



CSI REPRINT

AFTER ACTION REPORT

by Joshua L. Chamberlain

Reprinted by permission of the Maine Military Historical Society, Inc., Augusta, Maine, copyright 1989, and may not be further reproduced without the express permission of the copyright owner.



Joshua L. Chamberlain

The inspiration of a noble cause involving human interests wide and far, enables men to do things they did not dream themselves capable of before, and which they were not capable of alone. The consciousness of belonging, vitally, to something beyond individuality; of being part of a personality that reaches we know not where, in space and time, greatens the heart to the limit of the soul's ideal, and builds out the supreme of character.

Joshua L. Chamberlain
October 3, 1889
Monument Dedication
Ceremony
Gettysburg, PA



The official narrative of Colonel Joshua L. Chamberlain, dated July 6, 1863, describing the engagement of the 20th Maine Regiment at the Battle of Gettysburg, with an Introductory Note and type transcription by Joseph B. Ezhaya, Chair of the Library Committee, edited by Donald H. Marden, President.

Introductory Note

It is only fitting that the Maine Military Historical Society, Inc. should select as the first document for publication, for its members and others interested in military history, the "After Action Report" of Colonel Joshua L. Chamberlain. The narrative explodes the myth of "After Action Reports" as dull reading. The narrative draws the reader to the field of a crucial engagement in a turning point battle that probably altered the course of American history. What a field of battle it was!

Historians have documented the significance of the Battle of Gettysburg and Lincoln immortalized its participants and their cause. Colonel Chamberlain's After Action Report shows us some of the reasons why these men deserve to be immortalized.

Colonel Chamberlain, who was later to be the only man to receive a battlefield promotion to General by U. S. Grant, has numerous talents. Among them was the ability to describe events so as to give us the feeling of what those present were experiencing.

Joshua L. Chamberlain was born in Brewer, Maine, September 8, 1828. He grew up on a farm, the son and grandson of citizens who served in the Militia of Maine. He graduated from Bowdoin College and Bangor Theological Seminary. He became a tenured professor at Bowdoin College. He volunteered to serve in the Union Army and served with unique distinction. He was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his feats at

Gettysburg and went on to lead and fight in numerous other battles. He was selected by General Grant from thousands of officers to receive the surrender of the Confederate Army at Appomattox. The manner in which Chamberlain handled the surrender, by saluting the Southern "comrades-in-arms," is still cause for respect of Chamberlain in the South. Chamberlain went on to be a popular four term Governor of Maine, a visionary President of Bowdoin College, a Railroad President and much sought-after public speaker. He lived to be eighty-four years old, passing away on February 24, 1914.

In many ways, Joshua L. Chamberlain is immortal. The U.S. Army's Leadership Manual, FM 22-100, holds Colonel Chamberlain as a role-model for American military leaders. Michael Shaara's 1974 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *Killer Angels*, which is required reading of all enrollees in the Army's Command and General Staff College, places Colonel Chamberlain in the same company as General Robert E. Lee and others of distinction.

The Maine Military Historical Society honors this distinguished son of Maine not because he was just a "warrior," but because the depth of his character, his sense of duty, and the sharing of his talents at great personal sacrifice symbolized an ideal that those who serve under arms strive to achieve to preserve our way of life.

A special salute from the Maine Military Historical Society goes to the "keepers of the Joshua L. Chamberlain flame": The State of Maine Archives,

Bowdoin College Library Special Collections, The Pejepscot Historical Society and its Joshua L. Chamberlain Museum and the Centennial Committee of the City of Brewer, Chamberlain biographer, William M. Wallace, 20th Maine Regiment author John J. Pullen, 133rd Engineer Battalion of the Maine Army National Guard, and others.

**Headquarters 20th Maine Vols.
Field near Gettysburg, Pa.
July 6th, 1863**

Lieut,

In compliance with orders from Brigade Hd. Qrs. I have the honor to submit the following report of the part taken by the 20th Regt. Maine Vols in the action of July 2d and 3d near Gettysburg, Pa.

On reaching the field at about 4 p.m. July 2d, Col. Vincent commanding the Brigade, placing me on the left of the Brigade and consequently on the extreme left of our entire line of battle, instructed me that the enemy were expected shortly to make a desperate attempt to turn our left flank, and that the position assigned to me must be held at every hazard.

I established my line on the crest of a small spur of a rocky and wooded hill, and sent out at once a company of skirmishers on my left to guard against surprise on that unprotected flank.

These dispositions were scarcely made when the attack commenced, and the right of the Regt. found itself at once hotly engaged. Almost at the same moment, from a high rock which gave me a full view of the enemy, I perceived a heavy force in rear of their principal line, moving rapidly but stealthily toward our left, with the intention, as I judged, of gaining our rear unperceived. Without betraying our peril to any but one or two officers, I had the right wing move by the left flank, taking intervals of a pace

or two, according to the shelter afforded by rocks or trees, extending so as to cover the whole front then engaged; and at the same time moved the left wing to the left and rear, making a large angle at the color, which was now brought to the front where our left had first rested.

This hazardous manœuvre was so admirably executed by my men that our fire was not materially slackened in front, and the enemy gained no advantage there, while the left wing in the mean time had formed a solid and steady line in a direction to meet the expected assault. We were not a moment too soon; for the enemy having gained their desired point of attack came to a front, and rushed forward with an impetuosity which showed their sanguine expectations. Their astonishment however was evident, when emerging from their cover, they met instead of an unsuspecting flank, a firm and ready front. A strong fire opened at once from both sides, and with great effect, the enemy still advancing until they came within ten paces of our line, where our steady and telling volleys brought them to a stand. From that moment began a struggle fierce and bloody beyond any that I have witnessed, and which lasted in all its fury, a full hour. The two lines met, and broke and mingled in the shock. At times I saw around me more of the enemy than of my own men. The edge of conflict swayed to and fro — now one and now the other party holding the contested ground. Three times our line was forced back, but only to rally and repulse the enemy. As often as the enemy's line was broken and routed, a new line was

unmasked, which advanced with fresh vigor. Our "sixty rounds" were rapidly reduced; I sent several messengers to the rear for ammunition, and also for reinforcements. In the mean time we seized the opportunity of a momentary lull to gather ammunition and more serviceable arms, from the dead and dying on the field. With these we met the enemy's last and fiercest assault. Their own rifles and their own bullets were turned against them. In the midst of this struggle, our ammunition utterly failed. The enemy were close upon us with a fresh line, pouring on us a terrible fire. Half the left wing already lay on the field. Although I had brought two companies from the right to its support, it was now scarcely more than a skirmish line. The heroic energy of my officers could avail no more. Our gallant line withered and shrunk before the fire it could not repel. It was too evident that we could maintain the defensive no longer. As a last desperate resort, I ordered a charge. The word "fix bayonets" flew from man to man. The click of the steel seemed to give new zeal to all. The men dashed forward with a shout. The two wings came into one line again, and extending to the left, and at the same time wheeling to the right, the whole Regiment described nearly a half circle, the left passing over the space of half a mile, while the right kept within the support of the 83d Penna. thus leaving no chance of escape to the enemy except to climb the steep side of the mountain or to pass by the whole front of the 83d Penna. The enemy's first line scarcely tried to run — they stood amazed, threw down their loaded arms and surrendered in whole companies. Those in their rear

had more time and gave us more trouble. My skirmishing company threw itself upon the enemy's flank behind a stone wall, and their effective fire added to the enemy's confusion. In this charge we captured three hundred and sixty eight prisoners, many of them officers, and took three hundred stand of arms. The prisoners were from four different regiments, and admitted that they had attacked with a Brigade.

At this time Col. Rice commanding the Brigade (Col. Vincent having been mortally wounded) brought up a strong support from Genl. Crawford's command, and 3000 rounds of ammunition. The wounded and the prisoners were now sent to the rear, and our dead gathered and laid side by side.

Shortly after Col. Rice desired me to advance and take the high steep hill, called "Wolf Hill" or "Round Top" half a mile or more to our left and front, where the enemy had assembled on their repulse — a position which commanded ours in case the assault should be renewed.

It was then dusk. The men were worn out, and heated and thirsty — almost beyond endurance. Many had sunk down and fallen asleep the instant the halt was ordered. But at the command they cheerfully formed their line once more, and the little handful of men went up the hill, scarcely expecting ever to return. In order not to disclose our numbers — as I had now but two hundred guns — and to avoid bringing on an engagement in which I was sure to be overpowered, I forbid my men to fire, and

trusted to the bayonet alone. Throwing out two small detachments on each flank, we pushed straight up the hill. The darkness favored us, concealing our force and preventing the enemy from getting range so that their volleys went over our heads, while they deemed it prudent to retire before us. Just at the crest we found more serious difficulty and were obliged to fall back for a short time. We advanced again with new energy, which the knowledge of our isolated and perilous position rendered perhaps desperate, and carried the desired point. We took twenty five prisoners in this movement, among them some of the staff of Genl. Laws. From these officers I learned that Hood's whole Division was massed but a short distance in front, had just prepared to advance and take possession of the heights, and was only waiting to ascertain the number and position of our force. I posted my command among the rocks along the crest in line of battle, and sent two companies in charge of judicious officers to reconnoitre the ground in front. They reported a large body of the enemy in a ravine not more than two or three hundred yards distant. I therefore kept these two companies out, with orders to watch the enemy, while our main line, kept on the alert by occasional volleys from below, held its position among the rocks throughout the night. In the meantime the 83d Penna. and the 5th and 12th Penna. Reserves came up and formed as a support. The next day at noon we were relieved by the 1st Brigade.

We were engaged with Laws' Brigade, Hood's Div. The prisoners represented themselves as from the

15th and 47th Alabama and the 4th and 5th Texas Regts. The whole number of prisoners taken by us is three hundred and ninety three — of arms captured three hundred stand. At least one hundred and fifty of the enemy's killed and wounded were found in front of our first line of battle.

We went into the fight with three hundred and fifty eight guns. Every pioneer and musician who could carry a musket was armed and engaged. Our loss is one hundred and thirty six — thirty killed, one hundred and five wounded — many mortally — and one taken prisoner in the night advance. [As] Often as our line was broken and pierced by the enemy, there is not a man to be reported "missing."

I have to regret the loss of a most gallant young officer, Lt. W. S. Kendall, who fell in the charge[,] also Capt. C. W. Billings mortally wounded early in the action, and Lieut. A. N. Linscott mortally wounded on the crest of "Wolf Hill." Our advantage was dearly bought with the loss of such admirable officers as these.

As for the conduct of my officers and men, I will let the result speak for them. If I were to mention any I might do injustice by omitting some equally deserving. Our role of Honor is the three hundred eighty officers and men who fought at Gettysburg.

My thanks are one[,] the 83d Penna., Capt. Woodman, Comdg. for their steady and gallant support, and I would particularly acknowledge the

services of Adj. Gifford of that Regt. who exposed himself to the severest fire to render me aid.

Very respectfully
Your obdt. servt.
J. L. Chamberlain
Col. 20th Maine Vols.

Lt. Geo. B. Herendeen
Act. Asst. Adj. Genl.
3d Brigade, 1st Div. 5th Corps.