

rush at Flat Gap!³⁵

held about 50 rounds. I could speedload it by taking a mouthfull of BBs and spitting them into the magazine tube. The tube would quickly rust if not kept well oiled.

In order to cock the gun, I had to put the butt on the ground and push the slide down with both hands. This was only slightly less cumbersome than the lever action, but as time passed, I eventually gained enough upper-body strength that I could hold the gun horizontally and operate the slide with my left hand while still grasping the pistol grip with my right hand. I soon learned that I could fire from the hip with pretty good accuracy and achieve a rate of fire that surely must have equaled a BAR. This newfound skill was soon to prove pivotal.

There were a couple of other kids in the neighborhood who were close to my age. Both were a year or two older than I was but at least one grade behind me in school. Ralph was a tall, lanky kid who lived a half-mile or so further up the dirt road that I lived on. Jake was a shorter squatly sort who had a well-deserved reputation as a troublemaker and a well-known lack of personal hygiene. Ralph, when by himself, was a pretty decent sort and was almost friendly most of the time. When paired with Jake the two of them took great delight in picking on me. I could hold my own with either of them separately, but the two of them were usually more than I could handle.

It was late spring. School had not yet let out, but the weather was summer like and the vegetation was in full bloom. As soon as I got home from school and changed clothes, I armed myself with the Daisy pump and set out in search of targets of opportunity. Crossing the road in front of the house, I scoped out the cornfield. Like most of the topography in that area, the field was on the side of a hill. For the last couple of years the field had not been planted, and grass and weeds grew in fairly thick patches. A few large trees had been left standing when the field was cleared, and these trees were the objects of my attention. As well as the odd songbird or squirrel, the trees were frequented by numerous starlings, which were considered fair game all year.

One of these trees was located toward the top of the field near the edge of the "Hundred-Acre Woods." The wood lot was probably more on the

order of 10 acres, but it seemed to me to be much larger. The woods were rumored to be haunted. There was an abandoned cemetery just inside the edge of the woods. The hand-hewn headstones proclaimed the occupants to have lived and died mostly before the Civil War. The ghost tales primarily centered on a handful of soldiers, Yankee and Confederate, who rested there. They were casualties of a small skirmish, which had occurred a mile or so away at a place known as Silver's Creek. My father opined that the occasional nocturnal lights and noises coming from the far side of the woods could probably be attributed to a couple of enterprising neighborhood farmers converting their excess corn into whisky. He seemed to know too many of the details of the operation, and I suspect he was at least an occasional customer of their wares.

I approached the tree with great stealth, never knowing what might flush from the tree or the

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grown up area around its base. I had moved to the far side of the tree next to the woods, where a small rise would cover my approach. Moving down off the rise I approached the tree, intent on what opportunity might present itself. Just as I neared the base of the tree, I felt a sharp sting between my shoulder blades. As I turned, I felt another on my left shoulder. At the top of

the rise, about 15-20 yards away, were Ralph and Jake, both busily re-cocking their lever-action BB guns. There was a small gully just behind the tree, and I swiftly took refuge there. Hunkered down in the gully, I couldn't see my attackers, but I could hear them slowly moving down the hill, occasionally firing at my position.

I eased my red baseball cap up to the edge of the gully and immediately drew fire. At that point I decided I needed to get to a better position to mount a counterattack. Now, I could have simply made a dash down the field to the road and back to my own yard and averted any further hostilities. No way! This cowardly act of treachery would not be without consequences. Using my very best commando-style crawl, I moved quickly up the gully to the far side of the tree. From this point, there was enough cover that I could make my way to the top of the small rise that the attack had originally come from. By this time,

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