorated with a skull and crossbones. The man spoke in a drunken stage whisper. "Well, Johnnie," he told Rob, "*you* can stay, but your Yankee friend has got to go." He sounded like he was teasing, but I couldn't tell for sure.

"Round here," another man barked, "we don't like the Feds."

Rob nodded approvingly. "If the government doesn't stop telling people how to live," he bellowed like a rebel of old, "there just might be another Civil War."

"Damn right! The government isn't going to take away my guns!"

"Nossir!" Rob said, slapping the man's shoulder. "Once we lose those guns, no telling what goes next."

At this point one of the bikers offered to buy us a round. Another man wanted to put us up for the night. We politely declined both offers, drained our beers, and slipped back into the Maryland night.

Relieved, I complimented Rob on his performance. He smiled and hummed "My Maryland," the wartime song that began "The despot's heel is on thy shore!" and ended "She breathes! She burns! She'll come! She'll come!" Maryland never did come—into the Confederacy, that is. But the sympathies of many of her citizens remained strongly Southern. It was a Marylander, John Wilkes Booth, who leapt onto the stage of Ford's Theater shouting "*Sic semper tyrannis!*" after having put a bullet in Lincoln's head. For the crowd at Pete's Bar, at least, sentiments hadn't changed all that much in the 130 years since.

As we drove to the edge of the battlefield park, Rob disclosed our plan of attack. We'd hike under cover of darkness to our camping spot in Bloody Lane, the sunken road where the South lost several thousand men in the space of three hours. It was a loony scheme, not to mention illegal. I knew from my visit to Shiloh that darkness didn't protect us from park rangers trolling with night-vision gog-

gles. Anyway, sleeping in a ditch that had once brimmed with Confederate dead struck me as vaguely necrophiliac.

"Don't worry, I went there with Joel," Rob said, raising the ghost of Gasms past. "I bloated in the Lane and had my picture taken, but I felt bad about it and tore the picture up. This time we'll just sleep there." As for trespassing after dark, Rob said we were actually protecting the park. "If I ever catch a vandal touching a monument or cannon, they'll wish for a ranger to come save their ass from me."

So we suited up, with our haversacks and canteens and blankets rolled and tied like sausage and slung across our chests. Rob poured a last bottle of ale into a wicker jug. "It looks so much better that way," he explained, leaving me to wonder who would appreciate this touch of authenticity as we crept through the dark.

As we set off down a road skirting the park, lightning began to flash, illuminating our path. There was also occasional traffic. Each time headlights approached, we sprinted off the road and flung ourselves in the tall wet grass, lest the passing car belonged to a park ranger or policeman or local citizen who might choose to report a Confederate and a Union soldier sneaking onto the battlefield at night. After ten minutes we were soaked and exhausted from this ludicrous exercise, which reminded me of a wretched high school football drill: running full tilt in pads and helmet and then sprawling on the fifty-yard line.

A half-mile down the road, we climbed awkwardly over a split-rail fence and bushwhacked in what Rob guessed was the direction of Bloody Lane. Night-blind, he led us straight into a tangle of brambles and barbed wire. Scratched and bleeding, we pushed on, through woods and fields and woods again. At one point, crunching through chest-high thorns and listening for Rob's tramp in the dark ahead, I began to appreciate the utter misery of marching. In some memoirs, soldiers told of welcoming battle simply as an end to the agony and boredom of another day's march. I also felt the reckless urge that soldiers so often succumbed to, shedding their gear and staggering on unburdened. And we'd only been walking an hour; in the summer of 1862, many of Lee's men marched over 1,000 miles.

"At least we're losing some weight," Rob said, dripping with

sweat. "I need to drop five pounds if I'm going to look good at Gettysburg next weekend."

We glimpsed the outline of a building that Rob recognized as Piper's Farm, a bed-and-breakfast that had served as James Longstreet's headquarters during the battle. A light still glowed inside, so we slipped through the garden and into the cornfields beyond, hoping no one would hear us or decide to let fly a barrel of buckshot.

By then, the moon had risen. As we hiked between the tall rows of corn the view opened up, with mountains silhouetted on all sides. The moon was bright enough to read by. Loose clouds and distant flashes of lightning flitted across the night sky, matching the ground-level flicker of fireflies. Rob's scarecrow frame formed a clear outline just ahead of me, with his slouch hat and pointed beard and bedroll hump-backed on his shoulder. He looked less like a Confederate than a freight-jumping hobo.

Swigging from his jug of ale, Rob turned and said, in a giddy stage whisper, "This sure as shit ain't normal." Meaning us, trespassing in the dark, searching for a corpse-haunted ditch to spend the night in. I felt the same surge of Dharma Bum glee I'd experienced that morning as we set off on the Gasm; as though I'd crawled out my bedroom window for a lark with some dissolute buddy my parents didn't approve of.

Our spirits deflated a moment later when we spotted, at what seemed an impossible distance, the observation tower that marked one end of Bloody Lane. "We've been walking the wrong way for an hour," Rob confessed. Using the tower as a guidon, we turned and marched through yet more fields and woods and over fences, stopping every few hundred yards to make sure we could still see the tower through the trees.

It was 2 A.M. when we reached Bloody Lane. The sunken road was much deeper than Shiloh's, a full man-height below ground level and fronted by a snake-rail fence. In 1862, this made it a natural trench from which the Confederates could repel wave after wave of Federal infantryman charging across an adjoining field. Eventually, the Federals seized one end of the Lane, allowing the Northerners to fire down and along its length. "We were shooting them like sheep in a pen," a New Yorker recalled. The bodies lay so thick, another soldier

wrote, that "they formed a line which one might have walked upon" without touching the ground.

This "ghastly flooring" was now covered in low grass and we unfurled our gum blankets, heavy tarps made of vulcanized rubber. I looked quizzically at Rob. "Charles Goodyear, patented 1844," he assured me. Then, lighting candles, we read aloud from our final selection for the day: the memoir of John Brown Gordon, who commanded an Alabama regiment defending Bloody Lane.

"With all my lung power I shouted 'Fire!' Our rifles flamed and roared in the Federals' faces like a blinding blaze of lightning. The effect was appalling. The entire front line, with few exceptions, went down." Gordon was shot five times at Bloody Lane, with one bullet shattering his cheek. "Mars," he later observed, "is not an aesthetic God."

Rob closed the book and snuffed out the candles. We lay on our tarps, still soaked with sweat from our long hike. A breeze came up and the sweat turned cool. Ground moisture began to leach through our tarps. The damp—and our body funk—began to attract mosquitoes. Then, around 3 A.M., came the coup de grâce: a low-lying fog from the nearby Potomac, rolling through the swales and valleys and into the Sunken Road. The temperature dropped precipitously, making it unseasonably cold, like San Francisco on a foggy summer's day.

I tossed and turned in my sodden clothes, vainly searching for a position that might afford some warmth. Spooning seemed the only hope for sleep, except that Rob—wet, wretched and writhing—looked about as comforting to hug as a sick walrus.

"This kind of night will give you a good phlegm roll, like they had in the War," he groaned.

"What's that?" I asked, not really wanting to hear the answer.

"It's when you're so congested with phlegm that you can't cough it out and it just sort of rolls around in your chest and throat. There's a guy who writes in his diary that 'when one hundred thousand men began to stir at reveille, the sound of their coughing would drown that of the beating drums.'"

Rob coughed a bit and went on, "There's also stuff in the pension rolls about pneumonia and bronchitis that made these guys miser-

able for the rest of their lives. And if your feet don't dry well after a night like this, you'll have horrible blisters. The wet skin just tears right off when you march."

At least no one was shooting at us. "I was at the National Archives the other day," Rob said, "reading about this guy who got popped in the balls and the bullet came out his sphincter. Had to wear diapers the rest of his life."

Rob droned on in this vein until he talked himself to sleep. I lay awake, afflicted by the creeping paranoia known only to 4 A.M. insomniacs—especially those camped illegally in a foggy ditch where the dead once lay in heaps. Something rustled on the grassy bank above our heads. A park ranger with infrared goggles? Why was my breath suddenly so raspy? And who was that huge white figure standing down the Lane, pointing straight at us?

I finally managed a shallow doze until dawn. Opening my eyes and peering through the still-dense fog, I realized that the specter eyeing me in the night was a tall stone soldier clutching a stone flag. Rob lay in a fetal curl and looked at me with what seemed a rare flash of hardcore self-doubt. "Sometimes I wonder how I ended up here," he moaned. "I tend to blame that Blue and Gray set from Sears."

Not wanting to compound our crime by starting a fire on the battlefield, we decided to seek breakfast in town. The fog covered our movements as we crept back to the road, which lay only a few hundred yards from Bloody Lane, a distance we'd stretched into five miles or so during our circuitous night hike. Finding a diner that opened at 6 A.M., we perched at the counter and devoured our eggs and home-fried potatoes while studying a photographic book filled with pictures of the Antietam dead.

"These are some of the best shots you'll ever see of bloated people," Rob said. "See this guy with the puffy eyelids and the mouth all puckered? Classic bloating. The lips can't close, so they swell outward, in an O. Or they can curl in. See, here's an innie, there's an outie."

Rob soaked up some yolk with his toast and turned the page. "Look at the legs on that guy, real thick, no wrinkles in the fabric. And the pants are pinched around the groin. He wasn't that thick in real life." The man beside us glanced up from his sports page and

paid his bill. "I guess I'm intrigued by these pictures," Rob went on, "because I haven't seen corpses in real life."

The photos also offered clinical evidence Rob could use to refine his Confederate impression, live as well as dead. "The pictures are close-ups and they aren't staged, so you can study the belt buckles, the piping on their trousers, the bits of carpet that Confederates sometimes used as bedrolls. See that dead guy's canteen with the corrugated tin? It's captured Federal issue. That's the sort of solid documentary evidence of what rebels wore that you can't get anywhere else."

Mathew Brady's display of these pictures at his New York studio soon after the battle proved a pivotal event in the history of both war and photography. Visitors to Brady's gallery confronted a reality they'd often seen represented in art and print but rarely if ever in photographs. "With the aid of the magnifying glass, the very features of the slain may be distinguished," reported the *New York Times*, which likened Brady's exhibit to "a few dripping bodies, fresh from the field, laid along the pavement."

Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr., who had traveled to Antietam in search of his wounded son, glimpsed the pacifist message inherent in Brady's stark portraits of the dead. "The sight of these pictures is a commentary on civilization such as the savage might well triumph to show its missionaries," he wrote. For the first time, Holmes realized, mankind possessed images that stripped war of its romance and revealed combat for what it really was: "a repulsive, brutal, sickening hideous thing."

The military certainly understood this; after the Civil War, it censored photographs of American battle dead for almost eighty years. Not until the 1960s would the public routinely see vivid images of their own sons at war. In that sense, the TV-fueled opposition to Vietnam wound back to the pictures of the Antietam dead that Rob and I studied over coffee and eggs.

As we returned to the battlefield, I was also struck by how closely the landscape still resembled the one shown in the 1862 photographs. It was easy to align each grim portrait with the bucolic farmland across which the soldiers fell: flung promiscuously along a split-rail fence by the Hagerstown Turnpike, surrounding artillery

caissons near the Dunker church, sprawled across a cornfield where advancing troops had been exposed by the glint of their bayonets above the man-high stalks. Over 130 years later, the corn was still there, tended by descendants of the German-American family that had sown the same field in 1862.

There was one photograph in particular Rob wanted to revisit. Enlarged to wall size and hanging inside the Antietam visitors' center, it showed Confederates marching through the streets of Frederick on their way to the battle. The image was believed to be the only photograph from the entire war showing rebels on the move (rather than in camp, dead on the field, captured, or posing stiffly for a studio portrait). Though blurred and faded, the photograph—crowded with lean jaunty men in slouch hats—perfectly captured the ragged panache of the rebel army.

The photograph had inspired Rob and his fellow Southern Guardsmen to concoct a peculiar fantasy. They wanted to stage precisely the same scene, with hardcores filling the role of each Confederate pictured, right down to their equipment, expression and stance. Then, they'd position an old camera in a window and take the exact picture all over again. "That's about as close as you could ever get to Being There," Rob said.

Our own time-travel was drifting off course. We'd lingered around the battlefield for twelve hours, a veritable epoch by Gasm standards. And Antietam was what Rob called "early war"; we still had the rest of '62 and the first half of '63 to tour in what remained of the day. This meant speeding several hours south to central Virginia, where most of the action occurred in the eight months following Antietam.

As we drove back across the Potomac, Rob took out his notebook and updated the list of stops we'd made so far. "We're up to ten, if we count First and Second Manassas as separate hits," he said. "Not too bad for the first twenty-four hours."

MIDWAY THROUGH the long morning drive, Rob twiddled the radio dial until he found a rock 'n' roll station to keep us awake. Then, shouting over the music, he previewed the next phase of the

War, between Lee's retreat from Maryland in September 1862, and his ruinous march to Gettysburg the following June.

"These were the South's Glory Days," he said, borrowing from Bruce Springsteen. At Fredericksburg in late 1862, Lee repelled a Union invasion in one of the most lopsided slaughters of the War. Then, the next May at Chancellorsville, Lee crushed "Fighting Joe" Hooker and his 134,000 Federals, the largest army ever assembled on American soil and a force twice the size of Lee's.

Chancellorsville proved Lee's greatest triumph and also sealed the sainthood of Stonewall Jackson, who was mortally wounded while flanking the Federals—the apogee of his brief military career and ultimately that of the Confederacy's. "Stonewall was a lot like Jimi Hendrix and Jim Morrison," Rob said. "They were all peaking when they died and didn't stick around to become has-beens."

The analogy wasn't airtight. Morrison and Hendrix were sex-crazed hippies who OD'd on drugs; Stonewall was a Bible-thumping teetotaler who sucked on lemons and sipped warm water because he thought the human body should avoid extremes. But Rob was onto something. If Jackson had survived, and failed to change the course of the War, his luster might have been dulled by the South's eventual defeat. "Better to burn out than to fade away," Rob wailed, echoing Neil Young.

We were doing both by the time we reached the outskirts of Fredericksburg, which bore a depressing resemblance to Manassas. Developers had achieved what several Union generals never could, conquering Fredericksburg and littering the elegant colonial town with acres of modern crud. As we crawled along Jeff Davis Highway, past a shopping mall called Lee's Plaza, Rob scanned the ranks of franchise restaurants. "Fast food's one of the compromises you make on the Gasm, in the interest of speed," he said. "When you power tour, sometimes you have to power lunch." Rob ticked off our options, slotting in his own tags for all the familiar names. "Toxic Hell," he said, pointing at a Taco Bell. Then came "Pizza Slut." Arby's, inevitably, became "Farby's." We settled for the drive-thru window at Hardee's, which at least bore the name of a rebel general in the Army of Tennessee.

Lunch made us even drowsier, so we decided to do what Rob

called "a drive-by hit" on Fredericksburg (appropriately, an urban battle fought partly at night). Then we headed to Chancellorsville, ten miles west of town. In 1863, Chancellorsville wasn't a ville at all, just an inn called the Chancellor House located at the intersection of the Orange Turnpike and a plank road (literally, wooden planks nailed to logs laid over the mud). The battle also formed the unnamed backdrop to *The Red Badge of Courage*, in which Stephen Crane described a landscape of "little fields girted and squeezed by a forest."

Now, Chancellorsville was slowly being sucked into the maw of greater Fredericksburg, with subdivisions and faux plantation houses poking through the trees at every turn. The Park Service oversaw only a fraction of the vast battleground; earlier in the century, the government had been slow to acquire land near Chancellorsville, arousing suspicions that it wasn't eager to commemorate the most resounding of Southern triumphs.

Now, every inch not formally protected by law appeared slated for ruin. The local paper reported that a company called Fas Mart planned to build a gas station and convenience store on the spot where Stonewall Jackson turned the Confederate army in the famous flanking maneuver that won the day for the South. The irony was unintended—a Fas Mart supplanting Jackson's fast march—but the neglect of history was not. "It's just a handful of people concerned about the battlefields," the county supervisor told the newspaper, defending Fas Mart in the name of "property rights."

Near the center of the sprawl-pocked battlefield, we turned in at the small visitors' center. Rob told the ranger behind the desk, "We want to see everything relating to Stonewall Jackson's getting popped." The ranger interpreted Rob's question in narrowly anatomical terms. "All we have here is Stonewall's arm," he said. "The rest of him's in Lexington, along with his horse."

I caught Rob's eye. *Stonewall's arm*? We knew, of course, that surgeons amputated Jackson's shattered arm near Chancellorsville. But nowhere in the visitors' guide was there any hint that the sacred limb still resided on the premises.

"We don't really tell people about it," the ranger explained, "un-

less they specifically ask." Then he pulled a map from beneath the desk and showed us how to reach the arm's burial ground, on private property a short drive west. "You may find some lemons lying around," the ranger added.

Just outside the visitors' center stood a monument marking the site of Jackson's wounding, at the climax of his triumph on May 2. After a day-long march around Hooker's huge force, Jackson's men crashed out of the woods shortly before sunset and demolished the Union flank. At nightfall, as the Union fell back in disarray, Jackson galloped ahead of his lines to reconnoiter the enemy and judge whether to press the attack by moonlight. He was riding back through the dark woods when North Carolina pickets mistook his entourage for Union cavalry. "Pour it to them, boys!" an officer shouted. The volley struck Jackson three times in the hand and arm and killed four of his fellow riders. Jackson, ever the dour drillmaster, allegedly declared to an aide, "Wild fire, that."

A few yards from the monument lay a large quartz boulder dragged to the site by oxen soon after the War. The lump of stone, known simply as "the Jackson rock," was somehow more eloquent than the fine Victorian statuary that usually adorned such spots. A teenager stood reverentially studying the stone. He had spiked hair, earrings in every orifice, black combat boots, cutoff camouflage shorts and a T-shirt that read: "Sex Pistols. Pretty Vacant." He looked up and nodded at Rob, and said, Punk to Grunge: "Nice threads. Where can I get some of those?" Rob gave the teenager his address and promised to send a copy of the hardcore "vendors' list" he'd mailed me when I first expressed interest in reenacting. As the teenager wandered off, Rob said he often recruited people this way. "The uniform's like a worm, it's bait on your hook. Once they nibble at it, all you've got to do is reel them in."

From the site of Jackson's wounding, we worked our way backwards in time to the pine grove where Jackson met Lee on the night before Stonewall's final march. The two generals sat onhardtack boxes beside a campfire, plotting their bold scheme to split the Southern army and send Jackson around the Union flank. Their parting the next morning, known as the "Last Meeting," was the

most sanctified of all the Lost Cause's hallowed moments, reproduced in countless prints and paintings that once adorned the homes of many Southern whites.

"We'll do all the art and mythology stuff tomorrow in Richmond," Rob said. Today's lesson was anatomy. So we drove on, stalking Stonewall's arm. Probably no limb in history was so heavily sign-posted. We passed an historical marker by the road titled "Wounding of Jackson" and another labeled "Jackson's Amputation." After Jackson's wounding, litter-bearers carried him off the field under heavy fire, twice spilling the general on the ground. Then came chloroform and the surgeon's scalpel; a tiny stump was all that could be saved of Jackson's left arm. Stonewall, characteristically, took the loss in stride. Awakening from his drugged sleep, he declared that the doctor's bone-saw had sounded "the most delightful music."

The next day, Jackson was loaded on an ambulance and taken to a farm well behind the lines. An aide, meanwhile, bundled up the severed arm and carried it to his own brother's house for burial in the family graveyard. We parked on the quiet country lane leading to the spot. Rob dug two Ambulance Corps armbands from his haversack—"to get us in the right spirit"—and we slipped them on before walking solemnly toward the burial ground, which lay at the center of a just-tilled cornfield, ringed by a small iron fence and a perimeter of gopher holes.

The graveyard was unremarkable, except for one lumpy stone with an inscription that read: "Arm of Stonewall Jackson May 3 1863." No birth or death dates, no list of accomplishments. Just date of severance. It got stranger than that. A nearby marker stated: "During a mock battle attended by President Warren Harding in 1921, Marine Corps General Smedley D. Butler exhumed the arm and reburied it in a metal box." Butler, I later learned, had heard from a local man that Jackson's arm lay buried there, and arrogantly declared, "Bosh! I will take a squad of marines and dig up that spot to prove you wrong!" He found the arm bone in a box several feet beneath the surface and repented by reburying it and erecting a bronze plaque, which had since disappeared.

It was midafternoon, we were dazed and spent, and the graveyard seemed as good a place as any to rest for a while. Rob lay with his

eyes closed while I read aloud from the books we'd picked up at the visitors' center. Amidst hagiographic retellings of Stonewall's triumphs I caught glimpses of Jackson's famed idiosyncrasy. This was a man who was fearless in battle, but so hypochondriacal that he believed eating a single grain of black pepper was enough for him to "lose all strength in my right leg." He was a stern Presbyterian who frowned on public dancing, yet loved doing the polka with his wife in their parlor. A Virginian who owned six slaves, he broke state law by teaching blacks at Sunday school. He was also a merciless taskmaster who pushed his men ceaselessly and shot deserters without remorse, yet succumbed himself to battle fatigue during the Seven Days campaign and napped catatonically through much of the fray.

"He wasn't stable. That's attractive to me," Rob said. "Plus the fact that he always won. I may be a loser but at least I was born on the same day as a winner."

The identification went deeper than that. Jackson and the "foot cavalry" he led were mostly men of humble background from the Shenandoah Valley. Jackson grew up in the hill country of what was now West Virginia and spent his youth Huck Finn-ishly; orphaned at seven, he later rode a raft down the Ohio to the Mississippi, selling firewood to passing steamers.

Rob's own family came from the same sort of modest, upcountry Southern stock. His father was born in a log house in hardscrabble hill country near Rock Creek, Alabama. A mule-trader's son, he quit school after the eighth grade and at sixteen caught a ride to Cleveland, where he arrived with \$15 in his pocket. While boarding with a Southern family, he met Rob's mother, whose clan came from Tennessee. Nine days after they married, Rob's father shipped out to fight the Japanese and returned thirty months later, shell-shocked, one of only seven men in his unit of fifty-seven to survive.

Rob's father had recently retired from selling used cars and moved with his wife to the log homestead in Alabama that his forebears had lived in for generations. "Even though I was raised in the North I feel strong ties to the South, or at least the poor part of it my family came from," Rob said. He'd been gratified to discover at the Archives that his ancestors were common farmers who owned no slaves. Such yeoman often resented the plantation gentry, who could be exempted

from military service if they owned twenty or more slaves, a loophole that prompted the famous Southern gripe: "a rich man's war and a poor man's fight."

Rob clearly cast his lot with the latter. "I like to think of myself as the average grunt," he said, peeling off his filthy socks and draping them over a gravestone to air.

We snoozed beside Stonewall's arm until the cool of the day, then trudged back to the car. The land all around us was actually twice-fought ground. Almost a year to the day after Stonewall's wounding, the North fought Lee's army again in the dense thicket just west of Chancellorsville, known as the Wilderness. In some spots, soldiers stumbled on bones of men left unburied from fighting the year before.

The Wilderness wasn't so wild anymore; apart from a few roadside exhibits, stray cannons, and trails winding into the woods, much of the battlefield had been lost to development. We followed one line of trenches until it ended abruptly at a vast, brick-walled compound with a sign that said: "Fawn Lake, An NTS Club Community."

Curious, we followed a shaded entrance road into the community, which was bordered by signs warning "security patrols in effect." Then came a guard booth. The sentry said only residents were allowed beyond this point, but he let us drive just far enough to glimpse the golf course, artificial lake and wooded homesites that lay beyond. The development was laid out along streets and cul-de-sacs named for Longstreet, Jackson, Burnside, Appomattox—the only hint that minié balls, rather than golf balls, had once sliced through the air all around here.

As we wound back out of the development, Rob pointed to rifle pits still dimly visible in the road's median strip. "I should go bloot in one of those trenches," he fumed. "I'd like these rich fucks to have to look at me every time they tee off."

I had never seen Rob so angry. He'd told me before we set off that every Gasm finds its own theme; the dispiriting leitmotif of ours, at least so far, was the devastation of Virginia's historic landscape. The Wilderness a golfers' rough; Stonewall's flank march a Fas Mart; Jackson and Lee and Longstreet now names of shopping malls and streets built on the ground over which they'd once fought.

Rob and his fellow hardcores often staged marches to raise money for the preservation of battlefields and the landscape surrounding them. But sometimes Rob thought more radical action was required. "I fantasize a lot about my buddy who has a twelve-pound Napoleon firing some solid shot at this shit," he said, as we drove past a housing development called Lee-Jackson Estates.

We pushed on, past historic markers and realtors' signs, until we reached Spotsylvania Courthouse, where Grant battled Lee a few days after the Wilderness. By May 1864, both armies had learned the grim lesson of Bloody Lane; here, the trenches twisted and turned so the defenders could "enfilade" attackers, or fire on them from several sides. The rebels also axed trees from in front of their breastworks to create a clear kill zone. Then they sharpened the felled trees and deployed them as pikelike obstacles called abatis, bristling in front of their trenches. Spotsylvania was a long way from Shiloh, where generals regarded trench digging as unmanly and demoralizing, and a short way from the Western Front in World War I.

It was also here, at a salient called Bloody Angle, that some of the most intimate and fevered killing of the entire War occurred. At dawn on May 12, Grant threw 20,000 men at the rebel line; for eighteen hours, often in heavy rain, the two sides engaged in a rare instance of prolonged hand-to-hand combat as they hacked, bludgeoned, bayoneted and blasted away at point-blank range. The attack achieved little, except some 14,000 casualties. Corpses packed the muddy trenches so densely that burial parties simply collapsed the breastworks to cover the dead.

For half an hour I listened to Rob read aloud from accounts of the carnage: "The writhing of the wounded and dying who lay beneath the dead bodies moved the whole mass. . . . Troops were killed by thrusts and stabs through chinks in the log barricade, while others were harpooned by bayoneted rifles flung javelin-style across it. . . . I never expect to be fully believed when I tell what I saw of the horrors of Spotsylvania." The horrors of it all were starting to numb me. Chancellorsville, Spotsylvania, and the Wilderness ranked three, four, and six in the list of bloodiest Civil War battles; Fredericksburg rounded out the top ten. All told, the ten-mile-square territory we'd

traversed that afternoon claimed 100,000 casualties. The writer Bob Schacochis called Civil War Virginia "the abattoir of the South." At Bloody Angle, I felt as though we lay near the center of that slaughterhouse.

Butchery on the scale that occurred around Spotsylvania was hard to grasp, even for those who committed it. Curiously, many of the soldiers' accounts described a single oak tree, almost two feet in diameter, felled in the hail of small-arms fire. After the battle, the bullet-riddled stump was featured at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia and later installed at the Smithsonian. "The death of this single tree," one historian observed, "was a way of measuring the scale of combat that surpassed understanding."

The death of a single man was also easier to grasp than the massacre of thousands, particularly if that man happened to be Stonewall Jackson. Even the nonpartisan Park Service literature referred to his death site by the name Southerners gave it: the "Jackson Shrine." As shrines went, it was modest: a small frame cottage at a sleepy rail spur called Guinea Station, where doctors sent Jackson to recover after the amputation of his arm. During the twenty-seven-mile ambulance ride, civilians lined the route, offering the wounded general fried chicken, biscuits and buttermilk.

We waited until full dark, then crept along a half-mile gravel road leading from the old railroad station to the Shrine. Except for a caretaker's house and a few dogs howling in the dark, there wasn't much to worry about. It was a fine, starry night and the A-frame cottage stood clearly silhouetted in a small clearing not far from the railroad tracks. Unfurling our bedrolls on the building's front porch, we took turns reading aloud about Jackson's final days.

At first, Jackson seemed headed for a brisk recovery. But after a few days, nausea and fever set in. Doctors diagnosed this as pneumonia, though modern physicians suspected that Jackson's falls from his stretcher at Chancellorsville may have caused internal bleeding as well. Doctors treated the pneumonia with crude measures common in that day, such as bleeding Jackson and cupping his chest with hot glass to raise a blister and draw out ill humors. But on the morn-

ing of May 10th the general's doctor informed Jackson's wife that her husband would not last the day. When she told her husband, Jackson asked the doctor for confirmation, then announced: "My wish is fulfilled. I have always desired to die on Sunday."

The scene recalled an interview with Shelby Foote I'd read, in which he talked about the deathbed rituals of the mid-nineteenth century. "When you are dying, the doctor says you're dying," Foote said. "You assemble your family around you and sing hymns and you are brave and stalwart and tell the little woman that she has been good to you and not to cry. And you tell the children to be good and mind their mother, Daddy's fixing to go away. That was called making a good death, and it was very important."

Jackson's death wasn't just good, it was sublime. After consoling his distraught wife and cuddling his newborn daughter, he declined the doctor's offer of brandy, declaring, "I want to preserve my mind, if possible, to the end." Then, as Foote told it in his narrative of the War, Jackson slipped into a deathbed delirium, "alternately praying and giving commands, all of which had to do with the offensive. Shortly after 3 o'clock, a few minutes before he died, he called out: 'Order A. P. Hill to prepare for action! Pass the infantry to the front. Tell Major Hawks—' He left the sentence unfinished, seeming thus to have put the war behind him: for he smiled as he spoke his last words, in a tone of calm relief. 'Let us cross over the river,' he said, 'and rest under the shade of the trees.'"

Bizarrely, legend held that Robert E. Lee also ordered A. P. Hill into battle from his deathbed. "Tell Hill he *must* come up," Lee said, before making his own good death by uttering, "Strike the tent." A. P. Hill was a hot-tempered, gonorrhea-wracked commander who wore a red shirt into battle and feuded with his superiors. Judging from Lee's and Jackson's last words, Hill obviously got under their skins. I wondered whether Hill reciprocated by mentioning either commander on his own deathbed.

"Don't know, but I doubt it," Rob mumbled sleepily. "Hill got waxed at Petersburg, near where Pickett was getting loaded at a fish fry while losing the Battle of Five Forks."

"Hunh?"

"We'll see it all later in the Gasm," Rob said, drifting off to sleep.

I lay awake for a while. Night erased all sign of the twentieth century, as it had at Antietam, and lying there on the wood-slat porch, a few feet from where Jackson died, I felt the mournfulness of our campsite. Eight weeks after Jackson's death, Lee's army self-destructed at Gettysburg. Southerners and Civil War buffs had speculated ever since that Gettysburg—and, consequently, the whole course of the War—might have gone differently had Jackson been there. "That old house," the English prime minister David Lloyd George observed on visiting the Jackson shrine in 1923, "witnessed the downfall of the Southern Confederacy."

Guinea Station also possessed a spare dignity that suited the man it enshrined. The cottage bore little resemblance to the grand manses of the plantation South, just as Jackson had little in common with patricians such as Lee, who hailed from one of Virginia's leading families, married into another, and spent his adult life shuttling between vast estates. Jackson, by contrast, married a minister's daughter and when she died in childbirth he married another, honeymooning each time at Niagara Falls. He settled in a modest town house near the Virginia Military Institute, where he taught until the War broke out. His professor's salary didn't allow for much extravagance, even if his Presbyterian temperament had permitted it.

My musings were interrupted by Rob, who rolled over and mumbled, "Forgot something." Then he pulled out his notebook and scribbled: "Gasm, Day Two."

- 5:30 wake up, Bloody Lane
- 6:00 breakfast at diner, look at bloaters
- 7-9:30 antietam: cornfield, dunker church, museum
- 12-1 fredericksburg (drive-by)
- 2-5 chancellorsville, wilderness, stonewall's arm
- 6-8 spotsylvania
- 10-1 jackson shrine. cosmic. read about death

We were only to May 1863, the midpoint of the War. "Get some rest," Rob said, pulling a blanket over his head. "Tomorrow we've got to do Jeb Stuart's death, plus Richmond and the rest of '64."

TOMORROW ARRIVED a few hours later when a freight train roared past, just fifty or so yards from our campsite. In the dim predawn light I peered through the windows of the cottage, which revealed itself now as a handsome weatherboard structure with a shingle roof, wide pine floors, white walls and a stark Shaker beauty. In one room stood the bed in which Jackson died, a four-poster with ropes beneath the mattress and a jack to tighten the hemp before bed (hence the phrase "sleep tight"). A clock sat on the mantel, the same one that had ticked away the last minutes of Stonewall's life. It was set to 3:15, the exact time of Jackson's death.

A year and a day after Stonewall's death, Lee's army lost its most renowned cavalryman. The site of Jeb Stuart's mortal wounding, Yellow Tavern, sounded appropriately romantic: the sort of rustic saloon where Stuart might have danced in his spurs on the night before battle. Though a teetotaler and devout Christian, like Stonewall, Stuart cultivated the image of a wanton Cavalier, with his extravagantly coiffed beard, silken yellow sash, crimson-lined cape and ostrich plume poking up from his slouch hat. Stuart spoke of his daring rides around the Union army as if they were fox chases; after one narrow escape, he declared he'd rather "die game" than accept surrender.

Stuart fell gamely enough, shot off his horse while emptying a pistol at George Custer's cavalry just north of Richmond. Only thirty-one, he quickly joined Stonewall in the pantheon of Confederate gods. But the site of Stuart's last battle seemed as elusive as the fleet horseman had been in life. The crossroads where the eponymous Yellow Tavern once stood now featured a car lot, a body shop, and a Go-Kart store. Even the name had vanished from the map. The commercial sprawl surrounding the crossroads now belonged to a Richmond suburb called Glen Allen. Apart from a roadside historical marker—perched beside the Cavalier Motel—there was no hint of the fight that claimed one of the War's most colorful and courageous figures.

Finally, after wandering a maze of cul-de-sacs and housing tracts—Jeb Stuart Parkway, Stonewall Glen, Lee's Crossing—we

found an obelisk within earshot of the interstate. Erected in 1888 by Stuart's men, the monument bore a classic paean to Southern manhood: "He was Fearless and Faithful, Pure and Powerful, Tender and True." We stood there for a few minutes, trying to conjure the gallant Cavalier over the roar of truck traffic on I-95 and the insistent pock-pock of a tennis ball from a nearby court. *Sic transit* Yellow Tavern.

Later, after talking to historians and touring other lost corners of the Civil War landscape, I began to grasp the melancholy logic of Yellow Tavern's demise and that of so many other sites. While other wars on American soil occurred largely along the frontier, the major clashes of the Civil War were mostly fought for control of rail junctions, crossroads, and river or sea ports: Manassas, Atlanta, Charleston, Chattanooga, Fredericksburg, Petersburg, and so on. During America's rapid industrialization in the fifty years after the War, many of these transportation hubs naturally grew into commercial and manufacturing centers. What highways and office blocks hadn't yet claimed, suburbs were now devouring. Only at isolated battlegrounds such as Antietam and Shiloh was there much hope of the historic landscape remaining relatively pristine.

LEAVING YELLOW TAVERN, we sidled around Richmond, as Lee and Grant had done in 1864. Once again, the armies met on ground they'd fought over before: the gentle hills and swampy streams east of Richmond, where Lee drove back George McClellan in 1862. We decided to tour only the latter campaign and headed for Cold Harbor, where the fighting climaxed in early June of 1864.

Cold Harbor wasn't actually a port and it certainly wasn't cold; on the day we visited the temperature soared to 95. Harbor was believed to be an archaic English term for a tavern, and Cold a reference to the food served there. Either that, or Cold was a corruption of coal. Or, possibly, the whole name referred to a pleasant rest stop originally known as Cool Arbor. Whatever.

The tavern had vanished along with much of the battleground, covered now in suburban homes, including one tract incongruously named Strawberry Fields. What remained was a small, peaceful glen

with Union and Confederate trenches separated by a few hundred yards of flat, almost open ground. After the Wilderness and Spotsylvania, Grant believed Lee's army was exhausted. So he ordered a Somme-style assault that he thought would crush his well-entrenched but badly outmanned foe.

His soldiers knew better. On the night before the dawn attack, one of Grant's staff officers observed: "Many of the soldiers had taken off their coats, and seemed to be engaged in sewing up rents in them. This exhibition of tailoring seemed rather peculiar at such a moment, but upon closer examination it was found that the men were calmly writing their names and home addresses on slips of paper, and pinning them on the backs of their coats, so that their dead bodies might be recognized upon the field, and their fate made known to their families at home."

At 4:40 A.M. on June 3rd, 60,000 Federals poured out of their trenches along a front of seven miles. The waiting Confederates replied with a fusillade so fierce that windows rattled in Richmond, twelve miles away. "The division in front seemed to melt away like snow falling on moist ground," a Union soldier later wrote. In a matter of minutes the Federals lost over 6,000 men. "When I got by myself where I would not be ashamed of it," a Vermont soldier wrote home after the failed charge, "I cried like a whipped spaniel [*sic*]."

Grant later acknowledged that the assault was the worst blunder of his military career. But he compounded the slaughter by leaving hundreds of wounded men howling in the hot June sun. In one of the most callous episodes of this or any other war, Grant and Lee dickered for days over the terms of gathering the wounded from between their lines. Grant didn't want to lose face by requesting a formal truce; Lee, who had none of his own troops in the no-man's-land, saw little reason to give in. As the haggling went on, Shelby Foote wrote, "The cries of the injured, who now had been three days without water or relief from pain, sank to a mewling."

Grant finally caved and called for a cease-fire. When Union litter-bearers climbed out of their trenches, four days after the assault, they found only two men still alive amongst the piles of stinking corpses. One burial party discovered a dead Yankee with a diary in his pocket, the last entry of which read: "June 3. Cold Harbor. I was killed."

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From Cold Harbor we crawled through dense traffic into downtown Richmond. The former capital of the Confederacy was now a bustling urban center of 750,000 and the tail of a megalopolis whose head lay at abolitionist Boston. But Richmond's integration into the extended "Bos-Wash" corridor was relatively recent, and the city seemed somehow more Southern than I'd expected. There was a geniality and leisure in the way people spoke and smiled at each other that resonated much more of Memphis or Charleston, a day's drive away, than of Virginia cities just a short distance north. At a diner, the waitress addressed me as "honey" and drawled the daily special: chicken and dumplings, buttermilk biscuits, fried squash. Somewhere on the stretch of I-95 we'd driven earlier in the day, we'd crossed the invisible line that still separated North from South.

Southernness branded Richmond in another, spookier way. The city was a vast cenotaph of secession, with tens of thousands of rebel graves, countless monuments, and the remains of Confederate bulwarks, armories, hospitals, prisons, old soldiers' homes. Confederate history formed such a rich humus beneath modern Richmond that the past sprouted in odd, forgotten spots, the way glimpses of pharaonic grandeur could suddenly appear amidst the chaos of twentieth-century Egypt. On a dead-end street in Richmond's predominantly black East End, we found a towering shaft modeled on Pompey's Pillar in Alexandria; a rebel perched on top, gazing out at abandoned factories, highway flyovers and downtown office towers (in one of which Jeb Stuart IV now labored as a stockbroker). At Hollywood Cemetery, Richmond's answer to Cairo's City of the Dead, a rough granite pyramid inscribed with the words "Alumni et Patriae Asto" (In Eternal Memory of Those Who Stood for Their Country) overlooked the graves of 18,000 Confederates.

In a less classical vein, a plaque on a concrete floodwall by the James River stated: "On this site stood Libby Prison C.S.A." The location of another infamous dungeon, Castle Thunder, was now a parking lot. Jeff Davis's misnamed executive mansion, the pale-gray "White House of the Confederacy," now sat in the shadow of a huge hospital complex. We skipped a tour of the house and headed instead for the much greater treasure adjoining it: The Museum of the Con-

federacy, finest of the Lost Cause's many reliquaries and the repository of captured rebel flags returned to the South by an act of Congress forty years after Appomattox.

Rob said we had time for only a fraction of the museum's exhibit. Predictably, he made a beeline for glass cases containing clothes, mostly those of the men whose lives we'd spent the past few days touring. We began by inspecting the bullet-riddled overcoat worn by John Quincy Marr, whose death site at Fairfax had been the first stop of our Gasm. "This was probably a sumac dye, light purplish gray in the original," Rob said of the coat's muddy olive hue. "Oxygen and sunlight dulled its color."

We moved to a case displaying Jeb Stuart's thigh-high boots, plumed hat, white gloves and a portrait of the general that he'd signed, characteristically, "J.E.B. Stuart/Warpath Sept. 3d, 63." Another glass box held the amputation kit used to sever Stonewall's arm, as well as an aide's jacket stained with the great man's blood. "We're starting to make those Gasm connections," Rob said reverentially. "That jacket probably passed along the porch we slept on last night. And that Black and Decker set touched the arm we napped on top of yesterday afternoon."

But Rob reserved his deepest awe for the costumes of ordinary foot soldiers: crumpled kepis, tattered brogans and pants made of homespun jean cloth. "It was basically a twilled blend of cotton and wool," Rob said, expertly studying the trouser fabric. There was also a sewing kit, called a "housewife," used by soldiers to repair their garments.

After racing through the other two floors of the museum, we sped across town to a cluster of buildings that had once comprised a Confederate Vatican: a city within a city devoted to a single faith. The enclave, spanning several blocks, embraced a former Confederate soldiers' home and veterans' hospital, the Confederate Memorial Chapel and the Confederate Memorial Institute, better known as the "Battle Abbey of the South" (an allusion to the shrine William the Conqueror built to honor the noblemen who fought with him at Hastings). The Abbey contained the most famous artistic tribute to the Lost Cause, a set of murals that mirrored the Bayeux Tapestry's telling of William's conquest of England.

Painted in the grand style by a Frenchman trained at the *École des Beaux-Arts*, the murals followed a classical conceit, equating the seasons with the brief life-cycle of the Confederacy. "Spring" celebrated the South's early successes. Stonewall sat astride Little Sorrel as soldiers marched past, waving caps and leaning forward, as though eager to do battle. "The colors are strong but Jackson's off," Rob opined.

"Summer" showed the full Confederate pantheon: Lee, Jackson, Stuart, Longstreet and a half-dozen other generals. "These guys were never all together at once in real life," Rob said. "Anyway, they look too rigid."

"Autumn," the best of the murals, featured Jeb Stuart leading a charge in full Cavalier regalia. "The total Three Musketeers look," Rob quipped. "Fluid motion, very nice." The last mural, "Winter" depicted a collapsed artillery battery with dead horses and gaunt, retreating rebels. "A bit too sentimental," Rob judged, returning to "Spring" and doing the cycle all over again.

Rob's stylistic critique surprised me. "You do any painting?" I asked him.

"It's a long story," he said. I coaxed the short version. Rob, like me, had spent his childhood doodling Civil War scenes. Unlike me, he showed real talent. In high school, he won a statewide art contest with a painting of two rebels on a covered bridge. The prize was a trip to Washington for both Rob and the painting, which went on display at the Capitol for a year. This spurred Rob to major in studio art at Kent State.

"I wanted to keep doing naturalistic Civil War scenes," he said. "My teachers wanted me to go back to finger painting. Abstract expressionism, that sort of thing. One teacher called my stuff 'cornball illustrative bullshit.' He told me I should get out of art and into something else." Rob laughed. "I took his advice. Dropped out of college and became a Civil War bum, which is more or less what I've been ever since."

Painting was a side of Rob I'd known nothing about. A more familiar talent—his flair for drama—emerged a few minutes later, when we crossed the street to the magnolia-girdled headquarters of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. The building was a

mausoleum-like hulk with small windows, a locked front door and a side entrance protected by bulletproof glass, a security camera and a tiny speaker box. Rob pressed a button and asked to come inside. A woman's voice responded that the building was open only for members.

Rob stepped back so the camera could take in his gray uniform and the outraged expression on his face. "I'm a Sons of Confederate Veterans member," he bellowed. "You're saying that just because I'm a man you can't let me in?"

A young woman in a long dress appeared at the door. "I don't want a scene here," she sighed, agreeing to give us a brief tour. She led us briskly through hushed hallways lined with glass cases. I glimpsed a soldier's Bible that deflected a bullet at First Manassas, a replica of Varina Davis's engagement ring, and a framed picture of Lee's family tree. In a side office, our guide pointed out a large doll made in the image of the UDC's founder. Then, passing a closed door, she said, "That's the room for the Children of the Confederacy."

"Is that where they cook up the questions for the catechism quiz?" I asked, recalling the contest I'd seen in North Carolina.

"I'm not allowed to say," she said. Rob also tried to engage her in conversation, with equally little success. But then, we'd been on the road for three days without a shower or a change of clothes. The few people we passed gave us a wide berth. I couldn't blame our guide for whisking us through.

At the door, I tried one last question: Was it strange, in this day and age, to be sequestered inside a shrine to the 1860s? The woman glanced over her shoulder and whispered, "Strange isn't the word. Time warp's more like it." A recent migrant from New England, the woman had answered an ad in the paper for museum work. There was no mention of the UDC. "I think the only reason they hired me is because my family's Southern Baptist." She'd been in culture shock ever since. "Up North the War's over. Not like here." She smiled thinly, shut the heavy glass door, and withdrew into her cloister.

As we sprawled beneath the shade of a magnolia tree, I complimented Rob on his acting job at the door. Rob looked at me quizzically. It turned out he *was* a Sons of Confederate Veterans

member and frequently attended the group's meetings. Somehow, I'd assumed Rob's allegiance to the Confederacy didn't go beyond the sartorial and sentimental. Many SCV members I'd met were rabid defenders of the rebel flag and reactionaries when it came to contemporary politics. As an Ohio-born art student whose personal philosophy seemed, if anything, anarchistic, Rob didn't quite fit the mold.

"I think of myself as a liberal Confederate," he said. "I want the history preserved, and I think the Confederacy's a great story about men who did incredible things. But I don't subscribe to a lot of the politics that comes with it."

"Like what?"

"Like race. I don't give a shit if my sister marries a black guy. Unless he's a farb."

Rob's comments raised a question I'd been chewing on since the start of my trip. Was there such a thing as politically correct remembrance of the Confederacy? Or was any attempt to honor the Cause inevitably tainted by what Southerners once delicately referred to as their "peculiar institution"?

The question loomed again—massively so—a few minutes later as we strolled down Richmond's most famous, or infamous, street: Monument Avenue. The boulevard was lined with statues of the Confederacy's Holy Trinity—Davis, Lee and Jackson—and of two of their ablest lieutenants, Jeb Stuart and Matthew Fontaine Maury, a naval commander and brilliant oceanographer.

Having grown up near Washington, where most residents remained oblivious to ubiquitous pigeon-spattered statues of Union generals, I'd never really understood why people made such a fuss over Monument Avenue. But as we peered up at Robert E. Lee astride a rippling steed, I was taken aback. Lee's white granite statue stood sixty-one feet. The sculptor had substituted a French hunting horse for Lee's wartime mount; Traveller was judged too slender a model for such a titanic equestrian. The other monuments were almost as imposing. And their placement on a tree-lined boulevard more than fifty yards wide gave the statues a dominating presence in what was otherwise a low-roofed residential district.

The scale of Monument Avenue also amplified the weirdness of

the whole enterprise. After all, Davis and Lee and Jackson and Stuart weren't national heroes. In the view of many Americans, they were precisely the opposite: leaders of a rebellion against the nation—separatists at best, traitors at worst. None of those honored were native Richmonders. And their mission failed. They didn't call it the Lost Cause for nothing. I couldn't think of another city in the world that lined its streets with stone leviathans honoring failed rebels against the state.

I wasn't alone in harboring such thoughts. We'd arrived in Richmond amidst a fierce debate about the first proposed addition to Monument Avenue in over sixty-five years. Arthur Ashe, the black tennis star and Richmond native, had recently died, and the city planned to honor him with a statue a few blocks from Lee and his fellow Confederates (in statue-studded Richmond, only one monument currently honored a black—Bojangles).

We learned all this from the local papers while sipping iced tea at a sidewalk cafe. "Thought I felt a tick digging into me," Rob said, groping in his trousers. With his other hand he slapped the back of his neck. "These flies seem to like me now. I must be pretty ripe." Two women at the next table got up and moved inside.

As Rob hunted parasites, I read that plans to place Ashe's statue on Monument Avenue had aroused so much opposition from both blacks and whites that city officials had backed off. They now favored several alternatives, such as putting the statue in a black neighborhood, or near a park where the young Ashe had watched whites play tennis on courts from which he was excluded. A public hearing on the issue was scheduled for later in the day.

I glanced at Rob, who was now gouging behind his ears. "Would it be correct, Gasm-wise I mean, to go to the meeting?" I asked.

Rob stroked his beard rabbinically. "I think it's kosher," he said. "As long as there's some Confederate content." The only question was what to do until the late-afternoon meeting. Rob studied our map of Richmond and circled several spots we hadn't yet toured. "More dead rebs," he said.

Hollywood Cemetery, the largest and most illustrious collection of Confederate dead anywhere in the South, was remarkably hard to find. We circled a run-down neighborhood several times before spot-

ting an oddly juxtaposed sign on the side of a building: an arrow pointing to both "Victory Rug Cleaning" and to the losers' boneyard.

The hilly burial ground held over 18,000 Confederates, many of whom had perished at Richmond's wartime hospitals. The remains of 3,000 men killed at Gettysburg were later disinterred and brought here for reburial. We found George Pickett's urn-capped grave near a weedy field filled with his men. Their graves were marked by crude stone stumps bearing only numbers and the letters CSA. "That's how they were regarded in life, too," Rob said. "How many men can you bring up? 'Fifteen thousand.' Guys like Pickett spoke that way." The crowded field of anonymous stumps reminded me of a John Berryman poem about a Civil War monument. The dead, he wrote, were "Misled blood-red statistical men."

We drove past the modest obelisk marking Jeb Stuart's grave and then to a life-sized bronze of Jefferson Davis overlooking the James River. The monument's inscription encapsulated the militant victimology that prevailed in the post-War South: "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Davis was bizarrely persecuted in death as well; his poorly embalmed body began to deteriorate before the eyes of thousands of mourners while it lay in state. At Hollywood Cemetery, Davis endured one final indignity. The bronze statue above his grave gazed for eternity directly at a memorial emblazoned with the surname of one of his foremost antagonists: GRANT (one Thomas E., not Ulysses S.).

From Hollywood we sped through another "Confederate Rest" with 17,000 graves, then to Shockoe Hill cemetery in a decayed neighborhood tucked beneath a tangle of interstates. At the graveyard's entrance stood a wrought-iron enclosure with a pattern of entwined muskets, rebel flags, kepis, and sabers. A plaque with a Jewish star stated: "To the Glory of God and In Memory of the Hebrew Confederate Soldiers Resting in this Hallowed Spot. Erected by Hebrew Ladies Memorial Association organized 1866."

The Hebrew Confederates were listed alphabetically, from M. Aaron to Julius Zark. One carried a curious addendum: "H. Gersh-

berg should correctly read Henry Gintberger." Had one of Henry's Gentile comrades got his surname wrong? Another grave was listed as anonymous. How was the man's religion known, but not his name? And why were the Hebrew Confederates buried here instead of at Richmond's other rebel graveyards?

There was no one to answer these questions, at least not in the abandoned environs of Shockoe Hill. I got the distinct sense that Rob and I were the first visitors to pass this way in months. Nor were our various city tourist guides any help. Like Charleston, Richmond seemed ambivalent about its Confederate history. Both cities paid lip service to their most prominent Civil War sites—Fort Sumter, Monument Avenue, the Museum of the Confederacy—but clearly preferred to highlight other, less controversial attractions: the arts, dining, shopping. In Richmond, this New South gloss partly reflected the city's demographics. After several decades of white flight, the city proper was now mostly black. On many of the streets we'd toured during the day, we hadn't seen a single white.

This metamorphosis, and the ambivalence I'd sensed, became even more obvious at the public hearing about Monument Avenue. A black protester stood outside City Hall with a sign saying "White Racism Lives" and a red rag tied around his leg representing "blood from centuries of oppression." Inside, Richmond's black mayor and majority-black city council sat facing some 400 residents, ranging from blacks in African dashikis to whites in blue jeans and rebel-flag ties.

I'd expected to see an urban version of the angry meeting I'd attended in Todd County, Kentucky, where white parents vented their rage over plans to change the school's rebel mascot. What I witnessed instead was a thoughtful discourse on public art, the potency of historic symbols, racial healing, and affirmative action—albeit for a deceased black male who had fled Richmond at eighteen to escape what he later called "its segregation, its conservatism, its parochial thinking."

An elderly white man in a seersucker suit and a red bow tie was one of the first to speak. His appearance and courtly drawl fit my stereotype of a stuffy Richmonder—an image that his words quickly

contradicted. "We have Monument Avenue, not Confederate War Monument Avenue," he said. "Let's change it from a fantasy to a true Monument Avenue. If we don't, we'll be saying to the world that Arthur Ashe was not good enough to be on that street."

He was followed by a retired black foreman who expressed a similar view. "We've got to do something now to get over that fight back then," he said, referring obliquely to the Civil War. "That's the only way we'll finally sort out this black/white thing."

Other blacks could barely contain the rage they felt about Monument Avenue and the decades of Confederacy-worship they'd suffered through before the civil rights struggle. For them, putting Ashe on Monument Avenue represented emotional payback, an in-your-face gesture that would salve some of the insult blacks had so long endured. "I want my hero's statue as tall as Lee's," one man shouted. "I want Ashe to be as big as all outdoors. Arthur Ashe is bigger than Lee!"

But other blacks believed Ashe would be diminished rather than exalted on Monument Avenue. "The other guys on that Avenue would have enslaved him if they could," a college student said. "Why place Ashe among men who in the 1990s would be judged nothing more than criminals?" Another man was blunter still. "Why would I want my hero on a promenade of losers?" he asked.

As the debate went on, I felt my own opinions see-saw, as the city council's obviously had since the monument was first proposed. I sympathized with those speakers who felt Richmond needed to make a symbolic break with its past by integrating Monument Avenue. But I also found myself applauding an elderly black man who proposed putting the statue in a place that might inspire black youths today, rather than in a mostly white neighborhood, haunted by Confederate ghosts, where Ashe himself would have feared walking as a child. The next speaker, though, made an equally valid point: putting Ashe's statue in a black district would perpetuate the segregation the tennis star endured in life.

Equally compelling were the arguments of several speakers who opposed the statue's placement on aesthetic and historic grounds. Ashe's twenty-four-foot likeness would be dwarfed by the sixty-one-foot-tall Lee. Also, a modern statue of a twentieth-century athlete,

clad in tennis sweats and clutching a racket, would appear informal and incongruous on a boulevard lined with nineteenth-century military men. Whatever one felt about the Confederates, their enshrinement on Monument Avenue was historic in its own right, a unique museum piece of the Lost Cause mentality.

Still others gave this rationale a political twist. "Ashe isn't a soldier and his statue will barely reach Lee's saddle," said Wayne Byrd, who headed a chapter of the Heritage Preservation Association, a pro-rebel flag group I'd encountered elsewhere in the South. "This statue will trivialize Ashe and be disrespectful of Confederate-Americans who hallow the other men on that street."

In the name of inclusiveness and sensitivity—both to Ashe's memory and to "Confederate-Americans," a heretofore neglected minority—Byrd proposed memorializing still another ignored group: black Confederates. Recent scholarship suggested that some slaves and free blacks fought in the rebel ranks, though their numbers and motivation were unclear. In effect, the Heritage Preservation Association, one of America's most politically incorrect groups, was trying to claim politically correct motives while making a gesture that was precisely the opposite. By honoring blacks who took up arms in defense of their white masters, the group had found a sly way to disassociate the Cause from slavery.

During a break, I approached Byrd in the hall and asked what he meant by the term Confederate-American. "A Confederate-American—then and now—is simply anyone who's against big government," he said. "We as Southern Americans just want to be left alone."

"Yeah, the South wanted to be left alone—to oppress people!" a long-haired man shouted.

"It was not about slavery!" a man with a rebel-flag T-shirt barked back. "It was states' rights!"

"Exactly. The right to own slaves. Tear the statues and plantations down!"

"Should we tear down the Pyramids because they were built by slaves? And what about Washington and Jefferson? They owned slaves. Should we tear down memorials to them?"

I noticed a white man in jeans and duckbill cap standing off to the

side, smoking a cigarette and shaking his head as the others shouted. Wallace Faison was a peanut farmer from a small town near the North Carolina line. "For me it's not political at all," he said quietly. "The South—we lost. I feel like I lost, too. Monument Avenue is like that last Valhalla, that spiritual place I can go. It's crazy, I can't explain it, but that's how I feel."

Back in the council chamber, we stayed to hear one more speaker, an accountant in thick glasses and a dark charcoal suit. Jim Slicer was a native of Washington, D.C., where Civil War statues were what he called "just men on horses" that no one cared about. "I've been here in Richmond for six years and I still don't get it," he said. "To me, having the principal Richmond monuments dedicated to the Lost Cause is like saying we're dedicated to no hope, no future. It's like having a monument to unrequited love."

The question for Slicer wasn't whether Ashe belonged on a pedestal beside Davis, Lee and Jackson, but rather, "Do *they* belong? Does Monument Avenue?"

As Slicer headed out of the chamber, I asked what alternative he'd propose. "I'd do the same thing with Lee and Davis that the Russians did with statues of Stalin and Lenin," he said. "Take them down or at least don't add to their ranks. Stop honoring wrong." As for Ashe, he'd propose a whole new street to celebrate the tennis star and other modern Richmonders. "Make it an avenue of the future, not the past."

He chuckled, adding, "Of course, it will never happen. This town can't shake its past. I've learned that much from my six years in Richmond."

Slicer was right. In the end, the city council reversed itself and voted unanimously to put the Ashe statue on Monument Avenue. A councilwoman explained that the gesture was a necessary evil, to exorcise Richmond's historic demons. "Ghosts still haunt us, and we haven't resolved that," she said.

FROM RICHMOND Rob and I headed to another haunted place: Petersburg, twenty-three miles south of the capital and scene of the Civil War's endgame in 1864 and 1865. It was here, after the de-

bacle at Cold Harbor, that Grant laid siege for nine months, finally breaking the Confederate defenses a week before Lee's surrender at Appomattox. By then, Lee's once-proud army had atrophied to a scarecrow band of men and boys beset by hunger, disease and desertion. Photographs of the rebel dead at Petersburg showed smooth-cheeked, shoeless youths of fourteen or fifteen, half-sunk in trench mud, among the last and certainly the most pointless casualties of a cause that would be truly lost a few days later.

At twilight, Petersburg seemed destitute and semi-abandoned. Black families crowded on the rickety porches of once-elegant antebellum homes whose original owners had likely been slaveholding whites. Parking at what we took to be downtown, Rob and I wandered past vacant factories and peanut warehouses until we came to a sign saying "Old Towne" and a few faint stirrings of commercial life. Stepping inside a New Orleans-theme restaurant, we were immediately accosted by six men seated on stools by the bar.

"Hi, I'm Jim!"

"You guys reenactors?"

"Need a beer?"

This was more than the usual Southern hospitality, particularly given our appearance and stench after three days' hard touring. We settled in beside a young, balding man named Steve. "The social life in Petersburg is so limited that it's a relief to see a face you don't recognize," he said. Steve, the city's only legal aid attorney, also explained why Petersburg seemed so derelict.

"Desegregation," he said. "The day they integrated the schools was the day a lot of whites called U-Haul." Before the civil rights movement, Petersburg was so segregated that blacks and whites swore to tell the truth in court while placing their hands on separate Bibles. Following turbulent, court-ordered school integration in 1970, whites fled en masse to a suburb called Colonial Heights—or "Colonial Whites," as Steve called it. The suburb was now bigger than Petersburg and attracted almost all the area's new development.

Left behind was a struggling city of 38,000 people, three-quarters of them black and a quarter in poverty. Petersburg's apartheid was so profound that graduates of the first integrated class at the city's

main public high school had recently held two twenty-fifth reunions: one for whites, one for blacks. Steve, who had moved to Petersburg straight after law school, planned to flee as soon as he could land a job elsewhere.

"This is the anus of the South," he said. Then, realizing he'd talked for twenty minutes straight, he asked, "What brings you guys to town?"

"Just passing through," Rob said. "We'll hit the battlefield tomorrow. Anything else to do?"

Steve drained his beer and cast a melancholy eye around the bar. "You're looking at it," he said.

Five other men looked back at us, waiting their turn to buy us a beer and cry into theirs. Rob glanced at me and tilted his head, as if to say "outta here." So we thanked Steve and headed back into the empty streets. "They should hire that guy at the local tourist bureau," Rob said.

Returning to the car, we drove past pawn shops, wig shops, and a used-car lot ("Rebates are Here. Turn Tax Refunds into Wheels!") until we reached the farmland just beyond. Rob had chosen as our campsite a small battleground named Five Forks. It was here that Phil Sheridan's cavalry broke one flank of Petersburg's rebel defenses, opening the way for an all-out Northern assault that forced Lee to abandon the city. Five Forks was also notorious as the battle during which George Pickett and his cavalry commander, Fitzhugh Lee, gorged themselves on fish and bourbon while their troops faced disaster a short distance away.

We parked by a marker for the battlefield and threw down groundsheets twenty yards off the road. Rob lit a candle and read about the battle, with emphasis on the fish lunch. "Pickett joined me about two o'clock. We lunched together on some fine shad which Dearing and I had caught in the Nottoway [River] two days before," recalled General Thomas Rosser, who hosted the meal. Another rebel officer told of finding Pickett prone under a tent, "with a bottle of whiskey or Brandy, I don't know which for I was not invited to partake of it."

Pickett finally stirred himself to join his embattled troops, but the fight was soon lost and so was Pickett's already wobbly reputation.

The incident still rankled twenty-four years later; Jefferson Davis, just before his death, wrote of "that fatal lunch as the ruin of the Confederacy."

Rob snuffed the candle and we lay in the tall grass, bone-weary from another long day of touring. Five Forks got its name from the starfish of roads that converged there in Civil War days. Unfortunately, they still did. Each time I started to drift off, headlights flickered through the trees and another car hurtled down one of the roads, usually with the windows open and radio blaring. I felt like getting up and waving a checkered flag.

After an hour, we decamped and trudged into the woods, well away from the road. As we settled gratefully onto a bed of pine needles, rain began to sprinkle down. After a few minutes it began to pour. We broke camp again and hiked deeper into the woods until we found an abandoned cabin with mud chinking and an overhanging porch with support beams that had long since rotted away. The place looked unsteady, but we were too wet and exhausted to care and huddled beneath the leaky roof until the storm ended.

"Hallelujah," Rob said, throwing down his groundcloth again. His elation lasted thirty seconds. It was a hot, steamy night and we lay in thick summer woods in wet, stinking clothes. Rob rested his head on a haversack filled with three-day-old sowbelly. Our campsite was a virtual real-estate ad for mosquitoes: STILL WATER! HUMID AIR! ROTTING MEAT! RANK SKIN!

They came in ones and twos at first, like reconnaissance aircraft, then buzzed us in swarms, dive-bombing our eyes, ears, nostrils, lips. I threw a blanket over my head but was soon so hot I had to throw it off again. Bugs instantly assaulted every inch of exposed skin. Beside me, Rob thrashed and swatted and cursed. "Fuck George Pickett and fuck his goddamn fucking shad bake!"

There was nothing to do but wait the night out, which I did with weary, circular thoughts, interrupted by moans and howls from Rob. I tried lying perfectly still, thinking about baseball, Buddhism, the names of presidents, the names of Civil War generals, the names of the last fifty movies I'd seen. I looked at my pocket watch. It was still only 2 A.M.

At some point apathy or blood loss eased me off to sleep. Waking

at dawn, I found ticks in my scalp and chigger bites lining my wrists. Rob lay with a blanket wrapped tightly around his head, his palms over his ears like the woman in Edvard Munch's *The Scream*. Momentarily deranged, I wondered if Rob might have died from his wounds. But then his muffled voice came from under the blanket. "Every time I slipped off I was in the movie *Midway*," he moaned, "with Japanese and American propellor planes taking off over and over again. I kept thinking there must be an aircraft carrier nearby." Rob threw the blanket off; his eyelids and cheeks were swollen with bites. "That was the worst night of my life," he declared. For Rob Hodge, that was saying quite a lot.

We sat silently for a while, scratching. For the first time on the Gasm we'd camped well away from humanity. The morning was misty; smoke seemed unlikely to attract attention. So we decided to risk a fire. "Anyway," Rob said, "if we don't eat this salt pork today, it'll be lethal." As opposed to merely toxic, which it no doubt was after three days in Rob's haversack. "If we cook the crap out of it," Rob assured me, "it probably won't kill us."

So I gathered sodden twigs and managed to start a smoldering fire. Rob deftly peeled away the pork's whitish skin, then cut the meat in cubes and tossed it in the half-canteen he used as a fry pan. "Sometimes you find a pig's nipple," he said, poking at the sowbelly.

Rob guessed it would take forty-five minutes to cook. I didn't feel like staring at pig meat simmering in its own grease on the off chance that a nipple might appear. So I decided to forage, as the Confederates here might have done, and hiked back out to the car. Driving down one of the five roads, I came to a village called Dinwiddie and a restaurant with a huge sign saying "That's A Burger!" I wondered, sleepily, if the food was so bad that it might be mistaken for something else.

The place was shut but a newspaper box offered the *Dinwiddie Monitor*, whose banner proclaimed: "The only newspaper that gives a hoot about Dinwiddie County." I returned to our campsite and read Rob the list of arrests in the Sheriff's Log—public drunkenness, writing a bad check, "three counts of curse & abuse"—and reports on tent revivals and family reunions, summer staples in small Southern towns.

This passed the time until Rob announced that breakfast was done. The fry pan now held a puddle of bubbling black grease with fatty chunks bobbing atop the scum. Rob poked his knife into the murk, insisting, "There's lean meat in there somewhere." Then he skewered a chunk of charred gristle and dangled it just beneath my nose. "*Bon appétit*," he said.

I peered dubiously through my spectacles and shook my head. Rob wiggled the knife. "C'mon," he coaxed, "just think of it as blackened country ham." I closed my eyes and bit. Rob stabbed another piece and popped it in his mouth. We gasped, eyes filling with tears. The meat didn't resemble meat at all; it tasted like a soggy cube of salt, soaked in grease. Rob tried a second piece but quickly spat it out.

"I bet this stuff killed more rebs than Yankee bullets ever did," he groaned. By now we'd lost all appetite for a planned second course of potatoes and onions. So Rob emptied the pan, making sure to spill grease onto his trousers and dab a bit in his beard.

THUS REFRESHED, we headed off to tour the Petersburg defenses, or what we could find of them. Fort Sedgwick, dubbed "Fort Hell" because of the constant mortar and sniper fire aimed at it, now lay beneath the franchise hell skirting town. When we stopped to ask directions, a policeman said, "Where the Kmart is, that's the approximate location." Fort Mahone, another famous rampart, had been leveled, too, and now lay beneath a Pizza Hut parking lot.

What remained of the battlefield offered an even starker preview of World War I than had Spotsylvania or Cold Harbor. During the 292-day stalemate here (roughly a quarter of the entire War), the armies constructed sandbagged bombproofs, chevaux-de-frise (porcupine-like obstacles bristling with spikes) and trip lines of telegraph wire strung between tree stumps. The Union even experimented with a precursor of the machine gun known as the Gatling gun, a multi-barreled weapon that spat out bullets with the aid of a hand crank (this was also the origin of the gangster slang "gat").

It was here, too, that the Union pulled off the boldest engineering feat of the War. Seeking to break the deadlock, Pennsylvania coal

miners burrowed a 500-foot tunnel beneath a rebel salient. Then they detonated four tons of gunpowder, literally blowing the defenders sky-high. But the Union assault that followed quickly degenerated into a gruesome folly. Advancing troops plunged straight into the huge pit the blast had created, allowing Confederates to gather round the rim and fire down at the helpless, close-packed Federals. The Union force lost 4,000 men before retreating.

The Battle of the Crater, as it became known, left a hole 170 feet across and 30 feet deep that remained clearly visible today. Before the Park Service took control of the site in the late 1960s, the depression formed part of the Crater Golf Course, with fairways and putting greens laid out across the battleground and holes named for figures from the Petersburg campaign.

Walking through the woods, we found a monument to the 1st Maine, which suffered the worst regimental loss in one action of any Federal unit in the Civil War; 632 of the 850 Maine men became casualties during a brief, futile charge. Broken beer bottles, used condoms and small glass vials now ringed the monument. A nearby plaque with a map of the charge was obscured by graffiti that said, CRACK HOUSE! Petersburg's battlefield evidently doubled as an urban park after dark.

Depressed by the scene, we headed to the visitors' center to gather intelligence about where to go next. A ranger told us that Virginia had just opened "Lee's Retreat Route," a self-guided driving tour of the rebels' 100-mile flight from Petersburg to Appomattox. At each stop along the way, roadside transmitters broadcast historical reports, which tourists could tune in on their car radios. "You just park, listen and drive on to the next stop," the ranger explained, handing us a map and guidebook.

Rob was ecstatic. "It's Gasm heaven," he crowed. "We'll score twenty hits without getting out of the car."

The first stop was a crossroads west of Petersburg called Sutherland Station. As we sat with the motor running, listening on the radio to a report about the skirmish there in 1865, a line in the guidebook caught my eye. "For a down-home experience, visit the rather eclectic museum at Olgers Store if Jimmy is around."

Olgers Store perched just across the road. At first glance, it looked typical of the dwindling stock of country stores that once dotted rural crossroads across the South: a low-slung weatherboard building with a ramshackle verandah and the words "Olgers Gro" printed on an old Pepsi sign. Just inside the screen door stood a large statue of Robert E. Lee, spray-painted a brilliant gold. A sign around its neck said, "Come on In. Everything Else has gone wrong."

We were about to do just that when a giant appeared from around the corner of the store. He toted a machete and the largest watermelon I'd ever seen. "I unveiled that statue the day the retreat route opened," he said. "You shoulda been here. Confederate blood hasn't run so high since the Battle of the Crater."

He raised his machete and hacked the huge melon into three meal-sized slices. Handing us each a piece, he settled onto the porch's sagging top step. "Hope you're not rushing off anywhere. You know what they say, 'Two weeks at Olgers Store equals any college education.'"

Jimmy Olgers was the rare person who could be called, without hyperbole, larger than life. He was, first of all, extraordinarily large: six feet six and 320 pounds, poured into gym shorts and a sleeveless T-shirt from which his arms and legs poked like huge pink tree limbs. This towering physique was matched, incongruously, with the head of a 1950s science teacher—buzzcut, square head, black-framed glasses—and the syrupy, almost purring drawl of a Southern funeral director.

Olgers did in fact work at a funeral parlor—when he wasn't preaching, composing poetry, writing a column for the *Dinwiddie Monitor*, or serving as unofficial mayor of Sutherland Station, population 1,000. But his true avocation was minding the store, which his grandfather built at the turn of the century and where Olgers himself was born. However, "storekeeper" didn't quite fit, either. Olgers Store wasn't a store anymore and to call it "a rather eclectic museum," as our guidebook had, was a bit like calling the Grand Canyon a rather big hole in the ground.

"He's exactly life-sized and made from a junk heap," Olgers said, leading us inside to look at the Goldfinger Lee. The general's

sword grip was actually a hoe handle, the hilt made from roof shingle, the scabbard a piece of muffler—all of it covered with sheet rock. Strangest of all, the statue's creator—a dissolute-looking man named Frank—suddenly materialized from behind Lee's broad-shouldered figure.

"I make everything," Frank said, "I made my teeth too." He yanked out his irregular bridgework and handed it to me as proof.

"You shoulda seen Frank the day that statue was unveiled," Olgers said. "He was so proud his head was bigger than a washtub."

I handed Frank his teeth and asked Olgers about an enormous cotton garment dangling from the rafters behind Lee's head. "Largest pair of bloomers in the world, worn by Bertha Magoo, a 749-pound lady," Olgers said. Before I could inquire further about Bertha, Olgers plunged deeper into the room to show us an old ham boiler, a whale vertebra, a section of tree limb labeled "largest pine in the world," a colonial suit and horsehair wig belonging to a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and a photograph of an extremely hideous woman.

"Juanita, my first wife," Olgers said. "She was crazy about collards, which cause gas, you know. She ate a whole pot one day. I heard the explosion in the field, but by the time I got to the house it was too late. Nothing left." He shook his head. "God I miss that woman."

Olgers started his collection as a boy, first with arrowheads and minié balls he dug up himself, then with stray items that neighbors brought by the shop. So when the store closed in 1988, Olgers turned it into a display case for all the junk he'd gathered over the years. Now, every inch of floor, wall and ceiling was festooned with bric-a-brac. "I was born here the night Hitler sent a thousand bombers against London, and slept for many a year in that corner," Olgers said, pointing at a pile of rusted tools and a bone I couldn't identify: "Jawbone of an ass," he said, moving to an adjoining room, cluttered with old lunchboxes. "Mom and Dad slept here," he said.

Olgers's parents had recently died, a month apart. "When they ran this place, it was the hub of the community," he said softly. "My momma was a doctor, not one that had gone to medical school but

one that people brought sick babies to. Folks back then didn't go to a doctor unless they were really sick. My daddy pulled teeth—I pulled a few, too. And my mother would write letters for people who couldn't write themselves."

The store had also been general in the true sense of the word, living up to its advertising sign outside: "You Name It! We Got It!" A stain on the floor marked where a fifty-gallon barrel of molasses had sat for years, beside drums of kerosene-lamp oil, tins of lard, and tubs of hogs' feet and heads. Hog parts also had hung from the walls: hog shoulders, hog jowls, hog ears.

The house specialty was souse, a concoction of congealed pig's ear and foot, shaped into a loaf and sliced like bread. "Nearest thing to God's manna on earth," Olgers said, smacking his lips. His mother also made chitlins (pork entrails, battered and fried), scrapple (a fried mush of hog scraps I'd gagged on once at a backroads diner), and a nameless mix of pigs' digits and other bits: cooked, rolled in flour, and fried with sweet marjoram.

"Whoooo Lord, it makes me squeal just to think of it," Olgers said. "The new generation, they don't know real eating, just hamburgers and pizzas." They didn't know real shopping, either. "Wal-Mart, Kmart, whatever-Mart. They and the car killed the country store. People would come here and sit and talk like they always did, but they didn't buy anything." Finally, after his family had operated the store for eighty years, Olgers was forced to shut the place down and go work at a funeral home. "The day that store closed," he said, "a whole way of life went with it."

We sat on the porch, spitting watermelon seeds and watching traffic pass on the busy new highway bypassing town. I told Olgers about my journey and asked why Southerners like himself revered the past. "Child, that's an easy question," he said. "A Southerner—a true Southerner, of which there aren't many left—is more related to the land, to the home place. Northerners just don't have that attachment. ~~Maybe that means they don't have as much depen.~~ He ~~pauses,~~ then added, "I feel sorry for folks from the North, or anyone who hasn't had that bond with the land. You can't miss something you never had and if you never had it, you don't know what it's all about."

I'd heard Southerners say this sort of thing a hundred times before, usually without irony while driving a Jeep Cherokee through traffic-choked suburban streets or watching TV in a ranch-style home that could be Anywhere, America. But Olgers had lived the life he praised. He'd rarely strayed more than a few miles from Sutherland until going off to college at William and Mary, an hour's drive east, and then only for three months. "I was so homesick I couldn't bear it," he said. "The food was worse than awful, the professors were atheists, and my roommate was an animal."

"What do you mean?" Rob asked, obviously intrigued.

"He took me to a Viking Party. There were men wearing hats with horns, throwing women in sheets over their shoulders. They brought a girl in to sacrifice, and by the time they were done with her she wished she had been." Olgers shook his head. "This wasn't any panty raid, child." Soon after, Olgers retreated to Sutherland. "I feel honored because I wasn't stained by college. Education isn't everything, at least not the formal kind."

In the thirty-five years since, Olgers had left Sutherland only twice: to honeymoon in Washington, D.C., and to see the ocean in North Carolina. "I'm a homebody, a home soul," he said. "Olgers Store has been my domain."

Reaching for his walking stick—a ski pole—he led us through the 95-degree heat to what he called the "home place," a stagecoach inn across the road where some part of his family had lived for umpteen generations. Then, leaning against the ski pole, he gave his own rendition of the fight that occurred in the inn's front yard in April 1865. "Only four thousand Confederates faced twenty-three thousand Yankees, but Lee told them to hold the railroad line at all costs. So they dug in along a line of giant cedars that stood just so, and the North charged three times, at nine in the morning, at one in the afternoon and at five. The last time they broke through. One of those cedars had a cannonball in it for a hundred years."

At the turn of the century, Olgers's grandfather replaced the inn's heart-pine siding. "When he pulled it off, minié balls just came rolling out, there were that many of them." Leading us inside, past a deaf eighty-year-old aunt who sat bottling pickles in the kitchen,

Olgers pulled back the living-room carpet to reveal a splotch on the wood beneath. "Southern blood," he said. "They dragged the wounded in here." One of Olgers's ancestors had fought near the inn and died of his wounds a few days before the War's end.

To me, it seemed sad and pointless for men to have fought and died at that late date, rather than surrender. But Olgers didn't see it that way. He thought the South's leaders were wrong—"if they'd won, we would have been a divided country and had slavery for a few decades more"—but he identified with the individual soldier's allegiance to home. "A man has to make a stand in his life, at least once," he said. "That's what happened here. They knew they'd lose but they were going down defiant, right here on the land where they lived."

He walked us to a family graveyard and strolled between the headstones. The cemetery held enough Gothic characters to fill a Flannery O'Connor story, at least the way Olgers described them. There was a great-grandfather shot through the wrist in the War who was later hospitalized "for itch," Olgers claimed. "The hole in his arm was so big that my daddy used to stick his finger in it as a child." Another veteran swore that he'd never shave again if the South lost the War. "When I was a kid, he had a beard hanging like Spanish moss all the way down to his knees." Olgers also pointed out the graves of a dozen aunts and great-aunts, all of them spinsters. "So many of the boys were dead in the War that for a while there was no one to marry," he said. "Then it sort of became a family habit."

Olgers showed us his own plot, beside his parents, and said he had only one fear about meeting his maker. He was the first in a long line of yellow-dog Democrats to vote for the party of Lincoln. "When I meet up with my grandpappy at the Pearly Gates, I hope he doesn't find out." But in other respects Olgers remained true to his rebel forebears. He refused to travel the rest of the retreat route, and had never visited Appomattox, just a short drive down the road. "That way," he explained, "it can always be early April in 1865 and we haven't yet lost the War."

We wandered back to the store. Olgers had to close up and go to work at the funeral parlor. But he offered us a parting gift: a Mason jar filled with murky turtle soup he'd cooked the day before. "I've

got to get all the Yankees my grandpappy missed," he said, slapping the back of my Federal uniform. Then, heading for his car, he broke into song:

*They killed half a million Yankees with Southern steel and shot,
Wish it was a million more instead of what they got.*

Olgers waved and drove off, leaving us with our turtle soup and a bushel of homespun wisdom to digest. We peered through the store window and snapped a last mental snapshot. "That's the epitome of the Gasm," Rob said, shaking his head. "So much stuff that you can't possibly take it all in, and you don't know what to do with it anyway. So you just let it wash over you."

THE SAME WAS TRUE of Lee's retreat route. We wound west from Sutherland Station, over narrow bridges and past forgotten towns where the Confederates skirmished with pursuing Federals. We paused at a wood-frame church with a floor still bloodstained from bodies laid out there 130 years before; at a tiny museum with a silver tray on which a local slave served lunch to Robert E. Lee; at the Amelia County courthouse, where the Confederate monument read, "O comrades, wheresoe'er ye rest apart, Amelia shrines you here within her heart." The rest was a blur of rolling farmland and deserted railroad spurs with names like Deatonville, Jeterville, Farmville, Rice's Depot.

This was "Southside" Virginia, a rural enclave between the state's flat Tidewater and the rolling hills of the Piedmont. Like Jimmy Olgers's domain, Southside seemed to have largely escaped the modern era. Amelia County, through which we traveled for most of the day, had half its 1865 population. One of the retreat route's stops was an extinct village called Jamestown, of which our guidebook said, "The town died around 1920."

This pastoral, unprosperous landscape came as a shock after all the sprawl we'd passed through elsewhere in Virginia. The scenery also formed an appropriately wistful backdrop to the narrative unfolding on our car radio. Marching day and night for a week, Lee's

scarecrow army was stalked as much by hunger as by Union cavalry, and the rebels spent precious hours foraging for food or waiting at railroad junctions for rations that never came.

By the end, Lee's men quaffed creek water and ate parched corn intended for their horses; 500 of the rebel mounts died of starvation during the army's last three days in the field. And all the while, Phil Sheridan's and George Custer's well-fed cavalry kept closing in, hunting down the Confederates as they would the Plains Indians after the Civil War. But there would be no Little Bighorn here, only a rearguard battle at Sayler's Creek at which five Southern generals and almost a quarter of Lee's soldiers surrendered, prompting Lee to exclaim, "My God! Has the army been dissolved?"

One of the tour stops near Sayler's Creek occupied the parking lot of another general store. Unlike Olgers's, this shop was still in business and displayed oddly paired signs in the window: "Game Checking Station: Bear—Deer—Turkey" and "Current Jackpot 3 Million." Inside, we found the store deserted, except for a young black man shooting pool by himself at a ragged, ill-lit table. He wore sunglasses, a Simpsons' T-shirt and an Atlanta Braves baseball cap. "You all must be doing that reenact thing," he said, looking up at us with a bemused grin.

Rob sighed and explained for the fiftieth time what the Civil Wargasm was all about. The man listened patiently, put down his pool stick and said, "I been waiting for somebody like you to answer a question about that War."

"Fire away," Rob said.

"Let's roll the clock back. It's 1861. You two be first cousins, really. You both white, right? One North, one South, but it's just a mind thing. Why you got to kill six hundred thousand cousins? Can't you work it out?"

Rob looked at me. I looked back at him. The man walked to the window and pointed down the road. "I grew up down that way, feeding cattle by Sayler's Creek," he said. "Six thousand dudes got hurt or killed, three days before the War be finished. For what?"

As the Gasm's Union representative, I felt obliged to speak up. "At least some Northerners," I offered, "thought they were fighting to free the slaves."

The man lowered his sunglasses and looked me straight in the eye. "You shittin' me, right? I fought in the Gulf War. Nobody be getting their butt shot off for no freedom thing." Then he rolled the clock back again. Pointing at Rob, he said to me, "Say your mother's sister's son, he's got slaves. You gonna say to him, 'Let's fight over it'? C'mon now, no way. What you really gonna say is this." He paused for a moment, then continued in a perfect-pitch parody of redneck dialect: "Hey, Billy Joe, whatever you want to do with those niggers is okay by me. Keep 'em in chains, what the fuck. Your momma is my momma's sister."

He returned to his normal voice. "It's a big lie, this slave war thing. It don't matter really, except that whites today still like to say, 'Damn, my ancestors died for those niggers, they should be thankful.' What I seen in the Gulf War, it made me realize war is useless. The main man, Saddam, he still be there. It was politics and greed. Same as in your war. Seems to me y'all could'a worked it out." With that, he slapped a dollar on the counter, took a lottery ticket from beside the cash register and stalked out the door, leaving us alone in the deserted shop.

AN HOUR LATER we reached Appomattox Court House, where North and South did finally work it out, in the parlor of Wilmer McLean's farmhouse. There was a classical symmetry to Lee's surrender, as there was to so much about the War. The Army of Northern Virginia stacked its arms four years to the day after the South fired the War's first shot on Fort Sumter. And the surrender was signed in the home of a woebegone farmer who had moved to Appomattox after fleeing his former house at Manassas, site of the War's first land battle. "I was the alpha and omega of this contest," McLean told a Northern visitor a few months after the surrender.

At least that's how the story went. Even Ken Burns highlighted the coincidence in his documentary, which he opened with the tale of farmer McLean, the "aging Virginian" who "had had enough" after the Manassas battle and moved his family to the safety of Appomattox only to have the War follow him there.

The truth, according to park rangers at Appomattox, was a good

deal more complicated and less romantic. For one, McLean wasn't a farmer; he was an entrepreneur who rented his in-laws' plantation house to the rebels during First Manassas. Nor did he quickly flee Manassas in search of a safe haven for his family. He stuck around for two years, then realized that Southside Virginia was a more convenient headquarters for his main business: war profiteering. Among other things, McLean speculated in sugar, which he acquired through a brother in Cuba and sold at inflated prices to the Confederate government.

After the War, McLean used his brief acquaintance with Grant to secure a job as a tax collector at the port in Alexandria. He was also, at various times in his life, a bankrupt, a deadbeat, and a man so distrusted by his wife (a wealthy widow) that she made him sign a prenuptial agreement. "Visitors always come in here talking about 'poor Wilmer,'" said Patricia Schupp, the ranger showing tourists through McLean's restored home. "I have to break the bad news that he was a pretty unscrupulous fellow."

After the surrender, McLean's house had quickly fallen prey to tourists and profiteers, including McLean himself. He sold the furniture from the parlor where Lee and Grant met, and charged soldiers a gold coin to visit the room. Speculators later bought and disassembled the farmhouse in hopes of shipping it to Washington as a tourist attraction. The scheme failed and the ruined house sat for decades, a pile of lumber and mortar that locals often raided for "surrender bricks" to sell the occasional tourist. Appomattox Court House remained a virtual ghost town until the Park Service restored the village after World War II.

The rebuilt McLean parlor, a formal room with heavy curtains, seemed claustrophobic and somehow too small for the momentous history it encompassed. On April 9, 1865, Lee and Grant chatted about their service together in the Mexican War, then wrote out the terms of surrender. One of Grant's aides, a Seneca Indian named Eli Parker, penned the formal document (and apparently pocketed Grant's original draft, which he later sold). There were no theatrics or handing over of swords, though one aide was so overcome with emotion that someone else had to take over for him.

The ranger, Patricia Schupp, said visitors often responded with

similar emotion, particularly Southerners. "I had a lady here yesterday who started weeping, and when she found out I was from Mississippi she asked me, 'How can you work in this terrible place?' I told her I didn't think it's terrible. Reuniting was the only way the South could survive, and we merged back in while keeping our essential culture."

Schuppin saw another positive result to the conflict. "The War did a lot to launch the women's rights movement," she said. Before 1860, women in most parts of the country couldn't own or run businesses, unless they were widowed or let a man manage their property. "But during the War you had women working as nurses and clerks and factory laborers, and running businesses and plantations. After the War they started to sue for the right to keep doing so." The War also boosted the suffragette movement, with women like Susan B. Anthony forming political groups to support Lincoln, abolition, and, by extension, the right of women to vote.

I wanted to hear more, but a crowd of tourists arrived and Schuppin apologetically returned to her post. "Someone's sure to ask about poor Wilmer," she sighed.

We wandered over to a restored tavern where the Union army had printed passes so Confederates could return to their homes unhindered. Here, talking to another ranger, I learned of one more myth about Appomattox. I'd often heard Southerners speak sentimentally of rebel ancestors who arrived home starved and spent after walking all the way from Virginia. While some soldiers may have done so, the parole passes entitled Confederates to travel free on any Union-controlled ship or railroad, and to draw rations from Union troops they met along the way. The South also had hundreds of thousands of rations stockpiled at major cities and rail junctions.

"Any Confederate who walked home to Alabama without a crust in his pocket probably did so out of pride rather than necessity," the ranger explained.

As so often on my journey, I was reminded that what I thought I knew about the War was based more on romance than on fact. Fables about Appomattox were so rife that a former park ranger had written a book called *Thirty Myths About Lee's Surrender*, and a sequel offering twenty-one more. One of the most enduring misconceptions was that

Lee's surrender marked the end of the Confederacy. In fact, Lee surrendered only the 28,000 men under his command, leaving another 150,000 or so rebels in the field. The last land battle didn't occur until a month later, at Palmito Ranch in Texas; it resulted, ironically, in a Southern victory. The last Confederate general to capitulate was Stand Watie, a Cherokee who surrendered his Indian troops on June 23rd. Meanwhile, a Confederate cruiser called the *Shenandoah* kept seizing Union whalers in the Bering Sea until late June and remained on the loose until docking at Liverpool on November 6, 1865, a full seven months after Lee's surrender.

Once we'd toured the few restored buildings, there wasn't much else to see. Appomattox Court House remained a tiny village verged by rolling woods and pastures. This spareness amplified the eloquence of what happened there. In contrast to so many sites we'd toured, battlefield heroism didn't figure much in the picture. Instead, Appomattox honored a much rarer, less heralded virtue in America: reconciliation, mixed with what might be called sportsmanship. Grant frowned on celebration by his troops, and confessed to feeling sad and depressed "at the downfall of a foe who had fought so long and valiantly, and had suffered so much for a cause, though that cause was, I believe, one of the worst for which people ever fought."

Lee, for his part, proved equally graceful in defeat. He struck a rancorous passage from the draft of his farewell address, which an aide had prepared. Instead, Lee simply thanked his men for "four years of arduous service, marked by unsurpassed courage and fortitude." He later urged his fellow Southerners to accept defeat and serve the reunited nation. "True patriotism sometimes requires of men to act contrary at one period to that which it does at another," he wrote after the War to P. G. T. Beauregard. "The motive that impels them—the desire to do right—is precisely the same."

At the formal stacking of arms, the oft-wounded hero of Gettysburg, Joshua Chamberlain, ordered his men to honor their foes with silence and a chivalrous gesture called "shoulder arms." His Confederate counterpart, John Brown Gordon—whose battle scars numbered thirteen—responded with a flourish that Chamberlain described in his memoir. Gordon, Chamberlain wrote, wheeled his horse to face the Union general, touched the mount "gently with the

spur so that the animal slightly reared, and as he wheeled, horse and rider made one motion, the horse's head swung down with a graceful bow, and General Gordon dropped his sword-point to his toe in salutation." It was hard to imagine modern Americans ending any contest with such grace, much less one that lasted four years and claimed over a million casualties.

Leaving the park, we stopped at a small graveyard established in 1866 by local women. It contained the graves of nineteen men who died in a brief fight at Appomattox just before the surrender. Eighteen of the graves were Confederates, but one had a headstone that read: "USA UNKNOWN Union Patriot." It seemed remarkable, only a year after the War, that women who had seen their own husbands and sons march off to fight were willing to lay a Yankee to rest here, alongside Confederates.

But the graveyard also bore signs of the prideful defiance that quickly resurfaced in the post-War South, undoing so much of the reconciliation attempted at Appomattox. A plaque erected by the United Daughters of the Confederacy listed the number of Lee's men at 9,000, less than a third of the true total, thus making the odds faced by the rebels even more overwhelming. The inscription read: "After four years of heroic struggle, in defense of principles believed fundamental, Lee surrendered the remnant of an army still unconquered in spirit."

AFTER FOUR DAYS of arduous touring, I too felt ready to surrender and trudge home. But Rob insisted we press sixty miles west to Lexington, in the Shenandoah Valley. Lexington was the second city of Confederate remembrance: Medina to Richmond's Mecca. Stonewall Jackson taught college in Lexington before the War and Robert E. Lee after it. Both men lay buried there. So did their horses. "Well, not exactly buried," Rob said, offering no details.

So we wound out of Appomattox, past a billboard for "Bruce and Stiff Funeral Home" and into the Appalachian foothills. Driving at sunset through one of the loveliest stretches of Virginia, I found myself humming "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down" and feeling oddly melancholy, as Grant had at Appomattox. We'd reached the

War's traditional end point, its period, and the darkening hills underscored the South's hard-fought demise. "It's views like this," Rob said, as we crested the Blue Ridge and rolled into the Shenandoah Valley, "that make you appreciate what Jimmy Olgers said about people fighting for their land."

We reached Lexington at first dark. Navigating past a strip mall called Stonewall Square and into a gracious quarter of antebellum homes, we spotted a shop-window poster for a musical called *Stonewall Country* playing that night at an outdoor theater. The show seemed a fitting way to conclude a Gasm that had taken as one of its principal themes the mercurial career of Stonewall Jackson.

At the start of the musical the director welcomed the audience, then glanced at us and said, "I'd be particularly interested to know what you two think of the show." I'd become so accustomed to traveling in uniform that at first I didn't know what he meant. The director needn't have worried; the costumes looked fine and the show offered an irreverent tour of the landscape we'd just explored. There was Jeb Stuart, in silk sash and thigh-high boots, singing "I'm a daylight earthshaker, I'm a midnight merrymaker." Then came "A. P. Hill's Blues," a mournful recap of the rash general's clashes with his superiors. And throughout there was Stonewall, a cartoonishly stern figure, sucking on lemons as a choir mocked his catatonia during the Seven Days battle with a tune called "Seven Day Freak-Out."

Rob became enamored with one of the hoop-skirted actresses, so we lingered after the show to pay our respects. Then Rob spotted her leaving with an actor whose uniform Rob regarded as the worst in the show. "Fucking typical," he moaned. "Chicks always dig farbs. You'll see flamers in purple jackets who look like Barney and they're the ones getting all the chicks."

I gently observed that the hardcore look had its drawbacks in the chick department. Rob glared at me. "What are you saying? I should stop washing my beard in bacon grease?"

It was late. A cold rain lashed the theater's circus-like tent. Even Rob wasn't keen to sleep in a torrent beside Stonewall's grave, as we'd originally planned. So we tossed our bedrolls on the boards where we'd just watched *Stonewall Country* performed. Rob dutifully recorded all the hits we'd made that day, then scribbled evasively, "Mid-

night. Camp in Stonewall Country." He snuffed the candle and said, "I don't want a written record of farbing out."

FARBS GOT CHICKS; they also got sleep. For the first time all week we managed more than a wretched doze. It was a good thing we'd found cover; over breakfast, we learned from a waitress that flash-flooding had washed out roads and drowned several people.

As rain kept pelting down, we toured the Virginia Military Institute, where Stonewall taught Artillery Tactics and Natural and Experimental Philosophy (this academic combo wasn't as strange as it sounded; in the 1850s, natural philosophy was akin to physics). Stonewall's name and a Horatio Alger-ish quote attributed to him adorned VMI's barracks: "You May Be Whatever You Resolve To Be." A statue of Stonewall overlooked the parade ground, beside the cannons used by his troops at Manassas.

Stonewall also held sway at Jackson Memorial Hall, a chapel that doubled as a museum filled with relics of the martyred professor, including the india-rubber slicker he wore at Chancellorsville and a copy of *Bartlett's Spherical Astronomy* that Stonewall used in classes. Inside the textbook, a cadet had scribbled of Jackson: "The Major skinned me this morning by asking extra questions on Venus. I wish he would leave me and Venus be." Other students found Jackson so stiff and stultifying that they dubbed him "Tom Fool," "Square Box," and "Old Jack," though he was only in his thirties at the time. Like Ulysses Grant, a failure at a succession of jobs in the 1850s, Stonewall Jackson found success in war that he never enjoyed in civilian life.

The museum's prized exhibit was Jackson's war-horse, Little Sorrel—or what remained of him. The gelding's tattered hide had been stretched over a plaster of Paris body and mounted on a diorama-like platform scattered with dirt and leaves. The dumpy, dull-brown horse stood stiffly, as though at attention, still wearing a saddle and bridle that Jackson used in the War.

For Little Sorrel, this was the end of a long, strange ride that began in 1861, when Jackson procured the horse from a captured

Union train. Jackson, an awkward rider, liked the gelding's gentle gait ("as easy as the rocking of a cradle," he wrote his wife). Mount suited master in another way; both were unimpressive physical specimens whose attributes only became obvious in battle. Though described by one of Jackson's comrades as "a dun cob of very sorry appearance," Little Sorrel proved tireless on the march and calm under fire. The horse survived a bullet wound at Manassas and bolted only once, when Jackson was shot while riding him at Chancellorsville.

Captured by Union forces, then recaptured by the rebels, Little Sorrel spent his post-War years touring county fairs and Confederate fetes. Souvenir hunters clipped so many hairs from Little Sorrel's mane and tail that the horse eventually required guards. Nor did the horse's death at the age of thirty-six end the indignity. The horse's hide went on display in a caged exhibit at VMI's library, while his bones were used in biology class.

Now, finally, Little Sorrel had come to rest in the school's museum, where he had only to endure gawking tourists and occasional visits by a Smithsonian taxidermist who patched tears in the horse's flanks and cracks on his face. "If he'd got popped with Stonewall at Chancellorsville," Rob said, gazing into Little Sorrel's glass eye, "he never would have had to go through all this."

From VMI we strolled to Washington and Lee University. Here it was Robert E. Lee who reigned supreme. Lee Chapel, where the general worshiped and worked as the school's president, offered a startling illustration of Lee's Christ-like stature in the post-War South. Filling the altar was a life-sized sculpture of Lee, crafted from measurements of his face and physique made by the sculptor just before the general's death. Even the thickness of Lee's lips and the width of his ears were made to measure. Lee lay on a field cot, in full uniform, as though cat-napping between battlefield maneuvers. His recumbent form reminded me of Norman knights lying atop their tombs in Westminster Abbey.

"Square-toed boots, just like the originals," Rob said.

"Size seven," the chapel's guide added. "Just like Lee's."

Rob nodded. "Lee had small feet and was short in the legs but

long in the torso, so he seemed bigger in the saddle than on the ground."

"Did you know Lee liked to have his feet tickled?" the guide countered.

As she and Rob swapped anatomical trivia, I wandered outside to view the grave of Lee's mount, Traveller, who died nine months after her master when she stepped on a rusty nail and contracted lockjaw. Like Little Sorrel's, Traveller's bones had endured endless shifting about. Buried beneath the same blanket that had covered her in the War, Traveller was soon disinterred, only to sit around a taxidermist's shop for forty years. The skeleton was later displayed at the college, where students scribbled their initials on the horse's bones. When the skeleton began to deteriorate, Traveller was reburied beside the Lee Chapel's back door, beneath a simple granite slab. Visitors had left carrots there as a token of respect.

We completed our morbid tour at the cemetery where Stonewall lay buried—twice. There was a statue of Jackson clutching field glasses, and a nearby headstone that stated, "The remains of Stonewall Jackson have been removed from this spot and now repose under the monument." Rob chuckled, recalling the bizarre, twice-dug grave of Stonewall's amputated limb near Chancellorsville. "Smedley Butler must have got here, too," he said.

We stood for a while in the rain by Stonewall's graves, then climbed back in the car and drove through the Shenandoah Valley, which Stonewall and his men fought so hard to defend. Though traveling north, we were headed "down the Valley," in local parlance, from the high ground around Lexington toward the valley's floor near Winchester.

As we sped through the rain, Rob begged me to make a few last hits. "We could do Cross Keys and Port Republic at the same exit," he said, gazing wistfully out the window as we approached the turnoff for two of Stonewall's hard-fought battles.

But I kept my foot to the accelerator, eager now for a hot shower and a reunion with my wife. Rob, meanwhile, had a date with his hardcore mates at Gettysburg, where a string of reenactments would begin the following day. As we reached the beltway ringing Wash-

ington, Rob opened his notebook and recapped the day's dozen or so hits. Then, gazing pensively out at the traffic, he scribbled a few concluding thoughts on our Gasm:

"Very productive. New dimensions. Holy. Spiritual. Humorous. Educational. Maximizing time. Intense. Peaked many times!"

FIVE DAYS LATER, Rob called collect from a phone booth in Gettysburg. The reenactments were done, but he'd stuck around with a few fellow hardcores. Now, he'd decided to end his long Civil War sojourn with a flourish. "Tomorrow's the anniversary of Pickett's Charge," he said. "We're gonna do it at the exact time and on the exact ground that Pickett's men did. Wanna come?"

My chigger bites and poison-ivy rash were just starting to subside. But I was curious to see how Rob's time-travel fantasy played out. So donning my wire-rims and the filthy brogans I'd left airing on the porch, I drove to our rendezvous point by General Pickett's Buffet, part of the modern sprawl of fast-food joints, wax museums and cheap motels that encroached on the Gettysburg battlefield.

Rob wasn't there, but his three companions were easy to spot. They looked like Rob clones: lean men with chin beards, tattered butternut uniforms, sunburned faces and the thousand-yard stare bred of too many nights spooning by campfires. I was a little jarred, though, when all three introduced themselves with Northern accents. Don and Johann came from New York, Bob from Ohio. They'd first met Rob while filming a movie on Andersonville, in which all four played half-starved Union prisoners. "We saw this ad in the *Civil War News*," explained Johann, a tall handsome man of Scandinavian descent who looked like a young Max von Sydow. "It said a film company was looking for 'thin males aged eighteen to thirty-five.' Guess we fit the bill."

Rob appeared, clutching a spare rebel uniform for me and a book he called "the bible"—the Army War College's minutely detailed guide to Gettysburg. "We're going to follow the exact path of the 24th Virginia," he announced, brandishing a map of the unit's route during Pickett's Charge.

It was high season at Gettysburg and tourists swarmed across the battlefield. But we managed to find a quiet spot in the woods bordering Seminary Ridge and huddled in the shade, as Confederates had done during the long wait for the assault to begin. "After a noontime lull," Rob said, consulting the bible, "the Confederates opened up for over an hour with 140 cannon, the largest concentration of artillery in American history to that point." The cannons' blast carried to Pennsylvania towns 150 miles away.

Rob had brought along several other books and we took turns reading aloud, waiting for the midafternoon moment when the Confederates "stepped off" from the woods and into the open ground lying between the rebels and the Union line on Cemetery Ridge. "There were fifty thousand horses at the battle," Rob said, gnawing on a piece of hardtack. "Can you imagine the manure?" We also learned that the temperature reached 87 degrees on the day of the Charge; that Pickett graduated last in his class at West Point; that the general oiled his long ringlets with scented balm; and that Rob wrote his senior paper in high school on Pickett's Charge and got a C-minus.

Probably no half-hour in American history had been more closely scrutinized than Pickett's Charge. Yet hard facts about the assault remained remarkably scarce. No one knew for sure how many men participated, which units breached the stone wall marking the main Union line, or what time the charge began and ended. The assault was also fogged by more myth and misconception than just about any episode of the War. Even the name was a misnomer; Pickett's men formed only a third of the Southern force and James Longstreet, not Pickett, commanded the assault. Nor could anyone say for certain what Pickett did during the charge. Some sources even placed him near the rear, gulping "Confederate chloroform"—a.k.a. whiskey—certainly not in the lead with saber raised, as I'd shown him in my childhood mural.

Gazing out at the open valley the Confederates crossed, we tried to imagine what the rebels must have felt as they waited for the order to advance. This gave me an excuse to read my favorite passage on the Civil War, from Faulkner's novel *Intruder in the Dust*. In

one impossibly long sentence, Faulkner captured both the drama of the stepping-off and the nostalgic might-have-been that had lingered in Southern imagination ever since.

For every Southern boy fourteen years old, not once but whenever he wants it, there is the instant when it's still not yet two o'clock on that July afternoon in 1863, the brigades are in position behind the rail fence, the guns are loaded and ready in the woods and the furled flags are already loosened to break out and Pickett himself with his long oiled ringlets and his hat in one hand probably and his sword in the other looking up the hill waiting for Longstreet to give the word and it's all in the balance, it hasn't happened yet, it hasn't even begun yet, it not only hasn't begun yet but there is still time for it not to begin against that position and those circumstances. . . . yet it's going to begin, we all know that, we have come too far with too much at stake and that moment doesn't need even a fourteen-year-old boy to think *This time. Maybe this time* with all this much to lose and all this much to gain: Pennsylvania, Maryland, the world, the golden dome of Washington itself to crown with desperate and unbelievable victory the desperate gamble, the cast made two years ago; or to anyone who ever sailed even a skiff under a quilt sail, the moment in 1492 when somebody thought *This is it*: the absolute edge of no return, to turn back now and make home or sail irrevocably on and either find land or plunge over the world's roaring rim.

When I finished the passage—which required several gulps of air to read aloud—Johann shook his head. "Guy could fuckin' write," he said. One of the other men checked his pocket watch and nodded at Rob: the moment of no return had arrived. Rob stood up and pointed at the copse of trees on Cemetery Ridge, which the Army of Northern Virginia had used as its guidon. "Men," he said, mimicking Pickett's speech in the movie version of Gettysburg, "today you fight for old Virginia!"

We took swigs from a pocket flask and solemnly shook hands, saying, "See you at the top." Then Rob led us out of the woods. "Dress ranks," he shouted. "Shoulder to shoulder. Forward, march!"

As we left the shaded woods, the midafternoon sun felt blindingly

hot and bright. Cemetery Ridge shimmered in the distance, about a mile away across an undulating field that tilted gently upward. As we marched silently through the tall grass, I could feel the ground crunching beneath my cracked boots. The haversack rubbed uncomfortably through the wool shoulder of my butternut jacket. I felt a band of sweat forming beneath my slouch hat. My heart began thudding, more from excitement than exertion. I felt suddenly light-headed. *This is it. Plunging over the world's roaring rim.* Were these the first stirrings of a "period rush"?

My reverie was broken by something bright in the grass. I reached down to find a gaudy plastic sword some child must have lost. Then I heard whirrs and clicks just off to our left. A skirmish line of tourists had formed about fifty yards off, aiming cameras and binoculars at us. Several others approached from our right flank.

"Let's pick it up, boys," Rob said, stepping faster. But there was no escape. Within minutes we'd been swamped by people in shorts and T-shirts who bombarded us with questions and camera flashes.

"Are you guys reactors?"

"Which one of you's Pickett?"

"You gonna win it for us this time?"

We ignored them as best we could and marched quickly on, eyes trained to the ground. But a few followers still clung to either side of our line. A lobster-red woman in a halter top matched Rob stride for stride, carefully studying his uniform.

"What are you guys?" she asked.

"Confederates," Rob mumbled.

"Ferrets?"

"Confederates," Rob repeated.

"Oh," the woman said, looking underwhelmed.

When we'd finally sloughed off our entourage, Rob paused to consult his battlefield guide and angled us slightly to the left, toward the inaptly named Bliss Farm. Suddenly, drums began banging to our rear. I turned and saw about a hundred tourists marching behind us, evidently inspired by our example. Most of the men in the front rank wore duckbill caps advertising ball teams and cattle-feed brands. One carried a drum, another played "Dixie" on a fife, a third waved a rebel battle flag.

"Sir," Johann said to Rob, "the Tourists of Northern Virginia are close on our rear."

Rob glanced over his shoulder. A man waved his fist and shouted, "Give 'em hell, boys!"

Rob ordered, "Route step, 110 paces a minute!" and we quickened our march until we'd left the shadow army behind. We entered a field covered with chest-high corn. Cemetery Ridge loomed just above the stalks. "Dress ranks," Rob shouted, and we moved closer together, our shoulders almost touching, as the Confederates had done each time an artillery shell tore a hole in the their line.

We reached the Emmitsburg Road, which ran roughly parallel to Cemetery Ridge and marked the starting point of the rebels' final dash for the Union line. It was here that Union guns opened in earnest with close-range canister and rifle shot, ripping into the rebels as they swarmed over a plank fence bordering the road. One board of the fence was later found shredded with 836 bullet holes.

We faced no such firestorm, only a heavy line of skirmishers: campers, RVs, pickups. As we clambered over the fence, cameras and videos poked out windows and sunroofs, aimed at us like roadside deer. "Could you guys do that again?" a man called out, reloading his camera.

We snaked between the vehicles and rushed onto the gentle slope on the far side of the road. Rob shouted, "Double quick!" and we formed a flying wedge, as the Confederates had done, sprinting across the last hundred yards of open ground. One rebel later described this stretch as "covered with clover as soft as a Turkish carpet." Whether the clover was still there I couldn't tell; the ground was too thickly strewn with bodies, kneeling or lying prone, their cameras poking through the grass for a dramatic action snapshot. The crowd was so dense that I had to shoulder aside several people as I loped behind Rob toward the stone wall at the top of the slope.

"Home, boys, home!" Rob shouted, waving his slouch hat. "Home is over beyond those hills!"

We reached the stone wall amidst a final hail of snapping shutters, then slumped on the ground, hot and exhausted. The charge had taken us twenty-five minutes, about the same as the original. We'd lost only one man, left behind at the Emmitsburg Road nursing his

blisters. This was a far better ratio than the actual Confederates, almost two-thirds of whom were killed, wounded or captured in the assault. One Mississippi company lost every man. All told, the Confederacy took 28,000 casualties at Gettysburg, including thirty-one of the thirty-two senior officers who led Pickett's division during the charge.

"What were you guys trying to prove?" asked a man in a Hard Rock Cafe T-shirt. "The rebels I mean."

"You boys prisoners now?"

"Did it really happen like in the movie?"

After catching his breath, Rob began patiently answering each question in turn, as I'd seen him do at Manassas. Watching the rapt crowd, I began to feel less resentful of the gawkers we'd attracted all along the charge. From their questions, it was clear that Rob's interrogators felt deeply drawn to Gettysburg. But visiting the place, on a July day thick with gnats and tour buses, they seemed vaguely disappointed and didn't know quite what to do with the empty fields, the silent cannons, the mute blocks of marble. By charging across the landscape in our rebel uniforms, we'd given a flesh-and-blood boost to their imagination, a way into the battle that the modern landscape didn't easily provide. For one of the few times during my brief reenacting career, I felt I'd done something worthwhile by putting on a uniform.

Still, it was hard to avoid feeling like a creature at the zoo. When I wandered inside to use the visitors' center bathroom, the man at the next urinal looked at me and said, "Do they let you guys piss inside?" Buttoning up my fly, I heard a familiar click behind me and turned to find a boy smiling over his camera. "Gotcha," he said.

Returning outside, I found Rob and his friends hoisting their gear. They had a date with a photographer who wanted to duplicate the most famous picture of the entire War: three lean Confederate prisoners standing proudly beside a snake-rail fence at Gettysburg. The photographer was also putting together a Civil War calendar and planned to use a portrait of Rob as the accompaniment for one of the months. "Poster boy for the Confederacy," Rob said with a grin. "Next thing you know I'll be doing centerfolds."

Still, Rob confessed to feeling a bit depressed. Tomorrow, his extended escape from the twentieth century would end, and he'd go back to waiting on tables to pay the rent.

"I've had this uniform on for ten days straight," he said, wistfully fingering a sleeve starched with grime. "It'll feel like farbing out when I finally get in the shower."