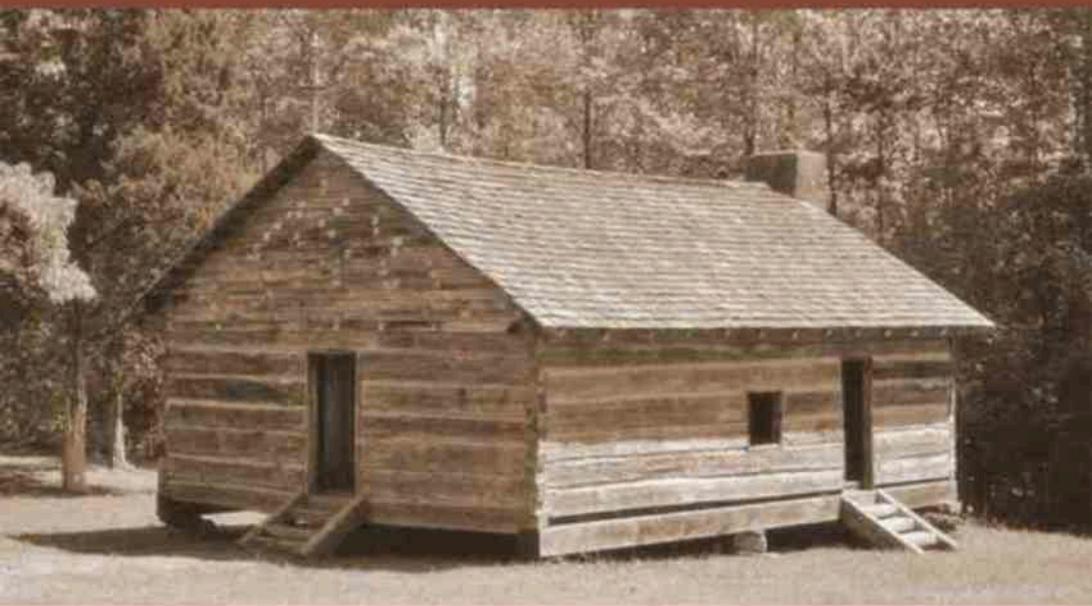


SACRIFICE
AT
SHILOH CHURCH

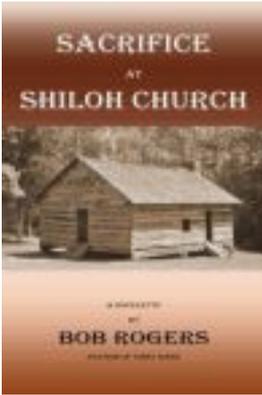


A NOVELETTE

BY

BOB ROGERS

AUTHOR OF FIRST DARK



Why do soldiers risk their lives to save a comrade?

Sacrifice at Shiloh Church

by

Bob Rogers

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**SACRIFICE AT SHILOH
CHURCH**

Sacrifice at Shiloh Church

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This book is a work of fiction based on actual events and the deeds of real people during the American Civil War. The point of view character and supporting cast (James Darby and Allen Parker) who engage in dialogue are my inventions. The historic men and women referenced herein, along with organizations, places, events, ships, geography, weapons, and the acts of war and kindness are all real. [See the bibliography.](#)

First Edition

Cover photograph: Shiloh Church near Pittsburg Landing, Tennessee; Courtesy of the U.S. National Park Service.

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2015

Bob Rogers

SACRIFICE AT SHILOH CHURCH

Bob Rogers

Sacrifice at Shiloh Church

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Buffalo Soldier Christmas Story (Short Story)

Bob Rogers

Dedication

In Memory of
[Carroll Ulysses Thompson](#) (1941-1966),
Captain, United States Army.

(Panel 12E, Row 57 of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial)

Sacrifice at Shiloh Church

Acknowledgements

Salute to my comrades-in-arms who provided encouragement and counsel, including Colonel Leroy Zimmerman, (Artillery, US Army, Retired), Houston Wedlock, and the late John Craig. Houston and John are former US Army sergeants and cofounders of the Baltimore chapter of the Ninth and Tenth (Horse) Cavalry Association.

Though I am much obliged to many, any errors herein are mine.

Bob Rogers
Charlotte, North Carolina
April 5, 2014

Bob Rogers

Chapter 1

For a split second, a flash of lightning made the night into day and caused an iridescent glow in the fog. Crashing thunder followed almost instantly, shaking the steamboat. The mist turned in to a steady downpour through the fog. Seconds later, the rain was a torrent.

Alone, with his face in his hands and elbows on his knees, nineteen-year-old Private James Darby sat on the third step of the rear stair that led from the lower deck to the parlor deck of the paddle wheeler *Aleck Scott*. Because of the fog, the *Aleck Scott* and her sister steamers and gunboats were tied up along the banks of the rising Tennessee River.

The deck above James shielded him from the rain. He felt a sudden violent shudder along his spine and knew the truth. Though he was cold, his body shook in anticipation of the coming battle. In an attempt to disguise his fear, James pulled the cape of his mud-splattered overcoat and covered his head and the short-brimmed forage cap he wore adorned with a brass insignia consisting of the number two perched atop crossed sabers. As he stared into the murkiness beyond the company's horses tied to rope lines on deck and the ship's idle paddlewheel, he told himself again to stop shaking. His body refused to obey. Inside, James felt gloom deeper than that brought on by the rain and fog.

From behind, a hand clasped his shoulder. "Lad, don't dwell on it. I know this is only your second fight, but, mark me words, you'll be perfectly fine after you fire your first shot at the Secesh."

James looked up and into the eyes of First Sergeant Allen Parker. He felt compelled to deny his fear. His lips parted, but quickly he thought better of lying to an old soldier—a hero of the

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Battle of Molino del Rey during the Mexican War. Both came from the edge of Springfield in Sangamon County, Illinois. Now, they served together in Company A of the Second Illinois Cavalry, presently attached to Brigadier General Ulysses S. Grant's Army of Tennessee. Instead of attempting to deceive, he muttered, "Maybe, I made a mistake by enlisting." James looked about, and then whispered. "Top, it's like this before every mission. I get the shakes just thinking about a new battle. And, to think, I enlisted for three years. What can I do?"

Allen Parker sat beside James and smiled, showing brown teeth, his brown hair graying at the temples and in his stubble. "Lad, how old is you?"

"I'll be twenty on the last day of next month—if, I live to see it."

Allen laughed. "Of course you will. So, you were born March 31, 1842? I guess that made you little more'n a toddler during the last war."

"That's right. I started school the year you returned from Mexico."

"Young or not, I've seen you on patrol. You have the instincts of a fine scout. And, me thinks, you'll be an excellent leader of men."

James turned and looked into Allen's eyes. "Top, I'm sure you've got a speech ready for every private you think will go over the hill." His voice became animated. "But I want you to know, now that I've signed up, by God I'll keep my word. I'll serve."

The older man threw his head back in a hearty laugh and slapped his thigh. "Bully for you! And right you are about me having a speech. And I've given it many a time; more'n me can count. But me think you don't need it." Allen laughed again as he loosened the strings on his small pouch of shredded tobacco

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and placed a pinch in his cheek. He offered his tobacco pouch to James.

Reluctantly, James put a smidgen in his cheek. Soon, he stopped trembling and was laughing at Allen's stories about growing up where James' father was born—back in the home country of County Derbyshire, England. James smiled at the way Allen called it, "Darbyshire."

A bugler sounded the Scottish Tattoo for lights out. Both men stood and stretched. James made a loud yawn and Daniel, his horse, neighed. James and Allen laughed about the Daniel's apparent comment as they mounted the stairs.

At the top of the stairs, James turned to join his squad mates. Allen put a hand on James' shoulder, causing him to pause. "You've trained hard and well. You've been an apt cavalry pupil. General Grant knows what he's doing. By Thursday, mark me words, Fort Henry will be a Union post."

James grinned, wishing he could be as confident. "Okay, First Sergeant. Your words are marked: Thursday, February 6, 1862! Goodnight!"

* * *

By midmorning on Wednesday, James and his Company A comrades, and their sister unit, Company B, were in their saddles and had marched four miles over muddy roads to reconnoiter the land side of Fort Henry. James and his comrades owned, or were still paying for their steeds, since the army had not yet furnished volunteer cavalry units with horses. They did their best not to take unnecessary risks that would injure their mounts. In the meantime, Grant's infantry divisions were still disembarking.

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Halted on a knoll overlooking the fort below them in a swamp at the edge of the Tennessee River, First Sergeant Parker and their company commander, Captain John R. Hotaling, predicted the rising water would cover the fort within a few days. Captain Hotaling ordered a squad to carry the news to General Grant's chief of staff.

James sat his horse studying the fort while he waited to speak with Captain Hotaling. He thought, *even with slave labor, why would any fool build a fort in a swamp?*

When the order was given, James rode closer and reported in an excited voice to Captain Hotaling. "Sir, there're many tracks leading away from the fort to the east. It looks like hundreds left here this morning since the rains ceased."

The threesome rode about fifty yards together and examined James' discovery. Captain Hotaling said, "Well done, Private Darby! Top, get the men ready to give chase."

First Sergeant Parker gave James a nod, turned his horse, and said to Captain Hotaling, "Yes, sir!" Within two minutes, Parker had the bugler sound "Boots and Saddles."

* * *

With the point squad, James rode ahead of Parker and Hotaling. They tried to gallop at first along Telegraph Road toward Confederate Fort Donelson, some twelve miles ahead and east on the Cumberland River. But after one horse slipped in the deep mud and fell, they slowed to a canter, then a trot.

Near midafternoon, James spotted the mounted rear guard of the Confederates. He and his squad mates opened fire and gave chase. After a running battle of several miles, Captain Hotaling called a halt and the company rounded up Confederate stragglers and marched them back to the Union enclave on the east bank of the Tennessee River, downstream and north from Fort Henry.

* * *

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As early dusk approached that cloudy wintry Wednesday, Allen rode beside James out of earshot of others. He grinned. "You don't look like the nervous chap me saw last night."

James sighed. "Thank, God. You were right. I fired a shot and my shakes were gone. I was surprised that I could do anything at all."

"Not only did you do your duty, you did it extremely well. Keep that up and you won't be a private for long."

* * *

Cold torrential rains returned on Thursday morning. Cold coffee and wet bacon did not cheer James. At first light, he ate with trembling hands, surprised that he felt the same butterfly stomach as Tuesday night. James wondered if the bravado bantered between his squad mates was cover for their fears. As he finished his coffee, sounds of the infantry divisions making breakfast grew louder as thousands of soldiers made ready for battle.

Daylight slowly penetrated the gloom and heavy rain. "Boots and Saddles" sounded. Minutes later, Company A mounted and rode out on patrol in the continuing rain to ensure that the infantry did not march into a Confederate ambush. They found nothing and returned to the enclave where the infantry had again delayed its departure.

Upriver a short distance from the enclave, the Navy's gunboats opened fire on Fort Henry.

"You can count on the Navy. As usual, they're right on time. So where's the infantry?" Allen shook his head.

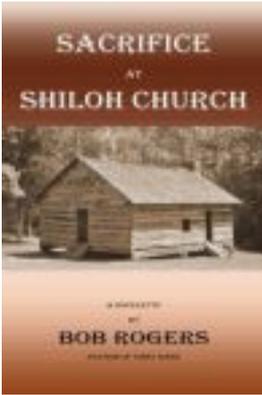
James grinned and shrugged. "I hope the brass will note that the cavalry did its duty before the big guns fired."

Then came the sound of artillery from Fort Henry responding to barrages from the Navy's gunboats. James' butterflies increased in number and activity. The duel between the fort and the gunboats continued for more than an hour, and

then stopped. James listened for someone who would say why the Navy's assault stopped. For a long moment, it appeared everyone else, including officers, pondered the same question as they glanced from face to face.

Because it was early Thursday afternoon and the infantry still had not marched, Captain Hotaling ordered his company out on patrol again for a fresh reconnaissance. Once underway, James' butterflies left him. The rain stopped before they arrived at the knoll on Telegraph Road above the fort. They looked down at Fort Henry and saw that Confederate Brigadier General Lloyd Tilghman had struck his colors. Fort Henry flew a white flag. The men of Company A cheered as their startled horses pranced in the mud and nickered.

Some distance away, James caught Allen's eye and tipped his forage cap. He called out to Allen. "I note and mark your words! Fort Henry is this day a Union post!"



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