

**AMERICAN CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE OF AUSTRALIA
(NEW SOUTH WALES CHAPTER)**

**JOSHUA LAWRENCE CHAMBERLAIN
- MORE THAN JUST THE HERO OF
LITTLE ROUND TOP**



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“General, you have the soul of the lion and the heart of the woman”

- *General Horatio G. Sickel to General Joshua Chamberlain
at the Quaker Road, Virginia, March 29, 1865*

Introduction

Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain (JLC) is best remembered for his role at Gettysburg where he and the 20th Maine defended 'Little Round Top' and staged the infamous bayonet charge down the hill to thwart the 15th Alabama on Day two of this mighty battle.

There is much more to JLC, however, than just this battle alone. He was probably one of the most successful amateur soldiers who fought for the Union. He was wounded many times, received the Medal of Honor and went on to become the Governor of Maine.

This paper highlights the achievements of his life pre-War, during the War and post Civil War, ending in his death February 24, 1914.

On a personal note Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain has always been my favourite Civil War Soldier. Why? He fought for the Union, he was handsome, had a lovely moustache and Jeff Daniels played him in the film Gettysburg, (one of my favourite actors).

The Early Years

Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain was born on September 8, 1828 in Brewer, Maine, the eldest son of Joshua and Sarah Dupee Chamberlain. He was actually named Lawrence Joshua after Captain James Lawrence a hero from the War of 1812. JLC would reverse the order of his name when he went to college.

He was the oldest of five children, he had 3 brothers, Horace, Thomas and John and a sister Sarah. They were raised and worked on the family farm. Brewer was a small farming and shipping community that was located across the Penobscot River from Bangor.

His father intended for him to have a career in the military and wished him to go to West Point. In preparation for this JLC attended military school for a short period. His grandfather was a colonel of militias in the War of 1812 and his father was a lieutenant colonel of militia in Maine's Aroostook War, but his mother, a devout Christian, hoped he would join the ministry.

The 'Aroostook War' was a border conflict between Maine and New Brunswick in 1839. Nearly 50,00 troops were massed and Major General Winfield Scott was dispatched to work out an agreement between the parties. The Webster-Ashburton Treaty, hammered out in 1842 by U.S. Secretary of State Daniel Webster and English special minister Lord Ashburton, finally settled the question of where Maine's northeast boundary lay.

JLC decided to follow his mother's wishes and enter Bowdoin College. In order to qualify and pass the entrance exams, JLC was required to know Greek and Latin. He arranged tutors and in under a year taught himself the required languages and was admitted to the college in 1848.

Bowdoin was an all male college, primarily devoted to Congregationalist ministry. It was established in 1796 and almost 300 Bowdoin men served in the Civil War, amongst them Oliver Otis Howard. (The college would finally admit women in 1971) Whilst at Bowdoin JLC studied Latin, Greek, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics and Hebrew literature. When he graduated he was fluent in nine languages- Syriac, Arabic, French, Italian, Spanish, German and Mohawk.

Bowdoin College Chapel, Brunswick, ME.



A little known fact is JLC had a stammer and was reluctant to speak in class, he discovered that his stammer would vanish when he sang in the choir. He managed to overcome his stutter through sheer determination and eventually became an accomplished speaker.

Whilst at Bowdoin he was elected Phi Beta Kappa, belonged to the Peucinian Society and Alpha Delta Phi social fraternity and was a member of the "Round Table". During this period he studied under the Professor of Natural and Revealed Religion, Calvin Stowe, whose wife would hold social events for her husband's students and friends. She would later gain fame as the author of "Uncle Tom's Cabin", Harriet Beecher Stowe. He graduated from Bowdoin with a Bc. Degree in the Class of 1852.

It was during this time JLC met Francis Caroline Adams, known as Fannie, who was to be his future wife. She was the adopted daughter of the First Parish Church's pastor, the Rev George Adams. They were engaged in 1852, and spent the next few years apart. Fannie went to Georgia and taught piano and voice at a girls' school whilst JLC went to Bangor Theological Seminary.

Fannie returned to see him graduate from the Theological Seminary and receive his Masters degree from Bowdoin in 1855. He was offered part time work by Bowdoin College in the Department of Revealed and Natural Religion. He also began instructing in Logic (a mix of English Literature and writing), Natural theory and Greek.

JLC and Fannie were married, by her father, in December 1855. In October 1856, Fannie gave birth to their first child, Grace Dupee and this was followed by a son in 1857, who would only live a few hours. In 1858 they had another son, Harold Wyllys, and in 1860 and 1865 two girls, Emily Stelle and Gertrude Loraine who would both die before their first birthdays.

The next few years were quite pleasant for the Chamberlain family; he bought a house and his two surviving children were happy and well. He was teaching at Bowdoin College – (Rhetoric, German, Spanish). However, his dear brother Horace passed away from tuberculosis in 1861, an event which greatly saddened JLC.

At this time the United States were on the verge of Civil War. Abraham Lincoln was elected President and the eleven southern states had seceded from the union and declared themselves as the Confederate States of America.

JLC was moved to save the Union, (he was not known for his views on slavery). He wished to join up and wrote to the Governor of Maine offering his services. Both his wife and Bowdoin College, however, were reluctant to see him go. Bowdoin offered him two years leave of absence to travel to Europe and study languages. Instead he signed up and on the August 8, 1862 he was appointed Lieutenant Colonel of Maine's Twentieth Infantry Regiment where he was 2IC to the Regimental Commander, Colonel Adelbert Ames. The 20th Maine were part of the Third Brigade, First Division, Army of the Potomac's Fifth Corps.

Campaigns

Antietam / Sharpsburg: Sept 17, 1862

The 20th Maine saw no action in this battle as they were held in reserve. They were involved in a small skirmish on the 20th Sept.

Fredericksburg, December 1862

Commanded by Burnside, the union attempted to take Marye's Heights, the 20th were held in reserve and when ordered in were one of the last units to cross the river, they were soon trapped for the night on the hillside. JLC and the 20th Maine spent the night hidden behind a small wall and their dead comrades. They ministered to the dying on the field around them. It was a freezing night and they had left their gear behind in the town and so took coats and gear from the dead in an effort to keep warm.

They survived the night to be greeted by a hail of bullets at dawn. They made breastworks of their dead comrades. They were trapped there all day. The following night the order was given to them to withdraw. They were sent out again to form a picket line, and were almost overrun by the Confederates in their retreat across the Rappahannock.

Chancellorsville, May 1863

The 20th did not fight as they were sick after Smallpox vaccinations. However, they guarded the telegraph line. JLC did fight and eventually was promoted to Colonel on June 1863.

During this period JLC suffered from malaria and was also ill with sunstroke.

Gettysburg, July 1863

The greatest battle ever fought on the American continent. Day 2, the 20th Maine were the extreme left of the Union forces on Little Round Top. Their instructions were to "hold the line at all costs". JLC was riding up to Little Round Top, with his brothers, a shot went past close to their heads, he feared his mother would take it very hard if they were all killed and hence sent his brothers to different areas of the unit.

He had 350 men, they held their line, even though they were forced from their position some five times. A third of his men fell, and when they had run out of ammunition they fixed bayonets and charged down the hill. They surprised the Confederates, 15th Alabama, and held Little Round Top.

The following day they were sent to support Hancock's troops near the centre of the Union line, the point chosen for Pickett's Charge

After Gettysburg, JLC was given command of the Third Brigade. However, ill health forced him from the battlefield until August 1863. In November he became ill; again with malarial fever and returned home, he returned to Washington in February 1864 and was assigned to court martial duties.

Petersburg, June 1864

JLC was now in command of the First Brigade comprising five Pennsylvania regiments. Whilst leading his men in a charge, he was struck by a Minie ball. This bullet hit his right hip, passed through his pelvis, severed arteries and nicked his bladder. Fearing his soldiers would stop if he did, he pushed his sabre into the ground and leant on it, still encouraging his men, when they had passed he collapsed to the ground. He was not expected to live. His brother Tom tracked him down in a field hospital and the 20th Maine's doctor went to work. He was thought mortally wounded, and grave fears were held for his life. He was promoted to Brigadier General by Grant, the first promotion in the field by Grant.

JLC obituary appeared in the newspapers but he was made of sterner stuff, and was on the road to recovery. He was sent home to convalesce and returned to duty in November 1864. He was involved in a few campaigns but eventually had to have further surgery for his wounds and returned to Maine.

Quaker Road

It was here that he was wounded again and had a second obituary printed, this time a bullet, which passed through his horse, Charlemagne, struck him in the chest and was deflected by a small book in his pocket, the bullet injured his arm and ribs. He was knocked from his horse and rendered lifeless for several minutes.

After rejoining his troops he found himself facing Confederate soldiers, he dismounted and asked them to follow him, pretending to be a southerner and managed to capture a few of them.

In all JLC fought in over 20 battles and skirmishes. He was wounded many times, and in fact died in 1914 from his Petersburg wounds.

Post War life

JLC returned to teaching at Bowdoin, as well as travelling around Maine and lecturing on his war experiences.

He was approached by the Republican Party to become a candidate for Governor of Maine, he was chosen as the delegate and in September 1866 was elected Governor of Maine, he would successfully hold this position for 4 consecutive terms 1866- 1869. (Maine elected governors for one-year terms)

He made several achievements whilst Governor, he helped establish the College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts in Ornon, later to become the University of Maine. He looked for new avenues to bring investment to Maine and encouraged Scandanavian settlements in the area now called New Sweden. He also settled all debts between the state and civil war veterans.

JLC however was not overly popular with the Republican Party, he was at odds to some of their policy proposals. Against party wishes he opposed the impeachment of President Andrew Johnson in 1868.

In Maine he took a stand on Prohibition Law and capital punishment. He signed death warrants, unlike previous Maine Governors. It is believed his marriage was under strain at this time due to his absences in Augusta.

A return to his old career as teacher eventuated in 1871 when he was elected president of Bowdoin College. He had reform on his agenda and his goals included:

- Curriculum revision -development of a science and engineering department
- Relax discipline
- Introduction of military drill

He managed to abolish prayers before breakfast and at evenings, except Sundays and there were no classes to be held on Saturdays. He even suggested that women should be allowed to enter the college, something that did not occur until 1971. (That alone makes him a great man in my eyes). In the matter of military drill, JLC was a great supporter of this. Hence, Bowdoin formed several drill companies. This eventually resulted in the "Drill rebellion of 1874". The students refused to drill. They were told to drill or leave, they left. The majority returned within ten days, however, and the Board voted to make drill an optional activity and it was eventually abolished in 1883.

In another defeat for Chamberlain, in 1880 and 1881 the Board voted to discontinue both the Science and Engineering departments.

He travelled extensively during this time and served as the US Commissioner at the 1878 Paris Exposition, where he wrote a paper on European education and would receive a medal from the French Government. His family accompanied him and they were away for some six months.

Due to ill health he resigned as College President in 1883, but continued teaching until 1885 where his ill health forced him to step down. He remained on the Bowdoin College Board until his death.

In 1876 he was elected major general of Maine militia.

There was a notable event in Maine during this period in which JLC played a major role. The "Twelve Days" in January 1880. Maine was on the brink of civil war. Following elections for Governor in 1879, none of the candidates won enough popular vote to claim victory. Therefore, the legislature would elect the governor. The congress was dominated by Republicans at this stage and the Democrats and Greenbacks began to accuse the Republicans of using bribery and fraud to win their seats. An inquiry was conducted by the Governor and the balance of power was overturned. This then proceeded onto the Supreme Court to rule on. An incensed Republican called James Blaine established an armed camp of Republicans at his home, next to the capitol building. The Governor, a Democrat, then hired armed men to guard the capitol building, whilst the Democrats and Greenbackers raised an army of their own. Men from all over Maine came to the capitol to fight for their political party. The state militia was called out to keep order. JLC as Major General of the militia, went to Augusta to keep order. He was approached from all parties to declare their candidate the rightful victor. He remained neutral and soon became the focus of anger from all sides. There were assassination and kidnap plots against him. At one stage a mob turned up at his office and threatened to kill him. He calmly went out and spoke to them.

The State Supreme Court made its decision, the Republicans would retain the majority in the house and hence install a Republican governor. The crisis was over and peacefully resolved. However, JLC made many enemies within all the political parties and this would probably damage his future prospects in political and diplomatic positions.

In 1893 he was awarded the Medal of Honor, the details of which are:

Rank and Organization: Colonel, 20th Maine Infantry. Place and date: At Gettysburg, Pa., 2 July 1863. Entered service at: Brunswick, Maine. Born: 8 September 1828, Brewer Maine.

Date of issue: 11 August 1893.

Citation: 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.

In 1895 he offered his services to the Governor for the Spanish–American War, but they were politely refused.

After resigning from Bowdoin, JLC ventured in business in Florida, New York and Maine – developing land, orange groves, railroads. However he made little financial gain.

In 1899 he was given the position of Surveyor of the Port of Portland. In 1901 he had a leave of absence and travelled to Italy and Egypt, hoping the warmer climate would aid his health, he had to spend additional time there recuperating due to ill health. His family did not accompany him, as by this time Fannie was blind and stayed home with Grace. Fannie died in October 1905.

He was involved in many veterans and non-military organisations in this period. He attended the planning ceremony for the 1913, 50th anniversary of Gettysburg, but was unwell and could not attend the actual reunion. In August 1913 he was once again unwell and his daughter Grace nursed him. This was the beginning of his decline and he was bedridden by 1914. He died on February 24, 1914 aged 85, surrounded by Grace and Wyllys in his home in Portland. He is buried in Pine Grove Cemetery adjacent to Bowdoin College.

His funeral was held in Portland's City Hall.

His previous home is now the Chamberlain Museum and is located across the street from Bowdoin College. His papers and Medal of Honor are housed at Bowdoin.

Brothers

John, died in 1867 at the age of 29. After serving in the Christian Commission, he returned to Maine and graduated from Bangor Theological Seminary and worked for the government in New York City. He died of lung problems.

Thomas, died in 1892 at the age of 56. He was very unsettled after the War and eventually married John's widow. He died of chronic lung and heart problems.

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