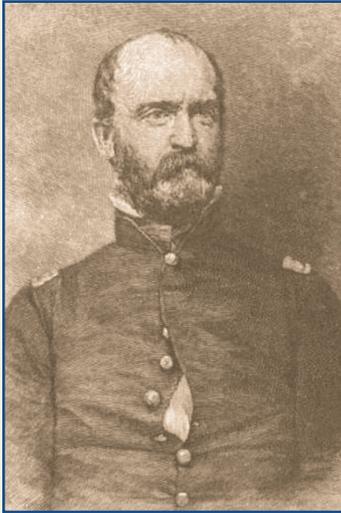


Brigadier General Lewis A. Armistead & Major General Winfield Scott Hancock

Best Friends and Enemies



General Lewis Armistead. From *Battles and Leaders III*.

The life of Lewis Armistead was full of setbacks and disappointments. Before the Civil War, he:

- Was forced to resign from West Point twice. Once was for hitting future Confederate General Jubal Early over the head with a dinner plate. The other time was due to an extensive illness.
- Suffered from Erysipelas, but was successfully treated for this disease which destroyed skin tissue
- Lost his first wife, Cecilia Lee Love, and his four-year old-daughter
- Lost his family farm when it burned to the ground
- Remarried, but lost his infant daughter. Then he lost his second wife in an epidemic of cholera

— *Lewis Armistead Biography*

Lewis Armistead met Winfield Scott Hancock, and his wife, Almira, for the first time in 1844. The three became close friends, and Hancock and Armistead fought together in the Mexican War. The Mexican War became a “training ground” for many future Civil War generals. Hancock and Armistead stayed friends, despite the fact that Armistead went off to fight for the Confederacy and Hancock decided to stay with the Union.

The decision to fight for the Confederacy was a difficult one for Armistead. Like Lee, he felt that his first duty was to protect his home state of Virginia. On the night of his departure, Armistead gave Hancock’s wife his prayer book with *Trust In God And Fear Nothing* inscribed inside, and he gave Hancock a new major’s uniform (*Lewis Armistead Biography*). Neither soldier saw the other again – until Gettysburg.



From the collections of Don Troiani.



Maj. Gen Winfield S. Hancock, U.S.A., was severely wounded during Pickett's Charge, but managed to survive the war. James Wadsworth Family Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. LC-B812-1877

It was July 3rd, 1863, and there they were - two old and dear friends - facing off on opposing ridges, preparing to destroy one another. What do you think Armistead was thinking as he stood in the blazing sun on Seminary Ridge, straining his eyes to see the enemy troops through the acrid battle smoke? He certainly knew that Hancock was there, commanding Meade's Second Corps. Maybe he was wondering if his best friend was, even then, looking back at him from his position on Cemetery Ridge. Maybe Armistead's mind slipped back to the days when they had fought side by side against a common enemy...before they had become one another's enemy.

Time for reminiscing was cut short when Armistead heard Pickett shouting, *Charge the enemy and remember old Virginia!* (*Lewis Armistead Biography*). The men began to march, with deadly precision, toward Cemetery Ridge. As some of the men neared their target at the Angle, Armistead pushed to the front and noting that the colors had been cut down, he placed his hat high on his sword, shouting, *Come on, boys, give them the cold steel! Who will follow me* (*Battle of Gettysburg*, 51)? As Armistead crossed the wall at the center of Cemetery Ridge, he was shot down.

As he lay bleeding, he asked a nearby soldier about Hancock, and was told that his best friend was also wounded. *Not both of us on the same day!* he cried (*Lewis Armistead Biography*). He then said to Captain Henry Bingham, Hancock's aide, *Tell General Hancock, from me, that I have done him and you all a grave injustice* (*Lewis Armistead Biography*).

Armistead died two days later. Hancock had a long recovery, but lived to fight through the war. He ran for president, but was narrowly defeated by James Garfield in 1880 (*Who was Who*, 280).

✓ SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER

Lewis Armistead gave up his long-standing position in the U.S. Army and fought against his best friend. What does this tell you about the loyalties of men and women during this time period?

Given the choice, do you think you would choose to fight for the United States or for your home state? Why?

What would convince you to fight in a war where your best friend was on the opposite side? Some soldiers fought opposite their fathers, brothers, or other family members. Could you do this?