**DOCUMENT LISTS FOR 11TH GRADE:**

**DOCUMENT LIST FOR SIDE A:**

 **Document A:** Report of Col. Joshua L. Chamberlain, Twentieth

Maine Infantry. Gettysburg Campaign. July 6, 1863.

 **Document B:** Tom Desjardin, *Stand Firm, Ye Boys from Maine*

(New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

 **Document C:** “Letter to the Governor of Maine after Gettysburg.”

*Bangor Whig and Courier,* Jul. 1863.

 **Document D:** “A Bayonet Charge the Last Hope.” (Medal of Honor

Recommendation). 1893.

**DOCUMENT LIST FOR SIDE B:**

 **Document F:** Letter from Joshua L. Chamberlain to Governor

[Israel] Washburn, Brunswick, July 14, 1862.

 **Document G:** Eloise Jordon, ”Joshua Chamberlain: One of Maine’s

Greatest Men,” *Lewiston Journal*, 1982.

 **Document H:** Martin Pengelly, “The Maine Lesson of Gettysburg: Real History is Never So Romantic as Reel,” *The Guardian*, 2013.

 **Document I:** Letter from Joshua L. Chamberlain to his father,

Brunswick, February 20, 1865.

**DOCUMENT A (Political):** Report of Col. Joshua L. Chamberlain, Twentieth

Maine Infantry. Gettysburg Campaign. July 6, 1863.

**Report of Col. Joshua L. Chamberlain, Twentieth Maine Infantry.**

**Gettysburg Campaign**

**O.R.--SERIES I--VOLUME XXVII/1 [S# 43]**

**FIELD NEAR EMMITSBURG, July 6, 1863.**

**Lieut. GEORGE B. HERENDEEN,**

**A. A. A. G., Third Brig., First Div., Fifth Army Corps.**

SIR: In compliance with the request of the colonel commanding the brigade, I have the honor to submit a somewhat detailed report of the operations of the Twentieth Regiment Maine Volunteers in the battle of Gettysburg, on the 2d and 3d instant.

Having acted as the advance guard, made necessary by the proximity of the enemy's cavalry, on the march of the clay before, my command on reaching Hanover, Pa., just before sunset on that day, were much worn, and lost no time in getting ready for an expected bivouac. Rations were scarcely issued, and the men about preparing supper, when rumors

that the enemy had been encountered that day near Gettysburg absorbed every other interest, and very soon orders came to march forthwith to Gettysburg.

My men moved out with a promptitude and spirit extraordinary, the cheers and welcome they received on the road adding to their enthusiasm. After an hour or two of

sleep by the roadside just before daybreak, we reached the heights southeasterly of

Gettysburg at about 7 a.m., July 2.

Massed at first with the rest of the division on the right of the road, we were moved several times farther toward the left. Although expecting every moment to be put into

action and held strictly in line of battle, yet the men were able to take some rest and make the most of their rations.

Somewhere near 4 p.m. a sharp cannonade, at some distance to our left and front, was the signal for a sudden and rapid movement of our whole division in the direction of this firing, which grew warmer as we approached. Passing an open field in the hollow ground in

which some of our batteries were going into position, our brigade reached the skirt of a piece of woods, in the farther edge of which there was a heavy musketry fire, and when

about to go forward into line we received from Colonel Vincent, commanding the brigade, orders to move to the left at the double-quick, when we took a farm road crossing Plum

Run in order to gain a rugged mountain spur called Granite Spur, or Little Round Top.

The enemy's artillery got range of our column as we were climbing the spur, and the crashing of the shells among the rocks and the tree tops made us move lively along the crest. One or two shells burst in our ranks. Passing to the southern slope of Little Round

Top, Colonel Vincent indicated to me the ground my regiment was to occupy, informing me that this was the extreme left of our general line, and that a desperate attack was expected

in order to turn that position, concluding by telling me I was to" hold that ground at all hazards." This was the last word I heard from him.

In order to commence by making my right firm, I formed my regiment on the right into line, giving such direction to the line as should best secure the advantage of the rough,

rocky, and stragglingly wooded ground.

The line faced generally toward a more conspicuous eminence southwest of ours, which is known as Sugar Loaf, or Round Top. Between this and my position intervened a

smooth and thinly wooded hollow. My line formed, I immediately detached Company B, Captain Morrill commanding, to extend from my left flank across this hollow as a line of skirmishers, with directions to act as occasion might dictate, to prevent a surprise on my exposed flank and rear.

The artillery fire on our position had meanwhile been constant and heavy, but my formation was scarcely complete when the artillery was replaced by a vigorous infantry

assault upon the center of our brigade to my right, but it very soon involved the right of my regiment and gradually extended along my entire front. The action was quite sharp and at

close quarters.

In the midst of this, an officer from my center informed me that some important movement of the enemy was going on in his front, beyond that of the line with which we were engaged. Mounting a large rock, I was able to see a considerable body of the enemy moving by the flank in rear of their line engaged, and passing from the direction of the foot

of Great Round Top through the valley toward the front of my left. The close engagement not allowing any change of front, I immediately stretched my regiment to the left, by taking intervals by the left flank, and at the same time "refusing" my left wing, so that it was nearly at right angles with my right, thus occupying about twice the extent of our ordinary front,

some of the companies being brought into single rank when the nature of the ground gave sufficient strength or shelter. My officers and men understood wishes so well that this movement was executed under fire, the right wing keeping up fire, without giving the

enemy any occasion to seize or even to suspect their advantage. But we were not a moment

too soon; the enemy's flanking column having gained their desired direction, burst upon my left, where they evidently had expected an unguarded flank, with great demonstration.

We opened a brisk fire at close range, which was so sudden and effective that they soon fell back among the rocks and low trees in the valley, only to burst forth again with a shout,

and rapidly advanced, firing as they came. They pushed up to within a dozen yards of us before the terrible effectiveness of our fire compelled them to break and take shelter.

They renewed the assault on our whole front, and for an hour the fighting was severe. Squads of the enemy broke through our line in several places, and the fight was literally

hand to hand. The edge of the fight rolled backward and forward like a wave. The dead and wounded were now in our front and then in our rear. Forced from our position, we

desperately recovered it, and pushed the enemy down to the foot of the slope. The intervals of the struggle were seized to remove our wounded (and those of the enemy also), to

gather ammunition from the cartridge-boxes of disabled friend or foe on the field, and even

to secure better muskets than the Enfields, which we found did not stand service well. Rude shelters were thrown up of the loose rocks that covered the ground.

Captain Woodward, commanding the Eighty-third Pennsylvania Volunteers, on my right, gallantly maintaining his fight, judiciously and with hearty co-operation made his

movements conform to my necessities, so that my right was at no time exposed to a flank

attack.

The enemy seemed to have gathered all their energies for their final assault. We had gotten our thin line into as good a shape as possible, when a strong force emerged from the scrub wood in the valley, as well as I could judge, in two lines in echelon by the right, and, opening a heavy fire, the first line came on as if they meant to sweep everything before them. We opened on them as well as we could with our scanty ammunition snatched from the field.

It did not seem possible to withstand another shock like this now coming on. Our loss had been severe. One-half of my left wing had fallen, and a third of my regiment lay just behind us, dead or badly wounded. At this moment my anxiety was increased by a great roar of musketry in my rear, on the farther or northerly slope of Little Round Top, apparently on the flank of the regular brigade, which was in support of Hazlett's battery on the crest behind us. The bullets from this attack struck into my left rear, and I feared that the enemy might have nearly surrounded the Little Round Top, and only a desperate chance was left for us. My ammunition was soon exhausted. My men were firing their last shot and getting ready to "club" their muskets.

It was imperative to strike before we were struck by this overwhelming force in a

hand-to-hand fight, which we could not probably have withstood or survived. 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 sprang forward upon the enemy, now not 30

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 which 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.

Meantime Captain Morrill with his skirmishers (sent out from my left flank), with some

dozen or fifteen of the U.S. Sharpshooters who had put themselves under his direction, fell upon the enemy as they were breaking, and by his demonstrations, as well as his well-

directed fire, added much to the effect of the charge.

Having thus cleared the valley and driven the enemy up the western slope of the Great

Round Top, not wishing to press so far out as to hazard the ground I was to hold by leaving it exposed to a sudden rush of the enemy, I succeeded (although with some effort to stop

my men, who declared they were "on the road to Richmond") in getting the regiment into

good order and resuming our original position.

Four hundred prisoners, including two field and several line officers, were sent to the rear. These were mainly from the Fifteenth and Forty-seventh Alabama Regiments, with

some of the Fourth and Fifth Texas. One hundred and fifty of the enemy were found killed

and wounded in our front.

At dusk, Colonel Rice informed me of the fall of Colonel Vincent, which had devolved the command of the brigade on him, and that Colonel Fisher had come up with a brigade to

our support. These troops were massed in our rear. It was the understanding, as Colonel Rice informed me, that Colonel Fisher's brigade was to advance and seize the western slope of Great Round Top, where the enemy had shortly before been driven. But, after considerable delay, this intention for some reason was not carried into execution.

We were apprehensive that if the enemy were allowed to strengthen himself in that

position, he would have a great advantage in renewing the attack on us at daylight or before. Colonel Rice then directed me to make the movement to seize that crest.

It was now 9 p.m. Without waiting to get ammunition, but trusting in part to the very circumstance of not exposing our movement or our small front by firing, and with bayonets

fixed, the little handful of 200 men pressed up the mountain side in very extended order, as

the steep and jagged surface of the ground compelled. We heard squads of the enemy failing back before us, and, when near the crest, we met a scattering and uncertain fire,

which caused us the great loss of the gallant Lieutenant Linscott, who fell, mortally wounded. In the silent advance in the darkness we laid hold of 25 prisoners, among them a staff officer of General [E. M.] Law, commanding t-he brigade immediately opposed to us during the fight. Reaching the crest, and reconnoitering the ground, I placed the men in a

strong position among the rocks, and informed Colonel Rice, requesting also ammunition and some support to our right, which was very near the enemy, their movements and

words even being now distinctly heard by us.

Some confusion soon after resulted from the attempt of some regiment of Colonel

Fisher's brigade to come to our support. They had found a wood road up the mountain, which brought them on my right flank, and also in proximity to the enemy, massed a little below. Hearing their approach, and thinking a movement from that quarter could only be from the enemy, I made disposition to receive them as such. In the confusion which attended the attempt to form them in support of my right, the enemy opened a brisk fire, which disconcerted my efforts to form them and disheartened the supports themselves, so that I saw no more of them that night.

Feeling somewhat insecure in this isolated position, I sent in for the Eighty-third

Pennsylvania, which came speedily, followed by the Forty-fourth New York, and, having seen these well posted, I sent a strong picket to the front, with instructions to report to me

every half hour during the night, and allowed the rest of my men to sleep on their arms.

At some time about midnight, two regiments of Colonel Fisher's brigade came up the mountain beyond my left, and took position near the summit; but as the enemy did not

threaten from that direction, I made no effort to connect with them.

We went into the fight with 386, all told--358 guns. Every pioneer and musician who could carry a musket went into the ranks. Even the sick and foot-sore, who could not keep up in the march, came up as soon as they could find their regiments, and took their places

in line of battle, while it was battle, indeed. Some prisoners I had under guard, under sentence of court-martial, I was obliged to put into the fight, and they bore their part well, for which I shall recommend a commutation of their sentence.

The loss, so far as I can ascertain it, is 136--30 of whom were killed, and among the

wounded are many mortally.

Captain Billings, Lieutenant Kendall, and Lieutenant Linscott are officers whose loss we deeply mourn-- efficient soldiers, and pure and high-minded men.

In such an engagement there were many incidents of heroism and noble character

which should have place even in an official report; but, under present circumstances, I am unable to do justice to them. I will say of that regiment that the resolution, courage, and

heroic fortitude which enabled us to withstand so formidable an attack have happily led to

so conspicuous a result that they may safely trust to history to record their merits.

About noon on the 3d of July, we were withdrawn, and formed on the right of the brigade, in the front edge of a piece of woods near the left center of our main line of battle,

where we were held in readiness to support our troops, then receiving the severe attack of the afternoon of that day.

On the 4th, we made a reconnaissance to the front, to ascertain the movements of the enemy, but finding that they had retired, at least beyond Willoughby's Run, we returned to

Little Round Top, where we buried our dead in the place where we had laid them during

the fight, marking each grave by a head-board made of ammunition boxes, with each dead soldiers name cut upon it. We also buried 50 of the enemy's dead in front of our position of

July 2. We then looked after our wounded, whom I had taken the responsibility of putting into the houses of citizens in the vicinity of Little Round Top, and, on the morning of the

5th, took up our march on the Emmitsburg road.

I have the honor to be, your obedient servant, JOSHUA L. CHAMBERLAIN, Colonel, Commanding Twentieth Maine Volunteers.

**DOCUMENT B (Political):** Tom Desjardin, “American Legend, American Shrine,” in *Stand Firm, Ye Boys from Maine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

***You were making history. The world has recorded for you more than you have written. The centuries to come will share and recognize the victory won here with growing gratitude.***

***Joshua Chamberlain, 1889***

As Joshua Chamberlain looked out upon the surviving veterans of the regiment that he had commanded to an unlikely victory on Vincent's Spur thirty-five years earlier, he struggled to put into words the meaning of the event that had so greatly transformed his life, and the lives of many of his men. His foresight was remarkable. The world has continued to record the events on the spur to an extent beyond what the veterans themselves wrote and, as he foretold, the centuries have recognized the events with growing gratitude and importance. Such is the place that the Civil War, and Gettysburg in particular, has grown to occupy in the American psyche.

Carefully examined, the spur is a worthless piece of land. Two hundred feet in diameter, it is little more than a pile of loose rocks and large boulders of no monetary or agricultural value whatsoever. Neither cows nor sheep could or would graze on the stony slopes, trees do not grow straight, tall, or plentifully in its shallow soil, and it yields neither water nor minerals. Yet despite its uselessness, it has become a national shrine, attracting as many as a million visitors each year.

In spite of its apparent uselessness, it has become the object of a pilgrimage for thousands of people for many reasons. The romantic nature of the legend, the military significance of the maneuvering and, in no small measure, the eloquence of Joshua Chamberlain, have attracted Americans and travelers from abroad for more than a century. It is the meaning of the place, interpreted differently by nearly every visitor, that brings them; meaning that commanders of both armies attributed to the hill in 1863, and veterans and historians have confirmed ever since. By many of these, the events that took place on Little Round Top have come to represent the hinge upon which the Civil War swung.

It is not surprising that veterans of the fight above the Valley of Death viewed their part of the battle with higher significance than any other. What is surprising is that the significance spread to others, and with the possible exception of Pickett's Charge on the third day, no other portion of the battle-perhaps the entire war-has attained such extraordinary significance. Beginning with the resurgence of Civil War reminiscence in the 1880s,

veterans of all ranks began to publish their interpretation of what the Confederate assault and Federal defense of Little Round Top represented.



**Twentieth Maine Reunion on Vincent's Spur, 1889**

Somewhat unusual among these recollections was the candidness with which many Confederate commanders discussed their failure on Gettysburg's second day. Evander Law, commander of the Alabama brigade, described the opening moments of his brigade's approach toward Little Round Top saying, "Just here the battle of Gettysburg was lost to Confederate arms." James Longstreet, Law's corps commander, viewed with regret many different parts of the battle and chief among them was his failure to seize the hill on the far left of the Union line. "I was ten minutes late in occupying Little Round Top." Even Jefferson Davis attached great significance to the hill, saying that the men on Little Round Top foiled his plans.

As veterans placed such high significance on Little Round Top, it seems that a disproportionate share of this fell to the 20th Maine's position on the spur. To a large extent, this is the result of a lack of testimony about the fight on the right of Vincent's Brigade. Virtually everyone on the summit of Little Round Top who might have filed a report testifying to the desperation there either died or left their command in the area. Most notably, the commanders of two brigades, Weed and Vincent, fell mortally wounded, as did the battery commander, Hazlett.

…

With the exception of Chamberlain, not one commander above the rank of captain remained unharmed and at his regular post through the fight. At least partly as a result, details of the fight for the spur gained greater clarity and thus greater importance.

Another reason for the unbalanced importance of the spur has to do with the requirements of the struggle there. Unlike the other regiments of the brigade, the 20th Maine had to shift, maneuver, and protect a flank during the fight, and nothing scared Civil War soldiers more than the threat of being flanked. They accomplished this under the guidance of the newest colonel in the Fifth Corps, who performed his duties remarkably well, given his inexperience.

Herein lies the key to what really made Joshua Chamberlain a hero at Gettysburg. His country awarded him the Medal of Honor for "daring heroism and great tenacity in holding his position on the Little Round Top against repeated assaults, and carrying the advance position on the Great Round Top." Neither the citation nor Chamberlain himself ever tried

to depict him gloriously leading a desperate bayonet charge down the hill waving his sword over his head. That Joshua Chamberlain could stand up on the spur, given his health in the weeks prior to the battle, is itself a remarkable accomplishment. He learned from Ames the

importance of instilling confidence in his men by demonstrating personal bravery and coolness in the fight and this quality did more for his victory on the spur than the legend ever recorded. In perceiving Oates' movement and bending back his left, Chamberlain placed his men so that they delivered to the Alabamians the most destructive fire they ever

saw, and as the fight continued he stoically demonstrated his own confidence, walking calmly among his men. Chamberlain did all of this despite the desperate nature of the fight and while hobbled by a wound in each leg.

Where this confidence came from is difficult to determine. He was sick and weak. One brother was close behind. He ordered another, even nearer at hand, into a desperate place, doubting he would return unharmed. Chamberlain commanded a regiment worn from the march, inexperienced, and with half its normal officers. Neither he nor the ; regiment, save sixty-eight men of the 2nd Maine, had ever been in a stand-up fight before and certainly not one on a hill in the woods nearly cut off from their brigade. With all of this playing on his mind, Chamberlain suppressed youthful insecurities and doubts about his own abilities and commanded his men to legendary glory.

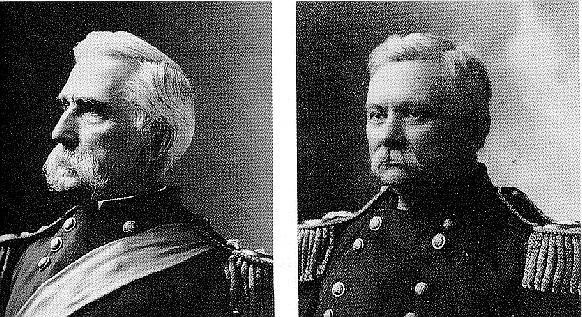
The modern image of courageous, cool-headed Maine men sweeping the field with a parade ground tactical maneuver is romantic, but belies the chaotic nature of the event. While many imagine the legendary right wheel of the 20th Maine's left wing, the men who are

said to have carried it out remembered something far more confused, with men running in every direction but the rear. The charge was less tactics and more instinct; adrenaline-

driven rather than the result of practiced maneuvering. No parade ground, where men practiced drill until their legs ached from the effort, ever had the slope of the spur, the boulders, trees, or gaps in the line that 30 percent casualties created in the 20th Maine that day.

The real significance of the charge from a military standpoint was not that it drove the Alabamians away from Little Round Top, they were ready to leave, charge or not. The rush down the sides of the spur brought into the hands of the Mainers at least ninety more captives who would otherwise have continued to fight for the Confederacy, and war is, after all, about diminishing the enemy's strength. In addition, the scattering effect of the charge on Oates and his men prevented them from holding Big Round Top as he had hoped.

Though unlikely, establishing a position on the larger hill in the night might have made Little Round Top untenable for the Federals. With seven hours of darkness and proper reinforcements, there is at least a slight possibility that Oates may have had his Gibraltar after all and, in preventing this, the charge of the 20th Maine may have indirectly saved Little Round Top.



**Joshua Chamberlain, 1905 - William C. Oates, 1899**

…

To Oates, only the combination of these two regiments, the 20th Maine and the 15th Alabama, could have ended with the same result. No other Southern unit could have come so close and no other Union regiment could have stopped him. Explaining the first and worst defeat his men ever experienced, he said, "There was no better regiment in the Confederate Army ... if it failed to carry any point against which it was thrown no other single regiment need try it... The other regiments of the brigade did their duty, but the Fifteenth struck the hardest knot." That knot was Chamberlain and his Mainers, and upon them he heaped great praise. "There never were harder fighters than the Twentieth Maine men and their gallant Colonel. His skill and persistency and the great bravery of his men saved Little Round Top and the Army of the Potomac from defeat. Great events sometimes turn on comparatively small affairs."

The real result of Gettysburg, and its primary importance as a military event, was the destruction of men and materiel that the Confederacy could not replace. This was Lee's risk when he launched the invasion ; into Pennsylvania and he lost the gambit. To this end, Gettysburg was a tremendous turning point. In that fundamental sense, the 20th Maine did its share, the charge contributing great significance to its role. The charge added nearly one hundred men to the Confederate loss. Men who might have escaped in an orderly Alabamian retreat. Overall, the Mainers inflicted one-and-a-half casualties for each one of their own against an Alabama force half again as large, depleting all three regiments by more than a third. But, back in Maine, three more regiments were headed out of Portland

that month, while Alabama, like most of its Southern counterparts, had but few more replacements.

For many people, Gettysburg was the central event of the mid- nineteenth century, and veterans of the war saw it as a measure of how significant one's war experience had been. For many Mainers, and certainly the 1,621 men who at one time or another appeared on the 20th Regiment's rolls, to have been on Little Round Top was to have participated in the most significant event of the war. It was the one great Union victory of the war's eastern theater, and the greatest of all in the minds of most veterans.

**DOCUMENT C (Political):** “Letter to the Governor of Maine after Gettysburg.”

*Bangor Whig and Courier,* Jul. 1863.

\*Viewable online only:

<http://www.joshualawrencechamberlain.com/gettysburgletter.php>

**Document D (Political):** “A Bayonet Charge the Last Hope.” (Medal of Honor

Recommendation). 1893.

\*Viewable online only:

<http://www.joshualawrencechamberlain.com/deedsofvalor.php>

**DOCUMENT F (Social):** Letter from Joshua L. Chamberlain to Governor

[Israel] Washburn, Brunswick, July 14, 1862.

**TEXT Background:**

As news of battles fought at distant places like Bull Run and Shiloh trickled back to

Brunswick, Chamberlain grew more interested in the conflict. With the casualties mounting at far off battlefields, including many Maine men, Chamberlain realized that his true

patriotic calling required him to offer his services to Governor Washburn, Maine and the

Union. He knew that military experience ran in his blood with the exceptional service of his grandfather in the War of 1812. He rationalized that if he combined this natural military

ability with his education and intelligence, he could become a very capable military commander. Chamberlain also had great confidence in his ability to recruit from the alumni of Bowdoin College to fill out the ranks of a regiment. In July of 1862, Chamberlain sent this

letter to Governor Washburn offering his services to the state.

Brunswick, July 14, 1862.

To His Excellency Governor Washburn[[1]](http://learn.bowdoin.edu/joshua-lawrence-chamberlain/documents/1862-07-14.html#_ftn1)

In pursuance of the offer of reinforcements for the war, I ask if your Excellency desires and will accept my service.

Perhaps it is not quite necessary to inform your Excellency who I am. I believe you will be satisfied with my antecedents. I am a son of Joshua Chamberlain of Brewer. For seven years past I have been Professor in Bowdoin College. I have always been interested in military matters, and what I do not know in that line I know how to learn.

Having been lately elected to a new department here, I am expecting to have leave, at the approaching Commencement, to spend a year or more in Europe, in the service of the College. I am entirely unwilling, however, to accept this offer, if my Country needs my service or example here.

Your Excellency presides over the Educational

as well as the military affairs of our State, and, I am well aware, appreciates the importance of sustaining our Institutions of Learning. You will therefore be able to decide where my influence is most needed.

But, I fear, this war, so costly of blood and treasure, will not cease until the men of the North are willing to leave good positions, and sacrifice the dearest personal interests, to rescue our Country from Desolation, and defend the National Existence against treachery at home and jeopardy abroad. This war must be ended, with a swift and strong hand; and

every man ought to come forward and ask to be placed at his proper post.

Nearly a hundred of those who have been my pupils, are now officers in our army; but there are many more all over our State, who, I believe, would respond with enthusiasm, if summoned by me, and who would bring forward men enough to fill up a Regiment at once. I can not free myself from my obligations here until the first week in August, but I do not

want to be the last in the field, if it can possibly be helped.

I am sensible that I am proposing personal sacrifices, which would not probably be demanded of me; but I believe this to be my duty, and I know I can be of service to my Country in this hour of peril.

I shall acquiesce in your decision Governor, whether I can best serve you here or in the field. I believe you will find me qualified for the latter as for the former, and I trust I may have the honor to hear a word from you, and I remain,

Yours to Command, J.L. Chamberlain

To His Excellency

The Governor

**Reference Information:**

Maine State Archives, Augusta, Maine, "Records Relating to the Career of Joshua Lawrence

Chamberlain."

[[1]](http://learn.bowdoin.edu/joshua-lawrence-chamberlain/documents/1862-07-14.html#_ftnref) Israel Washburn, Republican Governor of Maine from 1861 to 1863.

**DOCUMENT G (Social):** Eloise Jordon, “Joshua Chamberlain: One of Maine’s

Greatest Men,” *Lewiston Journal*, 1982.

\*Viewable online only:

[http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1899&dat=19820109&id=xl](http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1899&amp;dat=19820109&amp;id=xl0gAAAAIBAJ&amp;sjid=EmUFAAAAIBAJ&amp;pg=1386%2C1019495)

[0gAAAAIBAJ&sjid=EmUFAAAAIBAJ&pg=1386,1019495](http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1899&amp;dat=19820109&amp;id=xl0gAAAAIBAJ&amp;sjid=EmUFAAAAIBAJ&amp;pg=1386%2C1019495)

**DOCUMENT H (Social):** Martin Pengelly, “The Maine Lesson of Gettysburg: Real History is Never So Romantic as Reel,” *The Guardian*, 2013.

It's tempting to set up Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain as a liberal idol – sadly, the

Hollywood version of his battle isn't true



Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain. Photograph: US National Archives/Flickr commons

The story goes like this: 150 years ago today, Little Round Top was the key to the Union position at the battle of Gettysburg. If the Confederates had taken the hill, they would have won the battle. If the Confederates had won the battle, they would have won the war.

But the Confederates didn't take the hill, because [a professor of languages and rhetoric from Bowdoin College](http://learn.bowdoin.edu/joshua-lawrence-chamberlain/) commanded a bunch of Mainers in a heroic defence and, when their ammunition ran out, an even more heroic bayonet charge. Hollywood's version, in Gettysburg – a [Ted Turner-funded epic](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3by-Q722JUE) based on [The Killer Angels,](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/17/books/review/Donadio.t.html?_r=0) a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by Michael Shaara – goes like this:

Would that it were true. Would that the [American Civil War](http://www.theguardian.com/world/american-civil-war) was won by a "fighting professor" who looked like Jeff Daniels. (The only other actor I'd have play Chamberlain would be the other great Jeff, Jeff Bridges, [but as he rode with Quantrill](http://allgoodscivilwar.wordpress.com/2011/01/05/true-grit-and-confederate-irregular-warfare/) we'll count him out for now.)

The thing is, a lot of people think Chamberlain *did* win the war on Little Round Top, in the way portrayed onscreen. Until I sat down to write this piece, I did.

After reading The Killer Angels and making it through all 366 minutes of Gettysburg, I thought I knew what happened on Little Round Top: Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain became a hero. Of course, in the immediate circumstances of the battle he acted perfectly heroically, as did his men and theose who fought against them. But I *needed* Chamberlain to be

something greater. I wanted to see Chamberlain's war as a "good war", fought solely to end slavery, and Chamberlain thus as the ultimate good soldier, an educated man fighting for equality with a 20th [Maine](http://www.theguardian.com/world/maine) which seemed, in my somewhat diseased brain, more like some sort of soviet than a regiment. If such a soldier could have won such a war in such fashion, he could – with some poetic licence – be held up as an example to modern-day liberals, an inspiration for the fight against reaction and the right. That was what I intended to propose here.

I should, of course, have known much better. So should anyone – liberal or conservative, northerner or southerner, [history](http://www.theguardian.com/books/history) grad with a wildly overstated enthusiasm for 19th- century facial hair or normal person. The Killer Angels is a fiction, of which the film Gettysburg is an exaggeration. Such storytelling is hardly wrong – the book and the film are finely done. But it is the way such fictions assume the role of real history that is troubling. I should know, as ever since I took my degree I have said so at inordinate length to anyone unfortunate enough to be close by when some film or other has pretended [the Americans broke the Enigma code,](http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2009/feb/25/u-571-reel-history) or [Robin Hood had a mullet and a Californian drawl.](http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2009/jan/15/robin-hood-prince-of-thieves)

Regarding Chamberlain and Little Round Top, my fondly held view first began to wobble when, after watching and re-watching [Ken Burns' seminal documentary, The Civil War,](http://www.pbs.org/civilwar/) I read [Shelby Foote's The Civil War: a Narrative.](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/remember/jan-june05/foote_6-29.html) (Which I enjoyed, honestly, and not just because it means I can tell everyone I read the whole thing.) In the chapter titled Stars in their Courses, a description of the Gettysburg campaign so evocative [it was published as a separate book,](http://www.amazon.com/Stars-Their-Courses-Gettysburg-June-July/dp/0679601120) Foote mentions Chamberlain just once, thus:

The conflict was particularly desperate on the far left, where the 20th Maine, made up of lumberjacks and fishermen under Colonel Joshua Chamberlain, a former minister and Bowdoin professor, opposed the 15th [Alabama](http://www.theguardian.com/world/alabama) … composed for the most part of farmers.

Foote does write that the fight on Little Round Top might "perhaps" have decided the war. But of the commander of the side that won it, he says no more. Nothing about heroics. Nothing about eloquence under fire. This gave me pause. But Foote was a southerner and, more importantly, he was a novelist, not a historian. His book is a *literary* masterpiece. That explained that.

It took an excellent history of the fight for Little Round Top – Stand Firm Ye Boys from Maine – to dispel my wishful thinking for good. The book's author, [Thomas A Desjardin,](http://www.amazon.com/Thomas-A.-Desjardin/e/B001IXTXFQ) considers every contemporary and subsequent version and view of the fight, not just from the men of the 20th Maine but from the 15th Alabama, under Colonel William C Oates, who tried to take the hill from them. He thus produces a convincing picture of a haphazard, terrifying and – at the time and after, to combatants and historians alike – terminally confusing scrap. Desjardin also considers the historiography of Little Round Top, to the point of deconstructing his own title – a famous phrase which turns out to have been written in 1882 by a member of the 20th Maine who was in Philadelphia at the time of the battle.

As preparation for writing this piece, reading Desjardin – and indeed [Chamberlain's memoirs,](http://www.amazon.com/Autobiograhy-Chamberlain-Writings-Lawrence-ebook/dp/B008A5FVCY/ref%3Dsr_1_3?s=books&amp;ie=UTF8&amp;qid=1372702867&amp;sr=1-3&amp;keywords=joshua%2Blawrence%2Bchamberlain%2Bautobiography) James MacPherson's superb general history, [Battle Cry of Freedom,](http://www.amazon.com/Battle-Cry-Freedom-Oxford-History/dp/019516895X/ref%3Dsr_1_1?s=books&amp;ie=UTF8&amp;qid=1372702902&amp;sr=1-1&amp;keywords=battle%2Bcry%2Bof%2Bfreedom) and more – was priceless. It reminded me that though historical fiction and drama has its place, written history must be the first source for the lay reader as well as the specialist.

Jeff Daniels, standing at centre, portrays Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain in the 1993 film Gettysburg. Photograph: Allstar/Cinetext Collection/Sportsphoto/Allstar/Cinetext Collection

So far as any historian can be sure – and Desjardin has gone further towards certainty than anyone – the fight on Little Round Top was shaped by chance, circumstance and human error. By the time the Union troops came down the hill, the Confederates were exhausted and out of water: the men sent to fill their canteens had been captured. The Rebels' end

was hastened by a Union company who missed most of the fight, until an accident of geography brought it to them. The famous bayonet charge did not save the day, because the

day had already been saved. Nor did Chamberlain order the right wheel to the charge for which he has become known, partly thanks to Jeff Daniels and Ted Turner; he wasn't even sure he had completed any order at all, beyond shouting the word "bayonets". There was at the time – as after, as now, as forever – great confusion over who ordered the charge and how.

Little Round Top did not decide the fate of a nation. It was not a great victory for equality, light and good. [It was a horrible little fight in a large battle which was part of a vast, bloody and appalling war](http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2013/06/150-years-of-misunderstanding-the-civil-war/277022/) that we would do well to remember, primarily, that way. Had the Union soldiers lost it, the Confederates would not necessarily have won all else. After the Union won it, the Confederacy had not necessarily lost all else. After it, the war continued for two years.

Considering modern attitudes to Thomas Jefferson, the historian Gordon Wood wrote:

We make a great mistake in idolizing and making symbols of authentic figures, who cannot and should not be ripped out of their time and place.

Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain was a brave man who lived a fascinating life – he survived illness and serious wounds, presided over the surrender of arms at Appomattox, and later won four terms as governor of his state. (He was against the prohibition of alcohol but in favour of capital punishment. Wood really does have a point.) What he did on 2 July 1863 makes for a hell of a story. But as anyone reading The Killer Angels, watching Gettysburg or walking the battlefield should remember with every page, frame and footstep, a hell of

story is not the same thing as a proper history.

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**DOCUMENT I (Social):** Letter from Joshua L. Chamberlain to his father, Brunswick, February 20, 1865.

Dear Father,

I appreciate fully the view you + Mother take of the Collectorship offered me. It is natural and proper advice, + such as I certainly expected. But my own consideration of the subject has not, as yet, brought me to favor the proposal any more than at first.

I owe the Country three years service. It is a time when every man should stand by his guns.

And I am not scared or hurt enough yet to be willing to face to the rear, when other men are marching to the front.

It is true my incomplete recovery from my wounds would make a more quiet life desirable, +

when I think of my young + dependent family the whole strength of that motive to make the most of my life comes over me.

But there is no promise of life in peace, + no decree of death in war. And I am so confident of

the sincerity of my motives that I can trust my own life + the welfare of my family in the hands of

Providence.

And then as far as mere human probabilities go, my position + prospects in the Army were never better. I am now among the senior officers of my rank. And after all I have gone through, I am not willing to back out just at the decisive moment, + leave the rewards + honors of my toil + sufferings to others. I had a great deal rather see another man in that Custom House, than see another next commander of the 1st Division.[1] Nor will my claims be any less for an honorable post in civil life after still longer + better service in the Field, nor for having declined advantageous offers for myself personally, rather than to abandon our cause in the hour of its need.

At all events I must return to the army, and if I find I cannot stand it I shall not be foolish

about it but shall take proper care of myself.

I shall leave tomorrow. Have not yet been out of the house, but think I can bear the journey. Am sorry not to have seen you before leaving. Will write as soon as I reach the front.

Your aff. son

Lawrence