# Gettysburg Stories

## Second Day of Battle

**BY**

# Brian Walrath

## 2nd Day part 1

### STAMPEDE!

Men were killed or injured in almost every conceivable way at Gettysburg, from being torn by bullets and shells to being crushed by wagon wheels. But only one can claim the distinction of almost being trampled in a cattle stampede.

*General Henry Hunt*

General Henry Hunt was the chief of artillery for the Army of the Potomac. On July 2nd he was everywhere on the battlefield, placing batteries, bringing up the reserves and generally doing all he could to stem Longstreet's assault on Sickles' line. To visit the Union battery at Devil's Den, Hunt had to leave his horse some distance north of the Den and walk the long narrow ridge to the cannon. When he started to return to his horse, shells from Confederate artillery were crashing into the field he had to traverse, killing a cow that was pastured there and putting the rest of the herd into a frenzy. Said Hunt later, "All were stampeded and were bellowing and rushing in their terror, first to one side and then to the other." Managing to avoid their horns, Hunt finally made it to his mount and rode off. He claimed that he was more frightened by the cattle than by enemy shells and bullets, of which he heard plenty that day.

### DANIEL SICKLES

Even if Dan Sickles had never set foot on the soil of Gettysburg, history would remember him as a controversial, even scandalous, figure. A successful New York politician, he rose through the Tammany Hall organization and, as a twenty-eight-year-old state assemblyman, shocked his contemporaries by escorting a known prostitute onto the floor of the New York legislature.

A few years later, he set off more uproar by marrying a 16-year-old girl who then soon gave birth to a daughter. Marriage did not prevent Sickles from continuing to cavort with prostitutes; however, the standards he set for his wife were much different. When he learned that she was seeing Philip Barton Key, district attorney of the District of Columbia and the son of Francis Scott Key, he was infuriated. One day in 1859, while serving as a New York Congressman, he noticed Key outside their Washington, D. C. home, trying to signal Mrs. Sickles from Lafayette Park, across

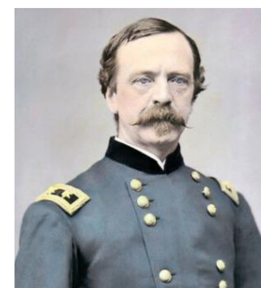
the street from the White House. Dan grabbed a pistol, rushed outside and shot Key dead in full view of neighbors and passers-by.

*Congressman Dan Sickles shooting Phillip Barton Key in Lafayette Park, across from the White House.*

He surrendered to authorities, and while in jail was visited by a constant stream of senators and other members of the Washington establishment. The Sickles trial captured national headlines with lurid tales of infidelity. But Dan's luck held. He was found not guilty by reason of temporary insanity, the first successful use of that defense in American History. As an interesting sidelight, his attorney was Edwin Stanton, who would later become Lincoln's Secretary of War. Sickles then stirred up more tsk-tsking by forgiving his wife and getting on with married life, at least as he practiced it.

When the Civil War came along, it was a perfect opportunity for Sickles to exercise his political ambitions, aggressiveness and patriotism. He immediate raised a brigade of New York volunteers with himself as colonel of one of the regiments. He took surprisingly well to army life and performed courageously and effectively in combat, rising quickly to command the brigade, then to lead a division. When friend Joseph Hooker took over the Army of Potomac, Sickles became one of his corps commanders.

By the morning of the second day at Gettysburg, most of the Army of the Potomac was arriving on the field and forming into the soon-to-be-famous "fishhook" – Culp's Hill was the barb, Cemetery Hill was the curve, and Cemetery Ridge was the shaft, stretching south toward the Round Tops.



*General Dan Sickles*

George Meade, who had replaced Hooker only a few days before, positioned Sickles' 6000-man III Corps on the shaft, at the far left of the Union position. Sickles didn't like where he was. At this point, Cemetery Ridge had pretty much petered out and could hardly be called a ridge any more. Sickles looked to his front and spied land that was slightly higher affording,

he was convinced, a better position for his corps. So he did what he had always done – what he damned well pleased. Without Meade's permission, he moved virtually his entire corps forward a couple of thousand yards to what he believed was a more defensible position. This caused his line to be stretched thin and bent at an odd angle, making it vulnerable to attack.

About 4:00 PM Meade finally found the time to visit Sickles' section of the front. He was shocked at what he saw. There was no love lost between the two, Meade viewing Sickles as an impetuous amateur and Sickles feeling that Meade was a typical doddering, overly cautious West Pointer. Meade told Sickles that he had positioned his line too far forward, but that it was too late to withdraw, since the Rebels were starting to attack.

Confederate General James Longstreet was overseeing the attack and he would later describe what followed as "the best three hours of fighting ever done by soldiers on any battlefield." Soldiers in blue and gray hammered at each other in places that would soon be remembered as the Peach Orchard, the Wheatfield, Devil's Den and Little Round Top. Meade would attempt to shore up Sickles' sagging line by throwing regiment after regiment into the fray, depleting other sections of his fishhook. When the day ended, the Union line had been pushed back to the original III Corps position on Cemetery Ridge and many of the III Corps regiments were pretty much finished as a fighting force.

Daniel Sickles was finished, too. Before the collapse of the Union line, he was sitting astride his horse when a cannon ball from the direction of the Peach Orchard hit his right leg a glancing blow, shattering the bones below the knee. Spunky as ever despite his painful wound, Sickles was carried from the field sitting up on a stretcher, smoking a cigar as he shouted words of encouragement to his troops. Later that day his shattered right leg was amputated just above the knee. Sickles had the limb placed in a small coffin and sent to the Army Medical Museum (now known as the National Museum of Health and Medicine) in Washington, where he visited it regularly. The bones are still on display today.

Sickles would not return to field command, but he would not disappear, either. He held a series of administrative positions and finally retired as a major general in 1869. That same year he was appointed ambassador to Spain, a post he held until 1874. Still the same old Sickles, he stirred up such trouble with the Spanish

government that it took intervention by other government officials to keep the two countries from coming to blows. He was also rumored to have had an affair with the deposed Queen Isabella II (at least at this point he was single, his wife having died in 1867.) In 1871 he married a Spanish woman.

Returning to the US, Sickles held a series of elected and appointed positions including congressman and senator from New York. He remained heavily involved in Gettysburg reunions and preservation efforts. He served for many years as the chairman of the New York Monuments Commission, which oversaw the design of the state's monuments at Gettysburg. As senator, he introduced legislation to form the Gettysburg National Military Park, the driving force behind battlefield preservation. Ironically, one of his contributions was the procurement of the park border fencing on East Cemetery Hill – the fencing came from Lafayette Park in Washington, where years earlier he had shot his wife's lover. It was later moved to separate the Soldiers National Cemetery from Gettysburg's Evergreen Cemetery.

Sickles also spent much of his time bolstering his self-proclaimed image as a great hero of Gettysburg. He engaged in a long-running dispute with George Meade over the decision to advance his corps west of Cemetery Ridge. In March 1864 the New York Herald published a long account of the Gettysburg Battle by someone using the pen name of Historicus. The author was clearly a Sickles supporter (many historians think that Sickles himself wrote it), since the article was blatantly favorable to Sickles and critical of Meade, who was portrayed as timid, indecisive and ready to retreat from Gettysburg after the first day. Sickles would go on to take every opportunity to promote himself and his actions at Gettysburg through other articles, speeches and interviews. The controversy rages to this day, with some feeling that Sickles' salient broke up the Confederate attack (a view apparently supported by James Longstreet) and others holding that Sickles' action needlessly sacrificed many of his soldiers. Meade falls into the latter group, since he had evidently considered court-martialing Sickles for disobedience, but thought better of it since the Union had won the battle and Sickles had been wounded.

Dan Sickles died in 1914 at age 95, having outlived most of the other generals at Gettysburg.

More than once before his death, he was asked why there was no memorial to him at Gettysburg, especially considering that there are statues honoring every other

Union corps commander and many lesser generals. Sickles' answer was always "The entire battlefield is a memorial to Dan Sickles."

But in a way, a fitting memorial to this controversial general does grace the Gettysburg Battlefield. On the west side of modern-day Sickles Avenue stands the monument of the Excelsior Brigade, the brigade which Sickles help to enlist and which started his military career. It is placed where Sickles sent the brigade when he pushed his line forward on July $2^{nd}$. It is one of the most striking memorials on the battlefield, capped with a soaring eagle atop five highly polished columns representing the brigade's five regiments. In the center stands a low pedestal looking for all the world like something should be upon it. But the pedestal is empty.

*Excelsior Brigade Monument*

Original plans were for a statue of Sickles to adorn the pedestal, but money ran short. In 1912 a state audit concluded that $28,000 had been embezzled by the chairman of the monuments commission. A warrant for his arrest was issued, but he was never brought to trial. The chairman, of course, was Daniel Sickles.

**PADDY O'RORKE'S NOSE**

Late on the afternoon of July $2^{nd}$, Colonel Strong Vincent of the Union $5^{th}$ Corps rushed his 1,300-man brigade to the south slope of Little Round Top in response to the urgent pleas from General Gouverneur Warren. Only minutes before the Confederates began their assault on the hill, Vincent positioned his regiments with the $20^{th}$ Maine on the far left, then the $83^{rd}$ Pennsylvania, the $44^{th}$ New York, and, on the extreme right, the $16^{th}$ Michigan. Soon the hillside was wreathed in smoke as the Rebels attempted to drive off the men in blue.

The $16^{th}$ Michigan, the smallest of Vincent's regiments with only 150 men on the line, soon began to feel pressure from the superior numbers of the attacking $4^{th}$ and $5^{th}$ Texas. Then someone – it was never established who – gave an order for the $16^{th}$'s color guard to fall to the rear to avoid being taken. Nearly a third of the regiment followed. This group, led by the regimental commander, kept going right over the crest. Seeing his brigade line falter, Strong Vincent rushed to the right and tried to rally the men. At that moment, Vincent fell with a bullet in his abdomen

and was carried from the field (he would die five days later.) Now the remainder of the 16th Michigan was fighting for its life, but it could not hold on for long. The Texans were starting to flank them.

General Warren, desperately searching for more reinforcements, came across the 140th New York near the Wheatfield Road just north of Little Round Top. They were commanded by 26-year-old Colonel Patrick Henry "Paddy" O'Rorke. Despite his youth, O'Rorke, who had graduated first in the West Point Class of 1861, had quickly earned the respect of his men. The regiment clambered up the north face of the hill, paused for a moment to load their rifles, then plunged into the fight at just the right place – to the right of the 16th Michigan. Not stopping to put his men into formation, O'Rorke simply yelled "Down this way, boys." A moment later, he fell with a mortal wound in his throat. But the 140th's unorganized rush was too much for the Texans. They fell back and would not charge again.

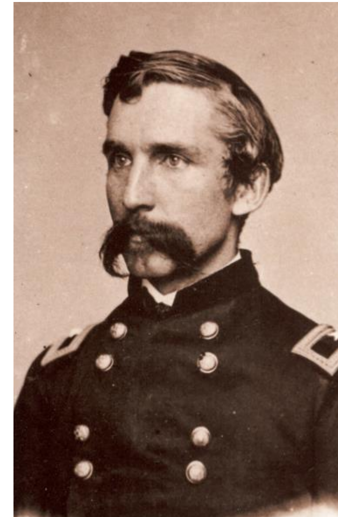
*140th New York monument on Little Round Top*

In 1889 the 140th New York erected a monument near the spot where O'Rorke fell. On its face is a bronze bust of the young colonel. Battlefield lore holds that Paddy O'Rorke had the luck of the Irish, but on Little Round Top he surrendered his luck to the living, which helped his men to save the day. To get a little of O'Rorke's luck, visitors rub his nose, which has been polished bright by countless fingers.

### JOSHUA CHAMBERLAIN BEFORE AND AFTER LITTLE ROUND TOP

If the typical American could come up with any two names from Gettysburg, the first would likely be Robert E. Lee and the second would be Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, a mere regimental commander at the time. Chamberlain's fame can largely be credited to three different media sources: Michael Shaara's 1974 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Killer Angels* and the 1993 film *Gettysburg*, based on Shaara's book, plus Ken Burn's 1990 TV series *The Civil War*. These sources reintroduced Chamberlain as the Hero of Little Round Top, the man who saved the Union left, the battle, and by extension the entire war.

It has become fashionable for some of today's historians to put Chamberlain, Little Round Top, and even Gettysburg itself into a different perspective. They argue that it wasn't just Chamberlain's 20th Maine that won Little Round Top (there were at least seven other Union regiments there, plus an artillery battery, all fighting just as hard as the 20th Maine); there is no guarantee that if the Rebels had taken Little Round Top they would have then routed the Army of the Potomac; and equally, if Lee had been the victor at Gettysburg, no one can predict this would have led to Southern victory in the Civil War.


*Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain*

Many of these historians have also chided Chamberlain for indulging in outright self-promotion for the rest of his life following the battle. Through several books and many articles and speeches he effectively retold the story of the 20th Maine's stand against the Rebel hoard, and certainly failed to give due credit to others who were heroes that day. This was typical of the many memoirs written after the war, in which the authors dwelt almost entirely on their personal actions and the fighting that they directly observed.

But let us forgive a man who may have overestimated the importance of "his" battle and whose stories might have grown better as he grew older. For Joshua Chamberlain was the real thing – one of those rare men who truly deserve to stand in the ranks of great American heroes. He might be considered the quintessential citizen-soldier – a civilian who heard his country's call, served with courage and dedication, and went back home proud of what he had done.

Long before anyone even dreamed there would be a Civil War, young Lawrence (as his family called him) had shown himself to be remarkably tenacious, driven and self-disciplined. In order to be accepted at Bowdoin College in Maine, he taught himself to read Ancient Greek. He would go on to master eight other languages (in addition to English): Arabic, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Latin, Spanish, and Syriac, an ancient Middle Eastern dialect. He also learned the language of the Mohawk Indians who lived in birchbark wigwams near his parents' house. In addition to his studies, young Lawrence camped and hunted, participated in athletics and even fenced with his father – using broadswords.

He had been troubled in his early years by stammering whenever he had to pronounce certain consonants. This was so troublesome in college that he often declined to participate in class discussions and was stricken with shame whenever he was called upon to make an oral presentation. Through mighty determination and skillful examination of the problem he finally struck upon a variety of solutions. The most effective one was to speak in a rhythmic style, almost singing the words. Over time he developed into a speaker renowned for his eloquent, powerful and melodic style.

He married in 1855 and he and his wife Fanny had five children, but only two survived beyond infancy. He studied at Bangor Theological Seminary and came close to entering the clergy, which was the career his parents were hoping for. Although he had a strong spiritual bent, he instead returned to Bowdoin College and started an academic career by teaching rhetoric. Eventually, he taught every subject in the curriculum except math and science. In 1861 he was serving as Professor of Modern Languages.

His ancestors had served in the Revolution and the War of 1812, and although he had already shown leanings toward the clergy and was successful in academia, Lawrence also had a strong interest in a very different profession – the military. When war erupted between North and South, he openly voiced his support for the Union, to the point of urging his students to follow their hearts (meaning to serve the Union cause). Such militant advice did not sit well with many of the Bowdoin faculty, of course, and they urged their colleague to take some time off to come to his senses. In 1862 Chamberlain was granted a two-year leave of absence to study languages in Europe. Instead, without first telling his family and fellow professors, he immediately enlisted and was offered the colonelcy of the newly formed 20th Maine Regiment. Feeling that he lacked the military knowledge and experience to lead the regiment, Lawrence accepted the position of Lieutenant Colonel under the leadership and tutelage of Colonel Adelbart Ames, a West Point graduate who was helping to form the regiment.

Chamberlain applied himself to his military studies, reading everything he could find on the subject and picking the brains of Colonel Ames and anyone else he could find with experience. He learned fast. He also possessed natural leadership abilities which could not be gotten from a book.

The 20th was at Antietam, but saw no fighting.  Their first taste of combat was during the Battle of Fredericksburg, where they participated in Ambrose Burnside's disastrous assault on Marye's Heights.  They spent the freezing night pinned down on the slope, Chamberlain using Union corpses for cover as minie balls thudded into the dead.

At Chancellorsville, the 20th was in the rear performing guard due to being quarantined after receiving smallpox vaccinations.  A few weeks later, Chamberlain was promoted to colonel and took over command of the regiment when Adelbart Ames was moved up to brigadier general.

Then came July of 1863 and Gettysburg.  When the 20th Maine was stationed at the far left of the Union line on Little Round Top, they had seen only limited combat and were being led by a colonel who less than a year earlier had been a language professor at a small college in a quiet, little town in Maine.  Nevertheless, through grit and Chamberlain's quick thinking and determination they performed like seasoned veterans and turned back the stubborn Confederates who attacked the Union left again and again.  Joshua Chamberlain and the 20th Maine had found their place in history.

Of course, the war did not end at Gettysburg.  The 20th would soldier on to the end, and Chamberlain would continue to distinguish himself.

Later in 1863 Lawrence was laid up by malaria, but by April 1864 he had returned to the regiment, and was made brigade commander a few weeks later.  June found him leading his brigade in an attack against strong Confederate earthworks at Petersburg.  As he turned to shout an order to the men in his ranks, a minie ball struck him in the right hip, ranged through his groin and stopped just under the skin of his left hip.  Lawrence was stunned, but he did not fall.  Holding himself up with his sword stuck into the ground, he continued to urge his men on through the heavy fire.  Finally, he collapsed from loss of blood.  The bullet had done tremendous damage, clipping his bladder and urethra, shattering bone and tearing blood vessels.

He was carried from the field barely alive, and surgeons pronounced the wound mortal.  His death notice appeared in Maine newspapers, and Ulysses S. Grant, told

that Chamberlain was not expected to live, promoted him to brigadier general. But Lawrence surprised them all. After a difficult recovery, he returned to active duty in November, despite the urgings of his wife, family and colleagues to resign.

Chamberlain led a brigade in the final battles of the war, and suffered a nasty wound in the chest and left arm. But he stayed in command. By the time the fighting ended, he had accumulated an impressive war record: action in over 20 battles, four citations for bravery, wounded six times, and six horses shot from under him.

But there was one more moment of destiny awaiting Joshua Chamberlain before he would leave the Union army. On April 9, 1865 Ulysses Grant met with Robert E. Lee in Wilbur McLean's house in Appomattox Court House to accept the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia. Grant harkened back to Lincoln's instructions on dealing with the Rebels when the war ended: "Let them up easy." But he insisted on a formal surrender ceremony to make clear to one and all that the Union had prevailed and the country would once again be united. He picked Joshua Chamberlain to preside over the ceremony.

Lawrence was not the sort of man to take such an assignment lightly. Although he had seen much of the horrors of war and fought hard against the rebellion, he bore no anger toward the Rebels themselves. He had, and would maintain for the rest of his life, an idealist's view of war as a contest between honorable men, one which tests the participants and builds character. It was in this frame of mind that he thought long and hard about the sort of ceremony that would be appropriate. He later wrote, "Before us in proud humiliation stood the embodiment of manhood…was not such manhood to be welcomed back into a Union so tested and assured?"

On the chill morning of April 12$^{th}$, a formation of Union soldiers lined up on both side of the road leading into Appomattox Court House. It was not the entire Army of the Potomac, but a single division of three brigades – enough to be the symbol of the United States. Temporarily in command of the division was Joshua Chamberlain.

The blue-clad soldiers watched as the long gray line of ragged, even emaciated, former enemy advanced down the road toward them. Leading them was General

John B. Gordon, who, like Chamberlain, had been picked by his superiors to represent their side at the ceremony. But for Chamberlain the assignment was an honor; Gordon, on the other hand had been stuck with the job, since no higher-ranking officer wished to preside over humiliation. One of the most ardent believers in the Confederate cause, Gordon rode with his head down, staring at the ground dejectedly.

*General Gordon salutes Chamberlain at Appomattox Court House.*

As the gray column came opposite the Union line, Chamberlain gave the order "Carry arms", a bugle sounded and a clatter rippled down the Yankee ranks as the soldiers raised their muskets in salute. Immediately recognizing the significance of the movement, Gordon snapped his head up and sat tall in the saddle. He reared his horse, then dropped the animal's head into a bow toward Chamberlain. His sword point came down to the toe of his boot, saluting the man who was showing such respect to his former enemies. Gordon shouted an order which passed back through the ranks, the Confederate flag dipped, and the men in the surrendering army brought their rifles in a salute in return. As Chamberlain put it, "Honor answering honor… On our part not a sound of trumpet more, nor roll of drum; not a cheer, nor word nor whisper of vain-glorying, nor motion of man standing again at the order, but an awed stillness rather, and breath-holding, as if it were the passing of the dead!"

This moment of tremendous symbolism made a great impression on the Confederates; however, as Chamberlain expected, it did not sit well with many in the North. For years there were some who cursed him for going too easy on the Rebels.

Chamberlain returned home to teach again at Bowdoin, but after his military experience, the role of professor lacked excitement. After much urging, he agreed to enter politics as a Republican. In September of 1866 he was elected governor of Maine by the largest majority that state had ever seen. He would go on to serve four one-year terms. His governorship was not without controversy, and he defied the party bosses by supporting the Fifteenth Amendment (which prevented the

states from denying suffrage based on race) and opposing the impeachment of President Andrew Johnson. He was also criticized for opposing the establishment of a special police force to enforce prohibition laws – he felt such a force would greatly infringe on the citizens' constitutional rights.

He also came under fire for his willingness to enforce the law regarding capital punishment (his predecessors had skirted the law by refusing to sign the death warrants.) But Lawrence had been under much more dangerous fire before, and took it all in stride, including death threats for revealing irregularities in the state's finances.

His terms as governor ended, Chamberlain was selected by the board of trustees of Bowdoin College as its new president. During his tenure he reformed and broadened the curriculum, and prepared the school to enter the twentieth century. Still troubled by his old war wounds, he resigned from Bowdoin in 1883, after serving as president for twelve years.

20th Maine Monument on Little Round Top

Chamberlain wrote and spoke profusely about his war experiences and was active in reunions and veteran's gatherings. His speech at the dedication of the 20th Maine monument at Gettysburg is quoted to this day. He turned his home across the street from Bowdoin College into a virtual Civil War museum, welcoming former comrades to visit and carve their initials into his dining room table. Among all this activity, he managed to buy a twenty-six-foot sailboat and indulged a passion he had enjoyed since childhood.

The Hero of Little Round Top would be called upon one more time to face down a group of attackers. In 1880 the Maine State House was taken over by an armed mob that was disputing the recent gubernatorial election. Chamberlain, as the commander of the Maine Militia, was called upon to do something. Rather than exacerbate the situation by calling out the militia, Lawrence set himself up in an office in the statehouse and convinced the mob to disperse. But tensions continued to grow, and it seemed that Maine was on the verge of its own civil war, as leaders on both sides riled up the crowds. Both factions offered Chamberlain a

seat in the US Senate if he would side with them. As usual, the old general maintained his integrity and refused all offers and pressures. He responded to death threats by bringing a pair of revolvers from home. No one doubted that he knew how to use them.

After twelve days of confrontation and political maneuverings, a rowdy mob of twenty-five or thirty men gathered outside the statehouse claiming to be bent on Chamberlain's murder. He did not cower in his office or surround himself with armed bodyguards. Instead, the old soldier went out – alone – onto the steps of the statehouse to face them. "Men," he told them, "you wished to kill me, I hear…. Killing is no new thing to me. I have offered myself to be killed many times, when I no more deserved it than I do now…. It is for me to see that the laws of this state are put into effect. I am here to do that, and I shall do it. If anybody wants to kill me for it, here I am. Let him kill!"

With that, Chamberlain threw open his coat and glared at the mob. There was a long pause, then an old veteran pushed his way through the crowd and shouted, "By God, old general, the first man that dares to lay hands on you, I'll kill him on the spot!" The mob shuffled off and the crisis was finally settled by the state Supreme Court. As a result of his impartial stance, Chamberlain's political career was over.

In 1893 Lawrence was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions on Little Round Top. True to his character, he accepted proudly but modestly, and requested that the author of a book about MOH recipients simply state that he personally led a bayonet charge "against an overpowering enemy assault."

His malaria returned periodically and his old war wounds had never really healed and continued to trouble him. He wore an early form of catheter ever since his wounding at Petersburg, and despite six operations in the hope of correcting the damage and stop recurring infections, the problems did not diminish. Health issues could not keep the old general down, however, and at the age of 70 he volunteered his services in the Spanish-American War. He said it was one of the major disappointments of his life when he was rejected.

He continued writing and speaking and indulged in a number of business interests, including property development in Florida. Not all of these were successful and

after leaving Bowdoin he began to feel some financial pinch. In 1900, he accepted the position of surveyor of the port of Portland, an appointment by President McKinley in honor of his war service.

Chamberlain made many trips back to Gettysburg. The first was in the spring of 1864, while the war still raged, to show his wife where he had fought. The last was in May 1913, as Maine's representative to the planning committee for the 50th anniversary of the battle. It was a difficult trip because of his poor health, but he felt it was his duty to attend. Sadly, his health prevented him from attending the actual reunion in July.

Late in 1913 Lawrence's health started to fail, and he became bedridden with infection in his old wounds. His attending physician was Dr. Abner Shaw, the doctor who had operated on him in Petersburg and treated him all those years. Usually stoic about the discomfort he suffered, Lawrence now described his pain as "unspeakable agony." On February 24, 1914, eighty-five-year-old Joshua Chamberlain finally succumbed to the wound he received half a century earlier.

Perhaps in his final moments The Hero of Little Round Top returned in spirit, as he had done so many times in body, to that bloody Pennsylvania hillside. His own words may have come back to him:

"I went – not long ago – to stand upon that crest whose one day's crown of fire has passed into the blazoned coronet of fame….

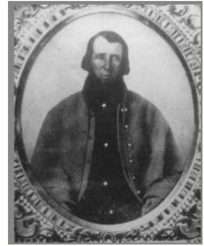
"I sat there alone on the storied crest, till the sun went down as it did before over the misty hills, and the darkness crept up the slopes, till from all earthly sight I was buried as with those before. But oh, what radiant companionship rose around, what steadfast ranks of power, what bearing of heroic souls. Oh, the glory that beamed through those nights and days.

"The proud young valor that rose above the mortal, and then was mortal after all . . ."

## 2nd Day, part 2

### GEORGE NIXON

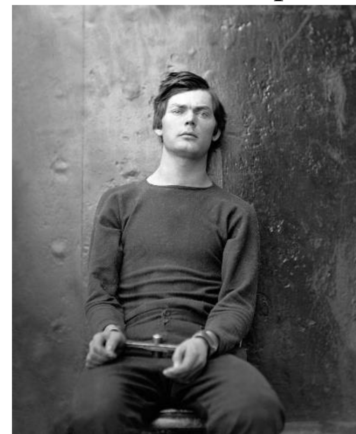
One of the casualties at Gettysburg was George Nixon III, great-grandfather of President Richard Nixon. George was a forty-two-year-old farmer from Chillicothe, Ohio and a private in the $73^{rd}$ Ohio Infantry. On July 2, he was shot while skirmishing along the Emmitsburg Road between Cemetery Hill and the town. He lay between the lines all afternoon and into the night, his moans loud enough to be heard by Ohio comrades. Richard Enderlin, a musician with the $73^{rd}$, crawled out to Nixon, picked him up and dashed back to the Union lines, as Rebels blazed away at him. 34 years later, Enderlin was awarded the Medal of Honor for his courageous act. Unfortunately, Nixon died of his wounds seven days later, and is buried in the Gettysburg National cemetery. He left behind a wife and several children.



*George Nixon*

### LEWIS POWELL

Late on the afternoon of July $2^{nd}$, the second day of the battle, a Confederate private named Lewis Powell was captured when his regiment, the $2^{nd}$ Florida, attacked toward Cemetery Ridge. Powell had suffered a wrist wound, so was sent to a POW hospital at Gettysburg College. In September, he was transferred to a hospital in Baltimore. Within a week he escaped, possibly with the help of a volunteer nurse, and fled to Alexandria, Virginia. After riding with the Confederate cavalry for about a year, he deserted and went back to Baltimore, apparently to live with the nurse who aided his escape. At some point along the way, he became involved with the Confederate Secret Service and met John Surratt. Powell adopted the alias of Lewis Paine.



*Lewis Powell being held before his trial on the Union Monitor USS Saugus at the Washington Naval Yard.*

Eventually, John Surratt got Powell involved with John Wilkes Booth's plans to assassinate President Lincoln. Powell's assignment on the night that Booth shot Lincoln was to kill Secretary of State William Seward. He came close. The hulking Powell arrived at Seward's home armed with at least one revolver and a large Bowie knife. Saying that he had medicine for the Secretary, he talked his way past the servant at the door. He then proceeded upstairs, where Seward was confined to bed because of injuries resulting from a recent carriage accident. In the upper hallway, Powell encountered Frederick Seward, the Secretary's son, and attempted to shoot him, but the gun misfired. He then pistol-whipped Frederick so hard that the gun was broken and Frederick was

left lying in a pool of blood, his skull cracked. Dashing into the bedroom, Powell knocked Seward's daughter unconscious and slashed a male army nurse. Then he turned to Seward who was lying groggy in his sick bed. The assailant slashed at Seward's face and throat, cutting his cheek severely and both sides of his neck. But Seward's life was saved by a metal neck brace, a legacy of the carriage accident. Afterwards, Seward was so sensitive about his facial disfigurement from the attack that he refused to have photographs taken from his right side.

Powell's bloodletting was not finished. Another of Seward's sons rushed into the room and was stabbed seven times. The army nurse recovered enough from his wound that he attempted to grapple with Powell, and received four more knife thrusts. As Powell fled out the front door, he encountered a hapless State Department messenger and stabbed the man in the chest. The attacker then fled down the street shouting "I'm mad! I'm mad!" Incredibly, all five of Powell's victims survived.

Powell attempted to escape on horseback but either was thrown or fell off. He hid out for three days, then, not knowing what else to do, went back to Mary Surratt's boarding house, where he had lived and the conspirators had met a number of times. He had the bad luck to arrive just as she was being arrested as a suspect. When asked why he was there at that time of night, the slow-thinking Powell claimed he had been hired to dig a ditch. Mrs. Surratt insisted that she did not know who he was. Suspicious police arrested him.

There was no escape for Lewis Powell this time. He was hanged in July 1865 with three other conspirators.

## 1ST MINNESOTA

July 2nd, 1863 found the 1st Minnesota, the only Minnesota regiment at Gettysburg, stationed on Cemetery Ridge after an exhausting 33-mile march on June 29th. During the march the regiment's commander, Colonel William Colvill had been placed under arrest for allowing some of his men to cross a stream using logs. Union corps and division commanders were pressing their men hard to move on Gettysburg as quickly as possible and felt that behavior like this slowed down the entire army, so such arrests of lower ranking officers were not uncommon. When the regiment reached Gettysburg, Colvill's request to be released from arrest was granted and he resumed command.

The Minnesotans were held in reserve on Cemetery Ridge when Dan Sickles made the ill-fated move of his corps off the ridge and to the west. They watched as the Confederates smashed into Sickles' men in the Peach Orchard, the Wheatfield and

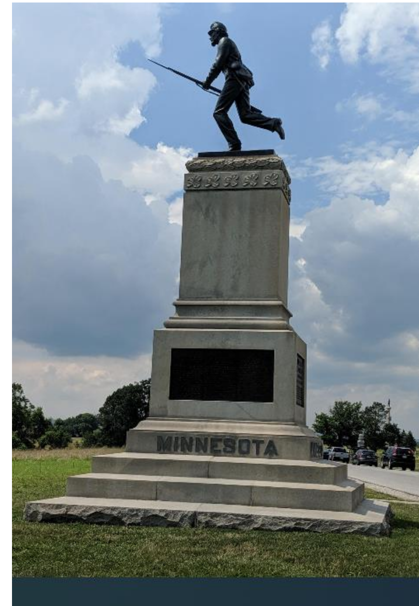
Devil's Den. They could see parts of the Union line crumble as some regiments made orderly withdrawals while others broke and fled. Driving the Yanks was a seemingly endless line of soldiers in gray. The men from Minnesota knew it was only a matter of time before the battle reached them.

Soon panicked Union soldiers started pouring back through the Minnesotans. Colvill, an imposing six feet five inches, tried to stop them and some of his men tackled the fugitives, but to no avail. Then a tall man on horseback rode up and the men immediately recognized the imposing figure as their Corps Commander, General Winfield Scott Hancock. "Hancock the Superb" they called him, in reference to the description that George McClellan had applied to Hancock in a previous battle. He lived up to it this day at Gettysburg, dashing about the field and throwing regiment after regiment into the fray in a frenzied attempt to stop the Confederate onslaught.

Now here was Hancock, as usual cutting a splendid figure with sparkling white shirt collar and cuffs (even other generals could not understand how he maintained such finery in the field), once more casting about for some way to stem the Confederate tide. When he spied the 262 men of the 1st Minnesota, he cried out "My God! Are these all of the men we have here?" Looking east he could see that the nearest reinforcements were at least five minutes away. Looking west he could see the steady advance of a 1400-man Rebel brigade. It was a dire situation, and Hancock did not hesitate.

"What regiment is this?" demanded Hancock. "First Minnesota," replied Colvill. Pointing at the Rebel flag leading the oncoming Confederates, Hancock ordered, "Advance, Colonel, and take those colors!"

Colvill and every man in the regiment knew what they were being asked to do. It was a forlorn hope, but a few precious minutes must be bought. Colvill turned to his men and shouted, "Will you go along?" It was not so much a question as a command. Then he ordered, "Forward, double-quick." The regiment advanced down the slope of Cemetery Ridge into the swale at the bottom where flowed a small stream called Plum Run. Entering the swale from the other side was the Alabama brigade whose colors had been targeted by Hancock. Confederate cannon started to pelt the small Union regiment and minie balls whizzed around and into the men. The Minnesotans started to trot then sped up as the Alabamians crossed Plum Run. When the Yanks closed to about thirty yards, Colvill shouted "Charge!" and the men in blue lowered their bayonets and careened into the Rebel line, sending it reeling. Then they paused at the stream to unleash their first volley into the Confederates. The men in gray were shocked by the assault and their momentum was checked. Outnumbered, the surviving Northerners took cover behind the low bank of the streambed, behind trees and rocks, and traded fire with the Rebels. The minutes ticked by – five, six, seven, ten – as the struggle raged on. Finally, Union reinforcements arrived, causing the Alabamians to give up the fight along Plum Run and back off to a safer position.



*1st Minnesota monument on Cemetery Ridge where they began their famous charge.*

There is some discussion today as to whether the 1st Minnesota actually "saved the day" there on the banks of Plum Run. But Winfield Hancock voiced no doubt. "I had no alternative but to order the regiment in," he later wrote. "We had no force on hand to meet the sudden emergency. Troops had been ordered up and were coming on the run, but I saw that in some way five minutes must be gained or we were lost…. I knew they must lose heavily and it caused me pain to give the order for them to advance, but I would have done it if I had known every man would be killed. It was a sacrifice that must be made. The superb gallantry of those men saved our line from being broken. No soldiers, on any field, in this or any other country, ever displayed grander heroism."

Thankfully, not every man in the 1st Minnesota was killed, but the losses were horrific. Of the 262 men who were thrown at the advancing Rebels, 215 became casualties, including 40 deaths. Only 47 men stood in the ranks when the regiment reformed after the fight. The colors had fallen five times only to be picked up and held high again and again. They are now on display in the rotunda of the Minnesota Capital. Among the wounded was William Colvill, the man who had requested to be released from arrest so he could lead his regiment. Although needing use of a cane for the rest of his days, Colvill would recover and live to age 75, dying in his sleep in 1905.

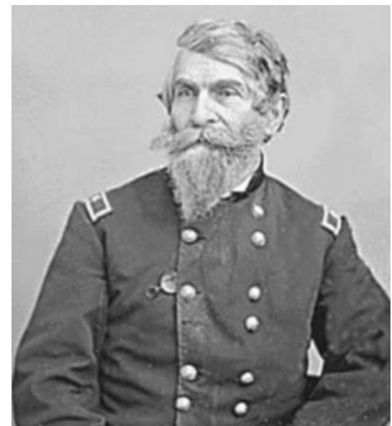
The 1st Minnesota's 82% casualty rate was the highest of any Union regiment in the Battle of Gettysburg, and, by some accounts, in the entire war.
After their devastating charge on July 2nd, the remainder of the 1st Minnesota was moved to a more peaceful place on the Union line – a couple of hundred yards south of a little copse of trees in the center of the Union line on Cemetery Ridge. Here on July 3rd they endured the tremendous Confederate cannonade and helped repulse Pickett's charge. On this day they suffered another 45 casualties.

There are three 1st Minnesota monuments on the Gettysburg battlefield. In 1867 the regiment placed a small urn in the Minnesota section of the Soldiers National Cemetery. This was the first stone monument on the battlefield, previous markers having been fashioned from wood. There is also a small marker near the Copse of Trees where the regiment met Pickett's Virginians. The third, and most impressive, monument was erected in 1897 at the spot on Cemetery Ridge where General Hancock had started them on their heroic charge. Atop a tall granite base emblazoned with "Minnesota" is a soldier at the "double quick" heading into the ravine where the 1st would meet its destiny.

**"PAP" GREENE, THE ENGINEER WHO SAVED CULP'S HILL**

Most of the combat at Gettysburg was what they used to call "a stand-up fight", with soldiers standing in two opposing lines and blazing away at each other. Here and there, men fought from behind low stone walls or threw up makeshift barricades to offer some protection. But for most, it was pretty much a matter of being erect out in the open while bullets zipped around – or into – them.

The most significant exception to this at Gettysburg was on Culp's Hill. The Confederates had lost an opportunity to occupy the hill on July 1st, before the Yankees got there. But on the evening of the 1st and the morning of the 2nd, the Yankees rushed an entire division to the hill, and the Rebs could only sit by and listen to the work of axes and shovels as the men in blue constructed breastworks, chest-high walls of rocks, trees, earth and anything else they could lay their hands on. If the Confederates wanted Culp's Hill now, they would have to push the Federal's off.


General George "Pap" Greene

John Geary, who commanded the division on Culp's Hill was opposed to fighting from behind earthworks because it "spoiled" the men and made them less courageous for open-field fighting, a view held by many high-ranking officers in both North and South. Brigadier General George Greene, in command of the brigade at the crest of the hill, scoffed at this theory and proceeded to have his men build the strongest works they could in preparation for the attack he was sure would be coming. It would be a fortuitous decision.

George Greene came from a wealthy shipping family, but they fell on hard times after the War of 1812. A bright student, he had hoped to attend college, but financial considerations forced him to go to work in a New York City dry goods store. One day he happened to meet Major Sylvanus Thayer, the Superintendent of West Point. Thayer was impressed by the young man and arranged for Greene to attend the military academy. Greene graduated second in his class in 1823 with such a good academic record that he was assigned to teach mathematics and engineering at the academy. One of his students was Cadet Robert E. Lee.

Greene married and fathered three children, but his wife and children all died within a seven-month period in 1833 from what is believed to be tuberculosis. He resigned from the Army in 1836 to become a civil engineer. He built railroads in six states and designed sewage and water systems for several cities, including Washington, D.C. and Detroit. Other projects included a reservoir and bridge in New York City. He remarried and fathered six more children.

George Greene was sixty-one years old and had been out of the army for twenty-five years when hostilities broke out between North and South. Although he had no political leanings, he felt strongly that the Union must be preserved, so it did not take long for him to join up as a volunteer. He was appointed a regimental commander and soon was promoted to brigade leadership. By then his hair was gray and he sported a broad mustache and pointed beard. Despite his age, he quickly earned a reputation as a tough soldier whose men held their ground. Greene's men had initially derisively referred to him as "Old Man Greene" or "Pap", but before long these became terms of respect.

When James Longstreet started his attack on Sickles' salient west of Cemetery Ridge on July 2nd, Generals Meade and Hancock pulled units from anywhere they could to throw into the fight. Soon, Culp's Hill was being stripped and Greene's brigade was spread thin to man earthworks that were meant for a much larger force. About 7:00 that evening, 4,700 Confederates attacked George Greene's 1,400-man brigade. Despite being so heavily outnumbered, the Federals held, thanks in great part to the old engineer's insistence that his men build breastworks. One Rebel claimed "in some places they could scarcely be surmounted without scaling ladders." A New York officer maintained that "Without breastworks our line would have been swept away in an instant by the hailstorm of bullets and the flood of men."

The fight raged on into the darkness and in the thick woods the opposing lines could only be identified by muzzle flashes. Reinforcements totaling about 750 men were rushed to Pap's aid, and they helped to bolster troops who by now were running low on ammunition. But the Rebels kept coming again and again, and finally took possession of some of the Union earthworks near the lower slope of the hill. The fighting died down about 10:30, with the Yanks stubbornly dug in on the top of Culp's Hill and Rebs holding the bottom.

By the next morning, both the Union and Confederate forces on Culp's Hill had been strongly reinforced, and both sides were determined to drive out the enemy. The fighting was vicious all along the line. By the time it petered out about 11:00 AM, the Yankees had regained possession of all of Culp's Hill and the Rebels withdrew, having lost about two men for every Yankee casualty. The one-sided fight was due in large part to Pap Greene, the old engineer.

Pap returned to engineering after the war, and was the chief engineer commissioner of the Croton Aqueduct Department in New York. Still a tough old bird, at the age of 86 he conducted a walking inspection of the entire 30-mile Croton Aqueduct.

By 1892 Greene was the oldest surviving Union general and the oldest living West Point graduate. With the intent of taking care of his family after his death, he petitioned Congress for a captain's pension. It took two years, but with the help of Daniel Sickles he was able to get a first lieutenant's pension, since this was the highest rank he had attained in the regular army. In order to qualify, Greene was sworn into the army again for 48 hours, making him the oldest first lieutenant at the age of 93.

Pap Greene died in 1899 at age 97. His grave in Morristown, Rhode Island is topped with a two-ton boulder from Culp's Hill. In 1907 on the crest of the hill at Gettysburg where he helped to save the Union right, a statue of Greene was erected, his arm raised as he points toward the attacking Confederates.

*"Pap" Greene statue on Culp's Hill. Culp's Hill Observation Tower is in the right background.*