

Through Many Dangers

BOOK 1

The 25th Michigan infantry facing General John Hunt Morgan's cavalry
at the Battle of Tebbs Bend, July 4, 1863. From *Illustrated Battles of the
Nineteenth Century*, Volume 2. Cassell & Company, 1895.

Through Many Dangers

BOOK 1

P.M. Kuiper



REFORMED
FREE PUBLISHING
ASSOCIATION

Reformed Free Publishing Association
Jenison, Michigan
© 2021 Reformed Free Publishing Association

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

All Bible quotations are taken from the King James [Authorized] Version

Reformed Free Publishing Association
1894 Georgetown Center Drive
Jenison MI 49428
616-457-5970
www.rfpa.org
mail@rfpa.org

Cover design by Erika Kiel

Interior design by Klaas Wolterstorff / KW Book Design

ISBN. 978-1-944555-91-7

ISBN. 978-1-944555-88-7 (ebook)

LCCN. 2021936575

Contents

1. August 1862	3
2. August 1862	9
3. August 1862	19
4. September 1862	30
5. September 1862	35
6. September 1862	45
7. October 1862	53
8. October 1862	58
9. October 1862	67
10. October – November 1862	73
11. November 1862	84
12. November 1862	95
13. December 1862	104
14. December 1862	109

THROUGH MANY DANGERS I

15. December 1862	118
16. January 1863	128
17. January – March 1863	133
18. April 1863	146
19. April – July 1863	149
20. July 1863	157
21. July 1863	165
22. July 1863	171
23. August 1863	180
24. August 1863	186
25. September 1863	194
<i>Military terms</i>	200
<i>Timeline</i>	203

“I hope that God will keep you in life’s journey, and me in mine . . . May He save you and me in health and may He grant that we may embrace each other again in His good time.”

Private John Anthony Wilterdink
in a letter to his family, November 26, 1862

CHAPTER 1

AUGUST 1862

Blue sky filled the large pane windows of the First Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan. Sunshine filled the sanctuary. Eighteen-year-old Harm van Wyke sat in the balcony with his friends, Ted Vogel, Kees de Groot, and Gerrit Bol. Down below, Harm could see his parents, his younger brother Sam, and his little sister Trina. He also caught a glimpse of Sarah Tillema, a pretty white bonnet covering her long dark hair.

Rev. Albertus Christian van Raalte stood in the pulpit and addressed the congregation. With Bible in hand, he spoke of God's grace. *Genade*, he called it, in the Dutch that was still spoken in Holland. God's *genade* had seen them through the difficult days in the Netherlands, when they suffered persecution for holding to the faith of their fathers in the biblical truths of the Reformation. It had seen them across the ocean to America and through those first years of hardship and hunger in the swamps and woodlands of Western Michigan.

Now, after fifteen years in America, that same grace brought a measure of prosperity to their *Kolonie*, with liberty to worship God freely and train up their children. None of it was done in their own strength. It was all of God's grace.

Harm knew the history well, for his parents often spoke of it. He'd been three years old when they crossed the ocean to America. Ted had come over on the same boat. Kees and Gerrit arrived a year later, and they'd all been fast friends ever since. Just that week, Harm and Ted and Gerrit had spent a fine lazy day in search of mulberries. Earlier, Harm, Ted, and Kees had sailed across Black Lake, exploring far up the coast of Lake Michigan. Now they all sat together listening to one of their *dominie's* fine sermons.

A cloud outside slipped in front of the sun, casting a shadow across the sanctuary. Rev. van Raalte turned his attention from God's gracious care in the past to their present struggle. A war threatened the future of the nation in which they had found refuge, bringing peril to the freedom they treasured. The boys in the balcony leaned forward to hear what he would say.

Slavery was a great evil in their land, said the *dominie*. How long would God continue to bless a nation that allowed such atrocities? They could no longer ignore it. They could no longer stand by.

After the service, Harm joined his friends at the corner of the churchyard. Kees said, "If that sermon doesn't stir you up, I don't know what will."

Harm smiled. It didn't take much to stir up Kees. He was lean and muscular and always ready for adventure.

"What?" said Kees. "You disagree?"

Harm shook his head. "No, but my father doesn't like it when he brings politics into his sermons."

"That's not politics. We're at war."

"Are we, though?" said Ted. "New York's at war. Virginia's at war. We're at church."

Harm smiled again. Ted never took things too seriously.

August 1862

“We *are* at war,” insisted Gerrit. “And it’s only going to get worse.”

Gerrit, on the other hand, took everything too seriously. He was six months older than Harm, but six years more serious. Everyone agreed he’d be a minister someday.

Ever since the election of Abraham Lincoln, the newspapers had been full of the conflict between North and South. At first, Harm didn’t pay it much mind. The fighting seemed far away. As newly arrived immigrants, they had their own problems to deal with. His father still felt that way.

But as the war progressed, Rev. van Raalte became more outspoken against the evils of slavery.

“I heard an army recruiter is coming to Holland,” said Kees. “Rev. van Raalte’s going to make a speech to promote enlistment.”

“We should go,” said Gerrit.

Kees agreed. “I’ll be there. Absolutely.”

“We should *all* go,” said Gerrit. He was a great admirer of Rev. van Raalte. He even wore his hair like the *dominie*.

Kees looked at Harm. “How about it?”

Harm hesitated. He knew his father wouldn’t like it.

Kees grinned. “You’ll be there.”

“I don’t know,” said Harm. “Why leave everything to go fight someone else’s war? Our families are here. Our church is here.”

“You sound like your father.”

It was true. When the war first broke out and some boys from Holland joined the fighting, Harm’s father and Uncle Ben called them fools. Harm respected Rev. van Raalte, but he respected his father and Uncle Ben too.

Still, when the night of the speech came, he wavered. It couldn’t hurt to go and hear what Rev. van Raalte had to say. All

his friends would be there. He told his mother he'd be with Kees. Not the full truth, but not quite a lie either.

He arrived at the town hall to find a crowd already gathered. Rev. van Raalte took the stage. At 5' 3", he stood several inches shorter than Harm. He was not exactly imposing, but he knew how to command an audience.

He spoke directly to the boys. Back in the Netherlands, the government-approved churches had become unfaithful. Ministers openly denied biblical truths like Jesus' virgin birth, his miracles, and his resurrection. Influenced by the Enlightenment, they no longer preached about sin and salvation—only moral improvement. Rev. Hendrick de Cock objected, and in the end his church withdrew from the state church. Other faithful churches soon followed.

Faced with persistent persecution and crippling poverty, many members of the new churches sought to emigrate to the United States. Rev. van Raalte led a group to America, eventually settling in Western Michigan. Others followed, establishing Dutch-speaking towns such as Zeeland and Drenthe near Holland. Together they formed a Reformed *Kolonie*, with freedom to worship God and educate their children.

Now a great war threatened those freedoms. The rebels had taken up arms against the Union. Hopes for a quick victory had given way to a prolonged struggle. President Lincoln had put out an urgent call for 300,000 volunteers to defend the Union. Michigan must raise six regiments. The *dominie's* eyes burned with an intensity extraordinary even for him. He urged the boys to show their loyalty by defending the freedoms they cherished.

"I'm in," said Kees, eagerly, "Let's do it."

Always more cautious, Harm hesitated. He felt torn between the *dominie's* soaring words and his father's opposition. "Three years is a long time."

August 1862

“Think how fast the last three went,” said Kees. “Just that fast and we’ll be back. But we’ll be heroes.”

“Or cripples,” offered Ted.

“Yeah, yeah,” scoffed Kees. “Follow me.”

They crossed the street to the office of the Justice of the Peace. Inside, an enlistment table stood along one wall and a line had formed in front of it. Gerrit stood there already.

Kees took a step toward the line and grinned back at Harm. “You going to fight with the men or stay home with the women and children?”

That touched a nerve. Harm wondered what life would be like if all his friends left and he stayed behind. For three years. And then, when they returned, they’d have a thousand stories that didn’t include him.

Kees took another step toward the line. “You know you want to.”

It was true. He *did* want to.

“What’s the worst that can happen?” said Kees.

“We could get shot,” offered Ted. “That’s pretty bad.”

Kees only smiled.

“Or typhoid,” said Ted. “I’ve heard that can be unpleasant.”

Kees laughed. “We all die of something. I’d rather go out in a blaze of glory than mucking out a barn.”

Harm hesitated.

“You don’t need permission,” scoffed Kees. “You’re eighteen. Besides, the *dominie*’s pushing it. How can your father argue with that?” He turned to Ted. “You going?”

“Sure. Why not?”

“See,” Kees turned back to Harm. “Ted’s not letting his father call the shots.”

“My father?” Ted snorted. “He’s already plotting how to spend

my signing bonus.” Ted’s mother had died on their journey from the Netherlands, and his father had never fully recovered. He fancied himself a founding father of the *Kolonie*, but mostly struggled to make a living from his small farm.

Harm’s cousin, Willem, a couple years older than the others, completed his enlistment papers and walked over to join them. Harm said, “I’m surprised Uncle Ben and Aunt Nel let you join.”

Willem shrugged. “They don’t like it. But they agreed I’m old enough to make my own decision.”

“And you think we should go?”

“Sure. Rev. van Raalte is getting older. Our fathers too. They won’t be around forever. We’ll have to finish what they started.”

“So, we go off to war?”

“We’ll see what’s going on in the world. Holland needs a better harbor, a railroad, some industry. We’re not going to learn how to do that staying here.”

Kees stepped into line. “You talked me into it.”

Ted joined him. “Sorry, Harm.”

Harm turned and walked toward the exit.

“Think it over,” said Kees. “It’d be a lot more fun if you came.”

CHAPTER 2

AUGUST 1862

The more Harm thought about his circumstances, the more irritated he became. He was angry at his friends, his father, and himself. He wasn't close to his older cousin Willem, but he was still upset that Uncle Ben had allowed him to go.

Harm avoided town and other places his friends might be. He wished he could skip catechism, but his father would have none of that.

While he waited for class, the talk began. He stood by miserably as everyone discussed the war effort—who'd enlisted and who hadn't. Frank de Windt made a snide comment about those who were too afraid to join. Harm had known it would come. He might have figured it would come from Frank. He tried to ignore it, but Kees went after Frank and sent him scurrying away.

"You don't have to put up with that," said Kees. "We all know why you're staying."

After class, Harm was eager to get away, but first he made time to talk with Sarah Tillema. She was a year younger than he, but they usually managed to say hello at church and catechism.

"My brother, Howard, is staying, too," said Sarah.

Harm knew Howard, but not very well. He was four years older than Sarah. He seemed nice enough but didn't say much.

"I haven't signed up," said Harm. "But I still might go. I don't know."

Sarah nodded that she understood.

Their eyes held for just a moment, then she said, "Well, I'd better get home."

"Me, too. See you on Sunday."

On his way home, Harm stopped by the site of the old log church where Rev. van Raalte and his flock had worshipped when they first arrived in Holland. The building had been torn down when they built the new church, but he could still see where it had once stood.

The cemetery was still there, shrouded in mist. Each stone represented a fallen member of the *Kolonie*. Harm found the stone where they'd laid his brother Jacob to rest that spring. Jacob had been eight years older than him, but they'd been close. Harm still missed him every day. He wondered what Jacob would have done about the war. He probably would have stayed home. He loved the rhythms and routines of farm life. Harm didn't exactly share that enthusiasm. He preferred the wild forests to the cultivated fields.

Not that it mattered. His family expected him to take over the farm. They had no money for college, and he wasn't exactly minister material. Mr. de Groot would give him a job at the leath-erworks, but Kees would probably end up running that someday, and working for Kees didn't sound great either.

Shoes scraped on the gravel behind him and he turned to see Rev. van Raalte. The *dominie* surveyed the cemetery. "I come here sometimes to remind myself. These stones speak to the sacrifice our people made. They gave up everything in hopes of freedom and a brighter future."

August 1862

“And here they lie.” It came out more bitter than Harm intended.

“These didn’t live to see it” —the *dominie* paused dramatically—“but their children will flourish because of their sacrifice.”

“Jacob didn’t have any children.”

He ignored that. “I see you haven’t enlisted yet.”

Harm didn’t respond.

“You’ve considered it, I trust.”

“What’s the point? I already know what my father will say. My place is here. With my family. In the church.”

“Your father’s a good man and I’m glad to have him, but he thinks this war is of no consequence.”

“He says we should let the Americans fight it out.”

“We’re Americans now,” said the *dominie*.

“You know what I mean.”

Rev. van Raalte put a hand on Harm’s shoulder. “There are two important truths we need to keep in mind. First, we are not of this world. We don’t live by the standards of this world. We don’t live according to our own desires. We’re citizens of heaven. We live according to God’s laws. We live by him and for him.”

Harm met his gaze and waited for the second thing.

“Just as important,” continued the *dominie*, “we *are* in this world. Understand? Not half in and half out. We’re in this world with both feet. Not like the old ascetics who hid themselves in the wilderness. Not like those who rejected government and civil society. We’re citizens of the United States, with all the duties and responsibilities that entails.”

“But we’re not supposed to love the world.”

“That’s 1 John 2:15. Again, we don’t love as the world loves. We don’t pursue the world for its own sake. We live as citizens of God’s kingdom. But we do that *in* the world. We don’t stay hidden away in church.”

“Holland is kind of hidden away.”

The *dominie* winced a little. “Understand this, Harm. Our *Kolonie* is necessary for a time. I’m convinced of that. We would have been swallowed up. A new land, not knowing the language or the customs. This community has allowed us to get our feet planted, to establish our homes and churches and schools on God’s principles. But we won’t continue this way forever. We shouldn’t.”

“I think my father would like to.”

“Sometimes I would, too. It would be so much easier. But I know better, and so does he.”

Harm left the *dominie* in the cemetery and made his way home. By the time he got there, he’d half made up his mind to talk to his father. After all, Uncle Ben let Willem go.

Sunday came, though, and he still hadn’t done it. After the morning worship service, he joined his friends at the usual corner of the churchyard.

“Change your mind yet?” asked Kees.

“I’m going to talk to my father about it.”

“Don’t wait too long. We leave next week.”

“We’ve got fifty volunteers already,” said Gerrit. “They hope for thirty more by the time we go.”

“We’re going to Kalamazoo,” said Kees. “We’ll join with other volunteers from Western Michigan to form a regiment and train for battle.”

Harm spent most of the next week in the fields. They had to get the harvest in before he could even think of leaving. He didn’t get a good opportunity to talk with his father until late in the week. Then one of their cows got sick, and he decided to wait and try to catch him at a better time. Sunday came again, and he still hadn’t spoken with him.

After the morning worship service, Melvin Moerdyke ap-

August 1862

proached Harm. A year older than Harm, he had thin lips and shifty eyes. He said, “I heard you’re staying.”

Harm didn’t answer.

“I’m staying, too. We’re the smart ones. They can get themselves killed if they want to.”

Harm studied his face. “What about Rev. van Raalte? He thinks it’s our duty.”

“Let *him* go, then. My duty is to myself.” Melvin turned and walked away before Harm could reply.

Harm couldn’t agree with Melvin. He felt sure he *did* have a duty to others beyond himself—to God, and church, family, and community. But what to do when those duties seemed to conflict with each other? He joined his friends at the corner of the churchyard.

“We leave for Kalamazoo in the morning,” said Kees.

“I know.”

“Will you be there?”

“I’ll talk to my father tonight.”

That night, Harm’s family gathered to close the Sabbath by singing a psalm. His mother loved music and had a beautiful singing voice. Sam, two years younger than Harm, and Trina, just six, also sang well. Harm loved to sing, but he was distracted, looking for an opportunity to speak with his father about enlisting. He decided it wouldn’t be proper to bring it up in front of the family. He had to talk to his father alone.

His mother chose Psalm 124, and they sang all three stanzas.

*Now Israel may say, and that in truth,
If that the Lord had not our right maintained,
If that the Lord had not with us remained
When cruel men against us rose to strive,
We surely had been swallowed up alive.*

*Yea when their wrath against us fiercely rose,
The swelling tide had o'er us spread its wave,
The raging stream had then become our grave,
The surging flood, in proudly swelling roll,
Most surely then had overwhelmed our soul.*

*Blest be the Lord who made us not their prey;
As from the snare a bird escapeth free,
Their net is rent and so escaped are we;
Our only help is in Jehovah's Name,
Who made the earth and all the heavenly frame.*

The psalm had become a favorite of Harm's family in the Netherlands, where they suffered official persecution from the government and abuse from their neighbors. But God had provided safety by opening the way for them to emigrate to America.

When they finished singing, Harm's father rose from his chair and made his way to his room.

Harm rose to his feet, anxious to speak, but only managed a weak, "Good night." His father's door closed behind him.

Harm threw his psalm book at the ground in disgust. It split in two, splaying loose pages across the floor.

"Harm!" gasped his mother.

He stepped over the book and stalked off to his room. He slumped on his bed and glowered at the floor. Maybe he wouldn't talk to his father at all. Maybe he'd just go.

Sam followed Harm into their bedroom. "What's wrong with you?"

"I'm going to volunteer."

"No."

"I am."

August 1862

“What’d Father say?”

“I haven’t told him.”

“Oh boy.” Sam rolled his head back. “He is not going to like that.”

Harm tried to imagine his father’s reaction when he found out he’d gone without saying anything. Anger? Probably. But more likely, disappointment. Harm decided he couldn’t sneak out like a coward. He had to face his father like a man. He’d get up early and talk to him in the morning.

Meanwhile, he packed up a few things to take with him. He wished he’d spoken with his mother about taking some food. It was fifty miles to Kalamazoo. But it was too late for that. He packed a small English Bible he’d bought in town and a change of clothing.

He noticed his drawing supplies lying on his bedside table. When Harm was almost ten, Jacob overheard Rev. van Raalte telling their father Harm showed artistic ability. Jacob was just eighteen, but he secretly arranged with Uncle Ben to purchase drawing supplies all the way from Grand Rapids. Jacob gave them to Harm for his birthday and then gave him more art supplies every year on his birthday. In return, Harm always drew Jacob a picture for *his* birthday.

Three of the drawings—a doe with her fawn, sunflowers in mother’s garden, and the new church with its pillars—still hung on the wall of Harm’s bedroom, right where Jacob had hung them. Just over where his bed used to be.

Early the next morning, Harm knocked on his parents’ bedroom door but received no answer. His mother came in from the kitchen. “Looking for Father?”

“Yes.”

“He’s heading over to help the Brouwers. I hope you didn’t miss him.”

Harm raced out into the yard. He scanned the lane. Nothing. He spun around in panic, then noticed a shuffling behind the barn and rushed over to see his father hitching up their ox.

“Do you have a moment?” asked Harm.

“Is it important?”

“Yes.”

Harm’s father stepped around the ox and faced him. His father’s face was deeply tanned, his hands rough and work-hardened.

“The volunteers are leaving for the infantry today,” said Harm. “Rev. van Raalte thinks we should join.”

“Does he?” It was framed as a question, but it carried the weight of an accusation.

“He says it will be good for us. We can demonstrate our loyalty.”

“And the state will respond by giving us money to dredge the channel to Lake Michigan. Yes. I know how the *dominie* thinks.”

“You don’t think we should go?”

“Sacrifice our boys for a better harbor? That’s no bargain.”

“But how can you disagree with Rev. van Raalte?”

His father pressed his lips together the way he did when he was searching for the right words. “The *dominie* forgets sometimes that he’s our minister and not our mayor. He should limit himself to matters of God’s kingdom.”

Harm thought about his conversation with the *dominie*. “What about our duty as citizens of the United States?”

“We’re citizens of heaven first,” said his father. “God called us out of this world and gave us a place in his church. Our duty is to live in gratitude.”

“I am grateful,” said Harm.

“Then you’ll keep his commands. That begins with worshipping in his house on the Lord’s day.”

August 1862

“Rev. van Raalte thinks we should go.”

“What do you think?”

“Kees is going.”

“Kees would join the circus if he could.”

“So is Gerrit. And Ted. Lots of boys are going.”

“Lots of boys are foolish.”

“Willem’s going.”

That staggered his father. “What does your Uncle Ben have to say about that?”

“He agreed Willem’s old enough to decide for himself.”

His father raised a hand to his forehead looking suddenly weary. “Why would you want to fight a war that has nothing to do with us?”

“They keep slaves. They treat them horribly.”

“What do you know of slavery?”

“Enough. Kees’ family came through Baltimore. They saw people marched about in chains, sold like animals.”

“That’s Baltimore. Let the Americans fight over it.”

“Rev. van Raalte thinks it’s our duty.”

“Your duty is here. I need you on the farm.”

“But you *don’t*. The harvest is in. Now’s the perfect time to go.”

“What about next year?”

“Sam’s almost sixteen. He *likes* farming.”

“We were going to plant the new field.”

“There’s no reason to. Anna’s married. I’ll be away. Jacob . . .” He stopped but too late. “I’m just saying you won’t have as many mouths to feed.”

His father’s eyes darkened. “That’s my consolation? Fewer mouths to feed?”

“It’s only three years.” Harm looked into his father’s eyes. “We can’t know what will happen. But we have to trust God, right?”

“Is that it? We throw ourselves from the temple height and trust God’s angels to save us?”

“Father.”

“No. That’s the devil’s game.”

“Father.”

“We don’t tempt God, son. We don’t disobey his command and then ask him to turn it to our profit.”

“I’m not disobeying God.”

“You’re disobeying your father.”

Harm hung his head. “I’m sorry. But I’m old enough to make this decision on my own.”

“If only you would,” his father cried. “But no, you follow.”

“I’m going now.”

“Then go,” he said, bitterly. “One less mouth to feed.” The look in his eyes betrayed not anger but despair.

Harm turned and fled to his room. He grabbed his things and stormed out the door.

His mother stopped him, her face wet with tears. “He loves you.”

“I know.”

She grasped his shoulders. “He loves you.”

“I have to go.”

She handed him a psalm book, her psalm book. “Take it. Use it.”

“I will.”

She put a hand on his arm. “Go with God.”