

"Masons March Upon Maryre's" by Steven Campbell

When our Nation's bitter Civil War began, many thought it would be over in 6 months! In September of 1862 over 23,000 Americans were killed or wounded upon the banks of Antietam Creek near Sharpsburg, Maryland - the result was a stalemate. Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia regrouped, refitted and recruited more men in Culpeper County, Va. The United States Army's Commander, Gen. George McClellan, was relieved by President Lincoln and a reluctant Gen. Ambrose Burnside was placed in command. The new Commander's orders were to undertake an unusual winter campaign to defeat Lee's army and to capture Richmond. Upon the heights outside the Rappahannock River town of Fredericks-burg, Va., Brothers Lewis Armistead, George Pickett, Winfield Scott Hancock and Lawrence Chamberlain would face each other on the bloody battlefield which would culminate upon Marye's Heights.

The Setting: In December 1862 the 100,000 man U.S. Army had "stolen the march" on Lee's army of 72,000 men. The colonial town of Fredericksburg had been George Washington's boyhood hometown. It lies directly between Washington and Richmond. Unfortunately for the U.S. Army, the two bridges across the Rappahannock had been destroyed. For nearly two weeks Gen. Burnside had to await the arrival of the pontoon (portable) bridges promised him. Meanwhile, Lee's army moved in to occupy the town and en-trench along the ridges west of town. Confederate snipers prevented U.S. Army engineers from placing the bridges across the river. For the first time in the war Federal artillery shelled the homes and buildings of a civilian population. Those citizens who had not fled took shelter in their cellars. Overwhelming firepower drove the Confederates from the town, across a canal and into their trenches along the heights.

The Three Mile Line: Lee's Army of Northern Virginia held the "high ground" with very good interior lines. At Prospect Hill and Hamilton's Crossing, Gen. Thomas Jackson's 2nd Corps held the south end. General Lee's headquarters were atop Telegraph (now Lee) Hill, and Gen. James Longstreet's 1st Corps was nestled on the north end of the line upon Marye's Heights and behind the to-be-famous wall along the sunken road.

The Brothers Upon the Field: Brother George Pickett was born in Richmond in 1825. A young George Pickett was studying law in Illinois when he applied for and was accepted to West Point. Though not a scholar, the popular Pickett did graduate from the Military Academy in 1846 - last in his class. He received his "baptism of fire" in the Mexican War, where he formed lifelong friendships with James Longstreet and Lewis Armistead. Widowed just after his wedding, Pickett served in the U.S. Army at western posts. Casting his lot with his native state of Virginia in 1861, he was appointed as a Colonel and shortly there-after promoted to Brigadier General.

In the Fredericksburg campaign, Pickett's Division would play a major role in blunting the Federal attack. His later career would find his name synonymous with Lee's fatal charge at Gettysburg. Only ten years after the war (1875) the 50-year-old businessman would die of natural causes (as did his son, also a West Point graduate, whilst serving his nation in the Spanish-American War in 1898).

Brother Lewis Armistead was born in New Bern, NC. Armistead's well-connected family relocated to Virginia and at the early age of 16 he entered West Point. He never graduated from the Military Academy due to bad health and an altercation with a fellow student (Jubal A. Early). However he was given an officer's commission during the Mexican War and remained in the U.S. Army, befriending Winfield Scott Hancock, a fellow officer. Casting his lot with the South, the strict and efficient Armistead was promoted to Brigadier General, and at Fredericksburg would command a brigade under Pickett. Left a widower during his U.S. Army service, Armistead would forfeit his life on July 3, 1863, at the "high water mark of the Confederacy" upon the field of Gettysburg.

Brother Winfield Scott Hancock was a native of Pennsylvania. He began his 45 year U.S. Army career "upon the plain" of West Point. He campaigned as a young officer in the Mexican War and the western frontier where he befriended fellow Masons Lewis Armistead and George Pickett. At the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861 he was promoted to Brigadier General of U.S. Volunteers and served with distinction in the Peninsula Campaign as well as Antietam. November 1862 found him receiving his 2nd star and placed under the command of Gen. Joseph Hooker. Hancock offered alternative strategy for the Fredericksburg campaign yet was overruled and witnessed the destruction of Federal troops in front of Lee's lines. Serving throughout the war, Hancock was wounded at Gettysburg, where his long-time friend Lewis Armistead perished. He led troops in the Indian Wars (1870's) and in 1880 lost the Presidential election by only 7,000 votes. At the age of 61 the "old soldier" died of natural causes and was mourned by the nation.

Brother Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain was the descendant of a Revolutionary War officer. Lawrence, as he was known, was born in Brewer, Maine, in 1828. An excellent horseman and avid outdoors man, he excelled in the academic world. Though enrolled in the Whiting Military and Classic School, he embarked upon the studies of the ministry. Enrolled in the prestigious Bowdoin College, he excelled at his studies and served as a part-time grade school teacher and as a professor's assistant. While at Bowdoin he became enamored with Frances (Fannie) Adams, whom he would later marry. He enrolled in the Bangor Theological Seminary and in 1861, while being afforded a scholar's sabbatical to Europe, decided to offer his services to his native state. As a result he received a commission as Lt. Colonel of the 20th Maine Regiment. Though a true "citizen soldier" Chamberlain proved to be "an apt student of war" under the tutelage of military trained officers, to include his commanding officer Col. Adelbert Ames (who later won the Medal of Honor).

In December 1862 Chamberlain was second in command of the 20th Maine, soon destined to march upon Marye's Heights. Though wounded in the right ear and neck, he survived the last frontal assault against Lee's Army of Northern Virginia at Fredericksburg. Later in the war he commanded the 20th Maine at Gettysburg's Little Round Top and was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions. Lawrence was wounded six times during the war and achieved the rank of Major General - he was only one of two men Lt. Gen. U.S. Grant ever afforded a battle-field promotion to. How respected was Chamberlain? He was selected to receive the formal surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox, and ordered a salute of honor to the vanquished Confederates. After the war he was elected four times to serve as the Governor of

Maine, as well as President of Bowdoin College. Gen. Chamberlain lived into the 20th century, dying of natural causes in Portland in 1914.

The Three Mile Long Line Attack: On Sunday, December 13, 1862, Gen. Burnside ordered piecemeal Federal attacks on Lee's entrenched army. At the southern end of the line (on Prospect Hill and Hamilton's Crossing) Federal troops under Gen. George Meade (who would later command Federal forces at their victory at Gettysburg) temporarily broke through Jackson's defense. "The hole was plugged" and Federal forces focused on Longstreet's position along Marye's Heights. Twelve times Federal divisions flung themselves into Confederate artillery and small arms fire. Brothers Pickett and Armistead were amazed that men could face such destruction. Upon the thirteenth ordered attack, Brother Chamberlain's regiment forged ahead and crossed the canal into the face of Confederate fire. As the Division Commander, Brother Hancock witnessed the slaughter. Once again the Southern position behind the wall along the sunken road proved too formidable and the last of the Federal assaults was turned back. The casualties of the battle were over 12,000 Federal troops killed or wounded, compared to 5,300 Confederate losses. After the last charge, Confederate Sgt. Richard Kirkland of Mississippi crossed the lines and provided water to the wounded and dying Federal troops. History has cited him as "The Angel of Marye's Heights". His actions served as a display of the Freemasonry tenants of brotherly love, truth and relief.

Desiring to launch a 14th frontal assault, Gen. Burnside was convinced by his staff not to do so and the U.S. Army retreated back across the Rappahannock River, leaving Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia the victors and one of Lee's finest defensive victories of the war.