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Thomas A. Desjardin. *Stand Firm Ye Boys from Maine: The 20th Maine and the Gettysburg Campaign.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. 272 pp. $16.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-19-538231-0.

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On and Over Little Roundtop

Adelbert Ames, son-in-law of Union general Benjamin Butler, Reconstruction governor of Mississippi, target of the James Gang's final (and failed) heist on the First National Bank of Northfield, Minnesota where he was believed to hold financial interests, had little good to say about the 20th Maine in the months before the Battle of Gettysburg, calling it a "hell of a regiment," which he meant in distinctly negative terms (p. 122). The men of the 20th returned these feelings; one swore, "the men will shoot him the first battle we are in" (p. 4). Luckily for both, Ames's promotion allowed Joshua Chamberlain, a professor from Bowdoin whose education in tactics proved mostly theoretical until July 1863, to take over as lieutenant colonel of the regiment. Nonetheless, after the fight at Gettysburg, where the 20th defended the Army of the Potomac's left flank and, arguably, saved the battle that proved the turning point of the war, Ames called his former charges in the 20th "a regiment which knows no superior;" in return, one soldier, speaking for all, called Ames the commander who "made … the 20th M[ain]e a regiment … whose line … was never broken" (p. 123).

The events that explain this remarkable turn of sentiment are the subject of Thomas A. Desjardin's *Stand Firm Ye Boys From Maine: The 20th Maine and the Gettysburg Campaign*, reissued in 2009 to mark the fifteenth anniversary of its first publication. Desjardin's anecdote of Ames's and the 20th Maine's changing attitudes toward one another offers a useful example of the most notable achievement of this book: its characterization of the way in which battles, as we come to know them, are as much made by memory as they are by the events themselves. Ames remembered the 20th as an unbreakable band of soldiers, though he had characterized it as a hapless collection of malcontents before the battle. The 20th remembered Ames as the disciplinarian who had made them into soldiers, but had dreamed of murdering him not eight months before Gettysburg. Little Round Top lay between each transformed memory.

Desjardin's account does not offer a substantial revision of the history of the Battle of Gettysburg or the exploits of the 20th as much as it provides a micro-narrative of events that, when viewed at such close range, cease to move in broad, clearly discernable patterns; in this regard, the maps of the battle lines in this book function as foils to events on the ground. For example, at a moment of pitched conflict, Chamberlain's line bent back nearly onto itself "into the shape of a mule shoe" and thereby, though pushed nearly into disarray by the 15th Alabama, had "the advantage of interior lines" whereby communication between the regiment's two flanks was "less than half the distance to travel than [that of] the 15th" (p. 55). In the chaos of Little Round Top, as the Alabamans pushed a temporary advantage, they exacerbated a debilitating disadvantage; on a map, this looks like a tactical coup for the 20th Maine. On the ground, it looked like bedlam: fighting on the rocky and steep terrain of Little Round Top made it difficult to even call the Union left and Confederate right flanks "lines" since "both regiments lay in scattered groups so that officers could scarcely hear one another or recognize where their company line began and ended" (p. 58). According to Desjardin, "commands were almost useless and tactics virtually impossible" under these circumstances (p. 58). In this confusion, only hindsight, with its tricky pitfalls, could say why one side came through to victory and the other to defeat. As Desjardin recounts, the bickering about what happened on Little Round Top between veteran soldiers, their commanders, and historians, continued into the twentieth century, fought out again and again on the battlefield of Gettysburg itself over the placement of memorial markers to enshrine the position of battle lines in public memory. Even the value of the war remained contested ground: for Chamberlain, it proved "the final

infinite good," (p. 144); for his fellow 20th Mainer, Ellis Spear, it remained a "horrific experience ... [better] ... forgotten than immortalized" (p. 145).

This is the hidden historiographical gem that lies at the center of this regimental history: Desjardin has written a case study of the way in which the memory of Little Round Top became, itself, a complicated and fraught battleground. Ultimately, participants proved to be both agents and bystanders in the creation of the history of the 20th at Gettysburg (cue Jeff Daniels). In this respect, Desjardin's *These Honored Dead: How the Story of Gettysburg Shaped American Memory* will serve as a useful companion to this very good little history of the fighting on and over Little Round Top.

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