

EYEWITNESS TO

THE CIVIL WAR



JOSHUA LAWRENCE CHAMBERLAIN

THE PASSING OF THE ARMIES



With a new introduction by James M. McPherson,
Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Battle Cry of Freedom*

THE PASSING of the ARMIES

An Account of the Final Campaign
of the Army of the Potomac,
Based Upon Personal Reminiscences
of the Fifth Army Corps



Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain

Brevet Major-General U.S. Volunteers

Introduction by James M. McPherson
General Series Editor, Paul Andrew Hutton



BANTAM BOOKS

New York • Toronto • London • Sydney • Auckland

THE PASSING OF THE ARMIES

A Bantam Domain Book / January 1993

PUBLISHING HISTORY

G. P. Putnam's Sons edition published 1915

Bantam edition / January 1993

DOMAIN and the portrayal of a boxed "d" are trademarks of Bantam Books, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc.

All rights reserved.

Introduction copyright © 1992 by James M. McPherson.

Cover painting copyright © 1992 by Don Troiani.

Cover photograph courtesy of Historical Art Prints, Ltd., Southbury, CT.

Maps designed by Alan McKnight.

Designed by M 'N O Production Services, Inc.

The copyrighted portions of this book may not be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. For information address: Bantam Books.

If you purchased this book without a cover you should be aware that this book is stolen property. It was reported as "unsold and destroyed" to the publisher and neither the author nor the publisher has received any payment for this "stripped book."

ISBN 0-553-29992-1

Published simultaneously in the United States and Canada

Bantam Books are published by Bantam Books, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc. Its trademark, consisting of the words "Bantam Books" and the portrayal of a rooster, is Registered in U.S. Patent and Trademark Office and in other countries. Marca Registrada. Bantam Books, 1540 Broadway, New York, New York 10036.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

OPM 0 9 8 7



EDITORIAL NOTE

This edition of Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, *The Passing of the Armies: An Account of the Final Campaign of the Army of the Potomac, Based Upon Personal Reminiscences of the Fifth Army Corps* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1915) contains the complete text of the original except for a publisher's biographical note and discursive footnotes.

INTRODUCTION

by James M. McPherson

To thousands of college students and countless others, Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain is one of the best-known figures of the Civil War. That would have astonished Chamberlain, for though he rose from the rank of lieutenant colonel to brevet major general in the Union army, this was an accomplishment he shared with many officers whose names are today known only to the most dedicated Civil War buff. Chamberlain's modern fame springs from his role as protagonist in Michael Shaara's novel *The Killer Angels*, a gripping epic of the battle of Gettysburg that won a Pulitzer Prize and has become a favorite assigned reading in college Civil War courses throughout the land. Sharing the spotlight in the novel with the likes of Robert E. Lee and James Longstreet, Chamberlain comes across to the reader as more heroic and human than either.

Commanding the 20th Maine in its desperate defense of the Union left flank at Little Round Top on July 2, Chamberlain won a Congressional Medal of Honor for courage and brilliant tactical leadership. Holding off su-

perior numbers of Confederate attackers until his regiment's ammunition ran out, Chamberlain ordered a bayonet charge that cleared Little Round Top, captured at least four hundred attackers (twice the number of unwounded survivors in the 20th Maine), and saved the day—perhaps the whole battle—for the Union.

This dramatic event deserves all the attention it has received. But it does ironic injustice to Chamberlain. Shaara's novel ends with Lee's retreat from Gettysburg, and thus ends most readers' knowledge of Chamberlain. Yet he went on to become one of the most remarkable soldiers of the Civil War—indeed, in all of American history. He rose to command a brigade in the grueling overland campaign from the Wilderness to Petersburg in 1864. Leading his troops in an assault on Confederate trenches at Petersburg on June 18, 1864, he was shot through both hips, a wound universally considered mortal at the time of the Civil War. Ulysses S. Grant personally promoted Chamberlain to brigadier general on the field—one of only two such occasions in the war—so that he could die at that rank. But Chamberlain defied predictions and recovered. He returned to lead his brigade—and eventually a division—in the final campaign from Petersburg to Appomattox. At the battle of Quaker Road on March 29, 1865, he took another bullet, this one just below the heart, where it surely would have killed him had it not been deflected around his ribs by a leather case of field orders in his pocket. He suffered only two cracked ribs and a bruised arm, and continued to lead his troops in several more fights during the next eleven days until the surrender at Appomattox. The impact of the bullet, though, had temporarily stunned him to a deathlike pallor, and for a second time the New York newspapers carried a notice of his death. Chamberlain outdid Mark Twain in this respect: he twice had the pleasure of reading his own obituary.

By the end of the war, Chamberlain had fought in

twenty battles and numerous skirmishes. He led his troops from the front, never asking them to go where he would not himself go. He was hit six times by bullets or shell fragments, caught malaria and pneumonia, and had his horse shot under him five times. Yet both he and his third horse Charlemagne (who was hit three times) lived to a ripe old age.

Few Civil War soldiers could match this record; and in many other respects Chamberlain was truly *sui generis*. His father had wanted him to follow a military career; his mother wanted him to become a clergyman. His mother appeared to win: young Lawrence (as his family called him) graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Bowdoin College and earned a B.D. from Bangor Theological Seminary. In 1855 he accepted a position at Bowdoin as professor of logic and natural theology, succeeding Calvin Stowe, whose wife Harriet Beecher had written *Uncle Tom's Cabin* while Chamberlain was a student at the college. In 1861 Chamberlain became professor of modern languages at Bowdoin. But he grew restless in those halls of ivy as war engulfed the nation. Though a thirty-three-year-old father of three children and a distinguished college professor, he considered it his duty to fight. To dissuade him, Bowdoin in August 1862 offered him a two-year sabbatical in Europe. Chamberlain tentatively assented, but went instead to the state capital and accepted a lieutenant colonelcy in the 20th Maine. He was not the only college professor in the Union army, but he was surely the only man in either army who could read seven languages—at least these particular seven: Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Arabic, Syriac, French, and German.

Chamberlain will always be remembered mainly for his action at Little Round Top—and deservedly so. Yet that was but a promise of what was to come. In some ways his combat leadership during the final twelve days of the war was even more notable. In the battle of Quaker Road (where he was wounded) on March 29 and the battle of

White Oak Road on March 31, Chamberlain led attacks that drove a wedge into the Confederate line west of Petersburg. This set up the Union assault at Five Forks on April 1—in which Chamberlain also played a conspicuous part—that crumpled Lee's right flank. This in turn gave Grant the opportunity to attack all along the line April 2, forcing Lee to abandon the Petersburg-Richmond line and flee westward in a desperate attempt to save his army. He failed, in part because of Chamberlain's continued brilliant performance. Despite exhaustion from four days of fighting in the mud, his brigade marched so fast at the head of the V Corps to help Phil Sheridan's cavalry cut off Lee's escape that on April 9 Chamberlain was right in line behind the cavalry blocking the Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox. So Lee had to make that fateful trip to meet General Grant in Wilmer McLean's parlor.

Chamberlain had played such a striking part in this final drama that Grant selected him—out of dozens of generals who ranked him—for the honor of receiving the Army of Northern Virginia's formal surrender on April 12. Mindful of the symbolic significance of this ceremony, Chamberlain determined to make a gesture that turned out to be of equal importance to Grant's generous surrender terms in binding up the nation's wounds. As the Confederate infantry marched up to stack arms and surrender their flags on the chill gray morning of April 12, many of them shared the depressed sentiments of one officer: "Was this to be the end of all our marching and fighting for the past four years? I could not keep back the tears." Chamberlain had placed his division of Union veterans in three lines to receive the surrender. Leading the Confederate troops as they approached these lines was John B. Gordon of Georgia, who had also been wounded six times and whose military rise had been more spectacular than Chamberlain's—from captain to major general and commander of Stonewall Jackson's old corps. First in line of march behind Gordon was the famed Stonewall

Brigade, five regiments with 210 ragged survivors of four years' carnage. As Gordon approached at the head of these men with "his chin drooped to his breast, down-hearted and dejected in appearance," Chamberlain gave a brief order, a bugle call rang out, and the Union soldiers shifted their rifles from "order arms" to "carry arms"—the salute of honor. Startled, Gordon looked up, and with sudden realization turned smartly to Chamberlain, dipped his sword in salute, and ordered his own men to "carry arms." These enemies in many a bitter battle ended the war not with scorn and humiliation but with "mutual salutation and farewell . . . honor answering honor."

Chamberlain anticipated Northern criticism of this action, and he got it. He had intended the salute to recognize not the cause for which the enemy fought, but the courage they had shown on the battlefield; like Grant, Chamberlain admired Confederate valor even though their "cause was, I believe, one of the worst for which a people ever fought." "Before us," wrote Chamberlain, "in proud humiliation stood the embodiment of manhood . . . thin, worn, and famished but erect, and with eyes looking level into ours, waking memories that bound us together as no other bond;—was not such manhood to be welcomed back into a Union so tested and assured?" Chamberlain's gesture had the desired effect. "You astonish us by your honorable and generous conduct," said one Confederate general to him after the ceremony. "Now that is my flag," said another pointing to the American flag, "and I will prove myself as worthy as any of you."

The Passing of the Armies is Chamberlain's story of those climactic twelve days that ended at Appomattox on Palm Sunday 1865, and of the aftermath leading up to the Grand Review of the Union armies in Washington on May 23–24. The book had its origin in Chamberlain's desire to write a history of the V Corps—the corps in which he served for his entire army career. But postwar activities prevented him from getting to the task before another

history of the corps appeared in 1896. The subsequent success of several magazine articles that Chamberlain wrote about the war encouraged him to undertake this book in his eighties, nearly half a century after the events he described had occurred. The V Corps theme remained prominent. Indeed, the first half of the book constitutes a defense of the corps' crucial contribution to the Appomattox campaign. It therefore has something of a defensive tone. And thereby hangs a tale.

Each corps in Civil War armies had its own distinctive qualities as well as esprit, none more than the V Corps. Containing the two brigades of regulars assigned to the Army of the Potomac, it was more professional, disciplined, and spit-and-polish in appearance than the all-volunteer units in other corps. It had been George B. McClellan's favorite corps; McClellan gave command of the V to his protégé Fitz-John Porter in 1862. Thus the corps also took on these officers' Democratic, conservative, antiemancipation, and antiadministration cast. By the time McClellan was removed from command (November 1862) and Porter cashiered (unjustly) for disobedience of orders at second Bull Run, the V Corps' political if not its military reputation had been tarnished, and its alleged elitism had provoked resentment among other units.

A staunch Republican and antislavery man, and a volunteer with no professional military experience, Chamberlain held no brief for McClellan or military elitism. But he was jealous of the fighting reputation of his corps. By early 1865 that reputation had suffered some erosion because of Gouverneur K. Warren—the very man who had summoned the 20th Maine to its moment of destiny at Little Round Top. As commander of the V Corps during the remorseless fighting of 1864, Warren had irritated General-in-Chief Ulysses S. Grant and army commander George G. Meade by alleged tardiness and lack of aggressiveness in obeying orders to attack at Spottsylvania and Petersburg. The II and VI Corps and Sheridan's cavalry

had eclipsed the V Corps' fighting reputation—the VI and the cavalry earning special plaudits for their victories in the Shenandoah Valley under Sheridan's command.

This background forms the context for Chamberlain's detailed account of the fighting from Quaker Road through Five Forks, from March 29 to April 1, 1865. As ranking officer of Union forces on this end of the line, Sheridan wanted the VI Corps, but got the V because it was the closest. Grant gave Sheridan summary authority to remove Warren from command if he did not measure up to the hard-driving cavalryman's demands. In the middle of the battle of Five Forks, the fiery, impulsive Sheridan did remove Warren when two V Corps divisions diverged from the attack route that Sheridan wanted them to take. This action was controversial then, and remains so today. A board of inquiry mostly exonerated Warren—but not until fifteen years later. Officers in the V Corps, including Chamberlain, bitterly resented Sheridan's behavior, and Chamberlain's account of the March 29–April 1 fighting casts Warren in the best possible light and Sheridan in the worst.

Readers of these chapters might wish to balance Chamberlain's account by reading Sheridan's memoirs (also published in Bantam's "Eyewitness to the Civil War" series), or perhaps a secondary source, most of which tend to reflect the Sheridan–Grant rather than the Chamberlain–Warren view. In any case, Chamberlain's account does something to redress historical imbalance. It also demonstrates just how chaotic and confusing a battle can be when viewed from the inside rather than on a map, with its neat lines and arrows that make everything seem simple. Chamberlain makes a convincing case for the importance of these battles—perhaps the least understood in the Civil War—as well as the key contribution of the V Corps to Union triumph at Appomattox.

In some ways, though, the best-written and most compelling part of the book starts with the surrender at Ap-

pomattox and ends with the Grand Review. The style varies from the playful humor of his description of an encounter with "the Belle of Dinwiddie" to the chilling horror of the account of his division's camp at Hanover Court House amid the skeletons of V Corps comrades killed three years earlier. The chapter on the Grand Review—the literal "Passing of the Armies"—reaches heights of lyrical prose.

Chamberlain lived forty-nine years after Appomattox—most of them in pain from his Petersburg wound. His postwar career was distinguished, including four terms as governor of Maine and a dozen years as president of Bowdoin College. Yet somehow those years seem anticlimactic, as if the passing of the armies in 1865 represented the passing of a part of his life that could never be equaled. Chamberlain does not glorify war—quite the contrary—but this book makes clear how war can bring out the best as well as the worst in humankind.

James M. McPherson
Princeton University





INTRODUCTORY

HISTORY is written for the most part from the outside. Truth often suffers distortion by reason of the point of view of the narrator, some pre-occupation of his judgment or fancy not only as to relative merits but even as to facts in their real relations. An interior view may not be without some personal coloring. But it must be of interest, especially in important transactions, to know how things appeared to those actually engaged in them. Action and passion on such a scale must bear some thoughts "that run before and after." It has been deemed a useful observance "to see ourselves as others see us," but it may sometimes be conducive to a just comprehension of the truth to let others see us as we see ourselves.

The view here presented is of things as they appeared to us who were concerned with them as subordinate commanders,—having knowledge, however, of the general plan, and a share in the responsibility for its execution. This is a chapter of experiences,—including in this term not only what was done, but what was known and said and thought and felt,—not to say, suffered; and in its

darkest passages showing a steadfast purpose, patience, and spirit of obedience deserving of record even if too often without recompense, until the momentous consummation.

These memoirs are based on notes made nearly at the time of the events which they describe. They give what may be called an interior view of occurrences on the front of the Fifth Corps, Army of the Potomac, during the last essay in Grant's Virginia campaign. This was so distinctive in character, conditions, and consequences, that I have ventured to entitle it "The Last Campaign of the Armies."

I trust this narrative may not seem to arrogate too much for the merits of the Fifth Corps. No eminence is claimed for it beyond others in that campaign. But the circumstance that this Corps was assigned to an active part with Sheridan during the period chiefly in view—the envelopment and final out-flanking of Lee's army—warrants the prominence given in this review.

It may be permitted to hope that this simple recital may throw some light on a passage of the history of this Corps, the record of which has been obscured in consequence of the summary change of commanders early in the campaign.

The Fifth Corps had a certain severity of reputation quite distinctive in the comradeship of the army. Early in its history, Porter's Division—the nucleus of it—had drawn the especial praise of General McClellan for its soldierly bearing and proficiency, being unfortunately referred to in orders as a model for the rest of the army. This had the effect of creating on the part of others a feeling of jealousy towards that Division or an opposition to apparent favoritism shown its commander, which was extended to the whole Corps on its formation in the summer of 1862, when the Regulars were assigned to it as its Second Division, and the choice Pennsylvania Reserves became its Third Division. This feeling certainly was neither caused nor followed by anything like boastfulness or self-

complacency on the part of the Fifth Corps; but, if anything, created a sense of responsibility and willingness to "endure hardness as good soldiers" to make good their reputation. And no doubt the discipline of the Corps was quite severe. Most of its commanding officers in the superior grades were West Pointers, and experienced officers of the old army, and prided themselves on strict observance of Army Regulations and military habitudes. The required personal relations between officers and men were quite novel and but slowly acquiesced in by volunteers who were first-class citizens at home,—many of them equal to their official "superiors." For example: my young brother, Tom, when a private in my regiment came sometimes to see me in my tent, but would not think of sitting down in my presence unless specially invited to do so. But he went home from Appomattox Lieutenant-Colonel of his regiment and Brevet-Colonel of United States Volunteers—and this on his own merits, not through any suggestion of mine.

Passages in the history of the Corps had endeared its members to each other, and brought out soldierly pride and manly character; but boastful assertion and just glorification of their Corps were remarkably less manifest among its members than with those of every one of the other splendid Corps of the Army of the Potomac.

It may not be improper to state here that there was a manifest prejudice against the Fifth Corps at Government Headquarters,—particularly at Stanton's,—on account of the supposed attachment for McClellan and Porter among its members. This was believed to be the reason why no promotion to the rank of General Officers was made in this Corps for a long time, unless secured by political influence. Brigades and even divisions were in many cases commanded by colonels of State regiments. This worked a great injustice in the fact that officers of similar commands in the different Corps were not of similar relative rank, and some were therefore unduly subordinated to

those who were not in fact their superiors in service. There was also a practical injustice in the added expense of supporting headquarters above lineal rank, which, with no extra pay or allowance, quite cancelled the compliment.

It had not been the habit in the Fifth Corps to encourage detailed reports on the part of subordinates, and in the rush and pressure of this last campaign there was less opportunity or care than ever for such matters, and the impressiveness of its momentous close left little disposition to multiply words upon subordinate parts or participants. The fact also of an early and sudden change in the grand tactics of the campaign confused the significance and sometimes the identity of important movements; and the change of commanders in the crisis of its most important battle induced consequences which, even in official reports and testimony afterwards called for, affected the motive in sharply defining actions where personal concern had come to be an embarrassing factor.

Very naturally, the immediate reports of those days are meager in the extreme; and very much of what has come out since, partaking of official character, has been under the disadvantage of being elicited as *ex parte* testimony before military tribunals where the highest military officers of the Government were parties, and the attitudes of plaintiff and defendant almost inevitably biased expression.

In the strange lull after the surrender of Lee and the sudden release from intense action and responsibility, but as yet in the field and in the active habit not readily relinquished, it occurred to me, impressed with the deep-wrought visions of those tragic days, to write down, while fresh in mind and mood, some salient facts of that last campaign, within my personal knowledge and observation, to serve for fireside memories in after years, and for the satisfaction of some others who had given of their best for the great issues in which these scenes were involved.

It has been suggested to me of late that these reminiscences might be of interest to a wider circle whose hearts respond to the story of things done and suffered for truth and honor's sake, which they would have gladly shared in their own persons. In preparing for this more exacting demand I have availed myself of additional material which, in the later consolidations in the Fifth Corps, successive assignments brought into my hands: particularly the office-copy of the Corps field-orders for the last campaign, and also the invaluable original records of the Medical Inspector of the Corps for that period. Later, came the (now suppressed) volumes of the records of the Warren Court of Inquiry, and the extensive *Records of the War of the Rebellion*. In revising this personal memoir, I have diligently consulted these, but have found no occasion to correct or modify the account given from my own point of view, however limited. Qualifying or corroborative testimony from these sources, when introduced, has been clearly indicated.

I confess some embarrassments of a personal nature in giving forth certain passages of this record. These facts, however simply stated, cannot but have some bearing on points which have been drawn into controversy on the part of persons who were dear to me as commanders and companions in arms, and who have grown still dearer in the intimacies of friendship since the war. Alas! that no one of them can answer my greeting across the bar. I feel therefore under increased responsibility in recounting these things, but assure myself that I know of no demand of personality or partisanship which should make me doubtful of my ability to tell the truth as I saw and knew it, or distrust my judgment in forming an opinion.

J.L.C.

