

EULOGY OF
GENERAL STRONG VINCENT

ERIE CEMETERY, ERIE, PA
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We are gathered here to honor General Strong Vincent, the man and the soldier.

Strong Vincent can be claimed by Waterford, where he was born and spent his earliest years, and by Erie, where he lived most of his life, first as a student at the Erie Academy, and later as a teen-aged iron molder and clerk in his father's foundry. He left Erie to enter Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, at the age of 17. Two years later he entered Harvard College and graduated from that school in 1859. He returned to Erie to study law with Attorney William Lane, was admitted to the Erie Bar in 1860, and practiced law until he entered the Army in 1861. His character and ability were known to all around him as he rose in rank, becoming the Colonel of his regiment, the 83rd Pennsylvania, in June of 1862, and being named commander of the brigade in early 1863. He had earlier declined an appointment as the Judge Advocate General of the Army of the Potomac, a position that would have assured his personal safety and his success in civilian life after the war.

Vincent was mortally wounded while rallying his men in the defense of Little Round Top at Gettysburg on July 2nd, 1863. Hours before his death five days later word came that he had been promoted to the rank of Brigadier General, a rare promotion in the field to recognize the value of his services at Gettysburg. He had just turned 26 years of age, an age when most men are on the threshold of their future.

His character was formed by his family, his education, and his work. Something of his character can be determined by the woman he married two years earlier. Elizabeth Carter Vincent was described as a very handsome, tall and graceful woman. She lived as Vincent's widow for the next 51 years, caring for Vincent's "defective and dependent" brother Ward, whom she taught patiently in an effort to give him what little good and happiness was possible to him in this life.

Vincent's daughter was born months after his death and lived less than a year. Blanche Vincent is buried here between Elizabeth and Strong Vincent.

Vincent's sacrifice deprived him of the greatest joys a man can know, a long life with the woman he loves, and the pleasure and pride of raising a child.

One can only speculate on what a future would have been in store for Strong Vincent, the brave and natural leader of men, had he returned from the war.

Why do we honor Vincent not only as a man but as a soldier?

Strong Vincent is generally recognized by those who have any interest in the Battle of Gettysburg as one of the determining factors in the struggle for Little Round Top, which in turn proved to be a keystone in the outcome of the great three day battle. He stands in history beside General Gouverneur K. Warren, Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, Colonel Patrick O'Rourke, and atop the list of all those who spilled their future on those rocks while holding the pivotal south end of the Union line against the rebel onslaught.

What exactly did Vincent do? Vincent's Brigade led the division south through the lower and open fields just east of the J. Weikert farm and northeast of the Wheatfield. While his brigade (consisting of the 83rd Pennsylvania, 44th New York, 16th Michigan, and 20th Maine regiments) remained a short distance behind him and in the protection of the swale, Vincent and his color bearer rode to the top of the small rise east of the present driveway. A mounted messenger raced toward him from the Wheatfield with an order directed to the

division commander, General James Barnes, who had gone ahead to reconnoiter the ground, and was no longer in sight.

The messenger protested that the order directed Barnes to divert a brigade from the division's march to the front and to "occupy that hill yonder" and to defend it. The order was to be delivered to General Barnes personally for action. Upon seeing the tactical importance of the stony hill to his left rear, hearing the roar of the conflict in the Wheatfield to his immediate front, and sensing that there was no time to find Barnes, Vincent demanded the order. With no hesitation, he announced "I will take the responsibility myself of taking my brigade there." He detached his brigade of some eleven hundred men from the division and turned them back to scale the clearly crucial and undefended heights. Vincent exercised the independent judgment required of an officer confronted with a changing situation, one that demanded quick and decisive action.

The brigade was led around the protective east side of the hill and onto the south and west slopes. There Vincent hurriedly eyed the terrain and posted his four regiments in a curve on the military crest, below the topographical crest. In a matter of minutes, he had the brigade placed in the best possible position using the slopes of the hill, and the boulders and rocks to maximum advantage. His speedy and judicious deployment of his troops in the face of the onrushing enemy proved to be crucial in the next few minutes as the attacking forces hurried to collide with Vincent's Brigade. The right of the brigade line, the 16th Michigan, began to falter and to fall back towards the summit. Vincent raced to steady the line and while urging the men forward at the boulders at the north base of the present 44th New York monument, received the fatal wound. **The brigade held. The gray tide was stopped. The Union line remained anchored on Little Round Top.**

Strong Vincent died five days later. General George Meade telegraphed a request for Vincent's appointment as Brigadier General. The request was promptly granted and affirmation was received just before his death. He was probably unaware of his promotion in last few hours of his life.

Dr. Jay Luvaas of the U.S. Army War College has stated that Vincent's actions in recognizing the necessity of moving without hesitation to detach his brigade from the division without specific orders, taking it to the defense of Little Round Top, and his immediate establishment of the brigade line in the most advantageous position, are studied by Army officers today as outstanding examples of initiative and decisiveness.

Scholars and buffs alike, from the U. S. Army War College to the local roundtables, recognize that Vincent deserves full credit for his independent action taken twice within minutes, both moves taken quickly enough to prevent the loss of the hill and fatal exposure of the flank of the entire defensive line of the Union.

I have been asked to eulogize Strong Vincent. I would like to praise him and to honor him--**but I can't do that!** Any words of mine are of no significance.. I choose instead to repeat the words of those men who knew him best--those men who soldiered with and fought along side him--and those who fought against him for their cause.

Oliver W. Norton, Vincent's brigade bugler and color bearer, wrote of watching Vincent ride in the open, exposed to rebel fire on the Rappahannock River; of seeing Vincent near Aldie, Virginia, raising his sword and leading his men in a charge to clear a bridge the cavalry had to cross and shouting, "There they go, boys. Now give them hell." He describes the cheers at the news of Vincent's taking command of the brigade. And he writes in great detail of Vincent's actions at Gettysburg, notes that the genius, the devotion, the heroism, and the consummate skill of Vincent saved the day on the left flank of the Union army. He says of Strong Vincent's death, "proud, gentle, tender, true, he laid his gift on his country's altar. It was done nobly, gladly."

Captain Amos Judson, in his history of the 83rd Pennsylvania, described Vincent at Fredericksburg, "With sword in hand he stood erect in full view of the enemy's artillery, and though shot fell fast on all sides, he never changed his position." Judson wrote later, "To sum up the character of General in three words I can only say that he was a gallant soldier, a fine scholar, and a Christian gentleman, and when you say this you have said all that can be said of any man."

A few days after Vincent's death, Colonel Rice of the 44th New York, now the commander of what had been Vincent's Brigade, advised the brigade that Vincent was dead and his general order included the words, "hearts exultant give way to feelings of grief. A soldier, a scholar, a friend has fallen."

General Meade wrote years after the war that but for the prompt action in securing Little Round Top and the desperate fight to secure that position, the enemy would have taken that hill, planted his artillery there so as to command the entire battlefield, "and what the result would have been, I leave you to judge."

General Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, then commanding the 20th Maine, wrote later, "Our Vincent, soldierly and self-reliant,----waited word from no superior, but taking the responsibility ordered us to turn and push for Little Round Top at all possible speed, and dashed ahead to study how best to place us." Chamberlain recalled that when he reached the slope of Little Round Top, "I found Vincent there, with intense poise and look. He said with a voice of awe----**I place you here. This is the left of the Union line. You understand. You are to hold this ground at all costs.**"

Towards the end of his life, Chamberlain wrote, "I regard the timely occupation of Little Round Top, which was at that stage of the battle the key of the Union defense, as due to the energy and skill of Colonel Vincent."

In 1901, General Daniel Butterfield wrote to Norton, "No man who lived and fought in the Battle of Gettysburg did more for his country than Vincent. He was a magnificent soldier, a gentlemen of high education and great ability."

The Confederate General, James Longstreet, also wrote to Norton about Little Round Top. "It was everything to the success of the Union battle. General Vincent's prompt action in moving to save that point held it, and was the means of getting the battle to his side. A delay would have given the Confederates the field."

Confederate Colonel William Oates, commander of the 15th Alabama which struck the extreme left of Vincent's line, wrote, "I saw no enemy until within forty or fifty steps of a ledge of rocks, a splendid line of natural breastworks. Vincent's Brigade reached this position **ten** minutes before my arrival, and they piled rocks from boulder to boulder and were concealed behind them, ready to receive us."

General Longstreet recollected that Vincent's Brigade was not in position all of ten minutes. While touring the field a few years war he remarked, "I was **three** minutes late in occupying Little Round Top. If I had got there first you would have had as much trouble in getting rid of me as I did in trying to get rid of you."

All who served with Strong Vincent must have shared the sentiments of Chamberlain who wrote to his wife upon hearing of Vincent's death, "I grieve for him much."

In 1889, the monument of the 83rd Pennsylvania Regiment was dedicated on Little Round Top. Oliver Norton was chosen to give the dedication speech. He closed by saying to the veterans around him, "May we not say that those who have gladly died for men are not dead, but are here with us today; more living than when they stood to stem the tide of invasion. If we are proud to say that we were in that line on Little Round Top, can you think that they regret it? With clearer vision than ours their eyes see this broad land a nation--- they look down the coming years and see it peopled with a host of free men, rejoicing in the result of their sacrifice. **They are content.**"

I am convinced that the spirit of Strong Vincent is here in our midst today. I firmly believe that he is aware of what we have attempted to do to honor and remember him. I hope he can look upon us and say "**I am content.**"

As long as the Gettysburg Battlefield exists, as long as the statue of Strong Vincent stands atop his regimental monument on Little Round Top, as long as his new statue looks over the City of Erie, as long as people come to gaze upon the painting of Vincent posting his brigade, as long as there is a Strong Vincent Highway in Erie and Waterford, as long as there are students of Strong Vincent High School, as long as there are individuals who will recognize and take responsibility, as long as there are men and women who care about honor,

character, duty, sacrifice, and who will remember those who have made this country the great nation that it is,
Strong Vincent, you shall never be forgotten!

Atty. James R. Wright