

ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

Oliver Otis Howard

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Union Major General Oliver Otis Howard was born on November 8, 1830, in the small town of Leeds, Maine. Otis (as he was known to all close family) grew up on a small family farm in Leeds and labored side by side with his younger brothers Rowland and Charles. In many respects, Howard lived the typical life of a boy in a small nineteenth century town with chores and other sundry elements of family life. Following his early education at local schools, Howard undertook his studies to prepare for the entrance exam at nearby Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine. Howard labored for long hours each day in preparation for his exam. These studies ultimately paid off when Howard was admitted to Bowdoin College in the fall of 1846. He spent much of his time at Bowdoin adhering to the strict religious principles engrained from a young age (following the death of his father) and by all accounts led a remarkably pious life at Bowdoin. Howard followed up graduation from Bowdoin in 1850 by entering the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1850. Such an opportunity presented itself owing to Howard's uncle serving as a member of Congress at the time.

Howard braved the cold reception of his fellow cadets arising from his piety and graduated fourth in his class in 1854, choosing a position in the Ordinance Department. After moving between posts in Troy, New York, and Augusta, Maine, Howard was assigned to Fort Brooke near Tampa, Florida. Reflecting on his assignment there, Howard commented, "Tampa was a field for self-denial and Christian work."¹ A large contributor to his aggressive pursuit of religion was his commander, Colonel L.L. Loomis. Loomis, a Presbyterian, shared the Bible and other religious texts with Howard, in whom he saw great potential.² Howard earnestly embraced the entreaties of his commander and pursued religion, but mostly at a personal level.

In late August 1857, Howard received orders to return to West Point as professor of mathematics. While Howard placed much emphasis on his academic position at West Point, he also became even more religiously active at the institution. Howard gave weekly lectures on religious topics ranging from the Ten Commandments to the Lord's

¹ Oliver Otis Howard, *Autobiography* (New York: The Trow Press, 1907), vol 1, 83.

² *Ibid.*, 80-81.

Prayer.³ In addition, Howard, much like his British “Christian Soldier” inspiration Captain Hedley Vicars, made a point to regularly visit the sick cadets in the hospital.⁴ As evidence of his firm conviction for providing religion to the academy’s younger population, Howard acted as superintendent of the West Point Sunday school for the children of enlisted men and spoke on the idea of the “Christian Soldier” to a unit led by then Lieutenant Edwin Porter Alexander.

However, as Howard settled into his position at West Point, he grew increasingly restless and continued to question his mission in life. Howard had reached a crossroads: should he continue his service as a junior officer in a peacetime army, or should he follow his other calling and join the ministry? Howard had long entertained the thought of becoming a minister. In 1853, he wrote to his mother discussing the ministry question, remarking that it had been his wish “that one of us three boys [the Howard boys] should take the ministry as a profession.”⁵ Even after his marriage, Howard contemplated the idea and even discussed the issue with his wife. However, Howard noted in his diary in December 1858, “I am thinking of the ministry of commencing my studies under the direction of the Preach. But my dear wife falls much against it.”⁶ Howard agonized over the decision and looked to God for guidance on the matter, believing that it had to ultimately “be decided by the great ruler of my life.”⁷ Howard viewed the secessionist crisis of 1860 and the subsequent firing on Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor in April 1861 as the sign from above he had long been waiting for.⁸ For Howard, the decision was now clear—his rightful position was a soldier as the army prepared to go to war. In the spring of 1861, Howard saw many men leave West Point and resign their army commissions in order to fight alongside their southern brethren. He saw first-hand the need of good West Point trained officers in the Union Army.

In the early spring of 1861, he telegraphed Governor Israel Washburn, Jr. of Maine to offer his services to the state in response to President Abraham Lincoln’s call for 75,000 Northern soldiers to put down the “Southern Insurrection.” Word came in the middle of May from James Gillespie Blaine, the young speaker of the Maine House of Representatives, whom Howard had befriended while stationed at the Kennebec Arsenal in Augusta, asking Howard if he would have any interest in the colonelcy of a regiment forming in the Kennebec region.⁹ After a conference with his wife, Howard went and

³ Laura Holloway, *Howard: The Christian Hero* (New York: Funk & Wagnall’s, 1885), 45; Oliver Otis Howard to Charles Howard, October 24, 1857, Oliver Otis Howard Collection, 53-1, folder 24, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

⁴ Oliver Otis Howard to Charles Howard, January 7, 1858, Oliver Otis Howard Collection, 53-1, folder 25, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

⁵ Oliver Otis Howard to Mother, October 22, 1853, Oliver Otis Howard Collection, 53-1, folder 3, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

⁶ Oliver Otis Howard Manuscript Diary, December 28, 1858, Oliver Otis Howard Collection, 53-1, folder 3, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Gerald Weland, *O.O. Howard, Union General* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc., 1995), 30.

⁹ Oliver Otis Howard, *Autobiography*, vol 1, 106-07.

consulted with the West Point commandant, Lieutenant Colonel John Fulton Reynolds.¹⁰ When Howard asked Reynolds whether or not he should accept the commission, he replied, “You’ll accept, of course, Howard.” Howard immediately submitted his response to Augusta and made the necessary arrangements to leave West Point and return to Maine.

An ambition for higher rank must have influenced Howard’s decision to resign his commission in the regular army in order to pursue opportunities in the new volunteer army. Howard spent much of the time in the wake of the attacks on Fort Sumter writing to Washburn, Blaine and Congressman Anson Peaslee Morrill. He needed their help, for when Howard assumed command of the 3rd Maine Regiment, he had not been the original pick of the men of the regiment. State politicians, mainly James Blaine, had convinced the men of the regiment to vote for Howard as the colonel of the regiment.¹¹ Although the men ultimately voted for Howard, he did not create a good first impression. Howard recalled the incident two years later at a speech in Philadelphia:

When I took the command of the third Maine regiment, the first words I said to them were these: ‘There are two things that I hate. The one is drunkenness, and the other is profanity. I set my face against them and shall do it.’ I loathe these two things. They are the worst enemies we have to encounter; for profanity sets us as rebels against God, and drunkenness makes us worse than rebels at home.’¹²

Such a bold statement on sensitive issues that had nothing to do with the war left members of the regiment vocal in their disapproval of their new commander. One member of the regiment recalled that Howard “talked down to us with the tone and manner of an itinerant preacher.”¹³ Howard was apparently blind to the widespread

¹⁰ By the battle of Gettysburg in July 1863, Reynolds, a native Pennsylvanian, and Howard had risen to the rank of Major General with Reynolds in command of I Corps and Howard in command of XI Corps. However, Reynolds had tactical command of the “left wing” of the Army of the Potomac which consisted of the I, III, and XI Corps on the march to Gettysburg. Following the death of Reynolds in the late morning hours of July 1, Howard assumed command of the field as the senior officer and commenced the placement of forces following the retreat of the Union Army to the south of town. Howard remained the effective commander on the battlefield until General Winfield Scott Hancock arrived under orders from commanding General George Gordon Meade to assume command and place the forces in a defensive position.

¹¹ Typically the colonelcy of a new volunteer regiment went to the man who had played the largest role in recruiting the regiment or who had contributed the most financially to the regiment or to the Union cause. Howard therefore was an exception—especially at the outbreak of the conflict when it was widely assumed the war would not last more than three months.

¹² “Words for the Army: Address of Major General Howard,” *The Sunday School Times*, April 4, 1863, before the American Academy of Music in Philadelphia, Oliver Otis Howard Collection, 53-3, folder 126, Moorland-Spangarn Research Center, Howard University.

¹³ Harold Adams Small ed., *The Road to Richmond: The Civil War Memoirs of Major Abner R. Small of the Sixteenth Maine Volunteers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1939), 9.

distaste his men held for him, remarking in a letter to his wife that the men of the regiment “seem to love their colonel.”¹⁴

The 3rd quickly departed for Washington D.C. to join regiments from throughout the North in preparation for the invasion of Virginia. While on a stopover in New York City, the residents of the city held a banquet in honor of the 3rd Maine, being one of the first regiments on its way to Washington D.C. to secure the threatened capital. It was during this banquet that Howard’s temperance principles first emerged to the public at large. At one point during the evening the host of the event held up a wine glass to toast to the success of the 3rd Maine and Colonel Howard. At that moment, Howard responded, “I’ll join you in a glass of water, the only beverage fit for a soldier.” A dinner host later recalled, “you should have seen how we all hustled around to get our glasses of water.” Thus, even before Howard’s men had made it to the front, he established his firm opposition to alcohol as detrimental to the success of the war effort.¹⁵

Under intense pressure from the Northern public as well as President Lincoln, commander of Union forces Brigadier General Irwin McDowell pushed further into Virginia in July of 1861. Howard, now in command of a brigade of New England regiments, led his men on the march and was alarmed at their behavior. Howard bemoaned shortly before the Battle of Bull Run the use of profanity that was prevalent in his ranks, commenting that if “the men had more regard for the Lord; we might then expect His blessing.”¹⁶ Adding insult to injury, the Battle of Bull Run occurred on a Sunday, the Sabbath, a point of contention for such a religiously observant man as Howard.¹⁷ Yet as Howard approached the battlefield with his men, he could not help but notice a “weakness” that overcame his body. Filled with a “sense of shame,” Howard cried out at that moment, “O God! Enable me to do my duty.” Howard remarked that never again on the field of battle did he experience another moment of weakness.¹⁸ By all accounts, Howard served admirably in the First Battle of Bull Run, despite the rout of Union forces.

Howard used the time following Bull Run to foster a religious atmosphere in camp. He held nightly prayer meetings in his tent with any members of his staff who wished to attend, as well as seeing that every regiment under his command held a religious service on Sunday. Howard even led the meetings himself if a chaplain was not present.¹⁹ Howard widely became known for his pious Christian beliefs, which led to mixed reviews by his fellow officers as well as the men in the rank and file. For some

¹⁴ Lizzie Howard to Oliver Otis Howard, June 3, 1861, in Oliver Otis Howard Collection, George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections and Archives, Bowdoin College Library.

¹⁵ Judith Relaford, “Glory and Grace: The Civil War Career of the ‘Christian General,’ Oliver Otis Howard,” MS thesis, University of Oregon, 1983, 44.

¹⁶ Oliver Otis Howard, *Autobiography* vol 1, 148.

¹⁷ John Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch: Oliver Otis Howard* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1964), 27.

¹⁸ Oliver Otis Howard, *Autobiography* vol 1, 154.

¹⁹ John Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch: Oliver Otis Howard*, 30.

soldiers, Howard's overly religious sentiments outweighed his bravery on the battlefield. One soldier serving under Howard complained about the "vanity and cold piety" that Howard exuded.²⁰ To him, Howard was "cold, selfish, and inordinately vain."²¹ Still another noted that Howard's widely professed religious beliefs were the subject of great ridicule amongst the men serving under him.²²

For Howard, unwavering faith in God created courage and bravery under fire that others would hazard to say bordered on the absurd. One staff officer with Sherman's Army during the 1864 campaign remarked that Howard was special because "when exposed to fire, there is no braver man living than he," noting that Howard had been constantly rebuked for "rashly exposing himself to the fire of the enemy."²³ Another officer described Howard as "careless of exposing his person in battle, to an extent that would be attributable to rashness or fatalism if it were not known to spring from religion."²⁴ Howard himself stated that he went "forth to battle without flinching" because he believed that God would direct him.²⁵ When asked on the subject shortly after the war, Howard responded, "I have gone through battles without a particle of fear. I have thought that God sent me to defend my country. I believed it was a Christian duty to stand in the foremost of the light, and why should I be afraid?"²⁶ Many soldiers had begun to regard Howard's actions as overtly religious and not becoming of an officer.

Following an uneventful winter of 1861-62, Howard's brigade joined Major General George Brinton McClellan's Army on the ill-fated Peninsula campaign. Howard grew weary of McClellan's pace and was encouraged to engage in the fighting that took place at Fair Oaks (Seven Pines) on May 31 and June 1, 1862. This joy was short-lived however, as on the morning of the June 1 Howard was struck by two minie balls just below the right elbow while rallying his men against a Confederate assault. The wounds ultimately required the arm to be amputated slightly above the elbow. Otis's brother Charles was also wounded on the field on June 1 and accompanied his brother on their return to Maine. Otis Howard took the loss of his arm in stride as he participated in the governor's recruitment campaign to increase numbers for the Pine Tree State. Howard returned to the Army of the Potomac less than three months after his wounding and played a role in the Second Battle of Bull Run.

During the Battle of Antietam, Howard's new command, a recently assigned brigade that he had commanded for only three weeks, found itself in the thick of the fighting in the West Woods. The entire division under the command of Major General

²⁰ Harold Adams Small ed., *The Road to Richmond*, 31.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 195.

²² William Shanks, *Personal Reflections of Distinguished Generals* (New York: Harper & Collins, 1866), 302-03.

²³ George Nichols, *The Story of the Great March* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1866), 141-42.

²⁴ Quoted in Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Men of Our Times or Leading Patriots of the Day* (Hartford, Conn.: Hartford Publishing Company, 1868), 449.

²⁵ Oliver Otis Howard, *Autobiography*, vol 1, 127.

²⁶ "Christian Courage," *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, 36 no. 42 (October 18, 1865), 1.

John Sedgwick found itself in the middle of a murderous crossfire from both rifle and cannon. It suffered horrific casualties and soon streamed out of the West Woods to the relative safety of the meadow south of Antietam's infamous Cornfield.²⁷ Following the battle, Otis's brother Charles Howard, who served as his brother's aide, commented on the tremendous loss of life in the bloodiest battle to date in the war. Charles feared for the brigade's losses and bluntly remarked to his step-brother Rodelphus, "Altho' I had had considerable experience in war I had never before seen such terrible sights - the heaps & rows of dead!"²⁸ The 2,200 casualties of Sedgwick's division in the West Woods also included the wounding of Sedgwick himself. With the wounding of Sedgwick, opportunity presented itself for Otis Howard to take command of the division in Sumner's Corps.

During the winter months of 1862-1863, Howard received a promotion to command of the XI Corps. Howard worked arduously for the honor. The new commander of the Army of the Potomac, Major General Joseph Hooker, had recently promoted Major General Daniel Edgar Sickles, a political general well-liked by the Radical Republicans on Capitol Hill, to command of the III Corps. Howard was outraged that a younger, non-careerist had been promoted before him. Howard may have disliked Hooker during the war, privately at least, due to his propensity for alcohol and women. Howard complained to his wife and finally to General Hooker himself.²⁹ Hooker appeased Howard and appointed him the commander of XI Corps, replacing the widely popular Major General Franz Sigel. Sigel garnered a strong reputation in the XI Corps because a significant portion of the corps was comprised of German immigrants who shared his nationality. For the German soldiers, the appointment of the "Christian General," did not sit well. One general remarked that the rank and file "cared little for Howard's reputation" and that Sigel's removal from command "was a blow to their nationality."³⁰ Another Union officer noted that despite the fact that Howard was "a Christian and an enthusiast" as well as "a man of ability," there was "some doubt as to his having the snap enough to manage the Germans."³¹

Howard underwent his first test as a corps commander at the Battle of Chancellorsville in May of 1863. In the early evening of May 2, Confederate Lieutenant General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, in one of the most daring acts of the entire war, led an assault on the exposed right flank of the Union Army held by Howard's XI Corps. Wholly unprepared, Howard tried as best as possible to organize his men to stem the tide.

²⁷ Stephen Sears, *Landscape Turned Red: The Battle of Antietam* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1983), 221-28; James McPherson, *Crossroads of Freedom Antietam: The Battle that Changed the Course of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 119-22.

²⁸ Charles Henry Howard to Rodelphus Gilmore, September 21, 1862, Charles Henry Howard Collection, George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections and Archives, Bowdoin College.

²⁹ Oliver Otis Howard to Lizzie Howard, June 3, 1861, in Oliver Otis Howard Collection, George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections and Archives, Bowdoin College Library.

³⁰ Abner Doubleday, *Chancellorsville and Gettysburg* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896), 3.

³¹ Allan Nevins, *A Diary of Battle: The Personal Journals of Colonel Charles S. Wainwright 1861-1865* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & Wald, 1962), 183.

Jackson's men steamrolled their way through the XI Corps line and only stopped because of the setting sun, followed by mortal wounding of Jackson himself.

Perhaps General Robert E. Lee's greatest military victory, Chancellorsville provided yet another defeat for Union forces and shortly after the battle, debate ensued over who was at fault. For many, Howard and his largely German corps were to blame. Evidence seems to support the assertion. At 9:30 on the morning of the May 2, General Hooker had ordered Howard to strengthen his defenses to the west as well as to send out pickets in that direction. Howard claims never to have received those orders, although one of his subordinates, Major General Carl Christian Schurz, remembered the order in vivid detail.³² Schurz recalled in his memoirs some years later the concern he had over the movement of Jackson's forces and a belief that an attack was imminent upon their flank. Howard did not share the same concern and remarked that he shared Hooker's opinion that Jackson's forces were in retreat. Despite the pleas of Schurz, Howard refused to move from his position, causing Schurz to remark in his memoirs that he could not comprehend how Howard's "mind simply failed to draw simple conclusions from obvious facts."³³ According to Howard, Schurz asked for his resignation, pleading for Howard to do so in order to prevent "another panic, another disaster, another disgrace to yourself, to the troops, to all of us."³⁴

One of the most crucial mistakes Howard made at Chancellorsville actually occurred after the battle. Following the defeat, Howard bemoaned to the other corps commanders at a conference the "bad conduct of his troops." For the corps commanders, Howard's complaints provided all that they needed in order to place blame for the failure of the Chancellorsville campaign. The press caught on and soon all criticism was leveled at the "immigrant" XI Corps. Nativist sentiment played a large role in the criticism of the XI Corps. Although Howard commanded the XI Corps, which had a significant contingent of Germans, it was the soldiers themselves, and not Howard, who took the brunt of the blame. On May 5, 1863, the *New York Times* wrote, "Thousands of these cowards [the Germans] threw down their guns and soon streamed down the road towards headquarters." Yet, the same article argued Howard "could not stem the tide of the retreating and cowardly poltroons."³⁵ The attack on the XI Corps itself deflected criticism from Howard and he ultimately came out of the fiasco at Chancellorsville largely unscathed owing to his alliances on Capitol Hill and the good favor he had fallen in with the Radical Republicans on the Congressional Committee on the Conduct of the War. The Congressional Committee on the Conduct of the War had been established to investigate incidents such as the debacle at Chancellorsville. Major General Abner Doubleday referred to the inquiry into Chancellorsville by the committee as "a farce and

³² John Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch: Oliver Otis Howard*, 45.

³³ Wayne Andrews, *The Autobiography of Carl Schurz* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), 236-246.

³⁴ Oliver Otis Howard, *Autobiography* vol 1, 378.

³⁵ *New York Times*, May 5, 1863, p.8.

necessarily unreliable.”³⁶ Thus, through his political connections, Howard’s poor command in the field was largely ignored despite his recent elevation to corps command.

While some historians who have analyzed Howard have insisted that Howard was “in the wrong place at the wrong time,” or that Howard’s conduct at Chancellorsville was acceptable given the circumstances, the evidence would seem to indicate that Howard was negligent in his duties. Howard surely neglected orders from Hooker about the movement to his west and regardless of orders should have realized that his position, being as precarious as it was, should have forced him to be on an even higher alert. But perhaps more critically, Howard allowed the perception of his actions as well as those of his corps at Chancellorsville to develop in such a way that he soon took on the persona of the inept general handling the cowardly XI Corps at Chancellorsville. Howard amplified the problem by never accusing Schurz of lying regarding the claim that Howard received Hooker’s orders. His refusal to challenge Schurz made Howard appear as though he accepted Schurz’s version of the story. Additionally, Howard held too much confidence in his subordinate officers, who also contributed to the disaster at Chancellorsville.³⁷ Finally, Howard’s criticism of his corps amongst his fellow corps commanders following the battle also played a role in the perception of Howard’s capacity to command at Chancellorsville.

Howard soon faced a tough test, with the memory of Chancellorsville still fresh on the mind of his subordinates in the XI Corps, as well as his comrades in the rest of the Army of the Potomac. In June of 1863, General Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia invaded southern Pennsylvania. The Union Army of the Potomac followed in pursuit under its new commander, Major General George Gordon Meade. On July 1, the two armies clashed at Gettysburg, where John Reynolds, the I Corps commander, was killed early on the first day. For a period of time on that first day, Howard was the most senior officer on the field and therefore took command. Before he did so, however, Howard placed one of his divisions on Cemetery Hill, south of town. Upon receiving word of Reynolds’s death and the current command situation at Gettysburg, General Meade issued orders for a junior officer, II Corps commander Major General Winfield Scott Hancock, to assume command of the field over Howard, his senior. Meade made this move for no reason other than his extreme lack of confidence in the command abilities of Howard following the Battle of Chancellorsville.³⁸ Union Cavalry commander Brigadier General John Buford, Jr. expressed his personal lack of trust in Howard’s command when he issued a message to Meade that read: “for God’s sake, send up Hancock. Everything is going at odds, and we need a controlling spirit.”³⁹

Upon Hancock’s arrival the real controversy of the battle developed. Hancock’s and Howard’s versions of the events surrounding Hancock’s arrival at Gettysburg differ significantly. While the two disagree over Hancock’s time of arrival on the afternoon of

³⁶ Abner Doubleday, *Chancellorsville and Gettysburg*, 32.

³⁷ John Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch: Oliver Otis Howard*, 47-63.

³⁸ Glenn Tucker, *Hancock the Superb* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1960), 130.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 132.

the first, it was most certainly somewhere around the 4 o'clock hour. According to Howard, Hancock notified him of his orders from Meade "to represent the field" upon which Howard replied "all right, Hancock... You take the left of the pike and I will arrange these troops to the right." Howard noted further that to him, Hancock was not doing anything "more than directing matters as a temporary chief of staff for Meade."⁴⁰ While Howard stood by this story throughout his post-war life, Hancock offered a significantly different version of the story. General Hancock argued that he had the order in writing to present to Howard, but that Howard indicated it would not be necessary to show it. Hancock offered an account of the events on the afternoon and evening of July 1 that gave himself much more credit than it did Howard.⁴¹ Others seem to corroborate Hancock's story. I Corps division commander, Abner Doubleday, claimed to have witnessed the altercation between the two generals. According to Doubleday, when Hancock began to give orders, Howard remarked, "why Hancock, you cannot give orders here," to which Hancock replied, "I am in command and I rank you."⁴²

Following the Union repulse of Pickett's Charge on July 3, 1863, discussions were had over who contributed the most to Union victory. Sides quickly emerged with those who supported Hancock and those who sided with Howard. Those who came to Howard's defense, namely III Corps commander Daniel Sickles, significantly compromised Howard's side of the story. When Sickles met with President Lincoln in October of 1863, he indicated that it was not Hancock, but rather Howard and himself who had selected the location of the battlefield. As Sickles recounted the events, a third person in the room, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles, noticed that the more Sickles spoke, the more responsibility Sickles took and the more Howard fell by the wayside.⁴³ Sickles explained that although Howard had originally selected the position, it was he who decided to establish a defensive position on Cemetery Hill between five and six P.M. Welles did not believe Sickles in the least, and gave the impression in his diary that President Lincoln did not either. Welles remarked in his diary, "allowance must always be made for Sickles when he is interested."⁴⁴ After all, this was not the first controversy surrounding Gettysburg that Sickles had been involved in. Howard's credibility undoubtedly suffered from his association with Sickles.

Yet the Gettysburg controversy did not fully develop until January of 1864, when Congress passed a resolution recognizing Generals Hooker, Meade, and Howard for their service in the Gettysburg Campaign, with Howard recognized particularly for his service in identifying the importance of Cemetery Hill on the first day of the battle.⁴⁵ Howard did not know of the resolution until he received a letter from political associate James Blaine,

⁴⁰ Oliver Otis Howard, "Campaign and Battle of Gettysburg," *Atlantic Monthly* 38, no. 225 (July 1876), 58-59.

⁴¹ Winfield Scott Hancock, "Gettysburg: Reply to General Howard," *The Galaxy* 22 (December 1876), 821-831.

⁴² Glenn Tucker, *Hancock the Superb*, 132.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁴⁴ Gideon Welles, *Diary of Gideon Welles* vol 1 (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), 472-73.

⁴⁵ *Congressional Globe*, 38th Congress 1st Session (Washington: Blair and Rives), 257.

who congratulated Howard on his accomplishment—one that, according to Blaine, forever recorded Howard “in the annals of the country as the Hero of the great Battle of Gettysburgh.”⁴⁶ Shortly thereafter, a letter signed by “Military” appeared in the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* attacking Howard for receiving credit at Gettysburg and questioning the possible political motivations behind accepting the credit. Furthermore, the article praised the work of General Hancock at Gettysburg.⁴⁷ In the *Evening Bulletin*, “Military” wrote a scathing assessment of the resolution passed by Congress. Perhaps the following passage provides the most contemptuous portion of the article:

Now, these resolutions, several of which have recently been passed by Congress, have either a military or political signification. That is they are either the recognition by Congress of the military services of those in whose favor they are passed, and therefore based necessarily upon the recommendation of competent military authority, or they are made irrespective of such recommendation, and with the idea of giving some political importance to the persons named in them.⁴⁸

“Military” also added that the resolution praising Howard had “certainly no military reason,” leading the public to infer “that a political one was the governing motive.”⁴⁹ An article published in the *Army and Navy Journal* by “Truth” echoed similar sentiments when it questioned, “on what ground is he [Howard] alone of all the corps commanders selected for this high honor?” Furthermore, the article criticized Congress for a resolution that “perpetuated what has always been a perversion of an impartial history of Gettysburg.”⁵⁰

Howard responded in a letter to Hancock denying political motivations behind accepting the honor from Congress and implored Hancock to denounce the accusations.⁵¹ Hancock’s private response to Howard was anything but cordial, and indicated that Congress had committed “an act of injustice” in recognizing Howard while simultaneously failing to acknowledge him. In addition, Hancock refused to dispel the myths behind the notion that the recognition by Congress was politically motivated. In fact, Hancock clearly stated to Howard the recognition had “been induced by a desire on the part of the Administration to make you [Howard] prominent.”⁵² Hancock’s Democratic Party affiliation up against the Republican dominated Congress certainly

⁴⁶ James Blaine to Oliver Otis Howard, January 28, 1864, in Oliver Otis Howard Collection, George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections and Archives, Bowdoin College Library.

⁴⁷ “Military,” *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, February 8, 1864, p.8.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Tucker, *Hancock the Superb*, 170-71.

⁵¹ Oliver Otis Howard to Winfield Scott Hancock, February 25, 1864, in Oliver Otis Howard Collection, George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections and Archives, Bowdoin College Library.

⁵² Winfield Scott Hancock to Oliver Otis Howard, March 14, 1864, in Oliver Otis Howard Collection, George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections and Archives, Bowdoin College Library.

added further fuel to the speculation surrounding the absence of Hancock's name on the resolution.⁵³

After Gettysburg, Howard served the remaining portion of the war in the Western Theater. Howard had appeared to put his Eastern Theater disasters behind him when he noted to his wife upon his arrival in Tennessee, "I feel that I was sent out here for some wise and good purpose."⁵⁴ In the Western Theater, Howard found himself subordinate to Major General William Tecumseh Sherman. Sherman was a hardened soldier who on the surface would appear to be in conflict with Howard.⁵⁵ However, the two men quickly grew on one another and fostered an excellent working relationship, with Howard receiving high praise for his actions at several battles including Wauhatchie, Chattanooga, Resaca, and New Hope Church. Such strong performances eventually led to Howard's promotion to command of the Army of the Tennessee following the death of Major General James Birdseye McPherson at the Battle of Atlanta.

Sherman had great respect for the "Christian General." Following the Battle of Chattanooga, Sherman wrote a personal letter to Howard, noting that Sherman appreciated "one who mingled so gracefully and perfectly the polished Christian Gentleman and the prompt, zealous, and gallant soldier." Sherman concluded the letter by earnestly expressing his hopes to Howard that the two could become good friends.⁵⁶ At the same time, Sherman wrote to Lieutenant General Ulysses S. (Hiram Ulysses) Grant, referring to Howard as "a polished and Christian gentleman, exhibiting the highest and most chivalrous traits of the soldier."⁵⁷

In the fall of 1864, Sherman's army began its infamous "March to the Sea," cutting a sixty-mile wide swath through Georgia on its way to the Atlantic seaboard. Howard's new assignment as the commander of the right wing of the march permitted him to enter into a good relationship with Sherman largely because of the marching and flanking maneuvers undertaken in Sherman's campaign in Georgia, maneuvers that suited Howard just fine after realizing the effect such flanking had on him at Chancellorsville. For Howard, the march proved to be a great test of his Christian faith.

⁵³ Tucker, *Hancock the Superb*, 134. Winfield Scott Hancock was the 1880 Democratic Presidential Nominee who lost to Republican candidate, and fellow Civil War veteran, James Garfield.

⁵⁴ Oliver Otis Howard to Lizzie Howard, October 1, 1863, in Oliver Otis Howard Collection, George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections and Archives, Bowdoin College Library.

⁵⁵ John Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch*, 62.

⁵⁶ William Tecumseh Sherman to Oliver Otis Howard, December 13, 1863, in Oliver Otis Howard Collection, George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections and Archives, Bowdoin College Library. Indicative of a blossoming friendship amongst the subordinates under Sherman, Carl Schurz relates an instance when he and another General Jefferson C. Davis, had fun at the expense of Howard by swearing as much as possible in front of Howard during a meeting. Schurz recalls that Howard became so uncomfortable that he left the tent. Upon his departure it is said that Sherman remarked, "Well that Christian soldier business is all right in its place, But he needn't put on airs when we are among ourselves." For more on this incident see Carl Schurz, *The Reminiscences of Carl Schurz* (New York: The McClure Company, 1907-08), vol. 3, 79-80.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Men of Our Times or Leading Patriots of the Day*, 450.

Throughout the march, the destruction of civilian property greatly concerned Howard. Not surprisingly, Howard's Christian impulses led him to preach at all times to reduce the impact of the war upon the civilian population. Howard described his concerns to his wife when he remarked that "soldiers at the best are like locusts: fences and trees are consumed, and private property is generally infringed upon."⁵⁸ It proved to be quite difficult for Howard to restrain his men who used the march through Georgia to vent their frustrations at the people of the South.⁵⁹

Howard faced another challenge of commanding with the occupation of Columbia, South Carolina. His actions in Columbia once again damaged his reputation. Upon the Union Army's entrance into Columbia, a great fire broke out that tore through the city. Despite various theories as to the origin of the fire, the Union Army shouldered the responsibility of extinguishing the blaze. On February 18, fires quickly spread through the dry city while many drunken Union soldiers pillaged it—the result of alcohol distributed by the city's residents in an attempt to appease the soldiers.⁶⁰ The drunkenness soon escalated within Columbia and Howard, as well as other Union officers, soon realized that stricter security measures would be necessary in order to control the situation.⁶¹

Howard called for a replacement of the drunken provost guard with sober forces from outside of Columbia shortly after 5 o'clock. The next day Howard issued Special Field Order 42, calling out the Provost Guard to use the "utmost vigilance by establishing sufficient guards and patrols to prevent at all cost, even to the taking the life of any refractory soldier, a recurrence of the horrors of last night."⁶² Yet, Howard did not communicate an extreme sense of urgency with these orders and actually lay down for a nap shortly after giving them, even as events rapidly spiraled out of control as the fire consumed the city.⁶³ Once again, Howard failed in his duties as a commanding officer to adequately order his troops. He failed to impress upon his subordinate officers the speed with which the orders needed to be executed in order to bring the situation in Columbia under control and to reduce the amount of pillaging and physical destruction of Columbia that occurred during the lag time between Howard's order and its actual implementation. Additionally, Howard's decision to take a nap during the events possibly only further fueled speculation that Howard did not have the strength to be in a position of such responsibility. Such an interpretation would be consistent with Howard's detractors who

⁵⁸ Holloway, *Howard: The Christian Hero*, 70.

⁵⁹ John Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch*, 75-79.

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United States War Department, *War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Series I, volume 47, part 1, pp. 198-199. (hereafter *O.R.*, I, 47, pt. 1, 198-199.)

⁶¹ Marion Lucas, *Sherman and the Burning of Columbia* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press), 93-94.

⁶² *O.R.*, I, 47, pt. 2, 475.

⁶³ Lucas, *Sherman and the Burning of Columbia*, 93-95.

viewed his religious ideals as effeminate and not consistent with the masculine strength required of a military officer.

In May 1865, Secretary of War Edwin McMasters Stanton offered to Howard the position as Superintendent of the Bureau of Freedmen's Affairs. Stanton made it clear that the offer was the wish of the late President Lincoln. In an article shortly after his appointment, the *New York Times* asked the people of the reconciling United States to "recognize the eminent fitness of... this Christian patriot and soldier."⁶⁴ Yet even at the war's end, Howard still had difficulty reconciling his Christian call to selflessness and humility with his self-aggrandizing career desires. At the end of the war, Washington held victory parades for both the soldiers of the Eastern and Western Theaters. In preparing the Western Theater parade, Sherman asked Howard to relinquish his command of the Army of the Tennessee in favor of Major General John Alexander Logan. Howard could not help but complain that he was the commander of the army and thus desired to be at the head of his men, as well as a visible position from which others could see and appreciate him. Sherman simply responded, "Howard, you are a Christian and won't mind such a sacrifice."⁶⁵ Thus, by the end of the war Howard, in his actions and in the media perception, had once again focused on his Christian faith as a guiding light.

For many, war can be a time of great personal struggle with their faith. Yet for Howard the war, if anything, strengthened his resolve in his God-given mission. For Howard, the role of the "Christian Gentleman" as an idealized form of Victorian manhood influenced every facet of his life during his Civil War service. Although he came across as the pious "Christian General," Howard actually desired the spoils and glories of war that came with promotion to a higher command. Even though Howard held great faith in his mission, he struggled mightily on a personal level as he tried to balance his masculine impulses of aggressive ambition and self-improvement with his nineteenth-century Christian characteristics of self-denial, humility, and self-control. Ultimately, the Civil War was an emotional experience for Howard as he continually moved from one end of the spectrum by pursuing an ambitious record (Gettysburg controversy), to the other end espousing Christian ideals of self-restraint and selflessness. However, the personal struggle that Howard underwent speaks to the larger struggles that all religious men faced in the nineteenth century as they attempted to reconcile the contrasting ideals coming forth from various pulpits throughout the nation. Following the war, Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote on famous generals of the Civil War and noted when discussing Howard that he did not have "the vast intellect and brilliant genius of General Sherman, nor the massive strength and immense tenacious will of General Grant."⁶⁶ Thus, although Howard made a sincere effort to follow in the footsteps of his Christian General predecessors, his ultimate legacy was one of an overly zealous Christian who put faith before service to country. Howard failed over and over again during the Civil War in a

⁶⁴ *New York Times*, May 14, 1865, p. 4.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Howard, *Autobiography* vol 2, 211-12; Judith Relaford, "Glory and Grace: The Civil War Career of the 'Christian General,' Oliver Otis Howard" 155.

⁶⁶ Stowe, *Men of Our Times*, 459.

leadership capacity, first at Chancellorsville, again at Gettysburg, and finally in his handling of the occupation of Columbia, South Carolina.

Yet in all of this, it is important to separate legacy from actuality. The criticism hurled at Howard for his Christian faith and its direct correlation to his performance is uncalled for considering the fact that religious soldiers comprised a sizable minority in the Army—a minority that grew as the war progressed. To chalk up Howard’s failures to his faith is indeed rash. Howard himself may not have been one of the better generals in the Union Army, but his faith and dedication to his country cannot be questioned. As historians continue to examine the role of Howard in the war, perhaps we can place less of an emphasis on Howard’s service in the Civil War. Howard, like all other religious men, struggled as they tried to reconcile the horrors they faced on the battlefield with the larger goals of their God in this "just" war and the role that He played in it. Perhaps Mark Noll put it best when he concluded that the theological crisis that religious men encountered in the Civil War was ultimately settled by the "consummate theologians, the Reverend Doctors Ulysses S. Grant and William Tecumseh Sherman."⁶⁷ To be sure, these men played a vital role in how the Civil War ultimately concluded, but examinations of the struggles over faith of individuals such as Oliver Otis Howard are necessary in any future scholarship in this era to better understand that men like Howard’s ultimate legacy is larger than the war itself, and speaks more to the evolution of Christianity in nineteenth century America and its effect on the interplay between faith and the American soldier.

Oliver Otis Howard

Born	November 8, 1830, Leeds, Maine
Died	October 26, 1909, Burlington, Vermont
Buried	Lakeview Cemetery, Burlington, Vermont
Father	Rowland Bailey Howard
Mother	Eliza (Otis) Howard
Career Milestones	Bowdoin College graduate West Point graduate Professor at West Point Major General in the Union Army rising to command of the Army of the Tennessee Major General in the United States Army Winner of the Congressional Medal of Honor (Fair Oaks, 1862, awarded 1893).

⁶⁷ Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 50.