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### **The Civil War and its Effect on Joshua Chamberlain**

Joshua Chamberlain is one of the most recognized heroes of the Civil War due to his bravery and perseverance on the battlefield. Before this, he was a professor at Bowdoin with no military experience at all but a drive to serve his country and to make a difference. He went against the opinions of all the people around him and decided to fight in the war. He endured many hardships including injuries and the loss of men he was close with and saw the horrors of war up close. He developed a new point of view and different opinions because of his experiences. Chamberlain saw all the terrible things about war but also found what he believed was the best side of himself. He liked the feeling of being a soldier fighting against evil for a noble cause. Due to this change in point of view, Chamberlain thought differently about life. He became a military-minded person and never again found something in life that gave him the same feeling being a soldier did. His injuries during the war also had a great effect on him. They followed him for the rest of his life and led to his eventual death in 1914.

Joshua Chamberlain was born on September 8, 1828, in Brewer, Maine with the name Lawrence Joshua Chamberlain, which he later changed. His parents were Joshua L. Chamberlain Jr. Lawrence and Sarah Chamberlain who were good parents to their children. Sarah was very caring and loving and Joshua had strong puritan values that he passed to his children. Chamberlain grew up like most children, having a set of chores but also having free time to

enjoy. He played in the woods of the Penobscot River, hiked, and sailed. Chamberlain, in his childhood and early adulthood, suffered from a speech impediment that caused him to stutter. This greatly shaped his character because he had to overcome this problem. He taught himself a breathing pattern as a boy that helped him. He would “sing” to avoid the stutter, especially the words he struggled with the most. The worst words for him to say were words starting with p, t, and b. Chamberlain’s impediment caused him serious anxiety and it was agonizing for him. He grew up very timid and shy because of it. It did not limit Chamberlain, however, as he decided he should attend college when he got older. He wanted to go to Bowdoin College and would have to be tutored to be accepted because of the school’s strict requirements. He spent each day studying, from early in the morning to late at night, and he only had a break on his walk to Bangor to see a teacher. All of this work paid off and Chamberlain entered Bowdoin College in 1848 (Desjardin 6,7).

In college Chamberlain had many new experiences. His difficult curriculum included theology and rhetoric and Chamberlain was required to recite and read many foreign languages. Chamberlain mastered all of them, despite his impediment. One of Chamberlain’s most interesting experiences was spending time at the house of one of his professors. His name was Dr. Calvin Stowe and his wife was Harriet Beecher Stowe, who would go on to publish Uncle Tom’s Cabin. Stowe read her manuscript for this book aloud over a few weeks and discussed it with her guests, including Chamberlain. The book’s original name was Life Among the Lowly but she eventually changed it. Chamberlain also met his future wife in his years at Bowdoin. Her name was Frances Caroline Adams and she was the niece of the pastor at First Parish Church and played the organ in the choir Chamberlain conducted. Her nickname was “Fanny” and she and

Chamberlain soon fell in love and later talked seriously of marriage. Chamberlain finished his studies and graduated from Bowdoin in 1852 and received the honor of “first rank”. He was faced with two choices after graduating. He could go to West Point, which his father wanted him to do, or he could enter a seminary, which his mother wanted him to do. He eventually chose his mother’s path and once he returned to Brewer, he entered Bangor Theological Seminary and studied for three years. He had already proposed to Fanny but since she decided to teach in Georgia they put off their marriage until she returned in 1856. Chamberlain settled into a comfortable life with Fanny, buying a house near Bowdoin and having two children (Desjardin 7-17). Their marriage and love life was not perfect at all. Fanny loved Chamberlain but was afraid of commitment and held herself back. Chamberlain had his own problems too. He was more in love with the idea of love and romance than he was with Fanny herself. He was also always afraid Fanny did not love him as much as he loved her (LaFantasie 55, 56).

In 1855 Chamberlain was offered a teaching position at Bowdoin, which he accepted. He taught logical and natural theology and freshman greek. The next year his colleagues elected him professor of rhetoric and oratory. This was a prestigious position for someone of his age and it was even more impressive because of his speech impediment as a boy that he completely overcame. He also taught Spanish, German, and Norse at Bowdoin (Desjardin 17). Chamberlain had a very unique view of education. He believed students should have more freedom and should not receive a one-sided education and instead of a rounded education where students could explore all their interests. He said in 1859 that “My idea of a college course is that it should afford a liberal education - not a special or professional one, not in any way one-sided. It cannot be a finished education, but should be, I think a general outline of a symmetrical development,

involving such acquaintance with all the departments of knowledge and culture, - proportionate to their several values - as shall give some insight into the principle and powers by which thought passes into life - together with such practice and exercise in each of the great fields of study that the student may experience himself a little in all (Wallace 30, 31)". This philosophy was very uncommon and none of his fellow professors agreed with him (Wallace 31). Although Chamberlain was very happy with his teaching position when the Civil War began his life would forever change.

Joshua Chamberlain felt a great obligation to fight for the Union in the Civil War. "In his autobiography, Chamberlain wrote that the mighty events leading up to the Civil War "took possession of every heart" and pushed everything else in his own life aside, including his personal woes" (LaFantasie, Glenn 62). He did not immediately join the war, however. He was held back by his father being against the war and by the family he would have to leave behind. He eventually did decide that he would join. He did not tell any of his family members and had to overcome a serious challenge, his teaching duties at Bowdoin. He would not be given permission to abruptly leave and go to war. The president at Bowdoin was strongly against the war and since the college was already losing students it certainly did not want to lose professors (LaFantasie, Glenn 62). After turning down Chamberlain's request for a leave of absence, the college offered him a big promotion and a two-year sabbatical in Europe. He accepted the sabbatical and instead of going to Europe he joined the military (Hillstrom). Chamberlain's efforts to join the war show how committed he was to fight in it. This commitment and stubbornness is a trend throughout his life.

His fellow professors did everything they could to stop Chamberlain from leaving. They tried to scare him by telling him of all the dangers he would face but this did not work (Ward). Chamberlain wrote to the Governor of Maine at the time, Ishreal Washburn, and told him about his interest in fighting for the Union. Washburn offered Chamberlain command of the newly formed Twentieth Maine Regiment but Chamberlain told the governor he would rather “start a little lower and learn the business first” (Hillstrom). He instead asked to be named lieutenant colonel, the second-highest ranking position in the regiment (Hillstrom). His fellow professors wrote to the governor trying to stop him from giving Chamberlain a position. They said that he was a scholar, not a fighter and that he would not be fit for the war, but the governor did not listen to them (Ward). Chamberlain was determined to learn and soon became a bright young officer. He was a very eager learner throughout his life. He pushed himself to get into college and again pushed himself to be the best soldier he could be. He spent almost all his time talking to veteran officers to learn military strategy (Willstrom). He wrote in a letter to his wife that “I am bound to understand everything” (Willstrom). Chamberlain saw war as an opportunity to prove himself a brave and good man. In his own words, he said that war “is for the participants a test of character; it makes bad men worse and good men better” (LaFantasie 63).

Soon into Chamberlain’s career was when he first saw the horrors of war. While the 20th Maine Regiment was stationed near the Battle of Antietam they saw many terrible sights, although they were never called into battle. Chamberlain saw a dead Confederate soldier who was clutching a bible to his chest. He said that this image haunted him for the rest of his life (Hillstrom). His struggles at war were not only emotional. He was injured six times in the twenty-one battles he fought in the war. He also had five of his horses shot out from under him.

His worst of his injury was at the Battle of Petersburg on June 18, 1864, where he was shot through the pelvis with a mini ball (The Worst Wound). The ball smashed through his left thigh and stuck just below the skin of his left hip. It smashed bones, severed arteries and pierced his bladder (Ward). After sustaining this injury Chamberlain demonstrated his commitment to the war and to his men by holding himself up by the tip of his sword until all of his men had passed him on the charge and then collapsed to the ground (Joshua Chamberlain's Record as Written with his Own Sword). This wound was believed to be fatal but somehow Chamberlain lived. He recalled the initial surgery done on him saying "Bending to his task, by a sudden miracle, he touched the exact lost thread; the thing was done. There was a possibility, only that even now, that I might be there to know in the morning" (The Worst Wound).

Chamberlain was immediately forwarded to the Hospital at Annapolis where he stayed for two months at the very point of death. The day after being moved there, General Grant promoted Chamberlain to Brigadier General, the only time that an officer was promoted on the field during the war. The reason for his promotion was his actions at Petersburg. Grant stated in his promotion that it was "especially for gallant conduct in leading his brigade against the enemy at Petersburg, on the 18th inst., in which he was dangerously wounded..." (Joshua Chamberlain's Record as Written in his Own Sword). After five months in the hospital, still weak, Chamberlain persisted in returning to his brigade even though he could not mount a horse or walk a hundred yards. This is a very good example of how Chamberlain would not let anything stop him from continuing in the war. This was demonstrated again a few months later. During January 1865 he led one of the assaults to gain possession of the Weldon Railroad and was exposed to an extreme amount of cold and snow that made his wounds worse. He was sent

North for surgical treatment and while there he turned down many lucrative job offers that would require him leaving the war (Joshua Chamberlain's Record as Written with his Own Sword).

Chamberlain found that he liked parts of the war. He saw all of the horrors of war but did not let any of it phase him. He had his own beliefs about war that he developed while fighting in it. He did not see the reality of the war but what he thought it should be good fighting evil. He felt that soldiers should not feel fear in battle and he claimed that he never did. He thought soldiers had other things to think about other than fear and that he was always way too busy to think about the danger he was in. He felt that officers "displayed knightly countenances as they rode by on noble steeds" (LaFantasie 70). He liked the feeling of being the "knight" in a battle of good and evil (LaFantasie 70).

Chamberlain had an extremely respectful view of his enemy during the war. He did not know whether God had wished the war saying "Was it God's command we heard, or His forgiveness we must forever implore?" (Ward). At the conclusion of the war, Chamberlain was chosen by Grant to receive the Confederate surrender at Appomattox Courthouse in April 1865. While watching all the soldiers, weak and worn out but still erect and proud, putting their weapons down, Chamberlain felt the sense of brotherhood they all shared fighting in the gruesome battles during the war. He ordered his men to salute the Confederates, whose general, extremely impressed with Chamberlain's act of respect, ordered his men to salute back (Glatthaar 67, 68). During the war, Chamberlain's men had a tremendous level of respect for Chamberlain. A letter from Sergeant Ruel Thomas to Chamberlain in 1895 he tells Chamberlain how proud he was to fight by his side and how he never left it.

Chamberlain came home from war forever changed in the public eye. He was a hero, most famous for his actions at the battle of Gettysburg where he received the Medal of Honor. Chamberlain's regiment held Little Round Top at all costs and Chamberlain demonstrated an extreme amount of bravery. He led his men by being cool and collected even though he was inexperienced in battle and had two painful wounds. He was loved by the people of Maine so much when he ran for governor he was elected in 1866 by the greatest majority in Maine's history (Ward). He was seen as a hero to the public but also strongly believed in that himself. He was not arrogant by any means but he fully embraced his new role in society. He believed the war changed him into a noble soldier and brought out the best in him. He felt like a new person and much preferred that side of him over his scholar and teacher side before the war. When he came home he needed to find something that gave him the same satisfaction war did and he turned to politics, becoming governor for four one-year terms. He found politics did not fill the hole, and turned back to Bowdoin, becoming its president in 1871 (LaFantasie 1, 66, 67).

While at Bowdoin Chamberlain tried to transfer his strong military beliefs into schooling. He implemented mandatory military drills for students. He believed that students should learn to be soldiers because another war would come eventually (Ward). He also felt because he found his home at war, that military drills would be just as important to others as they were to him. However, the students did not agree with the drills and many refused to do them. Chamberlain threatened to expel the students if they did not start to oblige in ten days. Most of them did but the drills were eventually made optional and were later done away with (Ward).

Chamberlain's time at Bowdoin did not give Chamberlain the feeling he longed for and it ended after his old injuries forced him to retire in 1883. He spent his winters in Florida but came



to Maine when his health permitted and attended reunions of his old regiment. Chamberlain's health got worse and worse and he died on February 24, 1914. His death was caused by the wound he sustained at Petersburg during the war that had given him pain his whole life (Hillstrom).

Joshua Chamberlain was one of the greatest generals that fought in the civil war and during it, he found his passion. Before the war, Chamberlain was happy with his life of teaching and he felt an obligation to serve his country so he joined the Union army. He was forever changed after this decision, as he had a major shift in point of view. He discovered that war brought out the brave and noble side of him. After finding this feeling during the war Chamberlain wanted more out of his life when he returned. He could not just be a teacher with a small family anymore. He sought to find the same feeling war gave him but he was unsuccessful. He died because of his war injuries in 1914, never finding something other than war that he was extremely passionate about.

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