

Seymore

It was just before dawn as the HMS *Warrior* crept closer to the almost silent coast of New York, leading a squadron of twelve ships towards the largest city in North America. The sky was lightening behind the cluster of vessels, who were silently deploying into a line-of-battle. Their approach had been undetected, as most of the United States Navy was deployed to the south, to deal with Confederate blockade runners. It was believed by all in the know that British movements to aid the struggling Confederacy had remained in secret, and the man commanding this expedition hoped such beliefs were true.

Two forts commanded the entrance to New York Harbour, where Admiral Michael Seymore hoped to strike, using speed and surprise to destroy the dock facilities where many new American immigrants and prospective Union soldiers disembarked. Three other squadrons were making similar approaches currently, striking at United States cities such as Boston and Hartford that thought themselves immune to the horrors of war that had been visited on cities like New Orleans. Seymore, in overall command of the Royal Navy in the American Theatre, had chosen to command the strike on New York City personally.

A level-headed veteran of both the Crimean War and the Arrow War, Seymore stood at a smallish 5'5", with black hair-turning-grey and a receding hairline. Though normally he wore a Royal Navy uniform resplendent with decoration and colour, for this operation he was wearing a long, dark, woolen overcoat with brass buttons soiled with a rub of coal, to ensure that he did not reflect light unduly. This dress matched the orders he had given the men aboard *Warrior*, and indeed, all of Seymore's squadron. A tight-fitting tricorne of black felt completed the arrangement; though Seymore wore no badge of rank, his lean, sailor's face and prominent nose left no doubt who he was; his mildly stern tone of voice ushered men onwards without any question as to the identity of the man giving the orders.

Aided by the darkest hours of the night and the knowledge of merchant navigators brought along for the mission, *Warrior* and her trailing vessels (all second-rate vessels or more powerful) slipped quietly between Fort Tompkins and Fort Hamiltons at the Narrows, sliding into the wider waters of New York Harbour. Seymore stood on the bridge of *Warrior*, watching the scene ahead of him. Though still early in the morning, lights illuminated enough of New York City that the veteran naval commander was easily able to maintain his bearing. He knew that there were several forts in the harbour itself that he would have to be concerned with; however, he also knew that most of the forts had been at least partially converted to training facilities or to hold prisoners-of-war. He hoped that he would not have to reduce the forts in question, and that he would be able to make his escape via Long Island Sound if the raid was swift enough.

There were three targets Seymore had identified as the most valuable in the harbour. The first was the opposing Jersey City, which had several large dockyards in use. The second was New York City's built-up area at the base of Manhattan, wherein a large amount of the rich and powerful lived in an area they felt untouchable. But the primary target, in Seymore's mind, was the expansive and full Brooklyn Navy Yards, a massive shipyard that was responsible for building, launching, and outfitting the United States Navy's collection of Monitor gunships. Inhibiting the US Navy's ability to build and repair their primary warship type would hurt their ability to fight the War Between the States.

Warrior crept closer as the sky turned more and more blue near the horizon; Seymore knew that watchmen at Governor's Island, Fort Wood, and Fort Gibson would be able to see the line of vessels; however, he hoped that confusion would allow his ships to be admitted closer access to the city. As he watched the silhouette of the largest and most dangerous harbour fort, Governor's Island, fill out in his view, four of his vessels detached from the line to head towards the west end of the harbour; they would be tasked with damaging Jersey City before joining the rest of Seymore's ships for the dash towards Long Island Sound.

"Admiral," said Commander Tryon, the ship's acting captain, who was standing off to the side on the quiet bridge. Even the commander's voice was lowered, as if the Americans at the nearby fortification might hear his accent and realize the grave danger that New York City was in. "I have the men sighting in. We'll fire on your order."

Seymore nodded, a faint, crisp motion barely visible in the lacklustre light. "I know, Commander. Hold your fire until we're at the Yards, or until we're fired upon. The longer it takes to wake up the Yanks, the better." The admiral turned to look to the ship's acting captain, and he then lifted up his hat, smoothing back his finger-length iron hair, before replacing the cap on his head. "If we can get all the way to the Yards, I'd be happiest; but I doubt that a bunch of Yanks who've never seen combat can harm *Warrior*."

The Admiral's thoughts were likely correct; after all, *Warrior* was easily the most powerful vessel in the entire world, rivalled only by her sister, *Black Prince*, which was still shaking down in the Mediterranean Sea. The first proper ironclad battleship, *Warrior* was also capable of making 17.5 knots with steam and wind, and bore 40 guns into battle, including 14 new breech-loading cannon. Seymore preferred the new innovations, but the Royal Navy design bureau disagreed, and stuck the Admiral's flagship with 26 older, muzzle-loading 68-pounders.

The vessel was still quiet, making only enough noise to quietly cruise through the harbour at a couple knots, though with the Admiral's word or the first sign of hostility from the Americans, that would surely change. Sweat was starting to bead on Seymore's brow, the only sign the veteran commander was at all concerned about the situation his fleet had been placed into. Governor's Island was starting to pass on the left, and her walls and cannon redoubts seemed to dominate the channel through which the British ships were steaming.

Finally, someone seemed to wake up; the shouts of alarm, maybe imagined, seemed to carry over to *Warrior*, and Seymore braced himself for the impact before the first cannon rang out. Maybe a half dozen of Governor's Island's cannons rang out, and the shot mostly fell short, having been improperly sighted by men who'd never fired a gun in anger, but two of the shells slammed into the armoured plates on *Warrior*'s port, denting them heavily, popping out rivets, but not smashing away wood and bone, as might have happened if *Warrior* were an older vessel, or one of the men-of-war following the modern battleship through the harbour.

"Fire! All port batteries, sight and fire on the enemy report!" Commander Tryon shouted, and within a handful of heartbeats, *Warrior* rocked as a port broadside fired out, dwarfing the show of force Governor's Island had so far shown, twenty guns releasing the fury of the Royal Navy. The walls of the fort were heavily assailed, and shell exploded against brick and stone. Shouts of anger and anguish left the fort, which, as Seymore knew, housed more prisoners than it did cannon.

The men on *Warrior* were mostly veterans, having been drawn from commands that had

seen combat in preparation for this mission, which could pit the Royal Navy's newest, strongest vessel against smaller, tough monitors of the Union Navy. They handled their weapons with ease, and they quickly reloaded, firing another broadside at Tryon's orders after only one or two more enemy cannon had spoke. This broadside was more effective than before, and what had been expected to be a series of muted explosions as shell found the fort's walls turned, suddenly, into a vicious display of fire bursting forth from one of the magazines on Governor's Island. The fortress upon the island, at least the eastern part of it, was broken in one lucky shot from *Warrior's* powerful cannon, and the sky was lit up well before the sun rose.

The admiral shielded his eyes as the fortress exploded a split-second before the sound reached his ears, and the entire battleship shuddered with the concussive impact. A shout of joy and cheers went up from the crew, and Seymore allowed a faint little smile to cross his lips. "Commander Tryon," he said, looking over to the acting captain. "Have engines bring us to four knots, and have the men fire at will at shore targets pleasing to them. We are to inflict as much damage as possible."

"Aye sir!" Tryon said, wheeling to the communication tube connecting the bridge to the engine room. "Attention engine deck, make four knots; repeat, make four knots," he called, waiting for confirmation before looking at one of the runners. "Gunners are to pick targets at will and engage enemy buildings for maximum damage," he ordered, and the runner dashed off the bridge to see to the men on the various gun decks. Similar orders were undoubtedly being given elsewhere in the squadron, as the other vessels began to open up, firing primarily to starboard, shelling the streets of Brooklyn.

As *Warrior* accelerated towards the join of New York Harbour and Long Island Sound, Seymore's honed battle senses detected danger again, up ahead. Unbeknownst to him, three ships of the United States Navy had put in to New York two nights ago for resupply, and had been scheduled to depart around the same time that Seymore's squadron passed the Narrows. Slightly delayed, they had left their berths only a few moments before the first shots were fired, and now they were quickly making steam to intercept the British ships, believing they were facing a Confederate raider.

The shots from the small Union squadron took Seymore and his ship by surprise. The low-slung monitor USS *Weehawken* was approaching fast from *Warrior's* port, and both of her guns were zeroed in on the mostly exposed left side of the British warship. They fired, but at too great a distance; both pieces of shot slammed into the battleship's armour but bounced off without exploding or doing more than buckling a few pieces of iron.

"Mr. Tryon! Enemy ships to port!" Seymore said, reaching to his breast pocket for a spyglass, which he quickly expanded and lifted to his right eye. Peering through a faint bit of morning fog hanging only a handful of feet over the Hudson, Seymore quickly identified a single stack cutting a swath towards his vessel. Unable to see the rest of the *Weehawken*, the British admiral quickly concluded that one of the new American monitor-type vessels was closing. After readjusting his spyglass, Seymore noticed two other stacks, with accompanying masts, several hundred feet behind the primary target.

After putting away the spyglass, Seymore turned to Tryon, who was issuing orders to add extra men to the port cannon, as well as a collection of snipers on the rigging.

"Commander," the admiral said, "Three ships are coming. Two gunboats, most likely, of wood

construction, and one of the new monitor-types. Have the breech-loaders concentrate on the stack in the fog, and remind them to aim low, while the 68-pounders should dispatch those two gunships once in range.”

The *Weehawken*’s guns fired again, and this time, the larger of the two fell short, splashing into the water. The second, however, met *Warrior*’s plate and exploded, rocking the ship, and (unknown then to Seymore and Tryon), knocking out two of the 68-pounder guns on the port side.

“Fire when practical, Mr. Tryon,” Seymore ordered, after watching the two deck guns being loaded and turned in their pivots to fire on the approaching monitor. Tryon only waited a moment before issuing the order, and *Warrior* again bucked as she unleashed a powerful broadside. Although at the maximum range for the 68-pound weapons, one of the gunships that hadn’t yet engaged immediately exploded as a heavy cannon shell found her magazine; the other was straddled but with no direct hits, and began returning fire immediately. *Weehawken* added a third salvo to the mix, and this time again struck *Warrior*, but with no appreciable damage.

While the sailors on *Warrior* were reloading, two ships from the trailing line began to fire on the approaching Union vessel, adding their preponderance of fire to the first salvo that had mostly missed the well-armoured craft. *Weehawken* was proving the brilliance of the simple monitor design, as most of the shells smashed into the water rather than the ship, and the thick iron plates protected the vessel from one or two hits. “Dammit, order those vessels to continue forward!” said Seymore, losing his professional calm as he watched the older, recently re-commissioned ship-of-the-line HMS *Duke of Wellington* close towards the small Union ship. “Tryon! Get a signal to those ships to continue on their duties! They can’t handle an armoured vessel!”

As Tryon was scrambling to find someone to signal the trailing vessel, *Weehawken* sensed weakness from the approaching first-rate wooden ship. Her guns turned on the *Duke of Wellington*, the monitor changing course to bob towards that vessel. *Warrior* fired, her guns straddling *Weehawken* but with no damage, and the Union vessel was able to unleash several rounds of shot into the older vessel. Poorly designed, the older British ship suddenly blew up when one of the large, 110 pound shells pierced her boiler, echoing the dying cry of the base on Governor’s Island and for a second blinding Seymore as he watched the engagement. He’d read the reports of the Battle of Hampton Roads, and had wondered (as many Royal Navy admirals, steeped in tradition), if conversion to armour and the use of vessels like the *Weehawken* was truly the future. Watching the *Duke of Wellington*, an older but infinitely more powerful vessel in terms of cannon being so easily destroyed convinced him.

“Signal *Defence*,” Seymore said. “Get her to engage this vessel. We’ll create a screen for the rest of the fleet to continue onwards. I don’t bloody well doubt that this little flea could blow up three or four more of our ships before we get a lucky shot, so we’d best put our armour forward as well. Ignore that gunboat - all guns to fire on the monitor.”

Flags went up, signalling the other ships in the fleet, and very shortly the other armoured vessel in the raiding squadron made extra steam to head into battle. The second wooden vessel that had tried to engage *Weehawken*, the *James Watt*, had fallen back into line after watching the heavy pounding that *Duke of Wellington* had taken. By now, *Warrior* had slowed her motion

forward, presenting an impassible wall to the Union monitor, with the smaller *Defence* drawing up at a decent pace.

The first full broadside directed at *Weehawken* straddled the vessel again, but most of the shot missed, sending up gouts of water that showered down on the black iron hull of the Union craft. Although no direct hits had been taken, Seymore noted the aft deck was awash. "Mr. Tryon! The enemy vessel's taking on water, look!" he said, as he pointed towards the rear deck. Tryon's eyes, a bright grey, focussed on the target and he nodded.

"Aye sir. All guns, focus fire on the enemy's aft! She's taking on water and we can make her founder!" Petty officers on the main deck echoed the order, and the men in charge of aiming the guns made the appropriate adjustments to their calculations. "Fire, fire when ready!"

Rather than firing a broadside, *Warrior* began to spurt gouts of flame and shot randomly, as various gun crews finished their loading. Although the other, wooden, gunship remained in the battle, Seymore's decision to ignore her was by far a better one. Solid and explosive shot rained down on the *Weehawken*, and he easily noticed that where the 110 pound shells from his breech-loading weapons were bouncing off, the plates were buckling wherever the smaller 68-pounder guns struck.

The *Weehawken*'s captain must have noticed the same, because she turned her fore towards the *Warrior* quickly, and began to make up heavy steam. The tip of her ram had lifted from the water, as her rear was heavily awash. Tryon issued orders down to the engine room. "Steam, full steam, enemy ship preparing to ram!" but the smaller Union ship was closing the distance quickly. Although cannon peppered the monitor, she had been only a mile away when she'd sunk the *Duke of Wellington*; now, she was maybe a half-mile, and closing the distance fast, despite her handicap and damage.

Shot continued to rain down on the *Weehawken*, however, as she kept forward. *Warrior* was making steam, and Tryon was turning the helm to try to twist the vessel towards the oncoming ram, taking away the firing lines of his guns; however, cannon shells rained down still over the enemy ship. *Defence* had arrived, and was firing at full speed. After her second volley, she was straddling the *Weehawken* with a heavy set of shells, and holed the enemy stack and struck the rear directly, twice, causing the Union monitor to produce less steam.

Tryon continued to work the helm, as *Weehawken* fired over and over. At the close range, she was inflicting damage; at the least, each shot buckled a new plate on *Warrior*, and heavy explosions were causing the men on the gun deck death and dismemberment. Seymore steadied himself against the all-too-familiar sound of his men's death throes, as *Warrior*, still able to make good steam, turned towards port, twisting her hull out of the range of the *Weehawken*'s deadly ram.

On the deck, the fore of which was now a solid five feet higher than it had any right to be, a hatch opened, and a man emerged, with a white flag going first. His ship's armour hadn't been pierced, but it was obvious he knew that *Weehawken* was doomed as she had been run awash from cannon fire and her armour plates broken in enough places that the pumps couldn't keep up. Seymore lifted his right hand in a stay, and orders echoed on the deck of the ship to hold fire; a broadside at this range had a very good chance of destroying the Union monitor, or at least, forcing her to capsize or otherwise submerge further.

"I think he wants to abandon ship. Very well. Signal him that we will allow his men to

abandon ship," Seymore ordered crisply. "And send a boat for that man. I want to shake his hand. We'll leave him on Long Island somewhere on the way out." Tryon nodded, and then he reached for the communication tube.

"All stop, repeat, all stop, the enemy vessel has struck her colours!" the ship's acting-captain then looked up, his eyes flickering out to the deck, and he repeated that call. "She's struck her colours!" he shouted, and the men on the gun deck lifted up their hats.

"Huzzah! Huzzah!" the cry rose, and Seymore allowed a small grin to cross his lips as a boarding party was prepared. *Defence* had already broken off, and was returning to the broken corpse of the *Duke of Wellington* in order to recover survivors; meanwhile, the crew of *Weehawken* were starting to flood the deck of the foundering ironclad, causing the ship to shudder angrily.

Tryon looked over to Seymore, and the Admiral shook his head reluctantly. "Take on the Captain and whoever else we can grab, and order *Defence* to hurry her recovery operations, Mr. Tryon. Time is of the essence here. And have the engine room ready; once our boat is alongside, we'll need good steam if we're to escape to Long Island Sound. I fear the bloody Yankees may have noticed we're now in the fight. Hoist the White Ensign, Mr. Tryon, and get me my proper hat."

A few minutes later, Seymore strode onto the gunnery deck where *Warrior's* boat was being hauled up, steam again being produced from her twin funnels. Admiral Seymore had found his appropriate hat, a bicorne with a white ruff and two bright cap badges, and with hands clasped behind him, looked somewhat pleased with the performance of his men and his new warship. The rest of his squadron had already passed forward, and the sound of cannon fire was audible; the first part of the fleet had found the Navy Yards and were peppering it heavily.

About a dozen Union sailors had been taken aboard the *Warrior's* skiff; the second, surviving Union gunboat had broken her colours and appeared to be on her way to recover the crew of the foundering *Weehawken*, an operation which Seymore had no intention of interrupting, given that it was clear to both the Union vessel and the crews of the *Warrior* and the *Defence* that a wooden gunboat had no chance of fighting it out with two Royal Navy ironclads. As Seymore watched, a handful of sailors got out of the boat, helping the Union men. One man, a portly fellow with a clear pate and a fringe of curled, grey hair, seemed to be their leader.

"You must be the commander of this vessel," he said, as he looked over the approaching Englishman. There was the faintest trace of a Southern American accent in his voice; he was wet with seawater and a streak of black marred his blue frock coat.

The Admiral nodded his head, and then extended his hand. "Admiral Michael Seymore, of Her Majesty's Royal Navy, commander of this squadron and vessel. May I ask your name, sir?"

"John Rodgers, Captain, United States Navy," the opposing commander said. "Formerly of the *USS Weehawken*. I'm told this is the *Warrior*. I see you limeys haven't wasted time stealing our ideas."

"Charmed, I'm sure," Seymore said. He then motioned to the taller, broader man to his side. "Commander Tryon, acting commanding officer. He's charmed as well." The voice was dry and suggested no humour; only the few people who knew Seymore well could have understood

he was gently teasing the younger man. Tryon was not one of those few, and so, slightly flustered, he shook Rodgers's hand and made a deep, gruff noise. "Captain Rodgers, I wished to extend my congratulations to your valiant ship. Your vessel, *Weehawken*, you said? You fought her very well. I'm more than glad you only had one monitor in the harbour."

"We count on the forts to keep the harbour safe, as you have noticed. And neutralized, though I doubt you'll be able to escape."

"Don't worry too much about that, Captain. We'll get a good head of steam and run the forts. I understand you've done that more than your share on the Mississippi. We may take some damage, but if we can knock your Navy Yards out, it will be well worth it." He paused for a moment, and then he resumed, his voice changing intonation. "Forgive my lack of manners; would you care for a drink? I have a fine bottle of port I was intending to open rather later this morning, but I am happy to share."

"With all due respect, Admiral, I prefer not to drink with my enemy as he destroys part of my country," Rodgers said with a tone of faint distaste. "And I can assume England is now my enemy. Our enemy."

"If it makes you feel any better, my sympathies are with you, old chum," the Admiral said, having found himself instinctively liking the taciturn Union officer. "I don't care for those Confederates one bit. However, with the Indians up in revolution again, it seems your divergent country is our best source of cotton for our mills. Politics, alas, makes enemies of those who should be friends."

"Indeed."

Warrior, now the second-last ship in the train, was finally coming up on the Brooklyn Navy Yards. An expansive enterprise, the Navy Yards were heavily aflame. Special, explosive shot had damaged much of the buildings and lit up the commonly-found tar and chemicals used to treat wood and help make ships waterproof; similarly, a half dozen almost-finished vessels were burning or sinking at their moors. Only the slips remained untouched, and Tryon was giving orders to target the slips with the heavy guns of the new British battleship. "Admiral?" he asked.

"At your leisure, Mr. Tryon," Seymore said. Rodgers remained silent as the starboard guns opened fire, slamming heavy-weighted shot into the dry slips. Non-explosive shot fired first, slamming through stout wooden beams and heavy iron rails, bending and breaking the supports needed to build new Union ships upon. *Warrior* came to almost a full stop as *Defence* drew near and added her fire to the volleys; all the slips were heavily smashed before both vessels switched back to explosive fire and lit the ruined slips aflame.

The sun was up now, and cries of panic could be heard from both the Manhattan and Brooklyn shores. Soldiers were responding, and men rushed out towards the river to fire single shots at passing English ships. Once Tryon was convinced the Navy Yards were good and wrecked, he gave the order for *Warrior* to continue forward and begin to make heavier steam. "Six knots! I need six knots!" he called down the communication tube.

"Aye-aye, six knots!" came back the call. Ahead, the ships were staggered out of their line, but all were beginning to pick up steam. The four detached vessels had pounded Jersey City and were on their way back to join the train's rear; they did not slow down to attack the Navy Yards, adding only a few passing shots. On the aft of the *Warrior*, both Seymore and

Rodgers stood, silently, watching the fires of the Navy Yards slowly slip behind the powerful ironclad; occasionally, cannons from one ship or another in the line fired, smashing shot into larger buildings on shore. However, the guns from the ships ahead fell silent once Long Island Sound was approaching; all the vessels seemed to be readying to launch broadsides as Forts Schuyler and Willets neared.

"Take us to ahead two-thirds, Mr. Tryon," Seymore ordered. "All ships, ahead two-thirds or ten knots." Tryon nodded to waiting signalmen, who ran flags up one of *Warrior's* masts to relay that command to the squadron, though surely the commanders already knew. Seymore could feel the powerful engines surging beneath him as the black gang fuelled the massive boilers with coal, and the vessel began to move forward faster.

Ranges were called out on the deck; all the ships had a good idea how far away the two forts would be if they passed through the bottleneck entering Long Island Sound at a certain distance, and the gunners were sighting already, ready to make what would hopefully only be slight adjustments. Seymore had no illusions about reducing the two forts as they had destroyed Governor's Island; that was a fluke shot, he was sure, and very unlikely to be repeated, and the vessels would obviously not be close enough to penetrate the walls of the forts as easily as *Warrior* had previously. Speed worked both for and against the Royal Navy ships; their line of passage was obvious, but they were harder to hit. By the time *Warrior*, near the end of the train, passed by Throg's Neck, both forts would have already figured out the path of the train of ships.

Fort Schuyler spoke first, her cannonade splashing down at the first ship in the line, dropping far short. There was no firm control, no attempt to "broadside", and the gunners in the fort seemed to be firing at will. Random goutts of water shot up over the *James Watt*, currently the first in line, but none of the shots came close. The starboard-side fort, Fort Willets, was a newer installation, and considerably less robust. The cannon spoke from there as well, but much slower; only a small battery was present in the fort.

Tryon was looking to the right, as Seymore's spyglass was drawn left. Fort Schuyler had the preponderance of fire, and that seemed to be the greatest threat present; but when the HMS *Nile* exploded suddenly, the port-side fort's guns had been silent. Tryon cursed. "Damn, the south fort's firing mortars, sir," he said. Seymore swung to look starboard, and he grunted.

"You're right," he said. Mortars were harder to aim at a moving target - but when the ships were moving in a predictable pattern, it made a lucky shot that much easier to obtain. Tryon wasn't the only captain who had noticed; the other ships had begun jinking at random, to dodge the mortar fire; this had the unfortunate effect of slowing their passage, exposing them to the regular shots of Fort Schuyler. Although the men on the port-side fort were not experienced in battle, the ships passing through the harbour were not targets that were hard to miss; the next two ships that steamed through were each hit once, though not heavily. Four shells, however, slammed down into the *Centurion*, and the converted sail vessel began to list and burn.

Fire was raining down on both enemy forts from each ship that passed, but neither fort had been significantly reduced; some guns at Fort Schuyler had been knocked out, but both fortifications continued to shoot at the best pace possible. A pall of black smoke hung in the water by the shattered ruin of the *Nile* and the burning hulk of *Centurion*, which was yet making some steam and trying to pass the gauntlet. Seymore felt she was foundering far too quickly. A similar black smoke rolled and mixed with the faint fog on the East River at each fort, a hanging

curtain that grew with each cannon fired.

Tryon leaned forward and looked at Schuyler, and then he paused for a second, brows pressed tightly together. "With your permission, sir," he said, making a motion to the Admiral, who tilted his head in acquiescence. "All stop! All engines stop! All guns re-range and prepare to fire on the enemy fort port-side!"

"Re-range for port side!" the gun masters began to yell, and the cannons below decks were adjusted. *Warrior* slowed. Her port side had already been hammered, and three of the cannon on that side had been knocked out. But a quick look by Seymore showed that there was some logic to the plan - the drifting hulk of *Centurion*, combined with the gouts of smoke the stricken vessel was spurting into the sky, obscured *Warrior* from the spotters at Fort Willets. They could concentrate fire on the port-side fort until *Centurion* sank or made it out of the way, and distract the enemy fort.

"Gun four sighted!"

"Aye, gun ten sighted!"

"Sir, gun fourteen sighted!"

One by one, gun stations reported prepared, and Tryon paused for just a second. The ship was silent; the reverberations of fire from the other ships and the forts seemed distant. These men were hardened veterans, and they knew that they would be drawing fire by doing what they were intending to do.

"Fire, all guns fire at will!"

Warrior rocked. Her forward motion had slowed, it had not stopped, but the gun crews were very good. Shallow, muddy water was kicked up before the fort, and two trees to the left of the French-style fortifications were levelled, but loud cracks of steel on stone, and two explosions, came back from the American fort. The sound of reloading filled the gun decks on the British ironclad, and the guns then spoke again - a rapid smattering instead of a single loud roar. Their shot began to bear down on Fort Schuyler, and the thick walls were battered by cannon and shell and fire. Out of the growing smoke, tongues of flame spat back towards *Warrior* as the Americans re-sighted their cannons. But as they did so, the ships that remained of the British column continued forward unassailed.

The cannonade from the American fort crept closer to the nearly-stationary English ship, and the British cannons had no success in reducing the fort. Perhaps one or two enemy guns had been knocked out, but the enemy kept up their rate of fire; a deadly exchange at near-maximum range that showed the experience of the British gun crews but the effectiveness of the American engineers. One or two shells snapped off the armoured hull of *Warrior*. But none penetrated.

The fleet was receding ahead, travelling into Long Island Sound, save for one. *Defence* had lingered, and began to open up on the northern fort from the opposite side. Her cannonade was smaller than that of *Warrior*, but her armour was just as tough. "Engine room!" Tryon called, as he saw the first volley from *Defence* on the other side, "Give me two-thirds, ahead two-thirds!"

"Aye-aye Captain!" came a thick Scottish brogue, made hollow and tinny by the tube. Smoke burst from the stacks of the ironclad, and she lumbered forward, gaining speed as the twin screws began to churn the waters of the East River behind her. Shot fell behind as the

gunners in Fort Schuyler failed to quickly adjust, and *Warrior* picked up more speed, dashing between the channel. Mortars splashed ahead of *Warrior*, drenching the fore as a gout of water was blasted up high from the exploding shot. *Centurion* had sunk, and the smoke of her passing had cleared the channel. Both armored vessels were now exposed to the far more deadly, plunging fire that mortars could bring down.

Seymore leaned forward and twirled to the right, extending his spyglass to see what he could see of Fort Willets. The mortars were slung obviously low, behind the stout ramparts, and were firing as fast as they could. One slammed down close to *Warrior*, on the close side, and a gout of water shot up, raining down thick drops of water on the ironclad's fo'c'sle. Tryon spun the wheel of the vessel, bringing the aft side to bear; *Warrior's* starboard guns fired, and the vessel rocked as the water bowed away from the ship for a second with the force of the broadside. The shot fell short and to the right, splashing up water heavily from Little Bay. *Defence* fired one last pattern of shot at the port-side fort, but then steam began to pour from her funnels. Both ships were under way.

Warrior was struck twice by the cannon of Fort Schuyler, but the balls bounced off harmlessly, simply causing the ship to rock with the impacts as the armour plate deflected the shot. Both forts were drifting to the aft; the British ship-of-the-line had slipped into Long Island Sound. For a moment, Seymore thought the danger was behind him; but then the world rang out, as if a church bell had been hammered by his head. He was on the deck, and *Warrior* was rocking and burning. A mortar had dropped amidships and detonated; without the powerful side armour, the British ironclad had taken a mighty blow.

Blood dripping from his lip, Seymore reached up for the handrail, wincing in pain when he realized his right hand had been slashed open along the palm, likely by a flying bit of shrapnel. His hat had been knocked askew, and the impact still ringing in his ear, he reached up with his left hand to tighten the hat over his head. Tryon was getting to his feet as well, blood running from a wound on his right thigh; the American captain named Rodgers was down as well, though he was uninjured; hoisting his larger form took a bit extra time. Smoke billowed from the hole in the ship; a boat had been blasted to the side and hung, dangling off the port side, by a twisted bit of rail. A dozen men lay about, without moving, gutted or otherwise slain by the bursting shrapnel. At least a half-dozen guns were ruined.

The ability to hear came back with a rush, as if the sound missed after the impact needed to return all at once. Seymore could hear Tryon calling into the engine room, "Full steam, full steam!" though the words were tinny and distant, obscured by the ringing burst that echoed still in his ears. He couldn't make out the words that came from the tube; the thick Scots accent was difficult in the best of conditions, and these weren't they.

"Up you come, Captain," Seymore said, as he turned to the American. His uninjured hand grasped Rodgers under the arm, and with a bit of an effort, he pulled Rodgers up to his feet. More cannonballs fell short of *Warrior*, these fired from Schuyler. There was a splash, but not great gouts - the shot had dropped into the water, exhausted from the distance. Though damaged, *Warrior* had run the gauntlet and headed into Long Island Sound.

Seymore stepped forward after the cannonfire from the stern had fallen off, and he looked down to the deck. Smoke still puffed from the hole, and iron and wood had been rent apart in a clear blast pattern. He paused, just before stepping down from the aft castle, and

looked to Tryon. "Have someone patch that leg up, Commander. I don't want you falling down on the job again." He then waved to another officer, to have him take the wheel, as he stepped down to the main deck. Finding a cloth, he wrapped it around his right palm to staunch the bleeding there.

"How bad is it?" he asked one of the petty officers on deck. The gruff man looked over; his thick grey beard was clotted with splattered blood, and the man's broad shoulders moved in a shrug.

"Twenty four dead, about as many wounded. Seven guns knocked out all-told, sir," he said, before he tilted his head and looked to the deck. "Three of the Americans from the boat were killed too, and another four wounded. That bloody mortar did a number on us," the veteran said. Seymore nodded.

"So it did. But for a first cruise, she took a devil of a beating. I'm proud of you all. Make a boat ready. We'll be dropping the Yanks off on the island once we're out of sight of the city."

"Aye, sir," the petty officer said, stepping back to gather a crew for a boat. *Warrior* steamed on; the damage hadn't dropped to her bowels, and the engines pumped on at a good speed. *Defence* wasn't far ahead, and curving around Long Island was the last wooden ship in the train, the HMS *Orion*. Beyond Long Island was open ocean and a steam north towards Halifax; Seymore was anticipating the journey.

However, he first had a promise to fulfill. Once around the curve of Long Island, *Warrior* slid to a stop in the Sound. One of her boats was filled with the prisoners - the wounded were able to walk, and the dead were treated with dignity. Seymore saluted Rodgers before the American captain boarded the vessel.

"Perhaps we shall meet again, outside of our professional capacity," Seymore said. "I should like to share that port with you, Captain."

Rodgers fixed his dark gaze upon the Admiral, and he inclined his head. "Perhaps so, Admiral. Or in our professional capacity, at which point I shall attempt to reverse today's decision."

"I anticipate either meeting, Captain. Good luck to you in the coming battles." Seymore saluted again, a salute Rodgers returned. The boat was set down, and the Americans given time enough to row away from the less-battered starboard side of *Warrior*, before the large screws began to turn. *Warrior* slipped towards the open ocean - and safety, leaving the American captain behind.

Sherman

The young man, his blond facial hair barely standing out against his boyish face, ran quickly through the crowded camp, dodging the tents as he made for the centre. Three larger tents had been erected at the middle of the camp sprawl of the Army of the Tennessee, and this drew the boy at his rapid pace. He was tall but slender, and the blue Union tunic hung off of his form, as it had been stitched for a proper man of his height.

In his right hand he clutched a yellowed piece of paper, upon which a transcription of a telegraph signal had been decoded. It was splashed with mud; the telegraph lines had not been run all the way to Vicksburg yet, and as a result, a rider had ridden hard over the night to bring

the note to the Army's camp. Delivered to the boy, a runner, it was now being brought to its final destination.

His pale cheeks blazing red, the boy stumbled into the main tent and snapped to attention. A table had been lain in the centre of the tent, and several large maps had been unfurled around it. Three men were standing next to the table, one leaning over it and moving his finger as he spoke. Another was leaning on the table, both hands at the edge, as he watched the first demonstrate. The third was standing back, arms crossed over his chest, puffing at a cigar that peeked from beneath his large moustache and from above his thick full beard.

"With that, I'll swing around and cut off Johnston from relieving Vicksburg. It shouldn't take much time, sir, and we'll cover your flank for the final attack..." the grizzled man pointing out on the map was saying. Two silver stars flashed on his shoulder patches, as he looked over to the entrant. He returned the salute the message boy was giving entirely too crisply. "Yes?"

"Message for General Grant," he huffed. The man with the cigar made a motion.

"Come here, then," he said, around his cigar. The boy did just that, stepping past Generals Sherman and Ord to give the stained paper to Ulysses S. Grant. "That'll be all," the general said, saluting quickly. The boy turned and all but fled the exalted presence of the three generals, as Grant looked down to the paper. Grant was 41 years old and looked his age; his body had started to settle inside the Union tunic and trousers, and his face was wider and fleshier than it had been even a year ago. A hint of grey had entered his beard at his temples and cheeks, and wrinkles had patterned out from the corners of his eyes.

The general looked down at the paper in his hand and read it, eyes flicking from left to right then back again. As the other two commanders watched, Grant seemed to slump lightly; the news was obviously poor. After a second, Grant inhaled, and then he spoke, reading the cable, "New York Harbor burning. Stop. England at war with Union. Stop. Dispatch commander from western front to Boston to command new army. Stop. Best available man requested immediately, send name by return cable. Stop. Situation dire. Stop. Abraham Lincoln."

The other two men had straightened as they heard Grant gruffly proclaiming the sudden change in course the war had taken. There was silence in the tent, broken only by the slow sizzle of Grant's cigar burning heavily as the general inhaled again, rather more deeply. Releasing the pent-up smoke, he looked to the other two men.

"Well. Things have certainly changed, gentlemen," he said, before he moved to sit at a stool by the camp table. Pulling the cigar from his mouth, Grant knocked ashes and flakes of ember from the tip, releasing another long stream of the smoke into the tent. "Damn," he finished. "I can't send either of you, gentlemen. If we are to fight the English at sea, then we'll need to finish taking the Mississippi now, before they consider an attack on New Orleans."

William Tecumseh Sherman nodded. He was tall and rangy; the epitome of a horseman, though he was commanding a division of infantry. His uniform was loose and rumpled, and his hair irregularly cut, as if it had been hacked in places by a knife to keep it out of the eyes of a man supremely unconcerned about his appearance. "Who are you thinking, Grant?" he asked.

"Not sure, Cump. It's a lot to think about, all of a sudden. What about you?" Grant replied. "Who would you send?"

"Phil Sheridan," Sherman said, rather quickly.

Beside him, Edward Ord raised his eyebrows. "Really?" he said. "Phil Sheridan? He's not even thirty-five years old, and he spent half his time in supply, for God's sake. Do you really think he has the, ah, experience needed to command an army in such a desperate time, Sherman?" Ord was an older gentleman, and slightly rotund; his large, white-streaked moustache rumbled as he spoke in a deep, ponderous voice.

"I do," Sherman returned. His beard was patchy and close-cropped, and his cold eyes regarded his fellow commander for a second. "Phil's a good man under pressure. He's proven that more than once. He might be young, but he gets momentum fast, and he carries through. They'll need it to hold up north. We can't have more than a few thousand men up there."

Ord nodded in response, but he remained silent. Grant re-read the cable in one hand, the second holding his cigar to his lips. He frowned again. "Abe clearly wants me to send one of my men, not one of Burnside's boys. Pretty clear he doesn't think highly of Burnside. I know you like Phil, Cump, but are you sure?"

"As sure as I sit here, Grant," Sherman said in his crisp, blunt tone. Grant nodded in return with that.

"I'll write Burnside. And Abe, and I will tell them both that our opinion is that no general here can be spared, but we feel Sheridan of the Cumberland is up to the task. Cump, detach those men and go hunting Johnston. If we're to take Vicksburg now, we'll need every advantage we can grasp. Edward, make sure to inform the other divisional commanders that we're detaching Sherman and his boys. With luck, we'll be moving shortly. I'll send these replies."

Both men nodded and saluted; Grant returned the salute, and then the two junior generals pivoted their heels and stepped out of the tent. When Sherman looked over his shoulder, he saw Grant sitting at a desk and reaching for a pen and a scrap of paper. The world had changed, and a good portion of the change had landed on his commander and friend's shoulders; Grant looked wearier than Sherman had ever seen. The tent flap fell down as Ord stepped out of the tent, and then Sherman turned forward, towards his task.

Loping away from the tent, Sherman turned his cold eyes on the flank of the camp that he knew contained the recently arrived IX Corps. Grant had agreed that Sherman should take those men and head towards Jackson, where the Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston had about thirty thousand men that could attempt to relieve Vicksburg.

They were camped to the north part of the camp, slightly down a hill. The lines around Vicksburg were to the south and west, and occasionally the report of a cannon reached Sherman's ears. He walked down the hill, moving carefully, his boots squashing into the mud caused by hundreds of men passing through the camp's crowded lanes. His nostrils were assaulted by the scent of unwashed men living in close proximity - not to mention the similar influence of a plethora of horses.

When he reached the area given to IX Corps, a cluster of officers met him. Sherman stood, one foot before the other, leaning back with a hand tucked inside of his loose-fitting tunic. He rarely smiled, and this was not one of those rare times; his hardened gaze looked to each brigadier and colonel that had been assigned to him.

"Two hours notice, gentlemen. We're marching out today, to head towards Jackson to oppose Johnston. If he moves on the Army of the Tennessee, we will stop him, until Grant is finished taking Vicksburg. Then we will destroy him," Sherman said. It was a tact speech, hardly

inspirational, but he had a method of laying out the future with such certainty that it sounded like fact.

He paused, and then he thought for a moment. He nodded almost imperceptibly - as if to himself - and then he continued. "One more thought. We received word today that England has entered the war on the Confederacy's side. Surely France will not be far behind. The Union is to be beset at all sides by enemies. Each man will have to be his best today, and each day forward. I am trusting you all."

For a second, the rangy general stood there, boots pushed a half-inch into the muddy hillside, gaze regaling the men under his command. He sought each pair of eyes in sequence, and then nodded crisply. He knew his message was understood; the gravity of the situation had dropped over their shoulders as well, but the officers took the news well. One or two, surely, had no real clue what an English attack meant, but the majority were West Pointers, and had been doused at least in passing in the world's political situation.

Stepping past the men, hand still tucked inside of his jacket, Sherman moved towards his tent. Unlike Grant's command tent, his was smaller, compact; a personal tent, with a handful of amenities that would be missed from the average soldier's bivouac. One of those additions was a small desk; Sherman pulled the three-legged stool out from under it and eased himself down to sit. Grasping a piece of rough foolscap and a metal pen, he began to scratch out a letter.

No doubt by now you've heard the news and seen the remains of your fair city. England is at war with the Union. It is a grave turn, and I don't think I can properly give you the idea of what that means to us here in Vicksburg. It is most likely that your newspaper will carry the cleansed details, but to me, it means that we must try harder to win what can be won before the English come in force. I resolve to best try. That means to concentrate here at Vicksburg, and forget what else the English can do to us. Today we are preparing to march. Grant has given me the control of an army's wing and ordered me out to prepare if Joe Johnston comes to the relief of the city. As usual, I shall have to leave my old companions and troops in the trenches of Vicksburg, and deal with strange men, but I find all willing and enthusiastic. Although the weather is intensely hot, I shall be prepared to ride a great deal, and I have studied the maps and know full well the line of circumvallation. If Johnston comes I think he will have a pretty hard time to reach Vicksburg, although with the broken nature of the country he may feign many points of attack and choose but one. Black River, the real line, is now so low with drought it can be forded at almost any point and I prefer to fight him at the ridge along which all the roads lead. I will have many of these roads blocked with fallen trees and others left open for our own purposes, and if he chooses to follow those roads then he will be charged a mighty toll for passing.

Grant has seen fit to give me command of XI Corps, John Parke's men. They are good boys, with a long history. They fought in the east with Pope at Second Bull Run, and acquitted themselves well at South Mountain and Antietam. I do not envy them that they made war at Fredericksburg, in that hellhole. You know well my opinions of Ambrose Burnside. I think he will be displeased with me. I will explain more later, for these are fine boys that I have been given to command, and to think of that man will not help me to write their praises. If Johnston decides to come, these men have seen stronger battle than he can bring. We will man the ambush points and fill the dry river with thousands of bullets and cannon balls, and stop the Rebels in their tracks before their relief attempt occurs. Grant will let me detach other men as I see fit, but these boys are a good start for any special force that he will detach. I think they will do our army good service. I will recommend Frederick Steele to replace me at XV Corps. He has given good

service to XV Corps in previous battles; his leadership especially at Chickasaw Bayou was critical, though that battle was lost. I have no doubt Grant will accept this recommendation while I am off chasing Joe Johnston.

Even still, the day has come where these efforts might be in vain. My thoughts return to this point. A war with England is a dangerous war, and it will change everything. Lincoln sent to Grant today, and requested a commander for a new army in the north. I think Edward Ord was pondering himself, or perhaps myself. But Grant was unwilling to spare either of us, and I cannot blame him. Our situation is most precarious. Ord is not imaginative. Grant asked of me, and I suggested Philip Sheridan of Burnside's boys. Burnside will not take kindly to it, but Sheridan is a good man, even if young. If he passes through New York, I will ask him to call upon you. It would be a small gesture to extend the man an evening of rest and home cooked meal before he embarks upon a task that I do not envy. He will either be the hero of Maine and Massachusetts or the loser of Albany. I fear it may be the latter.

I find again that I miss yourself and the children. I think it may be appropriate to ask Grant now for the permission to bring as many of you as may come. It would be good to have you inland, away from the waters. When Grant read from Abe that New York had been attacked, I had that twist of fear in my gut. But I know in my heart that if you had been harmed that Abe would have thought to include that. He is a politician, and treats his generals well, at least if they continue to gift him victories. The other news in the east is not good. I would feel safer knowing you are here. I would have you guest with the main army here outside Vicksburg until I return from this expedition. The weather is hot and humid but I feel this would be no difficulty. There are many homes of good state abandoned by citizens of this country who have feared our army's passing. I have no qualms in taking from them; each person who lives in the Confederacy has declared open war on our government, and until they are defeated by force of our arms, they have no rights as far as I am concerned. If you intend to come, address a notification of such to General Steele. I will inform Frederick to await your reply to forward it to me, and I will have him make the arrangements as practical.

After signing his name to the letter, Sherman set his pen aside. A hand ran over the slightly cramped palm, fingertips pressing over the hand and massaging it gently. He then twisted over the paper, folding it twice, before reaching for a candle of sealing wax. Stamping the seal, Sherman then wrote the address on the front of the paper. He stood up and stepped out of the spartan tent, a hand waving for a runner. "Take this to the mail," he ordered. The runner saluted and turned to dash through the camp.

Once outside of the tent, the war seemed to close back in around him. The tent city he currently lived in sprawled on all sides, stretching around the two corps he commanded. The city of Vicksburg was visible, smoke curling from some of the buildings; occasionally, the report of a cannon reached his ears as artillery flung more shot into the besieged city. Soldiers stood by, speaking, eating. Some sat on a log, cleaning their weapons or scribbling letters home. Quirking an ear, Sherman slowed as he walked to eavesdrop.

"The English," one man was saying. "New York and Hartford burning, it's not a damned good sign. My brother's in the navy, and he always said that we can't fight the Rebs and the English at the same time." Slowly, Sherman came to a stop, before turning to look to the man speaking. A New Englander, it seemed, by the accent. Perhaps straight out of Boston, by the way he dragged out his vowels. His cold eyes looked over the elegant, clean-shaven face of the soldier who had spoken. The angle prohibited the man from noticing the general standing to his side easily, but the other fellow with whom he was speaking certainly noticed. A ruddier man,

perhaps of Scotch-Irish descent with a cherrywood-coloured beard trimmed into two wide forks, the other soldier's complexion turned even redder as he saw the cool gaze of Sherman cast upon his friend.

Perhaps a hint too late, the New Englander noticed the look of fear on his confidant's face, and then his head swivelled. He, and then his friend, hastened to stand and salute. Sherman returned the salute with a casual wave of his hand towards his head. "As you were, gentlemen. For what it's worth, I share some of the same concerns you two do," Sherman spoke, and he grinned. It was a predator's grin, though, and as he walked over, both men seemed quite nervous. The Scots-looking fellow was positively aquiver in his muddy boots.

"But trust me, if the English want to follow this through to the end, it means we'll fight them in the old battlegrounds. On the St. Lawrence. In Michigan and Ontario. Perhaps again our river boats will duel theirs on Lake Champlain. I cannot go to sea and defeat them there, but gentlemen, I promise you, that every red coat who enters our country will be shot dead." Sherman smiled that aggressive smile again. Only a cautious observer could have noted that his eyes were more tired than his act showed. That somewhere inside there was the faint run of fear that all might not be well with this new enemy. But he was damned if he'd let the common soldier see it.

The men relaxed a little, and the New Englander nodded. "Of course, sir," he said. It wasn't of course. But it might be an achievable goal. Then the fellow added, "Do you think they'll be sending New England regiments back home, if the English do come down from Canada?"

That made Sherman pause. So far, the war hadn't been particularly territorial. He knew of more than a few regiments from the east fighting in the west. And vice-versa - the famed Black Hats of the Army of the Potomac were from Wisconsin and Indiana, for example. But only Maryland and (rumours said) Pennsylvania had been seriously attacked on the Union side so far in the war. "I'm not sure, soldier," Sherman replied. "Perhaps, if it comes to pass that New England is properly threatened, it could be that we'll send the local boys home. It could be that we raise regiments from Illinois or Ohio to defend them. This isn't about regions, remember. The Union fights together."

"Of course, sir," the man replied. Sherman didn't say anything further, but instead he looked to the man's eyes for a moment, and then he nodded, stepping past. The men saluted, and again Sherman's hand waved towards his forehead as he loped away, turning to start up the hill towards where his horse would be waiting. Already tents in the camp were being brought down as two corps were preparing to move. His own detachment. Sherman paused at the top of the hill, and looked to the left, where he could see the city of Vicksburg slowly burning, slowly starving, thirty thousand Confederates in the works before the city waiting for an attack that might not come or hunger that surely would. To his right, his own command, twenty-five thousand strong, preparing to march against another Confederate army. The English would come, at some point. But for now, Sherman remarked to himself, he had a duty to perform. For now, his opponents were still those men in butternut and grey.

McKinley

"It's still pretty, anyway," Leshar grunted as he looked out over the rolling West Virginia

hills. Thick evergreen carpets clung to the curve of the horizon and drew back to the camp where the 23rd Ohio Infantry Regiment was camped. West Virginia's statehood had been recognized by Congress earlier that day. There had been little in the way of celebration. Landlocked and well away from the ocean, the regiment had been told in the same cable that England had attacked and burned large portions of New York City and Hartford. Boston, too, had been attacked, but their forts had repelled the Royal Navy with some damage. Faulkner B. Leshar was the master sergeant in this unit. He was somewhere in his 40s, a veteran of the Mexican War, with short greying hair and a long, dangling beard made slightly stringy by the morning dew.

His direct commander, Lieutenant William McKinley, nodded. Unlike most of the men in his unit, McKinley shirked the trend of great beard espoused by fellows like Lincoln, Grant, Lee, and Longstreet. His face was carefully shaved each morning, and by the end of the day, showed a bit of a shadow. He was proud of his strong chin and the handsome sweep of his cheekbones; unlike some of the men in his unit, he rarely had difficulty locating company for an evening when quartered within a town. The idea of propriety had fallen askew in the soldierly ranks, and many men took advantage of how the war turned things upside down.

"Yes," he said to Leshar. "It's very pretty. But it still puts a sour taste in my mouth," he added, as the two men moved to the line for food. It snaked across the faint slope the men from Ohio had camped on, but moved quickly. The smell of food reached their nostrils, and made their stomachs grumble. Before long, they had each a metal plate of morning porridge, with some form of meat stirred in. It wasn't appetizing. It was filling.

Sitting on a rock, watching the morning mist slowly recede down the hills, the two men continued to speak - once the all-important business of food was taken care of. "Do you think we'll see any fighting with the English?" Leshar asked.

McKinley shrugged. "Maybe," he replied. His blue uniform wasn't quite cerulean; the single bronze bars on his epaulets caught the sun as it peeked through the bit of cloud, and reflected some of the light as his shoulders moved. "Not here, though. If the English invade West Virginia, we'll already have lost, don't you think?"

"Depends on if they land men to help out the Rebs," the sergeant replied. He had three stripes and two rockers on his sleeve. A lifer. The sort of man who lives and dies in the army. Luckily, he had done more of the latter. Both men had weapons nearby; Leshar had his Springfield rifled musket slung over his back, while McKinley's Colt 1860 Navy sat on his hip. Even in West Virginia, they were ready if a couple of Confederate bushwhackers came looking for trouble. That lesson had been learned in blood.

"I think," McKinley said, "That if they come in, they'll come from the north. Through Canada. They have a good port in Halifax, and another in Montreal. No point in trying to break the blockade to get Englishmen into Charleston or Hampton Roads. So if those men make it to West Virginia,"

"Then yes, we'll have been properly fucked," the sergeant said, with a sergeant's crassness. McKinley smiled.

"Exactly, sergeant," he said, as his eyes shifted to cast over the hill again. Trails twisted through the trees. By now, he could see where some of them were, and he could see movement coming up towards the camp. Luckily, that movement was on a path that he knew led to brigade

headquarters. "Visitors coming," he remarked. His unit wasn't on patrol or watch, so he didn't have to respond. The colonel despised it when men took initiative, anyway - he wasn't a forward-thinking commander like Rosecrans or Hayes had been.

The sergeant still reached to check that his rifle was over his shoulder. He'd been through his share of scraps in two wars, and had earned the right to act a little nervously when anything unexpected occurred. No, nervous was the wrong word - he had the right to act peculiarly to ensure his own safety, to take the sort of actions that someone who hadn't seen the elephant might mock. His eyes, a pale blue, found the path, and the motion, but obviously could not see the detail. "Ours?"

"I expect so, yes," the younger lieutenant replied. Sure enough, four horses with men with blue tunics on entered the camp. Both men recognized the leader. He wore stars on his epaulets and had a long, conical beard with small streaks of grey and a high, prominent forehead. The regiment's colonel saluted him, but both men could hear Rutherford B. Hayes's voice from over the murmur of the camp.

"The news is capital," he said deeply, before he paused to look around his old regiment with a soft, fond smile. The men knew that this unit was the favourite in Hayes's brigade of the Kanawha Division, and not simply because he had been wounded while commanding them, but because the regiment was called upon for difficult duties and hadn't failed Hayes and his predecessor - or successor. "England at war with us? Bastards won't know what hit them. A new army is being assembled in upstate New York, where they think the redcoats will strike from, and we've been tabbed to join," he blustered.

The colonel's question was too low for them to hear, but Hayes nodded and smiled. "The whole division, my boy! New regiments will rotate in here, and we'll be marching north till we find tracks, then a rail trip to Albany. It won't be so bad. They want the victors of Antietam to fight the British in New York, that's all." Another question murmured. "Ah, a fellow from the west, Sheridan, I think they called him. Young fellow, but recommended by Grant, yes, Unconditional Surrender Grant himself. Yes, we'll be moving out right away," he continued. "Gather your men, and then march to brigade headquarters. Then we're off to the new war!"

He turned his horse in a slow circle, waving to the men, before he turned to trot off, his entourage close behind. The old commander vanished back into the trees; McKinley suspected that he had ridden to tell his old regiment first. And to be fair, as Hayes had turned about, many of the men who had been in the regiment at South Mountain or earlier had waved to him in return. He was still quite well liked, the Brigadier was, among the men who had watched him bleed for them in a contest against Lee.

"Sheridan," McKinley grunted. Surely the English would have a well-hardened general to command their columns. It sounded like a young hotshot from the easier war in the west was being sent to do battle against the English. McKinley was quite sure that whatever armies the English sent, they would not be weak and inexperienced. Likely veterans of the Crimean War and the Indian Revolutions. The sort of men the Confederates and Union had only earned through two years of brutal, bloody war.

Breakfast was being put off by the news, and both Leshar and McKinley hurried to get to the pots of morning porridge before it was empty. They barely made it, and were each rewarded with a single ladle of the gruel, a simple oatmeal breakfast with indescribable bits of meat mixed

in. The two men ate rapidly, stopping at a small stream to wash out their metal bowls and spoons, and then fixed the iron utensils to each other's packs. Leshar, though a hardened veteran, had taken the Lieutenant on as a bit of a project - McKinley showed a willingness to learn and less of the young officer's usual arrogance. He was someone who the veteran sergeant could help learn the ropes of command.

After finishing with breakfast, the two men moved together to find their regiment, which was preparing to form up in column-of-fours for marching. As an lieutenant, McKinley probably could have found a horse, but he chose to march. Feet moving, they waited for the beat of the regiment's drum before they began to walk, following one of the many West Virginian trails away from the campsite they'd spent several weeks living within. True to the word of General Hayes, the entire Kanawha Division was on the march, palls of dust rolling through the hills, turning the morning mist a darker brown. Horns and drumbeats, the yells of sergeants and officers, and the constant, rhythmic crunch of hobnailed boots filled the valley through which the division marched. Expansive white summer clouds rolled languidly across the blue summer's sky, giving the day an almost picturesque feel as the division marched.

As the men marched, the landscape changed as they headed northeast towards Petersburg, leaving the untouched Appalachian hills behind to be replaced with the sporadic signs of settlement. After being ensconced in the mountains for too long, McKinley had all but forgotten the size of the Kanawha Division. Now, however, her six regiments were pulling together. Petersburg might have had a thousand people in it - and it might not have, to be fair - but now another three thousand men in blue were descending on the small town. Brigade Headquarters were placed in this small town for only one reason - a local spur of the B&O Railroad ended here, giving the Union Army a link to the greater supply network that kept the war machine running. A locomotive was already waiting at the station, and attached to it were several cars. However, McKinley's keen eyes could see that they were unloading rather than being loaded.

Still in column of fours, the 23rd Ohio Infantry made their way to a field on the opposite side of the railroad spur, where they formed up before their commanding colonel. As McKinley had noticed, box cars were being emptied before the regiment's men, and several large open canvas tents had been erected. Cookfires were already hot under several. Stacks of blue bundles that must have been fresh uniforms, wooden crates containing new rifles and ammunition, and even piles of new boots were being formed as the makeshift supply depot was laid out before their eyes.

Colonel Comly watched as his men formed up properly, and then he drew up to his proper height on the back of his horse, a strong-looking brown stallion. His hat sat slightly askew, and his whiskers were waxed to perfect points. Light brown eyes, hunters' eyes, gazed out over the 23rd. "General Hayes has ordered us to make ready to be shipped to New York state to engage our new enemy. Each man is being issued a new pair of boots, a new uniform, a new cloak for colder operations, as well as replacement weapons and ammunition as needed. We will refit here until we are ordered to load onto a train to be shipped north."

He cleared his throat, his voice slightly weaker than a regimental commanders' should be, or perhaps, McKinley was just spoiled by having had Hayes command his unit for some time. Regardless, Comly was personally brave, and generally considered an adequate leader.

He didn't inspire the same confidence, mind you. "As always, I expect this regiment will do its duty and lead the Union Army with its bravery and professionalism. Continue to do Ohio proud. Now - dismissed! Fall in for a hot meal!"

Hundreds of Union soldiers let their packs drop at the same time, and began to rummage for their mess kits. McKinley thought he was one of the first, but as he rose to start walking towards the nearest tent with smoke curling from under it, he noticed Sergeant Leshar had beat him there. Three of the other men in his section were ahead of him as well. With a faint smile, McKinley queued for the meal.

As he expected, it was nothing particularly fancy. Two hard biscuits were given to him first, followed by a large ladle filled with a stew made from what appeared to be fresh beef and several indeterminable vegetables. His mug was filled with beer from a large cask. The meat was good, at least, the beer wasn't too stale, and he didn't have anyone in grey shooting at him, so McKinley wasn't yet inclined to complain. He returned to his pack, sat down, and ate quickly. His section took up spots around him, curling up on the ground, leaning against their packs, or resting against each other for support.

"McKinley!" a man yelled. Looking up, McKinley saw a small cluster of officers standing off to the side. One of them waved at him, and McKinley got to his feet, jogging over to join them. There were five of them, three lieutenants and two captains.

"Yes, Captain Stark?" McKinley said as he drew close, pausing to salute. Stark waved the salute away, and then turned to walk towards a nearby stream, holding a tin mess plate that had been emptied just as thoroughly as most in the unit. The other men fell in place beside them.

"No need for that, Bill," Stark said. "We were just talking about the news - the idea of being shipped north, yes, but the idea of fighting England. Thought you might want to toss in your ideas. Robert seems to think we'll lick them quick as you please, and as he's a Yale man, his opinion does carry a hint of weight."

The other captain, Robert Kennedy, just shrugged. "I expect they have rather a large empire, and the British Army isn't known for its size of late, given they rule with their navy. They can open our blockade on the Rebs, but they can't exactly take away all of our cities with it, so I expect we'll handle a small army and that'll be about it."

McKinley shrugged. "I'm not a Yale man, Captain, but it seems to me that they have a large enough army to keep a good portion of the world pinned down. I also remember the stories of Ol' Tippecanoe in the War of 1812. The Canadians are tough men, and if they put together a few divisions of them, we might have problems. The idea of the Rebs getting their hands on more cannons and more ships doesn't exactly excite me, either."

The captain who'd gone to Yale nodded, his eyes getting the faraway look mens' eyes often get when they are deeply considering something. "You've some points there - especially about the Canucks and the Reb navy. All the same, they're not going to drop hundreds of thousands of men in Canada or on the East Coast to conquer us."

"Maybe not," McKinley said. Stark was scratching through his beard as he watched the two men discuss. McKinley continued, "Maybe they can't crush us. But what if they occupy Washington, Boston, and New York? What if the Canucks take Buffalo and Albany? Hard to see how we keep fighting a war if all our big cities are back in British hands. We have enough for

two big armies right now, one in the east, and one in the west. Protecting our cities and fighting in New York? We'll be stretched thin."

"And we're not already?" a third man piped up, a Captain MacDonnell. "The Rebs are raiding out of Texas and Arkansas, we're desperately trying to hold down Vicksburg, we're occupying New Orleans and Kentucky, and they say Old Lee is getting ready to march up into Maryland again."

McKinley pondered, and then he shrugged after a moment. He spoke slowly, but with a strong, deep voice, as he replied, "It could be that we are already stretched dangerously thin, yes. Pulling us out of the line sure seems to add to that. I'm just saying, do we really want to make it worse?"

Captain Stark interjected, there, and said, "It doesn't seem like we have a choice. I'm less worried about our manpower - we've enough and to spare - and I'm more worried about our veteran troops. Did you hear Hayes talking to Colonel Comly earlier? They'll be putting a new regiment in our slot. How many new regiments will be put forward? How many will we have with us in New York? I can't say that it feels like we'll have the advantage with experience, regardless of how it goes."