



# ONE OF THE MISSING

## **One of the Missing**

Private Jerome Searing was a Yankee scout. He was often sent to watch the movements of enemy soldiers.

A group of army officers was standing on a hill in Georgia. They were looking south, toward a forest. They were wearing blue Yankee uniforms. A regiment of the Confederate Army was on the other side of the forest.

"Is the enemy moving forward, or retreating, or not moving at all?" one of the Union officers asked.

"We'll send a scout to look," replied another officer.

A few minutes later, Private Searing was sent to check the position of the Confederate regiment.

Searing was a brave man. He worked alone and he did his work well. He had sharp eyes and ears. He could see far into the distance. And he often heard sounds that other people could not hear. Now he moved silently through the forest toward the enemy regiment. In his hands, he carried a powerful rifle. Searing could shoot extremely well.

When Searing reached the edge of the forest, he stopped. He got down on his hands and knees and crawled forward slowly. He was looking for the enemy's picket line.

Pickets guarded the men of their regiment. They dug holes-rifle-pits-in the ground around the edge of their camp. The pickets sat in the rifle-pits and aimed their guns at the enemy. Usually, there were three or four men together in each rifle-pit. The pickets took turns to sleep. While one man watched, the other men slept.

Searing was looking for small mounds of earth on the ground. The mounds would show Searing where the Confederates had dug their rifle-pits. The mounds would also show him where the enemy had positioned its picket line.

The scout quickly lay flat on the ground. Through a narrow opening in the hushes, he had seen a small mound of yellow earth. It was one of the enemy's rifle-pits. After a few moments, Searing slowly and carefully lifted his head. He looked at the mound of earth for several more minutes. Then he stood up and walked forward. The enemy soldiers had left the rifle-pit.

Searing wanted to be sure that all the Confederate pickets had gone. He kept his head low, and ran from one rifle-pit to the next. They were all empty. The Confederates had left this picket line. But where were they now?

Searing walked through the forest until he came to the edge of a plantation. Beyond the plantation, there was an old farmhouse on a small hill. The windows of the building were broken and there was no door.

"This will be a good place to hide and watch," he thought.

He went into the building and looked out of one of the broken windows.

Searing stared across the flat, empty ground that was between the farmhouse and Kennesaw Mountain. There were no trees between the farmhouse and the mountain. Half a mile away, he could see a road. It was crowded with soldiers who wore gray uniforms. This was the rear guard of the Confederate regiment. The metal barrels of their rifles

shone in the morning sunlight. The Confederates were moving south.

Searing had to return quickly to his own regiment. He had to report to his commanding officers. But the gray line of Confederate soldiers was in front of him. Private Searing had a powerful Springfield rifle. He wanted to shoot one of the enemy. He lifted his rifle and aimed it at a Confederate soldier. But Searing did not kill anyone that bright summer morning. And he did not make a report about the enemy's movements.

On the side of Kennesaw Mountain, a Confederate captain was standing beside a cannon. The distance between the cannon and the farmhouse was two miles. The captain saw the group of Yankee officers on the hill to the north. He aimed the cannon at them, and fired. But the shell missed the Union soldiers and flew off in a different direction.

Private Searing was aiming his rifle at the Confederates on the road. Suddenly he heard a whistling sound in the air. The sound became louder. Before he could fire the gun, the roof of the house fell in.

When Searing opened his eyes, he saw blue sky. Where was the roof of the house? He was half-sitting and half-lying on the floor, and there were heavy wooden beams all around him. The beams had been the roof of the house. Searing could not move and he was covered in dust. The gray dust covered his body, face, clothes and hair. A large beam was lying across his legs. The scout's left hand was trapped under many heavy pieces of wood. Searing could only move his right arm. In front of his eyes, the scout saw a ring of shining metal. The ring was, in fact, the muzzle of his Springfield rifle. The gun was also trapped among the pieces

of wood and other parts of the roof. And it was aimed at the center of Searings forehead.

The powerful rifle was loaded with a bullet. It was ready to fire. Searing did not like to look down the muzzle of his own gun. He tried to move his body.

"What is holding my head?" he asked himself. He was able to move one piece of wood a little. Then he stopped.

"The rifle might fire if I move suddenly," he thought. "It looks closer to my head now."

Searing closed his eyes. "I can't get out," he said to himself. "I can't move. I'll sleep now. The Confederates have gone and some of our own soldiers will come here soon. They'll find me."

The scout was extremely tired, but he did not sleep. He felt a pain in his forehead. When he opened his eyes, the pain disappeared. But when he closed his eyes, the pain returned. He heard birds singing.

"Help!" he shouted.

He was surprised by the sound of his own voice. He sounded afraid. No one came to help him.

Private Searing could not sleep and he could not look away from the gun. But, at last, he became unconscious.

When he woke up again, Searing knew that his hand was bleeding. He could not see his hand, but he could feel blood pouring from it. Then he saw some small, brown animals running over the wooden beams. They were rats! Rats were climbing near the rifle! But the rifle did not fire.

At last the rats ran away. Searing knew that they would return later. Then they would attack him. They would bite his face, neck and hands. He hoped to be dead before that happened.

Private Jerome Searing was a brave man, but he was tired and in pain. More and more of his blood was pouring from his injured hand. He was very weak and he was terrified. He was suffering, and no one was coming to help him. He tried to lift a small piece of wood with his right hand.

"Can I move the piece of wood so that it touches the rifle?" he thought. "Maybe I can push the rifle so that it isn't aimed at my head."

Searing slowly moved the piece of wood along the barrel of the gun. He could not push the barrel away, but now he could feel the trigger of the rifle. He knew that he wanted to die now. He closed his eyes and pushed the wood against the trigger. Nothing happened. The rifle did not fire.

Private Jerome Searing knew that the pain in his head was part of his dream. He dreamed that the bullet went into his head. At last, the fear of the bullet killed him.

Lieutenant Adrian Searing looked at his watch. The time was eighteen minutes past eight.

The lieutenant was in command of the Yankee pickets on the hill. He knew that his brother, Private Jerome Searing, was scouting somewhere near the hill. Adrian was waiting for Jerome to return and report about the enemy's pickets.

Suddenly, Adrian Searing heard a noise in the distance. It was like the sound of a building falling down. The sound

was coming from the south. At the same moment, an officer came toward him.

"Lieutenant Searing," said the officer, "The colonel orders you to move your men forward. You must look for the enemy. We think that the Confederates have retreated."

The lieutenant ordered his men to move down the hill. They went through the forest and came to the edge of the plantation. A wooden farmhouse had stood on a small hill beside the plantation. The building was now destroyed. The walls and the roof had fallen. The Yankees passed by on both sides of the house and moved toward Kennesaw Mountain. Lieutenant Searing came to the farmhouse. He looked inside building and saw the body of a dead man. The body was buried under a pile of big, wooden beams. It was completely covered with gray dust. The man s uniform was gray. His skin and hair were gray. His pale face was very thin and his eyes were staring in terror. The ground beneath his body was soaked with blood.

"I guess that this Confederate has been dead for a week, the lieutenant said to himself. "Maybe he was killed when the building fell."

Lieutenant Searing did not recognize the face of the dead man and he did not see the Springfield rifle. He looked at his watch. The time was six forty. He followed his soldiers toward Kennesaw Mountain.

- THE END -

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