

THE HUNTER

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By the end of 1776, the armed American rebellion was all but officially dead. It had begun in the spring of '75, when the British garrison in Boston, in hallowed European custom, was ordered to severely punish the contentious colonists of the city and nearby countryside. The garrison's punitive sally goaded the populace to greater, hornet-like anger. The Americans badly stung the British, who retreated to Boston, and with disdain, they allowed a ragtag army of Colonials to besiege the city on all sides. At last in the spring of '76 the Americans forced the indolent Red Coats to sail away, humiliated and disgraced. This retreat and the Declaration of Independence aroused George III to irate action. The British **monarchs** of that century were Electors of Hanover, who had no patience with insolent subjects. The first George neither spoke nor understood English. He had been chosen because his Protestant mother was a granddaughter of James I and because Protestant Queens Mary and **Anne** had left no heirs. After 1714 all British monarchs and spouses were German until the coronation of George **VI's** wife in 1936. If in 1770 the King of England had been English born instead of a stubborn German, the U.S. today might well be part of the British Commonwealth.

After the evacuation of Boston, London authorities ordered the occupation of New York City and its harbor, the commercial heart of the Colonies and seat of many **Tories**. General Washington had ably managed the siege of Boston, and he moved his troops to Brooklyn Heights to replay the same tactics. Unfortunately for the Colonials, the New York campaign brought unremitting disaster, and Washington needed luck to escape to Manhattan and then to New Jersey with his sorely diminished army. The British Gen. **Howe** occupied Manhattan and ordered his Hessian mercenaries into central New Jersey, where they advanced slowly across the state with skirmishes but no pitched battles, reaching the Delaware River in late December 1776.

Among the Hessian soldiers was **Priv**. Joachim Jaeger, a burly, handsome 16-year-old, and son of hereditary foresters and huntsmen in the court of the Landgrave of Hesse. Jaeger's prolific parents had sold him, when a mature and strong 15 years, to the Hessian army to ease their feudal poverty. Joachim had had an active youth in the forest and hunt, activities that nurtured in him spirit and zest, all too rare among stolid soldiers. The Landgraves of Hesse refilled their empty treasury by renting out their troops for cash. Standard combat training in the Hessian army consisted of close rank advance, musket volley, and a final bayonet charge, at the call of a bull voiced sergeant. Even Private Jaeger could tell that these tactics fizzled against Jersey defenders, who hid in natural cover and fired their hunting rifles, deadly at long range. In

addition, Jaeger noted with envy that farmers in Jersey owned their land and sold their own produce. He had never seen this in feudal Germany.

By late December '76 the Hessians reached Trenton on the Delaware River across from Washington's small army in Pennsylvania. Nine hundred Germans and their fat Colonel were quartered in comfortable houses and celebrated Christmas Eve with extra rations, liquor, and derisive jokes about the Yankee riff-raff, soon to be piddling pickings.

At dawn Christmas morn unexpected Yankee gunfire roused the sodden Hessians. The Colonel and staff died in their nightshirts. The German troops surrendered promptly without a decent fight. The Americans were astounded by the ease of their triumph and ferried the prisoners across the river to a rude, snow-covered stockade. An entire European regiment had been destroyed by a dirty rabble that in a frightfully unfair manner had sneaked up in stealthy attack. Reputable armies didn't fight that way.

Joachim Jaeger found himself one of many prisoners in the American stockade. From time to time in the past few months he had mused about the notion of deserting. His current plight, however dire, seemed all at once to favor such action. Only an impulsive youth, certain of luck and immune to debacle, would toss away the surety of the army for an alien and hostile land, far from friend and town. Barrack talk had told him about German settlers in Pennsylvania, Dutch as they were called, and he planned to rely on their help to reach the town of Bethlehem, some sixty miles [upriver](#) on the Pennsylvania side. This town, founded in 1740 by Moravian brothers, was a thriving seat of missionaries, with the glow of charity/peace, and good works. Bethlehem was reputed as a refuge for believers, for staid working types, and for the oppressed. The Moravian movement had been born in Silesia in eastern Germany, when Count [von Zinzendorf](#) in 1720 welcomed Protestant escapees from Catholic persecution. They had fled from their native Moravia, once part of the Austrian empire and now of the Czech republic, and they prospered in the realm of the friendly Count. The sect spread in Germany and from there to spots throughout North America.

The winter snow did not deter Jaeger from planning his escape that very night. He scrounged food and extra clothing and crawled under the stockade between sentries, who were wearily content to let a few Germans escape into the frozen hinterland and survive if they could. Jaeger headed north in the moonlight, elated by his new freedom, free from the hated sergeants, and free from all else, except his own lonely self. He ran fast and long, far from his recent past, and into the arms of the forest. For safety he traveled by night and hid for sleep in the day. As a forester's son, he felt at home among trees, which had reared him kindly through the warmth of boyhood.

At sunset the gnawing of hunger drove him out to the highway, where now, exposed and

vulnerable, he prowled for a likely kitchen. At last he came to a tidy farmhouse, bordered by pruned bushes, that spelled German. From the kitchen door a stern Frau sent him to the adjoining barn to wait there for supper. The inscrutable Frau soon brought him food and left without adieu, barring the barn door on the outside. His army training had taught him to snoop, and at a crack he overheard the mumbled words "deserter" and "reward." So the good Frau thought she now had hooked a prize fish. Shortly a milkman entered along with his urgent cows. Jaeger fell asleep to the musical beat of milk squirts, playing tunes on the side of a pail. Hours later he awoke with a start and, finding the door still barred, he squeezed an udder and aimed the warm stream into his open mouth for a late night snack. Farmers built barns on a slope, if available, so that the hay wagon on the outside could reach the door of the loft. Jaeger climbed to the top of the hay and, finding an opening, let himself down to the frozen ground and like a scared rabbit fled to the silent Bethlehem pike. He ran in the moonlight until a runner's high swept him up in ecstasy, and at dawn he plunged into the forest, gathered a hatful of walnuts, and curled up to sleep. Was there anyone he could trust?

By afternoon hunger riled him to seek food. On the road he overtook a house-Frau with a basket of bread, and from her he wangled a loaf. His native gifts of charm and fast talk enticed most women. Then another night in the woods, holed up in a thicket, like the hunted animal he was.

In the morning, sounds nearby of German voices and of logging routed him from his lair and led to cautious greetings. His ready skill with axe in limbing a fallen trunk, and with file in touching up saws, won their approval, and they welcomed his help. The men were Bethlehem loggers, who could tell without asking that they had on hand a deserter. Even so, at day's end they took him along home.

During the tramp to Bethlehem Jaeger's various emotions simmered like the contrasting portions of an Irish stew. There were of course immediate needs, but would the Moravians force him into a mold as rigid as the army's? He was not a devout Christian, but like most soldiers he depended on God to ease the pangs of wounding and death. His religion was more a matter of habit than of conviction. God, he felt, would hardly attend to his trivial concerns, but Jaeger himself aimed at two practical needs beyond daily sustenance, to own a rifle and learn English. For these targets he would willingly work, but would the Brethren make him pay with twice daily chapel?

The Moravian elders slowly scrutinized him and pondered his verbal wants. They agreed to his plea for haven but held unlikely his prospect as a stalwart in the church. They assigned him to Frau Trost, a widow and teacher whose children had left home. Jaeger received in stolid silence the elders' sentence for him, he a Hessian fusilier to run errands for a housewife.

As a soldier he bit his lip and followed orders. The Frau had been raised as English in Philadelphia before marriage into the Moravian culture. An elegant lady, she took particular pride in handsome furnishings and in tasteful jewelry. Nonetheless, her house and farm needed a strong back to maintain standards.

To his naive surprise, Frau **Trost** confounded his expectations. She was fair, full-bodied yet lean, and still in her prime. She stared him straight in the eye and told him what to expect and do. In return she would teach him English and civil behavior as well. He smirked.

"Does this mean a peasant learns parlor manners?"

"No," she replied. "In America we have no peasants, but it means that a foreign soldier learns to behave with women and girls, men and boys, and if you, the soldier, don't learn quickly, out you go to fend on your own. And now young man, other than rifle and English, what do you truly want?"

He murmured a confused reply. 'Im not sure. Everything is in a jumble, but perhaps, it is to be free."

She growled, 'Tree! That's a lark. No one is really free. You have much to learn and earn, before you can claim your brand of freedom."

He proved himself a nimble pupil, both in English and in the needs of her household. She found him inclined to drollery, but he pleased her with his eagerness, wit, and flexibility, qualities hardly to be expected in an erstwhile German soldier. The open, tolerant **lifestyle** of Bethlehem puzzled **him-all** the choices in clothing, of how to work, whom to follow, and where to go. He toiled at logging and saw-milling. As recreation he joined hunting parties in search of deer, squirrel, rabbit, and birds. In the process he honed his skills with rifle, hatchet, and knife.

Frau Trost announced that for him to become American and escape the British, he would have to change his name, posture, and stride in order to shed his Germanisms. Instead of Joachim Jaeger, they settled on the name "**Jebidiah Hager**." The first name had a Biblical and Yankee ring to it. It took long practice and endless repetition before his new name at last became his. With this name he was christened in the Moravian Church and made a citizen of Bethlehem.

Hager fared well in the **Trost** household. His work and questions pleased her, and she regaled him at length about the people in Bethlehem. She called him **Jeb**, and at meal time they traded congenial words. As they came to esteem each other, she gradually beguiled and instructed him in the customs and demands of the bedchamber, as a requisite part of civil behavior. As an apt pupil, he responded cheerfully.

The Moravians of North America followed a simple life, tending their trades in small communities of mutual help, harmony, and tolerant faith. Their resilient beliefs and respect for

education fueled joy in music, art, and festivity, in stark contrast to the dour Protestantism of the era, that delighted in threats of daily damnation. Ordained ministers led the Moravian services, which welcomed all comers, young and old, white, red, and black. The Moravian communities flourished, and they spread their missionary zeal with messages of charity to Indians as well, for the plight of the native tribes tore at the Moravian hearts. Internecine tribal warfare raged unabated. **Shawnees** from the west and **Iroquois** from the north, sought glory in vicious battle, inherent in their culture, and heedless of the peaceful tribes in between. For these **beleaguered** victims the Moravian missions offered refuge and succor.

Among the Indians, Bethlehem stood for haven, and the Brethren established distant missions in northeast Ohio, a remote and rugged region in the midst of tribal feuding. A string of civilized pearls the Brethren did fashion along the **Tuscarawas river-Salem, Gnadenhutten, Schonbrun**. Each settlement welcomed peaceful and neutral bands of natives, who knew they would find fair trade without the degradation of rum. The Christianity at the missions offered charity and tolerance, which attracted the ravaged natives, and converted hundreds. The missions relied on love to fill their churches rather than insisting on faith.

In the dim and depressing territory of Ohio the Moravians sparkled brightly as luminous forerunners of what today is known as **N.G.O., "nongovernmental organization"** Their missions survived entirely on their own, without help from government or outside sources. If Moravians could not stop Indian-white warfare, they softened it as best they could, to their lasting credit and honor.

In Pennsylvania the Delaware Indians, who were generally peaceful, roamed the **Susquehanna** valley and the mountains beyond. A few poor and isolated bands ventured as far east as Bethlehem in search of Christian charity, and from these bands **Jeb** first learned about Indian life. In his mind this culture became the ideal pattern for survival in the wild, particularly appealing to a young fugitive from feudalism and regulation. Though he saw that the battered Indians at Bethlehem represented the tidal refuse of a proud race, he was attracted to their ways. If Indians could thrive in the wilderness, why couldn't he? He would have to see by living with them away from white custom.

East of the Susquehanna in the Blue Mountains the Moravians had established a temporary mission to support the wandering and friendly **Delawares** that populated that jagged region. As an armed guard, Jeb accompanied a supply party to the Blue Mountain mission. He wanted to spend time with Indians in their own campsite. The Indian encampment at the mission was dirty, smelly, and chaotic. Where were the noble, dignified chiefs, the supple, braided warriors, the attentive squaws at their tidy fires? The reality of the camp shattered the glow of his illusions.

Yet at length he found one family group with a calm and stately elder, with his grown offspring, and with bustling womenfolk. In this setting, **Jeb's** European sense of excessive courtesy proved crucial in winning the elder's consent to allow **Jeb** to join the family's next hunt. The oldest son, named One Arrow and skilled in **Grafting** the traditional bow, arrow, and accessories, was famed as hunter, marksman, and warrior. He had little use for the white man's rifle, favored by most braves, as being heavy, slow to reload, unreliable in firing, and needing powder and shot, expensive in the wilderness. One Arrow's father and Chief carried the name Silent Foot, in honor of his great skill in tracking both animal and human and in concealing his own trail. This knowledge had been passed on to the son, and **Jeb** was fortunate to hunt with an acclaimed bowman and tracker. The leader of the hunt. One Arrow, acknowledged the white man's quiet, perceptive manner. To the other disdainful hunters he was only a solid back to carry deer meat. **Jeb** learned much from One Arrow, who killed a stag with a difficult shot, and he admired the efficient butchering. All edible organs were saved, as well as the head for its aphrodisiac velvet and **virilising** brain. The carcass was cut into 100 pound lots, secured by the hide. The hunters feasted on forelegs and their marrow, garnished with **sautéed** blood. Another deer was added to their loads and onto the back of a skinny horse, before the hunters returned to the cheers of the family. Processing began immediately, some parts into the stew pot, others to be dried for jerky. **Jeb** was included in the evening festivity, which featured a sensuous dance by Flying Toes, daughter of the Chief. As compliment and thanks to **Jeb**, the sturdy white hunter, she lay down for the night beside him and kept him company.

During his stay at the Mission **Jeb** was exposed to Indian ways, to their virtues and foibles, to their constant urge to wander in search of food and security. Young Indian males sought glory in combat and scalps. They valued most of all bravery and ability to endure pain and to deny weakness, even when this led to the perversion of torture. Boasting was acceptable if not always admired, but the personal word and promise of respected tribal members retained an almost sacred integrity. **Jeb** admired their loyalty to family and tribe. They captured women and children to fill the increasing need for warriors and wives. If a brave enslaved a captured opponent, it was usually only for limited years. Even white captives were admitted to the tribe. For example. Blue Jacket, a famous **Shawnee** war chief, had been adopted as a white adolescent.

Jeb's return to Bethlehem didn't curb his appetite for Indian culture. Why would a homeless, penniless expatriate want more than the scope of the Moravian stage? Was it to prove to himself, so totally alone, that he could survive in the wild as the red man did? He had shown that his cheerful, manly forte could win the respect of the Indians and that he understood their need to wander and fight.

The struggle between white and red puzzled him. He knew first hand that the two could

live in harmony. He noticed that on the frontier there were two types of whites, those who fought for land to farm and those who reveled in killing Indians. He wanted neither role but merely the chance to survive. What was happening to the former soldier? First he had changed from Hessian Private to citizen of Bethlehem, and now he was flirting with the notion of becoming a child of the endless wild. Of course he didn't know how true these changes were, yet this handsome, strapping male moved exuberantly from stage to stage. In Bethlehem he enjoyed both work and fun, and his presence gave pleasure wherever he breathed, from the forest to the household of **Frau Trost**.

In Bethlehem **twas** often said

That he asked of her to be amply fed,

While she asked of him to share ample bed.

They sang together but never wed.

He was too young and ever restless

To dote on her and her shiny necklace.

Music warmed his days. His mellow baritone swelled the choir, and in evenings around the fire he liked to play the fife that he had piped in the Hessian band. With a martial tune he would strut about, mocking his military past. Then turning to a lively dance that sparked the group to heat, he would end with plaintive notes that sang of a faraway land.

On Sundays he went to church to meet with a tolerant God, who smiled on frailty and music. **Jebidiah** felt kin to frontier folk who found God in nature's beauty. They revered the dogwood tree, its slender branches in virginal white at Easter and its proud bloom of four distinct petals, each pierced at a blood red tip with the four wounds of Christ on His cross.

Jeb's vivid imagination, the fireside stories, and his visits with Indian bands, all fed his deep fire to live as a bold, self-reliant frontiersman, an alluring idea, but how and where? Because so few whites had dared the Ohio country, its remoteness waved a magic wand over the land and shaped his dreams of reaching it. If Moravian missionaries and foreign traders could survive in its rugged terrain, then he also would live there in peace with the tribes. Yet at the same time Kentucky didn't lure him because of its increasing settlers and toleration of slavery.

Life in Bethlehem for **Jeb** centered about work at the sawmill and lively action with the **Trost** household and friendly groups. One day for fun he stained his face and hands with walnut juice, and, dressed in rags topped with flea-bitten hat, he stumbled to the church and pled for

salvation as a rum soaked half-breed, deeply mired in sin. The Church elders, ever strong in faith, accepted the challenge of his redemption, and began by prescribing a thorough purge to wash away his sin. The purge's violent results so chastened **Jebidiah** that he staggered back to the Church. With clean skin and clothes, he announced himself cured of sin and made abject confession of his deceit. The Elders were not amused but after lengthy discourse absolved him.

Bethlehem was a secure island of comfort, but across the nearby Delaware lay war-torn Jersey. And bad news traveled to the Moravian citadel about the army's gruesome winter at Valley Forge, eased at last by Baron **von Steuben**, who taught the dispirited forces the drill of self respect and cohesion known to formal armies. In his honor there stands on the Ohio River **Steubenville** at Ohio Cross Creek. Then in May of 1778 Bethlehem learned of the Battle of **Monmouth**, only 30 miles below Newark, where Washington had beaten the British, until Gen. Lee ordered traitorous retreat. **Hager** realized within his limits the stakes of the fight with the British, but he flinched from joining in it. Much closer did he relate emotionally to the strife between white settlers and red hunters. The turmoil along the frontier led to his reluctant conclusion that he could no longer hide from his country's rebellion, not if he ever was to carve for himself a portion of its wilderness. He now knew that he never could nor would grow old in Bethlehem as citizen shopkeeper. Though he was prized in town for his friendly charm, the elders worried about his heat for girls and his shallow warmth for the church. They would not urge him to stay, and this saddened **Frau Trost**. For memory's sake he and she exchanged gifts: to him a handsome flute, the best of Philadelphia, to her a ceremonial elk-calf shirt, soft, pale, tooled and beaded by gifted Delaware squaws, all at his special order, for well did he know her shape.

The friendliest route to the Ohio country lay through Virginia, which claimed all the land between it and the Mississippi, as well as that north of the Ohio as far as the Great Lakes. Lord **Dunmore**, governor of Virginia and with his War in '74, had established these claims by the **Scioto** treaty with the **Shawnees**, but after '76 British agents urged the tribes to fight against the white settlers, most whom stayed south of the Ohio, where even there the Virginia militia could hardly protect the scattered farms and settlements from the constant raids by Shawnees and **Iroquois**.

With reluctance **Jeb** left Bethlehem in search of a bonny future, defiant of British and Indian. He traveled south along the mountains with only a light pack, avoiding urban clamor and the presence of Negro slaves. Though he knew little of American slavery, to him it was live chaining of human to owner, which in his ken stood for European rule, and he avoided it wherever possible. Farmers in that region always needed labor; so he fared well in the barter economy of wartime inflation. Crossing Maryland, he headed for Harper's Ferry at the mouth of

the **Shenandoah** River. Its valley was famed for prosperous farms, usually without slave labor except on the large plantations of absent owners, such as Gen. Washington. **Jeb** knew that one hired hand did as much work as three slaves. From farm to farm he kept heading south, for in that direction lay paths to the west and to the **Kanawha**, Kentucky and Ohio rivers, the chief routes for travel in that dangerous region. Near the town of **Lexington** in the valley he found work on the holdings of a prosperous citizen, a Burgess from **Rockbridge** County named Hoard, who like others of his station owned a few slaves.

In contrast to the religious calm of Bethlehem, Lexington bustled with merchants, farmers, soldiers and travelers. From this center trails led both to the west through the mountains and the **Greenbrier** and Kanawha valleys and eastward to the Colonial **capitol Williamsburg** and Tidewater, Virginia.

Squire Hoard, until recently a bachelor in his fifties, well nourished and balding, decided at last that a wife would be useful in managing his property, since serving as a Burgess would keep him away for long periods. A man of his station and means easily won the hand of a vibrant young beauty whose father, or local entrepreneur, had vanished into the far reaches of Kentucky to speculate in land. The longer he was absent the more his prudent wife sought to marry their only daughter to money, a marriage more of convenience than infatuation.

Jeb worked hard in the fields of Squire Hoard, clearing and fencing acres along the wooded hills flanking the valley. One hot afternoon while setting posts and stripped to the waist, he turned suddenly from his work at the sound of an approaching horse. In that remote area to his surprise came near a trim lady rider, remarkable for her beauty and ease in the saddle.

"Well, my man," she called "whoever you are, are you hoping for an audience to admire your naked torso? This spot is much too distant and rugged so I guess I'll have to do."

Jeb's youthful unclothed chest and arms had classic purity and power, which she clearly relished. No Grecian marble could be as flawless.

"I'm truly sorry to have offended you, **Ma'm**. I'm employed by Squire Hoard for field work and my name is **Jeb**. I never thought anyone would come this way⁷ He wiped sweat from his blond hair while leaning on his shovel. She was in no hurry to leave this vision of divine **maleness**, with the added allure of traces of foreign courtesy.

"I am Mistress Hoard. I was baptized Venture since Father was ever gone exploring, but friends call me **Ven**."

The unexpected chat about personal matters choked from him his usual ease with people, especially women. He nodded slowly without putting on his shirt. She seemed to enjoy looking at him half clad.

"Will you be here tomorrow? My husband is off with the Burgesses in **Williamsburg**."

"Yes Ma'm. I expect so, if the foreman doesn't change his mind."

As she turned her horse, she called over shoulder, "Then maybe III see you again, and don't bother with a shirt."⁷ Waves of black hair streamed behind as she took off in a furious canter.

They met again, always in the far off field. About his age, she was the first Anglo-blue blood that Jeb had ever met. Her patrician beauty sprang from a long line of privileged gentry, and she spoke obliquely of her marriage to an elderly often absent husband.

He led her on walks through the sloping woods. Once they came to a clear pool beneath a waterfall. He told her he sometimes swam in the pool and dried in the sunshine. That made her envious. They talked about their pasts, and in short time he learned about the life style of Virginia's gentle folk, who mostly relied on ancestry and land. Without land there was still ancestry to keep up their appearance. Her beauty harmonized with nature, dark glowing skin on chiseled features, lithesome body that filled to admiration her loose outdoor clothing. No padded underclothes for her. With athletic grace she flew her horse over ditch and fence. Jeb wondered how any man could keep pace with her while dancing. After some hours together she asked him to call her Ven, but only when they were alone.

Jeb joined the local militia in response to their call for recruits to protect western settlers and to replenish northern drafts for the Continental line. With the stroke of a pen the former soldier, now citizen and farmer, found that he had changed back to one of the soldiers of Virginia, an ambling bunch compared to the Hessian army.

The Lexington militia wore their own clothes with the barest of insignia, and they carried their own weapons, rifle, tomahawk, and knife. The State provided powder, shot, and rations, but no shelter. Officers rode their own horses, while the men usually moved on foot. Their tactics were Indian tactics-hit, run, and hide. Crude forts were built at important settlements, such as the one at Wheeling. Every few weeks groups of militia left Lexington to heed calls from settlers, only to find smoldering ruins and scalpless bodies. Jeb was sickened by the senseless carnage, but fresh families streamed into the lands of the west, and old ones kept returning, sure that this time the war parties would pass them by.

To make matters worse, Jeb and comrades received bad tidings from the Carolinas, where Cornwallis was chasing Nathaniel Greene all around the land. Occasionally, the Americans hit back, as at King's Mountain and Cowpens, but the British controlled the seaports and inland centers. By the spring of 1781, Jeb heard that Cornwallis threatened Virginia proper and intended to destroy the nests of prominent patriots, the very heart of the rebellion.

Along with most fellow citizens, Jeb looked on these hours as Virginia's bleakest. Hemorrhage in the west, dismemberment in the center, doom was at hand, leading to a plaintive

plea for all available militia. Wallowing in gloom, Virginia didn't realize its own strengths, its daunting size and its defensive terrain, assets which eighty years later would thwart an aggressive North.

Gen. Washington, whatever his troubles in New Jersey, including the treason of Benedict Arnold, had to respond to the invasion of his Virginian homeland, hitherto spared. In cold reality the British strategy of destroying Virginia was **devastatingly** effective, burning farms and shooting the males. Washington reacted by sending Lafayette with selected Continentals, a mere token force to oppose the might of **Cornwallis**.

The Marquis performed in masterful manner. He saved his troops from open battle and lured the British on an exhausting and fruitless chase. From the James to the **Rapidan**, to **Charlottesville** and back, the fox **out-ran** the hounds. During the run the militia, including **Jeb**, pestered the British rear.

The **Lexington** militia baited **Tarleton's** dragoons into a Blue Ridge cove, known for its produce and stock. Steep woods embraced the cove's entrance, and here the militia hid. Hundreds of exulting dragoons cantered up to the **coves's** small fort and paused to bring up a cannon to pulverize the garrison. The silent militia in the trees opened concerted fire on the dismounted cavalry, who saw no target and were overwhelmed. **Tarleton** withdrew his remnants, and the militiamen raced for the spoils. **Jeb** scooped up a brace of handsome pistols.

In August of 81 **Cornwallis** realized that his troops could not subdue and hold Virginia. He and his men had been fighting for over a year, and they were worn down. He decided to head to **Williamsburg**, which already had been evacuated. From here he moved to the coast at **Yorktown** to replenish from the British fleet.

In late summer of 81 **Jeb** and the **Lexington** militia were excited by two bits of news; the British withdrawal to the Chesapeake; and the march to Virginia by Generals Washington and **Rochambeau**, each with considerable troops. Neither the Virginians nor **Cornwallis** could know what the Generals knew, the astounding fact that Admiral **DeGrasse** would soon blockade the Chesapeake. With that, **Cornwallis** would be trapped and helpless. In an extraordinary reversal, the stunning Allied strategy had overwhelmed the once successful British plan, which had almost conquered Virginia.

Jeb and the **Lexington** militia harassed the retreating British, who deployed to both **Yorktown** and Gloucester **Pt.** on either side of the York River, where they dug in defensively. The Allies followed on both fronts with stiff lines and besieged in European style, the militia in front of Gloucester. Virginia had promoted **Jeb** to sergeant, reflecting his Hessian training. He suggested to the commanding Colonel that in the event of an attack the militia be divided into three groups and that they hold fire behind their fascines. Upon order, group one would spread

aim at officers, followed at short intervals by group two, and then group three. Meanwhile group one would have time to reload.

When September ended, the trap had closed. French ships controlled the Chesapeake and furnished cannon to bombard the British. In desperation Cornwallis ordered Tarleton's cavalry to charge from Gloucester Pt. The Virginia militia with Jeb in group one held firm. Accurate at 100 yards, his rifle tumbled a dragoon Lieutenant, and his compatriots mowed down the horsemen, who straggled back to base and slaughtered their famished mounts.

On October 19, 1781, Cornwallis surrendered 8,000 men to Washington and the French. This allowed the Lexington militia to tramp back to the frontier, where war with the Indians raged hotter than ever.

Jeb had not been hurt but was depressed by the Tidewater where elegant houses stared out over wasted fields and neglected farmsteads. Tobacco, slavery, and bad managers had defeated the earth and wrung it dry of tilth and richness. Denuded of organic matter, the soil lay caked and fruitless. Rampant fence rows and invading thickets told a sad story of shiftless care and a legacy of dwindling land value from years of care by no hope slaves. Jeb himself knew about productive farming in the Shenandoah Valley, whereas in the Tidewater the worn-out land threatened eventual bankruptcy. The landed gentry had pampered itself into heedless debt with frivolous spending, the Washington families included. When added to this dismal picture was the moral decay of slavery, a dire reckoning was bound to come.

And then off to the West with the militia, slogging along to the Shenandoah over endless dust, empty fields, and reeking stagnant creeks. Jeb lightened the drudgery with memories of his past six years. Bright and cheerful had been his boyhood in the forest of Hesse, brought to sudden halt by his surly father who had sold him to the Army for an enlistment bonus that promptly turned into Schnapps. The husky fifteen year old survived the hazing of soldiers, but his adolescence had been shattered.

Then political deals of European despots had landed his army unit in New Jersey countryside, a region totally strange to the lad in geography and culture. Jeb had been quick to note that the enemy, Jersey farmers, owned their own land and stock. While the Hessians fought for daily pay, the Americans aimed to save their own possessions. In short order an obvious thought had entered into his being, that of fading from the ranks into the night, but only the lure of rations and shelter had kept him in line. Despite the heavy mantle of Teutonic feudalism over his shoulders, the more he saw of the new world and its spirit the more enticed he became.

At Trenton, the astounding collapse of his entire regiment had given him reason enough to shake off Hesse, the army, and its shackles. It had taken only common sense and not courage to slip out of the POW camp into the wintry night and endless forests of Pennsylvania. And here

he was six years later after sharing in Cornwallis's surrender of Yorktown. Where was he heading? Shenandoah for a while, but farm life? he was too restless for that. Besides, all the good land was already owned. And then, the glory of a woman's body, would it snag him? Probably not, if land that stretched to the Mississippi was waiting.

The Virginia militia marched to the Valley, now ripe with grain and fat with hogs. When Jeb came, he met with beautiful Ven in their remote fields. Fighting and separation had loosened all bonds, so in the autumn sun they shed clothing and clung together as one.

Yet she was married and he penniless. That winter they snatched brief encounters together. She smiled when her husband strutted about in his finery, as she fattened with child. "He thinks it's his," she murmured.

Constant calls for the militia gave Jeb no rest. And furthermore, there was still the urging of his search. Where to hunt? Where to keep moving? He knew that his hunt would lead him across the mountains to land where the tribes roamed and scalped one another. Once there, he would wander and seek, while the forest would nourish and care for him, as Virginia never could do.