

"Delivering the Charge" by Steven Campbell

Part I

Two long time Army comrades and fellow Freemasons met upon the field on America's bloodiest 3-day battle - on a ridge just outside of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. These two Brothers were George Edward Pickett and Winfield Scott Hancock. In Part I, we will look at the life and military career of George Pickett.

The Soldier

He was born in Richmond, Virginia, on January 28, 1825, the son of Col. Robert Pickett. Receiving a basic education, he entered an uncle's law office to study law in Illinois. It was there in 1842 that he received an appointment to the U. S. Military Academy at West Point from Congressman Abraham Lincoln! (As a result Pickett would never stand for any negative comments regarding Mr. Lincoln.) His record at West Point was not very illustrious - he averaged 170 demerits per year, and upon graduation in 1846, in the class with Thomas Jackson and George McClellan, he ranked 59th in a class of 59.

Pickett, along with such men as R. E. Lee, U. S. Grant, T. J. Jackson, and James Longstreet, served with distinction in the Mexican War from 1846 - 1848. He was cited for bravery and was the first to scale the walls in the capture of Chapultepec, Mexico's Military Academy. After the war he was posted in Texas (Ft. Bliss) and Virginia. He married his Richmond sweetheart, Sallie Minge, who died soon after their wedding. Bereaved, he took an assignment at Ft. Bellingham in the Washington Territory. In 1856 Capt. Pickett received the thanks of Congress for preventing the incursion of British troops into U. S. Territory there.

In early 1861, Captains Pickett, Richard Garnett, Winfield Scott Hancock and Lewis Armistead attended a sorrowful reunion in Los Angeles. Three of the four were "going south", having resigned their long-time U. S. Army commissions to offer their services to the newly formed Confederate States of America. First appointed a Colonel, Pickett was promoted to Brigadier General in January 1862 under the command of his friend and mentor, Gen. James Longstreet. Within the 1st Corps he commanded troops at the Battles of Williamsburg, Seven Pines, and at Gaines Mill, where he was wounded. He was placed on medical leave, and in October 1862 was promoted to Major General. His Division played a major role in the Confederate victory at Fredericksburg in Dec. 1862. Gen. Lee detached Longstreet's Corps to southeast Virginia to gather supplies. Whilst there, Pickett, the widower, became enamored by a teenage beauty named LaSalle Corbell. Later they would marry.

After the victory at Chancellorsville (and the death of T. J. Jackson) Gen. Lee recalled the 1st Corps in his preparation for his second thrust into the North. In June 1863, the Army of Northern Virginia crossed the Potomac River and at a small crossroads town named Gettysburg, engaged in

America's bloodiest 3-day battle (USA 100,000+ troops, CSA 75,000). On Friday, July 3, Lee's plan was to attack the Union center and split the Union Army in two. In nearly two years of campaigning, Lee's Army of Northern Virginia had not lost a battle. Pickett's Division, along with two from A. P. Hill's Corps were assigned to make the charge. Generals Pickett, Pettigrew and Trimble would lead the attack across an open field nearly a mile across. Longstreet's documented comment to Lee before the attack was: "General, I have been a soldier all of my life. I have been with soldiers engaged in fights by couples, by squads, companies, regiments, divisions, and armies and should know as well as anyone what soldiers can do. It is my opinion that no 15,000 men ever arranged for battle can take that position." Gen. Lee's reply was, "The enemy is there and I am going to strike him." So, on the hot Friday afternoon of July 3rd, 140 Confederate cannons began an hour long cannonade, the sounds of which could be heard 140 miles away in Pittsburgh. When asking for permission to begin the charge, Pickett received only a nod from Longstreet. Between 12,000 and 15,000 troops arranged in parade order marched out. They soon came under fire from Federal long range artillery and as they climbed over the fence at the Emmittsburg Pike, were met with musket, pistol and canister fire. Gen. Lewis Armistead's Brigade breached the stone wall, however, Federal reinforcements soon closed the "high water mark" break through. Of the 5,800 men in Pickett's Division, 75% were killed, wounded or captured. Of Pickett's old Army comrades with whom he served before the war, Richard Garnett and Lewis Armistead were killed, and Winfield Scott Hancock, who commanded the Union center, was seriously wounded. Though Gen. Lee took responsibility for the failed charge, Pickett never forgave him for the losses suffered by his Division.

Upon the retreat back into Virginia, what remained of Pickett's command was sent to northeast North Carolina to refit. There they would take part in the failed siege of New Bern before being recalled to join the army of Northern Virginia in its life and death struggle with the new Federal Commander, U. S. Grant - another old Army comrade. Pickett's division fought at Cold Harbor, the Wilderness, and the 9 month siege of Petersburg. He was given the task of holding the vital roadways at Five Forks, which Gen. Lee said "must be held at all costs." On April 1, 1865, after hard fighting, Federal troops broke through Pickett's line. There was concern as to his absence when the battle began (he was a mile away at a shad bake with several other general officers) and this resulted in his being relieved of his command and placed under arrest. This was, however, academic, for within a week the Army of Northern Virginia was boxed in near the village of Appomattox Court House. Unfortunately, Gen. Lee did not forget Pickett, and commented "Is that man still with the Army?" Longstreet's continued friendship protected his comrade.

The Man

While there are few students of American history who have not heard of Pickett's Charge, little is known of the man. He was charismatic, energetic, a bit vain and without doubt brave! According to a staff officer in the Civil War, Pickett "was very foppish in his dress and wore his hair in ringlets - he was what would be called a dapper little fellow but brave as they ever made men." Though thirsting for glory, he instilled confidence in his men. On his serious side, he was a romantic - grateful - though not a great scholar. In the winter of 1862/63, three of General

Longstreet's four children (1 year old Mary Ann, 4 year old James, 6 year old Augustus) died of scarlet fever in Richmond. Overwrought with grief, Longstreet and his wife deferred all funeral arrangements to his long time comrade, Brother George Pickett. Soon, after the end of the war, Pickett, his wife and children fled to Canada. He was concerned that he may be tried for having ordered the execution of Confederate deserters who had been captured wearing Federal uniforms near New Bern, NC. However, a long time comrade by the name of U. S. Grant interceded on his behalf. He also offered Pickett a U. S. Marshal's post in Virginia, which he declined. He also turned down a generalship with the Egyptian Army. His wartime sorrow was a burden which took a toll on his life. He went into the insurance business and in 1875, at the age of 50, died of natural causes in Norfolk. He was laid to rest in Richmond's Hollywood Cemetery, as was his beloved second wife Sally in 1998!

While not perhaps lucky in battle, his bravery was never questioned, and his name lives on. Brother George Pickett was raised in Dove Lodge, No. 51, in Richmond, Virginia.

"Receiving the Charge" Part II

Adams County, Pennsylvania in 1863 was the stage for the bloodiest 3 day battle in the United States. At the crossroads town of Gettysburg, long-time friends and brother Freemasons George Edward Pickett, Lewis Addison Armistead and Winfield Scott Hancock would meet as adversaries: Pickett and Armistead serving the Confederate States Army and Hancock serving the United States Army.

Hancock "The Superb"

Winfield Scott Hancock was born in Montgomery Square, Pennsylvania, in 1824. Named in honor of Gen. Winfield Scott, he was destined to be a soldier. His father was a well connected lawyer who was able to obtain an appointment for him to West Point. Winfield entered the Academy in 1840 to begin a 45-year military career. At \$28 a month plus education, he endeavored to remain out of mischief and graduated in 1844 in the bottom third of his class of 54. The young Lieutenant honed his leadership skills in the Western Indian Territory. In 1846 his unit, the 6th U. S. Infantry, took part in the successful campaign against the Mexican Army. It was this time he began a lifelong friendship with Brother Lewis Armistead.

A fellow young officer, Virginian Henry Heath, described Hancock standing 6 feet, well formed, light haired and a favorite with the ladies.

With the Mexican War over, Hancock served as a Quartermaster at various western posts. He accompanied a critically ill Henry Heath home to Virginia, and in 1849, upon being stationed in St. Louis, met Almira Russell, whom he married in 1850. Hancock's reputation as a well versed Quartermaster resulted in his promotion to Captain, and in 1856 he was transferred to Florida as the 3rd Seminole Indian Campaign began. The following year saw the second child born into the

family, as well as a transfer to Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas. Duty stations in Wyoming Territory and California resulted in a lot of traveling for the young family. When Almira balked at moving to Los Angeles, Lt. Col., Robert E. Lee told her that “her post was by her husband’s side”. Thus the Hancock family moved to California.

Armistead, “Ole Lo”

Lewis A. Armistead was born into a military family in New Bern, NC in 1817. His father was a West Point graduate who obtained an appointment for his son in 1833. As a result of poor health he resigned from West Point, and upon reapplication was accepted. Though a mediocre student, he persisted in his studies until 1836 when he was placed under arrest for breaking a plate over the head of Jubal Early. Lewis resigned and returned to his family’s home in Virginia. His abilities would be noted and his services in the U. S. Army would be requested in the war with Mexico. (During the War of 1812, his uncle, Major George Armistead, was the commander of Fort McHenry and the defender of the original Star Spangled Banner.)

War Looms

In 1861 as the national crisis of Civil War evolved, Hancock, along with his comrades-in-arms George Pickett, Richard Garnett and Lewis Armistead, all “serving officers” in California, deliberated what they should do. Hancock was ordered to Washington arrived after the Confederate victory at First Manassas. Pickett, Garnett and Armistead “headed south”. Each of these men would rise to be a general officer. Their long years of service culminated one last evening before they each “went east”. Hancock’s old mess-mate Armistead said, “Hancock, goodbye, you can never know what this has cost me, and I hope God will strike me dead if I am ever induced to leave my native soil, should worse come to worst”.

In September 1861 Hancock was promoted to Brigadier General of Volunteers. Now free from Quartermaster logbooks, his leadership skills would come to the forefront in the great struggle ahead. Assigned a brigade, Hancock displayed exceptional leadership qualities in the Federal Army’s Peninsula Campaign. In the push to capture Richmond, Robert E. Lee’s Confederate troops drove the Bluecoats away in disgrace. Hancock’s conduct was one of the few bright spots for the United States troops, and his manner in doing so resulted in his obtaining the nickname Hancock “The Superb”. Elevated to Division Commander, he was engaged at the stalemate of Antietam in September 1862. In November he was promoted to Major General, and in December crossed the Rappahannock River at Fredericksburg, Virginia, to take part in the suicidal frontal attacks against Lee’s entrenched Army of Northern Virginia. Overruled by his superiors, he witnessed the destruction of countless Federal troops in one of the South’s greatest victories in the war. The Federal Army reorganized in 1863 under the command of “Fighting Joe” Hooker. As a result of a Confederate military master-piece at Chancellorsville, the Federal Army was once again crushed. Hancock’s Division performed admirably as the rear guard. With his horse killed beneath him, his famed increased.

The Beginning of the End

June 1863 began with a Confederate and Federal cavalry engaged in the largest cavalry battle ever in North America upon the fields of Culpeper County, Virginia (Brandy Station). Thus the stage was set for Lee's invasion into Pennsylvania. Seeking a reprieve for war-torn Virginia, in need of foodstuffs as well as hoped for favorable political repercussions, the Army of Northern Virginia crossed the Potomac River. The spread out Federal Army was in disarray as its commander, Gen. Joe Hooker, was relieved and replaced by Maj. Gen. George Mead. Confederate forces spanned across southern Pennsylvania. Without knowledge of the Federal Army's location, Lee was taken back when reports of action between Hancock's old friend Henry Heath and Federal dismounted cavalry erupted at Gettysburg on July 1st. Federal infantry under Maj. Gen. John Reynolds arrived, however shortly after Reynolds' death the blue-coated troops were pushed back. When advised of the loss of Reynolds, Meade ordered Hancock to Gettysburg to assume command. Establishing positions upon Cemetery Ridge, Little and Big Round Top, Federal forces awaited Lee's next move and, on July 2nd he fell upon the Federal left flank. Many young Americans died in the Devil's Den, the Wheatfield, the Peach Orchard and Little Round Top; yet the Federal line did not break and Hancock's 2nd Corps anchored itself to the Federal center.

The Charge

On July 3rd Gen. Lee massed between 11,000 and 15,000 troops to attack the entrenched Federal center. Both flanks of the Federal Army had been reinforced, and Lee thought the center would be the weak link in the Federal line. George Pickett's division of Longstreet's 1st Corps, with about 5800 men commanded by Lewis Armistead, Richard Brooke Garnett and James Kemper, would lead the attack. These troops would link up and press across open fields nearly a mile across with units of Pettigrew and Trimble. In the early after-noon nearly 160 Confederate cannons began a bombardment which would last for over an hour and be heard 140 miles away in Pittsburgh. Thinking the Federal forces had been broken under this torrent of shot and shell, the gray clad troops marched out from under the cover of trees and in parade-ground style began their assault. Federal long range artillery began to fire and gaps appeared in the gray lines. The attack faltered under short range canister and rifle fire until Lewis Armistead placed his hat upon his sword's point and said, "With me, who will come with me?" Pushing forward Armistead and about 250 Confederates crossed the stone wall; however it was too little and the reinforcements hoped for did not appear. Gen. Garnett (age 44) had been blown out of the saddle by cannon fire and Gen. Kemper was wounded. Gen. Hancock, who had been riding along the Federal line, was seriously wounded. Gen. Armistead was struck down by rifle fire. Upon exhibiting the Masonic sign of distress, he was attended to by Federal Capt. Henry H. Bingham of Hancock's staff. With the conclusion of the attack, the Battle of Gettysburg was essentially over. Pickett survived though his division suffered 75% casualties. Armistead (age 46) would die two days later in a Federal field hospital (he entrusted his spurs, Masonic pocket watch and Bible to Capt. Bingham who took them to Hancock). Hancock survived his serious wound and served as a Corps Commander (perhaps one of the best in the United States Army) through the Wilderness, Spotsylvania Court House, Cold Harbor, Petersburg and, finally, in the Shenandoah Valley.

After the war, Hancock served as the Commanding General at the Lincoln conspiracy trial. Believing Mary Surratt was wrongly convicted, he personally interceded on her behalf with President Andrew Johnson – to no avail. The Plains Indian Wars and later pro-Southern reconstruction duties found him at odds with the U. S. Grant administration. The death of both of his children weighed heavily upon him, as did the recurring infection(s) from his Gettysburg wound. Even so, in 1880, Winfield Scott Hancock was the Democratic candidate for President. In a hotly contested race, he lost to James Garfield by just 7,018 votes. Five days before his 62nd birthday, the senior Major General in the United States Army, W. S. Hancock, died of natural causes. He was laid to rest in Norristown, Pennsylvania. A valiant soldier and true friend, he never forgot his Masonic Brothers and comrades-in-arms: W. S. Hancock – Charity Lodge No. 190, Norristown, PA.; H. H. Bingham – Chartiers Lodge No. 297, Canonsburg, PA; L. A. Armistead – Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22, Alexandria, VA; G. E. Pickett – Dove Lodge No. 51, Richmond, VA.