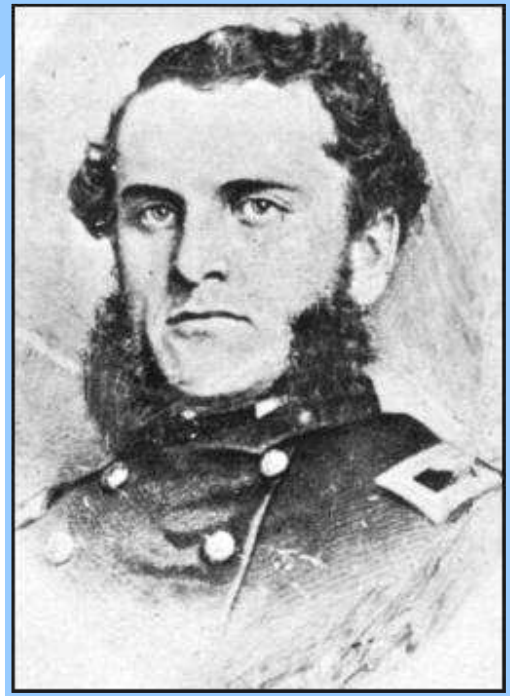


Strong Vincent: An Erie County War Hero

Strong Vincent is best known for his leadership of soldiers during the Battle of Little Round Top at Gettysburg in July 1863, but to friends and family he was known for much more – a handsome appearance, unquestionable bravery and intelligence.

Strong Vincent was born in Waterford, Erie County on June 17, 1837 to Bethuel B. and Sarah Ann (Strong) Vincent, but in 1843 his parents moved the family to the City of Erie. His school days were spent at the old Erie Academy, where he fit in well and formed long-lasting friendships with many of his classmates. When he was about 14 years old he was put to work in his father's iron foundry, Himrod, Johnson & Co. For six months he worked as a laborer, making cast iron stoves and other products. He spent an additional year or so working in the office of the foundry. Wanting a scientific education, Strong Vincent left home and moved to Hartford, Connecticut to study. He later enrolled at Trinity College, and then Harvard College when he was just a sophomore. His classmate and friend W.W. Swan said of him,



“Vincent was a man of mark in his class, and in the college. There was not a student from sophomore to senior who did not on first seeing him seek to learn who he was. Physically he seemed fully developed. Of rather above medium height, he had a well-formed, powerful frame, and his face was remarkably handsome. He looked many years older than he really was, and in every respect his mind corresponded with his body. One would have said on hearing him converse that he was 25 years old. He was not a hard student. And yet when the class of 1859 graduated, if the professors had been asked to name those whom the college would afterward delight to count among her children, Vincent would have been high on the list.”

After graduating in 1859, he began the study of law in the office of William S. Lane in Erie. Within fifteen months of joining the law office

he passed the Bar Exam and became Mr. Lane's partner. Strong Vincent's career as a lawyer was cut short due to the beginning of the American Civil War (1861 – 1865).

Before newly elected President Abraham Lincoln took office, seven states seceded from the union, and established an independent Southern government called the Confederate States of America on February 9, 1861. On the verge of a major war, President Lincoln was forced to ask Americans to volunteer to serve in the army. On the day after President Lincoln first called for volunteers to enlist, Strong Vincent enlisted as a private with the Wayne Guards, a division of the "Erie Regiment." The Erie Regiment was made up of three-month-men, so called because they signed up to serve three months in the army. Vincent quickly married Miss Elizabeth Carter before his regiment received orders to leave Erie – they had been engaged for some time. Before his company left Erie, Strong Vincent was elected second lieutenant. He served under Colonel McLane, another well-known Erie County soldier. When Strong Vincent completed his three month service he re-enlisted and joined the 83rd Regiment of the Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry for three years.

Shortly after his regiment left for Washington, D.C., he wrote to his wife, "Surely the right will prevail. If I live, we will rejoice over our country's success. If I fall, remember that you have given your husband as a sacrifice to the most righteous cause that ever widowed a woman."

Strong Vincent's first battle was in Virginia at the Hanover Court House on May 27, 1862. More than 1,300 men died during the one-day battle. He managed to survive the battle, but became ill after marching through the Chickahominy swamps which were found near the Hanover Court House. His illness forced him to remain in camp while the rest of his regiment readied for battle. As Strong Vincent struggled to recover, the 83rd fought in the bloody battle of Gaines' Mills. Over half of his regiment was either killed or wounded. Colonel McLane and his Major were two of the casualties. At first, news of their deaths was kept from Strong Vincent, but once he learned the truth, he forced those caring for him to let him go. He immediately mounted his horse and led his troops until exhaustion caused him to fall from his saddle. Strong Vincent was then carried to the James River in Virginia. As his health deteriorated, arrangements were made for Elizabeth and his father to

meet him in New York. He was taken home, where he remained until October 1, 1862.

Strong Vincent, now serving as Colonel, led the 83rd Regiment into battle in December at Fredericksburg. He gained the confidence and admiration of his men when he rescued his troops from a dangerous position. Fredericksburg was one of the deadliest battles of the Civil War. Nearly 18,000 casualties were recorded during this five-day battle.

In early 1863 Strong Vincent's regiment began its march to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

“As we rode slowly through the town of Hanover, Vincent had the torn flag of the 83rd unrolled and brought to the front of the marching regiment. As it rustled in the moonlight before him, he reverently lowered his head and said to his staff in a tone that will not be forgotten, ‘What death more glorious can any man desire, than to die on the soil of old Pennsylvania, fighting for that flag!’”

As the troops lay quietly on the field at Gettysburg awaiting orders, he said, “Today will either bring me my stars or finish my career as a soldier.” The Battle of Gettysburg began July 1, 1863. On the afternoon of the 2nd, an order arrived for a regiment to join General Sickles' troops toward the front of the Union line. Vincent took his soldiers to the front, and placed them at Little Round Top. Once the battle began, Confederate forces tried desperately to take Little Round Top and drive Union soldiers from their position. The hill was held throughout the battle by Strong Vincent and his men, but it cost the regiment a great loss of life. Strong Vincent himself was killed.



While standing on a rock, shouting encouraging words to his men, he was shot by a sharpshooter and died five days later. He was promoted to Brigadier General the day after he was wounded, but did not receive the news before his death. Strong Vincent's remains were brought back to Erie and buried in the Erie Cemetery. (A little girl was born to him



three months after his death, but she scarcely lived a year. She was buried in the same grave as her father, “the hero of Little Round Top.”)

At the Civil War’s conclusion in 1865, it was found that the 83rd Regiment had suffered more battle deaths than any other Pennsylvania regiment and second-most of all Union regiments.

Today, Colonel Strong Vincent’s actions are considered by military historians to have turned the important Battle of Gettysburg into a northern victory – he is considered a national and a local hero.

(Statue at Little Round Top honoring the 83rd Regiment P.V.I. Although Pennsylvania did not allow regiments to include likenesses of commanders on regimental monuments, the statue has a strange resemblance to Strong Vincent.)