

“In great deeds...”

By Charles S. Stuart

Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, from Maine, was a professor of theology when he volunteered to serve his country during the Civil War. Wounded many times, he fought in 24 separate engagements including names that speak of the frightful cost of preserving the nation - Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Petersburg, Gettysburg, White Oak Lane - and was given the high honor of receiving the formal surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox.

At Gettysburg, Chamberlain's regiment, the 20th Maine, was rushed to the top of a heavily wooded hill on the outskirts of the town - at the far southern end of the Union line - just as two regiments from Alabama charged through the woods to take the hill. Six charges were repulsed with heavy loss of life and scores of wounded on both sides, including the wounded Colonel Chamberlain.

Seeing the Alabamians forming for another charge - and knowing his men, unreinforced and alone, were almost out of ammunition - Chamberlain heard the words of his commander ringing in his ears - "The army's line stops here. You are the end of the line. Hold this hill at all costs...even to the last." Chamberlain knew that if this hill fell, the Union army would be beaten - and if it were beaten, there would be little to stop the capture of Washington by Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia.

Chamberlain, sensing a moment in time that would change history - a desperate, horrible, dangerous moment - ordered his men to fix bayonets and charge down the hill into the gathering Southerners. The shock of their attack broke over the Alabamians in a wave sending the butternut clad Southerners reeling from the hill.

I hope you are inspired by the story of an American who could not do much - he commanded less than 500 men that fateful July 2nd in 1863 - yet he knew that he must do what he could with what he had and leave the outcome to God.

36 years later, Chamberlain said these words in a moving speech dedicating the monument to the 20th Maine on that hill - Little Round Top. His words echo down the ages and call us to be a people of "power for the vision place of the soul."

“In great deeds, something abides. On great fields, something stays. Forms change and pass, bodies disappear but spirits linger to consecrate ground for the vision place of the soul.

And reverent men and women from afar, and generations that know us not and that we know not of, shall come here to ponder and to dream...and the power of the vision shall pass into their souls.”



Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain
Medal of Honor
Little Round Top
July 2, 1863
Gettysburg, PA

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