

Compatriot,

This afternoon, I turned on the television and by chance the movie, Gettysburg was showing. I tossed the remote on the side table and watched as Tom Berringer who played General Longstreet, gave his nod to proceed the attack on the third day of that exhausting battle. Even though the scenes were actors and special effects, I couldn't help but return to a time twenty years earlier when I had the privilege to live in that very town in Pennsylvania.

My family and I lived in a modest and comfortable home on the Fairfield Road (Highway 116) diagonally across from the Lutheran Seminary. It was a delightful place to live and every day I learned something new and different about the battle that took place there from someone in town. I taught Military Science at Gettysburg College and every morning, I would leave my house, walk across the front of the seminary, past the "railroad cut" and into my office on the edge of campus that overlooked a long forgotten quarry now turned into a pond on the back side of the ridge where Buford made his stand on Day-1.

One brisk April morning, as I was running along Seminary Ridge and stopped at the Virginia monument just before sunrise. I stood there on that brisk morning in the pink light of a new day and looked across the field at the small copes of trees that well over a hundred years earlier 10,000 Confederates, shoulder to shoulder, stepped off in formations, towards what many thought would be the last battle of the war.

I stood there in awe wearing only shorts, sweat jacket, and running shoes. And then as if possessed by something stronger, I began to run towards those trees. The grass, dead from winter, raked and cut across my knees; the ground firm gave me sure foot as I dashed across that open field. I pushed hard to get to the Emmetsburg Road (Highway 15) and for eight and a half minutes I ran to get there.

I ran, eight and a half minutes in modern clothing, in cool ideal weather, across a piece of ground that had no dead space; that had clear fields of fire; that offered no concealment, and no cover... eight and a half minutes.

Veterans of wars past will without question confirm that, this period of time is an eternity when you are exposed to fire. Yet these brave men proceeded with their Officers forward into this hailstorm of molten steel and thunder towards an enemy that awkwardly was kin and friend. Most of these son's of Virginia were too poor to own slaves much less shoes. But they fought for something that history has tried to erase, something that is universal in the profession of arms. They fought for each other.

Regardless of what contemporary politics may say or write about those that try to protect the heritage of "The Lost Cause," one thing must be understood. These men were Americans...more importantly, they were Soldiers. For this reason alone, we must remember their contribution!

This is where I stop on this cool white snowy day in the alter of God simply known as Alaska. I didn't write this to start a fight as much as to remind the complacent, that these men, like it or not are a part of our American (no hyphen) heritage.

I send this to you with very kind regards,

Arlie Nethken
Retired Soldier
Member, Sons of Confederate Veterans