



## CHAPTER 1

### JAMES & HARRY “PRIVATE THOUGHTS”

APRIL 2, 1865  
SPANISH FORT

The snipers' proficiency had become more deadly with practice. The slightest move or exposure could cost a man a limb or his life. Simultaneously, cannons bombarded the positions twenty-four hours a day, giving no moments of solitude or safety for the weary warriors of the South. James could hear the echo of cannons and the vibrations of the gunboats firing from across the bay. He wondered if he knew the names of those dying at this minute. There'd been too many over the past years. The sun would set soon, at least then the snipers would stop their target practice for the night.

James Durrett, at age 19, had seen enough death and terror in the past three years to last him a lifetime. He was at the end of his tour as a Confederate soldier. He was no longer the same idealistic youth ready to experience adventure and act out heroic fantasies of courage as he charged into battle. War was not an adventure or a fantasy.

War was brutal with no discrimination of age or color. War was random when it concerned fate.

He sat on the damp ground next to the small campfire. His knees pulled up beneath his chin, arms wrapped around his legs. He stared straight ahead, looking at nothing in particular, pondering the circumstances as they were. He knew this was the end. The word around camp was that there was a continual build-up of over fifty-five thousand Yankee troops being brought in to wipe out Mobile and bring this God-forsaken war to an end. James wanted the war to end, but not at the price he and his comrades were about to pay. The Yanks were thirsty for blood, and there would be no mercy at the end.

Mobile, Alabama was the last stand for the South, and there was nowhere to run. Approximately forty-five hundred Confederate troops were left to withstand the final Yankee assault. All that was left of the Confederate Army now was a ragtag, starving, and battle-fatigued bunch of veterans. The generals had even recruited squads of boys from Mobile, barely thirteen-years-old, to help reinforce the dwindling numbers of able-bodied soldiers on the picket lines. The "Boy's Brigade", as it was dubbed by the vets, was enthusiastic and eager for Yankee blood; however, their inexperience and unwillingness to listen to advice caused heavy casualties in their ranks. The snipers easily picked them off and cannon fire blew them apart as they ran for cover. Mercifully, they were finally pulled back to enforce Fort Blakely, 10 miles behind the lines. James could see no point in sending children to an assured and senseless death --- for any cause --- right or wrong.

James's own family had felt the brutal effects of the war. His oldest brother, Tom, was hopefully still alive somewhere up north in a Yankee prison. His father was back home, but he was a battered old man with the spirit sucked from his soul, his right arm shattered by a minnieball. Henry, his cousin, had been by his side the past three years helping him to keep his hope and will to survive alive. Hopefully, one of them would make it back home.

Then there was his mother. He could only speak of her as she was before the war. Her letters were brief and social, not daring to express her true thoughts. She did her best to keep everything upbeat and give only good news from the home front, but her concern about Tom was obvious. Conditions in prison camps were brutal and consumed with disease. And of course, she worried about him and coming home in one piece. He worried about the same thing. .

If the South were winning, that would be one thing, then maybe there'd be some justification to all the loss of life and shattered bodies. But the South had lost. The Rebs had known it for years now.

James felt moisture escape from his eye. Without realizing he was even speaking, he muttered, "What's the point in dying now?"

Harry had recently celebrated his eighteenth birthday, and he'd been with the 96<sup>th</sup> Ohio Regiment almost two years now. Even the veterans in his unit said that if Harry had joined the war when it began, he'd probably have more kills than California Joe, the most renowned sniper in the Union Army.

Harry Morgan had a reputation for his ability to shoot as a sniper, but he was not a popular figure among his fellow soldiers. He loved what he did too much, and it bothered even the most battle hardened vets.

“Ever’ body here wants this damn war ta’ end exceptin’ Harry,” a beardless youth commented, who just wanted to go home.

Harry heard what the soldier said and turned to face him with cold, dead eyes, “Not ta’ worry fellas ... there’s always somebody that needs killin’ somewheres.” Harry reached down and picked up his beloved Sharps rifle. “Well boys, time ta’ go! Them Johnny Rebs need somebody ta’ help ‘em keep their heads down. I’ll sees ya’ at supper.”

With that, Harry retrieved the rest of his gear, preparing to return to the sniper’s nest he’d staked out for himself. He wanted to get there before sunup.

“Just like shootin’ ducks in a pond, boys --- ducks in a pond.”