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CROSSFIRE

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CROSSFIRE

CROSSFIRE is the magazine of the American Civil War Round Table (UK), founded in 1953. It is published three times per year, and is free of charge to members of the UK Round Table.

Articles in Crossfire are written and supplied by members of the Round Table, and contributors who are invited by the Editor to submit material. The opinions expressed in these articles are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Round Table.

Additional information about the ACWRT (UK), and articles that have been published in the current and past issues, can be found on the Round Table's website, www.americancivilwar.org.uk

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- Corporate, advertising, educational, promotional and business: President
- Enrolment, address changes, subscriptions to Crossfire: Membership Secretary.
- Forthcoming activities: Meetings Secretary
- Articles for publication, letters for correspondence page: Editor

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Meetings All meetings start at 1.00 pm UK time (8.00 am EST) unless otherwise indicated
Please check for updates on our website.



6-8 May -	Conference – War in the Trans-Mississippi
18 June -	CSC The Siege of Mobile – Paul Brueske
16 July -	ZOOM Dreams of Empire Shattered – The Baylor –Sibley Campaigns of 1861 -1862 - Ian Mitchell
17 Sept. -	(TBC) CSC Emancipation Proclamation: Was it all it was Cracked Up to Be?- Len Reidel
Date -	TBC Field Trip – Sedan 1870
15 October -	(TBC) ZOOM Gerry Prokopowicz
19 November -	AGM Civil Service Club London

President's report

by Mike Somerville President, ACWRT(UK)

Welcome to our first issue of 2022, and a very special issue it is. Crossfire has always been one of our most important offerings to members. I am not sure if it is unique amongst Civil War Round Tables, but whether it is or not we are immensely proud of it, and Greg Bayne our editor always does a superb job with outstanding articles and scholarship from both our members and guest writers. About a year ago, Greg came up with the idea of having a special themed issue with guest editors. All the Committee members thought this was a brilliant innovation, and also that the Irish involvement in the war would be a good subject to experiment with. Everyone loves the Irish, and in Damian Shiels and David Gleeson we had two associates who perfectly fitted the guest editor profile.

I don't get any special advance sighting of the magazine, but I have seen the list of articles, and it looks like they have done a fantastic job, with a great range of material. Those of you

interested in the politics of the time should find Ryan Keating's article on Fenianism interesting; those of a more military inclination will enjoy Brendan Hamilton's narrative; while I expect David and Damian's articles to strike a more personal note exploring the lives of the soldiers and sailors themselves. The two articles on chaplaincy should be interesting too. Obviously their Catholic faith was a key differentiating factor for the Irish contingents, but the role of regimental chaplains of all denominations and in all wars in supporting soldiers through traumatic and terrifying experiences is one which is largely overlooked. Perhaps most unusual is Catherine Bateson's piece on Irish American songs. Catherine was one of the speakers who stepped up at short notice to make our Conference possible last year with a talk on the influence of Gettysburg on Irish-American culture, which we hope to have available soon on YouTube, so this looks like it might be the book of the film!



Dr. Catherine Bateson

If this issue is successful we'd like to repeat the idea in the future. Please give us feedback on what you think of the experiment, and what themes you would like to see. If you feel passionate about a subject perhaps you might even think about volunteering to act as guest editor – I am sure Greg would welcome a bit of a break again next year!

Mike Somerville

Editor's Report

by Greg Bayne

It seems that Mike has stolen most of my thoughts for this issue! It started as a whimsical idea, a plan to bring in some fresh blood and provide something a bit, well, radical to the table. If anything, it was mainly meant to give me a shake up and think about how the future might unfold. The ACWRTUK family has been widened a bit more with the contributions from these new writers. They are most welcome.

Is everything going well in the ACW world? There seems to be no end to the flow of books on the ACW, the plethora of YouTube videos et al. Yet as Spring arrives, I yearn to return to the battlefields both in the US and WW1 and WW2 this year, if I can. I say that because my main Europe travelling chum, Peter, has a bad hip and it dawned on me that we might



Russian tank stuck in Ukrainian mud

not be able to travel together again. Luckily, the last visit was in Ypres where we drank copious amounts of Trappist beer and giggled. Those are the memories that I want to have.

Even though I have studied military history most of my life, I will not declare myself an expert. I will say however that the Russian HQ should have given me a call before their "special military operation" was launched. I

would have told them that you do not launch an offensive in Winter with the chance of thaw across a region devoid of major roads. Ambrose Burnside will not doubt be debriefing the dead Russian Generals as they pass by the pearly gates on their way

to purgatory. At least the Ukrainian farmers are making the most of it with their free tractor recovery service.

See some of you at Conference in May. I will finish with an Irish toast for the dead.

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace

Special Issue; The Irish in the Civil War

By David T. Gleeson, Damian Shiels – *Northumbria University*.

On September 27, 1863, Navy Quarter Gunner James Carey was laying a "torpedo" [mine] in the Mississippi River about 35 miles below Vicksburg to hinder clandestine Confederate crossings of the great river. When it exploded unexpectedly, a substantial fragment, entered into Carey's right thigh. Though the projectile had left a one inch gash in his leg, the navy surgeon, even after inserting his finger in the wound, could not find the sizeable piece of shrapnel. Four days later Carey died of his wounds on board his vessel, the USS Carondelet. His comrades collected money to pay for his funeral. Carey was just another

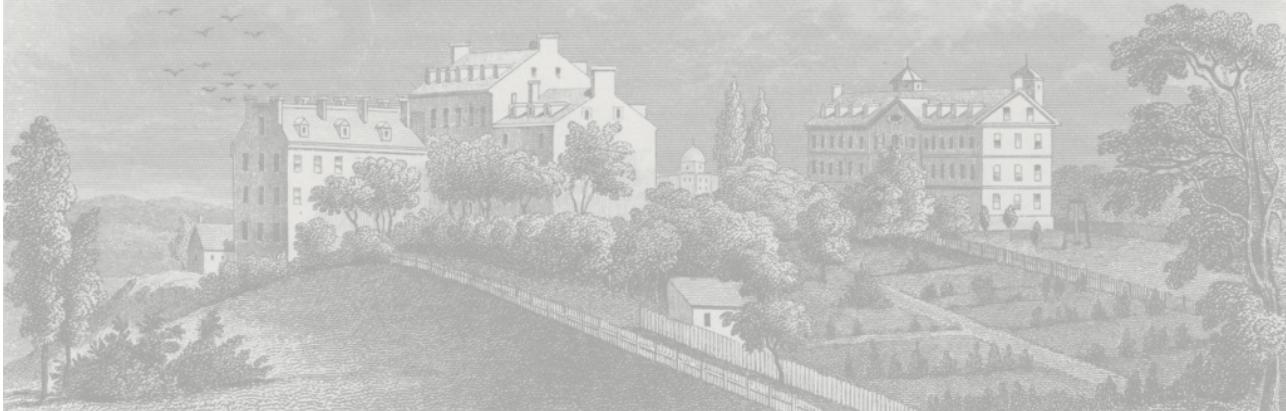
victim of America's bloodiest war. He was not your typical serviceman, however, in that he was an Irish immigrant who had worked in Philadelphia from the early 1850s before enlisting in the navy in late 1861. By that stage he was his family's main breadwinner and his death was devastating to their well-being reducing them to near destitution. The Carey family's experience echoed that of thousands of Irish immigrant families in the United States. Many had fled famine Ireland for a new life of opportunity in the US, but instead ended up dying in a war in their new homes. This special issue of Crossfire, brought to you in

Irish-American History Month, highlights the wide variety of Irish experiences in the Civil War. We call them the stories of the 'Forgotten Irish' since many in Ireland remain unaware that the largest Irish participation in any conflict was the American Civil War (and not World War I as many perceive), with over 220,000 enlisted, 200,000 on the Union side and 20,000 on the Confederate.

All these stories come from dedicated work in the primary sources of the War. We have the 'Official Records' which tell, for the most part, the stories of the Generals. James Carey did not make into these official records, his death not commented on in the reports of his vessel captain. Nor was he or his experience commemorated in memoir, painting, or song like those who fought and died in an Irish 'Green Flag' regiment like the 69th New York Infantry at the Battle of Fredericksburg. Instead, we know Carey's obscure story from digging deep in other records. Some of his service is recorded on the Carondelet's muster rolls and in the pension application from his parents. The Civil War literally brought millions of regular people into government purview and thus into public records. A letter from James Carey to his Irish parents, for example, still sits in the National Archives on Pennsylvania Ave in Washington DC. With the 'digital turn' in history, however, we can now see his record on the muster roll of the USS Carondelet online through the National Archives website and his dependant parents' pension application file is available through Fold3.com. With our new project, on the Civil War Union navy's common sailors, www.civilwarbluejackets.com, generously supported by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council, we seek to transcribe the muster rolls and link them to other navy records such as pension files. As a result, we will be able to describe better the lives of the likes of Carey and the other 118,000 or so Irish, British, African American, and native whites who served in the Civil War navy. We'll use the Citizen Researcher crowd sourcing platform Zooniverse for the transcription. If you're interested in the project or indeed being a volunteer transcriber, keep an eye on

St. E. Bacon. (Master Gunner)	\$82.00
Dan. Lyman. Capt. Optician	4.00
Jas. H. Kemp. Ships (Cocaine)	.5.00
George. Walker. (Master of Arms)	.5.00
~~~~~ Seamen ~~~~~	
Amasa. Derry.	\$10.00
Dennis. McHale	5.00
John. Murphy.	.5.00
Chas. Wilson	.2.00
Joseph. Abbott	.2.00
John. Daugh.	.5.00
Dick. Plamaine	.2.00
George. Meig.	.2.00
Henry. Dumphrey	.5.00
Tom. Silvers	.5.00
Jas. Whelton	.5.00
Samuel. Rosell	.2.00
Tom. Jordan	.2.00
John. Branen	.2.00
Tom. Mahony	.2.00
Tom. Shan	.2.00
John. D. Mc. Hale	.5.00
Robert. Bell	.10.00

The names of some of the crewmen of USS Carondelet who paid to have James Carey's body transported home



Georgetown_University 1850

our project webpage and/or follow us on Twitter @BluejacketsWar.

As readers of Crossfire are aware, and stories such as those of James Carey demonstrate, the Irish experience of the American Civil War encompasses far more than just analysis of the campaigns and actions of units like the Irish Brigade. In that vein, each of the articles that feature in this issue provide us with a slightly different focus, encouraging us to think about the many different ways in which Irish emigrants were influenced by the conflict, and how they in turn impacted the Civil War. To that end, we are fortunate that a number of leading historians currently active in the field have agreed to share some of their work with us. We open the issue with a piece by Dr Catherine Bateson (University of Kent, Editor [www.irishamericancivilwar.com](http://www.irishamericancivilwar.com)) that focuses on wartime Irish ballads, which proliferated during the conflict. Catherine's innovative work demonstrates the extent to which these songs can reveal some of the motivations and concerns of the Irish who took up arms in 1861. For those interested in a more detailed exploration of Catherine's research on this topic, keep an eye out for her upcoming book *Irish American Civil War Songs: Identity, Loyalty, and Nationhood* which is being published by LSU Press this Autumn. Consideration of Irish service in the Civil War has long had strong associations with the Fenian Movement, which had come into being immediately preceding the fighting. In his piece on Fenianism in history and memory, Dr Ryan Keating (California State University, San Bernardino) takes us on a journey both through that movement and the development of his own thoughts on its place within the history of Irish nationalism. Among Ryan's important contributions to Irish history in the Civil War are his *Shades of Green: Irish Regiments, American Soldiers & Local Communities in the Civil War Era*

(Fordham University Press, 2017) and *The Greatest Trials I Ever Had: The Civil War Letters of Margaret and Thomas Cahill* (University of Georgia Press, 2017). The majority of Irish Americans who marched off to war between 1861 and 1865 were Catholics, but for many years the ways in which the Catholic Church and those of the Catholic faith dealt with the conflagration was sadly neglected. Our next two contributions are by historians who have gone a long way towards re-dressing that imbalance. Dr Will Kurtz, most recently the Managing Director and Digital Historian at the John L. Nau III Center for Civil War History at the University of Virginia, shares with us an extract from the writings of David Power Conyngham on the Reverend Thomas Scully, Chaplain of the 9th Massachusetts Infantry. This regiment had the dubious honour of suffering the highest casualties of any Union unit at Gaines' Mill. The extract Will focuses on features in the book based on Conyngham's unpublished manuscript that he edited with Fr. David Endres, entitled *Soldiers of the Cross: The Heroism of Catholic Chaplains and Sisters in the American Civil War* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2019). Will is also the author of *Excommunicated from the Union: How the Civil War Created a Separate Catholic America* (Fordham University Press, 2015). Another who has done much to highlight the experience of Catholics in the conflict is Dr Patrick Hayes, Archivist of the Redemptorists of the United States. With his piece on Father James Sheeran, we cross the lines to examine the experiences of a Chaplain in "Lee's Tigers", and his trials during imprisonment. Patrick published Father Sheeran's extensive diary in his book *The Civil War Diary of Rev. James Sheeran C.Ss.R., Confederate Chaplain and Redemptorist* (Catholic University of America Press, 2016). Turning once again to the front lines, Brendan Hamilton (Editor, [www.irishamericancivilwar.com](http://www.irishamericancivilwar.com))

) follows the fortunes of a group of New York City Zouaves as they found themselves transposed from the hustle and bustle of the Empire City to the wilds of Florida. Brendan focuses much of his work on the experiences of the poorest and most under-privileged immigrants in the military, and here he provides us with a glimpse of life in uniform for some of those Irish who carried the slurs of being "roughs" and "rowdies" to the front. From the shores of Florida to the muddy waters of the Mississippi, Brendan's contribution is followed by the first of our own essays, highlighting some of what we hope to reveal in the Civil War Bluejackets project, based upon a pilot study we conducted in 2020. It looks specifically at the makeup of the crew of James Carey's USS *Carondelet*, and how that changed through the course of the war. We continue with a return to the Confederacy, beginning with a look at John Dooley, the son of a Limerick emigrant who produced one of the most notable accounts of Confederate service in recounting his experiences in the 1st Virginia Infantry. Louisiana was the state that witnessed the greatest number of Irish immigrants under arms in the south, the most famous of whom earned a fearsome reputation in Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, and they are the topic of our penultimate article. Our final essay crosses the lines once again and brings us closer to home, specifically to Newcastle and the North-East, to consider the reminders of American Civil War service—and especially Irish American service—that survive in England today.

We hope this special issue provides a sense of some of the fascinating and intriguing perspectives that are being brought to the study of the Irish today, part of an increasingly vibrant body of work on immigrants in the Civil War era. Happy reading!

David T. Gleeson, Damian Shiels, Northumbria University.

# The Place, Performance and Production of Irish American Civil War Songs

By Dr Catherine V. Bateson

**On 25 June 1864, Dwight's Journal of Music advertised a newly composed song dedicated to the Irish 9th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. Written by Thomas M. Brown, Cead Mille Fealthe – A Hundred Thousand Welcomes gave “a hearty Irish welcome to the returning heroes of the 9th Mass. Regiment” when they arrived back in Boston that summer. Written for “the officers who went, but did not return with the others”, its lyrics were “written and adapted to a favourite Irish melody”, The Pretty Girl Milking Her Cow.¹ There was a commercial reason behind the advertisement for Cead Mille Fealthe. During the conflict, prolific Boston-based publisher Oliver Ditson printed Dwight's Journal of Music. In addition, he sold a significant number of Irish-related wartime ballads and musical content. Dwight's advertising pages not only displayed notices of new music and songs for sale, but also helped Ditson publicise other areas of his production line, including Cead Mille Fealthe. The song's scorebook (with lyrics and pianoforte music) was also sold by Ditson and advertised in Dwight's the day after the 9th Massachusetts mustered out of Union Army service.**

In keeping with the fast output of Civil War songs about particular events during the conflict, the lyricist Brown and publisher Ditson worked quickly to print, advertise and sell Cead Mille Fealthe in time for the regiment's return to Boston and celebrations held in their honour. The song was also performed at these events. It was one of many other such examples. During the Civil War, an estimated 11,000 songs and ballads were produced, with over 150 singing directly about the Irish experience of the war, military service, views on politics, and impressions of the conflict. These sources offer a fascinating insight into the sentiments and culture of Irish American Civil War history, and the place, production and publication of Irish music's shaping of

American culture more broadly in the mid-nineteenth century.

The fundamental reason why there were so many specific Irish-related wartime ballads was because the genre of Irish music and song was already popular across the United States of America in the 1800s. Established Irish music and lyric themes circulated from the earliest migrations, and were part of a broader cultural production of ballad sheets and songbooks which developed through the continual use and fusion of many different British, Irish and European balladry traditions predominately from the eighteenth century. By the early 1800s then, it is possible to trace the emergence of surviving music and songs that shaped later cultural outputs heard on Civil War battlefields, in home-front parlours, and at music halls. In particular, songbooks in both the Union and Confederacy included several reprints of famous early nineteenth century traditional Irish songs such as The Last Rose of Summer, The Harp That Once Through Tara's Halls, and The Minstrel Boy.

Indeed, Confederate songsters were so full of references to traditional Irish and Scottish music and songs that it impacted attempts to create newer, Confederate nationalist cultural outputs. In his preface to the 1864 Southern Soldier's Prize Songster (printed in Mobile, Alabama), the publisher W.F. Wisley observed that over the course of the war: “Many songbooks have been issued to supply the great demand for that species of literature in our Army, but they have been almost exclusively collections of European or Yankee lyrics, ill-suited, if not adverse, to the spirit and purposes of our people”. In an attempt to aid Confederate cultural nationalism, Wisley stated he was “determined to use his efforts to produce a collection of original songs by Southern writers...credible to the heart and mind of our country”. Nonetheless, the continual presence of what he called lyrical “foreign intrusion” of European musical tunes made attempts to create



a separate Confederate musical culture unsuccessful.² Irish traditional melodies and songs – as well as other tunes and ballads from the British Isles and Europe – were too well established across American culture to be removed fully, even after Confederate secession.

A paramount example of this was The Bonnie Blue Flag – first written by the Scots-Irish song-writer Harry Macarthy in spring 1861. This massively popular Confederate anthem – which also gained dominant circulation and pro-Union versions in the federal North – was set to a much older traditional Irish tune of The Irish Jaunting Car. Part of the reason it was so successful was not just the catchy “Hurrah, Hurrah, for Southern Rights Hurrah! Hurrah for the Bonnie Blue Flag that Bears a Single Star!” chorus. It was because it was set to a very well established traditional Irish folk tune that had been present in the United States since the early 1850s. The Bonnie Blue Flag is a form of contrafacta – a form of music where lyrics are set to much older and familiar tunes. This was the pre-radio way of ensuring new lyrics gained the most musical impact!

Irish soldiers themselves engaged at every level in the music and song culture of army life. In autumn 1862, Corporal John Dougherty of the Union Army Irish Brigade's 63rd New York Infantry gave his mother an account of the general singing atmosphere of the Union Army's



Irish regiments: "The cheerful spirit of the Irish Brigade made the road seem short...on the march or in camp...the Brigade [is] the envy of the rest of the army – they would go along in silence looking sad while the Irish men would be laughing and singing."³ This musical joviality manifested itself in countless ways during the conflict.

As well as singing at gatherings, in groups, and on the march to boost morale, soldiers also sang in concert-style performances, often in winter quarters or in prisons. In his 1863 prison memoir, the 69th New York State Militia Irish-born commander Michael Corcoran recounted how his fellow First Battle of Bull Run prisoners of war put on several concerts for their Confederate captors in their South Carolina prison holdings to pass the time. On one occasion in October 1861, Corcoran described singing patriotic American Union songs to keep prison morale up – and to goad their southern captors: "The audience of several Confederate officers...seemed highly delighted with the performance, until...we got to the middle verse of The Star Spangled Banner, only a solitary one of them remained...A rebel fears the stirring notes of The Star Spangled Banner."⁴

This was not an exclusive Irish habit either. A Missouri Union officer called William Rogers recounted a memory from the middle of the war about how his time

in captivity was often passed "together with singing", and by "giving concerts every evening". Like Corcoran, Rogers and his fellow captives performed to their Confederate prison guards, who: "Seemed to like our army songs as well as we did. No matter how hard the words hit them they would applaud...and we used to sing Rally round the flag, boys, putting unnecessary emphasis on 'Down with the traitor and up with the star.'"⁵

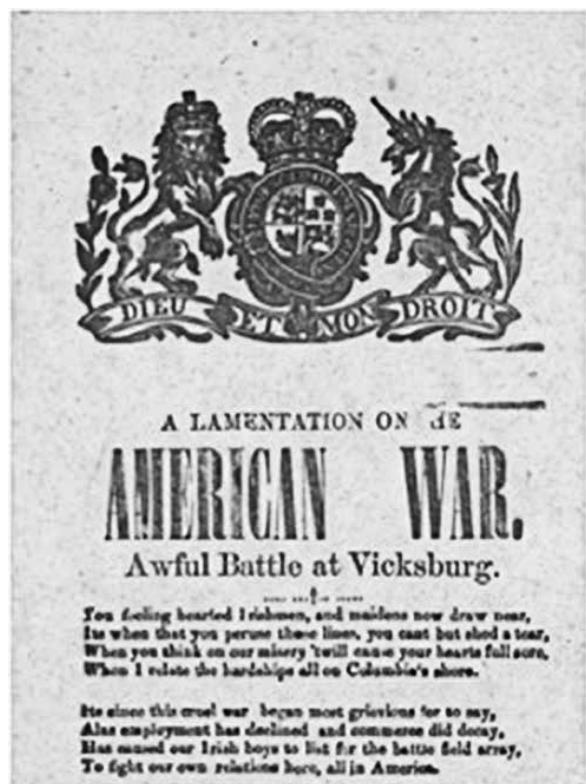
Singing on marches and military concert-like performances on front-line and in prisoner-of-war environments were essentially about community morale. They were public displays of engagement with musical military culture. Performances could also be heard and found around more private campfire settings as soldiers gathered to sing, share, play and create the music and ballads of the American Civil War. This environment generated intimate connections to the lyrics being articulated, and strengthened soldiering identity and community, especially in ethnic regiments.

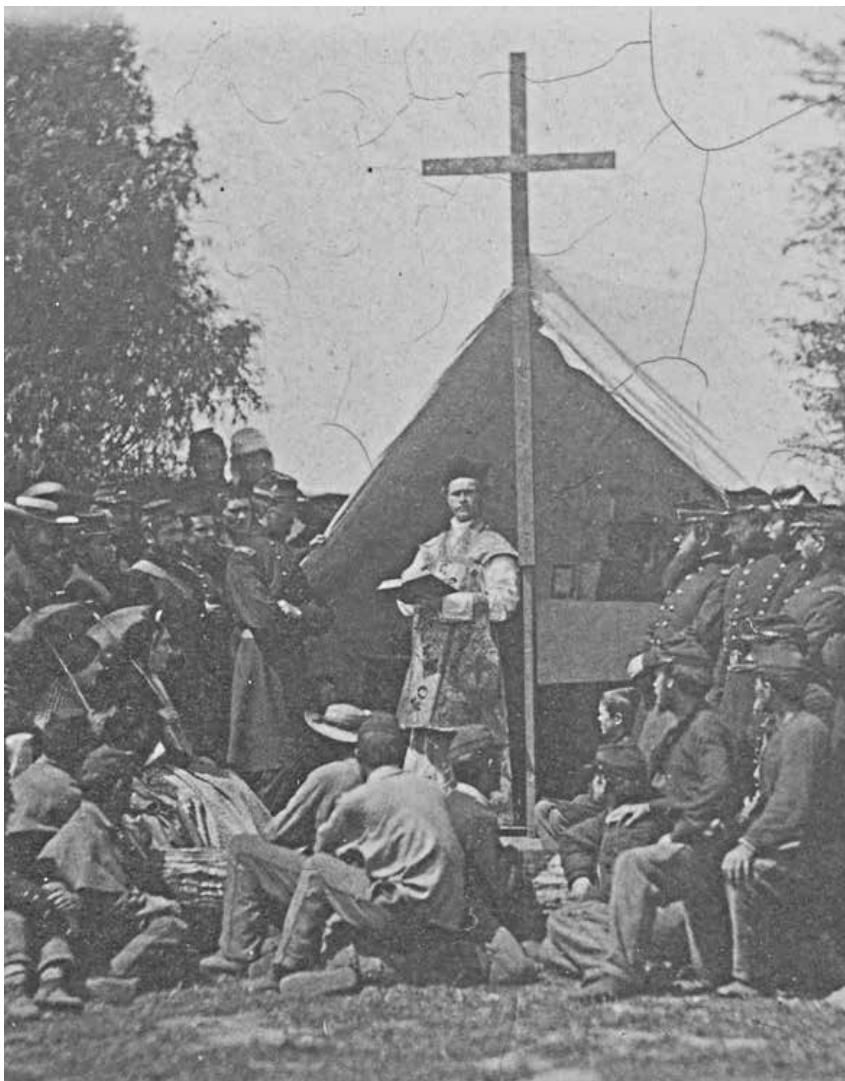
As well as playing instruments, soldiers also sent home their own written ballad compositions, creating a two-way form of lyrical distribution between the front-line and home-front. Many remained on the pages of private correspondence, but some songs found their way to printing houses and were published on songsheets and in songsters that then spread these compositions through society. They could also be published in contemporary newspapers but most of all, songs circulated from the front-line via oral culture transmission in home-front performance settings in home parlours and on music hall stages.

If anything, the war emphasised an already-established nineteenth century cultural marketplace that loved to sell two particular forms of song print culture ephemera above all others: song sheets and songster song books. Songsters

especially were valued items – soldiers would take particular care of these items as prized wartime mementoes. In one copy of the Virginian Songster, a Confederate 3rd Missouri Infantry soldier wrote in pencil on the verso of the title cover noting its purchase on 1 August 1863. He added the details: "Bought this Book at Augusta Georgia while on my way to Va. [Virginia]." He also adapted the songbook by pasting two songsheets to the insides of the outer cover, thus expanding its ballad repertoire. One of these additions was a copy of The Irishman's Shanty.⁶

Irish soldiers in the American Civil War most especially turned to song to sing key sentiments messages about their war service. The 69th New York State Militia (and later Regiment) and Michael Corcoran formed many of the first ballad productions in the early years of the war. In particular, their example, fighting service, and experience at Bull Run regularly appear on wartime songsheets. They set the tone for the main sentiments heard in Irish American Civil War songs about their experiences on the battlefields. Irish soldiers fought at every major battlefield of the war, but some like Bull Run, Antietam, Fredericksburg and Gettysburg were most noteworthy. The early wartime ballad Glorious 69th demonstrated how keen the Irish were to fight for the Union. The song praised





*The 69th New York State Militia (and later Regiment)*

“the Stars and Stripes and the Boys in the Shamrock green”, thus linking American and Irish symbolism together – a recurring theme at the heart of many Irish wartime cultural outputs.⁷ The Union’s Irish Brigade additionally formed their own enormous lyrical song focus – indeed there are numerous Irish Brigade related songs, all mostly with the same title, because the unit became synonymous with virtually all Irish wartime service in the Union states.

All Union Irish American Civil War songs were united by the same dominant lyrical sentiment. They expressed Irish soldiering and home-front loyalty to the United States. They sang about how the American Union was their home nation to fight for – and its ideas of freedom, liberty, democracy and republican unity were inspirational and had been adopted by the diaspora as their own ideals

too. Countless lyrics sang of how the Irish would “fight hand to hand until we plant the Stars and Stripes in Dixie land.”⁸ They would take the fight to the southern states, beat them heroically on the battlefield, be the main actors in ending Confederate secession, and bring together the country into a reunified body once again. Meanwhile in the Confederacy, very few songs sang about the Irish contribution to the war effort. In saying that, one song showed that Irish Confederates were just as passionate about celebrating their “Celtic race, from their battle-place” who charged against “dastard Yankees, base and hollow”. It went so far as to label Union Irish supporters as “Lincoln snakes.”⁹

Of all Irish American Civil War songs, though, Pat Murphy of the Irish Brigade (1863) captures this spirited message of Irish fighting service and sacrifice the best in just a handful of its lyrics:

*The morning soon came  
and poor Paddy awoke,  
On the Rebels to have  
satisfaction.*

*The drummers were beating  
the devil’s tattoo  
Calling the boys into action.  
Then the Irish Brigade  
in the battle were seen,  
Their blood in our cause  
shedding freely;  
With their bayonet charges  
they rushed on the foe  
With a cry for the land of  
Shillaly.¹⁰*

Dr Catherine Bateson is an Associate Lecturer of American History at the University of Kent. Her book, “Irish American Civil War Songs: Identity, Loyalty, and Nationhood” – which discusses the culture, sentiments, and history of the topics discussed in this article about Irish wartime songs – will be published by LSU Press in Autumn 2022.

1 Cead Mille Fealthe Advertisement, Dwight’s Journal of Music, A Paper of Art and Literature (Boston: Oliver Ditson), 25 June 1864.

2 The Southern Soldier’s Prize Songster: Containing Material and Patriotic Pieces (Chiefly Original) Applicable to the Present War (Mobile: W.F. Wisley, 1864), p.3-4.

3 John Dougherty to Ann Dougherty, 4 September 1862, Application WC93207 in the Approved Pension Applications of Widows and Other Dependents of Civil War Veterans (US National Archives).

4 Michael Corcoran Diary, 16 October 1861, in The Captivity of General Corcoran: The Only Authentic and Reliable Narrative of the Trials and Sufferings Endured, During his Twelve Months’ Imprisonment in Richmond and Other Southern Cities, by Brigadier-General Michael Corcoran, the Hero of Bull Run (Philadelphia: Barclay & Co, 1864), p.65.

5 William H. Rogers, The Great Civil War – William H. Rogers’s Personal Experiences (Boston: Bivouac, 1888), p6; p9.

6 Virginia Songster (Richmond: J.W. Randolph, 1863).

7 Glorious 69th (New York: James Wrigley, 1861).

8 Glorious 69th.

9 Unknown Lyricist, Song for the Irish Brigade, in Hopkins’s New-Orleans 5 Cent Song-Book (New Orleans: John Hopkins, c.1861), pp. 14-15.

10 Unknown Lyricist, Pat Murphy of Meagher’s Brigade, Boston: Horace Partridge and James Wrigley, New York, 1863.

# Fenianism in History & Memory

By Ryan W. Keating – *California State University, San Bernardino*

**On the night of November 24, 1865, Fenian Chief James Stephens, with the aid of two sympathetic jailers, made a dramatic escape from Richmond Gaol. Using keys supplied by sympathetic nationalist and Dublin Metropolitan Police Office Michael Breslin, Stephens escaped his cell and scaled a seventeen-foot wall using a rope that had been thrown over by his accomplices on the outside. Reaching the top, Stephens “slid down outside with his back to the wall, being caught by [John] Devoy and others to break the fall.” He made his way to Paris where he watched from afar as the rebellion he had long planned for sputtered and died; succumbing to crippling disorganization, poor leadership, and English power. Stephens’s arrest had occurred two weeks earlier, the culmination of two months of British roundups of known Fenians that began with the September 15 raid of the offices of the Fenian newspaper the *Irish People* in an attempt to silence the growing nationalist discontent and quell the pending rebellion. Stephens escaped the raid, but was captured in early November at Fairfield House, on Highfield Road near Dublin. “The arrest,” noted Colonel Eamon Broy, who had been charged in 1919 with archiving G Division secret reports from 1840-1900 for Michael Collins, “under such circumstances and at such a time must have had a demoralizing effect on the Fenians.” Perhaps it did, for the movement appeared to devolve quickly after 1865 and, despite the daring escape of the founder of the movement, the Fenians were left without true leadership and the lack of organization undermined their plans for rebellion.**



*James Stephens, Irish Republican*

Some years later, still in exile, the weary and aging nationalist took pen to paper to record his memoirs. The result, a manifesto aptly titled *Fenianism; Past and Present* provides Stephens' own account of his role in the organization of the Fenian movement and his thoughts on the direction of the nationalist movement. Fenianism was truly complex in its message, organization, and impact, and the movement that Stephens founded in the late 1850s had a significant impact

on the direction of Irish nationalism that continues to this day. Stephens recognized this. As he watched in 1881, with dismay, his comrades undertake a dynamite campaign across England, he noted succinctly that: “If Fenianism had not arisen in 1858 and the succeeding years—not to galvanize the corpses but to put a new soul under its ribs of death, it is at least problematical if the national feeling would be so strong and powerful in Ireland as it is at the present hour. If contemporary history be written aright for the benefit of posterity, I think the historian of the future will give Fenianism credit or discredit as the case may be— for having intervened at the proper or improper moment in the Anglo-Irish crisis, and for having saved the cause of Irish nationality from final [and] irremediable destruction.” In a very real sense, the old Fenian was spot on. His movement was vital to the preservation of Irish nationalism and if the seven men executed by the British in the wake of the Easter Rising in 1916 could be considered the fathers of the Irish state, helping to ignite a sense of national consciousness across the island, then certainly James Stephens was the grandfather.

I happened upon the Fenian movement as a graduate student at Trinity College, Dublin in 2005. I applied to, and attended, Trinity for two reasons which, looking back, were indirectly

tied to the Fenian movement (even if I did not realize it at the time). I grew up with a keen, if rudimentary, sense of Irish nationalism and the Irish question, and my passion for the subject was cultivated from a very young age by my father, an avid amateur historian who would play Clancy Brothers albums on Saturday mornings and revel me with tales of his father and grandfather, who (allegedly) had been staunch supporters of the Irish Republican Army in the San Francisco Bay Area and used their farm in Sonoma as a meeting place for Irish-American nationalist activities. I also spent my childhood reading novels by Jack Higgins, whose main character, Sean Dillon glorified the Irish Republican Army and the nationalist cause (until, of course, he started working for the British government). I moved on, as I got older, to more nuanced novels, the most important to me being *Trinity and Redemption* by Leon Uris, both of which I have since reread countless times and which further stoked my interest in and passion for the study of Irish history.

As a young academic, my interest in the development of Irish nationalism was further influenced by an outstanding scholar, Jim Bidwell, who challenged me to think deeply about the a priori existence of the nation state and introduced me to Eric Hobsbawm, Ernst Gellner, Walker Connor, and Benedict Anderson, among others. The broad question here—and one that I think underscores my understanding of Fenianism, its successes, failures, and longevity in the shared memory of Irish nationalism—surrounds the idea of national consciousness and the creation of the nation state and, more specifically, the idea that the nation is a modern “constructed” entity and nationalism is deliberately cultivated. Was, for example, Owen Roe O’Neill truly an Irish nationalist driven by a deep desire to unify “Ireland” as we understand it in the modern sense, or were his acts more closely linked to period norms surrounding feudalism, title, and power that became mythologized and coopted in order to ground the modern nationalist movement firmly in the past to give historical justification to the Irish nation? Certainly, similar nationalist

narratives permeate the historical memory of most modern nation states and provide vital links between past and present but also warrant inquiry from scholars to better understand the nuances of the past and the ways in which history was crafted and used to promote agendas, and they are vital to the legitimizing the Irish national legacy. These sorts of questions, backed by, in my mind, the lyrics from the Clancy Brothers album *Irish Songs of Rebellion*, drove me to Ireland in 2005.

The fascinating thing about studying Irish history in Ireland is the proximity between past and present and the ways in which memory lingers, permeates, and defines Irish society. The Irish hold their history dear and struggle, at times, with the problematic contradictions that exist in their past and impact their present. The emergence of the Irish nation is, in many ways, an ideal case study in the nation building process, still incomplete, with the struggles and challenges still raw and exposed while the division between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland remains a hotly contested topic and the sectarian violence that defined most of the 20th century still swirls just below the surface. As scholars, the lengths that the Irish government went to record the experiences of Irish men and women who fought in the war for independence and the accessibility of those witness statements has provided invaluable context to our understanding of the motives that drove the war for independence and inadvertently, for those who have scoured those pages, showcases the lengthy connections that existed between the young men and women who fought the British in 1919 and their fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers. The existence of these statements, to me, underscores the value that the Irish hold for their history, which is only reinforced by the outstanding work of Irish historians, who I have found to be among the most thoughtful of scholars and eloquent of writers.

For me, an outsider looking in, Dublin is

a wonderful, yet odd, city where the long shadows of history linger, and mingle with the fast-paced move towards the future; but a place of wealth and technology fail to cover completely the scars of strife and struggle, and the hopes for the future appear tempered by the unsettled past. I found, quickly, that the question of Irish nationalism and nation building was far more nuanced than I imagined and in conversations with some of the faculty members at Trinity, including Anne Dolan and Eunan O'Halpin, I was encouraged to look at the Fenian movement in part because of its trans-Atlantic presence and because, at the time, the Fenians had been relegated to footnotes in the nationalist narrative, wedged between O'Connell and the Young Ireland Movement and Parnell, with their "rising" in 1867 seen by many as a comic bungling rather than a real threat to English authority in Ireland. At the same time, though, my research on the Fenians became part of something larger, in my mind. Ironically, perhaps, the farther I get in time and distance from those days in Dublin, the clearer the history of the Fenian movement becomes to me, and the more convinced I am that Stephens was right in his own assessment of the movement he founded. I say this all to give some context to the place of Fenianism in Irish history and culture as I understand it, a vital piece of the broader narrative of the formation of the Irish nation and one that lingers to this day as a fundamental

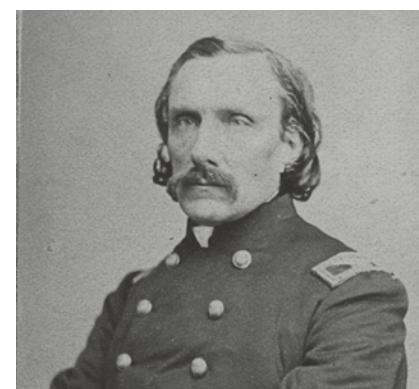


HQ of the Fenian Brotherhood

component of the culture of Irish nationalism.

In 1848, James Stephens played an inconsequential role in the Young Ireland uprising. So inconsequential was his role that a decade later, as Stephens attempted to cobble together a trans-Atlantic movement focused on Irish independence none of the then-exiled Young Ireland leaders took him seriously, an attitude that greatly angered the self-proclaimed Fenian Chief. Nevertheless, he took flight, escaping from Ireland to Paris where he became a part of the radical underground of that city. Though little is known about his time

there, he emerged eight years later and, in 1856, returned to Ireland "to commence the struggle anew." Walking across the island, Stephens found, to his dismay, a nation "politically dead." "She had been," he wrote, "so cruelly and so bitterly disappointed; the hopes she cherished had been so ruthlessly blasted, and the roseate dreams that haunted her fancy and fired her lot of Celtic blood turned out to be so many grinning phantasms to mock her degradation, and laugh at her despair, that she had given up the ghost and was at last, to all intents, and purposed, one of England's re-conquered provinces." Failed first, through agitation, by O'Connell and then, militantly, by Young Ireland, the "Irish people were woefully disappointed in their national hopes and aspirations." He returned to Paris intent on revitalizing that movement.



Fenian leader John O'Mahony during his time in command of the 99th

Stephens allied himself with John O'Mahony, a former member of Young Ireland and a scholar who had achieved some acclaim for his translation of Geoffrey Keating's *History of Ireland* from Gaelic to English. O'Mahony, Stephens believed, was "absolutely far [and] away the first patriot of the Irish race," and a firm nationalist who was deeply committed "not only in the justice of the Irish cause, but in the manhood and power of the people to make it triumph." Together, they conceptualized a trans-Atlantic nationalist movement in Ireland the United States, whereby O'Mahony would organize and openly train the Irish-American diaspora abroad with plans to return to Ireland to support a rebellion at home that would be ignited by members of a secret militant organization there. O'Mahony suggested they call themselves "Fenians," a name "borrowed [from the] annalists of old who record the fact that the ancient militia of the Kingdom of Erin were known as 'Fenians' throughout the length and breadth of the land...Besides being faithful and devoted guardians of their country's honour and liberty, they were adept in the military exercises of the period." According to legend, these warriors were led by the mythical Irish warrior Fionn mac Cumhaill, or Finn McCool. The name was no accident and, in taking it, Stephens and O'Mahony sought to establish the legitimacy of their movement while simultaneously justifying their quest for independence by the historical legacy of the mythical Irish nation state.

The pair divided the responsibilities, with Stephens returning to Ireland in overall command of the organization and determined to build a secret military organization under the noses of British authority. O'Mahony travelled to Brooklyn where he was tasked with organizing the disparate diaspora for the liberation of their homeland. "Thus do the exiled Irish suffer," O'Mahony wrote in 1860. "Scattered over the earth, they are the victims of accident, the slaves of capital, the bondsmen of adverse circumstances, mated with poverty and hardship, and toil to make wealth for heedless strangers." It was the Fenians "who have pledged our lives to the rescue of the old land and hope to see the flag of Erin again born." "The Irish at home and abroad, he wrote on another occasion, "hold fast to the good old ship while a plank remains. She has yet broadsides in her lockers

and boarding pikes on deck!" Stephens echoed these remarks. Fenianism, he wrote, "symbolized by two principles: firstly that Ireland has a natural right to independence, and secondly that the right could only be won by armed revolution." In spite of the seriousness with which these men undertook their avowed tasks, history has not been kind to their goals, especially when considering the American branch. The failed Fenian invasions of Canada in the late 1860s have been called "near comic-opera bungling" and "quick, futile, and embarrassing," and Matthew Frye Jacobson has stated that Feminism "seemed to some to demonstrate the futility of agitation for national independence."

The Fenian movement failed to achieve its avowed goals of achieving Irish independence in the 1860s. This is an undeniable fact, and the risings—both in Ireland and in Canada—were quickly suppressed. It is easy, then, to dismiss—as many scholars have—the seriousness of the movement, especially in the United States, where the common narrative attributed to the Irish diaspora is that of assimilation and, thus, the ethnonationalism espoused by members of this group is easily downplayed as a cultural proclivity rather than a serious transnational identity and ideology. Yet, the rhetoric of these men and their importance to the rekindling of a modern nationalist sentiment across Ireland and the United States should not be ignored. Their hopes for the creation of an independent nation were driven by their own personal convictions and dedication to this cause above all else and the seriousness with which they undertook their work was acknowledged at the time and should not be ignored in our own reflections on the movement. Republican John O'Leary, who was vital to the growth of the Irish Republican Brotherhood in the wake of Stephens' second exile, recalled of the early years of organization that "without him [Stephens] nothing could have been done, and with him everything was done that could well be done under the circumstances." Joseph Denieffe, another of Stephens' Lieutenants and an important intermediary for the Irish and Irish-American branches, recalled that the Fenian Chief was "the only practical man I had met in the Movement up to that time. there was an earnestness in his every move. He was all that could be desired as a leader. If he had continued

so, and lived up to the doctrine he promulgated . . . we would have a different state of affairs now." O'Mahony was equally dedicated to the cause. Hardly one of the "drawing room rebels" that Stephens so despised—men such as Thomas Francis Meagher and John Mitchel who Stephens bemoaned used the national question for their own personal gain but who could not be found when it was time to act. Rather, he was "a far greater patriot than myself," and one who could be relied upon to support the goals of Irish freedom, no matter what.

From Brooklyn, O'Mahony began the systematic organization of Irish Americans and founded the newspaper *The Phoenix*, a journal that "shall be studied so that every thing it contains shall be subordinate to the one principle of which it is the exponent" the cause of Irish Nationalism. In Ireland, Stephens began to organize in secret structuring the Irish Republican Brotherhood (as the Irish branch of the Fenian movement was termed) in a manner to prevent infiltration by British spies. Each area was commanded by a "center" (As) under whom served Lieutenants (Bs) who commanded sergeants (Cs) who were directly in command of any number of soldiers. The structure, in theory, meant that individual soldiers only knew their direct commander and thus in theory, if infiltrated, only a portion of the force could be compromised. At the same time, Stephens oversaw the public dissemination of Fenian ideology through the publication of the *Irish People* in Dublin. Both newspapers provide important evidence of the ways in which Fenians cultivated and helped to imagine a nationalist identity at home and abroad, and reflect Stephens's own commitment to the cause, succinctly noted in his journal: "Since the day I became a soldier of Liberty- I should proudly, nay joyfully, have given up...life for my country."

I think that I was drawn to Stephens and the Fenian movement because I saw in his leadership and their organization the true seeds of the Irish nation were planted at a key moment in time. Stephens and the other editors of the *Irish People*, John O'Leary, Thomas Clark Luby, and Charles Kickham utilized this platform to foster a sense of Irishness among the people; effectively creating, on their pages, an imagined Irish community through a shared history of triumph and tragedy. Historian R.V.

Comerford has suggested the growth of Fenianism was not due to there being "tens of thousands of Irishmen eager to "take up the gun" for an Irish Republic, but because there were tens of thousands of young Irishmen in search of self-realisation through appropriate social outlets." Such analysis is a convenient way to excuse the failure of the Fenian Rising while simultaneously undercutting Stephens's leadership of the movement, for although the Fenian Chief was adamant that he had nearly 200,000 men in Ireland ready to take up arms against the British those men never materialized. Nor did any sizable number of Irish-American soldiers land on the shores of their homeland to support the rebellion—though accounts do suggest there were a considerable number of Civil War veterans running around the island and the O'Donovan Rossa Archives held at Catholic University in Washington D.C. provide scholars with a wealth of information about the efforts undertaken by Fenians in the United States to organize and support the rising in Ireland. t

The Fenians were, in fact, deeply committed to their goals and worked diligently to both organize their efforts and foster an ideological connection to, and justification for, the Irish state. Fenianism, as it was conceived and as it manifested in during the 1860s was not intended to spark debate or to appeal to the majority. It was a radical nationalist organization that sought the support only of those men who were willing to sacrifice themselves for the greater goal of Irish independence. The Fenians recognized that Ireland, in desperate need of salvation, had nowhere to turn save those at home and Ireland's exiled sons in the United States and their nationalism often exhibited radical themes stressing self-sacrifice for the imagined nation. By "dying for Ireland," the Irish Fenian newspaper the *Irish People* claimed "each falling generation bequeaths to its successor the same sacred cause and heroic spirit, and the fresh generation does battle for the hallowed trust with the souls of men who nobly love their land." Irishmen, O'Mahony wrote, as civil war loomed large on the horizon in America, "have no right to be setting themselves up as the champions of any other nation so long as a miserable foreign garrison and a handful of traitors are permitted to rob and oppress them in their own country." In Ireland, the *Irish People* echoed this rhetoric. "The real glory

of our cause," the editors proclaimed, "must be sought for in the action of the People alone. From the very beginning to this day, they have been the same; single-hearted, self-forgetting, self-denying, faithful and devoted, their constant aspiration have been after freedom, their constant aim and struggle to win it at any risk or sacrifice." "There is a word which should be engraven upon the hearts of all men who struggle for freedom," the same editors boldly proclaimed in another editorial, "and that word is self-sacrifice." This sacrifice was vital to the future of the nation. "By dying for Ireland," the Fenians believed, "each falling generation bequeaths to its successor the same sacred cause and heroic spirit, and the fresh generation does battle for the hallowed trust with the souls of men who nobly love their land." We can understand the development of nationalism in two distinct, at times, interrelated phases. The first involves the conceptualization of the nation both as a physical space and an imagined ideal. The second and perhaps far more important, is the "selling" so to speak of that idea to the people, for without their support the nation only exists in the hearts and minds of a few. The challenges that Stephens and O'Mahony faced in pivoting this movement were extraordinary. As Stephens himself noted, the nationalist sentiment in Ireland was waning in the later years of the 1850s, undoubtedly impacted in Ireland by the shared horrors of the Famine—the aftermath of which still defined the Irish landscape. In the United States, where Fenian organization occurred openly and in celebrated ways, Irish immigrants



The I.R.A. at War 1916–1923

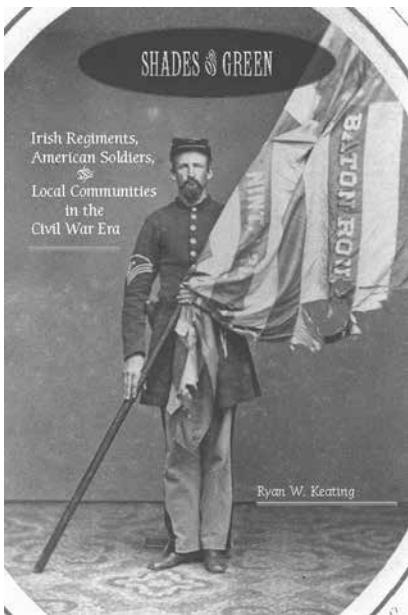
PETER HART

OXFORD

cegal

and their children still struggled with the duality of their identity and loyalties, which were tested and strained with the onset of the American Civil War in 1861. By the time the rising occurred in Ireland in 1867, more than 150,000 Irish had already fought for four years in defense of the Union, and by the time cannons fell silent, the sad reality was that the militant nationalism that we see in the United States in the four years before the outbreak of the Civil War had quieted, likely a result of physical weariness of the men who had so hoped to use that war as a training ground for the eventual liberation of Ireland. In spite of this, the seedlings of nationalism planted by Stephens and O'Mahony begin to sprout. In the United States, O'Mahony, on the pages of *The Phoenix* secured the allegiance to the cause from more than 200 militia officers from regiments across the nation, including Michael Corcoran and the much heralded 69th New York State Militia and Fenian organization expanded rapidly before and during the Civil War.

In Ireland, the secrecy of the organization efforts makes its growth slightly harder to determine, but letters to the editor of the *Irish People* captured by British authorities when it raided the offices of the newspaper in 1865 shine some light into the ways this ideology permeated the consciousness of the people. "From life without freedom oh! Who would not fly for one day of freedom oh!," wrote one reader of the *Irish People* concluding eloquently: "Who would not die hark hark! Tis the trumpet, the call of the brave The death-song of tyrants and the dirge of the salve/Our Country his bleeding, oh! Fly to her aid/ One arm that defends is worth [all] that invade" In Galway another reader reported the "feeling of this ancient Citie in saying that many are ready 'to take the green hill side and avenge their country's wrongs' . . . 'Ireland for the Irish' now reverberates through our hills and valleys/ The ancient spirit of the Celt is still unbroken despite seven centuries of persecutions unparalleled in the annals of any country in the world." In Killeanule another reported that "Some time ago (about twelve months) I did not know what the "Irish People" meant or what it aimed at. I know better now. I suppose it is aiming at Irish independence at present and is stirring up in the hearts of "Ireland's sons" her long widowed nation. . . . Come Irishman," the writer concluded, "Come Irishmen, unite



Keating *Shades of Green*

together and heaven will bless you with a smile. Come, rally forth from grove (and) heather for to free our own 'Green Isle.'" Stephens' movement had lit anew a sense of nationalism that some began to term "Fenian Fever."

If we look back over the history of modern Irish nationalism, with the Easter Rising and subsequent war for independence as the culmination of the efforts of state building, we can certainly point to specific individuals or groups who defined those efforts and stand tall in the historical memory of state-building. The lineage is seemingly clear: from Wolfe Tone and Robert Emmet, to Daniel O'Connell and Charles Stewart Parnell, and then Arthur Griffith to Pádraig Pearse, with each building on the efforts and legacy of their predecessors to cultivate a national consciousness that was tied to both a unique Irish identity and a shared hatred for the consequences of English rule. Yet, the track to independence was hardly linear, and each movement struggled to achieve a critical mass of support while also fighting to maintain itself in the face of both British, Protestant, and at times Catholic, subversion. The success of the Irish Republican Army during the War for Independence (1919-1921) and the creation of the Irish Free State was an astounding feat, even more so given the political climate and sentiment across the island at the time of the Easter Rising.

Peter Hart, in his seminal text *The I.R.A. at War, 1916-1923* posits an interesting supposition when looking at the disconnect that seemingly existed between the leaders of the rising and most Irish men and women in 1916. Simply put, many in the immediate aftermath, saw the Rising as a betrayal of Irish men on the Western Front and

a tone deaf act of defiance perpetrated by a few radicals. "How," Hart asks, "did the small band of defeated and unrepresentative Easter rebels capture their host organizations—Sinn Fein and the Volunteers—and turn them into successful revolutionary institutions?" Peter Sommerville-Large points to visceral and the immediate reaction of Dubliners to the rebels as emblematic of broader sentiment in Ireland at the time. "Everyone of yez should get a dose of capital punishment, and a bloody good kick up the arse after," one woman cried at a group of captives. "Bleedin' bastards," another cried, "my husband's out in the war fightin' for you bowsies and yez go and yez stab them in the back." Yet, the decision to execute the leaders of the Rising had immediate and far reaching consequences that truly unified the Irish nation for the first time. In the wake of the executions poet Francis Ledwidge eloquently wrote "In Dublin town they murdered them, like dogs they shot them down/ God's curses by on you England, God strike you, London town." Bishop O'Dwyer of Limerick wrote that the British "regime has been one of the worse and blackest chapters in the history of the misgovernment of this country." For the sake of space here, we can agree the execution of the leaders of the Easter Rising fundamentally changed the course of Irish nationalism in the 20th century and served as the catalyst for independence.

Yet, Fenianism remained a strong force in the tumultuous undercurrents of the Irish national question. The opening scene of the novel *Trinity* is set in 1885 at the deathbed of Kilty Larkin, "the oldest survivor of the great famine, to say nothing of being a hero of the Fenian Rising of '67 who had been jailed and fearfully tortured for his efforts." I gave little weight to this passage when I first read it, but now, in looking back, I see a profound moment here where Leon Uris intimately links the rise of the national consciousness of the novel's main character and Kilty's grandson, Conor Larkin, to Fenianism. Yet, Uris's fiction was hardly the creation of fantasy, for many who joined the renewed struggle for the Irish nation in the early 20th century were a part of this lineage, and were driven to action because of long family connections to the Fenian Movement. Joe Barrett, who served as Brigade Operations Officer for the Mid-Clare Brigade from 1908-1921 recalled that "I was sworn into the Fenian

Brotherhood on the 15th of August, 1908. In this part of the country, the Irish Republican Brotherhood was always known as the Fenian Brotherhood, being, as it was, handed down directly from the Fenian organization of 1867. At the time I joined, it was the practice in our part of Clare to invite the eldest sons of all the old Fenians to become members of the Brotherhood, and my father was an old Fenian at the time."

Sean T. O'Kelly, who served as the second president of Ireland, stated that the Gaelic movement, which was largely responsible for reviving a sense of cultural Irishness in the later years of the 19th century, was "utilized by a small but effective group of people who had been faithful to the Fenian tradition, and a great number of whom were still members of the Fenian organization—the Irish Republican Brotherhood." Kelly himself joined the I.R.B. in 1899, an organization that continued James Stephens's goal of organization in secret. "The I.R.B. itself never desired publicity, and never wished to be brought into the open. It tried to exercise its influence therefore on members of the I.R.B. to become members of these other organization" and direct the activities of these other organizations to ensure compliance with a nationalist viewpoint. For example, members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood were encouraged to join the Gaelic League and Gaelic Athletic Association and, in their presence, would help cultivate a sense of nationalism among the other members. Even Sinn Fein, O'Kelly noted "was composed firstly of people who were believers in the Fenian Movement who believed that the independence of Ireland would only be won, if won at all, by the use of force." "I will conclude by stating that like my uncle before me I was a member of the I.R.B." stated Dr. Patrick O'Sullivan, who served as commanding officer of the Kilnamartyra Company, Irish Volunteers and the 8th Battalion Cork 1st Brigade. "My uncle was in it when it formed the link between the ill-starred Fenian movement and the foundation of the Irish Volunteers, the Army which carried the aims of the I.R.B. to fruition and in which, through the inspiration and example of that





## The Greatest Trials I Ever Had

THE CIVIL WAR LETTERS OF  
MARGARET AND THOMAS CAHILL

Edited by Ryan W. Keating

*Keating The Greatest Trials I Ever Had*  
uncle, I was destined to serve."

Thomas Wilson who served as Captain of the Cortoon Company, Tuam Battalion, Irish Republican Army recalled a nationalist ideology cultivated from a young age. "There was a strong Fenian tradition in my native district and I heard many stories about the Fenians," he later recollected in his witness statement. "It was told to me by my mother and concerned her uncle, named Reilly, who was arrested because he was a Fenian. Instead of a prison sentence, he was sentenced to be scourged as an example to his colleagues in the Fenian Brotherhood. He was tied to the back of a horse cart in the Square of Tuam, stripped to the skin and whipped . . . At the bridge, he was untied and he remarked, 'Thank God! I'm none the worse of it.' He was an unrepentant Fenian." Sean Moylan, who had served as commanding officer of the Cork II Brigade and Cork IV Brigade, I.R.A. and later as a member of the Dail, too, recollected a scene from his childhood that spurred on his nationalist imagination. "When I was a small boy," he recalled, "a bearded stranger arrived one Summer's evening in my home. He was greeted with a silent handgrip by my grandfather, with tears of welcome by the womenfolk of the family. He was Patrick Pickett, my grandmother's brother. He had taken part in the Fenian Rising at Kilmallock in March, 1867, had served a prison sentence afterwards and shortly after his release had emigrated. This was his first visit home. He picked me up in his arms and enquired whom I was. I was shy and fearful of his bearded countenance,

reassured by the kindness of his eyes. I was consumed with curiosity and questioned everybody. I was told he had been a Fenian, had been in Jail and in America . . . One the morning of the Rising he had been ordered to intercept a police dispatch rider . . . He did his work successfully, disarming the rider and taking his horse and despatches which he handed over to Captain Dunn, the Irish American Officer in charge at Kilmallock." For his acts he had been imprisoned and later left the country for America. Of his childhood, Moylan noted, "the annals of the mere Irish existing in the locality were short and simply- poverty, oppression and that contempt which only the Mississippi negro knows. But in a Manhood denied its natural rights, resentment of that denial always smoulders." These, and countless other accounts, reenforce the staying power of Fenianism in the national consciousness of the Irish men and women who ultimately fought and died to free the nation from English rule. The awakening of the Irish national consciousness was a slow one, in many regards. The rhetoric of James Stephens and his lieutenants, stressing notions of self-sacrifice and liberty initially fell short. The original intent of Stephens's movement never came to fruition as the rising of 1867 failed and the Fenian Chief was ousted from control of the movement he founded and ultimately again fled to Paris. When the self-proclaimed "Fenian Chief" took pen to paper to record his personal recollections, the movement that he founded some 30 years earlier had transformed and mutated, but had also gained power and a degree of broad-based support among the Irish. It morphed radically during the American Civil War as Irish-Americans began to wrest control of the movement from their Irish counterparts. Then it changed again. By the 1880s, the Fenians had become terrorists, backing a dynamite campaign in England, an effort their founder ardently denounced. Yet, Stephens saw something profound in the importance of Fenianism in the national consciousness of the land he so loved. It is increasingly clear his assessment was accurate. Fenianism revitalized the ideology of militant Irish nationalism and its rhetoric sought to sow a deep sense of the Irish nation among the Irish at home and abroad. Perhaps equally important, Fenianism has become, in a sense, larger than itself—an omniscient threat lurking in darkened alleyways; a

catch-all phrase for anyone involved in radical activities—as much a more a myth, as anything else. One need only look at Irish ballads, the songs of my childhood, to find these references. In the Foggy Dew, for example, we are told "Twas Britannia bade our Wild Geese go that small nations might be free/ But their lonely graves are by Suyla's waves or the shore of the Great North Sea/ Oh, had they died by Pearse's side or fought with Cathal Brugha/ Their names we will keep where the Fenians sleep 'neath the shroud of the foggy dew." In Down by the Glenside the singer calls "Glory O, Glory O to the Bold Fenian Men," while in My Little Armalite a protestant constable calls to IRA snipers in the Bogside, a Catholic neighborhood in Derry; "Come out ye cowardly Fenians Come out and Fight. But he cried 'I'm only joking' when he heard the Armalite." In the 1990s, a mural appeared on Upper Falls Road in Belfast reading "THE FOOLS THE FOOLS THEY HAVE LEFT US OUR FENIAN DEAD WHILE IRELAND HOLDS THESE GRAVES IRELAND UNFREE SHALL NEVER BE AT PEACE" which appeared next to a larger image of a shackled hand superimposed over a map of a "united" Ireland. In all of these ways, both concrete and abstract, the legacy of James Stephens and John O'Mahony live on, intimately connecting the tenants of modern Irish nationalism to their not-so-distant radical past and lay bare for all to legacy of Fenianism in the story of the Irish nation.



*In the 1990s, a mural appeared on Upper Falls Road in Belfast*

# “Reverend Thomas Scully, Chaplain of the 9th Massachusetts”

Excerpted from *Soldiers of the Cross*,  
Chapter 9, pgs. 141-152

Edited and Annotated by William Kurtz and Fr. David Endres

**David Power Conyngham** (1825-1883), an Irish American journalist, author, and Civil War veteran, sought to preserve the deeds of Catholic chaplains and sister nurses forever in a work he titled *Soldiers of the Cross, or Heroism of the Cross, or Nuns and Priests of the Battlefield*, an unpublished manuscript compiled between the late 1860s and his death in 1883. Born in Crohane, County Tipperary, Ireland, Conyngham arrived in the United States in 1861 shortly after the beginning of the conflict as a war correspondent for *The Dublin Irishman*. In late 1862, armed with letters of introduction, he joined General Thomas Meagher and the Irish Brigade before the Battle of Fredericksburg. In early 1863, Conyngham became a member of Meagher's staff and served with the brigade at the battles of Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, and Bristoe Station. After the war, Conyngham wrote a number of novels or historical accounts about Irish saints, Irish history, and his experiences during the Civil War. His *Sherman's March Through the South* (1865) provided a first-hand account of his service during the war with General Sherman. His most famous work, however, was *The Irish Brigade and Its Campaigns* (1867).

Conyngham's untimely death placed the unfinished *Soldiers of the Cross* in limbo, and despite attempts to have it published, it remained among the archival collections of the University of Notre Dame, waiting for its first printing. In 2012, Father David Endres and I first discussed undertaking the project of transcribing and editing the work,



David Power Conyngham

convinced of its great worth for scholars of the Civil War and American Catholic history. Our long-awaited publication of *Soldiers of the Cross* has been the work of many, and we would like to thank the University of Notre Dame Press for their support and permission to publish this first of two chapters on 9th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry's Irish-born chaplain, Father Thomas Scully.

Father Scully (1833-1902) served as the 9th's chaplain during the first two years of the American Civil War. He enlisted in the war on April 15, 1861, and served until October 31, 1862. During his time as chaplain to the 9th Massachusetts, he was several times in the midst of battle and ministered to the dying and wounded. He was twice captured by the Confederates, taken prisoner on June 27, 1862, at the Battle of Gaines Mill (first battle of the Seven Days Battle)

and on June 29, at the Battle of Savage Station. He was held for a time in Richmond. He resigned from the military because of ill health at the end of October. In this first of two chapters on Father Scully, Conyngham discusses pre-war anti-Catholicism in Massachusetts, Scully's decision to enlist, and the early days of his ministry among the soldiers of the 9th Massachusetts.

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We are impelled by the peculiar nature of our work to refer to a period anterior to the late war, in order that we may present the Irish priest and the Irish soldier, not in his strongest but in his purest and highest light. This necessity is peculiarly apparent from the fact that this chapter on “Catholic Chaplains in the Army” will be devoted exclusively to the sedate old Commonwealth of

Massachusetts where once was made a most rigorous attempt to ostracise the foreign element, and especially the Irish and Catholic portion of it in the well-remembered years of 1852 and '53. Indeed, did we wish, we might go back a few decades and present scenes of evil, riot, wrong, and horror as might well embitter the Catholic heart against a state which has since been so well and bravely defended by the Irish and Catholic citizens of the old commonwealth.

We might picture in these pages the lurid glare of burning convents—the awful desecration of religious houses; of holy nuns flying from sanctuaries sacred no longer in the eyes of a bigoted mob; of churches assailed; priests hunted—hunted as fiercely as ever they were, by the wildest of Cromwell's soldiery—ay, we might present pen pictures so

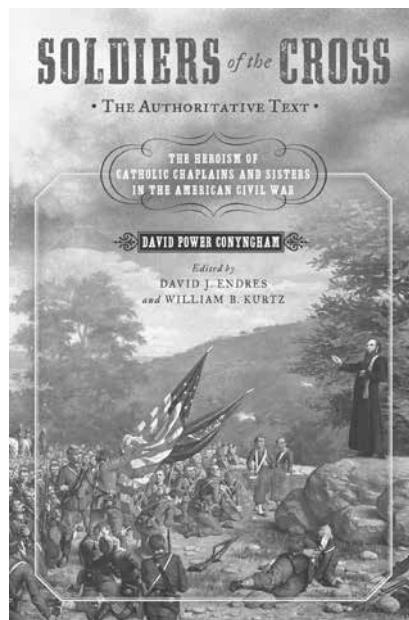
degrading and so infamous as would fill the most callous human heart with horror and make the very wretches, who occasioned them, were they living today, crazed to look back upon their frightful deeds. The demolished convents of Massachusetts, however, are part and parcel of the history of the commonwealth, and the bloody crime of those benighted days have left upon the once bright brow of Massachusetts a mark as indelible as that which disfigured the forehead of Cain!

But thank heaven, the times have changed! To picture such scenes is not for us—to mar the pages of our book with the unholy deeds of lowly minded bigots is not the purpose of our pen; we simply design to write of the later times when the warm and kindly hearts of Irish Catholics were filled with indignation at the narrow minded conduct of a state legislature, which authorized the mission of a [Joseph] Hiss—whose name is infamous—to search the Catholic female seminaries for mysterious trap doors and subterranean passages, where it was supposed were immured unwilling religieuse [nuns] and implacable enemies of our holy religion.

The embers of the Know-Nothing fire were still aglow with life when the mutterings of war came down to Massachusetts from the South. The Tubal Cains of the nations began to fashion the spears and swords for the coming combat—the rattle of arms in the arsenals, and the rumbling of artillery upon the streets proclaimed that war had allied himself with death; that soon the private and public buildings of the land would be draped in mourning! The grave digger sharpened his tools and increased his force; and, in a sudden moment, the black thunder of war fell upon the nation, and the nation looked to her sons for protection!

What was the attitude of the plundered and insulted Catholic Church of Massachusetts in that hour of national peril?

Where stood the Irishmen of the state at that solemn moment of the Union's life? Though they still smarted with the fierce wounds inflicted upon them by the bigots of New England, they were not idle spectators of the drooping folds of "old glory"—they beheld the grand young flag which had never gone down in defeat before a foreign foe, falling to the ground to be trampled under the feet of men who had sworn they loved it well!



It was then that the sons of Ireland leaped to the front—insults and ostracism—burned convents—and hunted priests—all were forgotten; and, when the grand old Irish 9th of Massachusetts prepared to march forth, to stand before and defend the life of the Republic, the Catholic Church of Massachusetts—all grand and forgiving—forgetting the past, and fervently praying for the future, stood behind her Irish heroes and with uplifted hands flowered their footsteps with prayers and benedictions!

Such was the attitude of our Church and people when the Irish 9th, as it was familiarly called, was organized by Colonel Thomas Cass, and when its officers shortly afterwards applied to His Excellency [Massachusetts Governor] John Albion Andrew for a chaplain to accompany them to the field; the application of the officers was referred by Governor Andrew to Bishop [John B.] Fitzpatrick who was sadly puzzled how to comply with the request, owing to the scarcity of priests at that time in the diocese.

It chanced, however, that the Rev. Thomas Scully, the subject of our memoir, was then on a visit to the bishop, and, learning the desire of the 9th, immediately relieved the Right Reverend Father in his difficulty by volunteering to fill the place in question.

The bishop was both astonished and pleased at the alacrity of the young disciple, as well he might be, having himself a large knowledge of the dangers and trials which his young priest was certain to encounter—for how many times had he listened to the stories and

military anecdotes of venerable Father [John] McElroy, when he recounted the terrible trials he experienced in his own person in the romantic but bloody campaigns of Mexico!

The Right Reverend Bishop did not allow the ardor of the young priest to cool; he accompanied him almost immediately to the statehouse and he was there sworn into the service of the Union. Almost before he knew the situation, the unfaltering soldier of the Cross, became a soldier of the Great Republic. Governor Andrew was as much pleased as the bishop was overjoyed; but the joy of the bishop and the pleasure of the governor did not exceed the satisfaction of the boys of the 9th when they learned that their application had been successful. When the knowledge arrived at the camp at Long Island in Boston Harbor, the boys felt themselves soldiers in every sense. By a thousand excuses they would get down to the transport when it arrived and, if asked what they were doing there, would reply:

*"Arrah, sure we want a look at our Sagart Aroon [dear chaplain]!"*

*"Do ye know Jim, is he an ould man?"* one would query.

*"How should I know; ave coarse he's an ouldman; why shouldn't he?"*

*"Yes, my banchal; but an ould man can't stand a sodger's life."*

*"Bah! What do ye know about it—Sure God looks out for his own—An' we can look out for him too!"*

To say that the lads of the 9th were astonished when they beheld their priest for the first time, would hardly express their sensations. Instead of an old man, they beheld a slender, modest looking young gentleman, little more, if any, than a hundred and forty pounds in weight, with a bright eye, a handsome face, and general physique, which eminently well fitted him for the position to which he had been assigned.

The critical eyes of our boys soon took his measure.

*"Well, he's a quiet looking man God bless him, but it's quare to me if he hasn't a mighty stiff back bone!"*

Not only the 9th boys, but even Southern officers, afterwards found that he did have not only a "stiff back bone," but a heart as replete with courage, and a spirit as uncomplaining of suffering as the best man that ever battled under the flag!



*Father Scully*

We say no more than the facts warrant when we assert that a better tone permeated the regiment; a higher and nobler spirit animated the men; a finer idea of discipline took possession of them after Father Scully arrived than ever the brave fellows had experienced before.

Prior to the celebration of the first Mass, the camp of the 9th presented curious scene. The soldiers were engaged in cleaning their clothes, pipe claying their brasses, "putting a polish" on their boots, every face shining with a new light—preparing to worship at the altar of God, before laying down their lives on the altar of their country—for the preservation of the Union—and for human liberty!

The camp was crowded with hundreds of visitors. No edifice in the world held a truer or more fervid congregation, than the magnificent church of Long Island! The brush of Michelangelo aided by the most brilliant of human imaginations had not adorned the dome of Saint Peter's at Rome, a tithe as wondrously, as that which looked down upon the assembled thousands at that Island Camp. The roof of the church was a sky of glorious beauty! The green fields and the vast expanse of sun-sheened waters was the floor fashioned by God's own hand! Twas there, about their brave priest, the soldiers knelt, and in their gleaming brasses and uniforms of blue worshipped the overliving, as they had never worshipped Him before. Around them, forming an outer circle, stood the visitors, friends and relatives of the kneeling braves, garbed in a thousand colors, with bowed heads adding beauty to the solemn scene. The voices of the choir sweetly ascending; the strange and, otherwise, solemn silence of the scene; the young priest equipped for his

sacred office. Ah, it was a scene for a Michelangelo to paint, not for a feeble pen to picture.

The altar held no work of art. It was ornamented simply by the flowers of the field; and, at the elevation of the host, by a strange coincidence, was heard the solemn roll of drums, as if music too had bowed her head in solemn joy that Mass was served where Mass had never been served before!

In writing of the associations of our priest, our pen sometimes hesitates, as if to remind us, that we should say a kindly word of the dead who appreciated him so well, and upon whom he looked with a priestly and martial affection.

So then, let our pen ramble on; we are curious ourselves to see what it will tell of the dead Tom Mooney! He was the leader of the little choir. He, in his own unassuming way, would suddenly improvise, "Quartermaster Mooney of the 9th." How familiar the words—we hear them echo from a hundred camps—we hear them sounded after a score of battles—and we remember that the gallant fellow could never say twenty words consecutively without breaking in with—

"But boys, that's nothing to do with it—where's Father Scully? "Few priests in this world have a better or more devout friend, than had the subject of this memoir in poor, kindly hearted Tom Mooney, killed at Stoneman's Switch on St. Patrick's Day [1863], by being thrown from his horse during the festivities of that occasion. Truly he was a godson of the Church, and a finer priest than Father Tom, or a nobler regiment than the "Bloody Ninth," in his estimation never existed!

We have felt it necessary in this memoir

of the chaplain of the 9th Regiment, Massachusetts Vols. to dwell somewhat upon matters which may appear anti-biographical; we have felt it necessary however, from the fact we are writing here of that most exclusive of states, Massachusetts, and of a citizen of it who as a member of the 9th is in a measure identified with its past and its present history.

For that reason if we have proved prosy our readers will excuse us, and for another reason, that we are now about to enter into the active life and military experiences of its chaplain.

The Rev. Thomas Scully was born in the City of Limerick—the grand old city of the "broken treaties"—on the 24th day of March, 1833. This youth was schooled in two of the finest cities of Ireland—Cork and Dublin and, probably, that is the reason why he is so lacking of the fine Irish brogue. He began and finished his collegiate career in England at one of the principle colleges, completing his education in philosophy and theology under the beautiful skies of Italy. A desire to practicelike studies of the [Church] led him to visit America, where he arrived early in 1859, and was shortly afterward ordained priest in Saint James Church in Boston by the Rt. Rev. Bishop Fitzpatrick.

The first mission of our young priest was in Roxbury (now known as Boston Highlands) and Dedham; which, at that time, comprised his parish. Here he remained ardously engaged in furthering the interests of his flock until the breaking out of the war, in which, as recorded before, he immediately assumed a place. We can have no better proof of the remarkable energy of Father Scully, than the fact, of his short sojourn in the country and his immediately volunteering to leave a comfortable mission, and a well beloved flock, to encounter perils fierce sufferings and probably death in order that the brave men who went forth to defend the Union, might not die without the rites of their Church. We can have no better proof of the appreciation of his bishop than the simple fact that he was immediately assigned to the grave and responsible position he voluntarily assumed—a thousand times more responsible than the cares of a mission, and in which he won for himself a name if equaled, certainly unsurpassed, by the brave and devoted Soldiers of the Cross, who so grandly associated themselves with the

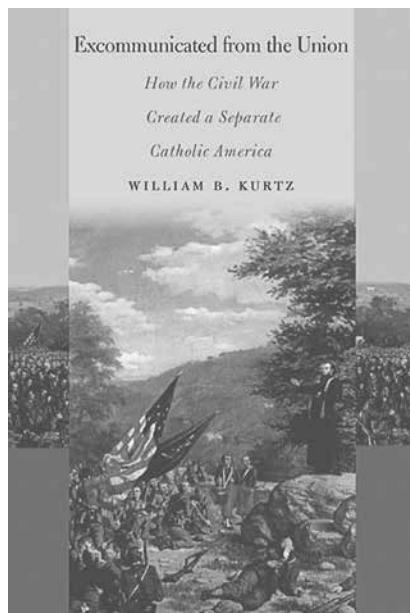
battles, miseries, and tribulations of the sons of the Church.

The appreciation of his bishop was still further indicated by his visit to Long Island shortly after Father Scully had assumed his duties as pastor of the camp. On the occasion of his visit the bishop seemed impressed with the onerous undertaking of the young clergyman, and felt more than ever satisfied with his selection of a chaplain—for in Father Tom he saw all the necessary elements combined for this peculiar phase of his holy vocation—youth, courage, indomitable [energy]; a thorough contempt for difficulties and a natural faculty for winning the affection of his men. During that visit the bishop bestowed his benediction on the troops, encouraged the men of the 9th to be true soldiers of Jesus Christ, as well as of the Republic, and distributed to every man a medal of the blessed virgin Mary. He instructed them to love and obey their young chaplain, who had sacrificed more than they, in honor and preferment in his Church, to be with them in their times of danger, and who would calmly follow them through every peril. In every possible way the good bishop of Boston showed his anxiety for the young disciple and for the future of the gallant men with whom he had embarked his fortunes.

The story of the departure of the chaplain and his regiment until their arrival at Fortress Monroe we need not tell. The pathetic incidents of separation; the cheers; the "good byes"; the sweet and thrilling music of the bands; a week's life aboard the Cambridge and Ben de Ford—the names of the transports—all this our readers may imagine but our pen would fail to describe.

Upon the arrival of the transports at Fort Monroe, chaplain Scully accompanied Colonel Cass and his officers to the fort and was then introduced to General Ben. F. Butler, since governor of the state, at that time in command. The general was greatly pleased to see a Catholic priest in the army, and expressed the wish that he had one with his men, saying that "an army blessed with priests could always fight well. "The following Saturday the regiment debarked at Washington, marched to the arsenal yard and then encamped. The 9th at that place went to the church of the Dominican Friars, where Mass was said by Father Scully and devoutly attended to by the officers and men....

The stay of Father Scully and his regiment in Washington was of short



duration; for, a day or two after their arrival, they took up their march for an available spot called Emmart's Farm, and afterwards, Wool's Hill; here the men soon fixed themselves comfortably and awaited events.

In a few days they were startled by the thunder of the guns at Bull Run. The news came to them that the Union arms had experienced an overwhelming and disastrous defeat!

We remember well the condition of Washington at that time. The stores were deserted and the doors flung open, nobody to sell goods and nobody to steal them. Wounded soldiers lying about on every hand. Where the people had disappeared to it was impossible to tell. The day too was wet and dismal when the news of the defeat reached the 9th Regiment. It had but little effect on the boys however; they were only anxious to come in contact with the enemy and give an additional touch to the magnificent picture painted by the glorious 69th Regiment of New York, under the gallant [Michael] Corcoran, upon the memorable occasion referred to.

At Emmart's Farm the 9th was visited by Governor Andrew of Massachusetts. It is no wonder that this distinguished man was a general favorite with Irish officers and soldiers. The domestics in his family were Irish and Catholic, he would employ no others, and when he called upon the regiment in this camp he brought with him blessed medals and prayer books to present to the brothers of two of his domestics enlisted in the 9th. He visited

the tent of Father Scully who sent for the men, to whom his excellency presented the sacred emblems and expressed the great pleasure it gave him to bring them to the boys in person; he then entered into conversation with them, and when he departed he shook them cordially by the hand, and was loudly cheered as he left the camp.

From Emmart's Farm the regiment crossed the Potomac, pitching its camp at Arlington Heights, where the boys were received with bonfires, lighted by the gallant 69th New York, with cheers and other tokens of joy. Here Fort Corcoran and Fort Cass were built for the better protection of the Capitol. In these labors the two Irish regiments worked side by side harmoniously together and at one time expected and wished to be brigaded. This was not to be, however, much to the disappointment of both.

Shortly after their arrival at this camp the men of the 9th Regiment got together a generous fund which they presented to their beloved pastor, requesting him to purchase a chapel tent. This was soon done and the regiment became the owner of as fine a chapel tent as was in the army of the Potomac. The men were never backward in coming to the assistance of the young priest, rather anticipating than awaiting an expression of his wishes. Quartermaster Mooney, after the purchase of the tent, became more active than ever, and was soon engaged in organizing choir; and, as he came from a family of musicians, this work he accomplished most successfully, for the 9th could boast many excellent singers. The chapel tent was dedicated at Falls Church by a High Mass; and it was a grand and solemn celebration.

It was not only attended by the soldiers of the 9th Regiment, but brave men gathered from all quarters to worship God and witness the holy ceremonies of the True Church. With the low tones of the priest would sometimes mingle the clash of arms, the roll of drums, the quick sharp word of command from some marching squad performing a necessary duty. Sometimes the sharp crack of a picket rifle would fall upon the ears but above and beyond all the rich and powerful voices of the soldier choir would ascend to the heavens—its solemn strains affecting every heart witnessing that martial scene.

*With thanks to UND Press, who Permitted this Republication.*

# Father Sheeran's Lost Cause: A Civil War Chaplain Finds a Home

By Patrick J. Hayes, Ph.D



*Father James Sheeran*

As a Catholic youth in County Longford, James Sheeran was subject to the Irish penal laws until the Emancipation Act of 1829, and consequently entered adolescence as a politicized nationalist. He carried this sensibility across the Atlantic as an immigrant in the 1830s and it later became manifest when he settled at last with his budding family in the American state of Michigan. There he experienced a pernicious anti-Catholic sentiment, particularly over his rights to educate his children. He became a school master, but also a zealous advocate for parochial schools, printing editorials condemning the state's Know Nothing legislative proposals.

Sheeran's argumentative spirit showed itself again as a Catholic cleric in the Redemptorist religious order. Some years after his wife and two boys died, and his daughter Isabella enrolled as a novice in the Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Sheeran joined a religious community that had few Irish in its ranks. He barely passed his Latin exams but was ordained in 1858. Soon after, his superiors wisely sent him to work with the people of the Irish Channel in New Orleans, where the Redemptorists had control of St. Alphonsus Church. The next three years were hardly without pitfalls, in part because he shared a house with mainly German-speaking confreres,

but he was placed in charge of raising funds for a school building for the boys of the parish and he was masterful at it.

The American Civil War was the great interrupter of all such projects. The house chronicles for St. Alphonsus report that when Archbishop Jean Marie Odin of New Orleans asked priests of his diocese to volunteer as military chaplains, two Redemptorists answered his call: Father Sheeran and his Dutch confrere, Father Egidius (Giles) Smulders. In August 1861, after training for two weeks at Camp Pulaski, northeast of Baton Rouge, Sheeran was officially appointed chaplain to the 14th Louisiana Volunteers, a unit that eventually amalgamated into what became known as "Lee's Tigers."

Sheeran's adventures began almost immediately after he arrived in Richmond on September 9, 1861. He wrote to the Redemptorists in New Orleans every two weeks thereafter, describing his exploits at Yorktown, Virginia, in the Peninsula campaign, and in the battles of Williamsburg and Seven Pines. But when he learned that his letters could not penetrate the blockade of New Orleans by Union General Benjamin Butler, Sheeran resolved to keep a journal of the war as he saw it. It is to our benefit that he did; all of his letters have been lost.

The resulting two volume journal of over 1,600 manuscript pages covers the period August 1862 to April 1865. It provides both the casual reader and the Civil War scholar with a window into several of the major battles of the war—from Cedar Mountain and Second Manassas to Antietam (Sharpsburg) and Gettysburg. After the battle of Third Winchester (Opequan) on September 19, 1864, and Cedar Creek a month later, Fr. Sheeran requested permission to go into enemy lines to tend to wounded soldiers of both sides. He was released by his superiors and managed to obtain a pass through Union lines. For several days he helped in the hospitals and administered the sacraments, but on October 31, while awaiting an audience

with Union General Philip Sheridan, he was arrested. Sheridan, who had been hoodwinked by a Jesuit some months prior, and vowing not to repeat the indignity, imprisoned the Redemptorist chaplain at Fort McHenry, Baltimore, until Sheeran was paroled in January.

To lock a priest up in this manner was unique in the annals of war—and Sheeran did not take it lying down. "The world shall hear," he wrote, "of the sacrilegious and perfidious manner in which you are treating a Catholic Priest." Sheeran wasted no time and wrote to a former Redemptorist seminarian, James McMaster, who was then the editor of the *New York Freeman's Journal*, a Catholic newspaper with broad readership. McMaster's indignance at receiving word of Sheeran's treatment—ostensibly by a fellow Catholic (Sheridan)—prompted him to publish the priest's letter in full. It appeared under the headline, "A Great and Cruel Wrong."

Life at Fort McHenry was hardly optimal. Sheeran billeted first in the "Old Slave Pen" in Baltimore and then in "Horse Stall No. 1" at the fort in a building that is no longer extant. It had no heat, "it was alive with vermin," and the inmates were ruffians, blasphemers, and thieves. Sheeran's many protests fell on deaf ears, but he had the ability to pass letters to McMaster who continued to publish them with regularity. Their detail is evident in the text of the journal and allow for a glimpse into the conditions there. Sheeran was also able to send letters by way of what he called the "Underground Railroad" to his own confreres stationed in Baltimore. One day by chance, Sheeran noticed two Redemptorists walking in the prison yard and called to them, but they were prevented from communicating. Sheeran believed these priests would be able to secure his release, and indeed they petitioned the Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, on Sheeran's behalf.

When Sheeran's complaints were rebuffed, he tried logic, but he never



*Church of the Assumption, Maple Ave., Morristown, NJ*

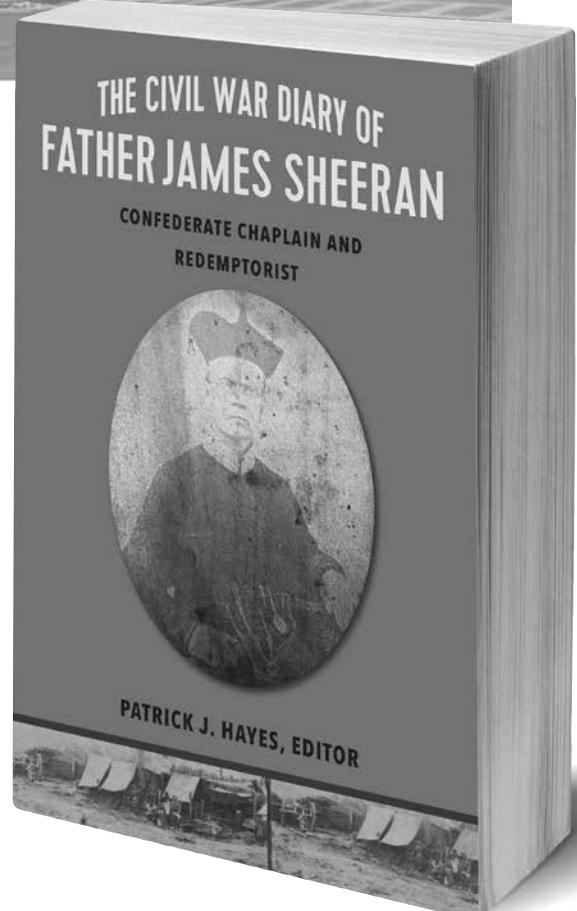
shirked from his position. In an exchange with the Fort McHenry Provost Marshall, Sheeran spoke plainly: "As a Catholic Priest, sir, I know of no parties, but as a citizen, I belong to the Southern Confederacy and my sympathies, feelings, and connections are with her cause, believing it to be just."

Finally, McMaster's publication fomented a public relations disaster for the Federals and the priest was given an opportunity of release if he would but swear an oath denouncing the Confederacy. Sheeran rejected the offer until, nearly broken in mind and body, he was paroled by promising not to supply the enemy with military information. On December 5, he was released. Near collapse, he managed to cross to Fell's Point, to the Redemptorist parish of St. Michael the Archangel for a respite from the war. He remained uneasy—it was a German-speaking house.

Sheeran's plight is recounted in a published volume with the entire text printed in full in 2016. It corrects

thousands of typographical or grammatical errors found in the manuscript and presents the most readable version of Sheeran's observations with a minimum of annotation. Father Sheeran later left the Redemptorist order after tangling with his (German) provincial superior. He moved to the Diocese of Newark in New Jersey and was assigned to the largely Irish parish of Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Morristown, a place known as Little Dublin.

Patrick J. Hayes, Ph.D., is the archivist for the Redemptorists of the United States and is based in Philadelphia. He is the editor of *The Civil War Diary of Father James Sheeran: Confederate Chaplain and Redemptorist* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 2016).



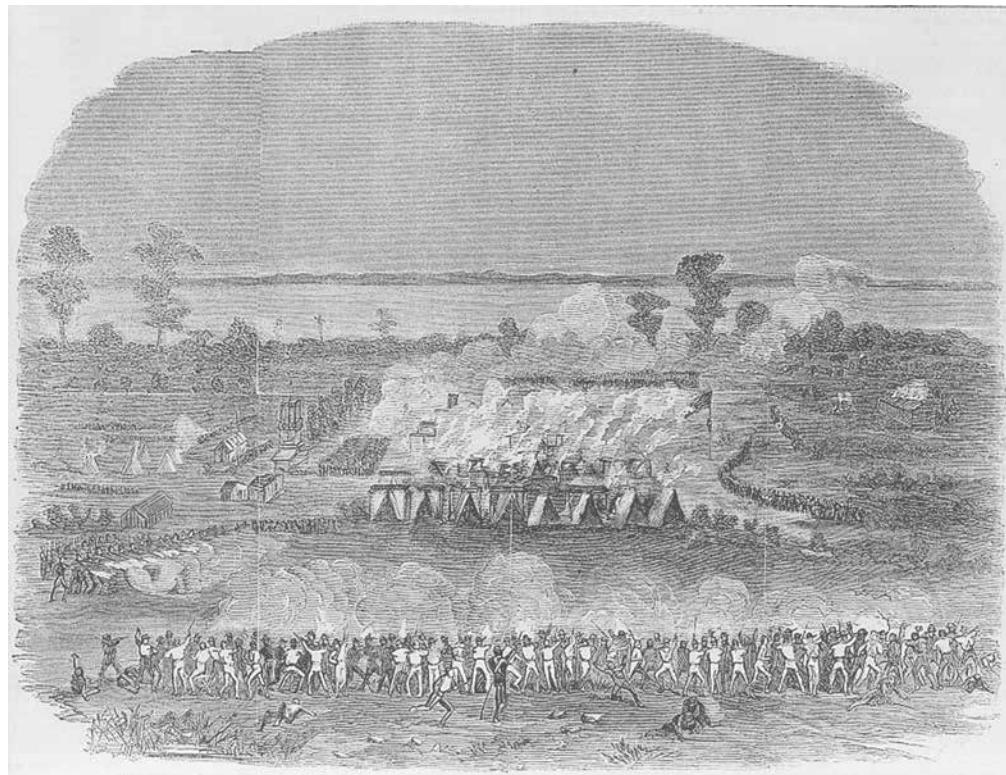
# “Denizens of Pandemonium:”

## Wilson’s Zouaves at the Battle of Santa Rosa Island

By Brendan Hamilton

The 6th New York Volunteer Infantry, better known as Wilson’s Zouaves, was recruited primarily in New York City. While not specifically organized as an Irish regiment, Irish immigrants and first generation Irish-Americans represented the largest single ethnic group in the unit’s ranks. Many immigrants from Great Britain and present-day Germany, as well as native born Americans, also enlisted. The 6th was commanded by Colonel William “Billy” Wilson, a notorious prizefighter-turned-Democratic alderman. Wilson had previous military experience both as an officer in the 8th New York State Militia and in helping organize William Walker’s filibustering campaigns in Nicaragua. While his precise nativity is unclear (his birthplace is given alternately as England and Ireland in various records), Wilson certainly identified as ethnically Irish, proclaiming in an 1859 political speech that he considered himself a “true born Irishman.” In lieu of the flashy, French/Algerian-inspired duds typically associated with “Zouave” units, Wilson’s Zouaves were initially issued a simple uniform consisting of a gray shirt, gray pants, and a wide-brimmed, brown slouch hat. This uniform was later completed with New York state-issue gray jackets “of the very worst sort of shoddy cloth.” Their arms consisted of .69 caliber Springfield Model 1840 muskets, converted from flintlock to percussion, and Bowie knives. Some men also carried personal revolvers and slung shots.

The New York Herald provided a detailed--if not exaggerated--account of the regiment’s formal muster and presentation of its colors at Tammany Hall in April 1861. The article captured the imaginations of newspaper editors across the country and was widely reprinted both in the North and the newly seceded South, sealing a particular image of Wilson’s Zouaves as a horde of roughs in the minds of countless Americans. Its author described Colonel Wilson delivering a dramatic speech to his rowdy, knife-wielding band, appealing to their rumored backgrounds in New York’s infamous street gangs by



*Battle of Santa Rosa Island*

invoking their common hatred for their rival Baltimore’s nativist, Secessionist-sympathizing Plug Uglies. With a flag in one hand and a sword in the other, Wilson called upon his Zouaves to take a knee and vow “to support the flag, and never flinch from its path through blood or death...they responded with shouts of ‘blood,’ ‘blood,’ ‘blood,’ ‘We swear,’ &c.”

S.T. Hammond, writing under the pseudonym Good Templar, later described his experiences in the regiment as part of a temperance-themed memoir entitled *Recollections of a Checkered Life*. Hammond claimed he blacked out while on a bender in Manhattan; when he came to, he was dressed in a military uniform and lying in the regiment’s encampment across the harbor. The men around Hammond informed him that he had not only enlisted, but he had already served with the regiment for nearly a week. “Had I enlisted from choice, or with my eyes open...” he wrote, “I should have chosen a different regiment. I was, I found, a member of the 6th New York, or ‘Billy

Wilson’s Zouaves,’ as they were termed, a regiment that was professedly raised from among the roughs of New York.” By the time the regiment left Staten Island for the front, Hammond recounted, the soldiers remaining in the ranks consisted of “a few of the roughs...young boys, and a great many...‘broken-down sports,’ and broken-down traders.” He likened Colonel Wilson “to David in the cave of Adullam, when ‘every one who was in debt, every one who was discontented, and every one who had run away from his master, gathered themselves unto him and he became a captain over them.’”

Gouverneur Morris, who wrote the unit’s regimental history, ventured to temper the popular stereotypes of Wilson’s Zouaves. He cited the high number of the regiment’s officers who previously served in esteemed New York militia units, as well the diversity of the prewar vocations of the enlisted men, as evidence that there was more to this regiment than the press let on. Father Michael Nash, a Kilkenny-born Jesuit

priest who served as the regimental chaplain, acknowledged the violent and criminal proclivities of many of the Zouaves, but understood this to be the product of their myriad troubled pasts. He saw through the soldiers' coarse veneers to the underlying sense of loyalty and fraternity they shared. He also noted that, despite their general lack of Roman Catholic education, the Catholic majority of the unit maintained an ingrained sense of their Catholic identity.

Through either the fault or the misfortune of their parents, their domestic Christian education has been woefully neglected; their hearts, however, have remained in the right place. They are nearly all of that class styled "New York boys"--or "New York Rowdies," who, though they seldom if ever darken the church door, are always ready to pour out the warmest blood of their hearts in defence of church or priest.

While Colonel Wilson played his own role in fueling the press's image of the rowdy Zouaves, he pushed back at classist attacks upon their patriotism, particularly the notion that their backgrounds would prevent them from performing their duties as soldiers when the time came. The New York Clipper quoted Wilson as proudly declaring that, "outcasts though we be, we have the hearts of men, loyal men, and as long as our blood last, we will never strike that flag to any southern man or body of men." The colonel and his Zouaves hoped they would soon have their chance to prove themselves to their many critics.

In June, 1861, after a wild, drunken spree in Manhattan, Wilson's Zouaves departed New York by steamer for Santa Rosa Island, Florida, home to Fort Pickens, a coastal fortification that had held out against repeated threats of Confederate attacks following Florida's secession in January 1861. The fort lay in sight of the Confederate-held Warrington Navy Yard at Pensacola, which was itself defended by two Confederate forts. While the Zouaves' arrival provided a significant numerical boost to the small force of well-trained US Regulars already stationed on the island, the post commander, Colonel Harvey Brown, was deeply skeptical of the soldiering abilities of these raucous volunteers. He soon dispatched experienced officers from his garrison to assist in training the

green regiment. Wilson's Zouaves' new camp--named Camp Brown after their new post commander--was established about a mile east of Fort Pickens. During the course of the summer, five of the regiment's ten companies were detached from the command and distributed to different posts on Santa Rosa and other Florida islands.

Wilson's Zouaves found themselves in a world that was radically different from the urban landscapes to which they were previously accustomed. The island consisted of barren, white sandhills interspersed with scrub grasses and, further east where the island widened, a few small lakes, swamps, and lagoons bordered by trees and thick vegetation. By day, the Zouaves contended with brutal heat and humidity interspersed with torrential rain. By night, they battled sand fleas and mosquitoes. As these volunteer soldiers adjusted to life on Santa Rosa Island, so, too, did they become more accustomed to their military duties. They drilled regularly and became increasingly proficient in both infantry and artillery drill, the latter skill attained in learning to assist the artillery crews of Fort Pickens and the nearby battery installations.

On the night of October 8th, 1861, the Confederates initiated an ambitious, carefully planned night assault. At the direction of Major General Braxton Bragg, commanding the forces at Pensacola, Brigadier General Richard H. Anderson organized a force of about 1,200-1,500 picked troops from eight Confederate regiments, aided by Confederate Naval forces, to carry out the operation. The troops were divided into three battalions, with the addition of a 53-man independent company. This latter unit

was lightly armed with only pistols and knives so they could carry the tools and materials necessary for spiking cannons and "burning and destroying buildings, gun carriages, &c." Anderson's aim was to utilize the cover of darkness to take Wilson's Zouaves by surprise, demolish their camp, then seize and destroy the island's batteries, and finally, perhaps even capture Fort Pickens itself. Beyond the obvious strategic goal of weakening the Federal stranglehold over Pensacola and its Navy yard, Bragg also sought retaliation over the recent sinking of the Confederate schooner *Judah* by a raiding party from the USS *Colorado*.

Utilizing the steamer *Ewing* and a hodgepodge of barges and flatboats, the Confederate force successfully crossed Pensacola Bay, disembarked, and assembled undetected on the beach of Santa Rosa Island, about four miles east of Camp Brown, by 2 a.m. October 9th. Two battalions led the advance, one moving along the north beach and the other along the south, while the remaining battalion prepared to strike at the center of the island once the leading columns had made contact with the Union forces. They moved as stealthily as possible, trudging through the sandhills, scrub brush, and swamps while trying to maintain their bearing in the pitch darkness. Wilson's Zouaves' picket line, about seventy men in all, was stretched thinly from shore-to-shore, guarding against any incursions toward their regiment's camp. Among them was Private John Shaughnessy of Company H, a 19-year-old native of Flatlands (part of present-day Brooklyn) and first generation Irish-American. Shaughnessy provided a detailed account of his experience to Morris,



Colonel William "Billy" Wilson

which was reprinted in full as an appendix to the regimental history. He described how his partner on the picket line, a soldier named O'Brien, saw a man dressed as a Union officer approach him in the darkness. Suspecting him to be a Confederate in disguise, O'Brien shot the man dead. "Scarcely had the report of O'Brien's musket died away in the early morning stillness," wrote Shaughnessy, "when he, poor

fellow, fell pierced by at least twenty bullets." Shaughnessy then raised his own musket and fired in the direction from which the volley had come, but was soon grazed across the head by a bullet and then knocked "senseless" by a Rebel musket butt to the chest. When he came to, the young Zouave found himself alone behind the advancing Confederate lines and reeling from the pain of three broken ribs. Confederate soldiers spotted and captured Shaughnessy as he attempted to sneak back to his regiment.

Similar fighting erupted all across the Zouaves' picket line. "The ground was contested foot by foot, and a hand-to-hand conflict was going on in the mean time," Captain Alfred S. Norman of Company F recounted in his official report of the battle. A Confederate soldier attested that the Zouave pickets "gave our close ranks a most destructive fire, throwing the company of which I was a member into great disorder." Father Nash later discovered Corporal William Parsonage of Company H in a grave state, bleeding out from the two gunshot wounds and one bayonet wound inflicted upon him while he stood his post as picket. Parsonage was a native of England who lived in Jamaica, Queens prior to the war and enlisted in the 6th New York when he was between 16 and 17 years old. The wounded teenager pleaded with Nash

to baptize him into the Catholic faith, so the chaplain ran to gather the nearest water he could find, wringing "the clear blue salt-water of the ever ruffled Gulf of Mexico" from his handkerchief across the boy's brow just before he died.

The 6th New York's picket line fought desperately, but they were overwhelmed by the superior numbers of the assaulting Confederate columns. Amazingly, the shots they fired initially went unheeded by most of their officers and comrades at Camp Brown and Fort Pickens. The majority of Wilson's Zouaves, who had been resting at the camp, thought little of the nearby gunfire. They had grown accustomed to jumpy pickets firing at alligators and other animals, which would in turn trigger chain reactions of general firing along the picket line. When the officer of the day raced to Fort Pickens to alert Colonel Brown of the attack, the post commander likewise assumed it was a false alarm and refused to dispatch reinforcements to the Zouaves' aid.

The Zouaves in the five companies at Camp Brown numbered between just 130 to 150 soldiers, the remainder serving as pickets, on detached service at Fort Pickens, or absent sick. Wilson and his officers tried in vain to rally this small force into a line of battle, but the Confederate columns converged on them rapidly and were storming



*Soldiers of the Clinch Rifles*

through the camp, howling shrill Rebel yells, and firing and stabbing their way into the regiment's tents before many of the Zouaves had time to get dressed--or even out of bed. All was chaos; soldiers from both sides scrambled about in the darkness, often unable to discern friend from foe. Joseph McCarty, a teenage private in Company C and recent inmate of New York's House of Refuge,

described the scene:

Our men could not get out of the tents before the enemy was upon them, and took some prisoners in their beds. The rebels were firing volleys through our camp, and our men were so confused they ran into the rebel's ranks, thinking they were among their own men.

A Mississippi soldier who participated in the attack gave a similar account in a letter to the Vicksburg Weekly Citizen. He wrote that "we arrived at the camp almost as soon as the picket guard. The surprise was complete. Many were bayoneted in their tents, and others were shot."

McCarty and his fellow Zouaves retreated into the sandhills west of Camp Brown. Colonel Wilson rallied about sixty men from three of his companies behind the cover of a nearby ridge. Unable to locate the remainder of the regiment in the darkness and confusion, and hearing rumors they had already retreated toward Fort Pickens, he either ordered his group to fall back to the cover of the batteries, or they proceeded to do so on their own. Unbeknownst to the colonel, a significant portion of his regiment, Companies C and H, under Captains Robert H. Hazeltine and Charles E. Heuberer, assembled closer to the camp, intent on holding their ground. According to Morris, they "retired a short

distance to the right of the camp and forming up sternly with their backs to the Gulf prepared to fight it out on that line." Meanwhile, the Confederate demolition company wasted no time in setting fire to Camp Brown. The encampment went up in a blazing conflagration, aided by the dry pine arbors which the Zouaves had constructed above and around their tents to shade them from the hot Florida sun. Many Rebel soldiers, "eager for plunder," broke ranks to scour the camp for souvenirs before the flames consumed everything.

It was at this point that the Confederate attack lost its momentum and cohesion. Camp Brown was a chaotic inferno with disorganized men darting about in all directions. The fighting in the darkness beyond the camp dissolved into what Captain Norman termed "bush fighting;" uncoordinated clusters of soldiers were left battling each other from behind sandhills and in the concealment of the brush. Norman noted that "several of the Zouaves were seen to hold their ground against treble their number of opponents for over an entire hour. Various were the acts of daring and impetuous valor displayed in this unequal contest.." Facing stiff resistance from the two small companies of the 6th New York, the bulk of the Confederate troops stalled in and around the burning camp. That handful of Zouaves, many still wearing nothing more than the clothes in which they'd gone to bed, had recovered from the initial shock of the night assault and were pouring a steady fire into the larger Rebel force. The burning camp now illuminated the battlefield, providing a focal point and allowing the Zouaves to distinguish the Confederates from their own comrades. The two companies, wrote Morris,

...being on somewhat higher ground than the camp, waxed hotter and hotter as the fight went on, and looking out of their surrounding darkness into the light of the blazing camp, so smote the enemy with continuous musketry, that many men went down killed or wounded, and many another man probably wished in his inmost soul that he had never 'loved a country.'

Joseph McCarty was more succinct in his description: "When they came," he said, "we gave them fits."

The tide began to turn--the Confederates in and around Camp Brown were now nearly as confused as the Zouaves had

been. "The enemy seemed bewildered," Father Nash observed. "They appear to have made a blunder. They are in possession of our camp, and they act as if they do not know how or why." With the sun beginning to appear on the horizon, and any hope of taking the Union batteries dashed, Anderson gave the order to retreat back to the disembarkation point, and the corresponding bugle call rang out along the Confederate line. Then, "like a vanishing mist," wrote Morris, the Confederates "took themselves out of the light of the camp fires, and into the friendly shades of the night, with a rain of abandoned muskets and bowie knives besprinkling the sand as they went." Several companies of US Regulars, finally ordered by Brown to reinforce the Zouaves, now began to advance toward the camp, but, wrote McCarty, the Confederates "were on the run from us before the regulars came, because they thought we were stronger than we really were." A Confederate soldier recounted what happened next:

Amid this excitement and conflagration, the wildest disorder reigned. Companies were disorganized and no such thing as a regiment was known. Our men retired in great confusion, and the line was a confused mass, moving without orders, and almost without object.

The Regulars advanced in company with Colonel Wilson's reorganized portion of the 6th New York, plus a smattering of other Zouaves rallied by the Regular officers or pulled from other posts. Companies C and H joined this advancing line and, wrote Morris, "the whole force cheering and firing, tore through the underbrush, and stumbled over the sand hills in a lively pursuit." It was a chaotic advance as mixed commands surged forward, flickering flames and muzzle flashes revealing glimpses of strained faces, the glint of steel weapons clenched in powder-darkened hands, black leather brogans, bare and stocking feet clambering through thickets and sliding in sand. Joseph McCarty recounted the mad stampede toward the Confederate's original disembarkation point. "We ran them up the island," he wrote, "until they reached their boats; but as it was near morning, we could not charge upon them, as our force was not strong enough to do so in the day-time. But we got behind a hill, and kept on bulleting them." The Confederates rushed to

board their transports and succeeded in steaming most of their force back across the bay, returning to Pensacola before any Federal Navy vessels could intercept them. As they watched the Rebels sail off into the early morning haze, the Zouaves and Regulars at Santa Rosa gave "three heavy cheers" and turned back to recross the scene of destruction being revealed by the light of dawn.

In the aftermath of their first battle, the surviving Federal soldiers were greeted by horrifying sights; they beheld the corpses of their own friends and comrades and bore witness to the moaning, agonized forms of those who had not succumbed to their wounds. And as the sun rose over Santa Rosa Island, it also illuminated unfamiliar faces in Rebel uniforms, lifeless and mingled with fallen Zouaves across the sand dunes. Father Nash described a "delicate type; a fair young man with long curling hair, his blue eyes...half open, his youthful hand...grasping a terrible wound in his side; he had no appearance of a soldier." Beside him "lay a beardless boy, who must have died from a bayonet wound through which his bowels were protruding." The Zouaves also encountered some wounded and captured Confederates speaking in familiar brogues. It's unlikely they knew it during the mad turmoil of the battle, but one of the companies that attacked their camp was an ethnic Irish unit, Company C of the 5th Georgia Infantry, nicknamed the Irish Volunteers. It may have been a member of this unit whom Father Nash reported finding with his "Agnus Dei, scapular, and cross, neatly fastened around his neck." The young Catholic died kneeling against a sandbank, as if in prayer.

Such revelations may have had a sobering impact on the aftermath of what was, in the eyes of the Zouaves, a clear Union victory. According to Father Nash, they returned to the smoldering ruins of Camp Brown "tired, weary and sad." At least half of their tents, and nearly all their clothing and equipment, save what they had been wearing, was destroyed or taken. Wilson's Zouaves recorded nine men killed, seven wounded (of whom three subsequently died from their wounds), and eleven missing, presumably captured. The dead included Private Dennis Ganley of Company F. Ganley was a father of five who resided in Brooklyn prior to the war. An Irish immigrant, he originally hailed



*Battle of Santa Rosa Island (October 9, 1861)*

from St. James' Parish in Dublin. Private John Molumby of Company C, who was also killed in action, was from the parish of Moycarkey in County Tipperary. He emigrated first to Massachusetts before moving to New York City, where he gave part of his wages to support his widowed mother on Cherry Street. Among the wounded was Private Alexander Geddes, a sashmaker who enlisted in Co. C between the age of 16 and 17. A Georgian by birth, Geddes lived with his parents in New York's Hell's Kitchen neighborhood prior to the war. He survived his wound, returned to the regiment, and was promoted sergeant the following January. Corporal William Hausel of Company K was not so lucky. A native of the principality of Hohenzollern-Hechingen in present day Germany, he was shot in the left arm during the fighting along the picket line and the surgeon attending his wound decided to amputate. Hausel was released from the post hospital and discharged on December 1, 1861. He succumbed to complications from his injury and amputation less than three weeks after returning to Manhattan and died at home on December 20th, leaving behind his wife Catherine and three young children.

The Battle of Santa Rosa Island was ultimately a chaotic and tragic episode that accomplished little of any strategic military significance. While the Confederates succeeded in delivering a temporary blow to the Zouaves' supplies, Colonel Brown declared proudly in his official report that "[the enemy] did not reach within 500 yards of

either of the batteries the guns of which he was to spike, nor within a mile of the fort he was to enter pell mell with the fugitives retreating before his victorious arms." While Brown implied in his report that Wilson's Zouaves had performed poorly, the career Army officer was likely motivated by his desire to shield his own reputation after he had, by his own admission, ignored the initial report of a Confederate attack. The realities of the battle, as corroborated by numerous Confederate and Federal witnesses, tell a different tale. Despite being caught off guard by the night assault, a significant portion of the small force of Zouaves managed to rally and, aided by about 200 Regulars, repulsed and pursued a Rebel force several times their strength. A Rebel correspondent, writing to the Augusta Constitutionalist, attempted to summarize his Federal foes' varied conduct throughout the engagement:

The Zouaves were taken almost completely by surprise, but as soon as they recovered fought desperately; at times, however, they acted rather cowardly, but, upon the whole, gave us some pretty warm work.

The Confederates reported 78 officers and enlisted men killed and wounded, plus another 30 captured. The operation's commander, Brig. Gen. Anderson, was himself among the wounded. Brown counted 34 killed and wounded and 24 captured among his full Federal forces. The Zouaves, grieving their lost comrades, also had

reasons to be hopeful for their future as soldiers. They had overcome the initial panic and terror of the surprise attack and proved their mettle against the odds. The Confederates never attempted another large-scale land assault upon Camp Brown and Fort Pickens. In May 1862, after receiving news of the Federal capture of New Orleans, General Bragg ordered his forces to abandon Pensacola. The 6th New York Infantry was the first unit to raise the Stars and Stripes over the city square.

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*Colonel William "Billy" Wilson (seated at center) and some of his Zouaves. National Archives.*

*<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2007676129/>*

*This illustration of the Battle of Santa Rosa Island was published in Harper's Weekly in December 1861 and based on a sketch drawn by Private Charles F. Allegower of Company C of the 6th New York. It shows a scene consistent with descriptions of Companies C and H—which are likely depicted in the foreground—facing the Confederates just outside the burning Camp Brown "with their backs to the Gulf." Library of Congress.*

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*Soldiers of the Clinch Rifles, Company A, 5th Georgia Infantry, one of the Confederate units involved in the assault on Santa Rosa Island. Photographic History of the Civil War, Francis Trevelyan Miller*

# The Civil War Bluejackets Project—

# New Insights into Irish, British & African American Sailors

By David Gleeson & Damian Shiels

In the introduction to this issue readers learned the story of Offaly native James Carey, which was revealed as part of the Civil War Bluejackets Project pilot study. That research was conducted by Northumbria University in 2020 to examine the viability of using wartime muster rolls as a baseline for exploring the lives and service of ordinary immigrant and African American sailors during the Civil War ([www.civilwarbluejackets.com](http://www.civilwarbluejackets.com)). The pilot took as its focus the digitised muster-rolls of the famed City-Class ironclads that operated on the Mississippi and its tributaries during the conflict, and served as a pre-cursor to the major Arts and Humanities Research Council UK project on which we are now embarking—Civil War Bluejackets: Race, Class and Ethnicity in the United States Navy, 1861-1865. Over the coming years, we will be working with partners at the University of Sheffield (Information scientists Dr Morgan Harvey and Dr Frank Hopfgartner), the Cooperative Institute for Climate, Ocean & Ecosystem Studies (CICOES) and the US Naval Academy Museum to expand our study to encompass the muster rolls of all U.S. vessels during the American Civil War. In advance of that wider study, we wanted to share some of what we learned from our pilot with readers of *Crossfire*.

The pilot project set out to examine how effective crowd-sourcing transcriptions of the muster rolls could be, and how we might be able to use this data as a basis to explore race, ethnicity, class and transnationality among U.S. sailors. Our team of volunteer transcribers were drawn from across Britain, Ireland and the United States. The seven City-Class ironclads they focused on were the USS Cairo, USS Carondelet, USS Cincinnati, USS Louisville, USS Mound City, USS Pittsburg and USS Baron De Kalb. Designed by Samuel Pook and constructed by James Buchanan Eads, they all entered service in 1862.

Their primary role was to operate in the shallow waters of the Mississippi River and its tributaries. 175 feet in length with a shallow draft, they carried an armament of up to thirteen guns. These vessels spent their first months under army control, but transferred to the navy in October 1862 (and all the extant muster rolls date postdate this transfer). Over the course of the fighting many of the ironclads saw action and two were lost—USS Cairo, which was sunk by torpedoes on the Yazoo River in December 1862, and the USS Baron De Kalb, which suffered the same fate on the same river in July 1863. The most catastrophic losses experienced by this group of vessels came aboard the USS Mound City at the Battle of Saint Charles, Arkansas in June 1862, when 125 of her crew lost their lives following the explosion of her steam drum.

All told, fifty-two musters survive from the seven ironclads, amounting to 206 individual sheets which our small team of eighteen volunteers transcribed. The

type of information we were recording from the ironclads included details such as name, age and place of birth, records we then sought to connect with other documents, such as pension files. While the story of James Carey shared earlier in the volume demonstrates the type of individual experience that emerged during our work, it also revealed broader patterns. One example relates to ethnicity and nativity on these gunboats, and we can take here the example of USS Carondelet, on which James Carey served. It is worth remembering that wartime vessels were in essence enclosed communities, cheek by jowl environments that could cause close bonds to form but could also accentuate frictions and tensions, particularly ethnic and racial ones. Considering how racial and ethnic makeups changed and evolved on these shipboard communities prompts us to think about what impact they might have had on vessel dynamics. It also serves as a reminder that many Union vessels saw

Figure 1. An example of one sheet of a Civil War muster-roll, this example from the USS Louisville (NARA)

prolonged service, their crews were often far from static.

We can visualise some of these differences using the example of the Carondelet's crew as preserved in two separate musters. One was taken on 1 January 1863, the date the Emancipation Proclamation came into force, while our second example was recorded some 18 months later, on 30 June 1864. Following transcription by our volunteers, we next "cleaned" the data so that we could analyse it and present it in visualisations

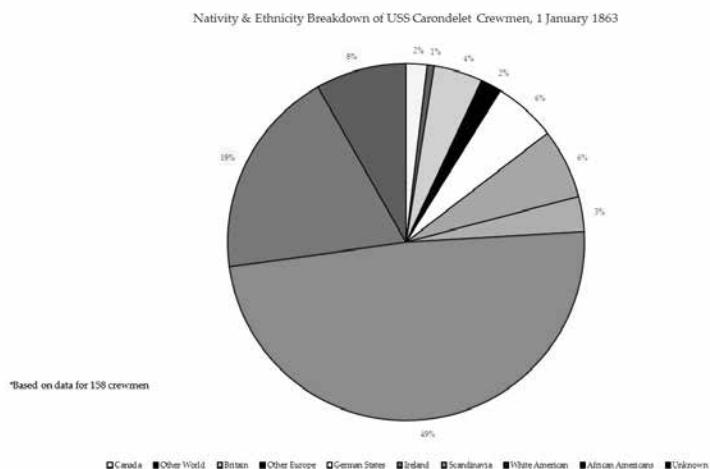
the next most prominent group, but on the Carondelet in January 1863 this was not the case. In fact, only 6% of the crew at this time had been born in Ireland, the same proportion as those who had been born in the German States, and only slight in advance of the 4% born in Britain.

This crew breakdown may be due in part to the way in which these gunboat crews were initially gathered together, a process which focused on securing experienced sailors at short notice. But

challenges us to consider how naval service changed during the war. For example, in the case of the Carondelet, we might seek to answer what underlies the Irish figures—e.g. were more Irish enlisting in the navy in 1864, or were there just more serving on the Carondelet?

The charts also make for interesting reading when it comes to African American service. As we have seen, African Americans already accounted for almost 20% of the crew by 1 January 1863, an indication of the extent to which the gunboats had been enlisting men escaping enslavement in 1862—long before the Emancipation Proclamation. The gunboats' area of operations along rivers like the Mississippi brought them into almost constant contact with southern Plantations, and the vessels quickly became lightning rods for African Americans seeking to escape bondage. Just as ocean going U.S. vessels sought to make up their numbers by recruiting foreign-born men in distant ports, so too the gunboats supplemented their numbers by taking advantage of the African American desire to fight for their freedom. By the summer of 1864, the African American proportion of the Carondelet had increased to almost 30%. Perhaps more significantly, whereas black men had represented just under 30% of American-born crewmen in January 1863, by June 1864 they accounted for 45% of American-born natives. It is interesting to consider how this shift might have impacted race-relations and racial tensions aboard the cramped vessel during this period.

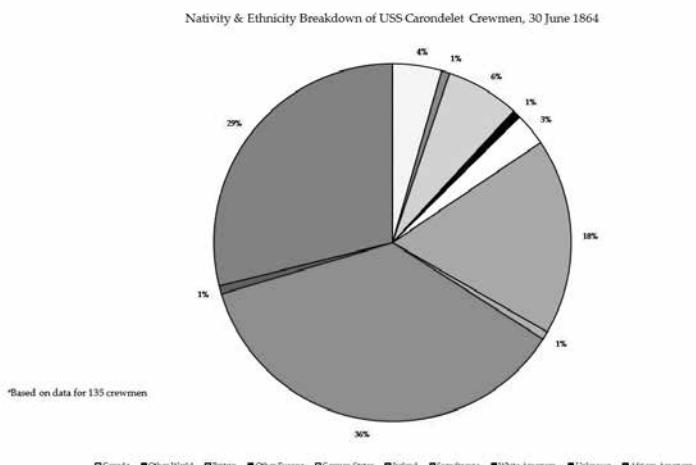
This nativity and ethnicity data is just a sample of what transcribing the muster rolls allows, and only a single element of what we hope to retrieve from across the U.S. Navy muster rolls during the course of our project. As well as providing us with an avenue to explore the hard to reach experiences of individual working-class European emigrants like James Carey, it also promises to provide us with exceptional insight into the lives of formerly enslaved African Americans. We hope that in time it will do much to broaden our understanding of the wider patterns of service, be it changing ethnic dynamics, sailor age-profile, or the employment profile of those who chose to become "bluejackets." Over the next few years we will be releasing regular updates of our work through forums like [www.civilwarbluejackets.com](http://www.civilwarbluejackets.com), so be sure and stay tuned to keep up to date with what we discover!



such as the pie charts presented here.

Turning first to nativity, what is evident on 1 January 1863 is that the Carondelet was a vessel dominated by American-born sailors. Indeed, they were serving aboard in higher proportion than we might expect to find across the navy as a whole. It is important to stress of course that nativity does not align with ethnicity, but nevertheless it is noteworthy that almost 50% of the crew at this point were white native-born American men; a further 20% were African American. Given that Irish-born men are believed to have made up c. 20% of the entire U.S. Navy, we might expect them to follow as

whatever its cause, what is apparent is that the makeup of the Carondelet crew had changed markedly just 18 months later. By then the Irish-born contingent had trebled, to 18%. The diversity of Europeans aboard had also contracted, those born in Ireland and Britain now completely dominated over those born in continental countries. Meanwhile the proportion of native-born white Americans had also fallen, from almost 50% to just over 35%. These are precisely the types of differential patterns that interest us, and are ones we hope to replicate, study and consider across the entire naval service. Revealing them



# Captain John Dooley of Richmond

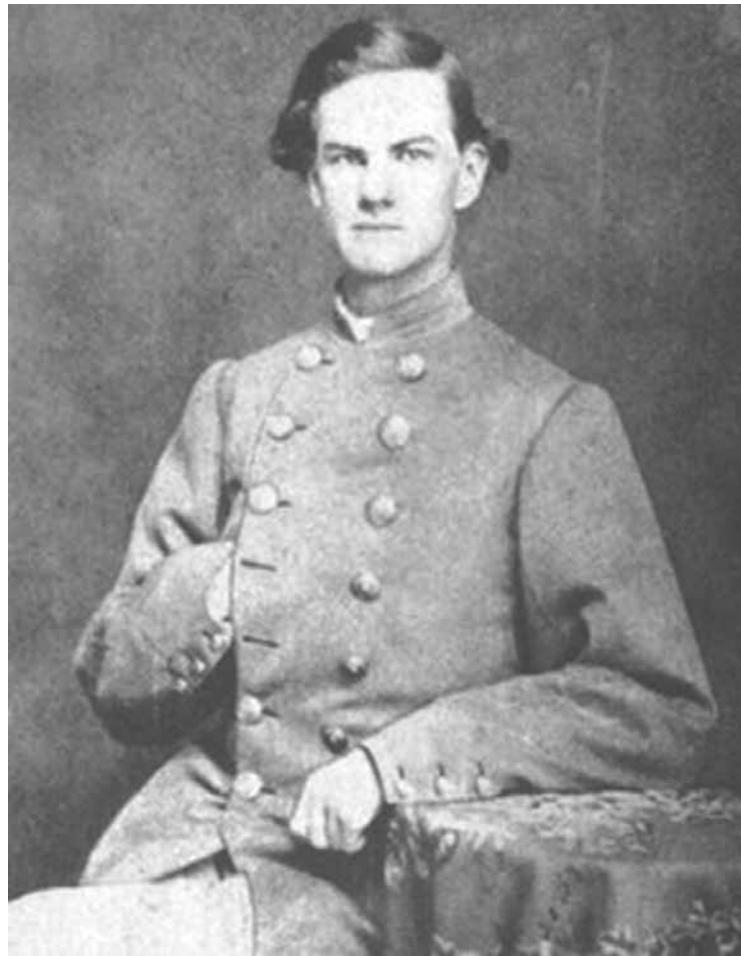
By David Gleeson

After being wounded in both legs and captured during Pickett's Charge on the third day of the Battle of Gettysburg, young Captain John E. Dooley of the 1st Virginia Infantry Regiment, CSA, found himself with a lot of time on his hands in a Union prison hospital. He used it to continue writing his diary but also to read whatever he could get his hands on. Apparently, he found a history of Ireland and wrote in his diary: "Read today of fearful cruelties perpetuated by English soldiers in 98' [the 1798 rebellion], upon the Irish. Their fiendish acts upon defenseless people we find sometimes paralleled by the by the infamous brutalities of the infamous Yankee mercenaries today." Dooley was making a common analogy among Confederates that the South's struggle with the North in the United States was akin to Ireland's struggle with Great Britain in the United Kingdom. Dooley, however, would have been very familiar with the comparison of Ireland to the South because was the son of a Limerick-born milliner who

had made his fortune in Richmond. John, Sr., it seems, had brought some hat-making skills with him from Ireland when he emigrated to Alexandria, Virginia (just down the opposite shore of Potomac River from

*John E. Dooley*

Washington DC) in the early 1830s. Eventually settling in Richmond, Dooley had, by the beginning of the Civil War, become quite prosperous in manufacturing and selling hats. He was wealthy enough to become a slaveowner and to send his sons to the premier Catholic university in the country at the time, Georgetown University in the



District of Columbia.

John Jr. found himself there as Virginia seceded from the Union in April 1861 and entered the Civil War as a member of the Confederacy. Despite being in "enemy" territory the young man stayed at his studies in the Jesuit college. Meanwhile, his father in command of the Montgomery Guards, the elite Irish militia



Georgetown University 1850



in Richmond, was mustering his Irish into the Confederate army as Company C of 1st Virginia Infantry Regiment. John's older brother James was also a member of the unit. In July of 1861 the 1st Virginia, under the command of now Colonel Dooley, took part in the First Battle of Bull Run, being one of the first Confederate units to face combat in the Civil War at Blackburn's Ford three days before the main battle. They had performed well that day. By early 1862, however, the elder Dooley had retired because of illness and James, having suffered a wound at the Battle of Williamsburg in April, had invalidated out of the army. John Jr. had had enough and went home to Richmond that summer to join up. Richmond had just barely escaped capture in the early summer, and with his father and brother out of the army, he felt it his duty to step up for the cause.

He too joined the 1st Virginia, though not his father's and brother's Irish Montgomery Guards. Instead, he joined Company D the Old Dominion Guards. John was very aware of Irish Catholic roots but saw himself as a Virginian first. Yet, he would exploit Irish and Catholic connections throughout his military career. Enlisting as a private, he mustered in just in time for the Second Battle of Bull Run in late August. Here he first "saw the elephant" and was quite nervous in his first battle. It was the Irish captain James Mitchel, successor to his father as Captain of the Irish Company C, and son of the famous Irish patriot and traitor to the Crown, John Mitchel, who settled him down before the fight. He gave the fresh recruit "some advice about loading and keeping cool when we should get under fire." Dooley, though

he felt very "scared" in his first contact with the enemy, survived Second Bull Run and the Battles of Antietam and Fredericksburg. Just before the latter his father came to visit him from Richmond as a member of the Ambulance Corps. With him the senior Dooley brought the Irish patriot himself, John Mitchel. Mitchel had run the blockade in 1862, crossing the Potomac to Virginia in a rowboat, to support the Confederacy. He had brought his youngest son with him, Willie, who had joined Dooley Jr. in the 1st. Willie became a boon companion of Dooley's.

Along with a close friend in the company, Ireland also provided Dooley promotion. In late 1862 James Mitchel had been discharged for a wound received at Second Bull Run and was replaced by Captain James Hallinan, a twenty-four-year-old Irish laborer. In early 1863 Hallinan needed a Lieutenant and because of Dooley's Irish parentage encouraged him to run for the position. Dooley agreed but refused to campaign directly in the company election. The Guards were now "divided into two parties—the old members—all Irishmen—and the conscripts." The conscripts were now in the majority and when a deputation of them visited him to "ascertain my views in regard to themselves" he told them quickly that he "had never solicited the honour [of election] and would make no promise whatever; but if elected, should consider myself at liberty to act as I thought proper." Despite his blunt refusal to promise anything to the majority, he still won election quite handily and transferred from the Old Dominion Guards to his father's and

older brother's old company. He was a little surprised at his victory and later heard that the old Irish members had "*bullied*" the conscripts *into electing* me." Irish machine politics had come to the Army of Northern Virginia.

Dooley was later promoted to Captain of the company and thus entered into the Union prisoner of war system under that rank when captured at Gettysburg. Again, he exploited Irish Catholic support. While in hospital in Washington recuperating from his wounds, he received aid from an old Georgetown tutor, Father James Hagan, S.J. After recovering, however, he lost contact somewhat with the outside world as he was shipped to the Union prison camp on Johnson's Island, Ohio. The island sat in Lake Erie opposite the city of Sandusky. The camp was designed for Confederate officers and Dooley quickly settled into life there, the only trouble being news reaching him of other Gettysburg casualties. Word of the death of Willie Mitchel in the battle, at only eighteen-years-old, hit him hard. By October 1863 when hopes of a prisoner exchange faded Dooley became despondent. Poor food supply and quality along with the sub-arctic weather conditions in the winter quickly turned him into a "Yankee hater," the "cold hearted, cold blooded enemy" as he called them. Some men became desperate to escape, attempting, in winter, to walk the fifty-plus miles across the frozen lake to Canada. Very few were successful. A Confederate plot to spring a mass breakout in 1864 using ships on the Lake was foiled. After more than a year in the camp, with the Confederacy's fortunes plummeting in



*Evacuation of Richmond*

late 1864, Dooley and some of his fellow officers were taking French, Spanish, and Portuguese classes, believing that they could never live in a reunited United States. It was Europe or Latin America for them.

He would not need the foreign languages though, as Dooley was pleasantly surprised in February 1865 to be exchanged. On March 4th he was finally back in the Confederate lines at Aiken's Landing on the James River just below Richmond. His brother was there to greet him and brought him up to the city. Though he was glad to be back home after twenty months in a POW camp, he was worried because he found "nearly all my friends gloomy and despondent in regard to the nature of the Confederacy." Nevertheless, he sought to continue the fight and would rejoin his regiment who were due to be shipped from Manchester (right across the James from Richmond) for Lynchburg on their way to support Confederate forces in the Shenandoah Valley. Before he went, however, he managed to celebrate St. Patrick's Day in the city, enjoying a good St. Patrick sermon in the Catholic cathedral after "having partaken of wine and apple brandy in *honour* [his emphasis] of the Day and having quite a social evening." Despite all his and the Confederacy's troubles he did find time to be "social" in church on St. Patrick's Day. Within a week, however, after the failure to capture Fort Stedman to break

the siege of Petersburg, the Confederate position in Richmond became untenable and General Robert E. Lee and the whole Confederate government evacuated on April 2nd. Thus began an odyssey for Dooley as he trailed the government to Appomattox and beyond, escaping Lee's surrender. He hoped to join Confederate forces in North Carolina. His Catholic connections again became useful as he stopped at various households for a meal and shelter as he wandered through southern Virginia into North Carolina. He eventually caught up the Confederate government in Charlotte and he was pleased to find a billet with "a nice old Irish lady." The news, however, was not good and he found solace in the local Catholic church, which though small, was "decidedly the prettiest inside" and had Irish American Father Jeremiah O'Connell, who he knew well, as a pastor. Reality began to hit home on April 23rd when he realised that continuing the fight was pointless. (General Joe Johnson had begun surrender negotiations with General William T. Sherman near Durham, North Carolina, only a few days before and surrendered on the 24th). He went to church to "recite the Rosary" acknowledging dejectedly that "my religion has always taught me that worldly desires and pleasures bring with them only bitterness and remorse." He surmised that he should have perhaps stayed at Georgetown and "entered the Society of Jesus." The next day he

accepted that "the Confederacy [had] dissolved" and decided to head for home. He returned to a devastated Richmond (large parts of which had burned in the Confederate evacuation). He got there on May 6 concluding his war diary with "the city in ruins and the hated and triumphant army of our malignant foes marching through the ruined city—with a raging headache and swelling heart I reach my home and here the curtain falls." Dejected by defeat, Dooley did find a vocation for the priesthood and entered the Society of Jesus as a seminarian in September 1865. He returned to Georgetown in 1867 to complete his clerical studies but his wartime experience, especially his time on Johnson's Island, left him sickly. By 1871 he could no longer do any pastoral work and was confined to study, including reminiscing on his wartime experiences. His weak lungs made him susceptible to consumption and he died of it in the infirmary of his alma mater on May 8, 1873, before his ordination and just over two months short of his thirty-first birthday. The man who had chosen Virginia and the Confederacy over his Irish Catholicism, had, in the end, returned to it. His fascinating war-time life can be found in *John Dooley's Civil War: An Irish American's Journey in the First Virginia Infantry Regiment*, ed. Robert Emmet Curran (2012). <https://utpress.org/title/john-dooleys-civil-war/>

David T. Gleeson, Northumbria University

# Irish Louisianians in the Army of Northern Virginia.

By David Gleeson



*Henry Strong Commander,  
6th Louisiana Infantry*

In the early morning of September 17, 1862, the men of Col. Harry Hays's Louisiana Brigade in the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia, were awakened to the sound of Union artillery fire. They had arrived at Sharpsburg, Maryland, just the night before having marched from Harper's Ferry, Virginia, on General Robert E. Lee's orders to reunite his army there, near Antietam Creek, to face General George McClellan's Union army of the Potomac. Camped in the West Woods along the Hagerstown Pike, the brigade prepared for battle. Though they were not the first to make contact with advancing Federal forces, they were soon sent across the turnpike toward the East Woods to meet the Federals there. Among the brigade was the "Irish" Sixth Louisiana Infantry regiment. Though not completely Irish more than half the regiment were in companies such as the "Irish Brigade A" and "Irish Brigade B." There were also the Calhoun Guards, another Irish company, who had been named in honor of the deceased South Carolina politician, the son of a Donegal man. The Guards had been formed by Irish immigrant Captain Henry Strong, a non-slaveholding New Orleans merchant. As part of the Sixth they had served in Stonewall Jackson's Valley

campaign and the Seven Days battles around Richmond in the summer of 1862. After the victories in the Seven Days they marched north as part of General Richard Ewell's division in Jackson's corps from the Confederate capital in August to take on the newly appointed General John Pope's Union army near the site of the First Battle of Bull Run. Strong was now in command of his regiment and had reached the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. At this second battle of Bull Run, through resignations and casualties, he found himself in command of the First Louisiana Brigade. Unfortunately, he made a mess of his formation for the battle and faced the full ire of his acting division commander, General Jubal Early. Early publicly rebuked the Irish man in his official report stating that he did not have the "sufficient skill" to lead the brigade.

Undoubtedly stung by that criticism, back just in charge of his regiment, he decided to lead into battle at Antietam on that Sept 17 on his white horse. He and his troops engaged Union forces in the notorious "cornfield" near the East woods. They halted the Union advance for a while, but Union artillery moved in virtually destroyed the Louisiana brigade. Among those killed was Strong and his horse, the latter hauntingly captured on camera, the day after the battle. Strong had been killed in action "leading his men bravely into battle" as recorded by one witness.

Strong was one of just thousands of Irish immigrants from Louisiana, who served in Confederate forces. Some served in local militias and a company called the "Southern Celts" served in the Army of Tennessee. A large majority of the Irish units from Louisiana served in the Army of Northern Virginia. They made up such a large part of the First Louisiana Brigade that one of their initial commanders recognised their value. Richard Taylor had been a prominent antebellum Louisiana politician. In politics he had been a Know-Nothing an explicitly anti-immigrant party. Yet, once he took command of the Louisiana brigade in the Stonewall Jackson's

1862 Shenandoah Valley campaign, he came to appreciate immigrants. After a particularly courageous action by Irish soldiers under heavy enemy fire, he remarked in his memoir "my heart has warmed to an Irishman since that night." He also noted, however, that Irish soldiers performed best which controlled with "a firm hand." Indeed, when one looks at the broader picture, one can see that the Irish did not always perform as well as they could have. In the Sixth Louisiana, for example, the most Irish companies had desertion rates double, or even triple of those dominated by native Louisianians. The Irish just did not have as much to lose as natives did. The Irish also often had the option to take an oath of allegiance when captured and head north, as many had Irish networks outside the South.

Despite the proclivity for desertion, and worse from a Confederate standpoint, swearing allegiance to the other side, Irish Louisianians still retained a strong reputation for being good fighters. This reality was down to the performance of officers like Strong. Mike Nolan was another who gave his life for the Confederate cause. Born in County Tipperary he had settled in New Orleans in the early 1840s. A avid Irish nationalist he had returned home for the 1848 Young Ireland rebellion arriving a week after its demise. His American appearance apparently got him arrested anyway. He was released on condition he went back to America, which he did. A radical in Irish politics he was something of a moderate in Louisiana politics. He was a campaign organizer for the national Democrat Stephen Douglas in the tumultuous election of 1860, seeking to hold the Union together. But, when President Lincoln won the 1860 election and South Carolina seceded, Nolan became a secessionist.

He was captain of a local Irish militia unit, the Montgomery Guards.





*Confederate pickets on Culp's Hill*

(named for General Richard Montgomery, the Irish-born American patriot killed in the siege of Quebec in 1785). Nolan and his men received guns seized from the Federal arsenal in the state capital, Baton Rouge, when Louisiana seceded in January 1861. Nolan and his Irish unit paraded around the city with their new arms when they mustered in Confederate service as Company E of the First Louisiana Infantry, Second Louisiana Brigade, and provided a pole for their new national flag. That staff had once been a pike one newspaper reported which had been "boren sixty-three ago . . . in the 'Irish Rebellion' of 1798." Irish Confederates in Louisiana, like Irish on the Union side, liked to link their American struggles with the Irish one for freedom from Great Britain.

Nolan created a certain esprit de corps in his unit because it was one of the best performing Irish companies in the Army of Northern Virginia with a very low desertion rate. Nolan's superiors recognized his leadership skills and he rose to command the regiment in the summer of 1862. Lieutenant Colonel Nolan found himself with his unit in the unfinished railroad cut in the centre of the Confederate line at the Second Battle of Bull Run in August of that year. The regiment held its nerve against wave after wave of Federal attack, eventually running out of ammunition, as the Union troops began to drive them out of the cut. Private Michael O'Keefe from Nolan's Montgomery Guards reportedly shouted: "Boys, give them rocks" and the regiment throw rocks from the plentiful railroad grade around them. Nolan quickly ordered the regiment to

rain rocks down on the Union soldiers and forced the Union soldiers to retreat. At the Battle of Gettysburg the following year, however, Nolan's luck ran out. In support of the Confederate actions on July 2nd he led his regiment up Culp's Hill to try and drive Union forces off Cemetery Ridge. In the charge he was hit by a bullet and killed. His body was taken from the battlefield and buried in a graveyard a few miles from Gettysburg, but his wife raised funds to have him exhumed and returned to her in New Orleans three years later. He was appropriately buried in St. Patrick's Cemetery #2.

Noted Irish military skill continued among the Louisiana Irish in the Army of Northern Virginia continued after Nolan's death. Irish immigrant William Monaghan was the organizer of one the Irish Brigade companies in the Sixth Louisiana. Captain Monaghan was promoted to regimental major and then took over command of the regiment after Henry Strong's death at Antietam. By the end of 1863 he commanded the brigade. In this role he performed vital leadership at the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House in May 1864. This horrendous bloody battle was nearly a disaster for the Army of Northern Virginia. Furious Union assaults on Confederate lines almost broke through but Monaghan spotted the gap and fill it, slowing down the Union attack. This effort meant the Confederates managed to escape southward to fight another day. The reality was, however, that there were not many left to fight. Monaghan had actually been in charge of a consolidated First and Second Louisiana Brigade the

numbers of each not even close to reaching brigade level. At the end of the battle his "Irish" Sixth had a strength of just sixty men. Nonetheless, Monaghan would lead the

new unit in the 1864 Shenandoah Valley campaign and was killed in action near Shepherdstown in August 1864.

Monaghan's death marked the end of notable contributions from Irish Louisianians to the Confederate cause. Those who survived though would participate in the "Lost Cause" joining veterans' organizations like the Association of the Army of Northern Virginia, which had a strong Louisiana Division led by Harry T. Hays, Richard Taylor's successor as commander of the First Louisiana Brigade. Hays would eventually be elected sheriff of Orleans Parish and was an implacable opponent any political rights for African Americans during the post-war "Reconstruction." As an astute politician he was prominent at Michael Nolan's reinterment in 1866, undoubtedly gaining Irish votes in the process. His term as sheriff became notorious when his officers massacred a number black and white Republicans in New Orleans in July 1866. Among his deputies were some Irish veterans from his Louisiana Brigade. Those Irish men and other former Confederates would also support the nascent Fenian movement in New Orleans, which became quite substantial in the late 1860s. Union Irish veterans in the city joined with former Confederates in Ireland's cause. The Fenians were ultimately unsuccessful and those Irish who remained in Louisiana focused on becoming American instead, which, in that state, also meant the disfranchisement of African Americans and an endorsement of Jim Crow segregation by the century's end. They chose their native white neighbours over any alliance with the "freed people." As a result, they would participate fully in white Louisiana politics electing their first mayor, John Fitzpatrick, in 1892. By that stage the Irish, thanks in part to their Confederate participation and their rejection of African American rights, were an integral part of the city, as much as the French Creoles and white Americans who had come before them.



*Strong-horse*

"Uncle Sam and John Bull Again Fast Friends

# An Irish Geordie in the American Civil War & Tyneside's Memorial Day Remembrance

By Damian Shiels

John Pendergast (or Prendergast) was born in Ireland around 1836. He and his family reportedly emigrated to North-East England when he was young, possibly as a result of the Famine. They were far from alone; in 1851 some 8% of Newcastle's population were Irish-born. John lived on Tyneside until adulthood, before electing to travel to the United States in the 1850s. John was still in America by the time the American Civil War erupted, but he did not follow an orthodox path into the Union army.

The regiment that John became a part of was the 13th Connecticut Volunteer Infantry, which had been organised in New Haven in early 1862. The unit was assigned to the Department of the Gulf, but John had not travelled south with them. In fact, he only joined the men from the Nutmeg State after they had landed in Louisiana. He was one of a large group—many of whom were Irish—who entered service with the regiment in New Orleans. Since May 1862 the 13th Connecticut had been barracked in the city's Custom House, which was also serving as the military headquarters. There many locals

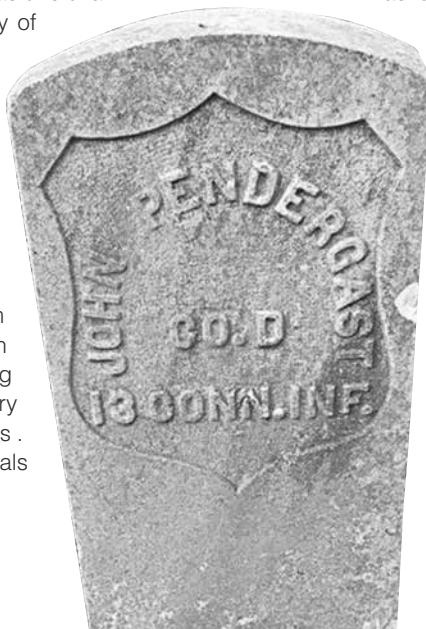
presented themselves to join up. The regimental historian remembered:

"We took in about two hundred and twenty in all, filling the regiment to the maximum. Nearly all were of foreign birth, and most of them had lived in the northern states. For illustration: Company H received twenty four recruits in May. Of these twelve were born in Ireland, ten in Germany, one in New York, and one in Massachusetts. All but five had lived in the North. All but six had been in the Confederate service. These New Orleans men were a valuable accession to our ranks, many of them being brave men, experienced in war. They were credited to the quota of Connecticut, and few of them ever dishonored her name. They were well aware of the risk they incurred of being executed as deserters if recaptured by the Rebels."

John was mustered in to the 13th Connecticut in New Orleans on 8th September 1862, becoming a private in Company G (he would transfer to Company D on 12th August 1865 in Savannah, Georgia). Had John been a Confederate prior to his enlistment into the Union Army? It

is entirely possible that he had, though only a detailed review of his surviving service record and pension file might reveal it. Either way, he proved extremely loyal to the Stars and Stripes, serving through some hard fighting at places like Port Hudson, along the Red River and in Sheridan's Shenandoah Valley campaign before the war concluded.

After the war, John returned to the North-East of England, settling in North Shields. He is likely the John Pendergast on the 1871 Census who was living at 1 Union Stairs in the town and working as a labourer mason. Although he had come back to England, John remained a firm part of the Irish community on Tyneside, as evidenced by his wife Margaret who was also Irish-born. The couple appear to have had at least one daughter. By 1891 the only Pendergast to match our man was married to a different woman, Catherine—Margaret having presumably passed away in the interim. Catherine was fifteen years John's junior, but notably she was also Irish-born. By then John and his wife were living at 4 Bell Street in North Shields, with the Irish immigrant still working as a labourer. Soon afterwards he took advantage of a change in American military pension law that made veterans eligible for payments in old age, and so from 1895 he received money from the U.S. Government for his Civil War service. By 1901 the couple were at 2 River Police Quay in North Shields (beside Liddell Street), and it was here that the Irishman passed away,



52286

WAR DEPARTMENT  
O. Q. M. G. FORM NO. 623  
Approved June 1, 1923  
Revised July 15, 1929

**APPLICATION FOR HEADSTONE**  
(PLEASE MAKE OUT AND RETURN IN DUPLICATE)

Name <i>John Pendergast</i>	Rank <i>Private</i>	Company <i>D.</i>	U. S. Regiment, State Organization, or Vehicle <i>13th Conn. Inf.</i>	Date of Death <i>May 2nd 1901</i>
Name of Cemetery <i>Preston</i>		Located in or near— <i>North Shields, Eng.</i>		
TO BE SHIPPED TO <i>Newcastle, England</i>		If World War Veteran— <i>None</i>		
POST OFFICE ADDRESS OF CONSIGNEE <i>G.W. Scott</i>		City <i>Newcastle</i>	State <i>None</i>	Division <i>None</i>
DO NOT WRITE HERE		Emblem <i>Christian Hebrew None</i>		
<p>I hereby agree to accept the headstone at above destination, freight prepaid, and properly place same at decedent's grave.</p> <p>This application is for the UNMAKED* grave of a native and delivered at the railway station, Newcastle, England, or American Consulate, freight prepaid, and agreed it will be promptly removed and set up at private expense.</p> <p>Applicant <i>G.W. Scott</i></p> <p>Date <i>May 28th 1930</i></p> <p>*Stone must not be requested for any grave at which a private stone, monument, or other permanent marker is already erected or is to be erected.</p> <p>2-864</p>				
<p>Verified <i>John Pendergast</i></p> <p>Ordered MAY 26 1930</p> <p>From 13th Conn. Inf.</p> <p>Shipped 196075</p> <p>Address 18. Victoria M.</p>				

#### Headstone application

later the same year. After his death Catherine successfully applied for an American widow's pension based on his service.

John Pendergast was buried in North Shields' Preston Cemetery. For a number of years only his family visited his final resting place, but all that changed after the conclusion of the First World War. The deaths of Americans in that conflict had brought a new prominence to U.S. servicemen buried in Europe, and saw the formation of the American Overseas Memorial Day Association in 1920. Still in existence today, the AOMDA have a stated mission:

To decorate on the National Memorial Day and such other public and patriotic holidays as may be appropriate, the graves, tombs and monuments of all American Servicemen and women of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and Auxiliary Services buried overseas.

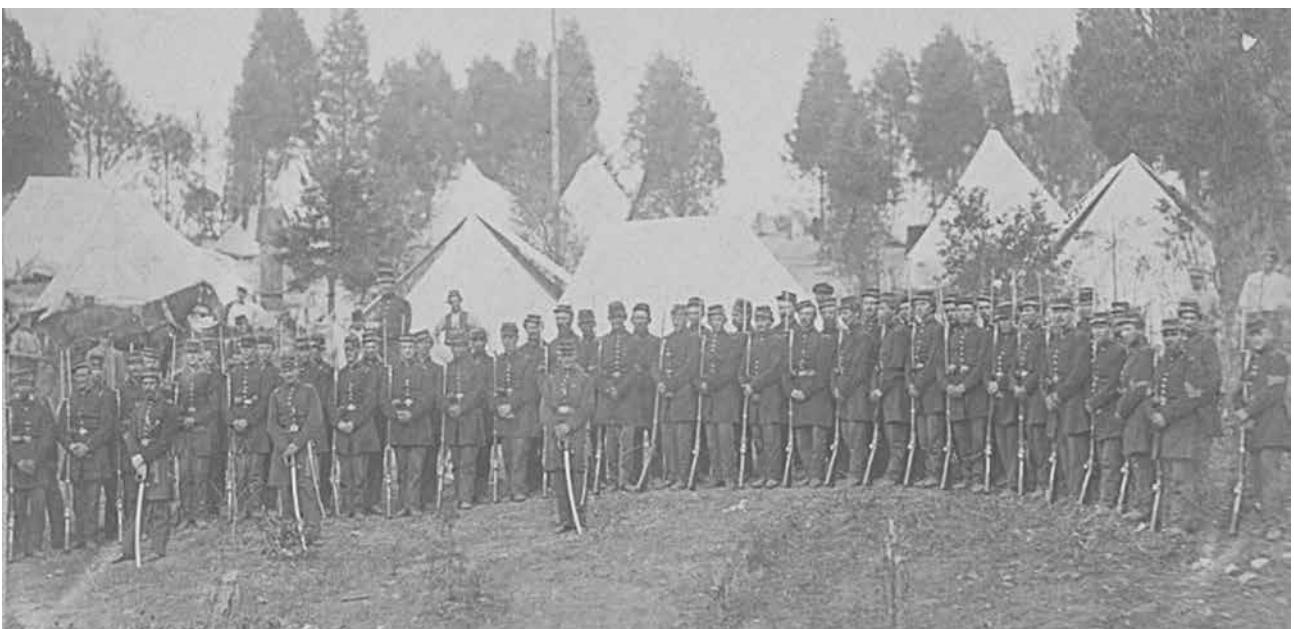
The American Overseas Memorial Day Association were fortunate that on Tyneside there was an American with a singular drive to see local men who had served in the American Civil War remembered. Ultimately it was he whom the Pendergast family and others had to thank for the recognition that was to come their way in the 1920s. His name was George Washington Scott, and remembering Tyneside's American Civil War veterans was described as his "labour of love."

George was a native New Yorker who for many decades was a prominent American in the North-East. Born around 1850, the 1891 Census found him classified as a stationer and living at 67 Blandford Street in Newcastle's Westgate area. He was enumerated with his 18-year-old Connecticut-born daughter Elizabeth, who served as his assistant, and his 12-year-old Newcastle-born son (also George W.) who was attending school. George cropped up

periodically in the local newspapers, most notably in 1914, when he fell foul of the authorities for failing to register himself and his family as aliens following the outbreak of the First World War. By then George was running a newsagents on Westmorland Road. The Newcastle Evening Chronicle reported:

George Washington Scott, 64, his wife, Sarah Ann Scott, and his daughter, Lizzie Annie Scott were jointly charged with not having registered themselves as aliens, they being American subjects...Scott said he had lived in Newcastle for 25 years, with the exception of a short period that he had spent, three years ago, in a visit to America. His wife and daughter had not been out of the city for 25 years. When the war broke out the American Consul informed him that he had to sign a book, and as he signed a book at the Consulate, he thought that was the book referred to.

George's explanation did not go down well with the authorities, and he was fined 20 Shillings and costs. Still, he doesn't seem to have harboured any ill feelings, and he remained a dedicated member of the community in the North-East for the remainder of his life. As the years past he was referred to as the "senior member of the American colony in the North of England" and by the late 1930s as the "oldest member of the American Colony on Tyneside." It was George who coordinated with the American Consul in the North-East to arrange for ceremonies to take place in late May to



Connecticut infantrymen in 1861

mark Memorial Day (which started as Decoration Day), the occasion on which the United States remembers those who fell in service.

Each year throughout the 1920s and 30s the Consul or one of his representatives travelled around with George to each of the identified Civil War graves in the area. Usually the ceremony would see the graves decorated with miniature American flags and Union Jacks, with wreaths laid and speeches delivered. Typical was Memorial Day 1931. Arriving at Preston Cemetery, wreaths and miniature flags (usually the Stars & Stripes and Union Jack) were placed on the grave of John Pendergast and another Civil War veteran (Robert Rennoldson, 7th New Hampshire Infantry) by their relatives. In the case of John that was his daughter, one Mrs. Stanton. After the decorations had been put on John's grave, George gave an address:

...it was said of Lord Armstrong [the famed Newcastle industrialist] that he loved the place so much that he would fight for it. These men had fought for the same principles and he was proud of them and thought it only right that they should be remembered in that way.

He went on to comment that the ceremony was a token of the friendship of Britain and America and that sacrifices were worthwhile when made for peace and freedom. George commented that he had been moved to see recently that a British soldier who died in America had been buried with full military honours.



New Orleans with the Union fleet at anchor, 1862

Mr. H. Daglish, Preston Cemetery Superintendent, also said a few words, and a Consular representative (or the Consul himself) also usually spoke. A local newspaper reported that the Civil War soldier's service:

...was a life time ago, but America wished to help those who had helped her and so a yearly visit is paid to the graves of these men in a quiet garden where the spirit of peace seems to dwell and there are few reminders of old, unhappy far off things and battles long ago.

In 1932 the American Vice-Consul Merlin E. Smith and Scott were accompanied on their Memorial Day tour of Tyneside's cemeteries by Cadet Major W.G. Finlay MBE, officer commanding the Armstrong Whitworth Cadet Detachment, Northumberland Fusiliers. This time round the Vice-Consul placed a flag on Pendergast's grave and then read



Memorial Day or Decoration Day

aloud Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, stating that these men had fought for freedom, but that the heroes of the future were those who would work for peace, and the task was given to the common people.

George Washington Scott died in 1937, but the tradition he established survived him. It continued right into the years of the Second World War, though in much reduced form. In 1940 it was reported that "owing to the war the ceremony which has been observed for many years past on the occasion of this annual tribute was dispensed with." In its place one of the American Consular staff, a Mr. R. Gibson from Whitley Bay, visited Preston Cemetery and placed a wreath and the miniature flags on each of the graves. In 1942 a "large spray of Flanders poppies" was placed on the burials, along with a card inscribed "American Memorial Day, May 30th 1942." The following year this was still in place, along with the mini-flags, though they were reported as "sadly weather worn."

The realities of the most horrific conflict the world had ever seen and the absence of the ever-dedicated George Washington Scott seem to have brought an end to the annual remembrance around Tyneside's Cemeteries. The story of the brief period when they flourished provide us a fascinating insight into how these graves became— for those years between the World Wars— a symbol of the new alliance between the United States and Britain forged during the First World War. George Washington Scott did leave a lasting legacy to many of Tyneside's Civil War veterans, including John Pendergast. It is one that anyone who visits one of these graves today can see for themselves. Most—if not all—the headstones of American Civil War veterans in the area were ordered by George around 1930, and still serve to identify the last resting places of the men whose memory he worked so hard to preserve.

*Special thanks are due to Michael Scott, who carried out research on the two veterans buried in Preston Cemetery and how they were remembered. This article first appeared on [www.irishamericancivilwar.com](http://www.irishamericancivilwar.com) and was part of a wider study of American Civil War veteran's graves in Tyneside. Additional analysis was published both on the website and in the Newcastle Chronicle.*

