

Patrick Gorman's Gettysburg

Stretched out on a wooden door serving as a makeshift operating table, his Confederate officer's uniform covered in sticky blood, Patrick Gorman winced. It wasn't the smells in the hot, close barn, or the noise of the moaning soldiers around him, or even the birds swooping precariously low that made the veteran actor portraying General John Bell Hood in the filming of *Gettysburg* uncomfortable: on top of everything else, the General had a rock in his underwear. Ready for the scene, Gorman had decided to follow the advice of fellow actor Gene Hackman: *Never get comfortable in a scene*. Recalls Gorman: "Before my scene I realized I was going to be laying down, no movement, so I picked up a rock outside and put it in my underwear. So every time we started to do the scene I would roll over on that rock and get a sharp jab. Believe me, it kept me focused."

Although his resume includes touring with Judy Garland, playing opposite Robert Redford, and appearing in the hit comedy series *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, Patrick Gorman is best known for his portrayal of General Hood in the films *Gettysburg* and *Gods and Generals*. And for many Civil War buffs, Gorman didn't just *play* Hood: he remains the flesh and blood embodiment of the hard luck Confederate general.

A self-described journeyman actor, Gorman's road to *Gettysburg* began in Hollywood, where his parents met. Taking his first role at the age of four – he played the 70 year old Geppetto in a production of *Pinocchio* – Gorman began his adult career as a professional dancer. Now a SAG member for over 55 years (he gets to vote for the Oscars), Gorman has studied acting with Michael Chekov, worked as a clown at the Cirque Medrano in Paris, and acted alongside stars such as Sammy Davis Jr., Dean Martin, Jerry Lewis, and Marlene Dietrich. His best known television role was playing an arrogant French fencer named Jacques DuBois in *Happy Days*.

When he signed on for the role of General Hood, Gorman could not have known he had just cemented his status as a respected member of the Civil War community - but that is exactly what happened. Ted Alexander, chief historian at Antietam National Battlefield, says, "Mr. Gorman brought realism to the character of John Bell Hood. A gritty realism that practically jumped off the screen. His was a very good portrayal." Brian Payne, a Maryland-based reenactor whose 14th Tennessee regiment worked with Gorman in *Gods & Generals*, says his admiration goes beyond what he calls the actor's outstanding portrayal of Hood: "What really impressed me with Patrick was his willingness to talk, pose for photos, and discuss Hood. He has stayed in touch with me, as well as many of the reenactors that worked on the movie."

Here, the beloved and respected actor shares with *Gettysburg Experience* some insider info on his *Gettysburg* and *Gods and Generals* experiences, his thoughts on the Civil War, and his upcoming role as, ironically, a Yankee.

Did you have any interest in the Civil War before playing Hood?

By the time I was cast in *Gettysburg* I'd already had years of on-going interest in the Civil War because of family heritage and the continuing and unanswered questions posed by the rebellion. My interest in the Civil War was part of my childhood because of stories and artifacts. Oh yes, there was history on both sides of the war and on both sides of my family. My grandmother's favorite story ... consisted of a chilling account of how (Gorman's great-grandmother) and the rest of her family hid in the cellar when Sherman's troops were coming. After hours of terror and smoke and gunshots and boots tramping over their heads, all became

quiet and as they raised the door from the hidden cellar, nothing remained of their home: all burnt to the ground. I guess that was one of the reasons they moved to Virginia.

Sacrilege of sacrilege, as a child, I played Three Musketeers with a Yankee infantry officer's dress sword, complete with scabbard, belt and hanger all intact, which belonged to one of my grandfathers. I shudder to think of how many pumpkins and watermelons I skewered on that fine blade. I played quick draw with another ancestor's Colt revolver with *CSA* carved in the grip.

How did you prepare for the role of General Hood? What do you think of Hood?

Hood was - to me - a romantic, tragic character, and a man with an incredible constitution. How he survived the war with those terrible wounds and the destruction of what he believed has always fascinated me. He was a rising star up until Gettysburg and from then on, as with the Confederacy, it was all downhill. The criticisms leveled at him by some historians don't hold water. No general, not even Lee, could have saved Atlanta or Franklin. The truth and the measure of the man has to reside in the fact that, after the war, and even after his death, the men who served under him still honored him. I can't say I identify with him but I was able to penetrate something of his persona to outline what he might have been like in the situations I had to embody. It is not necessary for an actor to 'like' a character he plays. In fact, it's not even pertinent. You must not, in my opinion, judge your character. You have to attempt to see with his eyes and act with his resolve. You have to believe in them and they have to breathe. I served in the military but I was an enlisted man so I have no real experience of the kinds of decisions he had to make. But, of course, that's what the imagination is for. That's what the research is for, and I have always had great respect for the profession of arms. For me, the military has one true function, to protect the nation, the society which they serve. The military is for defense but that also means you have to be a master of attack as well. I have always been drawn to the military, martial arts and the history of warfare. Hood was a perfect character for me to address.

Why do you think people find the movie Gettysburg, as well as the Civil War, so compelling?

When I first was cast in *Killer Angels* (the original title of *Gettysburg*) and I told friends about it I was amazed at the number of close friends and associates who were closet Civil War buffs. I had no idea how many. But when you think of it, if your family has been in this country for at least three to four generations, then you have family who was involved in the war in some way. Those films gave life to colorless history lessons received or ignored in school. The idea of "brother against brother" was something truly harrowing and tragic. The true horror of the Civil War has yet to be depicted. Some of what has been served to us has romanticized that deadly conflict but I think it is gradually changing. *Gettysburg*, along with *Glory*, proved that you could be true to history and still deliver a dramatic, rich, and fascinating story without distorting the facts. In *Gettysburg*, there were few and only minor errors in accuracy. *Glory* may have had some as well, I'm sure, but basically the story was accurate. *Gettysburg* told the story of the relationship of those generals and that was what sold the film, not the battle. Tactics be damned. How did they feel about being there? Why did they do what they did? There are no easy answers but the films did give you the complications at least. Would you want to take up arms and actually try to kill your father or brother? Unimaginable to us, but not to so many in 1860.

Can you describe for us what it was like when you came to town to make Gettysburg?

I was in Gettysburg for about six weeks. I'd never been there before and it was an unusual experience. This was about as close to a metaphysical experience as I've ever had and it began on the night I arrived in Gettysburg. It was early July, muggy and unpleasant, and I was really tired from the trip. Before hitting the sack I wanted to stretch my legs and as I started out the night clerk told me that just down the road was the edge of the battlefield. It was really dark but it felt good getting out and walking. There wasn't much of a moon but as I got to the end of the street, there were those famous low split log fences, deep shadows from trees and bushes. As I walked along the fence I had the powerful feeling of déjà vu – it was unlike me, but I had a feeling of knowing the place very well. It was too familiar and I couldn't shake it. Now, of course, we can write it off as my first time being so close to the fabled history of the place, but that couldn't be it. I've been around the world a bit and I've seen some pretty impressive places but this was entirely different. I finally went back to the motel but the unsettling feeling stayed with me till I awoke the next morning. Yes, I dreamed and there were lots of fences and low stone walls and dark foreboding woods.

Several weeks later the director, Ron Maxwell, mentioned he'd like to get some action scenes with me in one of the skirmishes taking place near Devil's Den. Of course, I wanted to do that but there were problems about putting the horses in trailers because of restrictions, etcetera, and we were losing the light and it would take too long. Well, I'd scouted the area earlier and actually rode the whole battlefield on horseback before I started filming so I told Ron that I knew exactly where Devil's Den was, and that if I took my staff and all the wranglers from the film and we galloped off through the woods behind us, we could be there in fifteen minutes. He said yes, and off we went. Once again, we entered those dark woods along a path lined with those stone fences. And yes, that feeling of familiarity slammed into me again. As we broke through the woods at a run on the road up to Devil's Den, just like the "ghosts of the Confederacy," a long line of tourists was coming down the hill. Now we were really moving with determination and we didn't slow down. The jaws of those folks just dropped. And for a moment, maybe just for a moment, I'm sure they thought they were seeing those famed apparitions. I didn't slow but gave them a salute as I passed. There was a look of relief when we got close but I'm sure they tell that story to this day, just as I do. Now, of course, that was pure theater, but once again those strange, familiar feelings. And they were there all the time I was filming on the slope leading to the cannon that were taken by the Rebs at Devil's Den. Of course, Hood never made it that far but they only needed some shots of me in the midst of the battle and we got some good ones. No ghosts of Gettysburg for me but an unusual memory of feelings never quite before experienced.

My two favorite spots are Devil's Den and the line of trees from which Pickett's Charge began. Every time I have stood in the shade of those trees looking over that vast space I get goose bumps. They stood there knowing that as soon as they stepped off they'd be in range of cannon and rifled muskets, and it turns my blood cold. I don't know how they did it. To have a historical park such as Gettysburg is a priceless gift which we need to support and be thankful for. Maybe that can make up for some of our personal lost history.

You're returning to the Civil War with the mini-series To Appomattox. What can you tell us about the series and your role?

I'm set to play General Charles Ferguson Smith who was something of an "Obi-Wan Kenobi" to Grant. He reminds me a bit of Hood but they are very different. He was old army and had been commandant at West Point when Grant was there. He also served in the Mexican War and

was a skilled strategist. He supported Grant entirely. I've read all the scripts and they are amazing. It's going to be a wonderful series. Can't wait for the green light.

Can you tell us a little about your life outside of acting?

Outside of acting, I don't have much of a life. I train in martial arts. I love chess and poker and I'm preoccupied with the Japanese language and Japanese Calligraphy. I vote for the Oscars, and am on the Executive Committee for the Student Academy Awards and my favorite, a member of the Foreign Film Committee that chooses the best foreign film for the Oscars. I keep busy but everything in my life seems to relate to my profession. In fact, I guess that's another reason I love it. Everything is grist for the mill. I never know who I going to play, what profession, what nationality, what era in time. Everything I come in contact with can be useful. That's great.

Anything else you'd like to add?

I always say that whatever success I have had as General Hood was due in no small part to my interaction with Civil War re-enactors who taught me a lot I couldn't get out of the history books and my lengthy research. Spending time with them before I started filming helped me feel confident I could give a good shot at filling his boots. I loved Hood and where he came from and re-enactors reinforced that feeling for me.

Find out more about Patrick Gorman at www.imdb.com/name/nm0331112/#Actor.

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