

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES PROGRAM

“JOSHUA CHAMBERLAIN IN HISTORY AND MEMORY”

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SPRING 2013

A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements  
for baccalaureate degrees  
in History and Political Science  
with honors in History

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the path that the American Civil War general Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain took through the mists of history and memory to the present day. Chamberlain has become the quintessential Civil War hero, and this thesis tracks the progress of Chamberlain's rise to fame. While Chamberlain is enormously popular today, his image has not always been so. His fame began largely in his home state of Maine. His heroic actions on July 2, 1863 on Little Round Top at Gettysburg, however, cast him into the national spotlight. After the war, he defended that legacy actively, sometimes against the criticisms lodged by his own veterans. Later in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Chamberlain's rise came to fruition through the mediums of historical fiction and film. In his push towards fame, Chamberlain's legend thrust aside all other contenders to advance a version of the "truth" surrounding his actions during the fight at Little Round Top, and beyond.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank my thesis supervisor Prof. Carol Reardon for her many hours spent assisting me with this thesis, as well as providing invaluable guidance and support beyond the classroom. I would also like to thank Dr. Mike Milligan, Dr. Mark Neely, and Dr. William Blair for their valuable contributions. Last but not least, I would like to thank my good friends John Mitchell, Patrick Henry, and Thomas McCauley for their advice and support throughout this project.

## Chapter 1

### A Heroic Life

Joshua Chamberlain is one of the most beloved figures to emerge from our nation's Civil War. In this capacity, Chamberlain finds himself in the illustrious company of such greats as Robert E. Lee, Ulysses S. Grant, Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, and perhaps even Abraham Lincoln. Multiple biographies, leadership studies, and novels center on Chamberlain, explore his life and various accomplishments. On top of that, children's books, and even graphic novels and movies detail his exploits. Admirers can purchase Chamberlain action figures, as well as t-shirts and coffee mugs that bear his portrait. If one wishes, one might even partake of "Chamberlain Pale Ale," a beer named after the Civil War officer. Chamberlain appears to have achieved a level of superstardom reserved today for athletes and actors.

On September 8, 1828, Joshua Chamberlain and Sarah Dupee Brastow had a son, whom they promptly named Lawrence Joshua Chamberlain. Like many men, Joshua had his childhood heroes, and thus Lawrence was named after Captain James Lawrence, who captained the United States frigate *Chesapeake* against the English H.M.S. *Shannon* in the War of 1812.<sup>1</sup> In the battle, Captain Lawrence upon being mortally wounded famously shouted, "Don't give up the ship!" Despite this legacy attached to his name, the young Chamberlain preferred to use his middle name as his first name. While Chamberlain's early life was somewhat uneventful, he did attend Major Whiting's

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<sup>1</sup> Willard M. Wallace, *Soul of the Lion* (Gettysburg: Stan Clark Military Books, 1960), 18.

military academy in Ellsworth, Maine. Chamberlain did well at the academy and learned basic military skills that served him well later in life as a soldier in the American Civil War. Financial difficulties led Chamberlain to abandon the academy and become a schoolteacher to help ends meet before choosing a career. While his mother hoped that he would become a minister and his father hoped that he would choose a military career, Chamberlain decided on a career as a missionary.<sup>2</sup> To begin his new career, Chamberlain needed to attend college. He eventually gained admission to Bowdoin College; his admission would begin a long association with the school.

At Bowdoin Chamberlain excelled at everything that he attempted. He had a real affinity for languages, and he eventually mastered nine, including Greek and French. He continued his interest in religion by joining the choir at his local church, the First Parish Church. At the church, he met and fell in love with Fanny Adams, the daughter of Reverend George Adams, and she eventually became Chamberlain's wife. Before he could marry, however, Chamberlain needed to complete his education. Settled on the life of a minister, Chamberlain entered Bangor Theological Seminary in 1852. He also excelled at the seminary, and increased his docket of languages to include Arabic, Hebrew, and Syriac. Before he was called to serve at a church, a momentous event significantly changed Chamberlain's life. He delivered an oration entitled "Law and Liberty" that so impressed the Bowdoin faculty that they invited him to become an

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<sup>2</sup> Wallace, *Soul of the Lion*, 21.

instructor of Logic and Natural Theology.<sup>3</sup> Chamberlain immediately accepted the offer, married Fanny, and began a new chapter in his life.

While starting a family, with a daughter, Grace, coming in 1856, and a son, Harold, coming in 1858, Chamberlain continued his relationship with Bowdoin. The school promoted him to professor of rhetoric and oratory when the seat became available.<sup>4</sup> The next several years went by fairly normally for the young professor, until the outbreak of the American Civil War. Chamberlain vehemently opposed secession and watched as several of his students went off to war; he began to feel a growing need to commit himself fully to the Union cause. Distressed that they might lose their young professor, the Bowdoin administration granted Chamberlain a two-year leave to study in Europe, a shockingly tempting offer to the budding scholar. Chamberlain accepted the offer of leave and then did the unexpected. Chamberlain went straight to the governor of Maine, Israel Washburn, and requested a commission.<sup>5</sup> He granted Chamberlain the lieutenant colonelcy of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine Volunteers. The new officer said farewell to his family, and set off for Camp Mason in Portland, Maine.

Chamberlain quickly found himself in the middle of the action with the Union's Army of the Potomac. A month after enlisting, he and the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine witnessed the Battle of Antietam, but never went into combat. In all likelihood, this was for the best, as the green 20<sup>th</sup> Maine could probably have been torn to shreds against veteran Confederate

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<sup>3</sup> Wallace, *Soul of the Lion*, 28-29.

<sup>4</sup> Wallace, *Soul of the Lion*, 29.

<sup>5</sup> Alice Rains Trulock, *In the Hands of Providence* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 61.

soldiers. Not being in action at Antietam gave the new regiment the time needed to drill and train to readiness under its meticulous commander, Colonel Adelbert Ames; Ames graduated from West Point in 1861, and went on to an admirable career over the course of the war.<sup>6</sup> He took to training his second in command, and Chamberlain's knowledge of military life grew enormously at this point in the war. This newly acquired knowledge served Chamberlain well in the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine's first major battle, the Battle at Fredericksburg in December 1862.

Dissatisfied with the performance of the commander of the Army of the Potomac, Major General George B. McClellan, President Lincoln replaced McClellan with Major General Ambrose Burnside in November, 1862. Burnside, urged to move quickly, moved the Army of the Potomac toward Fredericksburg, Virginia. Burnside planned to use pontoon bridges to cross the Rappahannock River, and then move towards Richmond, Virginia, the Confederate capital city. While in essence a good plan, unforeseen circumstances resulted in the pontoon bridges arriving and being constructed later than anticipated. Instead of giving up on the plan, Burnside decided to move ahead and try to force the Confederate army from its position. In doing so, Burnside committed Chamberlain and the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine to its first large scale battle.<sup>7</sup>

The 20<sup>th</sup> Maine moved across the bridges, through the town, and eventually assaulted the famous stone wall at the base of Marye's Heights that the Confederate troops used as cover. Despite their best efforts, the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine suffered heavy casualties,

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<sup>6</sup> John J. Pullen, *The Twentieth Maine* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 1957), 1.

<sup>7</sup> Trulock, *In the Hands of Providence*, 90-91.

and could not break the enemy lines. Col. Ames, Lieut. Col. Chamberlain and their men spent a cold evening out before the enemy lines. Chamberlain himself wrote years after the battle,

It was a cold night. Bitter, raw north winds swept the stark slopes. The men, heated by their energetic and exciting work, felt keenly the chilling change. Many of them had neither overcoat nor blanket, having left them with the discarded knapsacks. They roamed about to find some garment not needed by the dead. Mounted officers all lacked outer covering. This had gone back with the horses, strapped to the saddles. So we joined the uncanny quest. Necessity compels strange uses. For myself it seemed best to bestow my body between two dead men among the many left there by earlier assaults, and to draw another crosswise for a pillow out of the trampled, blood-soaked sod, pulling the flap of his coat over my face to fend off the chilling winds, and, still more chilling, the deep, many-voiced moan that overspread the field. It was heart-rending; it could not be borne.<sup>8</sup>

At dawn, the 20th Maine received orders to withdraw to the town and back across the Rappahannock River. The regiment survived its first major battle, and the Army of the Potomac endured another change in command.

After the disaster at Fredericksburg, Major General Joseph Hooker replaced Major General Ambrose Burnside as commander of the Army of the Potomac. Hooker raised army morale significantly in the wake of the Battle of Fredericksburg; he accomplished this through certain administrative changes, and the implementation of corps badges. Belonging to the First Division of the Fifth Corps, the men of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine began to wear a red Maltese cross. After these preparations, Hooker began an aggressive plan that culminated in the Battle of Chancellorsville.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Joshua L. Chamberlain, *Bayonet! Forward* (Gettysburg: Stan Clark Military Books, 1994), 7.

<sup>9</sup> Trulock, *In the Hands of Providence*, 108-112.

Hooker intended to swing south through the crossroads of Chancellorsville, Virginia, and crush the Army of Northern Virginia. However, once again General Lee anticipated the Federal plans, and in his most celebrated victory split his army and defeated the Army of the Potomac. The 20<sup>th</sup> Maine did not participate in this fight, as they suffered from a smallpox epidemic brought on by faulty inoculations. Instead of joining the fight, the regiment guarded a telegraph wire in the rear. Disgusted with his situation, Chamberlain quipped, “if we couldn’t do anything else we could give the enemy the small pox.”<sup>10</sup> Colonel Ames performed well on detached service, and won a promotion to brigadier general. Lieutenant Colonel Chamberlain soon came up for promotion as well, and effectively became Colonel of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine on June 23, 1863; the promotion came just a few days before Colonel Chamberlain and the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine’s most celebrated hour.

After defeat at Chancellorsville, the Army of the Potomac underwent yet another change of command, just before the regiment’s most celebrated hour. With General Robert E. Lee and his Army of Northern Virginia moving north in an invasion, Hooker offered a letter of resignation in a political maneuver. President Lincoln accepted the resignation, and put the commander of the Fifth Corps, Major General George G. Meade in command of the Army of the Potomac.<sup>11</sup> At this point, the Army of Northern Virginia found itself scattered to the north and west of Gettysburg. With the Army of the Potomac in close pursuit, General Lee decided to concentrate his forces. The many roads leading

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<sup>10</sup> Trulock, *In the Hands of Providence*, 111.

<sup>11</sup> Edwin B. Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign: A Study in Command* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 131-133.

into the town of Gettysburg ensured that the town and surrounding area became the place where the two armies came into contact. This contact came on June 30, 1863, when Union cavalry sighted Confederate infantry. The battle began the next day.

The Battle of Gettysburg began on July 1, 1863, when a Confederate division under the command of General Henry Heth moved toward Gettysburg from the west in a reconnaissance in force. The division met Union cavalry under the command of General John Buford. The Union cavalry performed a delaying action that gave Union Major General John F. Reynolds enough time to get to the scene with Union infantry.<sup>12</sup>

Reynolds made a very aggressive decision, and committed Union infantry to fight to the north of the town of Gettysburg to save good high ground to the south of the town.

Reynolds died shortly after by a stray bullet. Later in the day, Confederate reinforcements arrived from the west and north, and drove the Union infantry from their positions. The Union men retreated to the south, through the town of Gettysburg. Their destination: a commanding hill directly south of the town, Cemetery Hill. The hill served as a rallying point for the retreating Union infantry, and soon became a critical spot in the Federal battle line. By dusk on July 1, both armies brought in large amounts of reinforcements, with Chamberlain and the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine still on the road.<sup>13</sup>

Fighting did not begin on July 2 until later in the afternoon. By this point, the Union battle line began to form the famous ‘fishhook,’ with the barb curling around Culp’s Hill and Cemetery Hill in the north, and the shaft moving straight down Cemetery

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<sup>12</sup> Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign: A Study in Command*, 277.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas A. Desjardin, *Stand Firm Ye Boys from Maine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 30-31.

Ridge towards two dominating hills to the south. The Confederate lines formed a larger fishhook attempting to surround the smaller Union one. The key event of the day occurred when Major General Dan Sickles moved his small Third Corps out from Cemetery Ridge to some slightly higher ground directly to his front.<sup>14</sup> This left the Union flank on Cemetery Ridge exposed, up in the air, and left the two hills to the south vulnerable. Unfortunately for General Sickles, the Army of Northern Virginia made its attack before the mistake could be corrected, and forced General Meade to send in reinforcements piece by piece to where they were needed most. With an attack coming on the Union left, the hill closest to Cemetery Ridge, now known as Little Round Top, needed to be protected.

The Fifth Corps finally moved into the picture by this time, and its various divisions were broken up to counter threats where needed. Colonel Strong Vincent, Colonel Chamberlain's commanding officer, intercepted a message that forwarded one of General Barnes's brigades to Little Round Top.<sup>15</sup> Vincent immediately took responsibility for leading his men there. At the 'double-quick' Vincent's brigade moved toward the crest of Little Round Top, and took position just below the summit. Chamberlain and the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine stood to the left of the line, and effectively constituted the extreme left of the Union army. Soon, they went into action against the southerners.

Chamberlain's soon-to-be-rival southern commander continued moving his men toward Little Round Top at this point. Colonel William C. Oates of the 15<sup>th</sup> Alabama

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<sup>14</sup> Harry W. Pfanz, *Gettysburg: The Second Day* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press 1987), 124.

<sup>15</sup> Desjardin, *Stand Firm Ye Boys from Maine*, 36-37.

must have been tired, as his men made a tremendous 25 mile march to arrive to the battlefield on time to take part in General Longstreet's July 2 attack. Col. Oates's men thirsted due to the long march, and Oates sent out men to fill the canteens of the regiment.<sup>16</sup> The order for the 15<sup>th</sup> Alabama to move out arrived before the canteen bearers got back. On the far right of the attacking battle line, the 15<sup>th</sup> Alabama suffered further as their lines received fire from companies of marksmen with the 2<sup>nd</sup> U.S. Sharpshooters stationed on the hill next to Little Round Top, called Big Round Top or merely "Round Top." Moving his men to meet the new threat, Oates and his already parched men chased the sharpshooters all the way to the summit of Big Round Top. Seeing the defensive value of the location, Oates attempted to gain permission from a staff officer to fortify the hill. Instead, he told Oates to continue on and attack the enemy.<sup>17</sup> First however, Oates realized that he needed to give his men a rest before continuing his attack. After a ten minute break, the 15<sup>th</sup> Alabama continued on to meet the Union left flank, Chamberlain, and the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine.

Chamberlain took several measures to prepare for the coming attack. His most important step constituted sending one of his companies, Company B led by Captain Walter G. Morrill, out to the left of his flank.<sup>18</sup> Chamberlain worried that the flank had no protection, and the company, known as excellent marksmen, could guard the flank against a surprise attack. Another precaution that Chamberlain took: he released the regimental pioneers (regimental engineers), provost guard, and prisoners to join the battle

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<sup>16</sup> Desjardin, *Stand Firm Ye Boys from Maine*, 39.

<sup>17</sup> Desjardin, *Stand Firm Ye Boys from Maine*, 47.

<sup>18</sup> Desjardin, *Stand Firm Ye Boys from Maine*, 44.

line. He sent others, such as the drummer boys and chaplains to make preparations to care for the soon-to-be wounded. A final preparation consisted of appointing Captain Arthur W. Clark and Captain Ellis Spear to take command of the right and left halves of the regiment. Then the men waited for the coming onslaught.

As the Confederate regiments swept towards Vincent's Brigade, the Confederate artillery stopped, signaling the imminent arrival of southern infantry. Soon, the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine came into contact with the 47<sup>th</sup> Alabama and Col. Oates's 15<sup>th</sup> Alabama, while the rest of Vincent's brigade met other Confederate troops. The fighting went on, with the southerners moving further to the left with each attack, in an attempt to flank the Maine regiment.<sup>19</sup> In time, one of Chamberlain's officers, Lieutenant James Nichols, alerted Chamberlain to an odd occurrence. Chamberlain investigated, and saw Confederate soldiers moving far past the left of his line, preparing to attack the regiment from the flank. In order to counter this threat, Chamberlain refused his line, or took half of his men off to the left and bent his line into the shape of a letter v. With this maneuver, Chamberlain hoped to stop the flank attacks. Moving the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine's regimental flag to a large rock on the left side of the line, the second rank of Chamberlain's battle line moved out to the left and bent back to meet the new threat. The next time the Confederates attacked from the left, they met a wall of cohesive rifle fire rather than an undefended flank.<sup>20</sup> The men executed this difficult technique over rocky sloping ground, a testament to the regiment's training. While refusing the line helped, the

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<sup>19</sup> Desjardin, *Stand Firm Ye Boys from Maine*, 57.

<sup>20</sup> Desjardin, *Stand Firm Ye Boys from Maine*, 52.

southerners kept coming in waves. Years after the end of the war, Chamberlain vividly described this fight in his Gettysburg memoir,

The roar of all this tumult reached us on the left, and heightened the intensity of our resolve. Meanwhile the flanking column worked around to our left and joined with those before us in a fierce assault, which lasted with increasing fury for an intense hour. The two lines met and broke and mingled in the shock. The crush of musketry gave way to cuts and thrusts, grapplings and wrestlings. The edge of conflict swayed to and fro, with wild whirlpools and eddies. At times I saw around me more of the enemy than of my own men; gaps opening, swallowing, closing again with sharp convulsive energy; squads of stalwart men who had cut their way through us, disappearing as if translated. All around, strange, mingled roar- shouts of defiance, rally, and desperation; and underneath, murmured entreaty and stifled moans; gasping prayers, snatches of Sabbath song, whispers of loved names; everywhere men torn and broken, staggering, creeping, quivering on the earth, and dead faces with strangely fixed eyes staring stark into the sky. Things which cannot be told- nor dreamed.<sup>21</sup>

This furious fight went on, exhausting both sides. At times the two forces clashed with each other in hand to hand combat, but each time the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine threw its opponent back down the hill. Realizing the precariousness of his situation, Chamberlain sent an orderly to the nearby 83<sup>rd</sup> Pennsylvania, asking for assistance. Unfortunately, the 83<sup>rd</sup> could not spare any men to aid the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine, but did extend their battle line further to the left, allowing the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine to close up their own line. The other regiments of Vincent's brigade to the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine's right had enough problems to handle at this point in the fight. Attacked by Alabama and Texas regiments, the 83<sup>rd</sup> Pennsylvania, 44<sup>th</sup> New York, and 16<sup>th</sup> Michigan gave a good account of themselves, until a blunder almost cost the brigade dearly. While one cannot be entirely clear as to what happened, at some point during the fight a portion of the 16<sup>th</sup> Michigan retired from the battle, perhaps due to a

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<sup>21</sup> Chamberlain, *Bayonet! Forward*, 28.

misunderstood order.<sup>22</sup> The loss of these men began to put extreme pressure on the 16<sup>th</sup> Michigan and the right flank of Vincent's brigade. Hurrying over to assess the situation, Col. Vincent fell while attempting to remedy this problem. At this, the senior regimental commander, Colonel James Rice took command of the brigade. Unbeknownst to Rice, help for the endangered right flank already moved at the 'double-quick' on its way to Little Round Top.

In his effort to send troops to the hill, Brigadier General Gouverneur K. Warren came across Colonel Patrick O'Rorke's 140<sup>th</sup> New York Regiment.<sup>23</sup> Warren immediately ordered the New York regiment to Little Round Top, and the regiment arrived just in time to avert disaster on Vincent's brigade's right flank. Without even taking the time to load their rifles, the 140<sup>th</sup> New York entered the fray, moving down Little Round Top until they sighted the enemy and commenced firing. At some point during this beginning exchange of fire Colonel O'Rorke fell with a bullet through his neck. Even so, the extra reinforcement of the New York regiment shored up the right flank of Vincent's brigade. This flank no longer suffered extreme danger during the fight. However, the left flank told a different story.

Back on the left flank, portions of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine began to run low on ammunition, with men resorting to raiding the cartridge boxes of wounded and fallen comrades. At this point, the fighting had raged for around two hours, and the imminent lack of ammunition prompted Chamberlain's next famous action. Due to this shortage of

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<sup>22</sup> Pfanz, *Gettysburg: The Second Day*, 228.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph M. Leeper, "Statement of Capt. Joseph M. Leeper," *The Bachelder Papers*, Edited by David Ladd, Vol. 2, (Dayton: Morningside, 1994).

ammunition, Chamberlain claimed he decided to initiate a charge. Chamberlain needed to hold the hill, and in his view the Confederates would not retreat anytime soon. In order to preempt the next assault, he decided to go on the offensive. Chamberlain described the event efficiently in his after action report,

In the midst of this struggle, our ammunition utterly failed. The enemy were close upon us with a fresh line, pouring on us a terrible fire. Half the left wing already lay on the field. Although I had brought two companies from the right for its support, it was now scarcely more than a skirmish line. The heroic energy of my officers could avail no more. Our gallant line withered and shrunk before the fire it could not repel. It was too evident- we could maintain the defensive no longer. As a last desperate resort, I ordered a charge. The word 'fix bayonets' flew from man to man. The click of steel seemed to give new zeal to all. The men dashed forward with a shout. The two wings came into one line again, and extending to the left, and at the same time wheeling to the right, the whole regiment nearly described a half circle, the left passing over the space of half a mile, while the right kept within the support of the 83<sup>rd</sup> Penna...they stood amazed, threw down their loaded arms and surrendered in whole companies.<sup>24</sup>

Not mentioned at this point in the report, Company B returned to the fray with about a dozen of the U.S. Sharpshooters that plagued the 15<sup>th</sup> Alabama on its way up Big Round Top.<sup>25</sup> Their involvement sealed the fate of the 15<sup>th</sup> Alabama, and the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine had won its fight. With this action, Chamberlain's fight on Little Round Top came to its conclusion. He found himself assigned to picket duty on the larger hill to south, Big Round Top. Except for a brush with an enemy picket line, the rest of Chamberlain's time at Gettysburg could be considered unexciting. He and the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine ended the battle without being engaged further.

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<sup>24</sup> "Chamberlain's After Action Report: July 6, 1863." 20<sup>th</sup> Maine Infantry Folder 1 of 2. GNMP Library Vertical Files: V6-ME20. Gettysburg, PA.

<sup>25</sup> Desjardin, *Stand Firm Ye Boys from Maine*, 67.

The Battle of Gettysburg ended the next day, on July 3, with the disastrous Confederate assault known as Pickett's Charge. Defeated, the Army of Northern Virginia moved back south to Virginia, and crossed the Potomac River before the Army of the Potomac caught up. Chamberlain only moved south toward Richmond from this point on.

As the Army of the Potomac moved south, Chamberlain caught one of the many diseases that plagued Civil War armies, malaria, in August and suffered from recurrences through the end of the war. The Army allowed him a two-week furlough to return home and rest, but upon his return to the army found that he had been promoted to brigade command. This did not last long though, as a particularly nasty resurgence of malaria in mid-November sent him to Washington D.C. to recover. He remained in Washington on court-martial duty, and did not return to active duty until mid-May 1864. Chamberlain found that Brigadier General Joseph Bartlett was leading his old brigade, and so took command of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine again, participating in his first action since furlough on May 22. Later, due to a restructuring of the Fifth Corps on June 6, Chamberlain received command of a new brigade of six Pennsylvania regiments.<sup>26</sup> Soon after, the Army of the Potomac moved deep into Virginia towards the city of Petersburg. Surprised, General Lee moved back to defend the city, and the Army of the Potomac settled in for a siege. During the events leading up to the siege, Chamberlain faced his most dangerous experience of the war.

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<sup>26</sup> Trulock, *In the Hands of Providence*, 188.

Leading up to the siege, on June 18, 1864, Chamberlain received an order to move his brigade against a heavily defended Confederate entrenchment. Despite reservations about whether the attack would be effective, Chamberlain ordered the advance. At this point, in the midst of heavy casualties, Chamberlain himself was hit.<sup>27</sup> A minié ball entered, hit his right hip joint, and then exited his body behind the opposite hip joint. Not wanting to fall, he stuck his officer's sword into the ground and used the weapon as a cane. Eventually he fell, and some men carried him off the field by stretcher.

The doctors that examined the wound could not have been optimistic. The lead bullets of the time caused massive amounts of damage, and one of these bullets had ripped through Chamberlain's lower abdomen. The army surgeons operated in an attempt to save Chamberlain's life, and Chamberlain found himself put forward for promotion by the Fifth Corps commander, now General Warren. Chamberlain received a battlefield promotion to Brigadier General by Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant, who wrote in his Special Orders No. 39,

Col. Joshua L. Chamberlain, Twentieth Regiment Maine Infantry Volunteers, is, for meritorious and efficient services on the field of battle, and especially for gallant conduct in leading his brigade against the enemy at Petersburg, Va., on the 18<sup>th</sup> instant, in which he was seriously wounded, hereby, in pursuance of authority from the Secretary of War, appointed brigadier-general of U.S. Volunteers....<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Trulock, *In the Hands of Providence*, 209.

<sup>28</sup> U.S. War Department. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies in the War of the Rebellion*. Vol. 40. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), 236.

Yet despite the thoughts of the surgeons, Chamberlain clung to life, and eventually went to the Naval Academy Hospital in Annapolis.

Chamberlain recovered surprisingly quickly from such a dreadful wound and returned to his men by November, 1864. Despite leaving again due to illness, Chamberlain returned for another great fight of the war at White Oak Road on March 31, 1865.<sup>29</sup> Chamberlain had recovered enough by this point to lead his men, and indeed, he was sharp enough in this battle to dupe southern soldiers that were attempting to capture him into believing that he was a southern officer. Chamberlain next participated in the Battle of Five Forks, which broke the back of the southern army, and forced General Robert E. Lee to evacuate Petersburg and Richmond; Lee began his retreat that eventually ended at Appomattox.

In early April the end of the war finally came with Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox. This surrender led to another accolade for Chamberlain, as he wrote that he had been appointed to be the officer in charge of formally accepting the surrender of the Confederate army on April 11, 1865. In his memoir "The Passing of the Armies," Chamberlain describes in detail how he received the formal surrender of the Confederate forces at Appomattox. In his account he states,

I was told, furthermore, that General Grant had appointed me to take charge of this parade and to receive the formal surrender of the guns and flags...When General Gordon came opposite me I had the bugle blown and the entire line came to "attention"...At the sound of that machine like snap of arms, however, General Gordon

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<sup>29</sup> Trulock, *In the Hands of Providence*, 243-244.

started, caught in a moment of its significance, and instantly assumed the finest attitude of a soldier...and thereupon began the formality of surrender.<sup>30</sup>

In an action that may have caused anger among some northerners, Chamberlain brought his men to attention, saluting the defeated Confederates. Even so, other information points to Chamberlain not being in formal command during the parade, and will be discussed later. Yet finally, at long last, the bloody civil war came to its conclusion. Chamberlain received a brevet promotion to Major General due to his performance at Five Forks, and found himself given formal command of the First Division, Fifth Corps. He participated in the Grand Review of the Union Armies, and after being mustered out on August 24, 1865, Joshua Chamberlain returned home.<sup>31</sup>

Once again, Chamberlain returned to college faculty life at Bowdoin, again as professor of rhetoric and oratory. This did not last long, as the Maine Republicans put Chamberlain forward as their gubernatorial candidate in the 1866 election. Chamberlain defeated his opponent, Eben F. Pillsbury, handily, winning a record percent of the vote.

Chamberlain went on to four one year terms as Governor of Maine, breaking his record winning percent of the vote again in 1868. Like most everything that he put his hand to in life Chamberlain performed well as governor. After four years in politics, Chamberlain returned to Bowdoin College, resumed his relationship with the school, and served as president of the college from 1871 to 1883. Later in life, Chamberlain worked as Surveyor of the Port of Portland, Maine, and also participated in commemorative

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<sup>30</sup> Chamberlain, *Bayonet! Forward*, 234-236.

<sup>31</sup> Wallace, *Soul of the Lion*, 203.

affairs concerning the war. He could be remembered as being particularly skilled at giving speeches for the commemorations.

Chamberlain spoke at the dedication of the Maine monuments on the Gettysburg Battlefield in 1889. In the eloquent speech, Chamberlain discusses his ideas on commemoration, sacrifice, and the war that he fought in, “This is the great reward of service. To live, far out and on, in the life of others; this is the mystery of the Christ, -to give life's best for such high sake that it shall be found again unto life eternal.”<sup>32</sup> Chamberlain remained active in commemoration until his health began to fade.

Over the course of his life, Joshua Chamberlain underwent something of a transformation. He saw himself as a knightly soldier, and always acted as such. As asserted by historian Glenn LaFantasie: “He wanted to be a chivalrous knight and an Old Testament warrior, and so in his own eyes and those of his contemporaries he became those things.”<sup>33</sup> Even so, later in his life he became very stubborn about defending that persona, and everything that persona accomplished. This stubbornness led to a falling out with his old friend Ellis Spear, who complained about Chamberlain’s “egotism.”<sup>34</sup> Another veteran, Oliver Norton, felt the same way. As LaFantasie stated, “In their old age, both Spear and Norton came to consider Chamberlain a skilled prevaricator and self-promoter.”<sup>35</sup> As such, over the course of Chamberlain’s life, he appears to have gone

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<sup>32</sup> Chamberlain, *Bayonet! Forward*, 201-202.

<sup>33</sup> Gabor S. Boritt, ed., *The Gettysburg Nobody Knows* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 55.

<sup>34</sup> Boritt, *The Gettysburg Nobody Knows*, 49.

<sup>35</sup> Boritt, *The Gettysburg Nobody Knows*, 49.

from knightly officer to crotchety old man. This egotism played into later Chamberlain centric works. Clearly, Chamberlain set the stage for his legacy before his death.

Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain died on February 24, 1914.<sup>36</sup> He died of complications to his old Petersburg wound, and died the last Union soldier to perish of battlefield wounds. He had lived a remarkable, full life. His granddaughter, Rosamond Allen recalled, “I think of Grandfather as a scholar, a teacher, a person of great breadth of interest and concern for his fellow beings, rather than a fighter. I am sure that he fought only because he felt it was his duty to fight to save the Union with all that that entailed. Bravery, modesty, affection, are things I remember about my grandfather. I do not associate him with battles and killing.”<sup>37</sup> Not everyone agreed with Rosamond. Over the course of his life, Chamberlain participated in many actions that solidified his legacy. This legacy became a source for contention among many in the wake of the Civil War, and for Joshua Chamberlain, no aspect of his legacy became more important or controversial than his fight at Little Round Top.

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<sup>36</sup> Wallace, *Soul of the Lion*, 310.

<sup>37</sup> “A Personal Memoir of Rosamond Allen—Granddaughter of Union General Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain,” *Blue and Grey Magazine* Dec 1983: 16.

## Chapter 2

### Through Blood and Fire at Gettysburg

Through the course of Joshua Chamberlain's life, one experience returned again and again for discussion, examination, and debate. While Chamberlain undertook many trials, none became so controversial or popular as his fight on July 2, 1863, defending Little Round Top during the Battle of Gettysburg. Controversy began to mill regarding the fight on Little Round Top right after the end of the battle. Some of the controversy occurred due to Chamberlain's own official report and perceived errors within. Other controversy happened because of conflicting veterans' accounts. More controversy took place because of quibbles over monument placement. In any case, many veterans from both the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine and other units that fought at Little Round Top took a great deal of interest in what actually happened on the hill.

The central figure in the controversy surrounding the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine at Gettysburg is Joshua Chamberlain. His accounts stated that he ordered the charge of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine at Little Round Top, and that the charge constituted a 'right wheel forward' maneuver of the entire regiment. His accounts changed bit by bit, and became more self serving as more accounts appeared over time. Chamberlain's superiors offered support for this basic narrative in their own after action reports. After twenty years of comparative silence postwar, veterans began to rediscover an interest in their wartime trials. The Reverend

Theodore Gerrish, a former member of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine, wrote extensively about Little Round Top. He represents a number of Chamberlain's former soldiers who generally supported the version of the events of July 2 their commanding officer promoted. By the 1880s however, Chamberlain also faced critics. After this, Lieutenant Holman S. Melcher is Chamberlain's clearest opponent within the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine over the memory of Little Round Top. His accounts claim that he initiated the charge, not Chamberlain. Major Ellis Spear, Chamberlain's second in command at Gettysburg, added his own commentaries, as well. His major point constituted that he never received an order to execute a right wheel forward. Spear advanced his men with the colors. Not all the contributors to the growing controversy came from the ranks of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine, however. Another key critic of Chamberlain was a man named Oliver Wilcox Norton, who wrote in praise of his commanding officer, Colonel Strong Vincent, Chamberlain's commanding officer, as the real hero of Little Round Top. A final key player in this controversy was Colonel William C. Oates, Chamberlain's opposite number in the Confederate ranks. Oates wrote that instead of being driven from Little Round Top, he made the decision to retreat.

The first account of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine at Little Round Top can be found in Joshua Chamberlain's initial after action report, completed just a few days after the battle had finished. In the report, Chamberlain wrote of the charge,

In the midst of this struggle, our ammunition utterly failed. The enemy were close upon us with a fresh line, pouring on us a terrible fire. Half the left wing already lay on the field. Although I had brought two companies from the right for its support, it was now scarcely more than a skirmish line. The heroic energy of my officers could avail no more. Our gallant line withered and shrunk before the fire it could not repel. It

was too evident- we could maintain the defensive no longer. As a last desperate resort, I ordered a charge. The word 'fix bayonets' flew from man to man. The click of steel seemed to give new zeal to all. The men dashed forward with a shout. The two wings came into one line again, and extending to the left, and at the same time wheeling to the right, the whole regiment nearly described a half circle, the left passing over the space of half a mile, while the right kept within the support of the 83<sup>rd</sup> Penna...they stood amazed, threw down their loaded arms and surrendered in whole companies.<sup>38</sup>

This can be considered Chamberlain's best account of the charge of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine at Gettysburg. He wrote the document just a few days after the end of the action, and could not have had the time to embellish or forget. Other later accounts contrasted with this version of the charge, some of the accounts by Chamberlain himself.

Beyond the report that Chamberlain filed in regards to the fight for Little Round Top, one can look to Chamberlain's immediate superiors in the Union Army. While historians unfortunately do not have access to a report by Chamberlain's immediate commanding officer, (his brigade commander Col. Vincent was mortally wounded during the fighting at Little Round Top) one does have access to documents by Chamberlain's division commander, Brigadier General James A. Barnes. General Barnes gave a rather detailed account of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine's actions during the fighting, and his report seems to correlate with other popular accounts of the battle,

Four times that little interval of ten paces was the scene of a desperate conflict. The ground was strewn with dead and wounded men of both sides promiscuously mingled. Their ammunition was exhausted: they replenished it from the cartridge boxes of the men lying around them whether friend or foes: but even this resource failed them: the enemy in greatly superior numbers pressed hard: men and officers began to look to

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<sup>38</sup> "Chamberlain's After Action Report, July 6, 1863," 20<sup>th</sup> Maine Infantry Folder 1 of 2, "20<sup>th</sup> Maine Papers," GNMP Library, Gettysburg, PA.

the rear for safety, but the gallant commander of the regiment ordered the bayonets to be fixed, and at the command, forward!<sup>39</sup>

Furthermore, Barnes stated in the ending remarks of his report, “Colonel Chamberlain of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine Volunteers, whose service I have endeavored briefly to describe deserves special attention.”<sup>40</sup>

Apparently General Barnes appreciated Chamberlain’s actions on the second day at Gettysburg, and did not fear to make that known. His account agrees with Chamberlain’s accounts (being distilled from Chamberlain’s account), and adds yet concurring element to Chamberlain’s story of Little Round Top. Furthermore, the report lends valuable credence to Chamberlain’s tale, a valuable commodity in controversy that only increased as the twenty-fifth anniversary of the battle of Gettysburg approached.

After nearly twenty years of comparative silence, interest in Little Round Top reawakened in the early 1880s. During this era, monuments went up, accounts flourished, and counter accounts came forth in response. Many of these accounts surfaced in The National Tribune, the Grand Army of the Republic newsletter geared toward Civil War veterans.

In 1882, an article entitled “Battle of Gettysburg” by Reverend Theodore Gerrish can be considered very important in Chamberlain’s legacy for two reasons. First, Gerrish’s accounts of the fighting at Little Round Top became extremely popular due to the vivid way in which he related the trials of that day, “The conflict opens. I know not

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<sup>39</sup> Report of Brig. General Barnes, Aug. 24, 1864, Box B-4, “Chamberlain Papers,” GNMP Library, Gettysburg, PA.

<sup>40</sup> Report of Brig. General Barnes, Aug. 24, 1864.

who gave the first fire, or which line received the first lead. I only know that the carnage began. Our regiment was mantled in fire and smoke. I wish that I could picture with my pen the awful details of that hour..."<sup>41</sup> His writing style is mesmerizing. He uses this style to relate the entire story of his unit at Little Round Top, including the actions of Col. Chamberlain. Gerrish continued to write,

Our ammunition is nearly all gone, and we are using the cartridges from the boxes of our wounded comrades. A critical moment has arrived, and we can remain as we are no longer; we must advance or retreat. It must not be the latter, but how can it be the former? Colonel Chamberlain understands how it can be done. The order is given 'Fix Bayonets!' and the steel shanks of the bayonets rattle upon the rifle barrels. 'Charge bayonets, charge!'<sup>42</sup>

Here one finds the Chamberlain that Theodore Gerrish depicted, a dashing, decisive officer, leading his men in a glorious charge that won the day for the Union Army, in perfect accordance with Chamberlain's own accounts.

E.S. Coan fought in the color guard of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine. He mentions Chamberlain in a National Tribune article, specifically his involvement in the charge,

After the 20<sup>th</sup> had lost 32 killed and 97 wounded, Col. Chamberlain ordered a charge, and many of the company officers leaped in front and led their men; among that number was 'President Melcher,' (then First Lieutenant of the color company, now

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<sup>41</sup> Rev. Theodore Gerrish, "Battle of Gettysburg" in *Fighting Them Over: How the Veterans Remembered Gettysburg in the Pages of The National Tribune*, Edited by Richard A. Sauers (Baltimore: Butternut and Blue, 1998), 263.

<sup>42</sup> Gerrish, "*Battle of Gettysburg*," 263.

Major,) Col. Chamberlain advancing with the colors. The moment we reached the rocks behind which the enemy was stationed, many of his men surrendered.<sup>43</sup>

This account puts Chamberlain at the forefront of the charge that happened during the defense of Little Round Top, and correlates with Chamberlain's own writings on the fighting at Little Round Top. The passage also clearly states that Chamberlain personally ordered the charge, a point of contention among some of the members of the 20<sup>th</sup>, Maine, especially the Lieutenant Melcher mentioned in the above passage.

Due to growing opposition to his version of the legend of Little Round Top, surely Chamberlain felt a need to strike back. He soon had the chance to do so. Whenever a unit commander participated in a battle, he had to file a report detailing what occurred during said battle. These reports, along with other correspondence form the basis of *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies in the War of the Rebellion*.<sup>44</sup> These reports were compiled throughout the 1880s as the twenty-fifth anniversary approached. As the *Official Records* came together, someone found Chamberlain's report for the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine at Gettysburg missing. As such, the War Department sent Chamberlain a letter requesting the report. Chamberlain's letter back, and the ensuing correspondence is quite revealing. First, historians have Chamberlain's initial response, dated March 3, 1884,

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<sup>43</sup> E. S. Coan, "A Shot From the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine, Aimed at Comrade Fisher." in *Fighting Them Over: How the Veterans Remembered Gettysburg in the Pages of The National Tribune*, Edited by Richard A. Sauers (Baltimore: Butternut and Blue, 1998).

<sup>44</sup> U.S. War Department. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies in the War of the Rebellion*. Vol. 27. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901).

Sir. I am informed that my Official Report as Colonel of the 20<sup>th</sup> Regiment Maine Vols. Of the action of that Regiment in the battle of Gettysburg is not in the files of the War Department. I beg to say that I made such Report on the 6<sup>th</sup> of July 1863, and sent it to the Headquarters of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> Div. 5<sup>th</sup> Corps where I have reason to know it was received, as also afterwards at the Headquarters of the Division. I filed away my papers a copy of my report made at the time the report was sent forward. I beg now to inquire of this copy, without alteration of course, would be received at your office...<sup>45</sup>

Next, the Adjutant General responded requesting said copy, stating,

In reply to your communication of the 3<sup>rd</sup> instant, relative to your official report as Colonel of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine Vols of the operations of that regiment at the Battle of Gettysburg. I have the honor to request that you forward to this office the copy of the report to which you refer, with a formal certificate that it is an exact copy of the report as made by you in the first instance.<sup>46</sup>

Chamberlain acquiesced to this, and in the next letter stated,

I hereby certify on honor that this written 'copy' is the draft from which the original Report of the Battle of Gettysburg was made and I believe and have no doubt that Report was sent to Brigade Head Quarters, and corresponded with this draft including the verbal corrections and interlineations as now marked within. Nothing on this has since been added or otherwise changed.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> "Correspondence Between Gen. Chamberlain and the Adjutant General, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1884," Box B-4, Chamberlain Papers, GNMP Library, Gettysburg, PA.

<sup>46</sup> "Correspondence Between Gen. Chamberlain and the Adjutant General, March 11<sup>th</sup>, 1884," Box B-4, Chamberlain Papers, GNMP Library, Gettysburg, PA.

<sup>47</sup> "Correspondence Between Gen. Chamberlain and the Adjutant General, March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1884," Box B-4, Chamberlain Papers, GNMP Library, Gettysburg, PA.

One might think that this might mean the end of the correspondence, but the next and final letter is the most interesting by far. Chamberlain sent one last letter to the War Department, stating,

I enclose after making a copy of the same, the ‘copy’ or ‘draft’ which I have no doubt was the original from which my official Report of the battle of Gettysburg was made. I doubted whether to send you this mutilated and ill-written paper and it may now be your preference that I should have a fair copy made for your files. I must also beg indulgence for expressing something short of absolute certainty as any Report being identical in print an letter with this. I have not the slightest doubt whatever that this is what my report *was*, and without change. Many old papers came to light after some years of obscurity and this among them...<sup>48</sup>

According to this last letter, Chamberlain effectively rewrote the official report that he sent in to the War Department for the *Official Records*. This means that the account by Chamberlain of what happened on Little Round Top in the *Official Records* he wrote roughly twenty years after the actual event took place, with all of the baggage that comes with twenty years of trying to remember. Furthermore, many varying accounts regarding the fighting at Little Round Top came to light by this point. Perhaps Chamberlain wrote this later report with these earlier stories by 20<sup>th</sup> Maine veterans in mind.

While both Chamberlain’s initial report and his later report support Chamberlain’s version of the fight on Little Round Top, there are significant differences between the two reports, with the second report having a much larger amount of self promotion. The

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<sup>48</sup> “Correspondence Between Gen. Chamberlain and the Adjutant General, March 17<sup>th</sup>, 1884,” Box B-4, Chamberlain Papers, GNMP Library, Gettysburg, PA.

first difference that one immediately notices is that the report written just after the battle is much more streamlined than the other, with little to no embellishment. Chamberlain wrote the report just a few days after the battle had ended, and he had other things on his mind rather than writing a colossal report. The later report is full of embellishment, and indeed this embellishment was probably Chamberlain's motivation in submitting the new report. For instance, in the initial report, Chamberlain describes being placed at the extreme left of the army in just his second paragraph,<sup>49</sup> while in his 'official' report, he does not mention this until the sixth paragraph, indicating a large influx of new information...in all probability obscured by time.<sup>50</sup> Moving along with this theme, the 'official' report describes incidents not mentioned in the first after action report.

In contrast to the initial report, Chamberlain's second 'official' report states,

...At that crisis I ordered the bayonet. The word was enough. It ran like fire along the line from man to man, and rose into a shout, with which they sprung forward onto the enemy, now not thirty yards away. The effect was surprising; many of the enemy's first line threw down their arms and surrendered. An officer fired his pistol at my head with one hand while he handed me his sword with the other. Holding fast by our right, and swinging forward our left, we made an extended 'right wheel,' before the enemy's second line broke, and fell back, fighting from tree to tree, many being captured, until we had swept the valley and cleared the front of nearly our entire brigade.<sup>51</sup>

While the overall story here is the same, a few key differences emerge. First is the overall style of the writing. Once again, one can see that the writing in the 'official'

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<sup>49</sup> "Chamberlain's After Action Report: July 6, 1863."

<sup>50</sup> Joshua L. Chamberlain, *Bayonet! Forward* (Gettysburg: Stan Clark Military Books, 1994), 203-209.

<sup>51</sup> Chamberlain, *Bayonet! Forward*, 203-209.

report is much more romanticized than in the initial report. Furthermore, there is the incident with the Confederate officer that is described in the ‘official’ report, and not in the initial report. The incident did happen (Chamberlain kept the officer’s pistol), but interestingly he mentions it in his second report. Perhaps Chamberlain was more interested in storytelling rather than crafting a faithful report. A final contrast between the two accounts of the charge can be seen in reference to the ‘right wheel forward’ that the regiment performed. In the ‘official report’ Chamberlain says “we made an extended ‘right wheel,’”<sup>52</sup> while in his initial report, Chamberlain states, “...wheeling to the right, the whole regiment nearly described a half circle...”<sup>53</sup> somewhat different. In the first passage, it seems to insinuate that the ‘right wheel forward’ moved intentionally, while in the initial report it seems that Chamberlain just described what happened. This would mean that in actuality, the famous ‘right wheel forward’ just resulted from the lay of the land, not because Chamberlain or another officer ordered the maneuver. This reality gives a new perspective to what actually may have happened during the fight for Little Round Top with this second report contrasting both Chamberlain’s first report and other accounts from 20<sup>th</sup> Maine veterans, such as Holman Melcher’s accounts claiming that Chamberlain did not order the charge.

Chamberlain did not separate himself from what he and his men accomplished. He went back for the twenty-fifth 1888 anniversary of the battle to speak, and

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<sup>52</sup> Chamberlain, *Bayonet! Forward*, 203-209.

<sup>53</sup> “Chamberlain’s After Action Report: July 6, 1863.”

commemorate the Maine Monuments in 1889. In the eloquent speech, Chamberlain discussed his ideas on commemoration, manhood and the war that he fought in,

But these monuments are not to commemorate the dead alone. Death was but the divine acceptance of life freely offered by every one. Service was the central fact. That fact, and that truth, these monuments commemorate. They mark the centers around which stood the manhood of Maine, steadfast in noble service,-to the uttermost, to the uppermost! Those who fell here-those who have fallen before or since-those who linger, yet a little longer, soon to follow; all are mustered in one great company on the shining heights of life, with that star of Maine's armorial ensign upon their foreheads forever-like the ranks of the galaxy.<sup>54</sup>

Chamberlain continued to remain active in memory surrounding the fight for Little Round Top. Indeed, this aspect of his life is among his best remembered and lauded. In fact, if one visits the Gettysburg National Park Visitor's Center, and visits the museum, the last panel that one sees before one exits the museum contains the line above saying "In great deeds, something abides. On great fields, something stays." As such, some of Chamberlain's work regarding the memory of Little Round Top could be considered his greatest in terms of forging his own memory and legacy. His work regarding the memory of Little Round Top contrasted with other accounts, yet Chamberlain continued the process of spreading his version of the battle. This work continued right up until his death, and went back and forth among his friends and fellow officers in the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine.

After the publication of these earlier accounts by 20<sup>th</sup> Maine veterans, a challenger finally arose to meet the version of the story perpetuated by Chamberlain and

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<sup>54</sup> Chamberlain, *Bayonet! Forward*, 201-202.

others. Lieutenant Holman S. Melcher can be considered one of Chamberlain's biggest opponents regarding the memory of Little Round Top. Melcher participated actively in the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine's commemoration activities after the war and wrote prolifically. In an article published in the collection of wartime accounts, Battles and Leaders, Melcher wrote of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine at Little Round Top,

...The conflict was fierce, but necessarily brief, as it was a question of only a short time when every man must fall before the superior fire of our enemy, so greatly outnumbering us. When 136 of our brave officers and men had been shot down where they stood, and only 172 remained, hardly more than a strong skirmish line, and the 60 rounds of cartridges each man carried into the fight had been fired, and the survivors were using the cartridge-boxes of their fallen comrades, the time had come when it must be decided whether we should fall back and give up this key to the whole field of Gettysburg, or charge and try to throw off this foe, that were rapidly drawing the life-blood of our regiment by their deadly fire. It must not be the former; how can it be the latter? Col. Chamberlain decides it can be only the latter and gives the order to 'fix bayonets,' and almost before he can say 'Charge!' the regiment, with a shout of desperation, leaps down the hill and close in with the foe, which we find behind every rock and tree.<sup>55</sup>

Melcher made no mention of a right wheel forward and insinuated that Chamberlain gave no official order starting the charge. This clearly contrasts with Chamberlain's initial report, in which Chamberlain specifically stated that he ordered the final charge, and other accounts, such as Gerrish's that support Chamberlain.

Another one of the officers that Chamberlain fought alongside was Chamberlain's second in command, Ellis Spear. Spear functioned as major of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine at Gettysburg. Spear later took command of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine when Chamberlain was promoted to brigade command. Spear also had very concrete ideas about what exactly

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<sup>55</sup> *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, Vol. 3 (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1956), 315.

happened during the fighting at Little Round Top. In a letter to Chamberlain written in 1895, Spears wrote,

I have your very interesting letter of the 19<sup>th</sup> inst. enclosing the Roster. I do not think it correct. I know that I was not in command of company G at the battle of Gettysburg, I had been directed to act as Major some time on the march, I think while you were temporarily absent in command of one of the brigades of the division. I had not returned to my company, in fact never did return to the company. My commission as Major dated June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1863. I received orders directly from you to bend back a little the two left companies, when I had reported to you that the enemy was extending beyond our left. I did so, slightly bending back two companies to more directly face the enemy at that point.<sup>56</sup>

Clearly Spear remembered these events differently than Chamberlain did, so much so that he felt the need to send a letter correcting him. Even though Chamberlain must have known that Spear commanded the left at Gettysburg, for whatever reason Chamberlain listed him as a company captain. Quibbles over events on Little Round Top soured the relationship between Spear and Chamberlain. They never reconciled. Indicating this, later in his life, exasperated with the controversy regarding Gettysburg, Spear wrote a letter to his granddaughter when asked to describe the fight at Little Round Top. Spear wrote,

I was much surprised to learn, from your letter, that you were not at the battle of Gettysburg. So many people were there that I do not fully understand how you missed it....A great many deeds of valor were performed but in the excitement of the time and the unavoidable mental occupation & close attention to the business, they were not

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<sup>56</sup> "Ellis Spear's Letter to Gen. Chamberlain, May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1895," Box B-4, Chamberlain Papers, GNMP Library, Gettysburg, PA.

noticed; but many have been invented since, after much reflection and in an amplified form.<sup>57</sup>

Another critic came from outside the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine. Private Oliver Wilcox Norton served as brigade bugler for Colonel Strong Vincent during the fight for Little Round Top, and thus moved everywhere Vincent moved, giving him a unique perspective on the battle. Norton wrote a famous account of the fighting at Little Round Top entitled The Attack and Defense of Little Round Top, published in 1913. This account contradicts the view that Chamberlain was the real hero of Little Round Top, and instead puts forward Norton's dead commanding officer, Colonel Strong Vincent. Norton's writes glowingly of Vincent, and states,

The position chosen by Vincent for his brigade was the best possible for preventing the Confederates from turning or capturing the hill. Had he placed his men on the crest of the ridge the enemy could have turned his flank and attacked from the rear. Or having opened the way, they could have held it for Hood's whole division to follow, cutting Meade's communications, capturing his trains, and forcing him to leave his strong position and attack the Confederates in the open. Not all the troops that could have been placed on the crest of Little Round Top could have prevented this if the spur occupied by Vincent's brigade and the valley along the north side of Big Round Top had been left open.<sup>58</sup>

Clearly, Norton carried a flag for his deceased commander here. This was an account that directly challenges the notion that Joshua Chamberlain deserved to be known as the hero of Little Round Top. To Norton, the action of moving his brigade

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<sup>57</sup> William B. Styple, ed. *With a Flash of His Sword: The Writings of Major Holman S. Melcher 20<sup>th</sup> Maine Infantry* (Kearny: Belle Grove Publishing Co., 1994), 300-301.

<sup>58</sup> Oliver Wilcox Norton, *The Attack and Defense of Little Round Top* (Gettysburg: Stan Clark Military Books, 1992), 266.

without direct orders and placing his men so well on the hill earned Vincent the distinction of being known as the hero of Little Round Top.

After the fight on Little Round Top, the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine advanced and took the hill just to the south, Big Round Top. Surprisingly, controversy also surrounded the occupation of Big Round Top. Brigadier General Samuel W. Crawford commanded a division of the Pennsylvania Reserves at Gettysburg and felt slighted by Chamberlain's version of that action. Crawford had sent a brigade to support Vincent's men late on July 2. His men played a key role in taking Big Round Top after the fight at Little Round Top. Eager for his men to be acknowledged for their part in taking and holding the hill, Crawford took his grievance to the commander of the Fifth Corps, Major General George Sykes.

General Sykes wrote back in support of Chamberlain's version of the story,

Your division came into action long after Vincent's brigade had been posted in front of that mountain, and upon representation being made to me that this brigade required support, I directed a portion of your command to be sent to sustain it. In my official report of the battle, credit is given to this portion of your command, (part of Fisher's brigade) for assisting in taking forcible possession of Round Top Mountain, but the merit and result of that achievement, I have always thought due to Colonel, now General Rice, and especially to Colonel Chamberlain and his regiment the Twentieth Maine Volunteers. As your position required you to be with those troops of your division, which were ordered to the front on the evening of the 2d of July, and therefore removed you from the neighborhood of Round Top Mountain, I do not understand how any claim could be set up by you for services which did not lay within the scope of your operations....There was glory enough in the battle of Gettysburg for all who fought there, and although painful to know that efforts to monopolize what was accomplished, and undue prominence given to certain persons and parts of the corps to the prejudice of others, I have hoped that the story would one day be properly told, and all get their due.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> "Letter from Maj. Gen. Sykes to Brig. Gen. Crawford, Dec. 17, 1863," Box B-4, Chamberlain Papers, GNMP Library, Gettysburg, PA.

The search for the truth already existed in the months following the battle, with some coming out on top, and others left behind. Chamberlain listed the Pennsylvania Reserves as coming up in support after the capture of Big Round Top, and Sykes accepted Chamberlain's version of the story to the detriment of Crawford's.

Other members of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine and various units wrote accounts of the fighting at Gettysburg after the war, each with their own distinct memories about what happened involving Big Round Top. A few of these stories could be found in the veterans' newsletter, The National Tribune. One such story in The National Tribune returns to the controversy between General Crawford and Chamberlain. Colonel Joseph Fisher, the leader of the brigade of Pennsylvania Reserves sent to take Big Round Top wrote in an article in The National Tribune,

One of the regiments comprising his brigade was the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine, commanded by Col. Chamberlain, and I cheerfully admit that it performed its duty faithfully both at Gettysburg and elsewhere, and I know that Col. Chamberlain was a gallant officer and is entitled to receive all the credit due to good conduct in the field; but neither Col. Chamberlain nor President Melcher deserve credit for doing what they did not do. Hence, as they did not take Round Top, as I shall presently show, they are not entitled to its credit.<sup>60</sup>

Fisher went on to relate how his Pennsylvania Reserves took Big Round Top, and goes on to say,

This, then, is the true story of the taking of Round Top, of which so much has been said. I did not regard it at the time as a great achievement, nor do I think so now,

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<sup>60</sup> Joseph W Fisher, "Round Top Again. A Comrade Who Was There Tells His Story" in *Fighting Them Over: How the Veterans Remembered Gettysburg in the Pages of The National Tribune*, Edited by Richard A. Sauers (Baltimore: Butternut and Blue, 1998).

but whatever it was the men who did the work, surely, are entitled to the credit of it. I do not believe that Col. Chamberlain will attempt to dispute my statements here made, for I know him to have been a valiant soldier, and believe him a truthful and honorable gentleman, and no such man will deny the truth to gain credit for what he is not entitled to receive.<sup>61</sup>

This account clearly quibbles with different earlier accounts published by 20<sup>th</sup> Maine veterans, and sparks a debate with other 20<sup>th</sup> Maine veterans.

In his article "A Shot From the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine, Aimed at Comrade Fisher," E. S. Coan relates his experiences at Gettysburg, and responds directly to Fisher, rebutting his tale regarding Big Round Top. Coan relates his version of the tale as such,

A hint was as good as a command to Col. Chamberlain, and just as the shades of night were sitting down upon the battle-worn troops of the contending armies, the 20<sup>th</sup> Me. Reached that position, planted its colors there, formed in line of battle and sent out a skirmish line. After our skirmishers had advanced down the hill two regiments of the Pennsylvania Reserves came up behind us and rested on their arms....Immediately after the volley referred to the two regiments of Pennsylvania Reserves that had come up behind us, and not more than a rod or two in our rear, moved by the about-face down the hill, and it was with difficulty that their commander was persuaded to return them again to our support....when Col. Fisher claims to have captured that position, with the 20<sup>th</sup> Me. Deployed as skirmishers, the veterans of the latter will demand that credit shall be given to whom credit is due. The writer does not know who commanded those two Pennsylvania regiments, but he does know that they had no part in establishing the line there, but came up after the line was formed. He also knows that they did not fire a gun on Little Round Top that night.<sup>62</sup>

With these passages, Coan provides another perspective benefiting the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine on what happened at Big Round Top. He did this in direct opposition to the account supporting the Pennsylvania Reserves.

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<sup>61</sup> Fisher, "Round Top Again. A Comrade Who Was There Tells His Story"

<sup>62</sup> Coan, "A Shot From the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine, Aimed at Comrade Fisher."

While many Yankees partook in fighting over the legacy of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine at Gettysburg, a Confederate account did not surface until much later in the squabbles. Colonel William C. Oates commanded the 15<sup>th</sup> Alabama during the Battle of Gettysburg, and assaulted Little Round Top repeatedly on July 2, 1863. Oates offers a unique Southern perspective on the fight for Little Round Top, and wrote in his official report,

On reaching the foot of the mountain below, I found the enemy in heavy force, posted in rear of large rocks upon a slight elevation beyond a depression of some 300 yards in width between the base of the mountain and the open plain beyond. I engaged them, my right meeting the left of their line exactly. Here I lost several gallant officers and men. After firing two or three rounds, I discovered that the enemy were giving way in my front. I ordered a charge, and the enemy in my front fled, but that portion of his line confronting the two companies on my left their ground, and continued a most galling fire upon my left. Just at this moment, I discovered the regiment on my left (Forty-seventh Alabama) retiring. I halted my regiment as its left reached a very large rock, and ordered a left-wheel of the regiment, which was executed in good order under fire, thus taking advantage of a ledge of rocks running off in a line perpendicular to the one I had just abandoned, and affording very good protection to my men. This position enabled me to keep up a constant flank and cross fire upon the enemy, which in less than five minutes caused him to change front. Receiving re-enforcements, he charged me five times, and was as often repulsed with heavy loss. Finally, I discovered that the enemy had flanked me on the right, and two regiments were moving rapidly upon my rear and not 200 yards distant, when, to save my regiment from capture or destruction, I ordered a retreat.<sup>63</sup>

According to this report, Oates suggests an entirely different fight than the one that Chamberlain remembered, adding yet another wrinkle to the story of Little Round Top, one where the 15<sup>th</sup> Alabama retreated rather than being forced from the hill.

This new wrinkle entered the controversy surrounding Little Round Top in the late 1880's, with the inclusion of Oates's report in the Official Records. Later, Oates entered the fray personally, with his finally publishing an account of the fighting on July

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<sup>63</sup> OR, Series 1, Vol. 27, 392.

2 in 1905. His new story directly rejects Chamberlain's initial and later stories, in a new effort to tell his tale of Little Round Top. Oates's motivation for entering the fray involved the placement of a monument to the 15<sup>th</sup> Alabama on Little Round Top, to honor the men that fell there; Oates especially wanted to honor his brother, John, who fell during the fighting on July 2. This motivation in particular sparked Oates's desire to publish his version of the fight. In this account, published in 1905, Oates comes right out and states that he ordered the retreat. He states,

I found the undertaking to capture Little Round Top too great for my regiment unsupported. I waited until the next charge of the Twentieth Maine was repulsed, as it would give my men a better chance to get out unhurt, and then ordered the retreat. The historian of that regiment claims that its charge drove us from the field. This is not true; I ordered the retreat. He was, I believe, the chaplain, and not present to see it. Doubtless he was at prayer a safe distance in the rear. Colonel Chamberlain also reported it and doubtless believed it, but it was just as I state—I ordered the retreat.<sup>64</sup>

Oates differentiates from his initial report of the battle, where instead of merely insinuating that his retreat resulted in the success of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine's charge, later he makes the fact brutally clear. Colonel Oates operated as Chamberlain's enemy again, with the battleground in print this time around.

Joshua Chamberlain had aged significantly with the approaching of the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg in 1913. While he surely planned to attend, he could not due to declining health. Even so, the legend of Little Round Top had already taken firm hold in the public memory, not only due to Chamberlain's work, but because of the multitude of other soldiers that debated the validity of certain elements of the story.

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<sup>64</sup> Lt. Frank A. Haskell and Col. William C. Oates, *Gettysburg*, ed. Glenn LaFantasie (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 99-100.

Chamberlain's story rose above the ugly debates, and eventually became the account turned to the most in the story of Little Round Top. A signal of this is a sign that Chamberlain had placed where his men fought on Little Round Top. The story goes, as told by Thomas Desjardin in his book Stand Firm Ye From Maine,

Stone walls now trace some unknown purpose across the right wing of the 20<sup>th</sup>'s position. Some drew the ire of Joshua Chamberlain on a visit to the spur in the late 1890s. In 1897 park workers rebuilt some of the walls that soldiers had built on the third day of the battle. When he first saw the wall, now nearly raised to four feet, Chamberlain felt it gave the false impression that the Maine men had the advantage of protection during their fight on July 2....Such was Chamberlain's influence at the time that the Gettysburg Battlefield Commission placed what is still the only marker on the battlefield that corrects a misconception. On the far right of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine's position along what is now Sykes Avenue it reads, 'This wall was built for defense July 3<sup>rd</sup> PM, 1863.'<sup>65</sup>

With this sign, Chamberlain is ensuring that visitors listen to his particular version of the Little Round Top legend. His men did not cower behind rocks. They fought shoulder to shoulder, and beat back a numerically superior enemy. Even after Chamberlain's death in 1914 after the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, this is the story that survived, and this is the story that eventually came onto the national stage.

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<sup>65</sup> Desjardin, Thomas A. *Stand Firm Ye Boys From Maine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 166.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Onto the National Stage**

Joshua Chamberlain found fame in his actions at Gettysburg; however his legacy solidified due to his later exploits in the American Civil War. Chamberlain remembered these events fondly, and he wrote and spoke about them profusely. Soon after the end of the American Civil War, Chamberlain began to make the jump from local Maine hero to nationally known hero. In particular, two events after Gettysburg sowed the seeds to bring Chamberlain onto the national scene, his fights at Petersburg and especially Appomattox.

In November 1863, Chamberlain went on furlough due to a very nasty case of malaria. He stayed in Washington D.C. on court-martial duty until mid-May 1864, when he participated in his first official action since the fall of the previous year on May 22, 1864. Two weeks later, Chamberlain received a brigade command of six Pennsylvania regiments due to the restructuring of the Fifth Corps. After being away for the battles of the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, and Cold Harbor, the latter of which the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine thankfully did not take part in, Chamberlain rejoiced in being with the army again.

Chamberlain rejoined the Army of the Potomac just in time for the fights leading up to the battles for the city of Petersburg, Virginia. In an effort to capture the vital supply center, General Ulysses S. Grant thrust the Army of the Potomac south. While the Army of the Potomac had success in breaking the outer shell of Confederate defenses, the Federal army moved too slow in bringing up reinforcements. The Fifth Corps constituted

a large chunk of these reinforcements, and took part in a large attack against the secondary Confederate defenses. During this attack leading up to the siege, on June 18, 1864 Chamberlain received an order to attack a heavily defended Confederate position across open ground. Suspicious of the order, Chamberlain sent a message asking for confirmation of the attack. Chamberlain received this confirmation and resignedly deployed his men to move forward. He wrote of the event later in life in a 1903 document entitled Reminiscences of Petersburg and Appomattox. He wrote in the memoir,

At this juncture what was my astonishment at receiving a verbal order through a staff officer personally unknown to me, directing me in the name of "the general commanding" to assault the enemy's main works in my front with my brigade. This was certainly a compliment to my six splendid regiments. But I think you will justify my astonishment, as well as my back handed courage and recklessness of personal consequences in presuming to send back to the general a written statement of the situation with the opinion that that position could not be carried with a single brigade, even of Gettysburg veterans. Grant had lost all patience that morning, and his chief subordinates were excited and flurried in a manner I had not seen before. I received, however, a courteous answer saying the whole army would join in on my right. But the single brigade was to make the assault, and prove the prophecy. In such an assault musketry was not to be thought of. It must be a storm of cannonade, a rush of infantry with pieces at the shoulder. Over the works and bayonet the enemy at their guns! It was desperate, deadly business. The bugler sounded the "charge." Under that storm of fire the earth flew into the air, men went down like scythe-swept grain; a wall of smoke veiled the front. I had thought it necessary to lead the charge, with full staff following; but in ten minutes not a man was left mounted. My staff were scattered; my flag-bearer shot dead, my own horse down.<sup>66</sup>

Chamberlain led this attack on foot, urging his men onward and upward until the unfortunate happened. A bullet entered his body, hit his right hip joint, and then exited behind his left hip joint. As he stated,

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<sup>66</sup>Joshua L. Chamberlain. *Bayonet! Forward* (Gettysburg: Stan Clark Military Books, 1994), 48.

To cheer and guide the men, where no voice could be heard, nor rank distinguished, I picked up the flag and bore it aloft, till, close upon the enemy's works, a minie-ball cut me through, and the red cross came down to the reddened, riddled earth. I saw my men rush past me to the very muzzles of the guns, then torn in pieces and trickling back, — the enemy rushing out beyond our left to flank our batteries on the crest behind us. I had only strength to send two broken regiments to support the batteries before I saw that all else was lost. In the midst of this seething turmoil I lay half-buried by clods of up-torn earth for an hour, when the shrouding smoke lifting, I was borne from the field by some of Major Bigelow's men of the Ninth Massachusetts Battery on the crest.<sup>67</sup>

Others also wrote of the wounding. A history of the 9<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Battery explicitly mentioned the event,

So Gen. Chamberlain took another course. Leading his men in a detour, he formed them in shelter of woods at the nearest point possible to the batteries frowning from the heights of Petersburg. Then the order for attack was given, and the soldiers rushed toward the enemy. A terrible fire was opened upon them. Three times was Gen. Chamberlain's horse shot under him. Then he himself received a shot, going completely through both hips. He was unhorsed, but he stood his ground, though unable to walk. He was bleeding copiously. His boots filled with blood and his pantaloons were saturated. As he grew weaker, he thrust his sword into the ground and leaned upon it, still holding his position and encouraging his men. Becoming weaker still from loss of blood, and unable to stand with that support, he sank upon his knees, but still kept the upright position and encouraged his men. Then he fell prostrate entirely, wholly unable to keep erect. Soldiers came to his aid. "No," he said, "I am too far gone. You can do nothing for me. Help the others." But they lifted him on a stretcher and carried him away.<sup>68</sup>

Furthermore, newspapers reported the wounding. The *Daily Eastern Argus* published on June 22, 1864, "Col. Chamberlain of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine shot through both

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<sup>67</sup> Joshua L. Chamberlain, *Bayonet! Forward*, 48.

<sup>68</sup> Levi Wood Baker, *History of the Ninth Mass. Battery* (Lakeview Press, 1888), 123.

thighs. Recovery doubtful.”<sup>69</sup> Then, the next day the same newspaper published an account of his survival, “Col. Chamberlain left to-day for Washington. It is believed that he will recover.”<sup>70</sup> Other newspapers reported the event with their casualty lists. The *Providence Daily Press* reported on June 22, “Col. Chamberlain left City Point to-day for Washington. It is believed he will recover.”<sup>71</sup> Other newspapers spent a little more time discussing and commenting on Chamberlain, even if they reported faulty information. The *Springfield Weekly Republican* mentions him, stating,

Lieut Col Chamberlain, 20<sup>th</sup> Maine, dangerously wounded, is professor of modern languages in Bowdoin college, from which institution he received leave of absence to accept the position of lieutenant colonel in the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine. He has been in every battle in which his regiment has participated, and has won golden opinions for gallantry.<sup>72</sup>

This newspaper seemed to forgo the fact that Chamberlain had been a full colonel for nearly a year! Even so, they heaped praise on him, describing “golden opinions” of him.

Chamberlain’s commanding officers certainly agreed with these “golden opinions.” They put his name forward for an immediate promotion to brigadier general, due to the heroic nature of his actions at Petersburg and the gravity of his wound. His

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<sup>69</sup>“Evening News: From Gen. Grant,” *Daily Eastern Argus* 22 June 1864: Page 2, *America's Historical Newspapers*. Online (accessed on 15 March 2013).

<sup>70</sup> “Evening News: Military Matters,” *Daily Eastern Argus* 23 June 1864: Page 2, *America's Historical Newspapers*. Online (accessed on 15 March 2013).

<sup>71</sup> “Interesting Details of the Late Battles,” *Providence Evening Press* 22 June 1864: Page 2, *America's Historical Newspapers*. Online (accessed on 31 March 2013).

<sup>72</sup> “The Defeat of Sturgis, Gallantry Of the Black Troops,” *Springfield Weekly Republican* 25 June 1864: Page 5, *America's Historical Newspapers*. Online (accessed on 31 March 2013).

promotion pleased Chamberlain, and one can gain insight as to the beginnings of his coming onto the national stage through the documents written by the officers surrounding Chamberlain and the honor. Firstly, we have the wording of General Gouverneur K. Warren's correspondence to General Meade right after Chamberlain has been wounded,

Col. J. L. Chamberlain, of the Twentieth Main Regiment, commanding the First Brigade of the First Division, was mortally wounded, it is thought, in the assaults on the enemy yesterday, the ball having passed through the pelvis and bladder. He has been recommended for promotion for gallant and efficient conduct on previous occasions. ...He expresses the wish that he may receive the recognition of his service by promotion before he dies for the gratification of his family and friends, and I beg that if possible it may be done.<sup>73</sup>

Warren's wording here appears to be quite emotional, and he was certainly invested in this promotion. Clearly, General Warren thought well of Chamberlain, and we also find that the general that eventually granted Chamberlain's promotion thought well enough of him too.

This general promoted Chamberlain in his Special Orders No. 39, in which he states,

Col. Joshua L. Chamberlain, Twentieth Regiment Maine Infantry Volunteers, is, for meritorious and efficient services on the field of battle, and especially for gallant conduct in leading his brigade against the enemy at Petersburg, Va., on the 18<sup>th</sup> instant, in which he was seriously wounded, hereby, in pursuance of authority from the Secretary of War, appointed brigadier-general of U.S. Volunteers...<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> U.S. War Department. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies in the War of the Rebellion*. Vol. 40. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), 216-217.

<sup>74</sup> OR, Series 1, Vol. 40, 236.

That general, Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant, could not have promoted Chamberlain if he felt that he did not deserve the honor. On the contrary, General Grant reveals in his memoirs just how much he thought that Chamberlain deserved the promotion, "...at last a gallant and meritorious officer received partial justice at the hands of his government, which he had served so faithfully and so well."<sup>75</sup> Grant died soon after completing his memoirs, and suddenly Chamberlain had a new source to draw from in order to give credence to his version of what happened at Petersburg.

Despite reservations about returning to the army after such a life changing injury, Joshua Chamberlain recovered fairly quickly from his wound. He spent the bulk of his time at Annapolis until returning home on September 20. At this point Chamberlain needed to make a decision about whether or not he could return to the army. His injuries aggravated him, and for some time he could not walk long distances or even mount his horse. Even so, Chamberlain determined to return to the army and his men. He did so on November 18, and Chamberlain found himself in command of a smaller brigade at this point due to another restructuring of the Army of the Potomac's Fifth Corps. Chamberlain now commanded the 185<sup>th</sup> New York and the 198<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania. Chamberlain led these units during the Fifth Corps pursuit of the Army of Northern Virginia to Appomattox. While participating in these events, Chamberlain became a decisive actor in the battles at Five Forks and White Oak Road. As Chamberlain told his sister in a letter after General Lee's surrender,

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<sup>75</sup>U.S. Grant, *Grant: Memoirs and Selected Letters* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1990).

My dear Sae, I am glad I was not tempted to leave the army this Spring. I would not for a fortune have missed the experiences of the last two weeks. It seems like two years, so many, + such important events have taken place, within that time. Father said in his last letter to me that ‘the glory of battles was over.’ But if he had seen some of these we have had of late, in which we captured the enemy by thousands + carried their positions by a dash, and at last at Appomattox Court House received the surrender of Genl Lee + his whole army he would think differently. For my personal part I have had the advance every day there was any fighting—have been in five battles – two of them being entirely under my own direction and brilliantly successful—twice wounded myself—my horse shot—in the front line when the flag of truce came through from Lee<sup>76</sup>

Namely, the fights at White Oak Road and Five Forks are where Chamberlain boasted that he “had the advance every day there was fighting.” These fights constituted Major General Ulysses S. Grant’s coup de grâce to break up General Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia. While the rest of the Army of the Potomac held the Army of Northern Virginia in check in the Petersburg lines, Major General Philip Sheridan utilized his cavalry and took command of the Army of the Potomac’s Fifth Corps to assault the Army of Northern Virginia. This attack fell squarely on the weak right flank of the Confederate army at White Oak Road on March 31, 1865. Chamberlain wrote of this plan in the *Official Records*,

The brigade left bivouac on the White Oak road early on the morning of the 1st and moved, with the rest of the division, toward Dinwiddie Court-House, until we met General Sheridan with his cavalry. We then moved in connection toward Five Forks. Arriving at a point near Gravelly Run Church we were formed on the right of the Third Brigade of this division in three lines. Brevet Brigadier-General Gregory, commanding Second Brigade of this division, reported to me with his brigade, by order of General Griffin, and was placed upon the right flank of our lines, one regiment being deployed as skirmishers in our front, one on the flank faced outward, and one held in reserve. Mackenzie’s cavalry was on our right. In this formation we advanced in the order

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<sup>76</sup> “Joshua L. Chamberlain to ‘My dear Sae’, Appomattox Court House, April 13, 1865,” George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections & Archives, Bowdoin College, Joshua L. Chamberlain Collection, M27. Online.

designated. Our instructions were to keep closed to the left on the Third Brigade, and also to wheel to the left in moving, the design being to strike the enemy in flank.<sup>77</sup>

The Fifth Corps provided the main thrust of this attack, broke the Confederate lines and turned the enemy flank at Five Forks the next day. Chamberlain wrote of this action at White Oak Road later in his life as part of the Maine Commandery of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States papers,

What we had to do could not be done by firing. This was foot-and-hand business. We went with a rush; not minding ranks nor alignments; but with open front to lessen loss from the long-range rifles. Within effective range, — about three hundred yards, — the sharp, cutting fire made us reel and shiver. Now, quick or never! On and over! The impetuous 185th New York rolls over the enemy's right, and seems to swallow it up; the 198th Pennsylvania, with its fourteen companies, half veterans, half soldiers 'born so,' swing in upon their left striking Hunton's Brigade in front; and for a few minutes there is a seething wave of countercurrents, then rolling back leaving a fringe of wrecks, and all is over. We pour over the works; on across the White Oak Road ; swing to the right and drive the enemy into their entrenchments along the Claiborne road, and then establish ourselves across the road facing northeast, and take breath.<sup>78</sup>

The bravery of the Fifth Corps in this action turned the right flank of the Confederate army, allowed the Army of the Potomac to take the Five Forks road junction, and made the Confederate position at Petersburg untenable, forcing the Army of Northern Virginia to begin its retreat. The actions eventually cut off Robert E. Lee's last line of retreat and bottled him up at the small village of Appomattox, Virginia.

With a dwindling army, and a lack of supplies, General Lee decided to surrender the Army of Northern Virginia. After meeting with General Lee, General Grant dictated

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<sup>77</sup> OR, Series 1, Vol. 46, 849-850.

<sup>78</sup> Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, *War Papers: Maine Commandery L.L.* Vol. I. (Wilmington, North Carolina: Broadfoot Publishing Company, 1992), 225.

rather lenient terms of surrender to the southerners, and the stage was set for a surrender ceremony. Chamberlain participated in this formal surrender, and his self described actions at the ceremony craft one of the most important parts of the Chamberlain legend, his heading the ceremony and saluting the defeated Confederates.

After the surrender at Appomattox, Chamberlain immediately wrote a letter to his sister Sarah Chamberlain. This is the earliest account of events of the surrender from Chamberlain available. In the letter he writes of the surrender,

...—had the last shot + the last man killed, in their campaign; + yesterday was designated to receive the surrender of the arms of Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. The bare mention of these facts seems like boasting, but I assure you I do not feel any of that spirit. I only rejoice that I was here + bore my part in the crowning Triumphs of the war. It was a scene worthy of a pilgrimage, yesterday, when the old 'Third Brigade' of the 1<sup>st</sup> Div. was drawn up to receive the surrender of the Rebel arms. My Brigade you know consists of 9 Regts. The remnant of the old 5<sup>th</sup> Corps, veterans of thirty battles. They number about six thousand men all told- on the right was old Massachusetts with the remnants of her 9<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 22d + 32d. Then Maine, her 1<sup>st</sup>, 2d, + 20<sup>th</sup>- Michigan 1<sup>st</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, + 16<sup>th</sup>- Pennsylvania- with the sturdy relics of her 82d, 83d, 91<sup>st</sup>, 118<sup>th</sup>, + 155<sup>th</sup>.- with my staff + the old flag- the red maltese cross on a white field with blue border. I took post on the right at 5 a.m., + received first Maj. Gen Gordon with his corps—Stonewall Jackson's—then Longstreet's corps. with Hoods Andersons & Pickett's old Divisions—men we had faced a score of times + almost recognized by face. Pickett's splendid Div. only stacked 53 muskets + not a single stand of colors—we had so completely used them up at 5 Forks. Last came Hill's Corp.—by Divisions—Hill himself being killed. We received them with the honors due to troops—at a shoulder—in silence. They came to a shoulder on passing my flag + preserved perfect order. When the head of their column reached our left, they halted face toward our line + close to it—say 4 or 5 yards-- + stacked their arms + piled their colors. Poor fellows. I pitied them from the bottom of my heart. Those arms had been well handled + flags bravely borne.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> "Joshua L. Chamberlain to 'My dear Sae,' Appomattox Court House, April 13, 1865," George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections & Archives, Bowdoin College, Joshua L. Chamberlain Collection, M27. Online.

This letter constituted the first instance of Chamberlain claiming that he had been designated to receive the formal surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia. Upon closer examination of the letter, one may gain a relatively realistic take on what actually occurred during the formal surrender. After an embellished tale of the events leading up to the surrender, in which Chamberlain described himself as, “the advance every day there was any fighting,” Chamberlain made the claim that he was designated to receive the formal surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia. After describing the troops of his brigade, Chamberlain finally began to describe the surrender. In the letter, he wrote of receiving the enemy soldiers “with honors due” by remaining silent and shouldering arms. Chamberlain made no mention of an overt salute showing respect, or a response salute by the enemy commander. He merely mentioned the standard shouldering of arms, and then described the Confederates continuing on to stack arms and surrender flags. Chamberlain did not describe the poignant, grandiose spectacle that came to be in the accounts of later years; he just described a normal surrender ceremony. No pomp and circumstance. No moment of mutual respect and reconciliation. He wrote of only a regular surrender of a demolished foe. Even so, this is the first mention by Chamberlain that he commanded the formal surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia, and this is a boast that is surprisingly supported by a southern newspaper.

On June 22, 1865, a newspaper in New Orleans detailed the surrender at Appomattox. The article stated, “Gen. Chamberlain, (formerly a Professor of Bowdoin College, Maine,) a man of eminent attainments and valor was designated by Gen. Grant

to receive the surrender of the Generals of Lee's army at Appomattox Court House."<sup>80</sup>

This is particularly interesting, because already the claim that Chamberlain commanded the formal surrender had taken hold in the public memory, at least in New Orleans.

While this was only a few months after the formal surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia, the idea that Chamberlain officially commanded the surrender had spread to the south. Indeed, Chamberlain himself vigorously championed support for the idea, especially in his later years, by both speech and by publication. As a former professor of rhetoric, Chamberlain found himself irresistibly successful in this capacity, submitting works to be published. One later regimental history appeared to correlate with this claim, as well as imply a later claim by Chamberlain.

The 32<sup>nd</sup> Massachusetts took part in the official surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia. Its 1880 regimental history included an interesting new take on the surrender at Appomattox. The book stated,

April 11th was the day appointed for the formal surrender of the arms. General Chamberlain, commanding our division, was detailed in charge of the ceremony, and our brigade was ordered to receive the arms of the rebel infantry. At 9 A. M. the brigade was formed in line on a road leading from our camp to that of the Confederates, its right in the direction of the latter. The 32d Massachusetts was the extreme right of the brigade. The Confederate troops came up by brigades at route step, arms-at-will. In some regiments the colors were rolled tightly to the staff, but in others the bearers flourished them defiantly as they marched. As they approached our line, our men stood at shouldered arms, the lines were carefully dressed, and eyes front; seeing which, and appreciating the compliment implied, some of the enemy's brigadiers closed up their ranks, and so moved along our front with their arms at the shoulder.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> "Virginia and the South Still Disloyal." *New Orleans Tribune* 22 June 1865: Page 1. *America's Historical Newspapers*, Online.

<sup>81</sup> Francis Jewett Parker, *The story of the Thirty-second regiment, Massachusetts infantry: Whence it came; where it went; what it say, and what it did* (C.W. Calkins & co., 1880), 254.

This work puts Chamberlain not only in command of the official surrender proceedings, but also appears to imply the salute claimed by Chamberlain in later works. As stated above, the northern troops stood at shouldered arms in neatly dressed lines. The Confederates apparently took this for a complement and returned the salutation by shouldering their arms and closing up their lines. Some other later works did not mention this salute, and others cast doubt on whether Chamberlain commanded or not.

In a history of the Union Army's Fifth Corps, William H. Powell gave his own description of the surrender at Appomattox, as well as Chamberlain's role in the formal surrender. He wrote,

General Joshua L. Chamberlain, commanding the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division, Fifth Corps, had been designated to command the parade. In remembrance of its valuable services on many a bloody field, and at Gettysburg in particular, Chamberlain asked for the famous old 3d Brigade of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division, Fifth Corps, with which he had been identified constantly until he was detached to command the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade at Petersburg....The Union troops were brought to 'attention.'<sup>82</sup>

In this account, Chamberlain is named as commander of the formal surrender, although no special mention is made of any sort of salute to the defeated Confederates as above, other than the usual mention that the Union soldiers snapped to attention. Even though the book mentions Chamberlain as commanding the surrender, a grain of salt may be in order, as this is a source chronicling the effort of the Fifth Army Corps, a group that Chamberlain belonged to throughout his army career.

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<sup>82</sup> William H. Powell, *The Fifth Army Corps: A Record of Operations During the Civil War In the United States of America, 1861-1865* (G.P. Putnam's Sons. New York. 1896), 863.

Others regiments also wrote of the surrender of arms at Appomattox. The 118<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania, also known as the ‘Corn Exchange’ regiment published an account that correlates closely with Chamberlain’s story,

General Griffin and General Gibbon had sent for General Chamberlain on the night of the 11th and informed him that he was to command the parade on the occasion of the surrender of Lee's army. The general then asked for his old command, with which he had been constantly identified until he was detached to command the 1st Brigade at Petersburg, where he was so severely wounded. General Griffin at once assigned him to the 3d Brigade, and these were the troops which he found in line of battle on the morning of the 12th to take the last view of Lee's army. General Bartlett, commanding the division, sent the 1st Brigade and also General Gregory's 2d Brigade, which had served under General Chamberlain during the entire campaign, to take their places in the parade. These were found not in the same line, but close by. Our bugle sounded and our solemn and eager lines were brought to the manual of the ‘shoulder’ — now called the ‘carry’ — as a mark of respect. Acknowledging the courtesy by similar movement, the column wheeled to front us.<sup>83</sup>

This account corroborates with other sources regarding the surrender at Appomattox that accept Chamberlain’s version of the surrender. Here, as in several other works, Chamberlain commands the official surrender, and the history even acknowledges the ‘salute’ that became famous in time. Even so, another Pennsylvania regiment took part in the surrender and came away with a much different story.

One interesting account about the surrender comes from a regimental history concerning the 155<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania, one of the regiments present at the ceremony. The story according to this account stated,

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<sup>83</sup> *History of the Corn Exchange Regiment, 118th Pennsylvania Volunteers: From Their First Engagement at Antietam to Appomattox. To which is Added a Record of Its Organization and a Complete Roster. Fully Illustrated with Maps, Portraits, and Over One Hundred Illustrations* (J. L. Smith. 1905), 594-595.

By General Meade's order the Fifth Corps, General Griffin in command, was designated to receive the formal surrender. General Griffin, having selected his former division, now commanded by General J. L. Chamberlain, to receive the arms and colors of the Confederates, recognized the latter's claim by reason of seniority, to command the Third Brigade, which had been assigned to conduct the parade.... The Third Brigade, thus honored, was formed entirely from the eight veteran regiments of Chamberlain's Division, as follows:

One Hundred and Fifty-fifth Regiment Pennsylvania.

Twentieth Regiment Maine.

Thirty-second Regiment Massachusetts.

First Regiment Michigan.

Sixteenth Regiment Michigan.

Eighty-third Regiment Pennsylvania.

Ninety-first Regiment Pennsylvania.

One Company First Maine Sharpshooters.

...It was evident that the Confederates were much dejected, though there appeared an expression of relief on their faces as they marched away, and their depression may have been caused more by hunger and emaciation than by the chagrin of defeat. Most of them acted in a soldierly manner, but occasionally one would display ill-temper by peevishly throwing his cartridge box at the foot of the stacks instead of hanging it thereon.<sup>84</sup>

While Chamberlain stated that he had been appointed to receive the official surrender, this account puts the Fifth Corps Major General Charles Griffin in overall command. Chamberlain commanded the division that participated in the ceremony, but this account still puts Griffin in command of Chamberlain. Furthermore, there is no description of any sort of 'salute' in this version of the surrender, as Chamberlain, the 118<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania, and the 32<sup>nd</sup> Mass. imply. This comes into direct conflict with later

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<sup>84</sup>*Under the Maltese Cross, Antietam to Appomattox: The Loyal Uprising in Western Pennsylvania, 1861-1865; Campaigns 155<sup>th</sup> Regiment* (155<sup>th</sup> Regimental Association, 1910), 367.

accounts by Chamberlain suggesting a special moment of healing for the shattered country.

Joshua Chamberlain wrote many accounts of his travels with the Army of the Potomac. Chamberlain wrote about his accomplishments both through the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States (MOLLUS), and through a few other publications. Interestingly enough, Chamberlain submitted three works to the Maine section of the MOLLUS papers. He wrote an article dealing with Abraham Lincoln, and the other two dealt with his actions at Five Forks and White Oak Road.<sup>85</sup> Perhaps Chamberlain took greater pride in his actions during the closing stages of the war, as he wrote: “The operations of the Fifth Corps on the White Oak Road on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March, 1865, were more serious in purpose and action... than has been generally understood...”<sup>86</sup> His personal memoir, The Passing of the Armies, certainly supports that theory, as the book relates the final chapters of the war, including Chamberlain accepting the Confederate surrender at Appomattox. Chamberlain’s account of the surrender is an enormously important event in crafting Chamberlain’s legacy in and of itself.

In The Passing of the Armies, Chamberlain described in detail how he received the formal surrender of the Confederate forces at Appomattox. In his account he stated,

I was told, furthermore, that General Grant had appointed me to take charge of this parade and to receive the formal surrender of the guns and flags...When General

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<sup>85</sup> Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States. *War Papers: Maine Commandery L.L.* Volumes I, II, and IV.

<sup>86</sup> Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States. *War Papers: Maine Commandery L.L.* Vol. I. 207.

Gordon came opposite me I had the bugle blown and the entire line came to “attention”...At the sound of that machine like snap of arms, however, General Gordon started, caught in a moment of its significance, and instantly assumed the finest attitude of a soldier...and thereupon began the formality of surrender.<sup>87</sup>

In an action that must have caused anger among some northerners, Chamberlain claimed that he brought his men to attention, saluting the defeated Confederates, and took a decidedly soft approach during the surrender, in a direct clash with his earlier writings. In doing so, Chamberlain earned a reputation as one of the earliest reconciliationist northerners in the Union. Indeed, he eventually became one of the representatives for the reconciliation interpretation of the American Civil War, along with Confederate Major General John B. Gordon.

General Gordon had his own reminiscences of the surrender at Appomattox.

After reading Chamberlain’s account of the surrender, Gordon himself wrote,

Some of the scenes on the field, immediately after the cessation of hostilities and prior to the formal surrender, illustrate the same magnanimous spirit, and were peculiarly impressive and thrilling. As my command, in worn-out shoes and ragged uniforms, but with proud mien, moved to the designated point to stack their arms and surrender their cherished battle-flags, they challenged the admiration of the brave victors. One of the knightliest soldiers of the Federal army, General Joshua L. Chamberlain of Maine, who afterward served with distinction as governor of his State, called his troops into line, and as my men marched in front of them, the veterans in blue gave a soldierly salute to those vanquished heroes — a token of respect from Americans to Americans, a final and fitting tribute from Northern to Southern chivalry.... When the proud and sensitive sons of Dixie came to a full realization of the truth that the Confederacy was overthrown and their leader had been compelled to surrender his once invincible army, they could no longer control their emotions, and tears ran like water down their shrunken faces. The flags which they still carried were objects of undisguised affection. These Southern banners had gone down before overwhelming numbers; and torn by shells, riddled by bullets, and laden with the powder and smoke of battle, they aroused intense emotion in the men who had so often followed them to victory. Yielding to overpowering sentiment,

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<sup>87</sup> Chamberlain, *Bayonet! Forward*, 234-236.

these high-mettled men began to tear the flags from the staffs and hide them in their bosoms, as they wet them with burning tears. The Confederate officers faithfully endeavored to check this exhibition of loyalty and love for the old flags. A great majority of them were duly surrendered; but many were secretly carried by devoted veterans to their homes, and will be cherished forever as honored heirlooms.<sup>88</sup>

With this document, Gordon apparently affirmed the Chamberlain legend.

Indeed, when one reads Gordon's account, one might think that Chamberlain and Gordon played off of each other to create a poignant tale of beginning to heal the wounds of the Civil War, as well as cement their own individual legacies.

Chamberlain even took this back and forth far enough that he published an article in the Southern Historical Society Papers. Chamberlain gave yet another rendition of the surrender at Appomattox, rife with the embellishment and a theme of mutual honor. In this 1904 article, Chamberlain wrote,

And it can well be imagined, too, that there was no lack of emotion on our side, but the Union men were held steady in their lines, without the least show of demonstration by word or by motion. There was, though, a twitching of the muscles of their faces, and, be it said, their battle-bronzed cheeks were not altogether dry. Our men felt the import of the occasion, and realized fully how they would have been affected if defeat and surrender had been their lot after such a fearful struggle. Nearly an entire day was necessary for that vast parade to pass. About 27,000 stands of arms were laid down, with something like a hundred battleflags; cartridges were destroyed, and the arms loaded on cars and sent off to Wilmington. Every token of armed hostility was laid aside by the defeated men. No officer surrendered his side arms or horse, if private property, only Confederate property being required, according to the terms of surrender, dated April 9, 1865, and stating that all arms, artillery, and public property were to be packed and stacked and turned over to the officer duly appointed to receive them. And right here I wish to correct again that statement so often attributed to me, to the effect that I have said I received from the hands of General Lee on that day his sword.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> John B. Gordon, *Reminiscences of the Civil War* (Charles Scribner's Sons. New York. 1904), Online, 444-445.

<sup>89</sup> Joshua. L. Chamberlain, "The Last Salute of the Army of Northern Virginia," in *Southern Historical Society Papers*. Vol. 32. (Richmond. Published by the Society. 1904). 362.

Interestingly, the Chamberlain legend surrounding Appomattox had grown to include rumors that Chamberlain received General Lee's sword! Of course, no such event ever occurred.

Chamberlain himself corrected this myth in the same article. He continued on writing and stated,

Only recently, at a banquet in Newtown, Mass., of the Katahdin Club, composed of sons and daughters of my own beloved State, it was said in press dispatches that a letter had been read from me in which I made the claim that I had received Lee's sword. I never did make that claim even, as I never did receive that sword. As I have said, no Confederate officer was required or even asked to surrender his side arms if they were his personal property. As a matter of fact, General Lee never gave up his sword, although, if I am not mistaken, there was some conference between General Grant and some of the members of his staff upon that very subject just before the final surrender. I was not present at that conference, however, and only know of it by hearsay.<sup>90</sup>

Thankfully, Chamberlain corrected the myth regarding General Lee's sword. Furthermore, Chamberlain filled this narrative with romantic images of a teary eyed northern army gazing on as a defeated foe marches by. This work built even more to the Chamberlain legend of reconciliation at Appomattox.

In contrast to the legacy that Chamberlain has constructed around himself, a modern Civil War historian has postulated that Chamberlain's role at Appomattox has been greatly elaborated, mostly by Chamberlain himself. William Marvel, author of A Place Called Appomattox, wrote,

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<sup>90</sup> Chamberlain, "The Last Salute of the Army of Northern Virginia." Vol. 32, 362.

Chamberlain was the only original source of the claim that he commanded the surrender ceremony; he offered no witnesses or documentation, and none has been found. Regimental histories published as early as 1880 named him as commander of the Union forces, but those histories came from regiments within his own brigade, and his private claim may have influenced those references....Circumstantial evidence points to Bartlett commanding the parade formation, including Chamberlain's own reference to Bartlett retaining the division flag. Chamberlain told his sister on April 13 that he and his staff had gathered around 'the old flag, the red maltese cross on the white field with blue border.' In the Army of the Potomac a red emblem on a white field designated the first division of a corps, while a blue border identified the third brigade of that division....He undoubtedly was present, but evidently not in formal command, and he certainly was not designated for that service by General Grant<sup>91</sup>

In this excerpt, Marvel also stated that by the time that Chamberlain began making far reaching claims that he was in command at Gettysburg, the principal actors that could dispute his words had died, including Bartlett, Grant, and the other brigade commanders, leaving Chamberlain open to create a lasting image for himself.

The legacy that Chamberlain forged while coming onto the national stage through his actions at Petersburg and Appomattox played a key role in creating the modern Chamberlain legend. By claiming the command at the surrender at Appomattox, Chamberlain crafted a beautiful anecdote that became quite appealing to the country at large. Instead of dwelling on the horrors of war and a disgraced south, Chamberlain created a tale of forgiveness and mutual honor, a tale that has cemented his role as a reconciliationist, and fueled the later efforts to immortalize Chamberlain in literature and film.

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<sup>91</sup> William Marvel, *A Place Called Appomattox* (The University of North Carolina Press. Chapel Hill. 2000), 358-359.

## Chapter 4

### Chamberlain Today: The Power of Fiction

The Joshua Chamberlain of today is immortalized as *the* quintessential American Civil War hero. Whether portrayed in a painting, given voice in a book, or brought to life through film and television, Chamberlain can be found just about anywhere one cares to look. His face is on everything, from beer bottles to t-shirts. If one feels the need to own a Chamberlain beer stein, that can be arranged. Other Chamberlain products include knives, shot glasses, Christmas tree ornaments, bobble heads, action figures, teddy bears, and even wall clocks and thermometers. Indeed, the Joshua Chamberlain known at his death in 1914 is not *quite* the same as the legendary Joshua Chamberlain of today.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Chamberlain began to appear in historic regimental histories such as John J. Pullen's classic The Twentieth Maine, and biographies such as Willard M. Wallace's Soul of the Lion.<sup>92</sup> These early works set the stage for a significant novel in which Chamberlain can be found as a main protagonist. This novel, Michael Shaara's The Killer Angels, began Chamberlain's rise to superstardom in 1974.<sup>93</sup> Even so, Chamberlain did not complete his transformation into a household name until the film

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<sup>92</sup> John J. Pullen, *The Twentieth Maine* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 1957).

<sup>1</sup> Willard M. Wallace, *Soul of the Lion* (Gettysburg: Stan Clark Military Books, 1960).

<sup>93</sup> Michael Shaara, *The Killer Angels* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003).

*Gettysburg* came onto the scene in 1993. Since the release of *Gettysburg* into theatres and home entertainment, interest in Joshua Chamberlain and the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine has surged to an all time high. Correlating with this new interest is the addition of many modern books discussing Chamberlain, from scholarly works such as Thomas A. Desjardin's Stand Firm Ye Boys from Maine to children's stories.<sup>94</sup> The public fascination with Chamberlain following the release of *Gettysburg* has led to the reprinting of his memoirs, and even the production of a short film clip detailing his exploits in the Smithsonian's Museum of American History in Washington D.C. The Chamberlain of today followed a distinct path to reach his current destination, and his modern journey begins with the author John J. Pullen.

John J. Pullen's The Twentieth Maine can be widely considered one of the finest regimental histories of Chamberlain's first unit. First published in 1957, the history details the exploits of Joshua Chamberlain and the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine, from the inception of the regiment all the way to the last review of the Army of the Potomac. The book is quite significant in the development of the modern regimental history, and contributes to the Chamberlain legend in its own special way. Describing the aftermath of the Battle for Little Round Top, Pullen wrote of Chamberlain and his men,

The thing that was most frightening about it was how the weight of a momentous battle could have come to rest so disproportionately upon just a few ordinary men-farmers, fishermen and woodsmen. Seldom if ever before had one small regiment been in such a fantastic spot. And seldom had a regiment fought so fantastically. The maneuver whereby the double line of battle had stretched itself out into a single line, extending and bending back under fire with the noise making ordinary commands

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<sup>94</sup> Thomas A. Desjardin, *Stand Firm Ye Boys from Maine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

impossible was something out of a dream. The charge, the swinging and straightening of the left wing back into line, the plunge down the slope had succeeded simply because it had been so improbable.<sup>95</sup>

Describing the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine's fight for Little Round Top in such majestic language can only have increased the stature of the men who fought there, as well as furthered interest in the Maine regiment and its dashing colonel. Furthermore, the regimental history appears to agree with the bulk of Chamberlain's version of the fight on Little Round Top. Pullen makes mention of Chamberlain's critic, Holman S. Melcher, who wanted to advance and protect some of the wounded men. Melcher also is depicted as springing out in front of the battle line during the charge. However, Chamberlain clearly orders the charge. Pullen appears to accept elements of both Chamberlain's story and Melcher's story, but Chamberlain clearly has the advantage. This regimental history certainly played a part in influencing Willard M. Wallace, a Chamberlain biographer, who cites Pullen's work as part of his bibliography.

Wallace's Soul of the Lion was published in 1960. The biography follows every facet of the life of Joshua Chamberlain from his birth in 1828 to his death from old battle wounds in 1914. The work reads quite romantically, and puts a personal touch on each of the events that Chamberlain participated in, be said event a major battle or a fairly normal relatable occurrence. While the book chronicles Chamberlain's entire life, once again the Battle of Little Round Top hails as his and the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine's finest hour. In an account describing Chamberlain's remembrances of the fight while visiting Little Round Top, Wallace, mirroring Chamberlain's own style, romantically penned,

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<sup>95</sup> John J. Pullen, *The Twentieth Maine* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 1957), 127.

It was near dusk, and Chamberlain sat down on the summit. Overcome by his memories, he mused until the sun went down behind the hills to the west and darkness mantled the slopes. And it seemed to him in his mystical mood as if, with the coming of night, he were surrounded by a radiant fellowship of the fallen, the young men who did not know ‘what were their lofty deeds of body, mind, heart, soul, on that tremendous day.’ He saw the earth itself as treasuring something infinitely more precious than graves. But these hills of Gettysburg which had witnessed such valor and sacrifice ‘shall hold the mighty secret in their bosom till the great day of revelation and recompense, when these heights shall flame again with transfigured light-they, too, have part in that adoption, which is the manifestation of the sons of God.’<sup>96</sup>

In this single passage one can find the Chamberlain legend living on. As the first modern biography of the man, this book influenced later scholarly works focused on him, while accepting the legend of the late nineteenth century in its entirety. Even so, a written medium beyond the biography made the name of Joshua Chamberlain known to the average person.

Novels reach a far different audience than the biography genre, as they are much more relatable to the average person, as well as being somewhat more entertaining to read for some. Michael Shaara’s novel The Killer Angels flew off bookshelves after being published in 1974. Shaara was born in 1928, a century after Joshua Chamberlain. He wrote fiction, and taught at Florida State University before writing The Killer Angels after a trip to the Gettysburg battlefield.<sup>97</sup> As Shaara wrote of his motivation in his message to the reader,

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<sup>96</sup> Willard M. Wallace, *Soul of the Lion* (Gettysburg, PA: Stan Clark Military Books, 1960), 110-111.

<sup>97</sup> “Michael Shaara,” *Jeff Shaara: Official Web Site*, [http://www.jeffshaara.com/michael\\_shaara.asp](http://www.jeffshaara.com/michael_shaara.asp) (accessed on 31 March 2013).

Stephen Crane once said that he wrote The Red Badge of Courage because reading the cold history was not enough; he wanted to know what it was like to *be* there, what the weather was like, what men's faces looked like. In order to live it he had to write it. This book was written for much the same reason...I have therefore avoided historical opinions and gone back primarily to the words of the men themselves, their letters and other documents. I have not consciously changed any fact.<sup>98</sup>

As such, The Killer Angels came from the ideas of the men who fought the Civil War, not historians. The book took a very humanistic view of the Civil War, a fact noted by critics of the novel.

A hit among readers, The Killer Angels won the Pulitzer Prize in 1975.

Described by Thomas LeClair,

But this is no antiquarian, distant book. When the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine countercharges at Little Round Top, when Pickett's men breach the Union line at Cemetery Ridge, Shaara has a sentient observer there to register the terror and the bravery, the precarious balance of machine and man that made Gettysburg one of the last human battles. His achievement is combining these passages of apocalyptic immediacy with smaller scenes that dramatize the historian's cultural understandings...<sup>99</sup>

Another critic stated,

It is easy to see why Michael Shaara's 'The Killer Angels,' which has just received the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, was so honored. It is a novel about the Battle of Gettysburg, a subject of almost hypnotic fascination to laymen and military historians alike, and Mr. Shaara's narrative conveys the drama, the courage and the heartbreak of those days.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Shaara, *The Killer Angels*, Xiii.

<sup>99</sup> Thomas LeClair. "The Killer Angels." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Oct 20, 1974. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/119901341?accountid=13158>. (accessed on 31 March 2013).

<sup>100</sup> Thomas Lask. "Books of the Times." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, May 10, 1975. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/120419027?accountid=13158>. (accessed on 31 March 2013).

Taking a personal view of the Battle of Gettysburg, The Killer Angels related the story of the famous fight through the eyes of its participants, particularly General Robert E. Lee, Lieutenant General James Longstreet, Brigadier General John Buford, and of particular interest, Colonel Joshua L. Chamberlain. In Shaara's tale, one begins to see the Chamberlain of today emerge. Shaara's Chamberlain spoke softly and intellectually, with purpose. He is truly a character of the people, one that stood out among the rest of the narrators of the story.

One first meets Chamberlain in The Killer Angels as the Army of the Potomac marched north in Pursuit of Robert E. Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia. He is woken from slumber by the now famous fictional character of Private Buster Kilrain, who told Chamberlain that he must meet a courier. The courier stated that Chamberlain will be receiving 120 "mutineers" from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Maine regiment. The "mutineers" signed three year enlistment papers, but joined a two year regiment. When the regiment came to the end of its term, the men that still owed service refused to fight for another unit. Even so, the soldiers still went under guard to join the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine. This situation sets up one of the most memorable portions of the novel, and gave the readers their first real impression of Chamberlain as a character. Chamberlain spoke to one of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Maine enlisted men to learn their grievances, and then spoke to the men as a whole. One can immediately see Shaara's vision of Chamberlain as a knightly, scholarly, lion among men in the way that Chamberlain addressed the dissenters. He began by introducing himself and describing the current situation of the "mutineers" and what he can and cannot do for the mutineers. Next, in an effort to convince the men to join the regiment Chamberlain

gets to the heart of his speech. Describing his regiment and the causes of the war, Chamberlain pontificated,

You know who we are and what we're doing here. But if you're going to fight alongside us there's a few things I want you to know....This Regiment was formed last fall, back in Maine. There were a thousand of us then. There's not three hundred of us now....But what is left is choice....Some of us volunteered to fight for Union. Some came in mainly because we were bored at home and this looked like it might be fun. Some came because we were ashamed not to. Many of us came...because it was the right thing to do. All of us have seen men die. Most of us never saw a black man back home. We think on that, too. But freedom...is not just a word....This is a different kind of army. If you look at history you'll see men fight for pay, or women, or some other kind of loot. They fight for land, or because a king makes them, or just because they like killing. But we're here for something new. I don't...this hasn't happened much in the history of the world. We're an army going out to set other men free....This is free ground. All the way from here to the Pacific Ocean. No man has to bow. No man born to royalty. Here we judge you by what *you* do, not by what your father was. Here you can be *something*. Here's the place to build a home. It isn't the land-there's always more land. It's the idea that we all have value, you and me, we're worth something more than the dirt. I never saw dirt I'd die for, but I'm not asking you to come with us and fight for dirt. What we're all fighting for, in the end, is each other.<sup>101</sup>

All but six of the “mutineers” join, and Chamberlain began his march to Gettysburg.

The reader follows Chamberlain's path to Gettysburg, as he moved towards eventual glory at Little Round Top. At one point during the journey, the men of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine found a black man, sparking a philosophic discussion between the Colonel of the regiment and Private Kilrain. Kilrain went on to praise his Colonel during the discussion citing him as a member of the aristocracy of the mind. He went on further to say,

You are damned good at everything I've seen you do, a lovely soldier, an honest man, and you got a good heart on you too, which is rare in clever men. Strange thing,

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<sup>101</sup> Shaara, *The Killer Angels*, 29-30.

I'm not a clever man myself, but I know it when I run across it. The strange and marvelous thing about you, Colonel darlin', is that you believe in mankind, even preachers, whereas when you've got my great experience of the world you will have learned that good men are rare, much rarer than you think.<sup>102</sup>

If one forgoes the fact that this conversation could never have happened, as a Colonel could never consort with a private in this manner, one can still see the building of the Chamberlain legend, that of a lionized giant among men. Shaara used Kilrain to continue convincing his audience that Chamberlain is a truly great man, one to be admired and emulated. Not only is he highly competent, but he is physically attractive and a highly intelligent man to boot. Moreover, as Kilrain stated above, one must remember that Chamberlain is a *good* man. Among all of Shaara's narrators in The Killer Angels, Chamberlain is easily the most idealized version of manhood, a vision of Chamberlain that continues to this day. At the climax of Chamberlain's story in the book, his manhood is tested in a way that brought all of his best qualities to light, his defense of Little Round Top.

The familiar story continued once Chamberlain and the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine arrive at Gettysburg. They arrive on the scene, and are immediately ordered by Colonel Strong Vincent to march to Little Round Top. Chamberlain and his men arrived at the rocky hill, and are told by the commander of their brigade to hold the ground at all costs. After a bit of time to prepare, the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine is hit by what seems to the men to be the entire Rebel army. The fight raged back and forth, and Chamberlain is forced to extend his battle line to guard his flank. Eventually, the regiment begins to run low on ammunition, and the clever Colonel is forced to make a bold choice to save his position. He draws his

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<sup>102</sup> Shaara, *The Killer Angels*, 178-179.

officers together, outlined a plan to charge down the hill by swinging his left flank back into line, and sent his officers back to their men. At the word bayonet, the famous charge happened, and the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine gains immortality with the action. Chamberlain has stared death in the face with this fight and faced the destruction of the men he is responsible for. Rising to the challenge, Chamberlain passed his test of manhood as told by Shaara, and feels a sense of awe at the victory. After the fight is over, Shaara wrote of Chamberlain,

He moved forward and began to climb the big hill in the dark. As he walked he forgot his pain; his heart began to beat quickly, and he felt an incredible joy. He looked at himself, wonderingly, at the beloved men around him, and he said to himself: Lawrence, old son, treasure this moment. Because you feel as good as a man can feel.<sup>103</sup>

Here one can find the story of Little Round Top as known by the masses.

How does this account compare to earlier versions of the story? The 20<sup>th</sup> Maine arrived at Little Round Top, refused their line, ran low on ammunition, and executed a ‘right wheel forward’ bayonet charge. This is the classic Chamberlain version of the story, as based on his writings later in life. He certainly ordered the charge, and no other version of the story is even hinted at. The charge in both Chamberlain’s writings and the novel happen quite deliberately, and not as any sort of spontaneous action, as told by other members of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine.

Indeed, since Chamberlain is Michael Shaara’s foremost northern narrator in The Killer Angels on the second and third days, readers only gain *his* perspective on the Battle of Little Round Top. Shaara did not include Chamberlain’s critics of the late

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<sup>103</sup> Shaara, *The Killer Angels*, 236.

nineteenth century during the course of the fight, beyond a mention of Melcher as a “gaunt boy with buck teeth.”<sup>104</sup> Beyond this incorrect portrayal of an unattractive Melcher, he enquired what a “right wheel forward” maneuver constituted, when as an officer he knew exactly how to perform the maneuver. At this point in Chamberlain literature, his critics begin to be obliterated. In the later movie adaptation of the novel, no mention is even made of Melcher, while other characters came forward. Other key characters found themselves marginalized further.

A key example of other characters being marginalized or brought to the center of the story involves Chamberlain’s brothers present at the fight. Tom operated as regimental adjutant in the novel, and Chamberlain saw him more than any other character, except perhaps Kilrain. In contrast, Chamberlain’s brother John, who Chamberlain mentioned in his writings as well as Tom, makes no appearance in either The Killer Angels or the movie adaptation. Another example involves the Merrill brothers. The Merrill brothers are mentioned in later sources such as Pullen’s The Twentieth Maine, are mentioned in The Killer Angels, and are included in the movie, looking for thicker trees to stand behind. Captain Morrill and B Company made a significant appearance in all of the 19<sup>th</sup> century writings, figure prominently in the novel The Killer Angels. However, they cannot be found in the movie. Other members of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine made short appearances in the novel, but were omitted from the movie. An important character that Chamberlain mentioned in his writings about Little Round Top appears in The Killer Angels, but was not put into the movie. Private George Washington Buck used to be a sergeant, but lost his rank due to an unfortunate

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<sup>104</sup> Shaara, *The Killer Angels*, 225.

occurrence involving a mean-spirited officer. Buck dies at Little Round Top, but not before Chamberlain promotes him on his deathbed, as told in Chamberlain's accounts of the fight. While Buck is mentioned in The Killer Angels, no mention is made of his promotion. He was not included in the movie at all, in a sense. While Buck is not mentioned by name in the movie, the fictional character Kilrain bears a strong circumstantial similarity to him. In the novel, Kilrain is a former sergeant who dies on Little Round Top. Buck's story is eerily similar. Perhaps Shaara created Kilrain with Buck's story in mind. He certainly created Kilrain to allow Chamberlain to sound off on his ideas about the war and slavery. He also serves as a father figure to Chamberlain, to the marginalization of other significant actors on Little Round Top.

In the novel, not much mention at all was made of Chamberlain's brigade commander Colonel Strong Vincent, beyond him placing Chamberlain and the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine. Furthermore, one never hears about the fight on the other side of the hill where the rest of Vincent's brigade is engaged. The fight to the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine's right became just as difficult, if not more so, than the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine's own conflict with the 15<sup>th</sup> Alabama. Since the reader only sees what Chamberlain sees, one never gets the full picture of the battle. As such, many people only know of Chamberlain's fight, thus he receives the lion's share of the credit for the victory at Little Round Top. Scott Hartwig might put this phenomenon the best when he wrote in his A Killer Angels Companion,

Chamberlain is deserving of great credit. He fought with bravery, skill, tenacity, and cunning to win a crucial engagement, but he did not stand off the enemy alone. He was not the only hero on Little Round Top that hot July 2 afternoon, and Chamberlain would have been the first to admit it. But because Shaara presents the events at Little

Round Top through Chamberlain's eyes, his story is the only one the reader comes to know.<sup>105</sup>

Seeing the battle through Chamberlain's eyes, the reader never learns of the other heroes that defended flanks during the battle. One never hears about Colonel David Ireland of the 137<sup>th</sup> New York, who refused his battle line on Culp's Hill in order to save the Union Army's right flank on the evening of July 2.<sup>106</sup> Does this sound familiar?

Michael Shaara contributed to one of the largest misconceptions regarding Chamberlain in the final portion of his book. Needing a narrator to describe the Union side of the cannonade of July 3 and Pickett's charge, Shaara placed Chamberlain at the center of Cemetery Ridge during these events. In the story, after inquiring where his regiment will be placed, a courier responds, "Oh sir... a lovely spot. Safest place on the battlefield. Right smack dab in the center of the line. Very quiet there."<sup>107</sup> Later on, Chamberlain suffers through the massive cannonade preceding Pickett's Charge, before Shaara turned the story over to Confederate narrators to tell the tale of the charge itself. The problem here is that Chamberlain did not take the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine to the center of the Union line on July 3. After the fight for Little Round Top, Chamberlain moved his men to secure the next hill over, Big Round Top. Completing this task, he later joined the rest of the Fifth Corps near the George Weikert farm. Chamberlain never traveled to Cemetery Ridge on July 3. This is merely a convenient way for Shaara to explain the cannonade from the northern perspective, while using his most relatable narrator to boot.

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<sup>105</sup> D. Scott Hartwig, *A Killer Angels Companion* (Gettysburg: Thomas Publications, 1996), 16.

<sup>106</sup> Stephen W. Sears, *Gettysburg* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003), 329.

<sup>107</sup> Shaara, *The Killer Angels*, 283.

Unfortunately, this means that readers of The Killer Angels begin to think that the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine actually went to Cemetery Ridge on July 3, a fact any historian of the Battle of Gettysburg knows incorrect.

A significant addition to the history surrounding Little Round Top was Harry W. Pfanz's book Gettysburg: The Second Day, published in 1987.<sup>108</sup> The book gives a comprehensive look at the history surrounding the fighting on July 2, 1863, including Little Round Top. Pfanz brought together all elements of the story on Little Round Top, telling Chamberlain's version of the story, including the right wheel forward. As Pfanz stated,

His regiment could not fall back, and it could no longer hold its position; therefore, it seemed to him that the Twentieth Maine would have to strike before it was struck if it were to survive. At his command the men would fix bayonets, and the left wing would open the counterattack by wheeling right down and across the slope of the hill. When the left wing was on line with the right, the right too would go forward, and they would sweep the Confederates from their front or be destroyed in the attempt.<sup>109</sup>

Even so, Pfanz also included accounts from various other sources including Holman S. Melcher, Colonel Oates, and Ellis Spear, making this account of Little Round Top one of the most balanced. Every person gets his say, unlike the overtly Chamberlain centric Killer Angels. As such, Pfanz's book operates as a sort of counterpoint to the novel The Killer Angels and the later movie, even if it does condone the right wheel forward maneuver in the movie *Gettysburg*. The making of Shaara's book into a

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<sup>108</sup> Harry W. Pfanz, *Gettysburg: The Second Day* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press 1987).

<sup>109</sup> Pfanz, *Gettysburg: The Second Day*, 234.

critically acclaimed movie only spread the various elements of the novel to a much wider audience.

The movie *Gettysburg* debuted in 1993. Featuring several epic battle sequences, the film brought Shaara's novel to life for many. Remaining true to the book, Chamberlain won over the mutineers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Maine, became close friends with a mere Private Kilrain, and won immortality as the hero of Little Round Top before surviving Pickett's Charge.<sup>110</sup> The movie brought together the layman character of Chamberlain, portrayed by actor Jeff Daniels, with an all star cast to show the humanity of the American Civil War's greatest battle. For many, *Gettysburg* will be the only reason that they have even heard of Joshua Chamberlain. As such, the film served to spread Michael Shaara's version of Chamberlain to a much wider audience than he may have originally intended, which as Shaara's readers have seen, is very much Chamberlain's own version of himself. Ron Maxwell's massive movie triggered an exponential surge of interest in Joshua Chamberlain. Movie goers connected with the former professor from Bowdoin College, and Jeff Daniel's sincere portrayal of the man cannot have hurt his admirable qualities. As stated by Roger Ebert,

Maxwell deserves credit for not hedging his bets. This is a film that Civil War buffs will find indispensable, even if others might find it interminable. I began watching with comparative indifference, and slowly got caught up in the majestic advance of the enterprise; by the end, I had a completely new idea of the reality of war in the 19th century, when battles still consisted largely of men engaging each other in hand-to-hand combat. And I understood the Civil War in a more immediate way than ever before.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>110</sup>*Gettysburg*, Directed by Ron Maxwell, 254 Minutes, Warner Bros. Entertainment, 2010, 1 DVD.

<sup>111</sup> Roger Ebert, "Gettysburg," *Chicago Sun-Times*, October 8, 1993, <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19931008/REVIEWS/310080301/1023> (accessed on 31 March 2013).

Another stated,

One could wish for a more coherent explanation of the context of the battle in 'Gettysburg.' Those new to Civil War history may wish they'd read or listened more in school. Despite its weaknesses, however, 'Gettysburg' manages to make us reflect on concepts like duty, honor, loyalty and friendship -- even God -- almost lost to memory in our cynical age. It manages to evoke history itself, reminding a generation that once proclaimed the irrelevance of the past how inescapable the past remains. And like 'Glory,' a politically more acceptable story more easily and better told, it strikes a small blow for the return of movies as players in the continuing renegotiation of American history.<sup>112</sup>

The film introduced even more viewers to Chamberlain as the movie eventually broadcasted across cable networks such as TNT. The power of this movie cannot be overstated. Many people found a new interest in not only Chamberlain, but the Battle of Gettysburg and the American Civil War as a whole due to this movie, including this writer. Indeed, many new works discussing and portraying Chamberlain followed in the wake of *Gettysburg*.

The Chamberlain boom after the film *Gettysburg* shot the Maine man to the superstardom that he enjoys today. Demand for anything Chamberlain skyrocketed, with much of the merchandise being geared towards casual lovers of the Civil War. As such, Chamberlain t-shirts, shot glasses, pretty much anything came into existence. His

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<sup>112</sup> Ken Ringle, "Gettysburg," *WashingtonPost.com*, October 10, 1993, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/gettysburgpgringle\\_a09e44.htm](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/gettysburgpgringle_a09e44.htm) (accessed on 31 March 2013).

memoir concerning the latter part of the war, The Passing of the Armies, gained new life with a reprinting, and many of his writings came together in a new compilation.<sup>113</sup>

Chamberlain has become such an integral part of the American Civil War story, that readers find him featured in children's books. One book in particular, Joshua Chamberlain and the American Civil War, is a sort of mini biography geared towards younger readers. The book traces the entire life of Chamberlain, with special emphasis placed on Little Round Top. The legend of Joshua Chamberlain finally arrives in this story chock full of myth. One needs only read the account of the charge at Little Round Top to see just how embedded Michael Shaara's version of Chamberlain (Chamberlain's own idealized version of himself) has become. The passage states,

The situation looked grim. Half his men were dead or badly wounded. Some officers shouted that their units had been annihilated. The enemy forces outnumbered his by two to one. Without ammo, the shredded remains of his regiment had no hope of repulsing another attack....Suddenly the solution occurred to him: since he was too weak to defend, he would attack! He shouted the astounding command to 'Fix bayonets!' The order flew from man to man down the line, along with the metal clash of bayonets being attached to empty rifles. Then a wild shout rose spontaneously from Joshua's desperate soldiers, and before he had a chance to shout 'Charge,' they were piling over the barricades and sprinting downhill toward the astonished Confederates. Brave as the Rebels were, the unexpected sight of 200 careening wild men thundering down upon them with blades of cold steel caused their courage to falter. Joshua's boys slammed into the Confederate lines with unstoppable momentum from their downhill charge, and the exhausted Confederates broke and flew in every direction or turned to raise their hands in surrender. Within minutes, Chamberlain's 200 men had taken 400 captives. Entire companies surrendered as one....the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine's downhill charge had broken the Rebel flank and ended the treat to Little Round Top.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup>Joshua L. Chamberlain, *The Passing of the Armies* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), 1998.

Joshua L. Chamberlain, *Bayonet! Forward* (Gettysburg: Stan Clark Military Books, 1994).

<sup>114</sup> Robert F. Kennedy Jr., *Joshua Chamberlain and the American Civil War* (New York: Hyperion Books for Children, 2007), 19.

Here one finds the quintessential tale of Chamberlain's charge at Little Round Top. His men are running out of ammunition, so Chamberlain does the unexpected, and boldly attacks. Chamberlain was now popular enough that he was set forward as a role model for children! Why not? His story of bravery and tenacity on Little Round Top is truly inspiring, even if all of the historical pieces are not present. The story is inspiring to children and adults alike.

Recently, the Smithsonian's American History Museum in Washington D. C. included a section on the American Civil War that featured the story of Chamberlain at Little Round Top. Along with a few other tales about Civil War heroes, one section describes Chamberlain at Gettysburg, complete with artwork portraying him in the background. Making no mention of the other units on Little Round Top, the presentation ends by stating, "His heroism was critical to the Union victory at Gettysburg."<sup>115</sup> Clearly, Chamberlain's tale has become one of the classic stories surrounding Gettysburg and has become enough of a popular tale to be featured extensively in film, literature, and even museum exhibits generally showcasing the American Civil War.

The popularity that Joshua Chamberlain gained due to the movie *Gettysburg* extended to Civil War historians. The number of works involving Chamberlain around the time the film came out increased dramatically, starting with Alice Raines Trulock's In the Hands of Providence: Joshua L. Chamberlain and the American Civil War.<sup>116</sup> This book was the first major biography of Chamberlain since Wallace's Soul of the Lion,

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<sup>115</sup> "Joshua Chamberlain at Gettysburg." May, 2012. Interactive Exhibit. Smithsonian Museum of American History. Washington D.C.

<sup>116</sup> Alice Rains Trulock, *In the Hands of Providence* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

focusing primarily on his years in the army. The biography is also one of the most exhaustively researched books that exists about Chamberlain in general, accepting the bulk of the Chamberlain legend, while still making note of Chamberlain's critics, particularly Melcher. Published in 1992, as the movie *Gettysburg* was about to arrive, the book offers a counterpoint to the movie as a well researched, more realistic portrayal of Chamberlain. As stated about the book in a review regarding Trulock's book, "These books deserve a place on every Civil War bookshelf, if only because they reflect the humanity and literacy behind the legends."<sup>117</sup>

Other authors soon discovered their own interest in Chamberlain and his story, and left their own mark on the Chamberlain story. One of these other historians is Thomas Desjardin. His book, *Stand Firm Ye Boys from Maine*, ranks as one of the best books on Chamberlain's actions and legacy concerning Little Round Top.<sup>118</sup> The history states as best historians know what happened during Chamberlain's fight at the hill, and tells a bit about the impact the fight has on Chamberlain's legacy, as well as Little Round Top's legacy in the bigger picture of Gettysburg. He took many nineteenth century accounts of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine at Little Round Top into the fold, giving a very complete picture of Little Round Top. Desjardin further fleshed out his explanation of the creation of Chamberlain as a hero in his chapter, "Constructing the Consummate Gettysburg Hero," in his book *These Honored Dead*.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Harold Holzer, "Heroes were made," *New York Times* Sep 27, 1992, *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Online (accessed on 3 April 2013).

<sup>118</sup> Desjardin, *Stand Firm Ye Boys from Maine*.

<sup>119</sup> Desjardin, *These Honored Dead*, 127.

In this book, Desjardin related the various elements that help to create the Chamberlain legend, of which a gentleman named Reverend Theodore Gerrish is a large part. Gerrish, who the reader should remember from chapter two, did not participate in the Battle of Gettysburg, yet still influenced several historians, including the biographers Willard Wallace, and Alice Rains Trulock.<sup>120</sup> As told by Desjardin,

According to medical and regimental records of the period, Theodore Gerrish languished in a hospital in Philadelphia when the Battle of Gettysburg took place. Thus a man who was more than one hundred fifty miles away at the time it occurred wrote one of the most quoted eyewitness accounts on this part of the battle.<sup>121</sup>

Now modern scholars of Chamberlain, the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine, and Little Round Top know to beware of this unreliable source.

Even with some lackluster sources, scholarly writing surrounding Chamberlain has not diminished or been deterred. More books have followed, with Chamberlain making an appearance in Gabor Boritt's compilation The Gettysburg Nobody Knows, in a chapter which traces Chamberlain's own efforts to tell the story of Little Round Top, and the memory that resulted from that story.<sup>122</sup> Controversy abounds in the chapter of the book, "Joshua Chamberlain and the American Dream," by Glenn LaFantasie. LaFantasie traces the nitpicking over the details of Little Round Top as coming from Chamberlain's own personality, particularly as he aged. He also pinpoints the hero

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<sup>120</sup> Wallace, *Soul of the Lion*.

Trulock, *In the Hands of Providence*.

<sup>121</sup> Desjardin, *These Honored Dead*, 135.

<sup>122</sup> Gabor S. Boritt, *The Gettysburg Nobody Knows* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

worship that has developed around Chamberlain as the result of Chamberlain himself. As

LaFantasie states,

So the man Chamberlain we have come to know is, in a sense, the same man Chamberlain saw in the mirror every morning. That man knew what the stakes at Gettysburg were, and it was just no use trying to tell him otherwise. He was, as he liked to be called, ‘The Hero of Little Round Top.’<sup>123</sup>

He had more to say on the subject of Chamberlain, and LaFantasie wrote a significant work chronicling the entire fight for Little Round Top. While he discusses the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine, his work encompasses the entirety of the fight, giving a much broader view of the action in his Twilight at Little Round Top.<sup>124</sup> In the book, LaFantasie recounts the familiar story, with the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine running low on ammunition, and Chamberlain desperately ordering the bayonet. Even so, LaFantasie appears to give the bulk of the story over to Chamberlain’s critics. He explicitly mentions Col. Oates ordering a retreat, relates that Ellis Spear never received the order to advance, and mentions Holman S. Melcher’s request to move forward to protect the wounded.<sup>125</sup> Even so, LaFantasie does put Chamberlain at the head of the charge, moving forward with the colors. As such, LaFantasie incorporates many elements of the fight of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine at Little Round Top, agreeing with the bulk of Chamberlain’s classic critics of the nineteenth century.

LaFantasie discussed Chamberlain further in his book, Gettysburg Heroes. The book includes his essay from Gabor Boritt’s book, “Joshua Chamberlain and the

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<sup>123</sup> Boritt, *The Gettysburg Nobody Knows*, 54-55.

<sup>124</sup> Glenn W. LaFantasie, *Twilight at Little Round Top* (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2005).

<sup>125</sup> LaFantasie, *Twilight at Little Round Top*, 188.

American Dream,” as well as a new chapter entitled “Becoming Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain.” While one might assume that the chapter chronicles how Chamberlain became the Chamberlain of today, the chapter actually describes how Chamberlain transformed himself into a soldier despite his real life problems. LaFantasie stated,

Chamberlain never really seemed to have the killer instinct in him. Instead, he was a golden knight, a gentleman soldier, a genteel and humane commander. The changes he had experienced in the short time between his decision to join the army and the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine’s orders to leave Portland demonstrated that he had found in the soldier’s life a new persona, one that suited him far more comfortably than the roles of troubled husband, reluctant scholar, and unhappy professor.<sup>126</sup>

With this, LaFantasie tackled new territory, and discusses how Chamberlain became the soldier that fought at Little Round Top, a key aspect of his later legacy. While he does not contribute to the controversy surrounding Little Round Top in the chapter, he does help his reader to view Chamberlain as more of a man, rather than a legendary figure with a legendary legacy.

Next, John J. Pullen returned to Chamberlain with Joshua Chamberlain: A Hero’s Life and Legacy, which traces numerous aspects of Chamberlain’s legacy.<sup>127</sup> These aspects include all of the various points and counterpoints about the Chamberlain legend, from Little Round Top to Appomattox. Pullen took all nineteenth century accounts of the fight for Little Round Top into account, as well as modern influences on Chamberlain’s legacy such as the film *Gettysburg*. As Pullen wrote,

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<sup>126</sup> Glenn W. LaFantasie, *Gettysburg Heroes* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 66.

<sup>127</sup> John J. Pullen, *Joshua Chamberlain A Hero’s Life and Legacy* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 1999).

This novelized and filmed version has been set upon by some historians, who seem to forget that they are quarrelling with a fiction and who also forget that no matter what the truth is or what they write in its elucidation, this is the way the event will be remembered by 98 percent of the general public who are aware of it. This is the way mythology proceeds- carrying forward essential truths unencumbered by factual details.<sup>128</sup>

As explained by Pullen, Chamberlain's legacy has grown much larger than himself. Myth is too irresistible for the legend not to have grown.

One also can find a mention of the Chamberlain legend and his role at Appomattox in William Marvel's A Place Called Appomattox, where Marvel claims that Chamberlain did not command the formal surrender.<sup>129</sup> In defiance against several nineteenth century sources, Marvel states that circumstantial evidence pointed to General Joseph J. Bartlett as being in command.<sup>130</sup> While there are works both supporting Chamberlain and not supporting his being in command at Appomattox, Marvel took a decidedly anti Chamberlain approach.

One of the latest works to discuss Chamberlain is Gary Gallagher's Causes Won, Lost, and Forgotten.<sup>131</sup> Taking a different angle to previous works, this book focuses on how film and art have affected the legacies of certain Civil War personalities, and yes, Joshua Chamberlain is included. In fact, according to the book, Chamberlain finds

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<sup>128</sup> Pullen, *Joshua Chamberlain: A Hero's Life and Legacy*, 142.

<sup>129</sup> William Marvel, *A Place Called Appomattox* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

<sup>130</sup> Marvel, *A Place Called Appomattox*, 358-359.

<sup>131</sup> Gary W. Gallagher, *Causes Won, Lost, and Forgotten* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

himself as the single most portrayed northern officer of the war in art, topping even General Grant and General Sherman, showing that the Chamberlain legend is alive and well, due to the power of fiction. Many of these works of art portray Chamberlain at Little Round Top, and some of the works even portray Chamberlain as looking suspiciously like the actor Jeff Daniels. These works of art certainly buy into the Chamberlain legend, glorifying him as the true hero of Gettysburg, and affirming the pro Chamberlain sources of the late nineteenth century.

Chamberlain has also found his way onto the larger Gettysburg stage as told by the authors Stephen W. Sears and Noah Andre Trudeau. Both of these authors wrote books chronicling the entire Battle of Gettysburg, and they both include Chamberlain. Trudeau's book Gettysburg: A Testing of Courage takes an evenhanded approach to the Chamberlain myth. Chamberlain receives his deserved share of credit in the book; however the tale of Little Round Top appears to be incorporating Chamberlain's critics. To this effect Trudeau includes a tempered version of the Chamberlain myth where both sides get a say—where Chamberlain orders the bayonet, but not everyone hears the order. Furthermore, he mentions Col. Oates ordering the retreat and the famous right wheel forward maneuver being imagined.<sup>132</sup>

Chamberlain's critics of the nineteenth century appear to have regained some say in the scholarly community, as also evidenced by Stephen Sears's book. In Sears's Gettysburg, the story is much the same. Chamberlain gets his share of the story, however so do his critics. Melcher is mentioned, and the right wheel forward is described as

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<sup>132</sup> Noah Andre Trudeau, *Gettysburg: A Testing of Courage* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), 370-371.

entirely spontaneous. Furthermore, Sears felt the need to include a disclaimer about Chamberlain and the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine, “As gallant and dramatic as were the exploits of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine and its commander on July 2, they by themselves did not save Little Round Top for the Union.”<sup>133</sup> Clearly, the Chamberlain legend has been cooled by some of his critics.

A final work that came out quite recently is Joshua L. Chamberlain: A Life in Letters, edited by Thomas Desjardin.<sup>134</sup> The book offers a glimpse into Chamberlain as a man, not a legend. Many of the letters contained in the book are to and from his wife Fanny, while others chronicle his time with the Army of the Potomac or later political life. The biggest revelation one finds in the book relates to his relationship with Fanny. The letters between the husband and wife appear as an intimate look inside a very close couple. While Joshua and Fanny certainly had rough moments in their marriage, this book reveals that they truly loved each other. As such, the book brings Chamberlain down to the level of a normal man, talking to his best friend, his wife. This book seems to cement a growing current trend to see past the fluff of the Chamberlain legend, and to see to the man behind the controversy of the nineteenth century. The letters contained in the book give insight to this Chamberlain, as he lived day to day as a normal man, and husband.

Joshua Chamberlain fought in the American Civil War 150 years ago. He did his duty bravely, and helped the north to win the war. Yes, he helped to create the legend that surrounds him and his regiment today, but his own deeds inspired the legend.

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<sup>133</sup> Sears, *Gettysburg*.

<sup>134</sup> Thomas Desjardin, ed., *Joshua L. Chamberlain: A Life in Letters* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2012).

Numerous people have been drawn to Chamberlain: his men, his family, and many admirers...both long ago and here in the present, this writer included. It may be the ideal of what Chamberlain stands for is the most important facet of his legend, and might be why he has gained such popularity. Chamberlain stands for bravery, intelligence, compassion, resolve, and a sort of knightly chivalry. Indeed, the Chamberlain of legend is a model knight of sorts. Perhaps Chamberlain best described his legacy and the legend that grew from the memory himself when he stated,

In great deeds, something abides. On great fields, something stays. Forms change and pass; bodies disappear; but spirits linger, to consecrate ground for the vision-place of souls. And reverent men and women from afar, and generations that know us not and that we know not of, heart-drawn to see where and by whom great things were suffered and done for them, shall come to this deathless field, to ponder and dream; and lo! The shadow of a mighty presence shall wrap them in its bosom, and the power of the vision pass into their souls.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>135</sup>Chamberlain, *Bayonet! Forward*, 202.

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## Education

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Bachelor of Arts Degree in Political Science, Spring 2013, Penn State University, University Park, PA

Honors in History

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## Honors and Awards

-Phi Alpha Theta, Spring 2012

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## Professional Experience

-Museum Services/Interpretation Intern  
Gettysburg National Military Park  
Supervisor: John Heiser  
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