

# ***Day of Thunder-A Memoir***

*(Growing up in a small town)*

by Stephen Egbertson

When we weren't fighting the Russian army, which was trying to occupy East Nassau, or searching for stage-coach wheels or arrowheads, we were usually screwing off somewhere.

We had been up on the Mountain all morning, and were getting quite bored with ourselves. It was a crisp October day. The leaves were dry and crackly. The air up here was clean and sharp-almost runny nose weather. We had been fighting off the Russian battalion that had invaded East Nassau for almost a week now, and were growing tired of that war.

"It's almost time for lunch, isn't it?" Tony asked.

"Jeez, Ton, feed yer face, feed yer face. You ate just an hour ago." Eddie cracked. Tony rolled over and popped him on his shoulder.

"Shut up, or I'll squish you." Tony was a tall, skinny kid before he began to "fill out". As I write this now, he was more like a linebacker for the Giants.

Larry was lying back, with his hands folded behind his head-a familiar pose- with his feet against a rock at the edge of the cliff. East Nassau lay far below. Larry wasn't very interested in defending his younger brother. "Why don't you just roll him over the edge, Tony."

Eddie turned his attention to his brother, and soon Larry and Eddie were rolling among the pine-needles.. This happened all the time. Very quickly, Larry had Eddie

pinned against the nearest large object, the rock at the edge of the cliff. Eddie was digging his feet to gain purchase, straining against his bigger brother. The Rock moved! Just a little shift, but it was enough to cause both of them to roll away. Neither one really wanted to test his wings just then.

"Jeez, Larry, I coulda been killed."

"Yeah, too bad."

"Hey, check this out, guys." I was pushing some dirt from under the rock. The bottom edge of it seemed to curve out towards the edge of the hill. There was nothing but air below. Tony scrambled around the rock and hung himself out, straining to see the front.

"It comes out here, I think," he hollered.

"And you're gonna come out down there," I said, as I pretended to shove his legs towards the edge. Tony scrambled back.

We dug a little more around the edge. This boulder was massive! As we dug, it got a little looser. We weren't dumb. The potential here was awesome. Here was a rock the size of a house, poised at the edge of a cliff, which ended about a hundred feet below. There was another steep decline for another hundred feet or so. We looked at each other as grins spread across our faces. Here was a project worthy of our attention.

"Alright, here's the plan." Larry assumed leadership. Eddie was eager. He loved to instigate. "We go home for lunch. Don't take two hours, Tony. Get right back here and we'll roll that sucker right down the mountain."

We were all back inside of an hour, but no one had thought to bring a shovel or any other digging implements. So off we went to scour up some sturdy sticks to dig with. We went to work with a vengeance, excavating around that huge boulder, digging into the musty, mossy dirt, clearing the dark green moss off the surface. As we worked, the boulder seemed to get looser. That was all the incentive we needed. It was quite a job—four young boys, dirt and leaves flying, pushing and tugging and testing. After some time, The Rock was like a Sword of Damocles, poised over the tiny town lying below.

"I bet this rock will roll right across 66." Eddie said.

" Bull!" his brother, Larry, retorted.

"Betcha it will!" Eddie was insistent.

"Hey you guys, what if it hits Thompsen's?" I asked. That nice white house looked very tiny, sitting in the middle of the field, directly below us.

A worried look crossed Tony's face. We stood at the edge and studied the situation. The house did look to be right in the line of fire. A direct hit. The house was situated right on the road, less than 100 yards from the bottom of the mountain. A pretty long roll. But it looked awfully close from up there.

"If it's gonna hit the house, then we don't have to worry about watchin' for any cars." Eddie was a wiseacre.

We turned away from the sight and saw that Larry had gone off somewhere. We continued to argue. Tony and I were a little worried, Eddie was anxious to get it away. Larry settled the issue.

"Hey Tony, help me with this tree." We ran off. Larry had found a sapling that had fallen over. It was about a 3-4" thick, and about 15 ft. tall—a perfect lever. Who was it that said that given a big enough lever, he could move the world? We were all set now!

About a half-hour later, we were smeared with dirt, sweating like pigs. The boulder was loose and teetering on the brink. The sapling was jammed under the rock, which had slipped a bit towards the edge. The end of the lever was jutting out, pointing up the hill. We shoved and tried to rock the boulder over the edge, but couldn't get enough momentum. Finally, Tony took a short run and threw himself at the sapling, as the rest of us were straining. He hit it just right because the huge rock teetered and slowly rolled over the brink. What struck me, as it was poised at the edge, fully exposed, was just how huge it was. It had to be 10 ft. across. Must have weighed about ten tons. Too late now. Over it went, look out below!!

We looked at each other in horror. Thompsen's house was toast! O-my-god! As it plunged down the cliff face, we heard a terrific roar and crackling, as it landed and trashed its first trees. The earth shook. The slope was so steep, we couldn't see where the rock was going. Time stretched beyond us as we listened to hear the bouncing thuds, which were getting a little fainter each time. We peered over the edge and could see the tops of trees wiggling and parting far below. Getting closer to the edge of the woods. Getting closer to Thompsen's house.

After an eternity, the racket stopped and silence reigned again. The house was intact; it really was too far to be in any danger. We could see some tiny people gathered at the foot of Kivlen's driveway—Larry and Eddie's mother and grandmother? I think I saw my mother and,

maybe, my little sister, in front of our house. Now we were afraid to come down.

It is amazing the things you think about after the fact. I guess that kids like us are naturally short-sighted. Suppose Karl or Richie had been coming up? What if one of us had fallen over with the boulder? After a time, there was nothing left to do but to climb down and inspect the damage. Climb down and face the music. There were a few tiny figures at the edge of the road, probably wondering if an earthquake had happened.

The devastation was immense. Directly below the point of departure was a black tear in the ground where the boulder had landed. Two trees were uprooted, and a path of destruction led on down the slope. We followed it. We found the boulder about 20 yards beyond the edge of the woods, well shy of the house. What a relief!

We knew we still had to deal with the adults. Larry grabbed me and held us all back. "Hey, wait!" he said. "Nobody's seen us yet."

"Tony, does your Mom know you're up here?" I asked.

"Nope. Does yours?"

We all dropped out of sight behind the boulder and crept back into the tree line. Tony and I swung around to the creek and went home by way of the Swimming Hole. I think Eddie and Larry snuck around to the edge of the creek by the bridge.

\*\*\*

My mother asked me at supper if I had heard anything unusual. "Mrs. Kivlen called, wondering if you boys

were in the woods behind the creek. There was a huge racket. I heard it in the kitchen. She thought it might have been an earthquake"

WHEW! I played dumb. "No. I was up in Evan's woods with Tony" I lied. We made sure to match our stories before parting. "Didn't hear anything there."

I don't think anyone was wise as to the cause of the "earthquake" which hit East Nassau that day. It was a topic of discussion all over the town for quite some time. We kept quiet. But, from the way my dad glanced over at me during supper that night, I wondered if he thought we might have had something to do with it. I never asked him.

