

Companions: Let's take a walk backward in time. Imagine it is July 2, 1863. In a little Pennsylvania town called Gettysburg, the Army of Northern Virginia and the Army of the Potomac are locked in a ferocious battle that just may decide the outcome of the entire Civil War. It is about 5:00PM and the fighting has been particularly heavy on a small hill known as Little Round Top.

An obscure Colonel, Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain from Brunswick, Maine is in command of the 20th Maine Infantry on Little Round Top. One year ago the 20th Maine had been 1000 strong, today they are less than four hundred. One year ago today, that little known colonel had been a professor of rhetoric at Bowdoin College. Today the 20th Maine is informed that they are the extreme left flank of the Union line. They are the only obstacle between the Confederate Army and Washington, DC. Colonel Chamberlain has been informed that they must hold the line no matter what the circumstances, to the last man if necessary. The Confederate attacks have been fierce and frequent the entire day. Chamberlain's men are exhausted. The temperature is over 90 and they have had little sleep or rations in the last 48 hours and ammunition is running low. Chamberlain takes a moment to assess his situation, many of his troops have only a few rounds left and the Confederates are forming to charge again. Chamberlain is certain that he cannot hold his position so he makes a bold decision. He orders his men to fix bayonets and prepares to charge. He believes that downhill momentum may be an advantage and he leads his men down the hill toward the surprised Confederate troops. His bold strategy is successful and the enemy line breaks. Within a few moments he has routed his enemy and taken several hundred prisoners.

Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain was born September 8, 1828 in Brewer, Maine. He was the eldest of five children. His father, also Joshua, was determined that his son have a military career but his mother, a devout Congregationalist, was resolved that her oldest son should carry out the Lord's work.

Young Joshua was enrolled in a military academy at Ellsworth, Maine, where he learned military drill and also became proficient in Latin and French. Within a short time, family financial difficulties made it necessary that he obtain paid employment. Joshua was offered and accepted a job as a schoolteacher. It was here that he developed a lifelong love and appreciation of education.

After a few years, Chamberlain made the decision to become a minister and missionary. To that end he enrolled in Bowdoin College in 1848. He was an excellent student and was elected Phi Beta Kappa. Joshua entered Bangor Theological Seminary in the fall of 1852. Chamberlain had so impressed the faculty and administration at Bowdoin that he was invited to join its faculty as an instructor of logic and natural theology in 1855. He decided to accept the position in 1855 and also married his childhood sweetheart, a Miss Fanny Adams. Chamberlain settled into married and academic life.

In August of 1862, after much soul searching, Chamberlain decided to offer his services to the Union. He applied for a commission and was appointed a Lieutenant Colonel of the newly formed 20th Regiment Infantry, Maine Volunteers. This regiment was to become one of the most distinguished of the

war. Their first major battle was at Antietam, the bloodiest single day of the entire war.

It was also at this time that Joshua Chamberlain became a member of our fraternity. Many men during this time were hurrying to receive the degrees of masonry. At a special communication of United Lodge #8 in Brunswick, Maine he was granted a dispensation from Grand Master Josiah H. Drumond, to take his masonic degrees in less than the prescribed time period of one month between degrees. He was initiated an Entered Apprentice on August 27, 1862 and passed to the degree of Fellowcraft the same evening. At 8:00 AM, August 28, the lodge reconvened and he was raised to the sublime degree of Master Mason.

Within a few days of his raising, Brother Chamberlain and the 20th Maine were called to Washington. On September 12, 1862 they began a forced march that would take them to Antietam and into history. By the war's end the 20th Maine had earned numerous battle honors and had taken part in many major battles. Among the battles they fought in were Fredricksburg, Gettysburg, The Wilderness, Petersburg and Appomattox. By the end of the war, Chamberlain had participated in 24 major battles and numerous skirmishes. He had at least five horses shot out from under him and was wounded six times. A minnie ball nearly killed him at Petersburg, he was shot through both hips. It was here that he was given a battlefield promotion to Brigadier General, his commanders thought posthumously because of the severity of his wounds. (note: he was the only Union General to receive such a promotion) However, he survived his injuries and recovered in time to distinguish himself again at the battle of Five Forks in March of 1865. He was breveted to Major General for his actions at Five Forks.

Chamberlain was to receive one more honor before the end of the war. He was chosen to receive the surrender of the Confederate infantry at Appomattox on April 12, 1865. Here he demonstrated his compassion and great respect for his Confederate counterparts. He ordered his men to salute the surrendering Southern troops. This act of brotherly love was noted around the world and years later many people in the South still considered him to be a great General. At the close of the war Chamberlain was offered a commission in the regular army, which he declined.

In January of 1866, Chamberlain was released from military service and returned to the faculty at Bowdoin College. In the spring of 1866 he was approached by the Republican Party as a possible candidate for governor. He was elected and served four terms helping to establish a period of Republican domination in Maine politics which would last over 100 years. Among his accomplishments as Governor was the establishment of an agricultural and technical college at Orono which would become the University of Maine.

In 1871, Chamberlain returned to Bowdoin College, this time as it's president. He was instrumental in reshaping it's curriculum to include modern scientific and engineering subjects. During his presidency, he taught every subject except mathematics. Throughout the 1870's and 80's he continued to teach, write and lecture and participate actively in the G.A.R. In 1878, he

represented the United States at the Paris Exposition. Despite several operations, Chamberlain never fully recovered from his groin and hip wounds. In 1883 he was forced to resign from Bowdoin for health reasons.

In 1893, Congress finally awarded Joshua Chamberlain the Congressional Medal of Honor for his gallantry at Little Round Top in Gettysburg. He would spend the last three decades of his life pursuing business ventures and writing memoirs of his wartime experiences. In 1900, Chamberlain was appointed Surveyor of the Port of Portland. By the end of 1913, his war wounds flared up again and on February 24, 1914 he died. He was the last soldier to die from wounds received in the Civil War.

Although he was never forgotten in Maine, Joshua Chamberlain largely faded from view for most of the 20th Century. No statue of him is erected at Gettysburg and few historians studied his campaigns. Lately, due to renewed interest in the war, documentaries such as Ken Burn's *The Civil War* and several books, notably *The Killer Angels* by Michael Sharra which was made in the movie *Gettysburg*, Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain is being recognized for the true American hero that he was. By his actions he demonstrated throughout his life Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth, the tenets of our fraternity.

Sources:

Sharra, Michael [The Killer Angels](#)

Calhoun, Charles [Chamberlain Biography](#)

The Pejepscot Historical Society, Curtis Memorial Library

Ken Burns [The Civil War Documentary](#)

www.findagrave.com

