

Friend to Friend

Ray Soltis

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Presented by Worshipful James Hammond

Brigadier General Lewis Armistead

I was born in New Bern, North Carolina on Feb 18, 1817. My family shortly after went to Fauquier County, Virginia and had a nice little estate there. My father was a military man; in fact, our whole family was steeped in military tradition. My father was one of 5 brothers who fought in the War of 1812. My uncle, Major George Armistead, was the commander at Fort McHenry during the battle from where our nation's anthem, "The Star Bangled Banner", was gloriously inspired by Francis Scott Key.

I entered the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1833, but did not graduate due to some various "disagreements". One in particular was with a classmate, Jubal Early, which ended up with me breaking a plate over his head. After that particular incident the powers that be and myself figured I'd be better off outside the Academy and I resigned in 1836. Jubal went on to join the Confederacy and became a General; so that plate I guess did do some damage.

Despite my lack of graduating, I ended up in the military as a second lieutenant (some say it was due to my father using his influence, but I think I got in on my own). One of my early military posts, in 1844, was with the Sixth Infantry in Fort Towson, Arkansas, down near Texas. It was in this unit that I first met and became friends with Winfield Hancock. We became fast friends. He was a fellow Brother of the Lodge; I had joined

Friend to Friend – Ray Soltis

through Alexandria-Washington Lodge #22. My first military engagements were wrought from the Mexican-American War, where my superiors found me valuable and promoted me to Brevet Captain and later as Brevet Major. Hancock was in the same unit with me.

We moved around a bit after that, as military families do, from Kentucky, to Kansas, to Alabama, to Nebraska, to Missouri, back to Kansas, then to Utah. I was then part of the Mojave Expedition in 1858-59, where we had to put down an Indian skirmish. Hancock and I were in San Diego when the Civil War broke out, and when Virginia seceded, I couldn't imagine not defending my home state. I resigned my commission and joined the Confederacy. Hancock was really generous and had a going away party for me. As I left I told my old friend, "Goodbye, you can never know what this has cost me."

When I joined the Army of Northern Virginia I was promoted to Colonel and then as Brigadier General in battles such as Seven Pines, Second Bull Run, Antietam, and Fredericksburg. I missed Chancellorsville, but moved north and arrived in Gettysburg the evening of July 2, 1863. On the third day of the battle our brigade attempted to break the center of the Union line as part of "Pickett's Charge". I put my hat at the tip of my saber and led my men into battle. We reached a stone wall at what became to be known as the "Angle" and were ahead of the rest of our lines. They later called it the "High Water Mark" of the Confederacy because we penetrated their lines farther than any other brigade. I ended up taking three rounds there and my horse was shot from under me just after we jumped the wall and I could fight no more.

I came across Captain Henry Bingham (some believe the Masonic sign for distress was used, and Capt. Bingham, a Mason from Chartiers Lodge #297 in Canonsburg Pennsylvania, recognized it and came to his aid), who was a physician for the Union, and asked him to give Hancock my personal effects, which included my watch and my Bible.

Capt. Bingham then helped me to a field hospital and I was asking for General Hancock and was hoping that I could see my old friend again. He too was injured and could make it. I died the next day on July 5th.

Major General Winfield Scott Hancock

My twin brother and I were born on February 24, 1824 in Montgomery Square, just outside Norristown, Pennsylvania. My dad was a teacher, but later studied law and moved us to Norristown when we were kids. My dad named me after a hero of the War of 1812, Brother Winfield Scott. As I grew up all things related to the military were interesting and came naturally to me so I eventually went to West Point.

The boys there grew to respect me and it just so happened that I grew from being 5'5" to 6'6" during my time at the Academy. I would meet some of my classmates in the future, as they would include the likes of Ulysses S Grant, George McClellan, George Pickett, and Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson.

My first unit out of West Point was the Sixth Infantry assigned to Fort Towson in Arkansas. That is where I met my friend Lewis Armistead and we ended up fighting in the Mexican War. I also moved around from Florida, to Kansas, then to Utah. After Utah I was again with my friend Armistead in California when the Civil War broke out. It was right before then that I joined the fraternity of Masons in my home lodge, Charity Lodge #190, in Norristown under special dispensation. I understood why Lewis joined the Confederacy, it was basically the same reason why Robert E Lee did, as he had to defend his homeland of Virginia after it seceded. Nevertheless, I was heartbroken to see my friend go.

Friend to Friend – Ray Soltis

Once I came east General McClellan made me Brigadier General and helped him form the Army of the Potomac. One of our first major assaults came against Lewis's old friend Jubal Early at a battle in Williamsburg. There we were victorious and I apparently became well respected among my peers. I then fought in Antietam and was promoted to Major General just before Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville.

Then came Gettysburg. There General George Meade saw it fit that I command the lines that withstood "Pickett's Charge" and successfully avoided what would have been a dreadful loss. During that battle I sustained a pretty significant injury, but I pressed on the best I could. It was very unfortunate to mourn the loss of Lewis. I had heard that he too had been injured and was in one of our hospitals. I could not make it due to my own injury; my saddle took a round and shrapnel from it had entered my thigh, but I did receive his affects. He was such a good friend, a good man, and a Brother.

I then went on to serve under General Grant. After Lincoln was shot it was my responsibility to round up those who took part in the assassination and the attempts on Secretary Seward and Vice President Johnson. Now that's a whole other story in itself.

In 1876 I was put forth to be the Democratic nominee for the Presidency. I attempted to withhold my name, and eventually the Convention did withdraw me. However, I was the candidate against James A Garfield in 1880, and lost by only 7000 votes. I later died in 1886 from an illness and was buried in my hometown of Norristown.