

GEORGE EDWARD PICKETT:
A MACRO-HISTORICAL/
MICRO-HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

A THESIS

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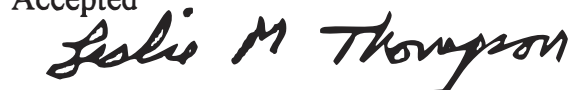
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GEORGE E. PICKETT:
A MACRO-HISTORICAL/
MICRO-HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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The purpose of this study is to prepare a life history of George Edward Pickett (1825-1875). However, there are many historiographical problems which present a variety of interpretations of George Pickett. As a result, historians have drawn numerous conclusions about Pickett, many of which are based on narratives written decades after his death. This study will attempt to clarify that image by ascertaining which materials present a true image and which historical information distort the image purposefully.

It is the intention of this thesis, therefore, to provide an interdisciplinary approach to the research problem. The quantitative methods for this study are based on census records, official U. S. military records, and statistical information provided by the United States government. The micro-historical model focuses on the personal life of George E. Pickett, utilizing letters, diaries and newspaper accounts. The macro-historical model for this research includes cultural and social trends, nineteenth century gender roles, and political issues. Manuscript collections located at the National Archives, the University of Virginia, Duke University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the Virginia

Historical Society, as well as others, have contributed to the research strategy. Another important component of this examination will comprise the use of letters and works written by LaSalle Corbell Pickett.

This study provides an integrated view of the impact of the Civil War and the subsequent period on George and LaSalle Pickett by demonstrating the interdependence of legitimized myth and culture. And, this analysis will also contribute to a better understanding of the Victorian era gender roles. An historiographical essay provides the conclusion to this study.

George Pickett was a member of the Pickett family of Virginia whose ancestors dated their arrival in the Virginia Colony to the early seventeenth century. His early years were undistinguished from other young men of his era; however, with the onset of a civil war his existence became closely entwined with notable figures of the nineteenth century whose endeavors helped shape the course of American history. Subsequent to his graduation from West Point in 1846, Pickett was assigned to diverse military stations in the United States. He fought in the Mexican War, and later received a transfer to the Washington Territory. However, in 1861 with the secession of South Carolina, Pickett resigned his position in the Federal army and returned to his home in Virginia.

Promoted to the position of Major-General in the Confederate Army, George Pickett became celebrated by reason of misfortune. Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg left an ineradicable mark on the future for Pickett, and his life would never be the same.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

COPYRIGHT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	v
Chapter	
I. "HONOR AND JOY"	1
II. "THESE PERILOUS YEARS"	9
III. MEXICO	16
IV. TEXAS	24
V. CAMP PICKETT	34
VI. "GALLANT BEHAVIOR"	51
VII. "USELESS SACRIFICE"	61
VIII. GETTYSBURG	72
IX. "WORSE THAN USELESS"	79
X. "WITH KINDNESS OF PROVIDENCE"	93
XI. "MEMORY AS OPPOSED TO HISTORY"	104
BIBLIOGRAPHY	115

CHAPTER ONE

“HONOR AND JOY”

In 1825, the year that George Edward Pickett was born, the United States had seen the close of the Era of Good Feelings. Nationalism prevailed on the surface, and James Monroe was in his second term as President of the United States. The United States had purchased Florida from Spain as part of the Adams-Onís Treaty in 1819; and, westward settlement into the lands of the Louisiana Purchase had doubled the size of the United States.¹

The American economy had steadily expanded from 1820 to 1837, giving many Americans a permanent view of prosperity. However, by 1837 events in Britain had begun to have rippling effects on American business. Southern cotton production was closely related to the demands of British textile mills; and, in 1836 the British mills responded to the sharp reduction of foreign investment money by the Bank of England.

The Panic of 1837 had begun in Britain; however, by the time George Edward Pickett was entering adolescence, Virginia’s mercantilism, based primarily on cotton

¹ Gabriel Kolko, Main Currents in Modern American History (New York: Random House, 1984), 17-23. The apparent lack of Federalist opposition gave the James Monroe administration (1817-1825) the name “The Era of Good Feelings.” Factionalism was forming, though, in the Democratic-Republican party, which was not evident at the time. The Monroe Doctrine was issued in 1823 as a declaration to European nations of United States’ intentions in Latin America, and to prevent their further colonization in the Western Hemisphere. Expansionism and the theory of Manifest Destiny continued to prevail.

investments, was sliding into depression. Cotton prices plummeted in the late 1830 period due to an increased supply, and as a result the nation became mired in its worst depression.² When George Edward Pickett was born on January 28, 1825 in Richmond, Virginia, his family was beginning to see the end of a way of life which had endured for several generations. Turkey Island, purchased by George Pickett's paternal grandfather in 1814, was the family plantation. Located on the James River in Virginia, it encompassed 1,000 acres of land, a brick house and numerous outer buildings.³ Author George R. Stewart wrote that Pickett "came of an old Virginia family and was related to practically everybody of importance east of Richmond."⁴

George Pickett was the eldest of three surviving children born to Colonel Robert Pickett and his wife, Mary Johnston of Richmond.⁵ Mary Johnston had lost five infants in this period of high infant mortality in Virginia; and, Mary had written about her loss to her son George: "I have known much suffering on the loss of my dear infants but I bless God that it has pleased him, if they were to go, to take them at so tender an age"⁶

² Harold Faulkner, Politics, Reform and Expansion (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), 131-133. The invention of the cotton gin in 1800 made the cultivation of short staple cotton more lucrative. However, the South was very dependent on agricultural products in the nineteenth century, with insignificant investments in manufacturing. And, a significant portion of the southern economic production was for export purposes.

³ United States Census Office, 5th Census of the United States, 1830.

⁴ George R. Stewart, Pickett's Charge: A Microhistory of the Final Attack At Gettysburg, July 3, 1863 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1987), p.24.

⁵ Genealogical Column, Times Dispatch, 1909.

⁶ Mary Johnston Pickett to George Edward Pickett, December 14, 1841, "Pickett Family" typescript notebook, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, VA. Hereinafter cited as VHS typescript.

Nevertheless, Mary Johnston Pickett had not only lost five infants; her family was migrating west as Virginia's soils became depleted and as the economy worsened.

Andrew Johnston, her brother, had left Virginia to live in Illinois, and Peter Johnston had left for the Mississippi frontier.⁷ William Pickett, who was George Pickett's great-grandfather, had decided to stay in Virginia, when most of this family migrated to the frontier. Heathcoate and James Pickett, brothers of William Pickett, had left Virginia in the 1760s for the Ohio Territory. Other Pickett descendants had moved to the Southwest Territory in the early nineteenth century.⁸

Robert and Mary Pickett had made plans to leave Virginia and to join family members in the Western territories. As the economy worsened, Robert shifted his economic interests from agriculture to the coal business that he owned in Richmond.⁹ The Census of 1830 revealed that Robert Pickett had real estate valued at \$50,000.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the financial health of the Pickett family continued to decline.

From 1837 to 1839 George Pickett attended the Richmond Academy, which was a college preparation school that provided courses in mathematics, English and the classics.¹¹ It was at this time that Robert and Mary had to abandon their plans to move to

⁷ See "Pickett Family Notebook," Indiana Historical Society, William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indianapolis, Indiana. Hereinafter cited as IHS typescript.

⁸ James Albert Pickett, History of Alabama and Incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi (Birmingham: Press of Roberts and Son, 1878), 32-35.

⁹ Montague's Richmond Directory and Business Advertiser for 1850-51 (Richmond, 1850), 95. "Pickett and Maynard Account Book," Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

¹⁰ United States Census Office, 5th Census of the United States, 1830.

¹¹ Alfred J. Morrison, The Beginnings of Public Education in Virginia, 1776-1860 (Richmond: Superintendent of Public Printing, 1917), 137-139.

the west; instead, in March of 1840 they sent George to live with his uncle Andrew Johnston, in Quincy, Illinois. With his departure from Virginia in 1840, George Pickett would not return to live in his home state for another twenty-one years.

By 1803 Ohio had entered the Union and within two years the population was over 100,000. As the western frontier expanded, Illinois became the twenty-first state on December 3, 1818, and this new state's population developed quickly. Andrew Johnston, Mary Pickett's brother, had moved to Quincy, Illinois to pursue the practice of law. Quincy, at the Mississippi River, is on the Illinois-Missouri border. Quincy is also less than 100 miles west of Springfield, Illinois, and northwest along the Mississippi River, from St. Louis, Missouri. Many of the Johnston relatives had also migrated westward to the Ohio River Valley earlier in the nineteenth century. Many new entrepreneurial opportunities had arisen, and Andrew Johnston wanted to participate in this growth.

Johnston wrote Mary Pickett on August 31, 1837 with news of his business in Quincy. His law practice had "begun to pay expenses and my share of the fees to us at this time, if collected, would put me smartly in front."¹²

¹² Andrew Johnston to Mary Johnston Pickett, August 31, 1837, VHS typescript. As a lawyer from Quincy, Johnston was required to travel to different circuit courts to represent clients. Additional correspondence from Johnston recounted his legal experiences in the court at St. Louis, as well as other cities along the Mississippi River. Civil and criminal matters would be resolved in marathon court hearings that lasted until all of the cases had been heard. When the cases were completed, the lawyer would travel to the next location on the circuit.

Johnston continued in his letter to relate recent events regarding Arthur Tappan and the “Abolition Society.”¹³ Johnston had become a “secret agent” for the Abolition Society in St. Louis. The need for secrecy, no doubt, was related to the mob attack in Alton, Illinois that same year in which the abolitionist Elijah P. Lovejoy had been killed. Lovejoy, as editor of the religious newspaper the *St. Louis Observer* had published anti-slavery rhetoric. He received threats to his life when he moved twenty miles north along the Mississippi River to Alton, Illinois. In Alton, Lovejoy published an abolitionist newspaper, and his strong anti-slavery stance provoked hostility leading to his death. This event created a surge of sympathy among northern abolitionists.

Andrew Johnston revealed to his sister Mary that he had become involved in the abolitionist activities of Arthur and Lewis Tappan, who were wealthy silk merchants from New York City. During the 1830s evangelical revivalism had moved from New England westward to the Ohio Valley. And, the unique aspect of this sweep of revivals was that it targeted the new business class, most of whom had benefited from the Industrial Revolution. Arthur and Lewis Tappan started publishing a new magazine which promoted

¹³ Ibid. Abolitionists were attempting to bring an end to slavery. In the late eighteenth century northern states permitted manumission (antislavery) societies to form, however, they did not gain far-reaching support. By the early nineteenth century William Lloyd Garrison encouraged the liberation of slaves in his newspaper, *The Liberator*. Additionally, early women’s rights groups lead by Lucretia Mott, Sarah and Angelina Grimke, and Sojourner Truth were participating in both the abolitionist and women’s movements. Lucy Stone was a speaker for the Anti-Slavery Society in 1848 and she stated: “I mean to lead not for the slave alone but for suffering humanity everywhere. Especially do I mean to labor for the elevation of my sex.” See Carol Hymowitz and Michael Weissman, A History of Women in America (New York: Bantam Books, 1978), 98. It appears that Mary Johnston Pickett was also participating in both the abolitionist and women’s movements. See letter from Andrew Johnston to Mary Johnston Pickett, October 28, 1843, VHS typescript.

the evangelical message. They aimed their magazine, *The Christian Evangelist*, at large numbers of people in a standardized religious format, and they marketed it to the successful middle class individuals.¹⁴

The evangelical revivalists moved from conversions to controlling the temperance movement and eventually gained a majority in the American Temperance Society. Their revival techniques proved successful as they focused on emotional conversions and temperance “pledges,” later incorporating the work ethic into their evangelical messages.

Many of these evangelical revivalists in the 1830s and 1840s became abolitionists as they focused on the Christian conscience and the immorality of slavery. William Lloyd Garrison was the most prominent leader in the 1830s anti-slavery movement. Garrison and Benjamin Lundy published in Baltimore the foremost anti-slavery newspaper, the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*. Garrison was convicted of libel and sent to jail in 1830 for maligning the reputation of a New England slave merchant. Arthur Tappan paid Garrison’s fine, and in 1833 Tappan and his brother, Lewis, joined Garrison and over fifty other black and white individuals to form the American Anti-Slavery Society. They met in Philadelphia under the financial sponsorship of Arthur and Lewis Tappan and focused on a two part program presented at the new emerging middle class. Their program focused on politicians and the general public with the intent of making slavery an intensely moral

¹⁴ Samuel Eliot Morrison, Henry Steele Commager, and William E. Leuchtenburg, A Concise History of the American Republic (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 402.

issue. Their postal campaigns, which inundated the nation with their anti-slavery pamphlets, began in 1835 and included mailings to southern states.

However, there was extreme opposition to the abolitionists, particularly in the southern states. The state of Georgia wanted William Lloyd Garrison prosecuted for inciting riots and rebellions and consequently offered a reward of \$5,000 for his arrest. Many southern states strengthened their slave codes, especially after Nat Turner's rebellion in 1831. Moreover, Virginia did in 1831-1832 attempt to enact a program of compensated emancipation which followed the principles of many abolitionists and the American Colonization Society.¹⁵ The Virginia bill was not passed.

In 1833 an angry mob of abolition opponents attempted to attack William Lloyd Garrison and Arthur Tappan in a church in New York. Lewis Tappan's home in New York was burned in 1834, and the next year William Lloyd Garrison was beaten and pulled through the streets of Boston. This anti-abolition hatred spread to the Ohio Valley, when in 1837, Elijah P. Lovejoy, the newspaper editor and abolitionist was shot and killed.

By 1840 Garrison and the Tappan brothers had ideological differences as Garrison continued his more radical approach with broad attacks on American institutions. Lewis Tappan became the main financial benefactor in the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, which promoted political reforms to resolve the slavery issues.¹⁶ These theorists subsequently evolved into the political abolitionists who eventually formed the new

¹⁵ Ibid., 403.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Republican Party. Abraham Lincoln was their first successful presidential candidate in the election of 1860. Andrew Johnston and Abraham Lincoln had met in Illinois and, thereafter, handled law cases together on the court circuit of Illinois and Missouri.

President Andrew Jackson had favored censorship of the United States mail, as South Carolina had done earlier, to curb abolitionists' activities. Jackson asked Congress in 1835 to abridge the abolitionists' use of the mail system, and Jackson also urged the states in the north to constrict the spread of abolitionism.¹⁷

In his letter to his sister, Andrew Johnston recorded the activity of the abolitionists in Quincy and St. Louis. He described their concern for "hoax" letters from Arthur Tappan, fearful of a trap, and this reflected their circumstances, especially after Lovejoy's murder.¹⁸

Johnston also exhibited genuine concern for Mary and her family in the August 1837 letter. He wrote about Mary's son, George: "I am truly glad to hear such good accounts of your children, George, especially, because he is at an age when his excellent disposition is to be confirmed . . . for life."¹⁹

Johnston closed the letter with his wish, "That your George will pass with honor to himself and joy to all of us through these perilous years is our hope"²⁰ His statement represented a prelude to the peril which would bring into being the turmoil of war.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Andrew Johnston to Mary Johnston Pickett, August 31, 1837, VHS typescript.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

CHAPTER TWO

“THESE PERILOUS YEARS”

To George Pickett at the age of fifteen the western frontier state of Illinois must have seemed very exciting. Letters from Virginia revealed a sense of great expectation for him. His aunt, Sophia Johnston wrote expressing her concern that he was “the great hope,” for the rest of the family was “all lost.”¹

Andrew Johnston wrote to George on April 6, 1840 about his letter being “the first intimation I have of your arrival . . . at St. Louis Our court commences its session in five or six days and will continue two weeks” Nonetheless, Andrew Johnston gave George explicit instructions about the riverboat “Rosalie” traveling from St. Louis to Quincy along the Mississippi River. His uncle instructed George, upon his arrival in Quincy, to “make your way to ‘Quincy House,’ which is a fine hotel, on the public square, about 500 yards from the river landing. Deposit your baggage there, and inquire of Mr. Grant . . . for me . . . you are pretty sure to get here before teatime.”² Andrew seemed pleased that Mary Johnston Pickett had allowed her son to visit Illinois. Johnston continued: “And believe me I shall be extremely pleased to receive you as my companion and friend for as long as your parents choose to let you remain.”³

¹ Sophia Johnston to George E. Pickett, March 16, 1840, VHS typescript.

² Andrew Johnston to George E. Pickett, April 6, 1840, VHS typescript.

³ Ibid.

Mary Pickett, who certainly yearned for a change, wrote to George on May 5, 1840 that she wanted desperately to “come to your Uncle’s new country.”⁴ Sophia Johnston, George’s aunt, wrote: “With your Uncle Andrew you will have every opportunity of improving yourself . . . you could not be placed with anyone who would be more anxious for your advancement than he will be Let everyone see that you did not go West to rusticate but that as much if not more can be done west of the Alleganies[sic] as East” Sophia continued, “ [there are] many friends I had hoped to see again. . . my regards for your advancement and improvement.”⁵

Robert and Mary Pickett wanted their son to be influenced by the frontier experience of Quincy, Illinois with the hope that it would open new possibilities for his future. Andrew Johnston was decidedly eager to participate in the new order of the west. He became the co-editor of the Quincy Whig with Nehemiah Bushnell, who had emigrated from Connecticut. Johnston quickly became active in local affairs, serving as Quincy’s treasurer, becoming a member of the library’s board of directors and joining the local Whig party. And, clearly George Pickett enjoyed the environment of Quincy, Illinois. He joined a community theater group, the “Young Thespians,” which produced plays locally.⁶

⁴ Mary Johnston Pickett to George E. Pickett, May 5, 1840, VHS typescript.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ “Reminiscences of the Quincy Thespians,” Quincy Daily Whig, January 15, 1861. See also Carl Landrum “From Quincy to Gettysburg,” Quincy Herald-Whig, April 26, 1981; and Carl Landrum, “General Who Studied Law in Quincy,” Quincy Herald-Whig, March 24, 1991.

Pickett also joined the Whig party and became active in Quincy politics. William F. Johnston, his cousin in Richmond wrote on July 15, 1840: “. . . If I may be allowed to use such words to a man of your standing, for you must have grown a great deal since you left here to be taking a hand in the Whig cause.”⁷ Pickett was campaigning for William Henry Harrison from Ohio in the Log Cabin Campaign presidential election of 1840. Harrison’s popular “log cabin and cider” campaign increased the public’s interest in presidential politics as never before. Another letter from a cousin described the harassment that the local Whigs in Richmond were getting from the Democrats:

Tippecanoe Club Log Cabin and hard cider take their places in Richmond as well as the Western Country, the Whigs have already built a spacious log cabin on the ruins of the Eagle, and every Saturday night the cabin is filled with people of every description[sic]. I suppose you have hear[sic] that lately we came very near being burnt out of the town, for the incendridaries[sic] have been playing the wild with us. On Sunday there were five fires during the day and night and but for our appointing such viligant[sic] guards, we would soon have had no house to live in.⁸

⁷ William F. Johnston to George E. Pickett, July 15, 1840, VHS typescript.

⁸ G. P. MacMurdo to George E. Pickett, August 11, 1840, VHS typescript. William Henry Harrison and his “Tippecanoe and Tyler, too” campaign defined democracy as “the only means, under Heaven, by which a poor industrious man may become a rich man without bowing to colossal wealth.” The Panic of 1837 and the ensuing depression assisted Harrison and the Whigs in gaining strength against President Van Buren. Harrison won the election of 1840 in an overwhelming victory; however, Harrison died of pneumonia one month after his inauguration.

In September, 1840 George began studying law with his uncle Andrew Johnston in Quincy. His mother seemed relieved that her eldest son was responsibly planning for his future.⁹ However, his father Robert Pickett, who was a Colonel in the local Virginia militia, instead began suggesting a military career for George. Aunt Olivia Johnston, still in Virginia, wrote to George, “In five years you will be a man, and how much you have to learn in that time.”¹⁰ Olivia had previously written to her nephew that “a soldier should be tall, at least he should look [tall] as much as possible . . . I shall be proud of my nephew Pickett, not as a militia captain but a real one . . .”¹¹ Clearly, the family was applying pressure for George Pickett to join the ranks of the “real” military.

Ironically, Robert and Mary Pickett knew the uncertainty of a military career. John Symington, Robert’s brother-in-law had graduated from West Point in 1815. He had been stationed across the country at different arsenals, finally achieving the rank of captain in 1830 “for faithful service for ten years in one grade.”¹² Robert wrote to George about John Symington: “It really is a hard case to be knocked from pillar [sic] to post in this way. Scarcely is he fixed at one place before he has to take up a line of march in another.”¹³ Robert Pickett could not have known how prophetic his remark would be.

⁹ Mary Johnston Pickett to George E. Pickett, May 5, 1840, VHS typescript. See also Mary Johnston Pickett to George E. Pickett, April 23, 1841, VHS typescript.

¹⁰ Olivia Johnston to George E. Pickett, March 28, 1841, VHS typescript.

¹¹ Olivia Johnston to George E. Pickett, March 16, 1840, VHS typescript.

¹² George W. Cullum, Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point From Its Establishment in 1802 to 1890 3 vols. 3rd Edition (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1891), 1: 131-132.

¹³ Robert Pickett to George E. Pickett, August 3, 1841, VHS typescript.

Robert continued, “We all wish to see you very much, and look forward to the time of your return with great pleasure.”¹⁴

Andrew Johnston, in editorials in the Quincy Whig, had supported the local Whig Representative, John T. Stuart. Johnston wrote Stuart regarding his nephew George and the possibility of an appointment to West Point. Captain Symington and Johnston were hoping to find their nephew’s name “first upon the list of applications -- that a vacancy at West Point from your district would make the nomination in his favor”¹⁵ Johnston proceeded to write, “I write at present therefore to inquire whether we may certainly look for his appointment in next February”¹⁶

Robert and Mary Pickett wanted their son to travel back to Virginia for Christmas, nonetheless; as Johnston continued in his letter to Representative Stuart, they would be “willing to forgo [sic] that pleasure if his leaving this district would at all interfere with the nomination and appointment” to West Point.¹⁷

By February of 1842 George was planning to return to Richmond to await his acceptance at West Point. Mary Pickett was thrilled at the prospect of seeing her son as she wrote: “I cannot tell you how I feel at the hope of seeing you, and presenting your dear little wild brother to you.”¹⁸ And, by April of 1842, George Pickett had received his

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Andrew Johnston to John T. Stuart, August 18, 1841, George E. Pickett Papers, United States Military Academy Archives, West Point, New York, hereinafter referred to as USMA.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid. See also Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 323.

¹⁸ Mary Pickett to George E. Pickett, February 18, 1842, VHS typescript.

“conditional appointment” from the Secretary of War to the United States Military Academy.¹⁹ Still, before the conclusion of his final acceptance, Pickett had to pass examinations which would test his abilities in mathematics, reading and writing.

The United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, had been founded on March 16, 1802. The purpose of the Military Academy was to educate young men for the Army officer corps; and, in 1818 the Academy began the first technical college education in the United States. West Point graduates were educated as civil engineers as well as in military positions.²⁰

George Pickett received his official acceptance, and in the late summer of 1842 he entered West Point as a member of the class of 1846. Of the 116 cadets in his original class, only 48 were to graduate. Not only were the academic standards rigorous, the discipline also proved to be a challenge for some. The “Register of Delinquencies, Class of 1846, United States Military Academy” records over 150 demerits per year for George Pickett for “highly unmilitary activity.”²¹ Some of these “unmilitary” activities included “wearing a checkered shirt,” “having long hair,” or participating in “highly unsoldierlike

¹⁹ Secretary of War to George E. Pickett, April 26, 1842, Letters Received, Adjutant Generals Office, Records Relating to the United States Military Academy, Record Group 94, National Archives, Washington, D. C. Hereinafter referred to as AGO, NA, RG 94.

²⁰ See Major General John A. Hemphill, USA-Ret., and Robert C. Cumbow, editors, West Pointers and Early Washington: The Contributions of U. S. Military Academy Graduates to the Development of the Washington Territory, from the Oregon Trail to the Civil War 1834-1862 (Seattle: The West Point Society of Puget Sound, Ind., 1992), 23.

²¹ Records of George E. Pickett. Register of Delinquencies, Class of 1846, United States Military Academy Archives, West Point, New York.

conduct . . . walking out on the parade grounds, smoking tobacco . . . and, [being] improperly dressed.”²²

By October of 1843 Andrew Johnston had become aware of his nephew’s record of conduct at West Point. In a letter to his sister he wrote: “I have been disappointed, I acknowledge, in not finding his old habits more corrected than they are . . . his heart is in the right place and his morality and faith untainted”²³

Despite his poor class ranking, George Pickett had solid family support behind him. Elizabeth McCaw Symington, his aunt, wrote directly to William C. Marcy, the Secretary of War to promote Pickett’s “active enterprising character.”²⁴ She acknowledged that his “standing in class” would keep him from his preferred “infantry or dragoons.”²⁵ Nevertheless, Symington added, “I question not he would prove useful in that situation”²⁶

As George Pickett’s education at West Point came to a close, the annexation of Oregon and Texas excited the expansionists, who favored the concept of Manifest Destiny. The expansionists’ new destiny would transform George Pickett, as their dramatic endeavor to augment the United States brought him into their controversies.

²² Ibid. See also John C. Waugh, The Class of 1846: From West Point to Appomattox, Stonewall Jackson, George McClellan and Their Brothers (New York: Warner Brothers Books, 1994), 68.

²³ Andrew Johnston to Mary Pickett, October 28, 1843, VHS typescript.

²⁴ Elizabeth McCaw Symington to William C. Marcy, May 16, 1846, Letters Received, AGO-US, RG 94. Elizabeth Symington was the wife of Captain John Symington, the brother-in-law of Robert Pickett.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid. See also Douglas Southall Freeman, Lee’s Lieutenants, Vols. I, II, and III (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1945), 58, vol. I.

CHAPTER THREE

MEXICO

Texas declared independence from Mexico in 1836, beginning a decade of sectional and political debate over the issues of slavery and annexation. Compounding the issues, by 1843 “Oregon Fever” was threatening British occupation in North America; and, northern and southern expansionists were promoting annexation of Texas and the Oregon territory.

Tennessee Governor James K. Polk was urging “Fifty-Four Forty or Fight!” as he campaigned for the presidency. The Senate quickly ratified the Treaty of Washington, voting an approval on June 18, 1846, resolving the issue of the northern boundary of the Washington Territory. However, one unresolved issue of this treaty was the ownership of San Juan island, and in 1859 this issue developed into a dangerous dilemma. These events foretold major consequences of the next decade for George Pickett.

As Pickett completed his final year at West Point, President Polk had secretly instructed John Slidell, a member of the Texas-Mexico Border Commission, to travel to Mexico City to purchase New Mexico and California for \$30 million. Mexico did not recognize the annexation of Texas by the United States and rejected Slidell’s mission. As a response, Polk created a confrontation by sending General Zachary Taylor into a remote district near the Nueces River. Ulysses S. Grant was serving as a young officer with

Zachary Taylor and Grant related, “We were sent to provoke a fight, but it was essential that Mexico should commence it.”¹

Grant was serving in the Fourth Infantry as he wrote to Julia Dent, his fiancée:

... there has been strong grounds for hoping that the whole of the 4th Regiment would be ordered back there [Missouri]; but that hope is blasted now. Orders have arrive[ed] from Washington City that no troops on the frontier will be removed. Fred’s Regiment as well as mine will have to remain. Mexico has appropriated four million[s] of dollars for the purpose of raising an Army of thirty thousand men for the re-conquering of Texas, and we are to remain here to preserve neutrality between the United States and the belligerent parties.²

On May 9, 1846 Polk released his war statement to Congress that Mexico “has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded our territory, and shed American blood on American soil. She has proclaimed that hostilities exist and that the two nations are now at war.”³ West Point was concluding the school year and preparing to graduate the Class of 1846, which included George Pickett, as Congress declared war. The response throughout the country was total agreement with the New York Herald editorial which stated that war with Mexico would, “lay the foundation of a new age, a new

¹ John Y. Simon, editor, The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), vol. 1, 58-59. Ulysses S. Grant graduated from West Point in 1843 and was commissioned a Brevet, Second Lieutenant. He was then assigned to duty with the Fourth Regiment of Infantry at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, a few miles south of St. Louis. See “The Story of Jefferson Barracks,” New Mexico Historical Review, XXI, 3 (July, 1946): 185-208. George E. Pickett was appointed to the infantry training school at Jefferson Barracks after his service in the Mexican War.

² Ibid., 30-31. (July 23, 1844) Grant is referring to Bvt. 2nd Lt. Frederick Tracy Dent, roommate of Ulysses S. Grant at the United States Military Academy, and his future bother-in-law.

³ Robert A Calvert and Arnoldo De Leon, History of Texas (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1990), 93-95.

destiny, affecting both this continent and the old continent of Europe.”⁴ This “new age” would parallel the onset of George Pickett’s “new destiny.”

The army of Zachary Taylor in Mexico was comprised mainly of volunteers from across the United States. Herman Melville wrote to his brother Gansevoort, that

People here [New York] are all in a state of delirium about the Mexican War. A military order pervades all ranks -- Militia Colonels wax red in their coat facings -- and ‘prenticeboys are running off to the wars by scores. Nothing is talked of but the ‘Halls of Montezumas’. . . But seriously something great is impending. The Mexican War (tho’ our troops have behaved right well) is nothing of itself -- but ‘a little spark. . .’ who knows what all this may lead to. . . will it provoke a war with England? Or any other great power? The day is at hand, when we will be able to talk of our killed & wounded like some of the old Eastern conquerors reckoning them up by thousands; -- when the Battle of Monmouth will be thought child’s play -- & canes made out of the Constitution’s timbers be thought no more of than bamboos. . . .⁵

George Pickett was awaiting his orders from the Secretary of War in late July, 1846 after graduation. He wrote inquiring about his “orders [which] might have been

⁴ There are many views on the sources of the war with Mexico. Some historians feel that the warlike attitude of Mexico regarding the boundary issue was primary; still other historians observe the contemptuous demeanor of many Americans towards Mexicans in this era as being an extension of “Manifest Destiny and Anglo-superiority;” while others in the New Left observe this as an expansionist move with capitalist objectives. See The Frontier Challenge: Responses to the Trans-Mississippi West, edited by John G. Clark (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1971) m 35-39, 52-54. See also Binkley, William C. The Expansionist Movement in Texas, 1836-1850 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1925), 41-42.

⁵ Herman Melville to Gansevoort Melville, June [May] 29, 1846, The Portable Melville, edited by Jay Leyda (New York: The Viking Press, 1961), 340-341. Gansevoort Melville, Herman’s brother, had actively campaigned for Polk in the presidential campaign of 1844, and had received an appointment as Secretary of the Legation in London. Gansevoort Melville died on May 12, 1846 in London, before receiving this letter from Herman Melville.

forwarded to Illinois from which state I received my appointment as a cadet . . . I shall be much obliged to learn from you, if it is so, in order that I may write on for them immediately and hand in my acceptance as quickly as possible.”⁶

On July 31, 1846 Andrew Johnston wrote to the War Department from his Quincy, Illinois office inquiring about the package mistakenly sent to George Pickett at Johnston’s Illinois address. Johnston explained that George “was appointed from this district but his parents reside in Richmond, Virginia, from which place all the reports from West Point have been sent where he is now on furlough as I understand from private letters.”⁷

However, George Pickett resolved this issue by signing his oath of allegiance on August 4, 1846.⁸ He received his first military order which sent him directly to Matamoras, Mexico to join Taylor’s army. For the next six months Pickett prepared for his participation in Polk’s war.

In a January 1847 letter to his aunt, Pickett wrote, “We have the delectable pleasure of drilling four times a day besides a dress parade.”⁹ He described the women as “prettier, more of the Castillian blood . . . the inhabitants, more civilized.”¹⁰ And, he went on to describe the behavior of the “mustang generals” who were volunteer officers, “los voluntarios” who have been guilty of the most disgraceful conduct in the treatment of the inhabitants.”¹¹

⁶ George E. Pickett to Secretary of War, July 31, 1846, Letters Received, AGO-US, RG 94.

⁷ Andrew Johnston to Secretary of War, July 31, 1846, Letters Received, AGO-US, RG 94.

⁸ “Oath of Allegiance, Brevet Second Lieutenant George E. Pickett,” August 4, 1846, Letters Received, AGO, NA, RG 94.

⁹ George E. Pickett to Elizabeth M. Symington, January 31, 1847, VHS typescript.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

Henry S. Lane, a lawyer from Montgomery County, Indiana, was a leader of a group of “los voluntarios.” He wrote in his diary on August 21, 1846 as his troops reached the mouth of the Rio Grande:

The climate of this country is decidedly more pleasant than Indiana or indeed any place I have ever been in. It is one of the richest countries in the world. The necessary & comforts of life are produced spontaneously. All the tropical fruits could be produced here in perfection, but the present inhabitants are altogether unworthy of such a country. It is an abuse of the bounty of providence to let such a race of drones & slaves [squander] so goodly a heritage, but they are do[o]med to be swallowed up in the all-engulfing vo[r]tex of Anglo-Saxon enterprise and ambition.¹²

Lane continued in his Mexican war diary on January 19, 1847:

A nation cannot be free with the popular mind enslaved. A man cannot be free with his soul in chains, whether spiritual or temporal. The only hope for Mexico is that she may be Americanized & religious toleration prevail. Then she may be free & never before.¹³

President Polk expected that by the end of 1846 Zachary Taylor would have succeeded in obtaining a Mexican peace. Nevertheless, Mexico would not agree. Polk ordered Winfield Scott, the commanding general of the army, to take the port of Vera Cruz and continue inland to Mexico City. On March 9, 1847 the invasion began with American troops landing at Collado Beach, south of Vera Cruz. Before midnight over 8,000 soldiers from the United States army had landed. Winfield Scott wrote: “. . . the

¹² Graham A. Barringer, editor, “The Mexican War Diary of Henry S. Lane.” Indiana Magazine of History 53 (December 1951): 383-434.

¹³ Ibid.

whole army is full of zeal and confidence, and cannot fail to acquire distinction in the impending operation.”¹⁴

George Pickett was part of the first group to land at Collado Beach under the command of Brigadier General William J. Worth. This group of West Point officers, mostly from the southern United States, continued in the assault of Vera Cruz until the city yielded on March 29, 1847.¹⁵

Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, the Mexican General and President, began to centralize his forces at a rugged area called Cerro Gordo. There, Engineering Captain Robert E. Lee scouted passages for attack. Also, Ulysses S. Grant was fighting in the Fourth Infantry, describing his activities in a letter to Julia Dent on April 24, 1847:

On the 13th of this month the rear Division of Gen. Scott's army left Vera Cruz to drive Santa Anna and his army from the strong mountain passes which they had fortified, with the determination of driving back the Barbarians of the North, at all hazards. On the morning of the 17th our army met them at a pass called Cierra Gorda [Cerro Gordo] a mountain pass to which to look at one would suppose impregnable. The road passes between mountains of rock the tops of which were fortified and well armed with artillery. The road was [B]arricaded [and] by a strong work with five pieces of artillery. Behind this was a peak of the mountains much higher than all the others and commanded them so that the [E]nemy calculated that even if the Americans should succeed in taking all the other hights [sic], from this one they could fire upon us and be out of reach themselvs.[sic] But they were disappointed, Gen. Twiggs' Division worked its way around with a great deel [sic] of laibor [sic] and made the attack in the rear. . . . As soon as Santa Anna saw that the day was lost he

¹⁴ Winfield Scott to William L. Marcy, March 12, 1847, Executive Document No. 1, Senate, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 217; hereinafter cited as Senate Exec. Doc. 1.

¹⁵ Ibid.

made his escape with a portion of his army but he was pursued so closely that his carriage, a splendid affair, was taken and in it was his cork leg and some Thirty thousand dollars in gold¹⁶

George Pickett went on to fight in the Battle of Contreras and on to the Churubusco River. He was later recognized “for having participated in the assault upon the fort and being one of the “officers who assisted in the attack on the fort, and whose conduct came under my personal observation”¹⁷ Clark continued “Lieutenants Snelling and Pickett were actively engaged during the action, and rendered important services.”¹⁸

Scott’s forces made final preparations for the assault on Mexico City in September of 1847. The Castle of Chapultepec, near El Molino del Rey, was believed to be an arsenal, and it became the next target of Scott’s attack. Chapultepec was surrounded by an enclosure of high walls with guard posts at each corner. On September 13, 1847, Scott’s troops, including James Longstreet and George Pickett, stormed the castle. Longstreet was wounded as he attempted to place the American flag atop the castle, and as he fell Pickett gathered up the flag and placed it in a prominent position.¹⁹ Winfield Scott wrote later about Pickett stating that he was one of the “most distinguished in those

¹⁶ John Y. Simon, editor. The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant, 131-132. Grant is referring to Bvt. Maj. Gen. David Emanuel Twiggs of Georgia.

¹⁷ N.S. Clark to W. W. Mackall, August 23, 1847, Executive Document No. 8, 30th Congress, House of Representatives, 1st Session, Appendix to the Report of the Secretary, 53. Hereinafter cited as House Exec. Doc. No. 8.

¹⁸ Ibid., 55.

¹⁹ Brevet Major W. R. Montgomery of the 8th Infantry to W. W. Mackall, September 10 [13], 1847, House Exec. Doc. No. 8, Appendix, 183.

brilliant operations at Chapultepec.”²⁰ William J. Worth stated that he was “distinguished for gallantry and zeal.”²¹

Brevet Major W. R. Montgomery characterized Pickett as having “noble exertions and gallant conduct. . . .” Montgomery advocated, “All are entitled to, and are commended for, the most favorable notice of the proper authority.”²²

Nonetheless, for the triumphant beginning of George Pickett’s military career, and his first combat experience in the Mexican War, he still had regrets. He had lost a close friend from West Point and Virginia, Thomas Easley, at Churubusco. And, as Pickett wrote to Easley’s family he acclaimed Easley as a man with a very “amiable disposition” and as “gallant and promising” who died in an achievement of “extreme bravery.”²³ Pickett went on, “I pray for the day this disastrous and bloody war has closed”²⁴

While the battles in Mexico drew to a close, Pickett’s attention suddenly was riveted on his future in the military. And, as the election of 1848 approached with “Old Rough and Ready” as the Whig candidate, Pickett’s life acquired an extra nuance of poignancy. The new direction would signal a change from the joyousness of his youth, to the pathos of dispossession and loss.

²⁰ Winfield Scott to William L. March, September 18, 1847, House Exec. Doc. No. 8, 379.

²¹ William J. Worth to H. L. Scott, September 16, 1847, House Exec. Doc. No. 8, 394.

²² W. R. Montgomery to W. W. Mackall, September 15, 1847, House Exec. Doc. No. 8, Appendix, 183.

²³ George E. Pickett to William R. Owen, December 1, 1847, Virginia State Library.

²⁴ Ibid.

CHAPTER FOUR

TEXAS

With the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo the Mexican War was ended on February 2, 1848. And, with the payment to Mexico of \$15 million, the United States received the area of Texas north of the Rio Grande, Alta California, Utah Territories and New Mexico. The Polk administration had been successful in their expansionist attempts to gain northern Mexico, Texas and Oregon, and, furthermore, to maintain party unity. The next question posed would be more difficult to resolve; that question pertained to the question of slavery in the new territory.¹

James Polk decided not to seek a second term as president, which left the Democratic party in search of a new candidate for the election of 1848. They nominated Senator Lewis Cass of Michigan, who was an expansionist advancing a new concept, popular sovereignty. The Whig party attempted to reconcile their sectional differences by nominating “Old Rough and Ready” General Zachary Taylor. His war record vanquished the other two candidates.²

In 1848 George Pickett was also determining his future after the Mexican War. He was appointed to the infantry training school at Jefferson Barracks in Missouri, which

¹ Samuel Eliot Morrison, Henry Steele Commager, and William E. Leuchtenburg, A Concise History of the American Republic (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 533.

² Ibid.

was located near St. Louis.³ He trained in Missouri until November of 1848, when he received his orders to transfer to the Texas frontier. Before he could be transferred to Texas, Pickett became ill. Letters from his father demonstrate the concern as Robert Pickett wrote to Roger Jones of the War Department, "Can you as an old friend of the family procure him a furlough, if so you would confer a great favour [sic] on me."⁴ Robert and Mary Pickett had also been ill, as Robert continued to Jones, and he "should very much like to see him [Pickett] again."⁵ The Adjutant General's Office returned a letter to Robert Pickett stating: "I regret to inform you that action in this matter rests entirely with the commanding General Western Division and not with the War Department."⁶ Records show that George Pickett was ill and "on leave 20 days" in November, 1848; however, his orders sent him directly to the Texas frontier.⁷

The frontier army, as required specifically in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, was directed to restrict the entry of Native Americans into Mexican lands. And, as part of this treaty, the U.S. Army was obligated to build forts along the border with Mexico and throughout Texas.⁸ As the forts were completed, George Pickett was moved to another

³ "Returns from Regular Army Infantry Regiments, June 1821-December 1916," Roll 91, RG 109, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Hereinafter referred to as "Old Army Returns."

⁴ Robert Pickett to Roger Jones, November 15, 1848, Letters Received, AGO, RG 94.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ S. Thomas to Robert Pickett, November 20, 1848, Letters Sent, AGO, RG 94.

⁷ "Old Army Returns," Roll 91, RG 109. The Eighth Infantry Army returns list indicates Pickett was ill with no specific enumeration.

⁸ See Theodore F. Rodenbough and William L. Haskin, The Army of the United States: Historical Sketches of Staff and Line with Portraits of Generals-in-Chief (New York: Argonaut Press, Ltd., 1966) 460. See also M. L. Crimmins, ed., "W. G. Freeman's Report on the Eighth Military Department," Southwest Historical Quarterly 51 (July 1947), 54.

location to build a new fort. In the 1850s he moved across Texas with the Eighth United States Infantry Regiment from Camp Worth to Fort Gates, not far from Austin, near the Brazos River. He then went to Fort Chadbourne in 1852, Fort Clark and then Fort Bliss.⁹ His despair was evident, when in 1852, Pickett wrote to his cousin Elizabeth Chevallie Vaden: “We manage to exist [but] it is scarcely more than an existence.”¹⁰

Between his relocations on the Texas frontier, First Lieutenant George Pickett married his first wife, Sally Harrison Steward Minge, the eldest child of Dr. John and Mary Minge of Petersburg, Virginia. On December 22, 1850 George Pickett left Texas after requesting a sixty-day furlough, to meet his bride in Louisiana at the home of her sister and brother-in-law, Richard and Margaret Wilkins. There is very little record of their engagement and subsequent marriage; however, it is known that they were married in Franklin, Louisiana at St. Mary’s Episcopal Church. They were married on January 22, 1851, and spent their honeymoon in New Orleans at the St. Charles Hotel.¹¹

After a brief stay in New Orleans George Pickett and his new wife began their trip to Virginia.¹² And, in February Pickett wrote to Roger Jones to request a six-month extension of his furlough, noting that it took at least two months to travel from Richmond

⁹ Cullum, Biographical Register, 2: 304.

¹⁰ George E. Pickett to Elizabeth Chevallie Vaden, December 4, 1852, Heth Family Papers, VHS

¹¹ “Minge Family Register.” William and Mary Quarterly 21 (Winter 1913-1915): 31-32. Record of marriage listed in “St. Mary’s Church Records, 1846-1883,” St. Mary’s Episcopal Church, Franklin, Louisiana. Franklin, Louisiana is in St. Mary’s Parish on the Gulf of Mexico, approximately 100 miles east of New Orleans.

¹² “Old Army Returns,” Roll 91, RG 109.

to Fort Gates, Texas.¹³ However, on May 1, 1851 Pickett wrote again to Jones stating “should a detachment of recruits be about to proceed to Texas at any time after the 20th of this month I wish to be considered ready to accompany them, should an officer be wanted for that purpose.”¹⁴ The “Old Army” records indicate that George and Sally had arrived at Fort Gates, Texas by July of 1851.¹⁵

Helen Ellsworth Blair Chapman and her husband William Chapman also lived on the Texas frontier after the war. Captain William Chapman had graduated from West Point in 1837 and first engaged in battle against the army of General Santa Anna at Buena Vista on February 22-23, 1847. After the ratification of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 and the establishment of the Rio Grande border, the American military had established martial law in Matamoros. Captain Chapman, as quartermaster, was “mayor de facto” of Matamoros until the U.S. Army departed for the original Fort Brown, across the Rio Grande.¹⁶ William Chapman built the new Fort Brown, and was responsible for overseeing the development of the city of Brownsville, Texas. Many of the experiences of William and Helen Chapman appear to parallel those of George and Sally Pickett in Texas on the frontier after the war.

¹³ George E. Pickett to Roger Jones, February 22, 1851, Letters Received, AGO, RG 94.

¹⁴ George E. Pickett to Roger Jones, May 1, 1851, Letters Received, AGO, RG 94, “Old Army Returns,” Roll 91, RG 109.

¹⁵ “Old Army Returns,” Roll 91, RG 109.

¹⁶ The News from Brownsville: Helen Chapman's Letters from the Texas Military Frontier, 1848-1852. Edited by Caleb Coker. (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1992), xix, Although the Chapmans were sent to Brownsville, many of their experiences parallel those of George and Sally Pickett on the frontier posts subsequent to the Mexican War. William Chapman was also a West Pointer, having graduated earlier than Pickett, and having already received the rank of Captain.

Helen had left New York aboard the *U.S.S. Massachusetts*, which was carrying supplies to Mexico for the American troops. The journey, though not unpleasant, lasted seventeen days. Helen Chapman wrote to her mother in 1848 upon her arrival in Matamoros, "I have never felt more secure in my life though living in a Mexican family with my husband absent all day at the office surrounded ever by luxuries with no cares, and no labor. My time passes delightfully and the day seems too short for my occupations."¹⁷ She had endured almost two years of separation from her husband, who had been sent to San Antonio, Texas in 1846 from their earlier military assignment on Governor's Island in New York Harbor. Undoubtedly, Helen was attempting to quell her mother's fear for Chapman's safety.

However, within two years Chapman was writing to a friend, "I have learned much since I have been on the frontier that once was never dreamed of in my philosophy. . . I have seen women thrown upon this frontier under most trying circumstances and I know they look with envy upon us who are sheltered within the walls of a garrison. There is this difference between being *in* the Army and *out* of it."¹⁸

Helen Chapman's letters revealed a thoughtful, bright optimism about her future with her husband; however, she expressed an intelligent approach to the odyssey that lay ahead. Helen realized the possibility of danger at Fort Brown and chose to leave her seven year old son in the care of her parents in Massachusetts. As she viewed a battlefield

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 166.

at Palo Alto in 1848 she wrote of “the scene of the deadliest fighting. As we rode down to the spot, all along in relief against the green grass, were the blackened bones of horses and men, fragments of shoes, of woolen cloth, of harness, of capes, of fertile proofs of a deadly encounter.”¹⁹ She then described the conditions on the fort: “Regiments are made up of men who would sell the shirts from their backs for liquor and seeing their miserable destitute conditions, it is hard to know where to fix the blame.”²⁰

Life on the Texas frontier posts was not pleasant and this difficult life took its toll on Sally Minge Pickett. On November 13, 1851 she died giving birth to her only child.²¹ It is believed that George Pickett accompanied the bodies of his wife and child from Texas back to Virginia. Pickett wrote a letter to Roger Jones requesting a long furlough by virtue of his “recent severe family afflictions.”²² Nonetheless, he did not return to the army until May of 1852.

By the time Pickett returned to his Army regiment, it had advanced to Camp Johnston, near the Concho River. After staying only until November 1852, Pickett’s regiment moved south to Fort Chadbourne.²³ George wrote to his cousin Elizabeth Heth about his sadness after the loss of his wife and child: “I wish constantly to speak of that dear being who is now an angel in heaven I know it and I feel it, I am no longer the

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 288.

²¹ Obituary in *Richmond Whig and Public Advertiser*, December 16, 1851.

²² George E. Pickett to Roger Jones, February 1, 1852, Letters Received, AGO, RG 94; “Old Army Returns,” Roll 91, RG 109.

²³ “Old Army Returns,” Roll 91, RG 109.

same person, the buoyancy of youth is past--I look forward to nothing with pleasure. . .

Why should I wish to make others bear a portion of the burden which has been assigned to

me”²⁴ This “burden which has been assigned to me” referred to his difficult

existence on the frontier, and it had taken the lives of his wife and child. Understandably,

Pickett felt it was necessary to improve his fate. He wrote to the adjutant general’s office

regarding his rank: “In accordance with a note in the Official Army Register I have the

honor to inform you that my ‘rank in the army’ is incorrectly stated in the Register of

1852. Instead of 1st lieut. by Bvt 13th Sept. 1847. It should be Capt. by Bvt for same

date.”²⁵ The War Department responded: “. . . [your application] will be duly submitted

to the Secretary of War, should the contingency contemplated by you occur.”²⁶

Robert Pickett was also attempting to enrich his son’s life after his loss. Letters to Robert Pickett indicate that he was pressuring others for a promotion for George. James Longstreet, who attended West Point with George wrote about their shared Mexican War experiences: “he was particularly distinguished as one of the most gallant soldiers on that field. I was near him through the day, and can safely say that more conduct and gallantry was not exhibited by an American officer during the Mexican War . . . your son has commanded a company on the Texas frontier, and has performed most important and

²⁴ George E. Pickett to Elizabeth Chevallie (Heth) Vaden, December 4, 1852, VHS.

²⁵ George E. Pickett to Roger Jones, July 12, 1852, Letters Received, AGO, RG 94.

²⁶ Samuel Cooper to George E. Pickett, October 12, 1853, Letters Sent, Adjutant General’s Office, RG 94.

arduous services . . . [he is] well worthy of command and position . . . always attentive and zealous in the discharge of his duties.”²⁷

James Lyons, a lawyer from Richmond wrote Jefferson Davis, the Secretary of War: “Understanding that there will probably be an increasing of the Army, Col. Pickett desires to obtain his son the appointment in one of the new Regiments . . . [he is] a gentleman of the most estimable and unblemished character.”²⁸

Louis F. Robertson wrote to his South Carolina congressman, Lawrence M. Keitt, about George Pickett in 1854. Robertson had served with Pickett in the Mexican War and reminded Keitt that Southern West Pointers made up the majority of those fighting in the regulars with Zachary Taylor in Mexico. Robertson added: “I would state that my friend is now out in the western wilds with his regiments and this is done for him without his knowledge. All that is done for him must be done by his friends and for that reason I would press his claim.”²⁹

On March 2, 1855 a petition to Jefferson Davis, Secretary of War, was signed by congressmen from Illinois and Virginia. The petition praised Pickett for his service in the Mexican War and for his “high reputation and gallantry and soldierly bearing.”³⁰

²⁷ James Longstreet to Robert Pickett, February 3, 1854, VHS Typescript.

²⁸ James Lyons to Jefferson Davis, January 28, 1854, Letters Received, Secretary of War, RG 107.

²⁹ Louis F. Robertson to L. M. Keitt, February 21, 1854, VHS Typescript.

³⁰ Petition to Jefferson Davis, March 2, 1855, Letters Received, AGO, RG 107. Signed by: John Wentworth (1815-1888), Illinois congressman and lawyer; James Cameron Allen (1822-1912), Illinois congressman; William Alexander Richardson (1811-1875), Illinois congressman; James Knox (1807-1876), Illinois congressman; John Samuels Caskie (1821-1869), Virginia congressman; and, Henry Alonzo Edmundson (1814-1890), Virginia congressman.

Robert Pickett continued to press for George's relocation. He wrote Jefferson Davis in March of 1855: "Knowing your time is fully occupied just at this close of Congress I deem it almost useless to try and see you in person. I have therefore thought it best to call your attention to the promotions about to be made in the new Regts, and would most humbly submit the name of my son Brevet-Capt. George E. Pickett as an applicant for a captaincy in the Cavalry."³¹

Congress had been considering a request by the Secretary of War, Jefferson Davis, to enlarge the size of the Army, and in 1855 completed the authorization. The new regiments included the 9th Regiment of Infantry on March 3, 1855, and appointed George E. Pickett to the new command.³² Pickett accepted his new rank as Captain in the 9th Regiment and left Texas for Fort Monroe, Virginia.³³

Robert Pickett again wrote to the Adjutant General, anxiously awaiting word of his son's arrival: "You will confer [to] me a great favor by informing me, if my son Capt. George E. Pickett has been ordered in to join his new Regt . . . [we are beginning] to feel under some apprehension about him."³⁴ Samuel Cooper of the War Department responded: "I have the pleasure to inform you that a letter was yesterday received from your son Captain George E. Pickett dated at Fort Bliss June 5th accepting his appointment

³¹ Robert Pickett to Jefferson Davis, March 3, 1855, Letters Received, AGO, RG 107.

³² See George W. Cullum, Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point From Its Establishment in 1802 to 1890 3 volumes, 3rd Edition (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1891), 1: 131-132.

³³ "Old Army Returns," RG 107.

³⁴ Robert Pickett to Samuel Cooper, July 12, 1855, Letters Received, AGO, RG 94.

in the 9th Infantry. He is under orders to report to his colonel in person at Fort Monroe, but the time of his probable arrival in his quarters cannot be readily stated.”³⁵

By August, Pickett had arrived at Fort Monroe, Virginia; however, his training duty lasted only until December, 1855. The Department of the Pacific needed trained fighters on the Pacific coast, and on December 15, 1855, Pickett left Virginia again for a new frontier post.³⁶ Leaving with George Pickett on this odyssey was his new regiment of seventy-seven men. Their assignment was to tend to “the hostile Indians on Puget Sound, Washington,”³⁷ And, with this new duty, the itinerant, military man faced challenges that compounded as the nation grew closer to a possible civil war.

³⁵ Samuel Cooper to Robert Pickett, July 14, 1855, Letters Sent, AGO, RG 94.

³⁶ “Old Army Returns,” Roll 102, RG 109.

³⁷ See Cullum, Biographical Register, II: 305.

CHAPTER FIVE

CAMP PICKETT

Years before, in 1818, an agreement between Great Britain and the United States had established joint occupation of the Oregon Territory. This land stretched from the 42nd parallel in the south (at that time the recognized Mexican/American boundary) to 54° 40' in the north (then the Russian Alaskan/Canada border).

The Hudson's Bay Company used this area to trap animals for the fur trade, while Americans had begun to settle south of the Columbia River in the 1830s. As a result of the American settlements, the United States had established a claim on the area between the 42nd parallel and the Columbia River.

In 1842 "Oregon fever" struck as the United States' economy began to recover from the Panic of 1837. "Occupy Oregon" was the cry of the U.S. expansionists.¹ Charles Wilkes, a Navy lieutenant with the Wilkes Expedition, began to publicize his exploits in explorations around Puget Sound. And, the new Oregon Trail, started by early explorers and traders, seemed to promise a pathway to the new lands; the first group of over one hundred settlers, lured by promises of rich farmlands, crossed along the Oregon Trail into the new territory.

¹ Gabriel Kolko, Main Currents in American History (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 40.

Finally, after the beginning of the Mexican War in 1846, the United States and Great Britain signed the treaty which would divide Canada and the United States at the forty-ninth parallel on the “Ultimate” map.² “Fifty-four forty or fight” was the Polk campaign issue in 1846; and, he again brought the Oregon Territory to the attention of the public in his inaugural address. However, the Mexican War took precedence in the United States expansionism of the time.

On May 13, 1849 the *U.S. Massachusetts*, the same ship that had taken Helen Chapman to Matamoros the previous year, now delivered over 150 officers, enlisted men, plus their families to Fort Vancouver.³ By the end of 1852; however, a group of settlers living north of the Columbia River pursued independence from the Oregon Territory. They petitioned Congress for the creation of a new territory, Columbia. Their request was approved March 2, 1853. The territory, newly named Washington, had about “4,000 non-Indians, with fewer than 1,700 considered eligible to vote.”⁴ The Native American population was approximately “30,000 . . . of nine language families living in the territory.”⁵ The salmon running from the Pacific Ocean to Puget Sound, continuing to the Columbia and Snake Rivers, provided the main food source for the tribes.

² Major General John A. Hemphill, USA-Ret., and Robert C. Cumbow, eds., West Pointers and Early Washington: The Contributions of U.S. Military Academy Graduates to the Development of the Washington Territory, from the Oregon Trail to the Civil War 1834-1862 (Seattle, WA: The West Point Society of Puget Sound, 1992), 12. The “Ultimate” map was, according to the U.S. Military Academy, the only correct map, delineating the the border between the United States and Canada.

³ Ibid., 22.

⁴ Ibid., 9.

⁵ Ibid., 12.

The Chinook Tribe, whose villages surrounded the Columbia River, began trading with early British merchants. Their language, the “Chinookin tongue” became the language used by merchants and the military.⁶ By March 1853, President Millard Fillmore approved the creation of the new Washington Territory before leaving office. The next president, Franklin Pierce, appointed Isaac I. Stevens, West Point class of 1839, to be the first governor of the Washington Territory.

With the creation of the new territory and planned expansion of railroad routes, white settlers rushed into this area. Native Americans were being overcome by foreign diseases and their lands and food supplies decreasing. Isaac Stevens attempted to ameliorate the tensions between the opposing groups; and, in May 1855 he organized the Walla Walla council, represented by over 5,000 Native Americans from five tribes. The new American government attempted to compensate the Native Americans for their lands, while moving them to reservations. Hostilities increased which were traced to the Yakima tribe whose anti-white feelings were known by the Army.⁷

American prospectors discovered gold at Fort Colville in the Washington Territory, and, as white miners moved in the Yakimas killed them. The army retaliated, and by the end of 1855 the Yakima War had begun.⁸ General John E. Wool attempted to protect the white settlers; however, he felt bound to respect the dilemma of the Yakima

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Rodney Glisan, Journal of Army Life (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft and Company, 1874), 257.

⁸ Plympton Kelly, We Were Not Summer Soldiers: The Indian War Diary of Plympton J. Kelly, 1855-1856 (Tacoma: Washington State Historical Society, 1976), 16-18.

tribal group, also.⁹ Wool wrote to Adjutant General Samuel Cooper about the Yakima:

“ . . . [they] will not engage in a field fight with any considerable number of regulars. Their mode [of] carrying on war is not by regular engagements, but one of ambush and surprise They can only be conquered and brought to terms, by occupying their country, and such position as would command their fisheries and valleys”¹⁰

Wool was sympathetic to the plight of the Native Americans, and in many incidents he attempted to negotiate a truce between the tribes and the white settlers.¹¹ Wool wrote to George Wright the commander of the 9th Infantry that the miners were in favor of “exterminating the Indians and accordingly do not discriminate between friends and foes . . . and only tended to increase our Indian enemies whilst it has subjected the regular service to great inconvenience and expense.”¹²

George Pickett reached Fort Steilacoom after his unit had arrived in March of 1856. The battles continued around Puget Sound and the Walla Walla Valley for another six months. Then, Pickett traveled to Bellingham Bay to neutralize hostilities there. Following orders, Pickett began to construct a fort on Bellingham Bay, which he felt was “capable of lasting ten or fifteen years.”¹³ This fort used land which had been settled by Maria and Charles Roberts earlier; and Pickett expected the War Department to reimburse

⁹ John E. Wool to Samuel Cooper, December 23, 1855, Letters Received, AGO, NA, RG 94.

¹⁰ John E. Wool to Samuel Cooper, December 23, 1855, Letters Received, AGO, NA, RG 94.

¹¹ See “Army Officer’s Report on Indian War Treaties,” Washington Historical Quarterly 19 (April 1928): 135.

¹² John E. Wool to George Wright, January 29, 1856, Letter Received, AGO, NA, RG 94.

¹³ George E. Pickett to W. W. Mackall, August 1, 1857, Letters Received, AGO, NA, RG 94.

them promptly. Pickett wrote: “As a matter of justice to the claimant [the Roberts], is it right and proper that we should deprive the citizen of his land for a whole year and not pay him what the law entitles him to . . . the valuations of his improvements[?] . . . I shall be most truly grateful when I can settle the just claims of this citizen, remove him, and have undisputed command of this post.”¹⁴ Pickett’s earlier study of law had served him very well in command.

As the Roberts’ property issue was being resolved, George Pickett was planning for his own home nearby the fort. He built a two story structure, with two bedrooms on the second floor. This would serve as his residence and office. He planned to house his horses in a stable, and in the yard he planted fruit trees.¹⁵

In August of 1857 George Pickett “married” a woman who was a member of the Haida tribe which colonized the Queen Charlotte Islands in Bellingham Bay. “Morning Mist” was the daughter of the chief; and, although several accounts exist of their meeting, there are no formal documents. Folk lore, legend and fiction have created a scenario,

¹⁴ Ibid. Underline from original.

¹⁵ Daniel E. Turberville III, Illustrated Inventory of Historic Bellingham Buildings, 1852-1915 (Bellingham, WA: Bellingham Municipal Arts Commission, November 1977), 7.

which does coincide with known facts.¹⁶ “The Pickett House,” where they lived, still stands today in Bellingham, Whatcom County, Washington.¹⁷

The marriage between Morning Mist and George Pickett took place in 1857 and “he married her according to the rites of her tribe and it is said, by white rites also.”¹⁸ Haida women are equal to their male counterparts in their culture, and their social order is matrilineal, which implies that George Pickett did not view this union as one of male dominance. The Haida women attained “culturally favorable status simply by virtue of the fact that descent is traced through females who are seen as the focus of the entire social structure”¹⁹

On December 31, 1857 James Tilton Pickett was born to George Pickett and his wife Morning Mist.²⁰ Yet, George Pickett was to lose his wife, again in childbirth; tragically, not long after the birth of their son, Morning Mist died.²¹

In the period of less than seven years Pickett had lost many of those whom he loved, and who were close to him. His first wife and child died on the Texas plains in

¹⁶ See Archie Binns, The Laurels Are Cut Down (New York: The Literary Guild of America, 1937), Binns, The Land So Bright. (Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University Press, 1992), Binns, Northwest Gateway. The Story of the Port of Seattle (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1946). These fiction works are built on known historic events and people of the early northwest. Binns claimed to have known certain “facts” about the marriage of George Pickett and Morning Mist. These elaborations are woven into his stories; however, certain events do correspond.

¹⁷ “The Pickett House” has been preserved by the Whatcom County Daughters of the Pioneers and is still in good condition in Bellingham, Washington. Their brochure provides details about Morning Mist and George Pickett.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Margaret B. Blackman, During My Time: Florence Edenshaw Davidson. A Haida Woman (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), 25-26.

²⁰ The Northern Light, August 7, 1858.

²¹ Ibid.

1851. His father Robert Pickett died in December of 1856, and in January of 1858 his second wife, Morning Mist died. Pickett knew also that his mother had been very ill; and, knowing this, he left Washington Territory in March 1858 to return to Virginia and his family, a source of strength to whom he had returned after the death of his first wife in Texas.²²

En route to Virginia, Pickett stopped in New York City in July 1858; and, before continuing, he wrote to the War Department, requesting a longer furlough.²³ The Department granted his request; however, he was aware that tensions had again erupted in Bellingham Bay between the settlers and the Native American tribes: "There are two officers present with my company, which is stationed on Bellingham Bay, and I was informed by the General Comdg. the Dept. that no troops could be taken from the Sound to the present scene of war east of the Cascade Mountains, otherwise I should not make this application"²⁴

Pickett finally returned to his post in Washington Territory in March of 1859.²⁵ Nonetheless, by July 1859 he had received new orders which would place him directly in the center of a controversy that had been brewing for over twenty years.

The Treaty of Washington, which had been signed by American and British commissioners on June 5, 1846 after the start of the Mexican War, stated in part:

²² George Wright to Samuel Cooper, March 11, 1859, Letters Received, AGO, NA, RG 94.

²³ George E. Pickett to L. McDowell, July 21, 1858, Letters Received, AGO, NA, RG 94.

²⁴ Ibid. See Special Orders No. 68, April 19, 1858, Letters Received, AGO, NA, RG 94.

²⁵ George Wright to Samuel Cooper, March 11, 1859, Letters Received, AGO, NA RG 94.

From the point on the 49th parallel of north latitude, where the boundary laid down in existing treaties and conventions between Great Britain and the United States terminates, the line of boundary between the territories of Her Britannic Majesty and those of the United States shall be continued westward along the 49th parallel of north latitude to the middle of the channel which separates the continent from Vancouver Island; and, thence southerly through the middle of said channel and of Fuca Straits, to the Pacific Ocean; provided, however, that the navigation of said channel and straits, south of the 49th parallel of north latitude, remain free and open to both parties. . . .²⁶

Specifically, however, this delineation did not refer to the Strait of Rosario, east of the San Juan Islands, nor to the Strait of Haro between San Juan Island and Vancouver Island. The United States had interpreted the Treaty as referring to Haro Strait; however, Britain determined that Rosario Strait was the channel referred to in the Treaty. San Juan Island lies between the two straits.

The Hudson's Bay Company had built a post on San Juan Island to be used as a fishing port and salmon pickling station; and, later the British company used the island to raise their flock of about 1300 sheep. And, in 1850 a Whatcom County sheriff claimed "that the [Hudson's Bay Company] sheep were being raised on American soil."²⁷

²⁶ Treaty between Her Majesty and the United States of America for the Settlement of the Oregon Boundary, signed at Washington, June 15, 1846. (London: T. R. Harrison, 1846).

²⁷ Major General John A. Hemphill and Robert C. Cumbow, West Pointers and Early Washington: The Contributions of U.S. Military Academy Graduates to the Development of the Washington Territory From The Oregon Trail to the Civil War 1834-1862 (Seattle, WA: The West Point Society of Puget Sound, Inc., 1992),

This charge led to threats from both sides and more attempts to collect taxes, including the commandeering of thirty-four sheep by the Whatcom County sheriff for payment of a debt. Then, Lyman Cutler, an American, was charged with the killing of an allegedly “British” pig on British soil. The British owner of the pig, Charles John Griffin, filed a complaint with the British government against Cutler; nevertheless, Cutler denied that the pig was on British soil.

With the establishment of the Washington Territory, the legislature determined to collect taxes on the Hudson’s Bay Company goods which were being shipped to San Juan Island. Charles John Griffin, who was operating the sheep farm, refused to pay the taxes levied by the Washington Territory legislature. In turn, the British sent an officer to collect taxes from the small group of Americans living on the island. These incidents, and others very similar, had continued for the next five years; however, both sides became progressively more combative. At one point the American officials confiscated a supply ship belonging to the Hudson’s Bay Company. They sold the ship at auction and charged her British captain with failure to clear United States customs. In retaliation, the British filed complaints against American “squatters” who had settled on Hudson’s Bay Company farmland. By 1859, the unpaid taxes that had been levied against Charles John Griffin for his flock, which had increased to 4500 sheep, amounted to \$935.²⁸

²⁸ Details taken from Executive Document No. 77, House of Representatives. 36th Congress, 1st Session, 217. Hereinafter referred to as House Exec. Doc. 77.

American settlers became fearful that this incident would escalate further, and they appealed to Brigadier General William S. Harney, the Commander of American Forces in the Northwest. Harney, a veteran of the Mexican War and also a Tennessee “ . . . Democrat, and one of General [Andrew] Jackson’s personal friends,” had, by 1859 a tarnished military career.²⁹ President Polk had intervened in past disputes to clear Harney’s name, including charges that he “invaded Mexico without orders” before the start of the Mexican War.³⁰

Harney, as Commander in the Northwest in 1859, believed San Juan Island could be used as a United States naval base; and, when apprehensive Americans approached him on the island, he was determined to use force. British intelligence agents reported at the time that Harney was resolved to follow Zachary Taylor’s route to the presidency and that Harney needed a military coup d’état which would garner the attention of the Democratic presidential nominating convention in 1860. This convention, according to British intelligence, would be deadlocked in view of the problematic issue of slavery.³¹ Many elaborate theories exist regarding Harney’s actions in August of 1859; however, the Olympia Pioneer and Democrat placed the blame for all misunderstandings directly “on Harney and on him alone . . .” for the ensuing results.³²

²⁹ Justin H. Smith, The War With Mexico, vol 1 (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1963), 269.

³⁰ Keith A. Murray, The Pig War (Tacoma, WA: Washington State Historical Society, 1968), 16.

³¹ Captain Provost to Earl of Malmsbury, August 6, 1859, British Foreign Office Document, “Printed for the Use of the Foreign Office, Confidential - United States,” 34-35, British Columbia Archives.

³² Editorial, Olympia Pioneer and Democrat, August 18, 1859.

On July 9, 1859 General Harney sailed to San Juan Island to investigate the concerns of the Americans living there. After consulting with Lyman Cutler, about the dead pig, General Harney concluded that his forces should occupy the entire island, without orders from Washington, under the auspices of providing protection to the Americans.³³ Undoubtedly, this was a duplication of his actions in Mexico before the war in 1846.

Harney immediately left for Fort Bellingham to consult with Captain Pickett. Two of Harney's officers were West Point classmates of George Pickett. Captain Alfred Pleasonton, born in Washington, D.C., in 1824, graduated from West Point in 1844, and had served with Pickett and Harney in the Mexican War.³⁴

Harney left Fort Bellingham after consulting with Pickett, though a week later he sent "formal" orders to Pickett to occupy the disputed territory of San Juan Island. The War Department did not have knowledge of Harney's directions to Pickett; however, Harney ordered Pickett on July 18, 1859 to move to San Juan Island and to construct a fort "in some suitable position near the harbor at the southeastern extremity . . . to protect the inhabitants of the island from the incursion of northern Indians of British Columbia and the Russian possessions . . . to afford adequate protection to the American citizens in

³³ See details from Executive Document No. 10, Senate, 36th Congress, 1st Session, 9-10; hereinafter cited as Senate Exec. Doc. 10.

³⁴ Ezra Warner, Generals in Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), 373-4.

their rights as such, and to resist all attempts at interference by the British authorities residing on Vancouver Island, by intimidation or force.”³⁵

Furthermore, Captain Pleasonton wrote to Pickett on that date to declare that:

. . . the serious and important duty will devolve upon you in the occupation of San Juan Island, arising from conflicting interests of the American citizens and the Hudson’s Bay Company establishment at that point . . . the duty is to afford adequate protection to the American citizens in their rights as such and to resist all attempts at interference by the British authorities residing on Vancouver Island, by intimidation or force in the controversies of the above mentioned parties The General [Harney] commanding is fully satisfied from the varied experience and judgment displayed by you in your present command that your selection to the duties with which you are now charged will advance to the interest of the service, and that your disposition of the subjects coming within your supervision and action will enhance your reputation as a commander.³⁶

Harney had placed Pickett in complete command in the upper Puget Sound, and Colonel Casey, who in actuality was the supreme commander of the upper Puget Sound, was now subordinate to Pickett. Casey also commanded the steamer *Massachusetts*,

³⁵ General Harney to Captain George Pickett, July 18, 1859, enclosed with Special Orders #72. Collection of Official Documents on the San Juan Imbroglio, 1859-1872. (Camp Murray: The National Guard of the State of Washington, 1964), Document #4. Hereinafter cited as Official Documents.

³⁶ Alfred Pleasonton to George E. Pickett, July 18, 1859, Senate Exec. Doc. 10, 6-7.

which Harney had ordered “to cruise in the sound among the islands frequented by the northern Indians.”³⁷

On July 27, 1859 George Pickett landed on San Juan Island and issued a proclamation: “This being United States Territory, no laws, other than those of the United States, nor courts, except such as are held by virtue of said laws, will be recognized or allowed on this island.”³⁸ George Pickett believed that the United States government had directed him to San Juan Island. He wrote to Alfred Pleasonton: “You know I am a peaceable man, but we cannot stand everything . . . [there is] very great want of courtesy exhibited towards us by these ‘Bulls’ . . . [rather like] Dog eat dog.”³⁹

By July 30, 1859 the British government agent, Charles John Griffin, had reconfirmed the British claim to the island; and, John Douglas, Governor of Vancouver, the British colony, had requested armed reinforcements. Yet, Pickett refused to recognize their authority. “I am here by virtue of an order from my government and shall remain till recalled by the same authority.”⁴⁰

Pickett wrote Colonel Casey requesting armed vessels: “I do not know that any actual collision will take place, but it is not comfortable to be lying within the range of a couple of war steamers. The *Tribune*, a thirty gun frigate is lying broadside to our camp,

³⁷ “Special Order #72,” General Harney to Colonel Casey, Official Documents, #3.

³⁸ George E. Pickett, July 27, 1859, Executive Document No. 29, Senate, 40th Congress, 2nd Session, 8, hereinafter cited as Senate Exec. Doc. 29.

³⁹ George E. Pickett to Alfred Pleasonton, July 27, 1859, Letters Received, AGO, RG 94. Pickett was referring to the Englishmen as “Bulls.”

⁴⁰ George E. Pickett to Charles John Griffin, July 30, 1859, Senate Exec. Doc. 10, 13.

and from present indications, everything leads me to suppose that they will attempt to prevent my carrying out my instructions.”⁴¹ Casey responded by writing to Alfred Pleasonton, Commander Harney’s Chief of Staff, that the British were “trying to bluff a little.”⁴²

Pickett was unmistakably worried as he wrote to Pleasonton “. . . everything will be conducted properly-- or I will go under Please my dear amigo mio, tell me anything--entre nous--that you think ought to be done.”⁴³

On August 3, the commander of a British vessel, The H.M.S. *Tribune*, requested a meeting with George Pickett. Captain Geoffrey Phipps Hornby arrived at the Pickett encampment to discuss joint occupation with the American forces. They reached no definitive decision, but Hornby later that night wrote to Pickett: “The responsibility of any such catastrophe does not, I feel, rest on me or on her majesty’s representatives at Vancouver.”⁴⁴ Likewise, Pickett wrote after the meeting to Hornby, “I hope, most sincerely, Sir, you will reflect on this and hope you may coincide with me in my conclusion. Should you see fit to act otherwise you will then be the person who will bring on a most unfortunate and disastrous difficulty and not the U.S. Officials.”⁴⁵

At that time Pickett informed Alfred Pleasonton, “I have had to use a great deal of my peace-making disposition in order to restrain the sovereigns. I must respectfully ask

⁴¹ George E. Pickett to Silas Casey, July 30, 1859, Senate Exec. Doc. 10, 13.

⁴² Silas Casey to Alfred Pleasonton, July 30, 1859, Letters Received, AGO, RG 94.

⁴³ George E. Pickett to Alfred Pleasonton, July 30, 1859, Letters Received, AGO, RG 94.

⁴⁴ Geoffrey Phipps Hornby to George E. Pickett, August 3, 1859, Senate Exec. Doc. 10, 16-17.

⁴⁵ George E. Pickett to Geoffrey Phipps Hornby, August 3, 1859, 11 PM, Letters Received, AGO, RG 94.

that an express be sent to me immediately for my future guidance. I do not think there are any moments to waste. I have endeavored to impress them with the ideas that my authority comes directly through you from Washington.”⁴⁶

During a heavy fog and completely unknown to the British, Colonel Silas Casey landed additional American troops and artillery on San Juan Island. Casey wrote: “Finding ourselves a smooth place near land, with the coast to [sic] depressed at the point as to make the ascent from the shore easy, I landed the troops and howitzers, with orders to the senior officer to move them to Captain Pickett’s camp.”⁴⁷

With the clearing of the fog in the morning, it became apparent to the British that American forces had increased their strength overnight. The British responded by positioning their steamer, the *Satellite* closer to the island, as if ready to fire. Colonel Casey was determined to avoid a confrontation that might lead to war; instead, he sent an officer to meet with Hornby on the *Tribune*. The officer proposed a meeting at Pickett’s camp. As Casey stated: “Seeing the dangers of a collision at any moment which would inevitably lead to war between two mighty nations connected by so many common bonds . . . I resolved to make an attempt to prevent so great a calamity.”⁴⁸

British Rear Admiral R. Lambert Baynes was aware of increasing hostilities in Europe, especially with Napoleon III and his army in Italy. Furthermore, Baynes knew

⁴⁶ George E. Pickett to Alfred Pleasonton, August 3, 1859, 10 PM., Senate Exec. Doc. No. 10, 14-15, underline from original.

⁴⁷ Silas Casey to Alfred Pleasonton, August 12, 1859, Letters Received, AGO, RG 94.

⁴⁸ Silas Casey to Alfred Pleasonton, August 12, 1859, Letters Received, AGO, RG 94.

that England could not afford to provoke war with the United States when European stability forced the threat of another Napoleonic emperor. Baynes was aboard the British ship *Ganges* in Esquimalt Harbor when he received word that Silas Casey wanted to meet with him on board the American ship the *Shubrick*. Baynes declined, perhaps by virtue of his rank, or that he preferred to negotiate on his ship. Colonel Casey, obviously offended replied, “I was of the opinion that I carried etiquette far enough in going 25 miles to see a gentleman who was disinclined to come 100 yards to see me.”⁴⁹

Negotiations reached a limit with neither side willing to risk war. Pickett remained on San Juan Island for another week while receiving reinforcements of artillery and men.

William Harney was forwarding his reports to Samuel Cooper of the War Department during the events of the late summer of 1859; however, Washington was not made aware of the near disaster until much later. Harney wrote Cooper that the “wanton and insulting conduct of the British authorities” threatened the safety of the Americans living on the island.⁵⁰ Harney also accused the agents of the Hudson’s Bay Company of provoking warfare between the Pacific Northwest tribes and American citizens.⁵¹

Nonetheless, General Harney appeared to gain his glory, perhaps to bolster his presidential campaign for 1860. However, the impact of Harney’s actions, and their implications for George Pickett, became clear. Pickett, the rebel of West Point, had

⁴⁹Ibid. See also William S. Harney to Winfield Scott, August 18, 1859, Senate Exec. Doc. No. 10, 24-25. Harney estimated that the British had 2,140 men, 5 warships, and 167 guns. Harney assessed the American forces at less than 500 men and 15 guns.

⁵⁰ William S. Harney to Samuel Cooper, July 19, 1859, Senate Exec. Doc. No. 10, 23.

⁵¹ William S. Harney to Samuel Cooper, August 8, 1859, Letters Received, AGO, RG 94.

continued to meet the compounded life and death challenges that had brought him to this juncture. The losses of his loved ones, and the disconnection from his family support give birth to a melancholy soul, who was not “the same person . . . whose buoyancy of youth [was] past . . . [who looked] forward to nothing with pleasure Why should I wish to make others bear a portion of the burden which has been assigned to me”⁵² George Pickett’s military training had inculcated him with the requirement that he follow the orders of his superiors. Was this the burden “which had been assigned” to him?⁵³ And, would this “burden” of enslaved dedication to his military leader later lead him to the brink of disaster?

⁵² George E. Pickett to Elizabeth Chevallie (Heth) Vaden, December 4, 1852, VHS.

⁵³ Ibid.

CHAPTER SIX

“GALLANT BEHAVIOR”

President James Buchanan spent the majority of his term as fifteenth president of the United States attempting to maintain peace between the northern and southern states over the issue of slavery. With the northern and western denunciation of the *Dred Scott* case in 1857, Buchanan was cognizant of the tensions which were building.¹ Buchanan's support for the Lecompton Constitution and his approval for the admission of Kansas as a slave state further alienated his supporters in the Democratic party. Stephen A. Douglas withdrew his support from Buchanan and organized both Republicans and southern Democrats to oppose the Lecompton Constitution. Buchanan knew the country was splitting apart over slavery.

Upon receiving information in September 1859 about the San Juan Island controversy, Buchanan ordered W. R. Drinkard, the Assistant Secretary of War, to warn General Harney not to precipitate war with Britain. Drinkard wrote to Harney:

The President was not prepared to learn that
you had ordered military possession to be taken
of the island of San Juan or Bellevue. Although
he believes the Straits of Haro to be the true
boundary between Great Britain and the United

¹ In light of Buchanan's arm-twisting of Pennsylvanian Supreme Court Justice Robert C. Grier to decide against *Dred Scott*, and the revelation of Buchanan's participation in the failed Ostend Manifesto of 1854, the president was clearly only forestalling hostilities in 1859. With the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860, Buchanan, as the lame duck president, did very little to settle the fury.

States, under the treaty of June 15, 1846, and that consequently, the island belongs to us, yet he had not anticipated that so decided a step would have been resorted to without instructions The President will await further details, which he expects to receive from you by the next steamer. He is especially anxious to ascertain whether, before you proceeded to act, you had communicated with Commissioner Campbell, who could not then have been distant from you, and who was instructed by this government in conjunction with the British Commissioner, to decide this very boundary question²

It became indisputable to many in Washington, D. C., that Harney was attempting to formulate American foreign policy on his own. James Buchanan sent Winfield Scott to Puget Sound immediately to preserve peace; and, he notified the British government that Harney had acted without approval from a higher command.³

General Winfield Scott arrived at the San Juan Islands on October 20, 1859 to find only one British ship offshore. George Pickett assured him that the tensions had cooled.⁴ Scott, therefore, removed nearly all of the American soldiers from the island, leaving a small infantry detail. Pickett returned to Fort Bellingham.⁵

General Scott proceeded to Portland to meet with General Harney to discuss the controversy over joint occupation of San Juan Island. Thereupon, Scott left Portland to meet with British Governor Douglas to propose the joint occupation of the San Juan

² W. R. Drinkard to William S. Harney, September 3, 1859, Senate Exec. Doc. No. 10, 19.

³ W. R. Drinkard to Winfield Scott, September 16, 1859, Senate Exec. Doc. No. 10, 22-24.

⁴ Lorenzo Thomas to Samuel Cooper, October 22, 1859, Senate Exec. Doc. No. 10, 56.

⁵ "Special Orders," November 5, 1859, Senate Exec. Doc. No. 10, 67.

Islands which would not exceed one hundred British and American soldiers to protect “in their persons and property, and to repel any descent on the part of the hostile Indians.”⁶

General Scott ordered Captain Lewis C. Hunt of the Company C, 4th Infantry to maintain protection on San Juan Island. Scott presumed the matter had been settled, and he departed for San Francisco.

General Scott suggested to Harney in a letter dated November 9, 1859 that he resign his command of the Department of the Pacific in order to avoid the humiliation of a dismissal.⁷ Harney’s handling of the San Juan Island controversy had angered legions from both parties in Washington, D.C., and almost precipitated a war. Harney immediately wrote back to Scott stating that he would not relinquish his command; and, instead, he immediately protested directly to President Buchanan.⁸

Harney’s volitional use of his discretionary powers and his eccentric behavior continued as he ordered Hunt to Fort Steilacoom and Pickett and his men back to San Juan Island.⁹ Harney refused to recognize the pre-arranged joint occupation order that General Scott had negotiated and ordered the British command off of the island. At that point, Harney ordered Pickett to place the government of the Island under the American civil authority of Whatcom County, Washington Territory.

⁶ Winfield Scott to James Douglas, November 25, 1859, Executive Document No. 65, House of Representatives, 36th Congress, 1st Session, 18; hereinafter referred to as House Exec. Doc. No. 65.

⁷ Winfield Scott to William S. Harney, November 9, 1859, Senate Exec. Doc. No. 10, 56-57.

⁸ William S. Harney to James Buchanan, December 12, 1859, Senate Exec. Doc. No. 10, 65.

⁹ “Special Orders,” March 10, 1860, Executive Document No. 98, House of Representatives, 38th Congress, 1st Session, 51; hereinafter referred to as House Exec. Doc. No. 98.

Captain George Bazelgette, commander of British troops on San Juan Island, was nearing retirement after having served most of his career in military action in Asia, near the coast of China. He did not want to end his career by starting a war with the United States. Instead, Bazelgette relinquished joint command of the island.¹⁰

Weeks passed between communications; however, by May of 1860, General Scott had been informed of Harney's actions. Scott wrote to the Secretary of State:

It will be seen by Brigadier General Harney's instructions to Pickett, of the last month (herewith) that Harney considers San Juan Island *as a part of Washington Territory*, and Pickett is directed "to acknowledge and respect" the *authority of that Territory*. If this does not lead to collision of army, it will again be due to the forbearance of the British authorities; for I found both Brigadier General Harney and Captain Pickett proud of their *conquest* of the Island, and quite jealous of any interference therewith on the part of higher authority. I beg it may further be remembered that I initiated a doubt to the War Department whether Brigadier General Harney could carry out my pacific arrangement, respecting the occupation of the island, with good faith, or even with courtesy, and hence one of my reasons for wishing to relieve him from his command.¹¹

¹⁰ Keith A. Murray, *The Pig War* (Tacoma, WA: Washington State Historical Society, 1968), 61.

¹¹ Winfield Scott to Lewis Cass, June 1, 1860, Executive Document No. 98, 39.

Secretary of State Lewis Cass immediately notified President Buchanan of General Harney's insubordination. And, on June 8, 1860 the administration relieved Harney of his command and ordered him to "repair without delay to Washington."¹² There, his superiors officially reprimanded him on October 26, 1860 for behavior "which might have been attended by disastrous consequences."¹³ The Pig War had been averted; however, with the November 1860 election of Abraham Lincoln, another war, a civil one, was stirring.

Captain Pickett remained in joint control on San Juan Island with Captain Bazelgette of the British forces; and, both reported that order had been maintained. Nevertheless, Pickett felt that he had been censured for following Harney's orders. He wrote to George Cullum, a friend from West Point: "The question arises why am I punished without even knowing what has been my fault . . . [there is] implicit censure upon me for obeying orders"¹⁴ Yet, Colonel Casey praised Pickett by writing that he was as "impressed as the general with the gallant behavior displayed by him during the late difficulties on the island."¹⁵

Furthermore, in early 1860 the legislature of the Washington Territory passed this joint resolution honoring Pickett:

¹² Lewis Cass to William S. Harney, June 8, 1860, Executive Document No. 29, Senate, 40th Congress, 2nd Session, 213; hereinafter referred to as Senate Exec. Doc. No. 29.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ George E. Pickett to George W. Cullum, February 19, 1860, George W. Cullum Papers, United States Military Academy; hereinafter referred to as USMA.

¹⁵ Silas Casey to Alfred Pleasonton, August 22, 1859, Senate Exec. Doc. No. 10, 46.

Resolved, by the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Washington, [T]hat the thanks of the people of this Territory are due Captain Pickett, U. S. A., for the gallant and firm discharge of his duties under the most trying circumstances on the Island of San Juan.

Passed January 11th, 1860.¹⁶

Upon receiving this accolade, Pickett responded to Henry M. McGill on January 25, 1860 from Fort Bellingham:

Sir . . . I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt (to day) of your communication of the 19th inst. enclosing the "Resolution" of Legislature of this Territory so highly flattering to myself. . . . You will understand me when I say it is one of the proudest days of my life. Allow me to extend my thanks for your courtesy and kindness in announcing this most pleasing intelligence.¹⁷

In July of 1860 Pickett issued an order which would keep Indian women off of San Juan Island; and, in September he issued another order banning the sale of alcohol to military personnel on the island.¹⁸ Throughout this period of leadership, Pickett maintained meticulous records and correspondence, perhaps to avoid the taint of another "General Harney ."

¹⁶ See "Pickett Grateful for Recognition," Washington Historical Quarterly, vol. 1 (October 1906), 74.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ George E. Pickett to Adjutant General, July 18, 1860, Executive Document No. 27, Senate, 40th Congress, 3rd Session, 68; hereinafter referred to as Senate Exec. Doc. No. 27.

British Captain John D. S. Spencer wrote early in 1861 about the gratifying resolution of events on San Juan Island:

I must, Sir, take this opportunity to express what pleasure I have derived from the very cordial and friendly feeling which had existed between the troops of the two governments during the time of joint occupation, and I have on all occasions received from Captain Bazelgette the assurance of having always experienced the utmost courtesy and friendliness on the part of Captain Pickett.¹⁹

Brigadier-General Albert Sidney Johnston, newly appointed commander of the Department of the Pacific, wrote to Spencer expecting that “this cordial and friendly feeling may continue to the end”²⁰ Major W. W. Mackall, assistant adjutant general, wrote to Pickett that General Johnston was “pleased to learn from Captain Spencer that between the forces occupying the island harmony prevails. He is anxious that this continue; and, if possible to be avoided, no question for discussion may be raised.”²¹

Local attempts at diplomacy were productive in the Washington Territory, especially regarding the joint occupancy of San Juan Island. Lord Lyons, the British minister in Washington, notified the United States State Department in December 1860 that the British government was amenable to negotiate the issue of the San Juan Island

¹⁹ John D. S. Spencer to George Wright, Jr., January 24, 1861, War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, 128 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing office, 1880-1901), Series I, 50, pt. 1, 435. Hereinafter referred to as OR; all references to Series I unless otherwise specified.

²⁰ Albert Sidney Johnston to John D. S. Spencer, February 18, 1861, OR, 50, pt. 1, 435.

²¹ W. W. Mackall to George E. Pickett, February 22, 1861, OR, 50, pt. 1, 449.

boundary.²² The British suggested a third party which would render a binding decision. Suggestions for the arbiter were the King of Sweden and Norway, the King of the Netherlands, or the President of the Federal Council of Switzerland.²³ However, with the November 1860 election of Abraham Lincoln, and the Crittenden Compromise proposed to the United States Senate by John Crittenden on December 18, 1860, the Buchanan administration was domestically engaged.²⁴

On February 13, 1861 George Pickett wrote to his friend Benjamin Alvord, who was serving as Paymaster in the state of Oregon. Oregon had become the thirty-third state of the Union on February 14, 1859. Major Alvord, who was from Vermont, and who had graduated from West Point in 1833 and had served with Pickett in the Mexican War in the Fourth Infantry, was a fellow officer and a personal friend of Pickett.

Pickett wrote to him:

I should have answered your kind note long since, had I not seen in the Portland papers that you were on the eve of saying goodbye to us. It was only by the last steamer I learned much to my gratification that the report was untrue, knowing as I did too that you yourself preferred being let alone. . . . However, my dear Major, I am afraid it is but a short respite -- for I think we officers of the Grande Armee be

²² Lord Lyons dispatch, December 10, 1860, Senate Exec. Doc. No. 29, 131.

²³ Keith A. Murray, The Pig War (Tacoma, WA: Washington State Historical Society, 1968), 68.

²⁴ The Crittenden Compromise was proposed by Senator John Crittenden of Kentucky to the U. S. Senate on December 18, 1860. It comprised six proposed amendments to the U. S. Constitution which would extend the Missouri Compromise line of 36 30' west to the Pacific Coast, allowing slavery to the south of the line. Also, it repudiated the right of Congress to abolish slavery. Abraham Lincoln, as President-elect, opposed this Compromise. The Compromise was overthrown in committee.

compelled to go. I much fear the Register of 1861 will be the last published. Write me what you think the best course to pursue in case of a break-up. What will we do with the public property and funds? In some places there may be a general scramble. Major Ragan has no money -- the troops ought to be paid very regularly in this crisis, that is if the government wish[sic] to use them. . . . I myself come from a Union loving state I do not like to be bullied nor dragged out of the Union by the precipatory and indecent haste of South Carolina²⁵

As it became necessary to prepare Federal companies for the war, George Pickett received orders to abandon Camp Pickett on San Juan Island, as other troops were withdrawn from forts in the state of Oregon and Washington Territory in June 1861.²⁶ Pickett disputed the orders which would have left the island defenseless; and, after having left the island, Pickett received new orders to return.²⁷

George Pickett then returned to San Juan Island again, under orders of the Federal government. However, on July 26, 1861 he resigned from the United States Army to return to Virginia.²⁸ This time George Pickett was not following military orders, but

²⁵ George E. Pickett to Major Benjamin Alvord, February 13, 1861, VHS typescript.

²⁶ Special Orders, No. 9, June 11, 1861, OR, 50, pt. 1, 512. See also Special Orders, No. 13, June 21, 1861, OR, 50, pt. 1, 519.

²⁷ Special Orders, No. 13, June 21, 1861, OR, 50, pt. 1, 519. See also George E. Pickett to Goldsborough, July 2, 1861, Edson, The Fourth Corner, 117.

²⁸ George E. Pickett to J. S. Mason, July 26, 1861, OR 50, pt. 1, 544-545.

instead he was responding to the pleading of his family members in Virginia.²⁹ His military expertise was needed in Virginia, and once again, rather than attending to his own inner voice, George Pickett “obey[ed] orders.”³⁰

²⁹ Andrew Johnston to Mary S. Boggs, April 26, 1861, VHS Notebook. Andrew Johnston had returned to Virginia and was assuming George Pickett would also return to Virginia at the start of the Civil War. Johnston, who had been like a father to George Pickett, felt certain that the delay in hearing from Pickett was due to the problems of mail delivery.

³⁰ George E. Pickett to George W. Cullum, February 19, 1860, VHS typescript.

CHAPTER SEVEN

“USELESS SACRIFICE”

George Pickett arrived in Richmond in early September 1861 and by the fourteenth he had received his appointment in the Provisional Army. Within one week his rank changed from captain of the infantry to major in the artillery to colonel.¹ Pickett missed the start of fighting, which centered around his homeland in Virginia. From the beginning of the Civil War localism dominated the South's main approach to the war, while Northern nationalism became imminent and unifying for the Federals.

The two armies fought the First Battle of Bull Run on July 12, 1861 yielding an early victory to the Confederate Army. The Union Army hesitated at Bull Run, which provided an opportunity for the Confederates to bring in reinforcements by rail. Railroads became vital to the transfer of troops, especially in the rebel armies which used the major junctions at Atlanta, Chattanooga and Petersburg. Confederate leaders quickly brought reinforcements from the Piedmont Station to the Battle of Bull Run resulting in a Union failure and demoralization of the Union troops.²

¹ George E. Pickett to Samuel Cooper, September 20, 1861, Letters Received, AIGO-CSA, RG 109. See also Compiled Service Record of George E. Pickett, RG 109; Special Orders No. 160, September 23, 1861, OR, Vol. 5, 877.

² Lash, Jeffrey N. “Civil War Irony: Confederate Commanders and the Destruction of Southern Railways,” Prologue, (Summer 1993): 36.

The first assignment for Pickett was to mobilize his forces in northern Virginia and to establish headquarters in Tappahannock for the District of the Lower Rappahannock. The area is not far from Washington, D. C., and on October 27, shortly after establishing his headquarters, Pickett was notified of an approaching Federal unit. Secretary of War for the newly organized Confederate states, Judah P. Benjamin, sent word to Pickett to “call out all forces you can collect in the country, to be armed with such weapons as they can bring, to repel the invasion.”³ Apparently this was an erroneous alert, and no Federal attack was imminent. There was concern, however, for the Union sympathizers living in northern Virginia, who could have permitted a break in the cordon defense that Pickett was preparing.⁴

In October the citizens of Lancaster and Northumberland counties organized a meeting to express their concerns for their needed protection from the fighting. Many of these residents complained about the actual need for a war between the northern states and the southern states. Virginia, as a border state, had numerous Union backers. Other citizens expressed their anger at the Confederacy.⁵ Pickett had to negotiate between these conflicting views within his Northern Neck region while offering protection from the Federal troops. He wrote: “As commanding officer of that part of the country the inhabitants looked to me for protection.”⁶ He requested help, while fearing that the

³ Judah P. Benjamin to Theophilus H. Holmes, October 27, 1861, OR 5, 923.

⁴ Theophilus H. Holmes to Samuel Cooper, December 12, 1861, OR 5, 993.

⁵ “Proceedings of the Meeting of the Citizens of Lancaster and Northumberland Counties, Virginia,” October 21, 1861, OR 5, 910-911.

⁶ George E. Pickett to Samuel Cooper, December 13, 1861, OR 5, 994.

Unionists among the Northern Neck region were potential problems. “We have to fear them most. All during a war like this must suffer, but for the good of the general service it will not do to yield to those persons who have refused to volunteer . . . and [who] would join the enemy should an occasion occur, it would be a mistaken leniency and would only lead to further trouble”⁷

Pickett was successful in getting reinforcements for this vulnerable vicinity. And, on December 24, Colonel John M. Brockenbrough, in command of the Fortieth Virginia Infantry, arrived to reinforce Pickett’s troops. Within less than a month Pickett was recommended twice for promotion to brigadier general.⁸ And, with this promotion Pickett was reassigned to the Third Brigade in Centerville, Virginia, which had been headed by his friend James Longstreet.⁹ Pickett and Longstreet had fought together at Chapultepec when Longstreet was struck while “bearing the colors” and Pickett took over to place the flag on the castle.¹⁰

James Longstreet had been anguishing over the death of his three small children from scarlet fever in early February 1862. George Pickett could now relieve him of command and later Pickett provided comfort for the grieving family. From his experiences of loss in his own past, Pickett was qualified to attend to the needs of his

⁷ George E. Pickett to D. H. Maury, December 10, 1861, OR 5, 991-992.

⁸ See Endorsements of Theophilus H. Holmes to Samuel Cooper, December 31, 1861 and January 4, 1862, OR 51, pt. 2, 428.

⁹ Special Orders No. 63, February 28, 1862, OR 5, 1085-1086.

¹⁰ See John C. Waugh, The Class of 1846: From West Point to Appomattox, Stonewall Jackson, George McClellan and Their Brothers (New York: Warner Brother Books, 1994), 121.

friend by making arrangements for the funerals of the three Longstreet children. Pickett attended the funerals in the role of surrogate father due to the overwhelming grief James Longstreet and his wife were experiencing.¹¹

As Longstreet's despondency continued, he wrote later of the first months of 1862, that "with the beginning of the new year winter set in with rain and snow, alternate freezing and thawing, until the roads and fields became seas of red mud."¹² Through this misery Pickett's men were marching to their new position south of the Rappahannock River. As they retreated the Union forces moved in. Abraham Lincoln had been advocating the use of an offensive line which would stretch along the entire circumference to prevent the Confederates from moving their forces from point to point.¹³

As Pickett's troops were marching to Culpepper Court House on March 8, 1862, nearby the Battle of Hampton Roads was taking place between the Confederate ironclad the *Merrimack* and the Union low-lying turret ship, the *Monitor*, unfolded nearby. The Confederate ship retired after the encounter, and the *Monitor*, armed with its revolving gun turrets, maintained the Union blockade at Hampton Roads. Three years later, on February 3, 1865, at this same junction aboard the steamer *River Queen*, Abraham

¹¹ William S. Piston, Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant: James Longstreet and His Place in Southern History. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987) 163.

¹² James Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox: Memoirs of the Civil War in America. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1960), 63.

¹³ See Lash, Jeffrey N. "Civil War Irony: Confederate Commanders and the Destruction of Southern Railways," 38. Lincoln's idea violated the principle of concentration which Jomini had advocated. Jomini promoted the idea of using one theater of action for a large effect. Ironically, not until Lincoln appointed Ulysses S. Grant as the commander of the Union forces in 1864 was Lincoln able to find the creative military mind he had sought.

Lincoln and William H. Seward met with Confederate representatives Alexander H. Stephens and Robert M. T. Hunter to demand restoration of the Union. Hunter and Stephens would not negotiate, but instead demanded complete independence for the Confederate states. This inconclusive battle of the *Merrimack* and the *Monitor* in March 1862 foreshadowed what would later occur at the Hampton Roads conference in February of 1865; and, in neither case did the Confederacy gain ground.

When Pickett received new orders to advance his troops to Yorktown on April 18, 1862, this move placed his new position on the Confederate line directly under McClellan's siege of Yorktown. Pickett's brigade held that line for almost two weeks.¹⁴

The Yorktown Campaign of October 1781 had been, for the American Revolutionaries, a decisive battle, by reason of the French assistance on both land and sea. George Pickett's great-grandfathers had fought in this American war for independence; and, at that moment, Pickett himself was fighting for independence. The moral issues against slavery in the current struggles were powerful. The strong reasoning for independence and states' rights, perhaps had borne a similarity to the Revolution.

Pickett's statement to Benjamin Alvord before leaving San Juan Island in 1861 presented a significant expression of his dilemma: “. . . I myself come from a union loving state, but matters are taking such a phase at present that she and the outer border of union states such as Ky.-- Tenn. Md. and Mo. can not make their voices heard. . . . When

¹⁴ General Orders No. 1, April 18, 1862, OR 11, pt. 3, 448. See also Frank E. Vandiver Blood Brothers: A Short History of the Civil War. (College Station: Texas A & M University Press), 93.

they ask but their rights and no more. . . . I do not like to be bullied nor dragged out of the union by the precipatory and indecent haste of South Carolina.”¹⁵ Pickett was not a member of the old-line Democratic party, nor did he join in Democratic politics.¹⁶ He had participated in Whig politics while living in Illinois for several years after 1840 with his Uncle Andrew Johnston. And, after the Civil War Pickett did not link himself with Democratic politics which were uniting to overcome the Reconstruction policies of the Radical Republicans. Many Southerners were opposed to Federal intrusion, and viewed secession as correlated to issues of states’ rights, localism and individualism.

Pickett’s letter to Alvord continued as he related “the sad news of my Mother’s death It is a great consolation to know that she is where she can no longer be subjected to our earthly afflictions, and that she did not live to see the country she was so proud of torn with civil strife and discord, and our once great nation aruin.”¹⁷ George Pickett added a postscript to his letter to Benjamin Alvord dated February 13, 1861. He asked: “Where is Longstreet?”¹⁸

The siege of Yorktown by McClellan’s Federal Army of The Potomac in April 1862 was an attack on Pickett’s birthplace, only miles from the home he had left in 1840

¹⁵ George E. Pickett to Benjamin Alvord, February 13, 1861, VHS typescript. Major Alvord was a Vermont native, and also an 1833 graduate of the United States Military Academy. He served with Pickett in the Mexican War in the Fourth Infantry. At the time of this letter, Alvord was serving the Department of Oregon as paymaster.

¹⁶ The author’s correspondence with Carol Reardon, April 27, 1995. Reardon is a Professor of History at The Pennsylvania State University, and the author of “The Convergence of History and Myth in the Southern Past: Pickett’s Charge,” in *The Third Day at Gettysburg and Beyond*, ed., Gary W. Gallagher.

¹⁷ George E. Pickett to Benjamin Alvord, February 13, 1861, VHS typescript.

¹⁸ Ibid.

before departing for Illinois. These intersections of memory, time and place must have weighed heavily on Pickett. Moreover, his losses of the past twenty years, including the loss of both parents, two young wives, his baby and the recent burial of Longstreet's three small children surely yielded suffering. Fort Monroe, under Union control and less than twenty miles from Yorktown, had been Pickett's retreat after the death of his first wife on the Texas plains in 1851. He returned to Fort Monroe again in 1855 before departing for Washington Territory. And, in April 1862 George Pickett found himself fighting against George McClellan, his classmate at West Point and fellow graduate of the Class of 1846. Confederate and Union commanders deployed military tactics that were identical battlefield plans, prepared by officers instructed by the same professors, from the same textbooks, at the same school - - West Point.

By May 1862 George Pickett's brigade had united with Longstreet at the Battle of Williamsburg and were sent thereafter to Fort Magruder.¹⁹ Pickett described the "quite severe losses of his men . . . [the ground, he wrote was] literally covered with dead."²⁰

However, his Virginians,

. . . maintained their ground returning the fire with the most telling effect The gallantry and energy exhibited by both officers and men cannot be too much praised. After hard night marches, drenching rains, and but scanty rations, they met an enemy well-fed, superior in numbers, better armed and equipped, and well posted, and drove them a mile during engagement It is with pleasure that I state that their

¹⁹ Report of the Battle of Williamsburg, George E. Pickett to Moxley Sorrel, May 1862, OR 11, pt. 1, 584.

²⁰ Ibid.

confidence in their own ability and cause is redoubled since their action . . . I must mention also the dastardly subterfuges of an enemy pretending to surrender in order to stop our fire to allow their reinforcements to come up and enable them to pour in a deadly volley upon an honorable and too unsuspecting foe.²¹

Pickett was dismayed that the enemy was not following the rules of war. The Union forces had used the “white flag” to halt a Confederate charge, and then shot the Confederate colonel who stopped the charge. Undoubtedly the rules of war had changed. By the time the battle of Williamsburg had been fought, both sides must have known the results of Shiloh.

The Battle of Shiloh in April of 1862 had sealed the fate of the Confederacy in the Western Campaigns. Ulysses S. Grant, an unfamiliar commander of the Union troops, began his siege on the Tennessee and Mississippi Rivers in April. The control of these rivers was essential to the Confederate supply lines. Union Admiral David G. Farragut had gained control of the port at New Orleans from the Gulf of Mexico earlier that month. And, when Grant surprised the Confederate troops of Albert Sidney Johnston and P. G. T. Beauregard at the church at Shiloh, beside the Tennessee River, the resulting carnage was horrifying. This battle became a marker for the war and for Ulysses S. Grant. He described the battlefield as “so covered with dead that it would have been possible to walk

²¹ Ibid., 587.

over the clearing in any direction, stepping on dead bodies, without a foot touching the ground.”²² Estimates placed the number of dead or wounded at 20,000.

The achievements of the Industrial Revolution had brought about modern implements of war resulting in casualty rates of close to eighty percent per engagement. Abraham Lincoln’s decision to prosecute a total war did not ensue until March of 1864; however, with the replacement of McClellan by Ulysses S. Grant at that time, Lincoln had revealed a leader whose use of new military warfare tactics could offer hope for a Union victory. Grant became known as a butcher. He wrote: “To conserve life in war is to fight unceasingly.”²³

Longstreet praised George Pickett, in spite of his concerns connected with the emanating new warfare, in his report of the Battle of Williamsburg. Longstreet wrote: “Brig. Gen. George E. Pickett greatly distinguished in other fields, used his forces with great effect, ability, and his usual gallantry.”²⁴

By the end of May 1862 in the Eastern Campaigns McClellan’s Union forces were preparing to enter Richmond; however, Stonewall Jackson moved north quickly to threaten the army of Nathaniel P. Banks which was safeguarding Washington, D. C. To reinforce Banks’ troops, Abraham Lincoln diverted part of McClellan’s army from outside Richmond.

²² See John Y. Simon, editor, Papers of Ulysses S. Grant, vol. 5, April 1- August 31, 1862 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), April 28, 1862.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Report of the Battle of Williamsburg, James Longstreet to Thomas G. Rhett, May 16, 1862, OR 11, pt. 1, 587.

In a series of counterattacks and delaying actions Richmond remained secure from Union attempts, and Jackson withdrew south to Richmond. The Eastern Campaigns of 1861-1862 produced decisive victories for the Confederates. James Longstreet recommended George E. Pickett for another promotion in June 1862, and Robert E. Lee became the new commander of the Army of Northern Virginia.

In July at the Battle of Gaines' Mill, George Pickett was wounded; and he returned to Richmond to convalesce with family. He did not return to active duty until September of 1862. On the seventeenth day of September, the bloodiest single day of military fighting at the hands of American troops, up to that time, took place at Antietam Creek. Casualties totaled over 25,000 men as Confederates led by Robert E. Lee and Union forces led by George B. McClellan met at Sharpsburg by Burnside Bridge. Lee had hoped to gather support from Britain and France for the Confederacy by invading the North. However, a Union soldier had found at an abandoned Confederate camp a copy of Lee's battle plan. This discovery gave McClellan the advantage of interception at Sharpsburg, Maryland. Union forces outnumbered the Confederate troops by at least two to one, and McClellan forced the Confederates back across the Potomac to retreat into Virginia. For reasons not yet determined, McClellan did not pursue them in their departure across the Potomac, leaving the North with a hollow victory.

Alexander Gardner, Matthew Brady's assistant, took photographs of the battlefield at Antietam several days after the battle. These images of dead soldiers were the first seen

by the American society. Moreover, as these images were dispersed the American view of the war began to change. Abraham Lincoln used the image of Antietam as a victory signal for the Union against slavery. He told Congress the Antietam victory was “an indication of the Divine Will” and, on September 22, 1862 Lincoln issued the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation to take effect on January 1, 1863.

In the same week of September 1862 Robert E. Lee was dividing his Army of Northern Virginia into the First and Second Corps, placing James Longstreet and Stonewall Jackson at the head of each division. By November 6 George Pickett had been promoted to Major-General in this massive re-organization of Lee’s army.

Pickett’s new command consisted of about 15,000 men: four infantry brigades of Virginians and one brigade of South Carolinians. His staff officers included Charles Pickett, his younger brother, and two cousins, Thomas and W. Stuart Symington. His sister Jinny’s husband, Dr. Blair Burwell, was the division surgeon.²⁵ For the past two decades George Pickett had forged friendships in the army that became his alternative family. Now, before Fredericksburg, his legitimate family was with him in the battle.

While the Civil War raged into the second year of bloody fighting, George Pickett would find himself encountering new challenges to his soldierly resolve, which would change his life forever. His unenlightened allegiance to leadership would place him in the center of an inexplicable controversy.

²⁵ Compiled Service Record of George E. Pickett, National Archives, RG 109. See also Monthly Return of the Department of Northern Virginia, December 31, 1862, OR 21, 1082.

CHAPTER EIGHT

GETTYSBURG

The next important victory for the Army of Northern Virginia unfolded at Fredericksburg along the Rappahannock River in early December 1862. Pickett's men did not engage the enemy at great length, and their losses were light.¹ Longstreet wrote: "Major Generals Anderson, Pickett and Hood, with their gallant divisions were deprived of their opportunity by the unexpected and hasty retreat of the enemy."²

By February 1863 Pickett's forces, which had camped along the Rappahannock River during the month of January, received orders to "take position on the South Side of the James River in immediate vicinity of Drewry's Bluff and there await further orders . . . [remain] advised and ready to move if necessary to repel advances from Blackwater and to defend the City of Petersburg."³ On the 21st of February the Confederate command ordered Pickett to "report without delay to Longstreet's location."⁴ New orders sent Longstreet in March into eastern North Carolina, and later orders placed Pickett's troops near the Union-occupied town of Suffolk. The spring of 1863 kept Pickett's men shifting

¹ George E. Pickett to Samuel Cooper, February 21, 1862, AIGO-CS, RG 109. See also Compiled Service Record of George E. Pickett, National Archives, RG 109.

² "Return of Casualties in Pickett's Division at Battle of Fredericksburg," December 18, 1862, OR, 21, 573. See also Report of the Battle of Fredericksburg, James Longstreet to R. H. Chilton, December 20, 1862, OR, 21, 570-571.

³ Samuel Cooper to George E. Pickett, February 18, 1863

⁴ See Special Orders No. 44, February 21, 1863, OR 18, 889.

as Lee changed orders and plans, primarily to deceive his enemy. Lee sent two of five of Pickett's brigades to North Carolina, leaving his command weakened, and on May 4, 1863 Pickett received special orders to move quickly to Richmond, “. . . where further instructions will meet them.”⁵ Lee expected a major attack on Richmond and had placed Pickett in a position of defense. The Confederate command repeatedly moved Pickett's division and then divided it again, leaving a “very much weakened” force.⁶ However, Lee's new strategy was to unite the Army of Northern Virginia and to proceed northward into Pennsylvania for the second invasion of the North.

By the end of June 1863 Pickett and his men had proceeded to the area around Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. Lee had issued orders to the Army of Northern Virginia to honor private civilian property, but to destroy the public facilities, especially the railroads.⁷ Lee needed to resupply his army and felt that by invading the North again he would be able to do this. He also planned to capture Washington in the northern invasion. Nevertheless, Lee was also aware of the six week siege by Federal forces on the

⁵ See Special Orders May 4, 1863, OR 18, 1045.

⁶ George E. Pickett to R. H. Chilton, June 21, 1863, OR 27, pt. 3, 910.

⁷ See Jeffrey N. Lash, “Civil War Irony: Confederate Commanders and the Destruction of Southern Railways.” Prologue (Summer 1993): 35-47. According to Lash, fixed-position warfare, in the old tradition, evolved into a mobile force during the Napoleonic Wars due to new military theories proposed by Karl von Clausewitz and Antoine Henri Jomini. Prior to the French Revolution, the small proficient troops were held in fortifications that were strategically placed. Then supply bases were located adjacent to combat zones. Clausewitz and Jomini developed new tactics which depended on the expeditious transfer of troops to demolish the enemy. Quick and effective mobility was needed, and this new method was first used successfully during the Crimean War in the 1850s. However, Lash continues to say that many Union and Confederate commanders destroyed the rail lines as “strategic deterrence” to protect retreating armies.

Confederate stronghold at Vicksburg on the Mississippi, and he knew this siege was draining the Confederate resources. He probably did not yet know that on July 4, 1863, Vicksburg surrendered.

On July 1, 1863 at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, the Union Army of the Potomac lead by General George C. Meade and the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia lead by Robert E. Lee, began an unplanned engagement. President Abraham Lincoln had appointed Meade only two days prior to the initial engagement at Gettysburg when Joseph Hooker resigned.⁸

Lee was unaware of the size of the Federal army at the time, nevertheless, his plan was to unite his forces at Gettysburg. He sent word to Pickett's troops to prepare and to be at the battle line on the morning of July 2. Pickett's men were in Chambersburg, still over twenty-five miles from the town of Gettysburg. They had been directed to guard Lee's supply wagons on the first and second days of the battle.

The first day at Gettysburg on July 1, Lee was successful in pushing the Federal troops to the south of town. Overnight, reinforcements arrived for both sides; however, the Union armies seriously outnumbered Lee's Confederate forces. Meade's Army of the Potomac had been reinforced with strong troops and heavy artillery. The second day at

⁸ Samuel Eliot Morrison, Henry Steele Commager, and William E. Leuchtenburg, A Concise History of the American Republic (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 490.

Gettysburg Lee attacked Meade's army on both boundaries holding Pickett's men out of the attack. The assaults failed and losses were heavy on both sides. Meade strengthened his line for another attack.

On July 3, 1863 Robert E. Lee pushed for a victory at Gettysburg and despite his heavy losses from the previous day he planned a final frontal assault directed at the midpoint of Meade's Union line. Lee ordered Pickett and his three brigades of over 13,000 infantry men to charge the center of Meade's line at Cemetery Ridge. At one o'clock in the afternoon, Confederate guns started an assault which lasted for two hours. The sky darkened from canon fire as the Union artillery returned the bombardment. Colonel Alexander had been observing the artillery fire and the Confederate line from his position on Emmitsburg Road. Alexander knew the Confederate ammunition supplies were low and he believed the Union fire was diminishing.

At three o'clock Alexander notified Pickett that it was time to proceed. Pickett went to Longstreet for final approval, and despite misgivings from Longstreet and others, Pickett's men fell into line and swept across the open terrain. Close-order formations, and linear infantry tactics of the previous Napoleonic era were known to be suicidal against the newer, more accurate long range rifles. Nonetheless, Lee had planned this bloody, frontal assault on the Union line.

Union infantry men from their elevated positions fired into the approaching line of Confederate soldiers.⁹ In contrast, Pickett pleaded for artillery support for his men with disappointing results as the slaughter continued. The same Union soldiers who were firing on the advancing line subsequently wrote battle reports that describe with admiration and respect the courage of the Confederates that day.¹⁰

Later, Lee reported that the artillery supplies had been exhausted earlier in the day, a fact that “was unknown to me when the assault took place”¹¹ Also, Longstreet reported afterward that he would have “revoked [the order to go forward] had I felt that I had that privilege.”¹²

The day drew to a close with one-third of Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia, approximately 28,000 men, either dead or wounded. Meade suffered losses of approximately 23,000 dead or wounded. Abraham Lincoln wanted Meade to pursue Lee

⁹ Theodore B. Gates, Report of the Battle of Gettysburg, July 4, 1863, OR 27, pt. 1, 319. See also Charles S. Peyton, Report of the Battle of Gettysburg, July 9, 1863, OR, 28, pt. 2, 385-386.

¹⁰ See “Report of the Battle of Gettysburg,” Theodore B. Gates, July 4, 1863, OR 27, pt. 1, 319. See also Kathleen R. Georg and John W. Busey, Nothing But Glory: Pickett’s Division at Gettysburg, (Highstown: Longstreet House, 1987).

¹¹ Robert E. Lee to Samuel Cooper, January 1864, OR 27, pt. 2, 321.

¹² James Longstreet, Report of the Battle of Gettysburg, July 27, 1863, OR 27, pt. 2, 360. Establishing accurate descriptions of the charge are difficult. This study relies primarily on the Official Record and does not present speculation, nor tentative assumptions. It is not my intent to “revise” Gettysburg. Post war historiography grew turbulent as the need for justification increased. Descriptions of Pickett’s actions are varied, and some views condemned Robert E. Lee’s military ability, especially after Gettysburg. Lee expected that Meade’s line was vulnerable, especially in the center. See Carol Reardon’s insightful essay, “Pickett’s Charge” in Gary Gallagher, The Third Day At Gettysburg and Beyond. Reardon notes, “The historical record provides a solid foundation of indisputable facts. The original cast of players in this dramatic event is well known, as are the units and commanders around whom future controversy would swirl. . . . Beyond these facts, the historical record reveals little more of which modern students can be certain.” (56-57)

in his retreat back to Virginia; however, Meade allowed the Confederates to escape. After the battle, Lincoln believed that the war should have been ended at Gettysburg; instead the Civil War continued for two additional bloody years.

Several days after Gettysburg, Robert E. Lee ordered Pickett and his remaining men to guard the Union prisoners who had been captured after the assault.¹³ Lee reported, "It was with reluctance that I imposed upon your gallant division the duty of conveying prisoners to Staunton No one grieves more than I do at the loss suffered by your noble division in the recent conflict or honors it more for its bravery and gallantry."¹⁴

Shortly after the three-day battle, George Pickett did prepare his battle report for the Gettysburg "conflict;" however, Lee requested a substitute report. He wanted Pickett's summary report to be " . . . one confined to casualties merely. We have the enemy to fight and must carefully at this critical moment, guard against dissensions which the reflections in your report would create."¹⁵ Apparently Pickett refused to "substitute" another report, and the original report has not been found.

¹³ Robert E. Lee to George E. Pickett, July 8, 1863, OR 27, pt. 3, 983.

¹⁴ Robert E. Lee to George E. Pickett, July 9, 1863, OR 27, pt. 3, 986-987.

¹⁵ Robert E. Lee to George E. Pickett, no date, OR 27, pt. 3, 1075. See also Charles Hamilton, Collecting Autographs and Manuscripts. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 148. Hamilton notes, "Speaking of Lee recalls an inflammatory letter of the guerrilla fighter Colonel John Mosby which I handled many years ago. In it, Mosby made the claim that Lee, after his repulse at Gettysburg, invented a story about a spy in order to save his reputation from the onus of defeat. Mosby wrote that, in company with Pickett, he had visited Lee after the war: " . . . as soon as we got out of the room Pickett spoke very bitterly of General Lee; called him 'that old man' --said that he had his division 'massacred' at Gettysburg. I replied -- 'It made you immortal.'" Hamilton continued, "Lee should be judged by the same measure that other men are A summary of this letter in my catalog distressed Lee's admirers. I was fearful that a new Army of Northern Virginia would descend upon my Yankee shop in Manhattan."

Descriptions of the Gettysburg charge by Pickett's men are varied, and many are completely contradictory. Memoirs composed decades after the war reflect sentiments that are notoriously faulty, especially after the rise of the Lee cult which portrayed Lee's flawless morality.¹⁶ It is doubtful that a single true picture exists in that aggregated memory. Nonetheless, George Pickett must have felt the same "implicit censure upon me for obeying orders . . ." that he felt on San Juan Island.¹⁷ The rebellious youth from his West Point days, had evolved into a perfunctory man whose blind loyalty to his leader became the failing of his life. Pickett's unquestioned fealty to Robert E. Lee ushered his troops to their slaughter.

¹⁶ See Thomas L. Connelly, The Marble Man: Robert E. Lee and His Image in American Society (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977). Connelly presents a fascinating study of the transformation of the Lee image. Lost Cause image-making made Lee a hero in the national mind fifty years after the Civil War; and Connelly asserts that in the 1960s Lee became the ultimate hero of the American middle class.

¹⁷ George E. Pickett to George W. Cullum, February 19, 1860, VHS typescript.

CHAPTER NINE

“WORSE THAN USELESS”

In September 1863 the Confederate command assigned George Pickett to the Department of North Carolina in Petersburg on the Appomattox River. He was given command of a broad geographic area; however, his troop strength had been diminished dramatically due to the need for more men on the Western campaign.¹ Furthermore, in September George Pickett married LaSalle Corbell; and, she would later play an important part in creating the post-war image of George E. Pickett.

Pickett's command covered the territory of southeastern Virginia and northeastern North Carolina. With the Confederate defeat at Gettysburg, and the surrender of the fortress of Vicksburg in the Western campaign, Union forces divided and weakened the Confederacy. The war had become a war of attrition, as General Robert E. Lee attempted an impasse with entrenched defensive positions in his campaigns.

Abraham Lincoln had, in September of 1862 suspended the writ of habeas corpus throughout the North.² And, Lincoln subjected “all persons discouraging voluntary enlistments” to martial law.³ On March 3, 1863 Congress had enacted the Enrollment Act of 1863 to increase the numbers of men serving in the military. This Act made male

¹ Special Orders No. 226, September 23, 1863, OR 29, pt. 2, 746.

² James McPherson, Abraham Lincoln and the Second American Revolution (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 236.

³ Ibid.

citizens between the age of 20-45 obliged to register for the draft. As a result, by July of 1863 riots were breaking out all over the Northern states, particularly in New York City. Poor whites, who were mainly immigrants, lynched blacks and burned neighborhoods in response to the new conscription law.

Conditions in the South were progressing in a similar manner as Jefferson Davis suspended the writ of habeas corpus and demanded that poor whites register for the military service. After Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which took effect on January 1, 1863, the Union began to recruit black soldiers. On July 30, 1863 Abraham Lincoln had issued a warning that if Confederate troops were to capture or mistreat black Union soldiers, then the Union would retaliate against Confederate prisoners.

The social upheavals which resulted from the uncertainties of the war were particularly devastating in the South, producing problems for George Pickett in his new assignment. His obligation to the Department of North Carolina made him directly responsible for the safety and welfare of the residents in southeastern Virginia and eastern North Carolina. The *Richmond Dispatch* published this article on March 11, 1864 about the homefront:

The spirit and courage displayed by the women of the Confederacy in the presence of danger and death are worthy of the heroic race to which they belong. It is no idle boast to say that if there were not men enough to fight our battles, the mothers, wives and daughters would take the place of the fallen brave. But whilst such a contingency is not probable, it

would well, in view of the horrid purposes disclosed in the Dahlgren papers, for every Southern woman to provide herself with the protection of a revolver, or some defensive weapon, to keep at bay ruffians who are insensible to any other consideration but their personal safety. It often happens that our Southern ladies are exposed to the insults and violence of the brutes who are invading us, and with no female protection at hand, and in that event they ought never to be without some efficient means of defence[sic].⁴

By the fall of 1863 Federal troops were raiding towns in eastern Virginia and North Carolina.⁵ George Pickett was troubled by the chaos that was taking place in the countryside that he was assigned to protect. He issued orders to Confederate Colonel J. R. Griffin regarding “. . . any one caught in the act of burning houses or maltreating women . . . [is to be] hung on the spot, by my order.”⁶

Clearly Pickett was feeling the pressure of his command. His troop strength had been diminished by the fall of 1863 as Robert E. Lee demanded more men for his campaign in the west toward Chickamauga Creek.⁷ George Pickett must have felt strongly that both his military position and his social role as a Victorian man was that of

⁴ *Richmond Dispatch*, March 11, 1864.

⁵ George E. Pickett to Samuel Cooper, October 21, 1863, OR 29, pt. 2, 797-798. See also George E. Pickett to Samuel Cooper, November 3, 1863, OR 29, pt. 2, 818.

⁶ George E. Pickett to J. R. Griffin, December 15, 1863, OR 29, pt. 2, 874. See also George E. Pickett to Samuel Cooper, December 15, 1863, OR 29, pt. 2, 873.

⁷ George E. Pickett to James A. Seddon, November 26, 1863, OR 29, pt. 2, 848. See also Seddon's reply to Pickett which admitted that Pickett's troop strength was low in James A. Seddon to George E. Pickett, November 26, 1863, OR 29, pt. 2, 848.

“defender.”⁸ However, after the devastation of Gettysburg, Pickett was beginning to display signs of post-traumatic stress disorder. Battle fatigue could result from the high levels of stress found in war or natural disasters; and, the symptoms include anxiety, depression and an inability to concentrate. “Southerners might have trouble labeling or even describing various mental disorders, but they instinctively knew what caused them.”⁹

By January 1864 Lee had ordered Pickett to attack a Federal naval unit which had captured the town of New Bern, North Carolina.¹⁰ The planned attack did not succeed. Pickett reported: “. . . there were too many contingencies. I should have wished more concentration, but still hope the effect produced by the expedition may prove beneficial . .

Had I had the whole force in hand I have but little doubt that we could have gone in easily, taking the place by surprise.”¹¹

Perhaps George Pickett was aware of his troubled mental state after Gettysburg, or perhaps not. Many obscure theories do exist which portray Pickett during and after the charge at Gettysburg; and, some of these theories cast judgment on his character, or

⁸ Gerald Linderman, Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War. (New York: Free Press, 1987), 64. See also J. A. Mangan and James Walvin, editors, Manliness and Morality: Middle-class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 221. The heroic “virtues” of military officers often defined ‘manhood’ as a strong difference between womanhood, childhood and adolescence. The distinction between manliness and childhood, or manliness and womanhood provided a concept of manhood, on which military institutions prided themselves.

⁹ George C. Rable, Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 223. Emile Durkheim’s term *anomie* referred to the deep sensation of deprivation caused by the disruption of pre-existing family and community ties. The individual was then responsible for creating new associations or new correlations with past or present perceptions. Durkheim (1858-1917) was a pioneer in the new, separate discipline of sociology.

¹⁰ Robert E. Lee to George E. Pickett, January 20, 1864, Seth Barton Compiled Service Record, National Archives, Washington, D. C., Record Group 109.

¹¹ Report of the Battle of New Bern, George E. Pickett to Samuel Cooper, February 15, 1864, OR 33, 94.

mental state after the failed charge. During the Civil War fear was forbidden and the terrors of combat were left unspoken. Nonetheless, during the New Bern expedition, Pickett had captured twenty-two soldiers from North Carolina who had refused to join the Confederate Army. Pickett viewed them as traitors and draft evaders. Military justice concluded in most cases with a court-martial and a verdict of hanging.

Military executions were ordered for deserters, and were invoked as military justice in both armies. However, toward the end of the war this punishment was not employed as often, for fear of retribution from the public. Abraham Lincoln stated that, “you can’t order men shot by dozens or twenties. People won’t stand for it.”¹²

Union Major General John J. Peck wrote to Pickett regarding the draft evaders whom Peck considered prisoners of war.¹³ Peck reminded Pickett of the Union policy of treatment of prisoners of war, which meant that should anything harm the soldiers, he then would retaliate against Confederate prisoners.¹⁴

Pickett responded to Peck: “I have in my hands and subject to my orders, captured in the recent operations in this department, some 450 officers and men of the

¹² Gerald F. Linderman, Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War (New York: The Free Press, 1987), 65.

¹³ John J. Peck to George E. Pickett, February 11, 1864, OR 33, 866-867.

¹⁴ John J. Peck to George E. Pickett, February 13, 1864, OR 33, 867.

United States Army, and for every man you hang, I will hang 10 of the United States Army.”¹⁵

The next day Pickett again wrote to Peck:

General: Your communication of the 13th instant is at hand. I have the honor to state in reply that you have made a slight mistake in regard to numbers, 325 having ‘fallen into your [our] hands in your [our] hasty retreat from before New Bern;’ instead of the list of 53 with which you so kindly furnished me, and which will enable me to bring to justice many who have up to this time escaped their just deserts. I herewith return you the names of those who have been tried and convicted by court-martial for desertion from the Confederate Service and taken with arms in hand, ‘duly enlisted in the Second North Carolina Infantry, United States Army. They have been duly executed according to the law and the custom of war.

Extending to you my thanks for your opportune list, I remain, very respectfully, your obedient servant.¹⁶

Details of correspondence and reports place the condemnation and the ensuing hangings on Pickett. It is clear that Pickett was not present at the hangings; however, he did provide the orders for the trials.¹⁷

¹⁵ George E. Pickett to John J. Peck, February 16, 1864, OR 33, 867-868. A major internal weakness in the Confederate army was the resistance of poor whites, who did not want to join the ranks of the Army. Many poor whites deserted and joined ranks with draft-evaders to create gangs of insurgents, who terrorized civilians. In addition to these insurgents, there were clandestine groups of Unionists who also preyed on civilians or supported Union troops in the area. See also Drew Gilpin Faust, “Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War,” *The Journal of American History* 76 (March 1990), 1200, for a comprehensive view of female resistance to the war.

¹⁶ George E. Pickett to John J. Peck, February 17, 1864, OR 33, 868.

¹⁷ George E. Pickett to Samuel Cooper, February 25, 1864, OR Letters Received, AIGO, NA, RG 109. See also George E. Pickett to Samuel Cooper, February 26, 1864, House Executive Doc. No. 98, 9.

The New York Times provided detailed reports of the “Horrors of the Rebellion” on the front page of the March 11, 1864 edition; however, it did not place direct condemnation on Pickett. At the same time *The New York Times* ran the “Official Dispatch from General Pickett” from Petersburg[sic], March 10, 1864 which read:

Via Weldon. . . . The enemy occupied Suffolk in force on Sunday. We attacked them to-day, and after a short struggle drove them in a route out of town, killing a number, capturing one piece of artillery and a large quantity of commissary and quartermaster’s stores. The enemy are flying to Portsmouth, burning bridges and leaving everything behind. We pursued beyond Bernard’s Mills.

By March 1864 and throughout the last year of the war the Confederate Army was in a steadfast decline. Public support for the war had diminished. The city of Richmond was proclaimed a “carnival of unhallowed pleasure . . . [with] shameful displays of indifference to national calamity.”¹⁸ Resistance to the ideology of atonement and sacrifice increased, as one woman expressed being “stunned and stupefied . . . forever” by grief.¹⁹

Lincoln had appointed Ulysses S. Grant as commander of all Union forces in March; and, Grant’s brutal military tactics involved attacks on all fronts of the Confederacy. By September William T. Sherman had captured and burned Atlanta and was en route to the Atlantic Ocean. Union troops were waging total war, under the

¹⁸ Richmond Daily Enquirer, February 11, 1864.

¹⁹ Drew Gilpin Faust, “Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and Their Narratives of War,” 1222.

direction of Abraham Lincoln. And, the destruction was nearly complete as the Union decimated rail lines, factories, homes, agriculture and livestock.

Grant pursued Lee in Virginia throughout May and June, 1864 in his Wilderness Campaign. And, Federal troops were raiding areas around George Pickett's headquarters in Petersburg, Virginia. Pickett's troops had been further diminished by partial deployments to the eastern front, leaving Petersburg vulnerable to attack.

George Pickett received notice on April 13, 1864 of increased Union movement in the area east of Petersburg: "Your scouts should be very active and vigilant to keep us advised of all movements about Suffolk and Portsmouth, especially during the absence of troops from their regular positions."²⁰ Pickett was responsible for protecting not only civilians in the town of Petersburg but also the rail lines. The rail lines at Petersburg controlled the railroad activity directed into Richmond.

Aware that Union troops were closing in on Petersburg and aware of his unprotected position Pickett contrived a plan to deceive the Federal troops. Pickett arranged a system of concealment and moving trains which gave the perception of troop movements and reinforcements, leading the Federals to conclude that reinforcements had indeed arrived. Pickett's troops only numbered 1400, against which the 30,000 Federal troops would presently attack.²¹

²⁰ J. F. Milligan to George E. Pickett, April 13, 1864, OR 51, pt. 2, 858.

²¹ George E. Pickett to Samuel Cooper and P. G. T. Beauregard, May 6, 1864, Received 3:35 AM, OR 36, pt. 2, 964; George E. Pickett to Samuel Cooper, May 6, 1864, Received 5:20 AM, OR 36, pt. 2, 965; George E. Pickett to Samuel Cooper, Received 9:10 AM, OR 36, pt. 2, 965.

On May 5, 1864 Pickett sent word that the Union forces were closing in on Petersburg. He wrote impatiently: "I have sent you numerous telegrams this morning and fail to obtain an answer. The emergency is so great that I sent a courier by train to say that the enemy in force are coming up the river. You had better send troops."²²

By the 11th day of May General P. G. T. Beauregard, who had been ill, arrived with his troops to reinforce Pickett's forces. By the next week, Pickett also became ill, perhaps due to stress. However, Pickett was acclaimed for saving the city of Petersburg. Yet, within a month, the Federal siege of Petersburg would be underway.

Ulysses S. Grant and 50,000 Union troops were launching their next attack which he directed against the city of Richmond on June 1, 1864. The Battle of Cold Harbor had begun on that day with Lee's forces outnumbered from the start as they attempted to defend a three mile line north of Richmond. Grant directed his attack against Lee's company and in less than an hour over 6,000 Union soldiers lay dead. By the end of the second day over 12,000 Union soldiers had died; Lee lost 1500 men. Even Ulysses S. Grant was shocked by the numbers of dead soldiers and he was forced to seek new tactics.

Pickett's division of 5,000 men with the Army of Northern Virginia was exhausted, sick, and hungry as they moved from Petersburg to Richmond, providing mobile reserves for Robert E. Lee. Pickett wrote: "The men are calling out loudly for bread . . . we must get something or the division will be worse than useless."²³

²² George E. Pickett to Samuel Cooper, May 5, 1864, OR 36, pt. 2, 955-956.

²³ George E. Pickett to Moxley Sorrel, May 28, 1864, OR 36, pt. 3, 843-844.

By the middle of June 1864 Pickett's division was entrenched along a three mile line north of Petersburg. The siege of Petersburg had begun on June 15, 1864 and lasted until April 2, 1865. Grant's forces built trenches and bombarded Lee's defensive line. Grant's army destroyed rail lines into Petersburg, as William T. Sherman approached from the South after his March to the Sea, to support Grant by cutting Confederate supply lines and by breaking the Southern morale. The siege continued through the fall of 1864 as the rest of the nation was involved in the presidential election. Northern voters re-elected Abraham Lincoln, with a clear victory in all states except Delaware, Kentucky, and New Jersey. Union soldiers were able to vote by absentee ballot, or were given a furlough to travel home to vote. Over three quarters of the Union soldiers who voted, voted for Lincoln.

Through the late winter of 1864 and into the cold, rain soaked spring of 1865 many of the troops were ill, while others were deserting the Confederate army to journey home in widespread numbers. Ulysses S. Grant wrote after the war, that the United States was a nation separated into "small communities" and "localized idioms" and that at first the war seemed to be an adventurous experience for many young men.²⁴ These men from modest communities would retreat to their "small-town values to resist any new set of restrictions placed on them by military discipline."²⁵ Volunteers on both sides would

²⁴ Ulysses S. Grant, Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant (New York: Charles L. Webster, 1885), 2: 55.

²⁵ Gerald F. Linderman, Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War (New York: The Free Press), 60. Linderman states that William T. Sherman was "appalled" that individualism should threaten to dominate combat. When "each private thinks for himself" the army becomes a mob.

resist the “military hierarchy,” instead, resorting to individualism which threatened the requirement of cohesive action.

The *Richmond Enquirer* attempted to deal with the increasing numbers of desertions by appealing “to the women to aid us in this crisis. None have so momentous an interest; and, none, as we firmly believe, wield so much power They know those stragglers, one by one, and where they are to be found. They, the mothers and the sisters, may, if they will, be a conscript guard impossible to be evaded. They know whose furloughs are out, whose wounds are healed, who are lingering idly about . . . philandering and making love” The persuasive article continued, “Will not the women help us, then?”²⁶

Pickett had been unhealthy for the past year. His men were ill and weak from hunger; at times the soldiers were forced to eat the grain intended for the animals. Bread riots were erupting across the South, as “women banded together to seize bread and other provisions they believed their due.”²⁷ Sectional differences were splitting the Confederacy even further. North Carolina Governor Zebulon Vance held 92,000 uniforms for his soldiers in a warehouse, while the Virginia divisions wore rags. The Southern ideology of the “sacredness of sacrifice” was disintegrating as the loss became too great.²⁸

Nevertheless, Lee had contrived a plan to break the Union hold on Petersburg. He ordered Pickett’s division to march in the direction of Five Forks on March 30, 1865,

²⁶ *Richmond Enquirer*, August 5, 1863.

²⁷ Drew Gilpin Faust, “Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War,” 1225.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

southwest of Petersburg. Early the next morning his troops were ready to join Fitz Lee's cavalry in the attack against the Union troops lead by General Philip Sheridan. Fighting continued throughout the day and Pickett was successful in pushing the Union forces back to Dinwiddie Court House. However, because of approaching darkness, Pickett stopped the attack. As they retreated back to Five Forks, enemy reinforcements were gathering. Pickett believed that Lee was sending reinforcements, also. However, by the afternoon of April 1, Sheridan had put into position a directed attack on Pickett's lines and severed Pickett's link to the rest of Lee's army.

The next day Lee withdrew from Petersburg, and on April 3, 1865 Richmond surrendered to Grant. However, as Richmond surrendered the Confederates burned their capital, destroying homes, supply warehouses and official records. Pickett's family correspondence was burned at his home in Richmond.²⁹ Lee, however, was not yet ready to cease; instead, he ordered evacuations around Petersburg and Richmond, marching troops southwest to meet supply trains. Grant was pursuing Lee's troops as the Army of Northern Virginia fled southwest to meet Confederate Joseph E. Johnston.

On April 6, 1865 Lee's plans for escape became hopelessly impossible when Sheridan's Cavalry met them at Sayler's Creek. Eight thousand starving and exhausted soldiers of Lee's army surrendered. During the battle of Sayler's Creek, George

²⁹ The author's personal correspondence with Carol Reardon, Department of History, Penn State University, University Park, PA, April 27, 1995. Carol Reardon is the author of "Pickett's Charge: The Convergence of History and Myth in the Southern Past," Gary Gallagher, ed., The Third Day at Gettysburg and Beyond. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 56.

Pickett's Division's headquarters wagon burned on April 6, 1865, destroying official records.³⁰ And, many debilitated Confederate men lay in the fields awaiting their capture as the Confederate unit surrenders slowly unfolded.

Word spread that the end was near. White flags had been seen before in the fields, consequently many soldiers did not comprehend their meaning at that time. Robert E. Lee negotiated the terms of the Confederate surrender with Ulysses S. Grant, and on April 9, 1865 they met at Appomattox Court House to sign the surrender and parole documents.

At the end of their meeting, Lee requested that his soldiers be allowed to keep their horses for spring planting, to which Grant obliged. The last words that Lee spoke to Grant were "useless sacrifice."³¹

Confederate staff officer W. H. Palmer wrote many years later that Robert E. Lee had relieved George Pickett of his command prior to the surrender at Appomattox Court House. Palmer recalled that Lee felt Pickett had not performed "up to the occasion . . . requiring supreme devotion."³² It is unclear whether George Pickett ever received this command. Perhaps he chose to ignore the final order of his supreme commander, and instead turned his loyalty to his men. Pickett's unenlightened loyalty to Lee's leadership

³⁰ Ibid. See also Charles Pickett to Lida Perry, March 24, 1894, George E. Pickett Papers, Perkins Library, Duke University.

³¹ Clifford Dowdey, editor. *The Wartime Papers of R. E. Lee* (New York: Bramhall House, 1961), 923.

³² W. H. Palmer to W. Taylor, June 24, 1911, Virginia State Library.

had ended at Appomattox as he surrendered 1,031 officers and men in Pickett's division on April 9, 1865.³³ And, at that moment, George Pickett became the master of his own destiny.

³³ "Tabular statement of officers and men of the Confederate Army paroled at Appomattox Court House," OR 46, pt. 1, 1277. Signed "Maj. Genl. Comdg., George E. Pickett."

CHAPTER TEN

“WITH KINDNESS OF PROVIDENCE”

As early as December 8, 1863 President Abraham Lincoln was attempting to reconstruct the Union as he issued the Proclamation of Amnesty which delineated his Ten Percent Plan. This plan established the terms under which the reconstruction process would take place.

Lincoln felt the issue of reinstatement was an executive prerogative, given to the president by the Constitution, and, “. . . amply justified by the Constitution. True, the form of an oath is given, but no man is coerced to take it. The man is only promised a pardon in case he voluntarily takes the oath. The Constitution authorizes the executive to grant or withhold the pardon at his own absolute discretion; and this includes the power to grant on terms, as is fully established by judicial and other authorities.”¹ Furthermore, under Lincoln’s plan this process was to take place quickly and without vindictiveness.

However, this lenient plan would not pardon all former Confederate officers, which did place a heavy burden on George Pickett. Lincoln wrote regarding loyalty oaths and pardons:

The persons excepted from the benefits of the foregoing provisions are all who are or shall have been civil or diplomatic officers or agents of the so-called Confederate government; all, who have left judicial stations under the

¹ Abraham Lincoln. “Proclamation of Amnesty.” A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897, vol. 6, edited by James D. Richardson, (Washington, D. C., 1896-1899) 130.

United States to aid the rebellion, all who are or shall have been military or naval officers of said so-called Confederate above the rank of colonel in the Army or of lieutenant in the Navy; all who left seats in the United States Congress to aid the rebellion; all who resigned commissions in the Army or Navy of the United States and afterward aided the rebellion; and, all who have engaged in any way in treating colored persons, or white persons in charge of such, otherwise than lawfully as prisoners of war, and which persons may have been found in the United States service as soldiers, seamen or in any other capacity.²

This presidential definition left George Pickett with fewer choices for an honorable profession after the war. His military career in a victorious “Union” army would have been impossible in post-war Virginia, and with Lincoln’s proclamation of 1863, any political prospects would not be possible, either.

This ambivalence which encompassed Pickett and his fellow Virginians before the war would now resurface. The majority of Southerners had not wanted to secede, nor had they wanted to fight. Nevertheless, the idea of reconstructing the nation would begin with the events at Appomattox.³

Robert E. Lee surrendered, after four years of war, to Ulysses S. Grant on April 9, 1865 at Appomattox Court House. By early morning on the tenth day of April, cannons and town bells across the North were resonating with ebullient approval. Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles recorded in his diary on April 10, 1865 “The nation seems delirious

² Ibid.

³ Samuel Eliot Morrison, Henry Steele Commager, and William E. Leuchtenburg, A Concise History of the American Republic (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 377.

with joy. Guns are firing, bells ringing, flags flying , men laughing, children cheering; all, all jubilant.” Most Northerners felt conciliatory: “There is something magnificent in having a country to love I worry a little about reconstruction, but I am inclined to think that matters will very much settle themselves,” wrote Harvard University professor James Russell Lowell. However, the events leading up to the evening of April 14, 1865 would change the course of reconstruction dramatically, altering circumstances particularly for former high level Confederate officers and officials⁴.

That evening, John Wilkes Booth, the actor and Confederate partisan, mortally wounded Abraham Lincoln at Ford’s Theater in Washington, D. C. Booth’s accomplices also attacked Secretary of State William H. Seward and threatened to harm vice-president Andrew Johnson on the same night. As the consequences of that fateful evening began to unfold, the possibility of a Confederate conspiracy appeared less remote.

The loss of a president was more personal to those who had known Abraham Lincoln. George Pickett’s uncle, Andrew Johnston, and Abraham Lincoln had been friends in Illinois, and Pickett himself had known Lincoln while he lived in Quincy, Illinois.⁵ George Pickett, in one short week had lost his friend and president, his career, and his home, now burned to the ground on Turkey Island. The military career that had given his life direction for approximately twenty-five years was now over.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Andrew Johnston to John Todd Stuart, August 19, 1841, George Pickett Papers, Quincy and Adams County Historical Society, Quincy, Illinois.

With the death of Lincoln, calls for retribution replaced reconstruction plans and the fated plan was now became a cry for vengeance. Lincoln's plan for reconstruction did not involve vengeance or retribution toward the South; however, with the assassination of Lincoln it appeared that charitable feelings at least on the part of the North, would not be possible.

Secretary of War Edwin Stanton organized a manhunt for John Wilkes Booth and his accomplices after the assassination. Stanton believed Jefferson Davis was an accomplice in the assassination plot, and placed a bounty of \$100,000 on his head. As Andrew Johnson assumed the presidency, he issued a proclamation that stated the traitors would be hanged, including Jefferson Davis. Robert E. Lee was indicted for treason in 1865 by a Federal grand jury which convened in Norfolk, Virginia. Union officers finally captured Jefferson Davis on May 10, 1865, and quartered in a federal prison. Nonetheless, many high ranking Confederate generals feared for their lives after the assassination and they fled to Canada. Many others fled to Europe and South America.

While Andrew Johnson assumed the role of president, he required that Confederate officers request a pardon personally from the president. On June 1, 1865 George Pickett wrote the following and asked that his uncle, Andrew Johnston, a loyal citizen of Illinois, forward the request to the president:

To His Excellency, Andrew Johnson,
President of the United States.
Sir. I have the honor to state that your amnesty
proclamation of the 29th day of May 1865, has just
been read: I find myself among the classes of

persons excepted from the benefits of the proclamation, under exceptions third, fifth, and eight. Having held the rank of Major General in the C. S. Army, resigning my position as Captain U. S. Army, and being a graduate of West Point. I write making a special application. At the commencement of our domestic troubles, I was stationed in the disputed San Juan, occupying it conjointly with the British forces, and did not leave till my resignation had been sent in, and I properly relieved by the Commanding Officer of the Department of the Pacific, and leave granted me to proceed to my home, and then only through the conscientious duty (as I conceived) to my mother state - Virginia. Had she not have seceded, I should not have been in the Confederate Army, as no one was more attached to the old service, nor ever stood by, and fought for it, with more fidelity, nor could any one have been sadder and more loath to leave it than I, who from my youth had been so devoted to it: and I now am and have been since the surrender of Genl. Lee (to whose army I belonged) willing and ready to renew my allegiance as a loyal citizen to the United States Government, and have advised and counseled all now belonging to my division to return to their homes and the peaceful pursuits of life - to take the oath of allegiance - and observe with scrupulous truth its stipulations - and to faithfully obey the laws of this country. My wish as expressed is a sincere one: and this communication addressed with a hope that the liberality spoken of in the amnesty proclamation may be extended to cover my case.

I have the honor to be very respectfully your Servant,
G. E. Pickett, Maj. Genl. CFA⁶

Secretary of War Edwin Stanton wrote to President Andrew Johnson on June 19, 1865: "General Pickett stands charged with the unlawful hanging of twenty citizens of

⁶ George E. Pickett to Andrew Johnson, June 1, 1865, The Papers of Andrew Johnson, Library of Congress.

North Carolina, and the case is now under investigation in North Carolina.”⁷ Pickett had been warned by friends in the Federal government that he was under investigation for the hanging deaths of the men in North Carolina; however, the Federal court of inquiry would not assemble until November 1865. With the uncertainty of either a pardon and/or a Federal court acquittal, Pickett and his family fled to Canada.

Orville Browning, who was an Illinois friend of Pickett’s uncle Andrew Johnston and of the late Abraham Lincoln, tried to intervene on Pickett’s behalf. Browning had been a Senator from Illinois and had practiced law with Johnston in Illinois. Browning was also a presidential adviser to both Lincoln and Andrew Johnson.⁸ Browning felt time would resolve the issues before Pickett would be brought to trial.

Andrew Johnston wrote to Pickett while in exile “regarding the case being brought before the U. S. Government” and the negotiations “between the late Abraham Lincoln and myself”⁹ Johnston seemed hopeful for an early resolution, also.

Major Walter Harrison, who had served in Pickett’s Division and had been his friend for many years, prepared an affidavit on May 29, 1865 stating the known facts regarding the North Carolina hangings.¹⁰ Apparently the court of inquiry was underway

⁷ Edwin Stanton to Andrew Johnson, June 19, 1865, Executive Document No. 11, House of Representatives, 39th Congress, 2nd Session, 7; hereinafter referred to as House Ex. Doc. No. 11.

⁸ Diary entries from June 6, 1865, June 16, 1865 and November 3, 1865, in James G. Randall, editor, Diary of Orville Hickman Browning 1865-1881, 2: 32, 34, 48. (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1993). Orville Browning was able to procure pardons for George Pickett’s brother, Charles, his sister Jenny, cousin William Symington, and his uncle Andrew Johnston.

⁹ Andrew Johnston to George E. Pickett, July 29, 1865, VHS typescript.

¹⁰ “George E. Pickett Maj. Gen., Application for Amnesty Under Proclamation of 29 May 1865,” Affidavit of Major Walter Harrison, May 29, 1865, VHS typescript.

before the war ended, which would clarify Johnston's [negotiations] "between the late Abraham Lincoln and myself"

Harrison also wrote another detailed statement on June 15, 1865 describing the North Carolina incident more completely. This statement was notarized by Herbert A. Claiborne, a notary public from Richmond, Virginia and witnessed by Andrew Johnston, Esq., George Pickett's uncle.¹¹

Although the military inquisition continued, by December 1865 Pickett and his family had returned from Canada. In March 1866 Pickett wrote directly to his West Point classmate, and "old service" friend, Ulysses S. Grant. Pickett wrote: "[there are] certain evil disposed persons [who] are attempting to reopen the troubles of the past, and embroil me for the actions taken whilst the Commanding Officer of the Confederate Forces in N. C."¹² Pickett requested "a guarantee that I may be permitted to live unmolested in my native state, where I am now trying to make a subsistence for my family, (much impoverished by the war), by tilling the land."¹³ He finished by asking for some assurance, that "I will not be disturbed in my endeavor to keep my family from Starvation, and that my parole which was given in good faith, may protect me from the assaults of those persons desirous of still keeping the war which has ended in my humble opinion forever."¹⁴

¹¹ Walter Harrison statement, June 15, 1865, VHS typescript.

¹² George E. Pickett to Ulysses S. Grant, March 12, 1865, "Amnesty Papers," NA, RG 94.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.* Pickett had taken an oath of allegiance to the United States on June 15, 1865; however, under the conditions of the Radical Republicans Reconstruction plans, since he was a high-ranking Confederate he did not qualify for this pardon. Instead, it would be necessary for him to apply personally to President Andrew Johnson.

Grant responded by writing a letter the same day to President Johnson, stating that perhaps Pickett had used poor judgment; however, he felt he deserved a presidential pardon.¹⁵ Grant issued the parole that Pickett requested to take effect immediately.¹⁶

However, there were those who were still interested in retribution. Attorney General Henry Stanberry wrote twice to President Andrew Johnson inquiring about the pardon.¹⁷ William Doherty wrote that “the South [particularly North Carolina] will lose confidence in the federal power if they are thus forsaken and their murdered friends unavenged.”¹⁸ Andrew Johnson did nothing.

Finally, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton determined that “The magnitude of the offense alleged against Pickett is such that there should be no reason to contest the jurisdiction of the tribunal to whom their trial may be committed.”¹⁹ However, the case never went forward and George Pickett was not charged with any crime. He received a pardon over two years later, in December, 1868, after his “old service” friend, and genuine supporter, Ulysses S. Grant, had won the election to the office of the President of the United States.

¹⁵ See Ulysses Grant to Andrew Johnston, March 16, 1866, The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant, edited by John Simon, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), 16: 120-122.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Henry Stanberry to Andrew Johnson, July 26, 1866, Papers of Andrew Johnson, 10: 740-741. See also Henry Stanberry to Andrew Johnson, December 6, 1866, Ex. Doc. No. 11, 6.

¹⁸ William H. Doherty to Joseph Holt, July 16, 1866, Ex. Doc. No. 11, 5. William Doherty was from North Carolina and was a Unionist, which would explain why he would continue to pursue this matter after the war. See also Judge Joseph Holt Report, December 12, 1865, House Exec. Doc. No. 98, 47-48.

¹⁹ Edwin Stanton to Andrew Johnson, December 10, 1866, Ex Doc. No. 11, 3.

Despite the post-war problems with the government and devastating financial setbacks, George Pickett had maintained his strong family ties and close friendships. The family home on Turkey Island had been destroyed, yet Pickett and his brother, Charles, and their families, were able to build small cottages and cultivate the land as their ancestors had tilled the soil on Turkey Island a century earlier. Pickett wrote to his friend Benjamin Starke in Oregon, who had been with Pickett in the “old service” before secession. Many of the words are in the Chinook language:

My Dear Starke. Upon my arrival I found certain matters (which I need not enumerate to a by ash tyee [chief] who does delate [true, sincere] cumtux [knowledge] connoway [all] icta [what, who, when, where]) pressing upon my the necessity of immediate visit to Washington with our friend Dr. G. S. . . . in order to see other friends such as Rufus, and W. S. I was most kindly received and cordially treated. My object simply being to verify the protection given by my accepted parole. I had found my dear old friend that the National Ex Co. had been too well organized and tho' poor I was still proud enough not to press my claims, or advice after the simple first wawa [speech]. I conceived they did not know their own interests. . . . in the meantime I have gone to work with my brother to farm it. The trouble has been the difficulty in procuring the necessary funds to start with to pay for labor, purchase agricultural utensils, and subsistence. . . . Everything has been swept clean by the war. We therefore Ben commence as we used to do on the grand old Pacific, “de novo” --but still with kindness of Providence and the clemency of the President (both of which we hope may be extended to us some of these days) we will have us long a roof (such as it may be) for little families, and a hearty welcome for our old tilicum [friends]. I thank you Ben for your kind recollections of me, and be proud that my dear wife would were she cognizant of my writing send you and Mrs. Starke much love. She has I am

sorry to say suffered much during the winter. Maki
siab nika [I] tumtum [heartbeat] hyasb [very] sick.
 I trust the good God will be merciful to us both, but
 I dread the approach a thousand times more than I
 did any better than I have ever been in. The one now
 looked forward to is with me the better when the
 heart must be crushed or peace of mind restored.
 Think me not entirely . . . when exposed as we old
 campaigners have been so frequently to physical
 discourse, forts, and personal dangers, we met them
 “sans souci,” but when a woman is in danger and
 distress I am a child. . . .²⁰

Pickett knew that his wife was suffering and under great stress, as he continued:

All I ask is to [be] let alone and work to keep
 the wolf from the door. There has been
 much suffering and destitution in the
 South, but I have no doubt with an
 assurance of again coming back to the
 fold with some rights and privileges²¹

Pickett endeavored, although not always successfully, to make a living for his wife and two small sons after the war. He continued to farm, and later became a general agent for the Washington Life Insurance Company.²² His youngest son, Corbell died at the age of eight in 1874 from measles, and the following year George Pickett himself, was stricken with “gastric fever.”²³ He died on July 30, 1875 at the age of fifty.²⁴

²⁰ George E. Pickett to Benjamin Starke, March 16, 1866, Oregon Historical Society typescript and Chinook interpretation.

²¹ Ibid.

²² George E. Pickett to Charles Ellis, Jr., May 18, 1875, George E. Pickett Papers, Perkins Library, Duke University.

²³ “Obituary,” Richmond Dispatch, July 31, 1875.

²⁴ Ibid.

Pickett endured with silence after the war as the Lee cult promoted the “Marble Man,” Robert E. Lee.²⁵ Former Confederate soldiers recited their versions of “Pickett’s Charge” and retold their anecdotes at each Confederate reunion.²⁶ “Memory as opposed to history” became the criterion as the South attempted to recreate a lost image of a chivalric time.²⁷ However, with Pickett’s death, an additional advocate began the arduous task of recreating memories of George E. Pickett. LaSalle Corbell Pickett took on the role of devoted widow of a Lost Cause icon, as she published “Her Soldier’s” letters from the war, and presented her memoirs at Lost Cause celebrations.²⁸ Her indefatigable dedication to his memory presented an image of George Pickett which took on national recognition as the South attempted to reconcile with the Northern political mentality.

²⁵ Thomas L. Connelly, The Marble Man: Robert E. Lee and His Image In American Society. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 58.

²⁶ Carol Reardon, “The Convergence of History and Myth in the Southern Past: Pickett’s Charge,” 56.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ LaSalle Corbell Pickett, (Mrs. General George E. Pickett), Soldier of the South: General Pickett’s War Letters to His Wife (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1928), 150.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

“MEMORY AS OPPOSED TO HISTORY”

The memory of George Pickett did not end with his death in 1875. During Reconstruction, the South began the assessment of post-war Southern civilization, and as the physical, cultural, and economic devastation of the late war became clear, many shattered lives needed justification for the newly exposed terrors. Numerous former Confederate government officials and soldiers embarked upon the process of reconstructing an “image” of the South that never truly existed in the selective pre-war memory. The new Southern “image” was a form of memory of all that was brave and true and gallant. Their creations took form in literature, speeches, commemorative ceremonies, and reenactments of Civil War battles. The image of George Pickett was transformed after his death by his devoted veterans who had served with him in the war, and by others who would benefit from the transformation. Mrs. (General) George E. Pickett, as she was known after his death, became the principal activist in his reformation.

George Pickett and LaSalle Corbell were married during the Civil War, celebrating their nuptials on September 15, 1863 in Petersburg, Virginia.¹ Old rules of courtship and marriage had been replaced by the realities of war, as fathers, brothers and husbands were

¹ “Obituary,” New York Times, March 22, 1931.

slain on the fields. Siege mentality altered social customs as daily tasks became too tedious, and celebratory traditions promised little hope for the future. However, in their union the foundation was laid for a future, authoritative legend. At their marriage, LaSalle became the wife of a soldier, and until her death in 1931, she vigorously maintained the image of “Her Soldier” in her writings and lectures.

In the postbellum South after the humiliation of defeat, a new literary group emerged which became a spiritual force in the creation of Lost Cause mythology. The prevailing themes of the Lost Cause writers included the distinct moral and intellectual superiority of Southern civilization. Lost Cause mythology was regional, and did not have a nationwide appreciation. Nonetheless, LaSalle Corbell became the link between the Lost Cause mythology and the national conscience in the late nineteenth century, by adapting the representation of her husband to create a figure which appealed to the entire nation, not just Southern sentiments.

LaSalle Corbell, the oldest child of John and Elizabeth Corbell, was born on May 16, 1843 in Nansemond County, Virginia.² Her education included music, literature, French and Latin at Lynchburg Female Seminary in Lynchburg, Virginia. Her father, John D. Corbell held the progressive belief that women could make “good teachers, poets, historians and even patriots, good managers of estates and families.”³ Female academies

² Ibid.

³ “Benefits of Knowledge on Morals,” Southern Literary Messenger, December, 1838, p.4.

provided an education comparable to the education of male students by the mid-nineteenth century. And, LaSalle inherited this advantage to study Latin, history and literature, which contributed to the success of her career in the years following her husband's death. Her educational advantage also appeared to provide a basis for equality in their marriage, although, in the mid-nineteenth century, "The well-educated woman fulfilled her destiny by helping men, not herself."⁴

LaSalle's years as a student in Lynchburg were marred by the war, which was taking place around her. However, like most Southerners, LaSalle and her family believed the war would end quickly.⁵ In the spring of 1863, shortly before Gettysburg, she graduated from the Academy and began what would later become a long, literary career. Romantic poems, short stories and editorials were her first contributions in 1863 to The Illustrated News.⁶ And, from the date of her marriage in 1863 to George Pickett, LaSalle Corbell became the champion for him, particularly after his death in 1875. Nevertheless, her role of defender of his virtue portrayed an unfamiliar role reversal from the Victorian ideal of manliness.⁷

The nineteenth century male "gender-ideal," particularly in Southern culture, was the patriarch, who protected the sacred roles of wife and mother.⁸ Nevertheless, in the

⁴ George C. Rable, Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 20.

⁵ LaSalle Corbell Pickett to Henry E. Huntington, October 6, 1925, George and LaSalle Pickett Papers, Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California. Hereinafter cited as HEH Papers. Microfilm.

⁶ "Mrs. Pickett Dies; Widow of General," New York Times, 22 March 1931.

⁷ J. A. Mangan and James Walvin, editors, Manliness and Morality: Middle Class Masculinity in Britain and America 1800-1940, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 220.

⁸ Ibid., 48.

postbellum era, widows were invoking powerful images, in the manner of Queen Victoria, by protecting the legacies of their dead husbands. American, as well as British culture in the Victorian era devoted great energies to the commemoration of the dead by sentimental displays of bereavement. Thus, the role of the devoted widow was to create an idealized representation of the lost loved one, particularly the valiant depiction of a fallen war hero.

Victorian literary works, biographies specifically, were didactic in nature, and they invariably emphasized the value of inspiration. As in the past, the creation of myths and legends transformed ordinary, or less than perfect, individuals into publicly sanctioned heroes. A well-known nineteenth century example of this transformation is the early legend of George Armstrong Custer. After the Battle of the Little Bighorn, Elizabeth Custer, the wife of George Armstrong Custer, became a widow at the young age of thirty-four years.⁹ She was left penniless, after his death in 1876, to face his gambling debts and bad investments, and her options for producing an income were limited as a middle class widow; nonetheless, she knew the rewards would be greater for a widow of a hero as opposed to the widow of a discredited soldier. Her embellishments and recreations of his life established the public perception of George Armstrong Custer, which lasted well into the twentieth century.¹⁰

In addition, the myths that Libbie Custer presented in her stories of the wild west engendered a fallacious image of the Native American culture, by contrasting their unique gender roles with the “cultured, and civilized” army officers. Consequently, by

⁹ Shirley A. Keckie, Elizabeth Bacon Custer and the Making of “The Myth”, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 84.

¹⁰ Ibid., 86.

presenting a disrespectful image of the Plains tribes in her stories, Libbie Custer provided an ideological justification for their conquest by the United States Army.¹¹ Her stories, which were written for young boys, were imbued with Herculean-type role models of Indian fighters on the western plains. Other children's magazines, such as St. Nicholas, honored the dead but not extinct heroes, like Custer and Pickett, with descriptions of valiant bravery and, some would say, "persistent misrepresentations."¹²

In the late nineteenth century there were many forms of "persistent misrepresentations," particularly with the newspaper and magazine circulation wars between Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst. Their papers were known for exaggerations and misstatements, and the reading public generally knew this, but nonetheless, was influenced by it.¹³ Yellow journalism greatly influenced the opinion of American citizens as the expansionists dragged the United States into the Spanish

¹¹ Ibid., 110.

¹² Capt. W. R. Bond, Pickett or Pettigrew: An Historical Essay, (Weldon: Hall and Sledge Publishers, 1888), 7. Captain Bond wrote this pamphlet in 1888 and published it at his own cost, reprinting it four times by 1900. Bond's intent was clearly to re-write history. He stated that "the trash that passes for Southern history . . . [is] libel containing so much ignorance, narrowness and prejudice." Popular images were reshaped with time; however, Bond wanted to place more emphasis on the valor of the North Carolinians, instead of the Virginians. Shortly after the battle of Gettysburg, the re-creation of the battle started in the Richmond, Virginia newspapers. Strong rivalry between Southern states encouraged local papers to present stories that favored their state regiments, leading to numerous misconceptions upon which epics were built. See Carol Ann Reardon, "The Image of 'Pickett's Charge,' 1863-1913: Virginia's Gift To American Martial Tradition." M. A. Thesis, University of South Carolina, 1980.

¹³ Stefan Kanfer, "From The Yellow Kid To Yellow Journalism," Civilization: The Magazine of the Library of Congress, May 1995: 32. Comic art acquired new popularity when four-color presses were developed in the mid-1890s. Charles Saalberg, foreman of Joseph Pulitzer's *The World's* color press, tried an intense new shade of bright yellow, rather than the pale pastels that had been used; and, *The Yellow Kid* was born. "The Yellow Kid . . . America's first true comic-strip character in a poster for Joseph Pulitzer's New York World uses the Yellow Kid and other funny-page characters to lure readers from the competition The editor of the upright *New York Press* believed that the Yellow Kid embodied all the ills of modern communication: inconstancy, venality, vulgarity. . . [upset] over Hearst's and Pulitzer's checkbook battle for supremacy, he dubbed it 'Yellow Journalism' A new era had begun." Richard Felton Outcault, the "official artist" for Thomas Edison's traveling exhibit of electric lighting, was the creator of the Yellow Kid and Buster Brown.

American war in 1898. And, in a twist of irony, George E. Pickett, Jr., was a decorated, national hero of this war, with references made persistently to his father, Major General George E. Pickett, CSA.¹⁴

“Historical sentimentalism,” in the phrase of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., is indeed sentimentalism, even feminine sentimentalism, but it is as equally historical. Although the content of LaSalle Corbell Pickett’s writings might be viewed as placing memory and history in adversarial roles, the fact that she wrote about her late husband is as much historical as memorial.

The Victorian widow Pickett was protecting the legacy of her dead husband. And, the financial demands placed on LaSalle Pickett after her husband’s death created a need for an income; while, at the same time, her social role as the wife of a dead Confederate soldier created another need. After the war LaSalle had been the guardian of their home in her “separate sphere.” However, upon Pickett’s death LaSalle was forced to become the wage earner and mother, assuming a new role for a proper Victorian woman. It was difficult to maintain and reinforce Southern traditions while feeding, clothing and educating her child as a young widow.

¹⁴ Manila Freedom. “The Corkscrew Hill Fight,” April 4, 1901. See also, Manila Freedom. “Fought With Odds of Thirty to One: Major Pickett Tells How He Repulsed Filipinos and Saved the Army Coin,” June 25, 1901. See also, LaSalle Corbell Pickett to Mrs. Edward J. Parker, March 31, 1901, Pickett Papers, Historical Society of Quincy and Adams County, Quincy, Illinois. Hereinafter cited as HSQA. LaSalle wrote: “. . . The invitation comes just as I have a message from Manila telling me that my son is desperately ill in hospital . . .” See also, LaSalle Corbell Pickett to Mrs. Edward J. Parker, April 16, 1901, Pickett Papers, HSQA. LaSalle wrote: “I wish that I could tell you that more encouraging tidings have come to me across the sea. The last message is that he will come home on the transport that left Manila on the 15th. I am hoping that the voyage and the home-coming [sic] will bring life to him and give him strength to fight his way back to health. I cannot hear again until the transport touches at Honolulu, when a cable message will be sent . . .”

LaSalle's new role of wage earner would eventually merge with her required role of guardian of the Lost Cause mythology. Historian George Rabel notes that the widows and daughters of Confederate soldiers would often dedicate their lives to enshrining the sacrifices of their dead loved ones.¹⁵ LaSalle Pickett, as the "well-educated" Southern woman, was now fulfilling her destiny of being an author. Although, as she wrote LaSalle reassured the South that she would not undermine the social order that had re-emerged in post-war lives. Northern feminism became her reality after she moved to Washington, D. C. in 1876, nonetheless Southern honor was her byword.

LaSalle lost all of her "worldly goods" after the death of her husband in 1875, and was forced to take a job as a clerk in the Federal Pensions Office in Washington, D. C.¹⁶ By 1890 LaSalle had returned to her first love of writing, and was inspired to learn that she could make a living at this profession.¹⁷ Her articles for Cosmopolitan and McClure's, and her addresses while on national lecture tours, were primarily connected with George Pickett and the Lost Cause. However, in later years her subjects were well-known women of the era.¹⁸ LaSalle was successful at this endeavor and was adequately supporting herself and her son.¹⁹

It may be charged that she wrote of George Pickett as she remembered him, or as she wanted to remember him. However, there is no doubt but that she noticed that no

¹⁵ George Rabel, Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 236.

¹⁶ LaSalle Corbell Pickett, What Happened To Me (New York: Brentano, 1917), 156.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ LaSalle Corbell Pickett, Across My Path: Memories of People I Have Known (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1916), 36.

¹⁹ Margaret Heth Vaden to George Anson Bruce, May 18, 1928, Pickett Family Papers, VHS.

Federal Pension checks went to Southern veterans and their children, no matter how hungry or in need they were. The phrase, “With malice toward none . . .” did not include them.

There is also no doubt but that life for her was far more pleasant, and far more sustainable as a widow and mother of their child, as well as more attuned to profit, when she depicted him as a Southern hero, with Southern valor, Southern loyalty, and Southern gallantry. Certainly, her readers were more likely to buy her books to read her descriptions of George Pickett than to buy “historical” works revealing the stupidity, senselessness, and depravity of the South. It may well be argued that if she had not written of “Her Soldier,” had she not drawn a character portrait of him, no matter whether exactly accurate or not, that others, intent on demeaning the South and Southerners, would have portrayed him with words far more inaccurate, and less knowing, than those of a widow and mother.

There is also no doubt but that in her memories of her husband and the father of her children, she recalled him through an emotional haze and depicted him with valor, warmth, and courage.

There is equally no doubt but that others writing about George Pickett portrayed him, not as heroic, but as stupidly following orders, whining that he was accused unfairly of military subservience, and without question having feet of clay. Of course, such accounts seldom mention that officers who do not follow orders are considered even worse.

If one appraisal may be termed to be “bad,” then certainly the other could be called “worse.” It may well be that “memory” is not so much opposed to “history,” as it is a part of history, and, at times, admittedly an imperfect, and human, part of history. History is written by the survivors. LaSalle Corbell Pickett, widow and mother, was a survivor. She had no choice in the role she would play, merely in whether she would do it well, or ill.

Arthur Crew Inman had read her first version of The Heart of a Soldier in 1921, and was determined to edit another version.²⁰ Inman wrote: “. . . It is a book for the rereading. Can I say more? It is beautifully bound, printed and arranged, and the introduction by his wife is exceedingly artistic. Truly the book is well named. Gen. Pickett must have been a man among men, a great soul.”²¹

Inman obtained permission from LaSalle Pickett to reprint the letters in 1924, and in 1928 the letters were reprinted with his persuasive and articulate introduction. Houghton Mifflin rendered the new Inman version, and titled it, Soldier of the South: General Pickett’s War Letters to his Wife

Inman wrote:

We have been reading Gen. Pickett’s letters written upon the desperately poor paper of the Confederacy, brown and blue and yellow; faded and crumpled and torn. The letters lie in a pasteboard box. The cryptic cipher to the heroic past strikes emotionally home. And when my fingers bring to light the spurs, Mrs. Pickett explained to Evelyn, that her Soldier wore at Gettysburg, then indeed it seems that all the poignant

²⁰ Arthur Crew Inman, edited by Daniel Aaron, The Inman Diary: A Public and Private Confession (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 185.

²¹ Ibid.

sadness of years gone by encompasses me This morning have been going over Gen. Pickett's letters. I find that the letters in 'The Heart of a Soldier' have been considerably edited and in many places abridged. The arrangement has been so artistically and judiciously accomplished that I hesitate to make changes. Where in the book each letter is signed "Your Soldier," I find that Pickett never signed himself that way. Much sentimentalism, some crudities have been deleted.²²

Archivist Gary Gallagher stated, "LaSalle Pickett's edition of her husband's letters," published in 1913, "was controversial . . . from the time of its publication."²³ And, author George Stewart described the letters of General Pickett, edited by Mrs. Pickett, as being " . . . lusciously sentimental."²⁴

LaSalle Pickett did write sentimental stories and luscious, reminiscent tales, which obscured the lines between reality and fiction. Nevertheless, in her role of devoted widow she was merely protecting her lost loved one. Her literature conceals the man in the twentieth century mind, though; and prompts historians to misinterpretations by virtue of her grandiloquence.

²² *Ibid.*, 267. Author Charles Hamilton wrote: "Because of the scarcity of paper, necessary for gun-wadding, many military documents of the Confederacy were written on cheap, brown sheets which only feebly resist the incursions of time. The ink, too, was often of soot or gunpowder, a pale, gray scratching that is difficult to read and has a tendency to fade. Many letters of Lee and Pickett were penned in cheap, light-colored ink. Pickett's spidery pen adds to the washed-out appearance of his signature." See Charles Hamilton, Collecting Autographs and Manuscripts (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 152.

²³ Gary W. Gallagher, "A Widow and Her Soldier: LaSalle Corbell Pickett as Author of the George E. Pickett Letters," The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 94 (July 1986): 329. Gallagher notes: "A woman of high integrity, LaSalle Pickett approached her editing project from a nineteenth-century perspective."

²⁴ George R. Stewart, Pickett's Charge: A Microhistory of the Final Attack at Gettysburg, July 3, 1863 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1959), 433. Stewart notes: "Possibly the letters may go back to some originals which have been very heavily edited."

By the end of the decade of the twenties, and with the crush of the Great Depression deepening, LaSalle was finding life more difficult as her health continued to fail.²⁵ She died in Washington, D. C., on March 22, 1931, as she was laying the groundwork for her next book about "Her Soldier," George E. Pickett.²⁶

²⁵ LaSalle Corbell to Henry E. Huntington, March 27, 1927, George and LaSalle Pickett Papers, HEH Papers. Microfilm. In the series of correspondence between LaSalle Pickett and Henry E. Huntington she expressed her concern for her failing health; also, in this correspondence she indicated her gratitude for his financial support as her health declined.

²⁶ "Obituary," Washington Post, March 23, 1931. The outline for LaSalle Pickett's next book "... contained reminiscences of the hazardous journey she made with her small son to Canada at the end of the Civil War to join her husband, who fled there in exile."

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