

## CHAPTER 4

### A Wild Retreat

The troops of the 304th moved up to the edge of the grove. They crouched and pointed their guns toward the open field, where another regiment was under fire. Though thick smoke covered everything, they could make out men running and shouting to each other.

Screaming shells were whizzing into the grove, sending branches and leaves down on the heads of the regiment hiding there.

The lieutenant out on the field was shot in the hand. He held it away from his body so the blood wouldn't drip on his uniform. This gave

# THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

the men of the 304th a chuckle.

When his captain came to his aid and bandaged the wound with his handkerchief, the two officers got into an argument as to exactly how the bandaging should be done.

“Officers, hah!” muttered Henry, more certain than ever that officers were stupid.

He turned away from the officers and back to the troops under fire. Through the smoke and flashes of gunfire, he spotted the regiment’s battle flag flying toward him in the grove. Following the flag was a mob of screaming soldiers wildly fleeing the battle.

Officers on horseback rode frantically among the deserting men, cursing and threatening them, striking them with their fists, kicking them with their legs, and beating them with their swords, all in a futile attempt to keep them on the battlefield.

“Go back, you cowards! Go back!”

“Stay and fight! Fight like men!”

# THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

“Pick up that gun and shoot! Shoot!”

But the stampede continued.

The flag bearer was running toward the grove with the rest of his regiment when a bullet hit him. He fell to the ground, taking the flag down with him.

In the grove, the veteran troops on either side of the 304th regiment began to jeer at the fleeing soldiers.

“What th’ devil yeh in sech a hurry fer?”

“Yeh run like a herd a’ cows!”

“O Gawd! They’re as raw as fresh fish!”

Henry looked up and down the line at the raw recruits in his own regiment as they stood in the safety of the trees watching the wild retreat in front of them.

“Why, they’re pale an’ shakin’ with horror just like me,” he thought. “We ain’t seen them rebs out in the open yet, but I guess when we do, we’ll all be ready to run away, just like that regiment out on the field is doin’ right now!”

## CHAPTER 5

### The Rebels Attack

“Here they come!” called the lieutenant, waving his sword. And his cry was repeated throughout the grove. “Here they come!”

The soldiers opened their cartridge boxes and quickly began loading their rifles.

From out of the smoke-filled field in the distance came a swarm of running, yelling rebel soldiers. At the front, the bright red and blue Confederate flag stood out against the men’s dust-covered gray uniforms.

The Union general rode wildly up to the front of his line, shaking his fist and shouting

# THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

savagely at the colonel, "You've got to hold them back! You've got to!"

The colonel replied, "We'll do our best, sir. I'll give my captain the orders now."

Hearing the officers talking, Tom Wilson mumbled to Henry, "We're in for it now!"

Once the captain received the orders, he began pacing up and down the line behind the men, repeating to each position, "Hold your fire, boys. . . . Don't shoot till I tell you to . . . . Save your fire till they're close up."

Henry's face was dripping with perspiration, which he nervously wiped with his coat sleeve. When the "Fire!" order finally came, he raised his rifle and wildly fired off his first shot. His next ones were better aimed.

All around him, bullets from the rest of the troops joined with his to blaze toward the rebels. As he fired, Henry felt a rage building up in him. A burning roar filled his ears, a blistering sweat rolled down his face, and his eyeballs felt like hot stones.

# THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

He became furious at his rifle because it could only kill one man at a time. He became more furious at himself because he couldn't destroy the entire rebel army with one shot.

Noises of the regiment cheering, praying, snarling, even babbling, surrounded Henry. Mixed with these noises was the clanking and clanging of the steel ramrods, which the men pounded into the hot barrels of their rifles as they loaded each new cartridge.

With the cartridges in place, the soldiers jerked their rifles onto their shoulders and fired. Some fired aimlessly into the smoke; others fired at the blurred, moving forms that were advancing toward them.

The officers were running back and forth, observing the enemy on the other side of the smoke, then shouting out orders and encouragement to their own men.

Henry's regimental lieutenant was gripping the collar of a weeping soldier who had fled screaming when the shooting began. He

# THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

was slapping the young man and pushing him back into position to start firing.

Soldiers were dropping like bundles all around Henry. One soldier was holding his head and babbling after being grazed by a shot that sent the blood streaming down his face. Another gripped at the bullet hole in his stomach as he slid down to the ground.

Up the line, a man stood with both arms clinging desperately to a tree. He was crying, "Help me! Someone please help me! My knee's been split open by a bullet!"

After a while, the firing quieted down on the field in front of the 304th. When the smoke finally cleared, Henry saw that the enemy had been driven back and scattered into small groups.

All around him, the battle-weary troops had different reactions to the victory. Some were whooping wildly. Others sat stunned, staring at the bodies scattered on the ground and at their wounded comrades who were

# THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

trudging wearily toward the rear.

Grimy, exhausted, and dripping wet with perspiration, Henry found it difficult to take a deep breath. He reached down for his canteen and took a long swallow of water. It refreshed him. "It's over at last!" he whispered to himself with a deep sigh and a smile. "And I reckon I've done right well."

He stood up, filled with a new feeling of good will toward his comrades. "Sure is hot, ain't it?" he called to a nearby soldier who was stretched out on the grass.

"You bet!" the man replied. "An' I sure hope we don't have no more fightin' till a week from Monday."

Henry's good will continued as he shook hands with more of his comrades and helped one soldier bandage a wound on his shin.

All of a sudden, cries of amazement broke out along the line. "Here they come again!"

Henry turned quickly toward the field and saw rebel troops pouring out of the distant



# THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

woods with their flag bearer in the lead.

Shells began exploding again in the trees and in the grass as the enemy approached. The men of the 304th moved their exhausted bodies stiffly, and their grimy faces showed just how discouraged they were.

“Why can’t those gen’rals send us some replacements?” complained a corporal.

“We ain’t never goin’ t’ put down this second attack!” argued Jim.

“I didn’t come here t’ fight th’ whole rebel army myself!” snapped Tom angrily.

“This has to be a mistake,” mumbled Henry, not believing what was happening. But the sheets of flame and clouds of smoke along the line convinced him there was no mistake.

The muscles in his arms and legs went numb. The nerves in his neck pounded the blood into his head. “If those enemy troops could attack again so soon, they have to be machines, not men!”

Henry lifted his rifle and began to shoot

# THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

into the smoke. Each time the smoke cleared, he was able to see the rebels coming closer and closer. "They're like attackin' dragons comin' to gobble me up!"

His comrades saw the same "dragons." Men who had been shooting courageously suddenly threw down their rifles and fled from the battlefield. Over and over, these frightened troops rushed past Henry.

"They're runnin' away!" he gasped. "Runnin' like scared rabbits!" Then he added with horror, "*And they're leavin' me behind! They're leavin' me t' fight the whole rebel army by myself!*"

When that horrifying realization hit him, Henry gave a frightful yell. He jumped up, threw down his rifle, then sped to the rear in great leaps. His hat flew off and his unbuttoned coat flapped in the wind. His canteen swung out behind him, and the lid of his cartridge box bobbed wildly.

He ran like a blind man, falling over rocks,

# THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

banging into trees, hearing only the footsteps of the men running beside him, behind him, and in front of him.

Officers tried to force the troops back to their positions, but it was no use. The shells screaming over their heads made the men run even faster.

One shell exploded like lightning on the ground directly in front of Henry, sending him flying head first into the dirt. Moments later, he sprang up and fled into the safety of some bushes.

He passed close to a battery of six cannons under attack from the enemy across the field on a hillside. The men seemed to be patting the thick, black barrels of the cannons as they loaded the balls into them and lit the fuses.

“Fools!” gasped Henry. “Idiotic fools! They’re so enthusiastic about what they’re doin’, they don’t realize they’ll be dead before long!”

# THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

When the shooting seemed to be far enough behind him, Henry slowed his pace. It was then that, through some thick bushes, he saw a general and several officers seated on their horses. A young cavalryman was riding toward them, waving excitedly.

Henry crept through the bushes, thinking, "If I'm right quiet here, maybe I'll find out what's happenin' back on the front line. Or maybe I'll tell that general about the fix my regiment's in and how they sure need orders to retreat."

"Good news, General!" cried the rider. "Your plan worked! The line held! The regiments didn't have to retreat!"

"By heavens, they've held 'em!" shouted the general, bouncing excitedly in his saddle. "My boys held the line against those rebels! We'll wallop 'em now! We've got 'em for sure! Let's get over there and congratulate those boys!"

## CHAPTER 6

### A Horrible Discovery!

“They won after all!” gasped Henry, cringing in the bushes. “Those idiots stayed and won! Those blind, stupid men didn’t have the good sense to realize they couldn’t possibly hold that line. But they did. . . . Now, what are they goin’ t’ say when I get back there? Sure as shootin’, they’re goin’ t’ torment me an’ shame me!”

Once the officers had ridden off, Henry stood up and angrily trudged on, heading into thicker woods where vines and bushes and trees grew close together. There was no

# THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

path and he had to force his way through, separating vines from bushes and bushes from trees. He hoped that the noises of the branches swinging back into place didn't alert nearby soldiers who might be looking for him.

On he went, deeper and deeper into the woods. The sounds of war and death were now gone. Only the buzzing of insects and the singing of birds reached his ears. Only the sunlight blazing through the trees looked for him. It was a time of total peace for Henry, and he didn't want it to end.

A playful squirrel crossed his path and stopped to stare at him. Henry threw a small pine cone toward the furry creature. Chattering with fear, the squirrel scampered off and climbed to the top of a tree. There, safe on a branch, he stopped and looked down in fright at the blue-coated stranger.

Henry raised his head and smiled. "You have obeyed the laws of Nature. You're

## THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

smarter than all those boys back in the regiment. You saw you were in danger and you ran, just like I did. You didn't stand there and wait for the pine cone to hit you, just like I didn't wait for those bullets to hit me. Yes, siree, we sure are smarter!"

Henry continued on deeper into the woods. After a while, he reached a place where the tall branches curved into an archway. It reminded him of the archway in a church chapel, with the sunlight streaming in. Some bushes seemed to act as the chapel door. Pushing the bushes aside, Henry entered.

But he immediately froze in his tracks, horrified at the sight that greeted him. There, seated with his back up against a thick tree trunk, was a dead man! Sticking out above his faded blue uniform was a ghostly gray face. Its eyes stared out at Henry, much as the eyes of a dead fish stare out at the fisherman who caught it. The mouth of the corpse hung open.

## THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

Henry stopped breathing for a moment, then gave a shriek. Carefully placing his hands behind him, one at a time, he groped for the support of a tree. Then he backed out of the chapel, step by step, never once taking his eyes off the corpse for fear that the thing might jump up and follow him!

Once outside, Henry turned and fled, paying no attention to the vines and bushes and thorns that tore at him. All he could see was that dead gray face! All he could hear were strange voices that he imagined were coming from that dead throat... voices that were shouting out, "Henry Fleming! Coward!"... voices that were accusing, "Henry Fleming! Deserter!"

The peace in Nature was gone!



## CHAPTER 7

### Joining the Wounded Throng

Henry kept running until the sun began to sink in the sky. By then, the voices in his head had slowly faded, and he heard only the rustle of the trees in the silent woods.

Then, suddenly, in the distance, the thunderous roar of cannons and the exploding blasts of rifles broke the silence. Henry stopped running and listened. "It's startin' again," he whispered. "Only now it seems worse than the fightin' I ran away from."

When he started running again, Henry realized that his feet were leading him toward

## THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

the edge of the woods... *toward* the battle. "Why am I headin' for a war I just ran away from?" he asked himself. And he knew why. "That shootin' means this must be an important battle, and I just got t' see it!"

The louder the battle noises grew, the faster Henry ran. Soon he left the safety of the woods and was heading across a field.

He climbed over a fence that ran along the field. On the far side, he found the ground covered with clothes and guns... and five dead soldiers! "They must've been dead for some time out here in the hot sun," he decided, "judgin' from the looks of their swollen bodies."

A chill suddenly ran through him, and he hurried off, fearful that one of the corpses would rise and chase him away.

By the time night was approaching, Henry saw a road in the distance. As he came close, he saw a stream of blood-stained troops stumbling along, groaning, cursing, and wailing

# THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

with each step they took.

One soldier was laughing hysterically as he hobbled along like a school child playing hopscotch...but this man was hobbling in a shoe full of blood!

Another soldier was staring blankly ahead as he marched along, playing an imaginary drum and singing his version of a child's song:

“Sing a song a’ vic’try  
A pocketful a’ bullets,  
Five an’ twenty dead men  
Baked in a . . . pie.”

Others soldiers were leaning on their rifles as they walked, their faces twisted in agony.

One man seemed moments away from death as his bloody hands covered a wound in his chest and his teeth bit into his lips.

A wounded officer being carried along by two privates bellowed at the men, “Don’t joggle me so, you fools! My leg’s not made

# THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

of iron!" Then he turned his rage on the limping troops in front of him. "Make room for me or I'll knock you down, you fools!"

Messengers occasionally rode through the crowd, scattering the wounded to the side of the road. Officers galloped through as well, shouting "Clear the way!" when cannons had to break into the throng to be repositioned.

Henry joined the crowd and trudged along beside a tattered, ragged man who was covered from his hair to his shoes with blood, dust, and powder stains. A blood-soaked rag was tied around his head, and another was wrapped around his limp arm, which dangled at his side like a broken tree branch.

Trying to be friendly, the man smiled at Henry. "It was a pretty good fight, wasn't it, young feller?" he said weakly.

"Y-yes," muttered Henry. Then, to avoid further talk of battle, he hurried on ahead.

But that didn't stop the tattered man, and he hobbled along to keep pace with Henry and

## THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

start the conversation again. "Derned if I ever did see fellers fight so good! They ain't had no fair chance up t' now, but this time they showed 'em. Yes, sir! I tell yeh, they be fighters, they be!"

Henry continued to ignore the tattered man, but the veteran had more war stories to tell. "And once I was talkin' 'cross a wall with a boy from Georgia an' he sez t' me, 'Yer fellers'll all run once they hears our guns.' Well, I din't b'lieve none of it an' I larfed. An' t'day our fellers din't run. No, sir! They stayed an' fought an' fought an' fought."

He put his good arm on Henry's shoulder and asked, "Where yeh hit, young feller?"

Panic took hold of Henry. "Why, I-I—that is—I—" he began nervously. Then he turned quickly and hurried off the road, away from the throng.

The tattered man stood staring after him in astonishment.