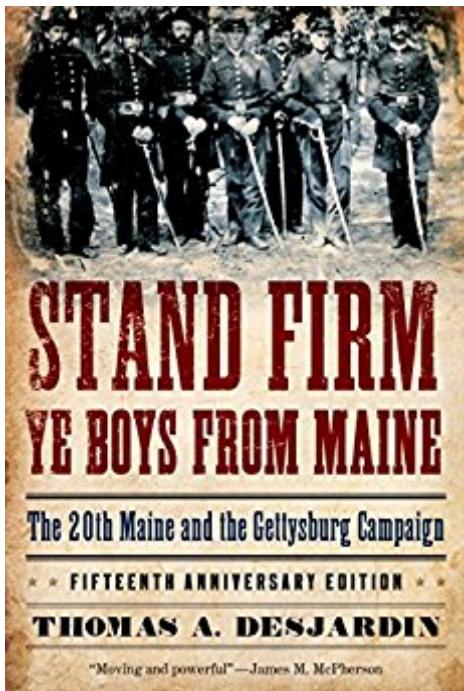


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# Stand Firm Ye Boys From Maine: The 20th Maine And The Gettysburg Campaign



## **Synopsis**

Fought amid rocks and trees, in thick blinding smoke, and under exceedingly stressful conditions, the battle for the southern slope of Little Round Top on July 2, 1863 stands among the most famous and crucial military actions in American history, one of the key engagements that led to the North's victory at Gettysburg. In this powerfully narrated history, Maine historian Tom Desjardin tells the story of the 20th Maine Regiment, the soldiers who fought and won the battle of Little Round Top. This engaging work is the culmination of years of detailed research on the experiences of the soldiers in that regiment, telling the complete story of the unit in the Gettysburg Campaign, from June 21 through July 10, 1863. Desjardin uses more than seventy first-hand accounts to tell the story of this campaign in critical detail. He brings the personal experiences of the soldiers to life, relating the story from both sides and revealing the actions and feelings of the men from Alabama who tried, in vain, to seize Little Round Top. Indeed, ranging from the lowest ranking private to the highest officers, this book explores the terrible experiences of war and their tragic effect. Following the regiment through the campaign enables readers to understand fully the soldiers' feelings towards the enemy, towards citizens of both North and South, and towards the commanders of the two armies. In addition, this book traces the development of the legend of Gettysburg, as veterans of the fight struggle to remember, grasp, and memorialize their part in the largest battle ever fought on the continent. With a new preface and updated maps and illustrations, *Stand Firm Ye Boys of Maine* offers a compelling account of one of the most crucial small engagements of the Civil War.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

We take our heroes very seriously in the State of Maine. Major General (and Governor) Joshua Chamberlain appears on everything from t-shirts to beer bottles; he has become nearly mythical in our eyes. "Stand Firm" provides an honest account of the 20th Maine regiment in the Battle of Gettysburg; it is grounded in thorough research and reflects careful analysis by its author. It is very readable, with maps and notes included to promote greater understanding of the information. I offer it to my high school students for both the content and as an example of the process of analyzing historical information for accuracy, bias, etc. Mr. Desjardin took on the myth, and allowed Joshua Chamberlain to be seen as he should be; a decent man in a difficult situation. (The hard cover edition of this book has earned the honor of being the only one never returned to me from the many books I have shared with students over the past 13 years!)

I initially read this book after participating in a staff ride of the Gettysburg battlefield. My knowledge of the battle at that time came largely from Shaara's "The Killer Angels", and the subsequent film "Gettysburg". As both were meant to inspire and entertain rather than inform, I had an unrealistic understanding of the 20th Maine and its place in the struggle at Gettysburg. Thomas Desjardin's book changed that. Well written and fast moving, "Stand Firm Ye Boys From Maine" provides excellent background information on the 20th Maine, identifies members of the Regiment beyond Chamberlain and his brother Tom, and reminds the reader that the 20th Maine's opponents at Little Round Top weren't a nameless mass of rebels, but members of a proud regiment with a strong leader all their own. Desjardin explains the fight between the 20th Maine and the 15th Alabama in tremendous detail, with accompanying maps that enhance the narrative. More importantly, he describes the post-war growth of the Chamberlain legend, and explains the difference between Chamberlain the Man, and Chamberlain the myth. Desjardin's Chamberlain is not the battlefield intellectual who conceived an unorthodox maneuver in the face of the enemy to win the day, but an ordinary man who led from the front under extraordinary circumstances. I prefer the latter. Students of Gettysburg will be interested in Desjardin's perspective on familiar events, and those unfamiliar

with the battle will find it a great introduction to the subject. While not a history of the overall campaign, it is definitely a great starting place to learning what took place in PA over 140 years ago.

The book isn't one that would catch your eye in a bookstore. It's barely 200 pages long and at first looks like any number of books one will find related to Gettysburg and the Civil War. The difference is while there are a lot of good historians out there who are good researchers, few of them are as talented at writing as Tom Desjardin. The 20th Maine is perhaps the most famous regiment that fought at Gettysburg and its commander Lawrence Chamberlain is perhaps the most famous Union officer after Grant thanks in part to the book 'Killer Angels' and the film 'Gettysburg'. Unfortunately however there are a lot of myths surrounding both Chamberlain and the 20th Maine. This book cuts through the myths that the book and film have helped perpetuate without trying to tear down Chamberlain like some in recent years have tried to do. In the end the truth is just as fascinating as the myths, if not more so.

The success of the Novel "The Killer Angels," and its motion picture version "Gettysburg," has made Joshua Lawrence Chamberlin one of the most recognized figures in Civil War history. This book seeks to deflate some of the myth, but nonetheless represents an outstanding gem of small-unit scholarship. Desjardin maintains a ruthlessly narrow focus, recounting exclusively the actions of the Maine regiment on July 2nd, 1863. He counters the notion presented by Michael Shaara that the 20th Maine's charge was some kind of executed maneuver, presenting it rather as a spontaneous rush down the hill. He also de-emphasises the importance of the 20th Maine's actions, suggesting that had the 20th withdrawn, the 83rd Pennsylvania could have held against the exhausted Alabama regiments. He presents Chamberlin as somewhat of a tragic character after the war, suffering from political reverses and a failing marriage-this is in contrast to most accounts that celebrate his actions as a soldier, governor and college president. Desjardin's book certainly makes the battle less glamorous than it appears on the silver screen. Nonetheless, he reaffirms the basic story of a green regiment, and a green commander, putting up a hell of a fight. 20th Maine aficionados will want to read this book to get a new angle on the famous story, while Civil War buffs will appreciate it for its in depth detail about the dynamics of a regimental action.

When I saw this at our local bookstore I thought it was brand new since I am a big Gettysburg fan and hadn't seen it before. Turns out it was originally published in 1995 by a small press in Pennsylvania or somewhere and was only available in a few places, Then [someone else] got hold

of it and now it is everywhere. It is a really great book, more balanced and objective than ANY Civil War book I've read, and even though it exposes a lot of myths about Joshua Chamberlain and his men, you will still end up admiring them, only now for the truth, not the myth. Reads like a novel and has some great detailed appendixes with lists of participants, wounded, etc. Outstanding!

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