

Shiloh: A Novel Study Guide

Shiloh: A Novel by Shelby Foote

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Contents

Shiloh: A Novel Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter 1.....	4
Chapter 2.....	7
Chapter 3.....	10
Chapter 4.....	13
Chapter 5.....	15
Chapter 6.....	17
Chapter 7.....	19
Characters.....	21
Objects/Places.....	24
Themes.....	26
Style.....	28
Quotes.....	30
Topics for Discussion.....	32

Plot Summary

The story opens with men of the Confederate Army marching toward Pittsburg Landing. Lieutenant Palmer Metcalfe, who is an Aide-de-Camp for the staff of General Albert Sidney Johnston, describes the men and his impressions of the situation. He is called on to help draft the battle plan and notes that Napoleon's Battle of Waterloo is used as a blueprint. Palmer says that he is pleased with the result, even though he played a very minor role. Palmer later realizes that the very thing he had considered a stroke of genius turned out to be the downfall of the Confederate Army at Shiloh. The troops became so intermingled that men were being given orders by commanders they didn't know. The commanders were asked to lead men without knowing their strengths. Palmer is wounded and his horse killed as he helps repulse the final attack by the Union soldiers.

Captain Walter Fountain is adjutant for the 53rd Ohio. He is upset because he is been forced to take a turn at guard duty, which is something not usually required of men of his rank because of their duties during the day. As he waits out the few hours remaining before the dawn, he writes a letter to his wife. In that letter, he tells his impressions of the situation. He laments the fact that he has not seen his wife for six months and that he loves her dearly. His letter is stopped mid-word and it is later revealed that he is hit by a mortar round fired by the confederates into the Union camp.

Private Luther Dade is a Rifleman of the 6th Mississippi. He is among those that storm the Union Camp in what becomes known as the Battle of Shiloh. He's wounded and sets out on foot in search of a doctor but finds himself unable to continue and eventually sits in a shaded area to rest. There he sees Johnston brought in from the battlefield with a fatal wound.

Private Otto Flickner is a connoneer with the 1st Minnesota Battery. Flickner is in the heat of the battle and when he sees a great many of his fellow soldiers fall to Confederate fire, he leaves the battlefield and joins a mass of Union soldiers who have done the same. Over the course of several hours, he thinks about his decision and knows that he has to face his fear if he is going to be able to live with himself and so returns to the fight.

Sergeant Jefferson Polly is a scout with Forrest's Cavalry. It is Polly who discovers the Union reinforcements arriving by boat and he alerts Forrest who tries to get other Confederate commanders to withdraw. Forrest is unsuccessful and Polly is among those who remain with him to fight the Union troops the following day. The 23rd Indiana is among the Union forces facing the Confederates. They take serious losses and one notes that none of them like the army, which results in dislike for each other.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The story opens with men of the Confederate Army marching toward Pittsburg Landing. Lieutenant Palmer Metcalfe, who is an Aide-de-Camp for the staff of General Albert Sidney Johnston, describes the condition of the Confederate soldiers as they march. The road has been difficult for them and rain has muddied their way so that many have stopped looking at anything other than their boots and the backs or the rucksacks of the men in front of them. Then there's a brief clearing of the skies and the sun shines through. Palmer says that when this happens, the men are immediately cheered and some of them even find the energy to dodge puddles in their paths. At one point Palmer sees the men from the vantage of a ridge and from that vantage point he can only see a large "army in motion." He says it's only when he draws near the men that he sees individual faces that register the hardships they've endured.

There comes a point when a group of commanders stop to talk to General Johnston. Palmer is included by virtue of his rank. Johnston tells those gathered that he is in favor of cancelling the attack. He says that the only real advantage they might have had was that of surprise, and the Confederate Army has given away any possibility of a surprise attack. As it turns out, many of the men had started the march without a weapon in their possession. As they were given guns, their sergeants taught them to load and reload, focusing on the need for military speed. But Johnston says that as they marched through the rain, many of the men began to wonder whether their powder had become wet and to speculate that their weapons might not even fire when the need arose. Rather than unloading their guns, they'd fired off shots to check the powder. A group of soldiers had seen a deer running alongside them in a field and many of them fired at the deer, though it escaped and Palmer said no shot even came close to hitting the animal. That noise was coupled with the fact that some of the soldiers had yelled for joy when the sun came out. Johnston now says that all that noise combined had been more than enough to alert the Union soldiers of the Confederate advance. Johnston's caution isn't supported by other commanders in the ranks. Most say their men desperately need a battle and that to turn back without facing a fight would be as demoralizing as being beaten in a confrontation. At one point, Johnston hears a drum and sends someone to silence it but the messenger returns with the news that they are hearing a Union drum. Johnston now knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Union Army is aware of the presence of the Confederates. While Johnston is still pondering this, the first shots ring out and he knows it's too late to make any other plans.

Prior to the battle kicking off, Palmer recalls what his life was like before joining the army. His mother died in childbirth and Palmer's only knowledge of her are from his father and a portrait that hangs in their home. His father lost an arm fighting in Texas. It's from his father that Palmer learns a great deal about Johnston. Palmer was attending the Louisiana State Military Academy when the Confederacy seceded from the Union. He recalls that Sherman had been one of his commanders there and

Sherman had predicted ruin to the Confederacy. As Palmer is going to sleep the night before the major battle, he imagines that he meets Sherman on the battlefield. In that dream, Palmer holds Sherman at gunpoint and Sherman is forced to admit that he was wrong, that the South was capable of fighting a successful war.

Prior to the clash of the Confederate and Union armies, commanders prepare a battle plan. As an aide, Palmer is part of that planning process. He is initially confused and believes the plan to be inordinately complex. Napoleon's Waterloo is used as a blueprint and as the Confederate plan emerges, Palmer begins to recognize the rhyme and reason to the process. He says that, even though he provides only the punctuation to bring order to the plan, he's proud of it when it's finished. The plan is simple. Palmer says that commanders have their orders to push forward at particular points, keep their file well protected and ensure that other forces aren't waiting for their movements. On paper, those orders are easily carried out but Palmer admits that a sheet of paper is clear with not obstacles and that correcting problems there is easy. The problem is that the commanders on the ground are faced with problems not so easily solved. One of those erupts quickly and a commander has to call on another to wait for his advance.

Along the road on the way to the battle, commanders read a letter from Johnston. The letter urges the men to remember that they are fighting for honor and homeland and says that the women of the South are dependent on the efforts of the soldiers. Palmer says that some commanders simply read the letter while others add their own flourish to the words and still others add their own comments, taking advantage of the opportunity for public speaking.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Palmer is obviously proud of his southern heritage but he does not dwell on this a great deal. He talks only briefly about his time at the Louisiana State Military Academy though he will later describe the circumstances that caused him to be in Sherman's room when Sherman says that the South has made a mistake. Palmer is young, just nineteen at the time of the events in the first chapter of the book, but he says that he's aged a lot over the past two years.

Palmer is obviously well educated and he is proud of the fact that he participates in the planning of an upcoming battle. Aside from the pride of accomplishment, Palmer realizes that planning a battle and executing it are two entirely different things. He says that the commanders on the ground have obstacles and challenges that don't exist on the clear, flat piece of paper. This realization is probably prompted by the fact that Palmer is already disillusioned as a member of the military.

Palmer seems to greatly respect the men he serves under. He touts the events of Johnston's life, saying that he's been greatly covered in the newspapers though most of those stories are less than accurate. The reader will later learn that Palmer is eager to serve again but makes it clear that he will choose his commander and wants someone he can be proud of. An interesting aspect of this is that the people were initially pleased

with Johnston but come to blame him for situations that don't evolve in favor of the South. This seems typical of any campaign with the general population looking only for positive results and caring little for extenuating circumstances or for the men who carry on the daily rigors of warfare.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Captain Walter Fountain is an Adjunct with the 53rd Ohio Regiment. He is just finishing with guard duty or a duty that men of his rank seldom have to perform and that he's drawn because his commander is angry with him. He begins writing a letter to a woman he addresses as "Martha dearest." Walter tells about a dog that's been named Bango. The dog is a Redbone and "joined" the army as they marched through the countryside. General Ulysses Grant is in the area and had stopped practice maneuvers just a few days earlier to look at Bango. Walter says that Grant has always had a soft spot for animals and relates what other facts he knows about Grant. Walter says that Grant is only eight years older than he and, being from the same town, Walter knew Grant by sight prior to the war. He says that Grant had been dubbed "Useless Grant" as a young man and that he'd hated the idea of working in the family tanning business. Grant had drifted somewhat and eventually settled down to marry the daughter of a slave-owner, which is an interesting step because Grant's father had been known as an abolitionist. Over the years, Grant continues to drift, never really making a success of anything though he has a wife and children to feed. An effort at real estate sales is equally unprofitable. He eventually returns to the family business though he's such a poor salesman that his brothers try to keep him away from customers. Then the war erupted and Grant became involved. A political figure had demanded Grant's reinstatement into the army and that had led to Grant's being in charge of the regiments that converge on the area known as Shiloh.

Walter describes their trip through Confederate territories, saying that his overall impression is that if the South wants to withdraw this land from the Union, the Union should say "good riddance." He writes intermittently to his wife while remembering other details about his service up to this point. He says that the men were set to clearing a spot along a river near the Shiloh Church and that it took only a short time for all the men to realize that Sherman had chosen an incredibly good position for the Union camp. Walter says that for the first few days in camp, a man would wander into some group and ask for help finding his way back to his own regiment, so easy was it to become disoriented.

One of Walter's lines to Martha indicates that he has been gone from home for six weeks and he says that it seems a long time. Walter says they spend their days drilling, that there's nothing else to do but that he hadn't expected a "picnic." He says that his fellow soldiers are aching for this fight because they know that this will be a decisive victory that will likely bring an end to the fighting. As the men go on marches, they occasionally discover small bands of Confederates and these sometimes result in very minor skirmishes though for the most part there's a single shot or two as the Rebels hurry to run away. Walter says that being shot at is also part of the daily drills.

Walter is under the command of Colonel Appler. He says that Appler is constantly trying to alert the higher commanders that there are enemy forces in the area - a fact that has earned him the scorn of other companies and of his own men. Appler has also decided that his aides and officers have to spend their days training with the troops. While Walter says this is a good idea in theory, he says that the aides and officers then don't have time to do their own work. About this same time, there's a minor skirmish and Appler sends Walter with a message for General Sherman that the enemy is near and that attack is imminent. Walter dreads having to deliver the message, knowing that he might earn Sherman's wrath. He hopes that Sherman will be gone, which means Walter will only be laughed at by members of Sherman's camp. However, he meets Sherman on the way to deliver the message and is forced to relay Appler's words. Sherman goes on to Appler's camp and listens as Appler shares his information and his fears. This time Sherman says that the Confederacy is not foolish enough to leave their own base unprotected. In front of Appler's men, Sherman says that he knows that there are no Confederate forces nearer than Corinth. Duly chastised, Appler is furious and takes it out on the men, ordering Walter to night duty.

Walter explains much of this to Martha and says that the rest of the night after his watch has elapsed since he began the letter. He says that the land on this particular day is pretty and that he can hear birds singing. Walter then tells about a conversation he can hear in which a man named Lou Treadway is telling a fellow cook about the history of the word "Shiloh." Lou points out a nearby church named Shiloh and says that it's mentioned in Second Samuel. Lou says that the scholars who have studied the passage say it means "place of peace.." Walter goes on with his letter, saying that he greatly misses the Ohio spring that he knows Martha is seeing. His next sentence reads, "My dearest, if only you knew how much I lo ..." and breaks off. Walter says that he hears a "rattle" of sounds along the front of their position and that he realizes it's the sound of guns being fired. He then sees a fawn run toward the camp, obviously scared and pausing to look behind her. Then the Confederates break through and Walter sees them advance.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Walter's attitude that the war is going to be short is typical of most of the young men who joined the military at this time. He talks about his desire for the battle to hurry and begin because he believes this to be the battle that will end the war. While Walter is obviously fearful for his life, he seems to treat the situation and his involvement in it as a duty and one that is not all that dangerous. He is almost flippant as he tells Martha that he being shot is as much a part of their daily drills as the marches.

Walter's description of Grant is, according to the author's explanations, factual. It's interesting that this man who became such an important part of the Civil War was not expected to amount to much by those who knew him as a young man. This meeting of people who knew each other seems also typical of situation and many of the young men whose letters have been preserved wrote about their encounters with friends and family members, sometimes fighting on the opposite side.

Walter describes the advance of the Union Army via the Tennessee River and says that there was torrential rain during part of their journey, a fact that hampers their landing because much of the area becomes flooded. The author notes that he even sought accurate accountings of the weather conditions and that he based this information on the writings of those who were there.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Luther Dade is a private in the Sixth Mississippi Rifle regiment. Luther is from Tennessee and has managed to fall asleep the night before the battle at Shiloh. He is dreaming about his family at home. He is the oldest child and remembers how they all gathered around him when it was time for him to leave to join his regiment. But his dream is interrupted by someone shaking him awake. He discovers that it's actually the day his group is supposed to fight against the Union Army that is camped between two small rivers with their back to the Tennessee River. Luther rises, somewhat fearful of what's to come but willing to do his duty, whatever that may be. He notes that others have a different look today as well, realizing what lies ahead. In his words, "The put-on had gone off their faces."

Luther says that they were standing in formation one minute and the next they were headed into battle. Their commander, Captain Plummer, has a lisp and keeps yelling at them to stay in formation, but the briars and underbrush make that impossible. As soon as it clears some, they return to formation as near as possible and continue forward. Luther sees General Johnston ride by and is, as always, impressed with the man's bearing and appearance. Luther's group is behind some skirmishers and the soon catch up to the men who are leading the battle. When they encounter a swampland, the men split. General Cleburn is furious and yells at them to close the gap, but when he rides into the swamp, his horse sinks to its knees and Cleburn is thrown. As the men begin the push up the hill to the Union encampment, Luther passes a man named Burt Tapley. At first, Luther believes Burt is wounded but soon discovers that he's actually got a stitch in his side. Luther credits it to the amount of food Burt eats and the fact that he's out of shape.

When the first volley of shot comes toward the men, Luther realizes that they are shooting toward him. For a moment he's very afraid and considers whether he could run away. But while he's thinking about his situation, he's struck by a man rushing his way and when he gets up again, he goes forward. Luther says that he begins passing by men who are lying on the ground and he initially believes that they must be out of breath like Tapley was. But he soon realizes that they are actually wounded or dead. Luther says that he and the others who are involved in the Confederate charge soon begin avoiding those lying on the ground, even when it's someone they know. He says that it's not that they believe it would be back luck to be near the wounded as some people say, but that they run around them as if what ails them might somehow be contagious.

The rush continues through the Union camp and Luther says that he and most of the other men stop to grab biscuits or other food from the tents as they rush past. The officers rally the men into formation and prepare for another charge. They make it past the tents where they discover a large Union force lined up, "shoulder to shoulder," and waiting for the Confederate advance. Luther says that the Union soldiers are situated so



that a row of men are squatted down and another row is standing above them, ready to fire over the heads of their fellow soldiers. The result is a wall of fire that comes at the Confederates. Luther and the others charge but are pushed back by this force. Luther sees many men shot as they stand or run during their rush to take the Union forces. When the Confederates are joined by reinforcements, they break through the Union lines and Luther is engaged in hand-to-hand combat. He stabs a Union soldier in the head with his bayonet and the man doesn't immediately die, but lies on the ground as if wanting to pull the bayonet out but fearing to do so. Luther remembers that he's been told to take good care of his gun and to keep it by his side, but he can't bring himself to pull the bayonet from the man's head and walks away, leaving it behind. He finds another gun and picks it up but realizes that a wound that hadn't hurt very much is apparently more serious than he'd thought.

He is excused from the next charge and told to wait with some other wounded men for a doctor. He does as he's told and falls asleep as he waits. When he wakes, he discovers that most of the men who were able to walk have walked away in search of help. He decides he should leave too and he gets up, headed toward the sound of rifle fire, reasoning that the doctors will be near the fighting. He walks for awhile, realizing that he's very weak but determined to keep walking. He finds the Shiloh Meeting House and asks a man where he might find a doctor. The man says he doesn't know and Luther continues to walk. Eventually he finds a place in a wooded area and, unable to go farther, sits down. Once he's off his feet, he knows that he won't be able to get up again. While he's sitting there, he sees two men approaching on horseback. One is in civilian clothing and he soon recognizes the other as General Johnston. Johnston is injured, obviously severely, and is leaning on the civilian who Luther soon recognizes as Governor Harris. Luther watches as Harris gets Johnston off his horse and gently lays him out on the ground. He loosens Johnston's clothing in an attempt to find where he's wounded, but can't find it. He tries to give Johnston some brandy but Johnston doesn't swallow and the brandy runs out of his mouth. Another man arrives, this one unknown to Luther but wearing the stripes of a colonel, and tries to get Johnston to talk, but the General is too near death. Luther notes that he still looks handsome, even as his eyes glaze over.

Chapter 3 Analysis

With Luther's story, the stories of the men involved begin to come together. Luther describes the location that has already been described by Walter Fountain. In Walter's story, the location is positioned as a highly defensible spot that favors the Union Army. However, in Luther's story, the Confederate generals plan to use the lay of the land to their advantage. Luther says that he'd been told about the plan by two commanders but hadn't really understood because of the use of the big words and the tactics involved. However, when someone else explains it to him by drawing the plan out on the ground, he realizes that the Union soldiers are boxed in on each side by a stream. The Confederates are going to push them to the banks of the Tennessee River and there capture or kill the entire unit.

Luther describes a man who is running down a hill when a bullet strikes him in the chest. The man's body is propelled by the force of gravity on down the hill but his legs also continue to pump so that it appears the man is running, even after Luther can see in his face that the man is dead. This image, apparently more than any other he sees during the bloody battle, disturbs Luther. He says that it's "unreligious" and "obscene." He compares it to what he has seen when a deer continues to run after being shot. It is not clear why this disturbs Luther so much but it might be that it's because he notes that even after the man is dead, he continues to run as he was doing in life. Luther says that "they" warned him there would be blood once the forces were engaged in battle, but that he hadn't realized how real it would be until it began. It might be that this man's death is simply the image that strikes home the fact that the battle is for real and that men are dying all around him.

At one point, Luther sees a young aide and describes him briefly. From this description, it seems he has seen Palmer Metcalf. Palmer also describes being heckled by some of the soldiers marching on the way to Shiloh and it seems that one of them he sees is probably Luther. This intermingling of the characters is seen throughout the book though seldom are their encounters of any more importance to the story than this encounter described by Luther and Palmer.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Private Otto Flickner, a canoneer with the First Minnesota Battery, is well away from the line of fire where he encounters a man who has accused him of being a coward. Otto says he wants to fight the man for the words but the man won't get up. Otto cites the words of one of the commanders and says that he isn't a coward, he's just disheartened. The men are all well behind the lines of fighting and all have walked away from their posts, their fellow soldiers and their commanders, fearing for their lives when faced with the onslaught from the Confederate Army. Otto sees that one of the men has a dog and the dog seems to be badly wounded. The man then tells Otto how he came to be in possession of the dog. The man says that he'd been on guard duty the previous night and had come into camp around four in the morning. He said that he woke "just before dawn" to go "to the bushes" and noticed that the "officer of the day, Captain Fountain, from up at Regimental," was sitting at his table writing a letter. The man says that he'd noticed the hound laying near the officer but that the hound, accustomed to all the men of their outfit, had barely stirred. Just as the man gets back in his tent, he hears the blast of a canon and then feels the impact. He says a short time later he discovers that the shell has landed on Fountain, literally in the officer's lap, blowing him to bits. The dog is smeared with debris from that blast. Otto suggests to the man that he should wash the dog off in the river, but the man cites the dog's size and the obvious strength of his teeth and says that he doesn't want to upset the animal anymore than he already is.

As the man concludes his story, others tell theirs and Otto chimes in that he'd remained in the line through the first charge of the Confederate soldiers, but one of the other men continues to insist that it was cowardice that drove all of them to be so far from the fighting. Otto recounts the day's events. He said he was on canon detail when some of the infantry had marched past, laughing as they called the canon detail "easy-living boys" and relaying the word that they were facing a huge Rebel force. Otto says that he'd grown accustomed to hurrying at some duty only to sit and wait for an eternity for something to happen and that's the way this day starts out. He says that his commander, Sergeant Buterbaugh, warns that the fight is imminent just before the Confederate forces appeared. A short time into the fighting, Otto realizes that the canon to his right is hit and then another shell hits nearer his own location.

The Union canon battery moves the remaining canons to a new location and is forced to move again just a short time later. Otto says that they were pounding the Confederates but that it seemed to make little impact on the Confederate forces. About this time, some of the troops begin walking or running away. Otto says that Corporal Keller is "cussing and calling them cowards" but Sergeant Buterbaugh says that the men have been demoralized and have lost their confidence. Otto says that he would never have been ready to walk away himself but when he learned that the canons were going to have to move again, he simply gave up.



Otto recounts his decision to join the army. He says that he'd had brothers already in the fighting but when he made the decision, his father gave him a watch that had belonged to Otto's grandfather. The story went that Otto's grandfather had fought against Napoleon. Otto's father says that maybe the watch will help Otto do as well against the Confederates. Otto, though he'd never wanted to hear about his grandfather's exploits, was happy with the gift. He says that as he was walking away from the fighting he had to wonder whether his grandfather had ever walked away.

As Otto is sitting with all the other men who have run away from the fighting, there are reinforcements coming in. While officers come and go on the steamboats bringing in fresh troops, none tries to get the deserters back into the fighting. Some of the men are heckling those who ran away and some try to shame the men into returning to the fight. As Otto listens, he says that he suddenly realizes that they are right. He had not walked away because he was demoralized but had run away because he was scared. He says that there's a big difference in the two and that it frightens him because to be demoralized is something outside oneself while being scared comes from within. Armed with a new resolve, he sets out to find his company but soon learns that they were captured. He eventually finds a few of his fellow soldiers who escaped capture and joins them, saying that he'll be ready to fight the following morning.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Otto describes seeing a canon ball that was probably a ricochet coming his way. He says that it seemed to take a long time in its journey and that he somehow knew it was coming for him. The shell doesn't hit him but clears his location only slightly. This phenomenon is also described by Jefferson Polly in chapter five. Jefferson and his men are mounted and can see the cannonballs as they arc across the sky. In that instance, the men have time to dodge and they keep their horses moving to avoid the projectiles.

Otto describes the unnerving sound of the Confederate yells as the Rebels are headed into battle. In Otto's case, it seems to play an important role in his final undoing. Though he describes other reasons that led to his decision to run away from the fighting, he says the yells of the attacking soldiers "didn't sound even partly human" and that he could imagine those yelling had no brain. What's interesting is that one of the Confederates describes the low roar that comes from attacking Union troops and one mentions that he begins yelling the Confederate yell without even meaning to.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Sergeant Jefferson Polly is a scout with Forrest's Cavalry. Jefferson is standing atop an Indian mound near the river when he discovers that Union reinforcements are arriving by steamboat. Jefferson says that Bedford had been born in Middle Tennessee and was known as a man who got most things he went after. Jefferson says that as a young man his father had been insistent that Jefferson attend seminary. He was dismissed from school for disobeying the rules and says that it was almost a relief when he and his roommate were caught with a woman in their room so that he no longer had to try to live up to his father's demands. He then travels around, doing various things and trying his hand at different jobs. He is on his way home to see if his father is still alive when he sees an advertisement for cavalry men to serve in Forrest's regiment. Jefferson decides to join, at least partly in order to put off the meeting with his father. He goes to the Gayoso House where Colonel Forrest's brother, Jeffrey, is swearing in the recruits.

Jefferson is soon moved to the position of scout and says that he enjoys the work. He's working in this capacity on the night after the battle when the Union's reinforcements begin to arrive. Jefferson is standing atop the largest Indian mound of the area when he discovers the arrival of the fresh troops. He goes to Forrest's tent to make his report, knowing that Forrest will want to see for himself. Jefferson is initially worried about finding the place again but locates it easily. He and Forrest, dressed in blue jackets taken from Union dead and accompanied by several others similarly dressed, go to the mound and look out at the new arrivals. Jefferson says there are at least six thousand Union men "skulking" at the base of the cliff - the location they'd chosen when they ran away from the fighting. The new arrivals are Buell's men, a fact that Jefferson knows because the men are announcing their affiliation to their fellow Union soldiers who are hiding from the fighting.

Forrest takes note of the number and equipment of those arriving and realizes that the Confederates are going to be greatly outnumbered when the fighting resumes the following day. He believes that leaving the area is the best course of action. But Forrest sets out to find other commanders to make that decision and finds that he cannot find the highest-ranking officers and those on a level with Forrest are unwilling to make that decision. The night passes without the Confederates making any move away from the area and Forrest's men join in the fight. Jefferson says that his men are waiting for their orders and Forrest is looking for an officer to tell him where his forces are needed. While Jefferson is outside the Shiloh Meeting House a young man approaches and asks where he can find a doctor. Forrest is told that he's going to have to make the decision for himself. He says that while they are trying to work out the details, the mounted men can see incoming cannonballs and dodge them. Forrest then leads the attack

Jefferson says that the battle at Shiloh wasn't meant for a mounted cavalry attack because there were too many ravines and trees. But, he says that the men under



Forrest's command had no idea that they weren't in a position to be an effective force. In truth, by this time, the group of men had worked so hard together that they were more of a "horse infantry" than a traditional cavalry force. Jefferson says that Forrest's idea of how to win a battle was simply to arrive with as many men as possible, then to use them to the best advantage. Jefferson says that a tactician who had studied at West Point would use different terminology, but that the basic principles were the same.

Forrest has a sword that he uses a great deal in battle and Jefferson says that each time he led the men, they responded and did whatever he asked to the best of their ability. He says Forrest hadn't wanted this fight and had, in fact, tried to find commanding officers who would order a retreat before the Confederates had to face a renewed Union force. When he wasn't able to accomplish that, Forrest set out to do all he could in the fight. Jefferson says that Forrest is later recuperating from a wound received in the battle of Fallen Timbers and it's during his convalescence that he advertises for two hundred able-bodied recruits.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Jefferson seems to greatly admire Forrest. He says that what most people don't realize is that Forrest is a great cavalryman and Jefferson goes on to say that Forrest was "one of the great ones of all time." Jefferson's admiration seems limitless and he says that it's only the men who see Forrest up close, mainly the men of his unit, who really realize how great this man is.

Jefferson is ashamed for the Union soldiers he sees that have run away from the fighting. He says that they are so anxious to put distance between themselves and the fighting that they push themselves onto the wharf in an effort to get a ride on one of the steamboats bringing in fresh recruits. He says that even though the soldiers are the enemy, they had once all belonged to the same country. This thinking indicates several things about Jefferson, including that he is proud and would never run away from a fight.

The young man who asks Jefferson where he can find a doctor is Luther Dade.

Jefferson hints at the battle of Fallen Timbers, saying only that Forrest is wounded there. That battle will be described in depth in another chapter of the book. What's interesting is that Jefferson says it's while Forrest is recovering from his wound that he places another advertisement, this time for two hundred recruits. This seems to indicate that he lost two hundred men at the battles of Shiloh and Fallen Timbers.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

The squad from the 23rd Indiana are camped at Stoney Lonesome, a place near Shiloh. The first section of the story is by Robert Winter. Robert says he can remember being picked up at an orphanage in New England at age six. He'd been told then that his name would forever after be Robert Winter. Robert says that "for years, I thought all children came from Boston." The perspective changes at this point, though it is not clear who is speaking. The speaker says that Lew Wallace is the unit commander and that on the second morning of the battle, they all realize many will die attempting to close the gap between the battle lines. The speaker says that the situation is fairly easy to this point and that it could be the Confederates know that the Union reinforcements have arrived. He can't believe it, though, and expects that there were "hard things coming." The next speaker is named Klein and he complains about the weather but a man named Bonner says that the Confederates are also getting wet and won't like the weather any better. The rain is heavy enough that visibility is low but they begin to hear shots, indicating a battle is heating up.

The man named Diffenbuch is next to speak and a man named Lavery says that a skirmish in their favor was "pretty." Diffenbuch says he saw nothing "pretty" about the situation and prays that God will forgive Lavery. Another speaker takes over and says that Winter and Klein are missing but Klein soon arrives, saying that he'd waited for the main body of the squad to draw any fire before making his own run across a field. It's the second day of the battle and this speaker says that some may have run away the previous day but none need be ashamed of their performance this day.

The next speaker goes back in time, saying that they'd been wakened Sunday - the first day of the battle - by sounds of fighting. The men listen as the sounds grow stronger. This speaker says that it would be reasonable to expect that their squad would be close, but that this is not the case. He says it's because none of them want to be in the army and all of them are looking for someone to blame. The natural course of those feelings is that they dislike each other. On that first morning of the battle, they'd marched along a particular route then discovered that they were about to march directly into the hands of enemy troops. They have to turn around and march back.

The next speaker says the squad breaks into two groups and that during their marching they found two men, face to face, each with a bead on the other. Both men had died where they lay. The next speaker is likely Grissom. He describes seeing Pettigrew's death. Pettigrew says only, "Tell my wife," before dying.

The next speaker says that Grissom is wounded as the squad retreats. He says that they had stood while the Confederates charged and that the Union soldiers were relieved when the Confederates didn't charge again. He describes the burial of Confederate soldiers in mass graves.

The next speaker is probably Armory. He says that Winter and Pettigrew have died while Diffenbuch and Grissom were wounded. He briefly expresses his dissatisfaction with the situation and plans to try to get a transfer out of the squad. The next speaker recalls Winter and Pettigrew and believes that the two men "died for nothing."

Chapter 6 Analysis

Chapter six is confusing in that it is difficult to tell who is speaking. It's obviously members of a squad from the 23rd Indiana, but the reader is given only a few hints as to which squad member is speaking at any given time. There is apparently twelve squad members represented in the chapter though thirteen names are mentioned. It's left to the reader to decide which perspective is being presented at any given time. Overall, with only a couple of examples, it seems unimportant to know exactly who is talking.

The final speaker sums up the attitudes probably experienced by many of the Union soldiers. This speaker says that he believes the Confederates have a reason for fighting - the war is in their area and they are fighting for a way of life they want to protect. He says that he believes it to be easier to fight "for something that it was to fight against something." He recalls that one of his commanders had explained that the Confederates wanted "the right kind of life, the right kind of government," but that they'd been "misled by bad men." This man explains to the Union soldiers, including this speaker from the squad, that the Confederates were bound to discover their misconceptions and would then just stop fighting.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

The final chapter is seen from the perspective of Palmer Metcalf and picks up where chapter one left off. Palmer is trudging along behind a wagon, holding onto the wagon to make walking easier. He is eventually too tired to even do that and drops off for a rest. He thinks back over the days' battles and says that he suddenly realizes why everything went wrong despite the battle plan that he'd thought was so perfect. He says that on the first day of the battle, that Sunday, the situation had gone in favor of the Confederates. As of the opening of the fighting on Monday morning, it was obvious that reinforcements had arrived and that the Confederates, already tired from the previous day, were outmatched. The biggest problem with the plan, Palmer now realizes, is that the troops were situated in such a way that they could have done a great deal of damage even against fresh troops, but that the companies had "intermingled" in the course of executing the previous day's plan. Troops didn't know where their commanders were and were uncertain how far to follow a different leader. Commanding officers didn't know the men and had no idea of their strengths or weaknesses.

Palmer himself had remained unattached to any troop until he joined up with the remains of Forrest's cavalry. He says that Confederate troops began to withdraw and he falls in with Forrest's men who are charged with guarding the rear of the retreat. Their purpose was to ensure that the Union didn't harass the main body of the troops as they retreated. Palmer says a scout named "Polly" arrives with news that they are being pursued just about the time Forrest discovers an area that would provide a tactical advantage. The area is filled with downed trees and would become known as Fallen Timbers. The troops following Forrest fall into a long line along a ridge and wait. As the Union soldiers draw near, Forrest orders the attack and Palmer says that he falters for a moment, having expected Forrest to hold and wait for the Union to make the first move. Palmer's horse is shot and he falls to the ground, but gets up in time to see Forrest still on the attack. Forrest fails to stop at the Union line and breaks through, the only one of the Confederate soldiers to do so. He's shot in the hip but stays on his horse. He realizes he's alone, grabs a Union soldier and uses the man as a shield as he breaks back through the line. The Confederate effort to break up a Union pursuit is effective.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Palmer recounts how he came to be in the room when Sherman learned that the Confederate States had seceded from the Union. Palmer was at the Louisiana State Military Academy but had been recovering from an illness that prevented him from leaving for home with all the other students. Once Palmer's recovery was assured, Sherman ordered him moved to a room near Sherman's own. Palmer was in that room on Christmas Even when Sherman learns of the Confederate actions. Sherman tells a fellow professor that the Confederacy is bound to fail. He points out all the advantages

the North has - industrialization at the top of the list - and says that the South cannot hope to compete. This memory seems to haunt Palmer. He says that for the entire first year of the war, he'd thought often of Sherman's words. It seems that Palmer wants desperately to prove Sherman wrong, and that may be what drives him. It seems that this was also the reason for his dream the night before the battle ensued, the dream in which Palmer had captured Sherman at gunpoint, prompting Sherman to admit that he had been wrong.

Characters

Lieutenant Palmer Metcalf

This is the person telling the story. Palmer is a nineteen-year-old member of the Confederate Army as the story opens and he is among those marching toward Pittsburg Landing where the Union Army is waiting. He is an "Aide-de-Camp" for Johnston's staff. Palmer says that he remembers the reaction of Sherman, one of his instructors at the Louisiana State Military Academy, upon learning that the Confederacy had formed and seceded from the Union. Sherman had predicted that the south would fail and Palmer seems to have taken that opinion to heart. He wants desperately to prove the man wrong and on the day before a big battle, he imagines himself holding Sherman prisoner at gunpoint and Sherman admitting that his initial assessment must have been incorrect. Palmer remains with Forrest's cavalry when they remain behind to thwart the Union attack. Palmer is pleased with himself for his role in creating the battle plan. Later, when the Confederates are in retreat, Palmer realizes that the reason he'd thought the plan would succeed was exactly the reason it didn't. He said the troops were scattered so that men were no longer with their commanders.

Private Otto Flickner

Otto is a cannoneer for the 1st Minnesota Battery. During the battle, he is doing his duty but after seeing several of his fellow soldiers killed and being forced to help relocate the canon several times, he comes to believe that there's no hope. Following the lead of others, he simply stand up and walks away. He joins thousands of other Union soldiers who have taken refuge away from the fighting. Otto initially tries to tell the other men that he wasn't afraid but had become "demoralized" or a word he had heard a commanding officer use. However, several of the men argue that point and after awhile Otto comes to evaluate his own feelings. He realizes that if he were truly demoralized, he could live with his decision to walk away from the fight. However, if he discovered that he was actually afraid, he would be unable to live with himself because that kind of fear comes from within a man whereas being demoralized is caused by outside forces. He decides that he has to return to his duty but has trouble finding his unit. He finally settles in with a canon unit and notes that no one chastises him for having left.

Captain Walter Fountain

Walter is a member of the Union Army, has been away from the woman he loves for six months and notes that it has been difficult to be apart. Walter knows Grant, including the fact that he was called "Useless Grant" and that he was not successful at anything other than his military career. Fountain is literally in mid-word, telling the woman how much he loves her, when he is killed by a Confederate shell.

General Albery Sidney Johnston

The man appointed General Commanding of the Western Department of the Army of the Confederate States of America by President Davis, he is responsible for the troops that were stretched from Virginia to Kansas. Johnston is well respected by Palmer Metcalf who has heard stories of Johnston's life from newspaper accounts, but notes that most of those stories aren't completely factual. Johnston is killed during the battle.

Private Luther Dage

Luther is a rifleman in the 6th Mississippi and sees a great deal of action during the Battle of Shiloh. Luther is dreaming about his family gathered around him just as another member of his unit shakes him to wake him up. Luther is among the soldiers who charge the Union lines repeatedly and he's wounded. He witnesses the death of Johnston.

Jefferson Polly

Jefferson is a scout with Forrest's Cavalry. He says that he'd been pushed into attending seminary and was relieved when he was kicked out. He spent years traveling around the world, doing an array of jobs, and was on his way home to see his father when he saw Forrest's advertisement for men to join the cavalry. Jefferson is with Forrest when he repulses the charge at Fallen Timbers.

Robert Winter

A member of the 23rd Indiana. Robert says that he was adopted from an orphanage in Boston and that as a youngster he thought all children came from Boston. Robert is killed in the action at Shiloh.

Sergeant Buterbaugh

The commander Otto Flickner answers to, Buterbaugh tells the men when the Confederate charge is about to occur. It is also Buterbaugh who uses the word "demoralized" when describing the Union soldiers who are running away from the fighting.

N.B. Forrest

The commander of the cavalry of which Jefferson Polly is a part. Polly tells Forrest about the fresh troops that are arriving to reinforce the badly battered Union Army. Forrest runs around during the night, looking for other commanders and informing them of the changing situation. Forrest hopes that the Confederates will withdraw but finds

that none of the commanders feel they have the power to make that order. Forrest is wounded at the Battle of Fallen Timbers.

Sherman

The commander in charge of the Union Army, Sherman is a professor at the Louisiana State Military Academy when the southern states secede from the Union and predicts their downfall. Palmer Metcalf is present for that prediction and as the Union and Confederate forces are about to clash at Shiloh, Palmer imagines himself taking Sherman prisoner which prompts Sherman to say he was wrong about the South.

Objects/Places

Corinth

This is the site of a railroad station in Northern Mississippi and the site General Johnston chooses for a strike that he hopes will regain public favor for the Confederate war effort.

Napoleon's Waterloo

This is the battle used as a guide for drafting the plan for an upcoming battle by a commander of the Confederate Army.

Bango

This is the name given to the Redbone dog that "joins" the Union Army as they march.

Louisiana State Military Academy

This is where Palmer Metcalf attends and where he hears Sherman say that the South had made a terrible mistake by starting a war.

Tennessee

This is where Luther Dade is from.

Shiloh Meeting House

This is where Luther Dade goes after being stabbed in the arm with a bayonet in his search for a doctor.

Boston

This is where Robert Winter was in an orphanage until his adoption.

Stoney Lonesome

This is where the 23rd Indiana is camped prior to the battle of Shiloh.

Fallen Timbers

This is where Forrest stops to make a stand against the Union Army and where he is injured.

Ohio

This is where Walter Fountain is from.

Themes

Patriotism

Patriotism is a recurring theme in the book and is seen in the attitudes and actions of several soldiers. One of those is Palmer Metcalf. Palmer is at the Louisiana State Military Academy when the southern states secede from the Union, forming the Confederacy. Palmer's loyalty is immediately with the South, where his home is. He hears Sherman say that the South has made a terrible mistake and that they can't possibly win the war. This touches Palmer's pride and continues to haunt him as the war progresses. On the night before the Battle of Shiloh, Palmer imagines that he captures Sherman and holds him at gunpoint. In Palmer's dream, Sherman says that he was wrong about the Confederacy. Palmer doesn't seem to have any real animosity toward Sherman personally but the fact that Sherman doubts the South can win wounds Palmer's pride in his countrymen. Another example of this scene is seen when Jefferson Polly discovers the thousands of Union soldiers "skulking" away from the lines of fighting. Jefferson is ashamed for the men and notes that they were once countrymen. One of the Union soldiers notes that it would be easier for the Confederate soldiers to fight because they are defending their homes. This man's patriotism takes a different approach and he seems to indicate that he would be more than willing to fight if the fighting were happening in the North.

The Brutality of War

Several of the soldiers describe the brutality of the battle and of the war in general. Luther Dade sees a man who is at a full run when he's shot. The man's body, propelled by gravity, the slope and the muscles of his body, continues to run even though he's dead a second after the shot. This image horrifies Luther and stays with him through the rest of the battle. Otto Flickner encounters a man who has a dog with him. The dog is covered in blood and is obviously traumatized. The man tells Otto that a member of their unit, Walter Fountain, had been sitting near the dog when the first of the Confederate shells came into their camp. The shell had apparently landed very near Walter and had killed him, splattering the dog with his remains. A member of the Indiana squad describes a scene in which the squad had come upon two men, one Union, one Confederate, who had apparently shot each other at exactly the same time. The men were still in their shooting positions but both were dead. Another example of the brutality of war is seen when Forrest rides through Union lines at the Battle of Fallen Timber. Forrest is shot but grabs a Union soldier and uses his body for a shield as he retreats.

Self Preservation

Self-preservation is a human emotion that few can deny. The prime example of this theme is seen when Otto Flickner leaves the fighting and joins thousands of other Union

troops who have also run away from the battle. While Otto initially tries to explain that he's "demoralized," he soon comes to realize that he's actually scared of being killed or wounded. This is the case in all the men who have run away from the fighting, despite the spin some of them try to put on it. Another example of this is seen when Luther Dade is wounded. Immediately after being hurt, he stabs a man with the bayonet of his rifle. While he's not willing to pull the bayonet from the man's head, he is aware that he needs a rifle and he picks up one someone has abandoned on the ground. Luther joins a group of wounded men but soon tires of waiting for medical help to arrive and he gets up to go look for a doctor to tend his wounds. Another example is seen when Johnston, believing that the Union Army camped in and around Shiloh are already aware of the Confederate presence. Johnston believes the only real hope of success lies in the element of surprise. Without that, he wants to pull the troops back from the fight and seek another, more favorable opportunity. Another example is seen when the soldier from the Indiana unit says that he's going to seek another assignment, distancing himself from that squad that seems to have more than its share of casualties. This theme is repeated throughout the book though the majority of the soldiers are willing to do their duty, even when their lives are in serious danger.

Style

Point of View

The book is written in the first person from a limited point of view. The perspectives vary depending on the speaker at the moment. Chapters one and seven are both presented from the perspective of Palmer Metcalf. This perspective is acceptable because it allows the reader learns about the various aspects of military life and the battle of Shiloh through the eyes of different men. The characters include a full range of soldiers, including those on both sides of the conflict. The Confederate Lieutenant Palmer Metcalf begins with the first chapter. Palmer presents his perceptions of life from the view of a minor Confederate officer who has first-hand knowledge of all the most important officers. Chapter two is from the perspective of Captain Walter Fountain who is writing a letter home when the battle commences. He is one of the first casualties. Chapter three is from the perspective of Luther Dade, a Confederate rifleman who participates in the charge against Union lines. Chapter four is from the perspective of Otto Flickner who is with the canon division of the Minnesota Battery. Otto leaves his post but later realizes that he has to return to finish the battle. Jefferson Polly is a scout for Forrest's Cavalry and he is the first of the Confederates to learn that there are Union reinforcements arriving. Chapter six is presented from several perspectives, all members of the 23rd Indiana.

Setting

The setting for the story is confined to the area in and around the community of Shiloh. There are some very specific areas described, such as the location of the 23rd Indiana camps called Stoney Lonesome. As the Confederates retreat and Forrest's cavalry makes a stand to repulse the Union army that is in pursuit, Forrest chooses a place called Fallen Timbers for that battle. The author also offers up a building as a setting called the Shiloh Meeting House. This is where Luther Dade encounters Jefferson Polly as Jefferson is waiting for orders and Luther is searching for a doctor to tend the wounds. All aspects of the settings are real and the author says he set out to recreate them from official documents. The descriptions are not overdone so that the reader does not get bogged down in details that are unimportant to the story line. The event is also real. The clash of the Confederate and Union armies at Shiloh is a documented part of the Civil War. The author includes a map at the beginning of the book. This map details the setting and can be a help for the reader who wants to know more about the locations of the various troops at specific times.

Language and Meaning

The book is written in a fairly straightforward style. Most readers will be able to read and understand all aspects of the story. There are some aspects of the author's writing style

that may be confusing for some readers. For example, the writer doesn't use apostrophes and words such as "'you're" is spelled "youre." There are also some old-fashioned words and some that are specific to the time and region. One example is seen in the chapter from the perspective of Luther Dade. Luther says he "disremembered" something. As a rule, these words do not create confusion and most readers will be able to immediately grasp the meaning. The overall tone of the book is one of careful optimism, though each of the characters speaking is fully aware that they are engaged in a brutal war and may lose their lives in combat. Despite this, several talk of valor and pride in the actions of their leaders. The fact that the perspectives vary between both Union and Confederate soldiers means that the tone changes somewhat from one perspective to the next.

Structure

Chapter two revolves around a letter home from Captain Walter Fountain, an Adjunct in the 53rd Division. Fountain's letter is italicized but there is a great deal of information presented in the chapter that is presumably not in the letter. The book moves very slowly and the reader who expects this to be stories of young men in battle will likely be disappointed. The author makes a note that he is careful to be historically accurate with the overall setting and details, though many of the characters are fictional. Because of this attention to detail and the author's objective - which is to present historically correct information about this time in history - the casual reader may become bogged down in the details. As an example, the chapter presented from the perspective of Captain Walter Fountain spends a great deal of time describing the setting and the strategic importance of Sherman's decisions. This attention to detail provides information to the reader about the historical time frame and events, but the result is that the action of the book is extremely slow. In many ways, the book reads more like a history book than a piece of fiction.

Quotes

"On paper, in the colonel's lamp-lit office, when we saw a problem it was easy to fix; all we had to do was direct that corps commanders regulate their columns so as not to delay each other, halting until crossroads were clear, keeping their riles well closed, and so forth. It didn't work that way on the ground, which was neither flat nor clean - nor, as it turned out, dry" (Chapter 1, pg. 14.)

"With such incentives to brave deeds, and with the trust that God is with us, your generals will lead you confidently to the combat - assured of success. A.S. Johnston, General commanding" (Chapter 1, pg. 21.)

"We were green; most of us had never left home before (officers as well as men, except the officers carried their greenness better) yet here we were, traveling south up an enemy river past slow creeks and bayous and brooding trees. I thought to myself if this was the country the Rebels wanted to take out of the Union, we ought to say thank you, good riddance" (Chapter 2, pg. 40.)

"It was a strange thing to be in a distant land, among things you'd never seen before, all because our people in Congress had squabbled among themselves and failed to get along and there were hotheads in the South who thought more of their Negroes and their pride than they did of their country" (Chapter 2, pg. 40.)

"It wasn't a question of luck, the way some folks will tell you; they will tell you it's back luck to be near the wounded. It was just that we didn't want to be close to them any longer than it took to run past, the way you wouldn't want to be near someone who had something catching, like smallpox" (Chapter 3, pg. 76.)

"But it seemed so wrong, so scandalous, somehow so unreligious for a dead man to have to keep on fighting - or running, anyhow - that it made me sick at my stomach. I didn't want to have any more to do with the war if this was the way it was going to be" (Chapter 3, pg. 80.)

"But they were all thinking the selfsame thing: I might be a disgrace to my country. I might be a coward, even. But I'm not up there in those woods getting shot at" (Chapter 4, pg. 98.)

"You easy-living boys had better get set, they said. There's johnnies out there thicker than fleas on a billy goat in a barnlot" (Chapter 4, pg. 104.)

"They will tell you Shiloh was no cavalry battle; the field was too cut-up with ravines and choked with timber for the usual mounted work. However, none of Forrest's men realized this at the time and we had our moments" (Chapter 5, pg. 157.)

"If Wallace sends us across that hollow in the face of those guns, he's going to have considerably fewer of us when we reach the other side" (Chapter 6, pg. 165.)

"We hated the army; we hated the war (except when we were actually fighting it; then you don't have time) - and we took it out on each other" (Chapter 6, pg. 178.)

"That was enough, he told us. And if anyone thinks we weren't glad to hear it, let him try pushing an army of rebels through three miles of scrub oak and briers" (Chapter 6, pg. 187.)

Topics for Discussion

Who is Palmer Metcalf? What kind of person is he? What is his background? Do you believe he probably came from a wealthy family? Why? How does he know Sherman? Why does he hope he can be the person to capture Sherman?

Who is Walter Fountain? What is he doing the night before the Battle of Shiloh? What is the animal he described as being near his tent that night? What is Walter's fate?

Who is Jefferson Polly? What was the dream Jefferson's father had for him? What happened to that dream? What is Jefferson's job? What discovery does he make during the night after a day's fighting? Who does he tell? What is the result? What is Jefferson's fate?

Who is Otto Flickner? What is his job in the army? What action does he take in the middle of the fighting? Is he the only person to take this action? How does Otto try to explain his decision? What does he eventually come to realize about it? What does he do after that?

Who is Luther Dade? What is he dreaming the morning before the battle begins? What does Luther mean when he says, "The put-on had gone from their faces?" What role does he play in the battle? What does Luther do after he is wounded? Who does he see die?

Describe the 6th Indiana squad. Name at least four of the squad members. Do the members of the squad have a close relationship? What explanation is given for this? What is the fate of the squad?

Compare any two of the book's characters. What do these have in common? How are they different? What are the strengths of each? What are their weaknesses?