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THE RED-EYED RAVEN GAZETTE

The Official Newsletter of Author Tim Ritter



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WELCOME!



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Welcome to the July 2025 issue of the Red-Eyed Raven Gazette!

Did you know that the number of subscribers has skyrocketed? We now have over 360 wonderful people reading this. Many thanks to all of you who have taken the time to subscribe! I enjoy putting it together, and I hope you enjoy reading it. Feel free to email any questions you have to titterman@gmail.com.

There's never a shortage of things to talk about. In this issue, you get an update on my next book, a collection of short stories of horror and adventure. Also, you get another exclusive access to another unpublished tale from my Civil War reenacting days. Lastly, The Presentation Update page has all the latest info on when I will be giving talks which are open to the public.

As always, thanks for your encouraging messages sent when these newsletters are released. Your support is very much appreciated.

AN UPDATE ON *THE SCREAMER* *DOWN THE HALL AND OTHER TALES*

Work continues on my next book, a collection of spooky and adventure stories entitled ***The Screamer Down the Hall and Other Tales***. I discussed it quite a bit in the last issue of this newsletter, but I thought you might like to know how things are progressing.

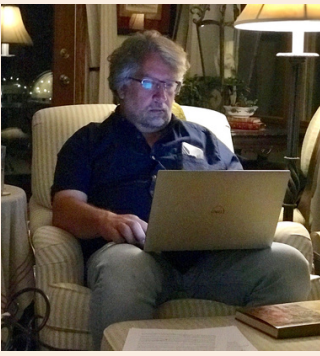
Currently I have sixteen stories collected for the book. More were written but a few had to be put in the “Nope” folder (Sometimes a story just... well, it just stinks). There’s also a “Maybe” folder, but it has only one story in it, and I’m not yet convinced it shouldn’t go in the “Nope” folder. I’ve also got a few other story ideas bouncing around in my head, so I want to get them down on paper before calling the book complete.

Another aspect of publishing this book that is currently requiring some attention is how it will ultimately be formatted. At this point, I believe it will be the size (length and wide, not thickness) of my 2020 collection of poetry and short stories ***Soul Sketches - 2nd Edition***. Its size is referred to as “half-letter”, 5-1/2" x 8-1/2". My other most recent books, ***Sarah Burning*** and ***Sarah and Orville*** were slightly larger dimensionally, but I feel like ***Screamer*** should not be that same larger size, so I’m opting (at this point) for the half-letter dimensions.

Editing is really the most lengthy process. Naturally I edit each piece several times before considering it good enough to move on to the next step. Then I have a team of editors to whom my work is sent, and they take multiple passes at it. The first pass is for basic sentence structure, typos, and general formatting. And by the way, I’ve discovered through the process I use the word “that” entirely too often. So such things have to be flagged and fixed. Then a second pass takes a look at the content itself, to see if the story makes sense, or needs a little adjustment. More review also takes place within the third, fourth, and possibly fifth passes. So, as you can imagine, it’s a lengthy process but very necessary.

Several other steps need to be taken as well. There will be an audiobook version of this collection, so I have to start collaborating with the voice actor to work through the details. And silly though it may sound, I am considering having a new headshot taken for this book. Since these are mostly creepy stories, I think I need a new photo taken in a creepy location. I’m still tossing that idea around.

Stay tuned for updates about signed presales, the audiobook, and release this coming October!



EXCLUSIVE ACCESS: A LITTLE SOMETHING NO ONE ELSE HAS READ

As I mentioned in the last newsletter, I was a Civil War reenactor for about 20 years, which was an amazing, exhausting, and smelly experience. I even wrote about my adventures, planning a three-book series. Unfortunately, the first book was expensive to produce (this was before Amazon's publishing platform was available), and it never really gained much traction. I think I sold maybe 20 copies. Plus, I questioned how well the political climate at the time would accept a book about reenacting. So, I pulled it off the market, and most of the stories within continue to await a rewrite.

I included a rewrite of one of the stories in my last newsletter. Since all of you appeared to enjoy it, I thought you might like to read this one too:

Hand to Hand Combat with a Gorilla Fight That Guy? Really?

Hand-to-hand combat during reenactments was rare in my experience and generally frowned upon in an unscripted fight. Unless ample time is given to practice such simulated fighting with the opponent, unrehearsed hand-to-hand combat can be a real problem. It is fairly dangerous, as accidental contact can be made, injuring one or both of the combatants. In other words, somebody might get hurt.

Once, at an event in Houston, Missouri, one of our captains led a large detail of men in practicing hand-to-hand combat, in rehearsal for the afternoon battle. We formed two lines facing each other, Confederate against Union. The man in line across from me was the man I was to fight with.

As the captain opened up the rehearsal, his first point of order: "Alright men, first you need to shake hands."

"The reason," he continued, "is I want you to remember you two are not really enemies. If one of you gets too excited or either of you accidentally gets hurt doing this, I want you to remember the other guy didn't mean to hurt you. It was an accident. This is pretend. So, shake hands and remember that."

Another consideration during hand-to-hand combat is it can be rather costly to get into a big musket-shoving contest to see who goes down. If the two opponents are banging weapons together, a musket stock could fracture or break on impact, prompting a costly repair. Or if swords and sabers are used, numerous injuries could happen, like a severe laceration. So, instances of hand-to-hand combat have been rare on the field. The first one was a doozy...

My first experience with hand-to-hand combat came during the Sunday engagement at the Battle of Cane Hill event in November of 2001 in northwestern Arkansas. That day, the numbers were lopsided between Confederates and Federals, as several blue clad reenactors packed up and left the event Saturday night. So to even up the numbers and make a better show for spectators, an entire Confederate battalion galvanized (changed uniforms) to fight as Federals.

I must admit, it always felt a bit odd to change uniforms. My blue uniform fit differently than my gray, even though the sizes were the same. Minor detail. What made it feel stranger was when we changed uniforms, we took the field against the regiments and battalions which we normally fought with, rather than against. So it just felt weird to face them on the field. Sometimes it reminded me of the Irish who fought on both sides during such landmark engagements as Fredericksburg. They knew they were shooting at their former countrymen, possibly even relatives. I felt my experience was minuscule compared to theirs.

Back to the story...

Over the course of several minutes, the battle developed into an interesting fight, with the Confederates of the Arkansas Battalion attempting to flank us a few times. My company held the left end of the brigade, so we stood as the target for the Confederates' flanking maneuvers. Their right-most regiment broke off from the main body and marched toward us at the oblique, angling slightly away from us, which meant once they advanced far enough toward our line, they were going to swing back to their left to fire into us.

"They are flanking us!" I yelled at Danny, my captain.

"I see them."

"Yeah, but does Colonel Prater see them?"

"I'm sure he does. Let's head them off. Attention Company!" Danny yelled, "Refuse the flank! Left rear wheel!"

I echoed his command and we angled back to the left to face the gray soldiers approaching.

"Fire at will!" Danny yelled, and our line hit the flankers with withering fire.

After a few minutes of exchanging fire, the opposing regiment broke off their flanking maneuver and rejoined the main Confederate line.

Then our battalion began to receive fire from a pair of cannons to our left. They were not dangerously close to us, but the ground shook as they belched smoke and flame at us. Had this been the real thing, our entire company would have been mowed down.

They peppered our end of the battalion several times, until our commanders decided to do something about it.

The major came riding over to us, closely followed by the sergeant major on foot.

"Captain," the major said, receiving a salute, "Take your men over to those cannons and silence them."

He reined his horse and rode back over to the rest of the staff without waiting for a response. Danny turned around and grinned.

"Well, guys, looks like we get to go silence those cannons."

"Sounds like fun," the sergeant major said with a grin.

"Let's just go get 'em!" Danny said, "Third Missouri, Charge!"

We looked at the ground we were about to cover, a run of maybe 500 feet maximum, and it was wide open and ready for the taking. We took off at a healthy jog. The men of the artillery crew saw us coming, egging us on and peppering us with pistol fire. That was enough for us, and we took off for the artillerists at full gallop. They continued to harass us to get us to attack, and I fully expected our captain to order us to halt and fire. The order never came, and we found ourselves charging into hand-to-hand combat with the cannon crew.

Within seconds, my guys had picked out the man with whom they would fight, except for me. I had been so caught up in the idea of hand-to-hand combat, I hadn't really paid attention to the idea of figuring out who I would fight. Suddenly I became aware that the only guy not engaged was a huge gorilla of a guy, and he was looking at me, egging me on. I swear he looked like he could have single-handedly folded me up and stuffed me in one of his field pieces. Standing at least six foot four inches in height, weighing in at probably 250 pounds, and holding a six-foot lanyard across him, he was intimidating. I said out loud, "Oh shit."

I thought to myself, "Oh sure, I've never done this before and I get stuck with the biggest damn guy on the gun crew!"



The cannon crew attack. The man standing approximately mid-photo with the dark kepi and light colored shirt is the gorilla I had to fight with. To the extreme right is our captain. I was next to him at this point, barely outside the view of the photo.

Putting all fear aside and realizing this guy had no real intent to harm me, I ran forward to engage him. I must admit, I was initially fairly timid about the whole process, not really knowing what to do. He picked up his lanyard and held it out in front of him, so we could do a little jousting.

"I haven't done this before," I said quietly to him as we shoved each other.

"No sweat, just follow my lead," he said with a grin.

He held his lanyard horizontally, so I turned my musket vertically and shoved it against his lanyard. I then backed away and he moved his lanyard vertically, so I turned mine horizontal and repeated the shove. We did that back a forth a few times, in fairly rapid succession, so it kind of looked like we were fighting.

Soon it became obvious one of us needed to go down so someone would come out the victor. The thought must have occurred to him at the same time, because in an instant, he and I both ended up hitting the ground at the same time. Since he was down, I decided to get up and rejoin my comrades, who were congratulating each other on an exciting capture of the cannons. Our celebration was short-lived, though, as the sergeant major told us we needed to get back online and join the rest of the battalion, thus ending our episode of hand-to-hand combat.

I mentioned earlier the Houston event, and the rehearsal of the combat before the engagement. During the actual reenactment later that day, our rehearsed combat went well. The fight plan was as follows: the Union force would send out a group of skirmishers, six of whom were to cross a small creek which ran across the battlefield. The Confederates were also to deploy skirmishers, typical tactics for that time. Once the six Federals crossed the creek, six Confederates would run forward from the battle line to fight with them, while the rest of the regiment stayed back. At the proper time, the Union sent out their skirmishers as planned. We sent out skirmishers as well, and watched as the six Federals worked their way to the creek. My heart was pounding as I waited for them to cross. As previously noted, hand-to-hand combat is rare, so this was terribly exciting to me.

One they crossed the creek, our captain said, "Ok guys, take off."

The six of us jumped out of the line at a dead run, looking quickly to identify the man with whom each of us had rehearsed the fight that morning. I found my guy, we pointed at each other simultaneously, and ran up to each other at full gallop.



The hand-to-hand combat engagement at Houston. My opponent and I are fighting at the right foreground of the photograph. Note the fighting duo on the left side. They appear to have abandoned their weapons and are slugging it out with fists. I don't believe it was rehearsed but it looked good and no one got hurt.

He started out a bit timid as we shoved each other with our muskets. But eventually he got more comfortable with it, and began to show a bit more aggression.

The close fighting was supposed to end by one of us drawing up our musket under the chin or in the belly of our opponent. So as we neared the end of it, I quietly said to my guy, "Get ready, I'm going to take you down, ok?"

He quietly said ok, so I swung my musket down and brought it back up under his chin, carefully, so that it looked like I knocked him out. He fell backwards into the grass. The whole thing had taken only about a minute, but I was plenty tired. Still full of adrenaline, I ran back to the regiment, taking my place in the battle line, then took a drink before we moved out to continue the engagement.

My only other experience with hand-to-hand combat was a unique scenario created for the Battle of Jefferson City in 2012. For the Sunday fight, the battlefield was set up with the Federals on a slight rise, and they had constructed an earthen fort from which to fight. Their cannons were placed there, as well as a regiment or two of infantry. The plan called for several of us to rush the fort to fight with the bluecoats.

As we rehearsed it, the plan developed into several Confederates charging the fort. The Federals would engage those charging, and one or two would surrender, while the rest would die. We couldn't fire pistols at each other, because we would all be too close, and could thereby get hurt. So all the fighting was to be done using musket butts, ramrods, and whatever else the Union guys could find to fight with. My attack was to end when one of the cannoneers punched me in the gut with a ramrod.

When it came time for battle, we were all wound up tight and ready to make a good show for spectators. The day was ridiculously hot, and we were all drinking water like crazy and sweating in our wool.

Finally, the battle started, and we began to maneuver on the field, firing volleys at the fort. As we moved nearer to the fort, those of us involved in the special scenario received the order to run. In our excitement, we ran at top speed, screaming like banshees. I jumped up on top of the small earthen fort, waving my stick.

"Alright you guys," I squalled, "Who wants to give me something?"

For some reason in the moment that was all I could think of to say.

"Come on! Give me something!"

I was carrying on like a madman. In a real battle they would have shot my silly ass by then.

Finally, one guy came running up with a big cannon ramrod and punched me (gently) in the stomach and I went down.



The fighting at the earthen fort at Jefferson City. The photo was taken as I hit the ground, to the left. My opponent who took me down is seen in the middle of the picture, hoisting his ramrod. To my right, a frightened-looking young reenactor has his hands raised in surrender. Photo courtesy of Ruben Gusman.

When the fight was over and Resurrect was called, the crowd applauded wildly. Those of us who had been casualties got up and raised our hats to the crowd. We then turned to our opponents and shook hands. The guy with the ramrod came over to shake hands.

"That was great fun," I said, shaking his hand and laughing.

"Absolutely!" he laughed, "That was awesome. You did great!"

I thanked him, then raised my hat to the rest of the Federals in the fort and said, "Thank you gents! That was fun!" They all smiled and raised their hats in return. I climbed out of the fort, sweaty and covered with dirt, and made my way back to the regiment to march back to camp.

Throughout nearly 20 years of reenacting, those were my only opportunities to perform hand-to-hand combat. They were interesting experiences, and thankfully no one got hurt. And I laugh when I think of my first experience, facing off against a huge gorilla of a guy.

PRESENTATION UPDATE

If anyone you know belongs to a group needing speakers, please give them my contact info!



September:

9th: Bella Nina Candle Company, 59 S. Main Street, Fair Grove, MO - 7:00p.m. - My evening presentations in Fair Grove are moving a couple of doors down from their previous location. I'll be presenting "What Really Happened at the OK Corral." Stay tuned for more details as we get closer.

20th: Daughters of Union Veterans meeting, Springfield, MO (private event)- I'll be presenting "Wild Bill Hickok and Davis Tutt: A Big Bucket of Ugly"

27th: Ava Civil War Tour, Ava, MO - 9:00a.m. - This will be the 5th year of doing the Ava Civil War Tour. We gather at the upper park pavilion, then travel (your own vehicle) to several locations in and around Ava that pertain to the little-known ambush of a Home Guard company in May of 1864.

27th: Dougherty Family Reunion, Ava, MO (private event) - My Dougherty relatives have asked for another presentation during their reunion. It is a pleasure and a privilege to be welcomed into this group.

October:

7th: Bella Nina Candle Company, Fair Grove, MO - 7:00p.m. - I'll be presenting my talk about "The Battle of Little Bighorn", often known as Custer's Last Stand.

10th - 11th: Ozarks Creative Writers Conference, Eureka Springs, AR - I will be giving two presentations at this conference. If you are a writer, please consider attending this event. It is a terrific gathering of folks who creating the written word.

18th: Republic Library, Republic, MO - 10:30a.m. - Presenting "What Really Happened at the OK Corral"

More events are in the works! Stay tuned!

My regular speaking engagements, twice each month, continue at the four Elfindale senior living facilities in Springfield. Also, I present monthly at these other senior facilities: The Preston, Mission Ridge, Turner's Rock, and now Springhouse Village.