

A Civil War Battle, Revisited

(Heroes and Rogues)

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In the summer of 1987, I received what would eventually be my terminal assignment as a US Air Force officer, to the Industrial College of the Armed Forces, National Defense University, Fort McNair, Washington, DC. I was initially assigned as the USAF Chief of Staff Chair and as a Professor of Systems Acquisition Management.¹ To my surprise and great pleasure, my first task at ICAF was to join the team of instructors orchestrating the annual student "Staff Walk" (and bus tour) of the Gettysburg Battlefield. This led me to begin my now long-standing interest and research in the US Civil War and to become a military tour guide for the annual ICAF Gettysburg "Staff Walk"; which is a guided walking tour and narrative of the actual battleground.²



I have had the good fortune to visit a number of battlefields in Pennsylvania and Virginia. If you have not had an opportunity to visit a Civil War battlefield, you are missing a great American heritage history lesson.

Two areas of interest have been highlighted to me during my visits to Civil War battle sites. First, I found the impact of the many characters involved, both heroes and rogues, to be absolutely fascinating. Secondly, I found in virtually every case (although I had researched the battle before the visit) that my perspective as to what had happened, and more importantly, why commanders made the decisions they did, changed substantially after my visit to the actual battlefield. I have also learned that a person may not be able to fully appreciate the events of

¹ By way of introduction, I am a Colonel, USAF-Retired. I am also a Vietnam Veteran and I worked as a staff officer in the Pentagon, 1984-87 (as a senior logistician and systems acquisition officer). I retired in 1990 with 27+ year's service as the Dean of Administration and Resources, a Professor of Systems Acquisition Management, and Chief of Staff of the US Air Force Chair at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces (ICAF), Ft. McNair, DC. I am a Certified Association Executive (CAE) through the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) (<http://www.globalspex.com/bartlow>).

² ICAF is one of five DoD senior service schools, including the Army War College, Naval War College, Air War College, National War College, and ICAF. The author is a graduate of both the ICAF and Air War College. Officers assigned to a one-year senior service school are in the top 10-to-15% of the Lt. Colonels (Navy

Commanders) and Colonels (Navy Captains) and is a required milestone for any potential promotion to General/Flag officer.

a military battle without actually “walking the ground” and seeing with your own eyes what the commanders and participants saw at the time. No matter how well crafted an author’s narrative might be, or a movie photographed, only by visiting the battle site can you fully comprehend how a series of rolling ridges, a grove of trees, or a set of rocks might have impacted decision making at the time.³ When two armies clash, it can begin as a result



of a chance meeting or a planned engagement. In the case of the Battle of Gettysburg (July 1-3, 1863) it was a chance meeting.⁴ However, it was a Union general officer (Major General John Buford) that chose to make a stand on that day (July 1, 1863) by selecting the terrain he deemed to be in the Union’s favor.

³ However, I have yet to fully understand why General Lee decided to order “Pickett’s Charge” into the reinforced middle of the Union line on day three of the Battle of Gettysburg. Of the 13 colonels in Brig. Gen. George Pickett’s division that day seven were killed, six were wounded, and casualties exceeded 60%.

⁴ The Confederate forces were looking for shoes in Gettysburg.

His decision regarding the selection of the best ground to be defended and physically holding it, proved to be critical to the eventual success of the Union forces over General Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia.⁵

The ICAF “Battle of Gettysburg” tour guides are always exceptionally well-informed military officers who routinely provide many quite interesting yet trivial details, which all

add depth, texture, and substance to the war story and the personalities involved. In the case of the ICAF students, we all loaded on a 55-passenger bus at 6:00 a.m. and drove the two-plus hours to Gettysburg to begin where General Buford made his site selection on day one of the three-day battle.

Enroute to Gettysburg the ICAF military instructors functioned as tour guides and described the events that led up to the battle, including a description of the various types of weapons used, the uniforms, and the logistics of the travel by the armies of the day, and this lecture normally filled the entire two-hour bus ride. Next, the actual “Staff Walk” would follow with a walking tour

⁵ Gen. Buford never received the recognition for his part in choosing the ground and holding it, and in so doing saving not only the battle but perhaps the war. In December 1863 he came down with pneumonia, and died of it.

accompanied by a full lecture narrative describing what happened in chronological order of events, one engagement to the next, and one day to the next.

For three years, 1987 to 1990 (when I retired from the USAF), I was on the team of ICAF instructors handling the annual Gettysburg Staff Walk. This was a grand opportunity and I thoroughly enjoyed this part of my ICAF tour. I was introduced (by an ICAF instructor⁶) to one of the best books⁷ that I ever had the pleasure to read, *The Killer Angles*, by Michael Shaara.⁸ This book was our basic ICAF narrative textbook for the “Staff Walk”. I highly recommend it.⁹

Another excellent way to gain a better understanding of a battle is to witness a rendezvous of “Reenactors”, who take on the persona of participants in a particular battle; and I assure you, they take it all very seriously. Living in Northern Virginia, I find that there are

many opportunities in the summer time to visit Civil War battlefields, and most importantly, to observe the “Reenactors” as they attempt to re-live the events of a specific battle scene on the actual battleground in question (thus, the photos included herein). This includes the colorful, pageant-filled, cannon aides, marching troops and bands, bivouac and provisioning activities, sutlery vendors, camp followers, cavalry troops and their horses, and the whole mock battle as it unfolds. The “Reenactors” work very hard to be exceptionally realistic in their dress, logistics, weapons, and tactics. All “Reenactors” work on developing their “characters”, the person that they represent, during their periods of participation.



⁶ James E. Toth, Colonel, USMC (Ret.), who was an instructor on the ICAF faculty.

⁷ The best novel I ever read was by Herman Wouk, “*Winds of War*”, Warner Bros. Books, ISBN: 0316955167.

⁸ “*The Killer Angles*” by Michael Shaara, published by Random House, Inc., New York, 1974, ISBN 0-345-34810-9.

⁹ An extract of this article was published in the *Journal of Electronic Defense (JED)*, Volume 65, in the July, 2003 issue, pages 60-62, publisher Horizon House, Norwood, MA.

Thousands of “Reenactors” have worked as extras in various Civil War movies. The photos enclosed were taken during some of those reenactment events.

“**The Heroes**”. The real-live “character” that I have come to

consider the most interesting, and most heroic, among the Union forces is Major General Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain. After “walking the ground” at Gettysburg, it became clear to me why then Col. Chamberlain of the 20th Maine was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his leadership on the second day of Gettysburg, and his defense and subsequent attack from Little Roundtop. Standing where he stood and seeing the terrain and defensive left-flank position the 20th Maine represented to the entire Union situation, it is much easier to see how his decisions achieved the success that it did.



Joshua Chamberlain became one of the most remarkable soldiers in American history, a certified hero. His story before the war, during the war, and afterwards is absolutely fascinating.¹⁰ Here are a few more

¹⁰ I also recommend this book: “*The Passing of the Armies, The Last Campaign of the Armies*” by Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, Brevet Major General US Volunteers, published by Stan Clark

examples. He was shot through both hips, and eventually wounded six times, and had six horses shot out from under him, but he returned to be cited for bravery in action four times. He was promoted to Major General for heroism at the Battle of Five Forks, Virginia (April 1, 1865). Chamberlain was the officer chosen by Gen. U.S. Grant from all other Union officers to have the honor of receiving the surrender of the Confederate forces led by General Robert E. Lee at Appomattox Court House, Virginia, on April 9, 1865. That day he surprised the world by calling his troops to attention to salute the defeated South. Later, he

was given the first place in the last Grand Review in Washington, DC.

Before the war Joshua Chamberlain was a college professor, and after the war he was elected Governor of Maine by the largest majority in the history of the state and was reelected three times. In

1876, he was elected President of Bowdoin College¹¹, and received a medal of honor from France for distinguished efforts in international education. Upon his retirement from

Military Books, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 1915, ISBN: I-879664-18-6.

¹¹ Bowdoin College is an independent, nonsectarian, coeducational residential, undergraduate liberal arts institution founded in 1794. It is located in Brunswick, Maine.

Bowdoin he had taught every subject in the curriculum except mathematics. His was a truly incredible human-interest story.¹²

“The Rogues”. The prime example that I have found as a “rogue” is Daniel E. Sickles (former Democratic Congressman from New York), a charismatic man who courted controversy throughout his life and held a succession of significant posts. Daniel Sickles already had a national reputation when the Civil War started.

Some of this you may find hard to believe, but I assure you, this narrative is all absolutely true.

Sickles's career was replete with personal scandals. He was even censured by the New York State Assembly for escorting a known prostitute, Fanny White, into its chambers.

At about 2:00 p.m., on Sunday, February 27, 1859, at least 12 people witnessed Sickles murder the unarmed Philip

Barton Key (the son of Francis Scott Key, author of the “Star Spangled Banner”) in Lafayette Square, Washington, DC.¹³ Earlier, Sickles

had observed from a window of his mansion in Lafayette Square, his beautiful wife’s lover signaling her in broad daylight. Sickles’ attorneys argued that he went mad because of anguish over the adultery and he became the first defendant to use a “temporary insanity” defense in the United States. Despite his distress, Sickles, who was also a lawyer, had the presence of mind to persuade Teresa to write a detailed confession. It was ruled inadmissible in court but nevertheless was printed in the newspapers. Sickles was notorious primarily because of this 20-day nationally publicized trial in which he was acquitted of murder to the cheers of a crowded courtroom.



Sickles and Key, both dapper, about 40 years old and part of Washington’s social elite, had been friends before Key started a torrid and rather public love affair with Sickles 20-year old wife, Teresa.¹⁴ Teresa met the tall dashing Key (and well-known ladies man) at President

¹² Chamberlain died of his war wounds, June 1914, at the age of 83 (1828-1914).

¹³ Ironically, Key’s brother, Naval Academy midshipman Daniel Key, had been killed in a duel about 1836 in the village of Bladensburg, just outside of Washington, DC.

¹⁴ Teresa died in 1867 at about the age of 31.

James Buchanan's inauguration about two years before the slaying. Because of the double standard of the era, the well-known fact of Daniel Sickles' infidelities and his frequent absences made no difference to much of the public. Perhaps only a larger-than-life character such as Daniel Sickles could have gotten away with killing his wife's lover in broad daylight; and he then actually reconciled with Teresa, who had asked for forgiveness.¹⁵



At Gettysburg on day two of the battle (July 2nd), Major General Sickles' 3rd Army Corps was under the command of General Meade, and was ordered to cover a critical area. However, Sickles thought he saw a better position about three quarters of a mile to the front, and without Meade's permission, he moved his entire corps forward and left the key Little Roundtop unoccupied and both his flanks

¹⁵ Daniel and Teresa had a daughter named Laura.

exposed.¹⁶ This was a disastrous move. Sickles' 3rd Corps was so badly chopped up that it would never again be employed as an entity; and the bloody fighting spread for four more hours over the entire landscape with significant Union losses.¹⁷ Sickles's decision had two effects: it greatly diluted the concentrated defensive posture of his corps, by stretching it too thin; and it created a salient that could be bombarded and attacked from multiple sides. Meade rode out and

confronted Sickles about his insubordination, but it was too late. Moreover, Sickles lost his leg after being struck by a 12-pound cannonball putting him out of front-line action for the remainder of the war. He sent his freshly amputated limb to the new Army Medical Museum in

Washington, DC with a visiting card reading "with the compliments of Major General D.E.S." After the war he often brought his lady friends to visit his leg in the museum. His leg is still on display at the National Museum of Health and Medicine at

¹⁶ The corrective action taken by Major General Winfield Scott Hancock and Brig. Gen G.K. Warren moved Col. Chamberlain's 20th Maine into position on Little Roundtop.

¹⁷ Union forces lost 23,049 men at Gettysburg and the Confederate forces lost 20,451 men (e.g., the 2nd N. Carolina Regiment started with 800 men and 708 were killed).

Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Northwest Washington, DC.

After the war, Sickles became the military governor of the Carolinas and later he was appointed Ambassador to the Court of Spain. He married a Spanish woman, converted to Catholicism, and fathered two more children (he was also rumored to have had a romantic involvement with the deposed Queen Isabella II). After making untoward sexual advances to the then Spanish Queen he was unceremoniously declared *persona non grata* and expelled from Spain. He later became sheriff of New York County, and then served in Congress again from 1893 to 1895.¹⁸ Sickles was also chairman of the New York Monuments Commission from 1886 to 1912, when he was removed after accusations of embezzlement surfaced. He died at age 94 in 1914 and was buried at Arlington National Cemetery.



Photo of General Robert E. Lee, CSA

“**Heroes and rogues**” surface in every era, in every war, but it did seem that there was an unusually large number of truly interesting “characters” in our colorful past, especially during the Civil War.¹⁹ I encourage you to visit a battlefield and learn about the interesting people and events from our colorful heritage.²⁰

¹⁹ The photos shown herein are by the author.

²⁰ *Personally, my interest in the Civil War was further engaged when I discovered, during a genealogical search of my family history, that my great grandfather was William Henry Harrison Bartlow (1830-1917), who was a Captain in the 49th Ohio Volunteers. Capt. Bartlow was involved in the Battle of Stones River, Murfreesboro, TN, in which Union forces led by Gen. William S. Rosencrans forced the retreat of Confederate forces under Gen. Braxton Bragg, on Jan. 2, 1863. Over all, both sides lost more than 18,700 killed or wounded in this midwinter battle.*

¹⁸ Congressman Daniel Sickles authored a law, which was passed on February 11, 1895, establishing the Gettysburg National Military Park.