

# Joseph H. Chenoweth

*Joseph Hart Chenoweth, Virginia Military Institute graduate and chair of the Mathematics Department at MAC in 1861, served in the 31st Virginia Regiment and was killed at the Battle of Port Republic, Virginia, on June 9, 1862.*

Joseph H. Chenoweth, born in 1837 in Beverly, West Virginia, to Lemuel Chenoweth, a self-taught civil engineer and bridge builder, was the eldest of 11 children. At Virginia Military Institute, he studied under Thomas J. Jackson, brother of the family's neighbor, Laura Jackson Arnold, who was later to earn the nickname "Stonewall." After graduating in 1859, Joseph stayed on at VMI to teach mathematics, also conducting cadet drills under the direction of Major Jackson.

Chenoweth wrote home regularly, discussing topics ranging from cadet pranks to national politics. Days before Abraham Lincoln's election, he acknowledged to his father that their family had little to lose if emancipation came, but avowed that true patriotism was not based on selfish motives, but on what the commonwealth requires. He stated:

*I shall, in the event of a dissolution of the Union, do and act just as the Virginia desires me to do and act. -*



During these uncertain times, he accepted an appointment to the MAC faculty as chair of mathematics, writing home with delight about his work and the warm welcome extended by the Calvert family and other faculty members.

But duty to Virginia called. In the fall of 1861, Chenoweth was commissioned as a first lieutenant in the Provisional Army. When he was not immediately assigned to active duty, he resigned and enlisted as a private in the 31st Virginia Regiment. He wrote to his mother of joining his "old professor and fellow-in-arms, 'Stonewall' Jackson."

Elected to the rank of major, he quickly distinguished himself in early battles of the Shenandoah Valley Campaign. He kept a diary, reflecting on strategy, camp conditions, loved ones at home, and his own sense of impending death. The last entry dated June 9, 1862, 8:00 AM, reads "I may not see the result, but I think we will gain the victory, although I do not think our men have had enough to eat. I cannot write on horseback."

A few hours later, at the Battle of Port Republic, a Confederate victory, he was shot through the head and buried by his comrades near where he fell.

For years, his grieving family sought to bring his remains home for burial, but they were unsuccessful. His marker in the Beverly, West Virginia, cemetery stands over an empty grave. His mother, Nancy Hart Chenoweth, wore a brooch bearing his image until her death in 1912.

