

5-2008

A defense of the 63rd New York State Volunteer Regiment of the Irish Brigade

Patricia Vaticano

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A DEFENSE OF THE 63RD NEW YORK STATE VOLUNTEER REGIMENT
OF THE IRISH BRIGADE

By

PATRICIA VATICANO

Master of Arts in History

University of Richmond

2008

Dr. Robert C. Kenzer, Thesis Director

During the American Civil War, New York State's irrepressible Irish Brigade was alternately composed of a number of infantry regiments hailing both from within New York City and from within and without the state, not all of them Irish, or even predominantly so. The Brigade's core structure, however, remained constant throughout the war years and consisted of three all-Irish volunteer regiments with names corresponding to fighting units made famous in the annals of Ireland's history: the 69th, the 88th, and the 63rd. The 69th, or *Fighting 69th*, having won praise and homage for its actions at First Bull Run, was designated the First Regiment of the Brigade and went on to even greater glory in the Civil War and every American war thereafter. The 88th, or *Connaught Rangers*, the majority of whom had served with distinction in the famed British Regiment of the same name, was designated the Second Regiment of the Brigade,

or Fourth or Fifth depending upon sources. True to its distinguished regimental roots, it continued its tradition of military excellence throughout the duration of the war.

This study focuses on the regimental composition and wartime merits of the Third Irish Regiment of the Irish Brigade, the 63rd New York State Volunteer Infantry, traditionally deemed the least remarkable and causative of the three core units. Through the presentation of facts, chronicling of events, and exposition of character of both officers and men, this thesis identifies the 63rd as a fighting unit on par with its fellows and as a major contributor to the enduring fame of the Irish Brigade.

I certify that I have read this thesis and find that, in scope and quality, it satisfies the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Robert C. Kenzer, Thesis Advisor

Sydney Watts, Second Reader

A DEFENSE OF THE 63RD NEW YORK STATE VOLUNTEER REGIMENT
OF THE IRISH BRIGADE

By

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B.A., College of Saint Elizabeth, 1977

M.A., Drew University, 1986

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the University of Richmond

in Candidacy

for the degree of

MASTERS OF ARTS

in

History

May, 2008

Richmond, Virginia

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My interest in the Civil War came rather late in life, having first “discovered” the war in the late 1980’s through Louisa May Alcott’s *Hospital Sketches* and then later, through Ken Burns’s poignant and haunting documentary, *The Civil War*. Given these introductions, my sensibilities of the event leant themselves more to the hospital and the hearth rather than to the march and the trenches, and that I should have chosen a military topic for my master’s thesis is still quite beyond me to comprehend. Frankly, I could not be more surprised at this fruition of my labors if I tired. Decidedly, I could neither have begun nor completed a work of this nature without the kindness and generosity of many.

With sincerest gratitude, I wish to thank my Thesis Advisor, Dr. Robert C. Kenzer, for his gracious cheering-on whenever the road ahead looked threatening. His knowledge, guidance, gifts of time, and many kindnesses will always be remembered. My heartfelt thanks, as well, to my Second Reader, Dr. Sydney Watts, for her time and support in this endeavor. Her perspective and direction were invaluable and her sincerity and caring evident in every respectful question posited and every gentle suggestion made.

I would be greatly remiss if I did not take the time and space here to thank Suzanne Blyer, Program Coordinator of the Arts and Science Graduate School, for her kindhearted shepherding throughout these last seven years. She returned many a frantic phone call or email from Williamsburg with grace, humor, and the much needed solution in question. Thank you for all your help, Suzanne—and for your friendship.

I would like to thank my old neighbor and dear friend, Neil Hanlon, of Williamsburg, Virginia, for first suggesting I write about “his lads” of the 63rd New York--and for not giving up on the idea. His Celtic tenacity served me well, as did his expert proofing skills and talents as guide and companion on many a Civil War battlefield trip. It is my greatest hope that what I have written here meets with his approval and does honor in some small way to his great grandfather, Timothy O’Neil, Sergeant, Company E, 63rd NYV, and all the good lads of the Third Regiment.

If Neil Hanlon initiated this work, his friend and now, mine, William Rose, of Petersburg, Virginia, sustained it. Bill’s military expertise, exhaustive knowledge about the Irish Brigade, and great generosity of heart made this work possible. Thank you, Bill, for cheerfully sharing with me your time, your resources, and your insights. I am hard-pressed to think how this work could have been brought to completion without your help, your patience, and your kindness.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the following people for helping me to defend the men of the 63rd New York. Thank you all for your sincere interest in my work, for your wit and humor, and for your good-natured sharing of time and knowledge: Jim Gandy, Archivist, New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center, Saratoga Springs, New York; Justin D. White, Oswego County Historian and Archivist Clerk, Oswego County Records, Oswego, New York; Interpretive Park Rangers, Brian Baracz and John Hoptak, National Park Service, Antietam National Battlefield, Maryland; Mark Allen, Seasonal Historian and Kris White, Interpretive Park Ranger, National Parks Service, Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park, Virginia;

Del Moore, Reference Librarian, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, Virginia; Josh Bucchioni, Civil War Re-enactor and Historical Interpreter, Military Magazine, Division of Historic Site Interpretation, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, Virginia; and the Reference Librarians of The Williamsburg-James City County Regional Public Library, Williamsburg, Virginia.

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INTRODUCTION
FROM THE HEAD OF ZEUS

New York's Irish Brigade, or more precisely, the 69th New York State Militia which was soon to become the nucleus of that celebrated brotherhood, began its Civil War career on a somewhat amusing note. In the autumn of 1860, the 69th Militia and its then commanding officer, Colonel Michael Corcoran, were in a test of wills with the state of New York. Corcoran, an Irish immigrant and political activist, was then formally under arrest and facing court martial charges for refusing to parade the 69th in honor of the soon to visit Prince of Wales. To say that state authorities were scandalized by Corcoran's brazen insubordination would be an understatement. Joseph Bilby, in *Remember Fontenoy!*, a history of the 69th and the Irish Brigade, writes that many anti-Irish factions within the state seized the opportunity to use Corcoran's defiance to disband the 69th entirely, as anti-Irish sentiment had disbanded Irish militias in other states.¹ But Corcoran, nonplussed by the reactions, stood firm, remaining distanced and removed from the whirlwind controversy in both word and deed. The colonel, notes Frank A. Boyle in *A Party of Mad Fellows: The Story of the Irish Regiments in the Army of the Potomac*, coolly protested that the 69th had already participated in twelve parades in twelve months time, and in so doing, had met militia law.² An ostensibly plausible stand. No one, however, credited Corcoran's argument. All knew that he and the 69th, at the time all immigrant Irish to a man, were protesting, not the visiting prince, but

¹ Joseph G. Bilby, *Remember Fontenoy! The 69th New York and The Irish Brigade in the Civil War* (Hightstown, NJ: Longstreet House, 1995), 3, 5.

² Frank A. Boyle, *A Party of Mad Fellows: The Story of the Irish Regiments in the Army of the Potomac* (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside House, Inc., 1996), 21.

Britain's heinous crimes against the Irish in the Great Potato Famine and the country's callous repression of the nativist Young Ireland Movement, thereafter.³ Need won out. However enflamed the authorities, the moment was ripe for forgiveness. With the Civil War looming, writes David P. Conyngham, author of the painfully laudatory *The Irish Brigade and Its Campaigns*, Corcoran was summarily relieved of the charges, released from jail, and under Special Order No. 9, directed to resume command of his regiment forthwith.⁴ The 69th Militia never paraded in honor of Queen Victoria's son.

The all-Irish 69th Militia was the first militia-based infantry unit to be mustered into service by the state of New York and the first Irish unit mustered into the service of the Union, Corcoran amassing in quick order 1,040 men for deployment.⁵ The second to form for the state was yet another all-Irish unit under Corcoran's command. This unit was designated Company K of the 69th Militia, outfitted in Zouave uniforms, and captained by yet another Irish immigrant and activist, the company's organizer and promoter, Thomas Francis Meagher.⁶ Meagher was an exiled leader of the Young Ireland Movement and a man of great fame among the Irish in America, and arguably abroad, both for his anti-British activities and persuasive oratory skills.⁷ Given his position in the Irish community and his relationship to the unit, Company K was subsequently named Meagher's Irish Zouaves and, like the 69th, wasted no time in

³ Bilby, 3. Richard Demeter, in *A History of the Fighting 69th*, notes that Corcoran issued a statement to the *New York Herald*, dated October 18, 1860, that he "could not in good conscience order out a regiment of Irish-born citizens to honor the son of Queen Victoria, "under whose reign Ireland was made a desert and her sons forced into exile." Richard Demeter, *A History of the Fighting 69th* (Pasadena, California: Cranford Press, 2002), 24.

⁴ David P. Conyngham, *The Irish Brigade and Its Campaigns, With Some Accounts of the Corcoran Legion* (New York: William McSorley & Co., 1867), 20.

⁵ Bilby, 5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷ *Ibid.*

responding to the crisis at hand.⁸ Both units performed bravely amid the carnage of First Bull Run. When all other regiments on the field that day retreated in chaos and disarray, both the 69th Militia and Meagher's Zouaves left the field with their wits about them and in good order, "acquitting themselves well if not better than any other Union outfit, regular, militia, or volunteers, on the field."⁹ By turn of fate, however, the 69th Militia returned to New York without its colonel, Corcoran having been captured during the battle by the enemy. He spent the next thirteen months in Libby Prison in Richmond, and upon release, in the summer of the following year, formed a fighting unit all his own, Corcoran's Irish Legion.¹⁰ Corcoran continued to perform with distinction until his non-combatant death in 1863.¹¹ Unfortunately, his incarceration after First Bull Run lost him any role in the creation of the 69th New York State Volunteer Infantry, legendary offspring of the 69th Militia, or in the formation of the Irish Brigade. That role fell to Meagher.

Almost thirty years after the war, General Robert Nugent, originally lieutenant colonel of the 69th Militia and later colonel of the 69th New York State Volunteers, would publicly claim that the idea of creating an all-Irish brigade was the joint inspiration of himself and Thomas Francis Meagher.¹² It is understandable that Nugent would seek recognition for his involvement in the planning stage. It was a bold and clever proposal.

⁸ The 88th New York was often called "Mrs. Meagher's Own," due to the inclusion of many of Meagher's Zouaves into its ranks.

⁹ Bilby, 17.

¹⁰ William Corby, C. S. C., *Memoirs of Chaplain Life: Three Years with the Irish Brigade in the Army of the Potomac*. Edited by Lawrence F. Kohl. Reprint. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992), 17; Boyle, 171.

¹¹ Conyngham, 540.

¹² Boyle, 54.

The idea of creating an ethnic regiment, one highly identifiable as Irish and Irish American would, in the end, serve the Irish well. Due largely to the Know Nothing movement of the 1850's, a nativist political movement opposing large-scale Irish and German immigration, sentiment in the country at the time was largely anti-Irish Catholic. Many Americans believed that the Irish immigrant was loyal only to the Pope and did not hold the same values as did other Americans. An all-Irish brigade would give the Irish in America the chance to demonstrate their loyalty to their new country and their worth to the American people. In addition, it was hoped that an all-Irish brigade would attract Ireland's patriots to the Union's cause. Those among them surviving the war would then be empowered with the necessary military skills to liberate from British rule their own broken and dispirited country. Though he maintained that the primary loyalty of the Irish in America was to the Union, Meagher, as a leader of the Young Ireland Movement sponsored this outcome.¹³

But despite Nugent's claims of co-authoring the idea of an all-Irish military unit, history would forever identify Meagher as the sole originator of the Irish Brigade, Meagher having worked tirelessly, publicly, and seemingly single-handedly to organize it. By manipulation and self-promotion, he would eventually take command of it, as well, at the expense of Nugent who was far and above the more qualified soldier. In the summer of 1861, after countless rousing pro-war speeches to thousands of New York Irish, Meagher was commissioned by the Assistant Secretary of War, Thomas A. Scott, to arrange with other colonels the command of four regiments to form a brigade. Though

¹³ Jones, *The Irish Brigade* (Washington, D.C.: Robert Luce, 1969), 16.

the state of New York would later legally authorize the formation, Scott gave Meagher, thereafter confirmed by Simon Cameron, Secretary of War, not only the power to raise and order four, three-year regiments but to select officers for them, as well.¹⁴ When James Shields, a hero of the Mexican War and the most famous Irish-American military figure then living, refused Meagher's offer of brigade commander, many contended, Shields among them, that the next likely choice for brigadier general was none other than Thomas Francis Meagher. Meagher did not protest.¹⁵ In the end, with his oratorical skills and organizational talents fully utilized and the position of command secured, it would seem to many, then and now, that Thomas Francis Meagher had birthed the Irish Brigade from his forehead, fully formed and clothed in armor, as Athena from the head of Zeus.¹⁶

Ultimately, the Irish Brigade, the entirety of it designated the Second Brigade, First Division, Second Corps of the Army of the Potomac, would encompass more than the four allotted regiments requested by the War Department. Three core units were attached to the Brigade almost immediately, the 69th, 88th, and 63rd New York State Volunteer Infantries, and would serve in the Brigade throughout the war, highly identifiable as Meagher's Irish Brigade.¹⁷ To the three core regiments, however, at varying times, would be added a good number of fighting units, Irish and non. The 2nd

¹⁴ Corby, 18, 64-65.

¹⁵ Conyngham, 68-70. Conyngham proposes Shields could not have accepted the offer as it was incompatible with his dignity, finding it beneath him, a major general in the last war, to take a command under civilian superiors in the present one. Meagher, perhaps, knew this and may have been merely jockeying for the position of brigadier general himself in his nomination of Shields.

¹⁶ Organizing the Brigade was not as easy as it appeared, of course. Not every soldier had confidence in Meagher due to his lack of military experience, and many were uncertain of his motives. Only 200 veterans of the 69th Militia joined the Irish Brigade. Those remaining chose to continue service as an independent unit. See Bilby, 19.

¹⁷ Meagher's original plans for a cavalry unit for the Brigade never materialized.

New York Light Artillery Battalion, Fifth Regiment, consisting of two batteries, Hogan and McMahon's, was attached to the Brigade in the very beginning, but would fail to see actual service under Meagher.¹⁸ The 69th Pennsylvania, though slated for the Brigade, was called back by Pennsylvania's governor, Andrew Curtin, who, writes Patrick D. O'Flaherty in *The History of the Sixty-ninth Regiment in the Irish Brigade, 1861-1865*, begrudged its military quota to the state of New York.¹⁹ The 29th Massachusetts, a non-Irish, Protestant regiment, joined the Brigade early in the Peninsula Campaign in 1862, but was exchanged after Antietam for the all-Irish 28th Massachusetts which remained in the Brigade until the close of the war. The 116th Pennsylvania Volunteers was also added after Antietam, Governor Curtin, apparently, having compromised his position, but was transferred to the 4th Brigade of the 2nd Corps during the Petersburg Campaign in 1865. At this same time, the remaining regiments, consisting of the three New York units, the 28th Massachusetts, and the 7th New York Heavy Artillery added late in 1864, were consolidated into a new, but much reduced, Irish Brigade.

But of all these units, the three New York regiments attached to the Irish Brigade would forever be recognized as the heart of it, each regiment composed almost solely of the newly-arrived Sons of Erin or the sons of those who once were. As Nugent and Meagher had intended, these all-Irish units, as newspapers, recruitment announcements, and personal correspondence attest, fought for one or several of the same reasons: loyalty to home, native or adopted; the inclusion, by merit, of the Irish people in an anti-Irish

¹⁸ Four batteries were originally intended, but only the two cited were ever manned.

¹⁹ Patrick D. O'Flaherty, *The History of the Sixty-ninth Regiment in the Irish Brigade, 1861-1865* (New York: Privately printed, 1986), 6. The 69th Pennsylvania entered the war a separate unit.

America; or, for the immigrant, the liberation of a beleaguered Ireland using skills obtained through military service in the war.²⁰ But if these regiments shared the same ethnic composition and nationalist rationales, history has not judged the three equal as regards their military prowess and effectiveness in battle. In the assessment of many, the 63rd New York was and remains, only middling, at best, to the 69th and 88th regiments of the Irish Brigade. It is a regiment customarily consigned, by popular opinion, a lesser portion of that mettle by which the other two regiments became famous, a unit habitually relegated the shadows in many a battle and campaign.

It is the position of this study, contrary to the traditional assessment, that the 63rd New York was neither inferior, nor an afterthought to the more favored and highly acclaimed 69th and 88th Regiments of the New York Irish Brigade. As may be readily discerned below through the use of official records and personal accounts, the 63rd waged war with as great abandon and recklessness as any Irish mother or sweetheart might dread or fear, combating as fiercely, as defiantly, and as successfully as did its companion core regiments. Along with the 69th and 88th, the Third Regiment, particularly at Antietam as will be seen, fought with distinction, winning honor for themselves, for their fellow Irishmen, and for Meagher's Irish Brigade. This work does not propose to be an exhaustive regimental history of the 63rd New York State Volunteer Infantry. It is a defense of its worth as a fighting unit in relation to the other core regiments of the Irish

²⁰ Richard F. Welch, "America's Civil War: Why the Irish Fought for the Union." *Civil War Times* (October 2006). *HistoryNet.Com*, http://www.historynet.com/wars_conflicts/4293512.html?page=1&c=y (accessed October 28, 2006).

Brigade. As such, only major battles and campaigns, the latter not always in their entirety, will be examined in the following pages.

CHAPTER ONE

DEBRIS OF A NATION: THE MEN OF THE IRISH BRIGADE²¹

“Ye boys of the sod, to Columbia be true,
“Come up, boys, and fight, for the Red, White and Blue!
“Two countries we love, and two mottoes we’ll share.
And we’ll join them in one, on the banner we bear:
“Erin, mavoureen! Columbia, agra!
“E pluribus unum! Erin, go bragh!”²²

The Irish, perhaps as no other people may, can measure their years as a nation by violent cycles, sure and perpetual, of heartless repression and bloody rebellion, their history hewn out of Ireland’s wild and rugged earth by the mace and by the sword. The Irish have been, by necessity and from the very beginning, a warrior people, forced by fortune and fate to defend, almost without respite, a relatively small island from foes of great strength and daunting size, an oppressed people whose ancient lore and song is replete with the sobering tales of invasion, subjugation, and exile. Ironically, at least until the 19th century, it was only as mercenaries for distant powers that the Irish achieved any real success as to autonomy and self-realization, fighting and dying gloriously upon foreign soil for causes not their own, a tradition dating back to ancient times. In these pursuits, life and death continued to be defined for them by the skirmish, the battle, and the campaign. Always at war, always yet another call to arms. The truest symbol of Ireland may be neither harp nor shamrock but the warrior-soldier, a restrained and

²¹ New York Archbishop John J. Hughes identified the immigrant Irish nation with these words. See Jones, 60.

²² James De Mille, “Song of the Irish Legion,” in *Songs of the Soldiers*, ed. Frank Moore (New York: George P. Putnam, 1864), 39-40.

solitary figure positioned in time and space, courageous, heroic, resolute, and strangely poignant.

Given their history, it is not surprising that the Irish in America, both immigrant and native-born, should have responded as they did to the Civil War. Their rally to the call to arms was immediate and great, with numbers conservatively estimated at 150,000 on the Union side, 40,000 on the Confederate. Faithful to their martial past, Irish regiments in every quarter, North and South, went on to win fame and renown wherever they fought and often in the most hopeless of circumstances.²³ They were ferocious fighters, born of centuries of practiced warfare, wild and impetuous in their charges, ensuing from a personal intimacy with lost and hopeless causes. In recognition of this, it is, perhaps, more than just to say that the gore and chaos of the battlefield was the natural milieu of the Irish, and the ancestral blood in them made good their commitments. But if these were the hallmarks of Irish regiments, North and South, New York's Irish Brigade was, arguably, the most colorful, the most care-free, the most driven, and the most daring of all the Irish units, either side. It is well within the mark to say that by war's end, it was a brigade universally recognized as having been, most often, in the very thick of things, participant in almost all the major battles in the Eastern theater and which had, without stint, given that last full measure time and time, again. George Alfred Townsend, Delaware-born war correspondent and novelist, wrote of New York's Irish Brigade:

²³ Kevin O'Beirne, "Playing Paddy Right: Some Basics of an Irish-American First-Person Impression," Part I, *Columbia Rifles*, <http://www.columbiarifles.org/Articles/Paddy.-2.html> (accessed September 11, 2006), 1. As many as 175,000 Irish fought for the Union cause in the war. See W. S. Neidhardt, *Fenianism in North America* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1975), 11.

“Whenever anything absurd, forlorn, or desperate was to be attempted, the Irish were called upon.”²⁴

But despite their exemplary service, the men of the New York Irish Brigade, as Irishmen in many another Northern unit, may well have been conflicted in their loyalties in the beginning. Most Irish-Americans at the time were Democrats and many, in the spring of 1861, identified with the South, not the North. The South was rallying for freedom and home rule, causes well known to the Irish. How could they *not* identify with such principles? The cruelest episode in Ireland’s history, the Great Potato Famine, was a vivid illustration of the evils of a tyrannical foreign rule and which had been perpetrated in their very own times. It was the seminal event that brought them in scores to America’s shore, “the poorest and most wretched population that can be found in the world—the scattered debris of the Irish nation,” as John J. Hughes, first Archbishop of New York, identified them.²⁵ It was a hard decision. Were they to support the South with which they had much ideology in common? Or the North and, as they saw it, the Constitution, which had given them safe-haven, a livelihood, and hope?²⁶ Even Thomas Francis Meagher himself hesitated in his commitment to the North at the start of the conflict. A vowed Democrat, Meagher declared to his Republican father-in law, Peter Townsend, only a month before Fort Sumter, “You cannot call eight millions of white

²⁴ George Alfred Townsend, *Campaigns of a Non-Combatant, and His Remount During the War* (New York: Blelock, 1866; Alexandria, VA: Time-Life Books, 1982), 130. This citation is to the Time-Life Books edition.

²⁵ Stern, William J., “What *Gangs of New York* Misses,” *City Journal*, Summer 2007, Vol. 17, No. 3: 1, http://www.city-journal.org/html/eon_1_14_03ws.html (accessed October 7, 2007).

²⁶ William L. Burton, *Melting Pot Soldiers: The Union’s Ethnic Regiments*. (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1988), 112.

freeman ‘rebels,’ sir. You may call them *revolutionists*, if you will.”²⁷ In the end, of course, Meagher cast his lot with the North, his new homeland, preferring to shoulder a debt to the Constitution and publicly declaring that whatever hopes for a free Ireland this affiliation might realize in the future, the true cause of the Irish in this war, now, was the union of North and South.²⁸

Meagher’s decision, ultimately, was the decision of scores of Irishmen then living throughout the vast confines of the North. By 1860, at least 40% of the immigrants to the United States were of Irish blood and birth, the state of New York claiming half a million of that percentage with large conclaves of Irish living in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Buffalo, Rochester, Albany, and Syracuse.²⁹ When the call to arms came, droves of Irishmen from every quarter came forth from these boroughs and cities to join various military units then forming throughout the state. And it was all for one purpose. With Democratic affiliations and Southern sympathies set aside, these Irish recruits enlisted in Federal regiments *to support the Union*, a single vision to both fight and die for what they perceived was a sacred alliance, a hallowed affiliation which had given them, and through them all future generations, a safe haven and a much-longed-for homeland. They did not fight to free the slaves. As the draft riots in New York City after the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 readily attest, the Irish in America were “notorious racists.”³⁰ They did not fight against states rights, per se, as to do so would have been alien to them and, given their history, hypocritical. They fought for the preservation of

²⁷ Jones, 13.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁹ Claire Morris, “History of the 69th New York,” *The 69th New York State Volunteers*, <http://www.69thnewyork.co.uk/> (accessed June 30, 2007), 3.

³⁰ Burton, 152.

the American Union. And even if it is conceded that the future hopes for many of them lay in the glorious restoration of Ireland, it was yet for the Union that they died.³¹

The men who joined the New York Irish Brigade came from every walk of life imaginable. Among them were hod carriers, construction laborers, diggers, canal workers, railway track layers, streetcar drivers, porters, barkeepers and waiters, teachers, lawyers, college academics, journalists, public officials, students, businessmen, and merchants.³² Regardless, this great diversity of occupation and class was made into a whole by the leveling power of ethnicity. The ethnic makeup of the Irish Brigade, officers and the rank and file, gave the Brigade a unified and cohesive identity, despite what disparages there were in the life circumstances and class composition of its individual members. They were *Irish* and shared a common ancestry and a collective memory that both defined the Brigade and set it apart from other, less-ethnically identifiable brigades. As such, New York's Irish Brigade, like other Irish regiments, to be sure, but perhaps, unlike other ethnic units then serving, was amalgamated further by two, exterior forces which shaped and augmented their ethnicity and formed and regulated their military identity: Fenianism and the Roman Catholic Church.³³ The influence of the Catholic Church on the Brigade, as might be expected, was great, with regimental chaplains, most of them Irish themselves, fostering a sense of inimitability in

³¹ For a greater understanding of how support of the Union met the economic and spiritual needs of the Irish poor, see Lawrence F. Kohl and Margaret C. Richard, eds., *Irish Green and Union Blue: The Civil War Letters of Peter Welsh, Color Sergeant, 28th Massachusetts Volunteers* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986), 1-11. It may be briefly summarized here that support of the Union was equated in the minds of the Irish with inclusion in a free homeland, where full citizenship for them was, at long last, possible.

³² Morris, 3.

³³ Burton, 153-154.

their Irish charges. With a collective vision, these priests tirelessly promoted a form of internal regimental politics that served the unit well, encouraging the soldiers in their keeping to think of themselves as different from their American counterparts—and for all that, better. By all accounts, each Brigade chaplain treated his respective regiment as a military adaptation of the neighborhood parish back home, providing each regiment with spiritual and emotional support, a true sense of Irish self and purpose, and a link to far away family and friends.³⁴ Faith and the Church, then, became binding agents for the Irish Brigade, drawing the diversity of its members together into an even greater totality. Fenianism did much the same, but wholly in the political arena.

An accurate picture of the men of the New York Irish Brigade cannot be realized here without a serious word, or two about Fenianism. As provided by the Church, Fenianism gave identity and purpose to the Brigade, engendering, above all else, a strong sense of Irish nationalism while fighting for the Union's cause. Fenianism was a political, semi-secret organization, or "brotherhood," bent on freeing Ireland from foreign rule and creating a free democratic Republic on Irish soil.³⁵ It had seen many avatars before its corporate manifestation in the Civil War as the *Fenian Brotherhood*, but was the product of an unbroken line of defiance against British rule stemming from the days of the Great Famine and the repression of the reactionary Rebellion of 1848, thereafter.³⁶ The important fact to keep in mind, however, is that the Fenian Brotherhood in Ireland was funded and fueled by Irish exiles in America and could not have reached the level of

³⁴ Ibid., 154.

³⁵ Fenianism was also alive and well among the Confederate Irish.

³⁶ Neidhardt, 1-8. The Great Famine was also known as the "*Great Hunger*," among the Irish themselves. See Neidhardt, 1.

organizational strength that it did without American support.³⁷ It was predictable, then, for the American leaders of the organization to seize the event of the Civil War as that golden opportunity by which they could not only foster a greater consciousness for Irish identity and nationalism, but gain military experience for future rebellion, as well. Meagher, though never declaring himself a Fenian openly, and other military leaders like Corcoran and Nugent did all they could to make the regiments of the Brigade citadels of the Fenian cause, as did other Fenian military in other Irish regiments.³⁸ Fenian Circles, the internal structure of the organization, were dispersed throughout the unit, and Ireland's cause kept alive and well throughout the war with regular meetings, the singing of patriot songs of the homeland, and the retelling of tales of Ireland's freedom fighters of long ago.³⁹ But perhaps the most effective way in which the Fenian military leaders kept the homeland's cause alive was in the commissioning and formal presentation of regimental flags to each unit at the very start of the conflict which became nothing less than daily iconographic reminders of the Brigade's Irish roots and Ireland's ages-old fight for home rule. These flags would become the famous hallmarks of the Brigade,

³⁷ The same would be true for the *Irish Republican Army* generations later.

³⁸ Burton, 153. It should be noted that the Union government seized the opportunity at hand. The Fenian call to arms resulted in such a large return for the Federal Army that the recruiting agents for the Union, to keep the deluge going, "let it be understood" that once the war was won, the Fenian Brotherhood could bank on both support and material aid from the American government in the future Fenian insurrection against British rule. As the war continued, so hard pressed was the Union's need for recruits that it sent recruiters to Ireland with the enticement of large bounties for Irish nationals. The return was gratifying, but a curious result, as more and more Irishmen became supporters of the Confederacy as the war continued. See Neidhardt, 11; Burton, 154; Thomas J. Ryan, "Out of Ireland into the Union Army: The battle over Irish Immigration," *The Irish Sword, Journal of the Military History Society of Ireland*, Vol. XXIII. No. 91 (Summer 2002): 7-22.

³⁹ The term "Fenian" comes from *the Fianna*, a band of legendary Celtic knights, not unlike those of King Arthur's Round Table, who served the great warrior of Irish mythology, Fionn mac Cumhaill.

gloriously remembered by survivors of the war, Irish and non, in poem and song, thereafter.

It is important to give consideration here to these regimental flags as that which gave an even greater cohesiveness and identity to New York's Irish Brigade. In 1861, upon completion of training, the Brigade received its official regimental Colors for each of its three New York units. In addition to these state and national flags, however, each of the 69th, 88th and 63rd regiments received an ethnic green flag combining ancient Irish icons and imagery with a renowned fighting slogan testifying to the irrepressible strength and spirit of the Irish fighting man.⁴⁰ The Irish Brigade Colors was a flag of emerald green upon which a harp took central position, resting on a wreath of hunter green shamrocks. Above the harp an arch of clouds was depicted from which rays of the sun burst forth, showering the harp beneath.⁴¹ Above the clouds was a scroll upon which appeared the name of the respective regiment and below the shamrocks a second scroll upon which was written the Gaelic phrase, *Riam nár druid ó spairn lann*, which translated means *Never retreat from the clash of spears*. This phrase and *Faugh-a-Ballagh*, or *Clear the way!* became the rallying cry for the men of the Irish Brigade and would echo down the ages to Irish Brigade camps and reenactment groups in existence today.⁴² But the importance of these flags cannot be understated. Every unit in the war

⁴⁰ See Appendix H, top image.

⁴¹ The sunburst represented the quest for a new birth of independence and freedom from British rule.

⁴² It should be noted that a glorious silk recreation of this flag, produced by Tiffany's of New York, was commissioned by the "Citizens of New York" in 1863 and presented to each regiment just after the Battle of Fredericksburg. This version included a listing of the battles fought by the Brigade thus far, a common practice of brigades and regiments during the war, and a brief statement of appreciation for their "gallant and brilliant conduct in the Battle Fields of Virginia and Maryland." (See Appendix H, bottom image.) The 88th New York's version of this flag did not survive the war, and the 69th's was gifted to Ireland by

had its own flag, from headquarters to regiment; and the flag served each unit in two ways. Practically, it was a position marker. Wherever the flag could be seen, there one would find the regiment, whether in camp at rest, or out in the smoke and chaos of the battlefield. Emotionally, it embodied the spirit of the regiment, the unit's heart and soul, representing its history, honor, and glory and maintaining a place in the heart of each soldier then, and ever after.⁴³ The importance of the Irish Brigade flag to the Irish soldier can be readily felt in the following excerpt from a song of the Brigade, written by an unknown soldier of the 63rd New York State Volunteer Infantry. If not exemplary poetry, it is yet a strong statement on behalf of the Brigade's singular attachment to its Colors and the common soldier's identification of self with flag.

Hurrah! Hurrah! For our dear old flag.
 Hurrah for our gallant leader, too;
 Though 'tis and torn and tattered rag,
 We would not change it for the new.
 We've borne it with the Stripes and Stars,
 From Fair Oaks to Frederick's bloody plain;
 And see, my boys, our wounds and scars,
 Can tell how well we did the same.⁴⁴

In addition to the ethnic history, unit composition, and military objectives of the men who made up the New York Irish Brigade, this discussion could not be complete

President John F. Kennedy in 1963. The only version of this flag remaining on American soil is that of the 63rds. It was restored by the University of Notre Dame in August 2000 and has been displayed at numerous exhibits since then. See Peter J. Lysy, *Blue for the Union and Green for Ireland: The Civil War Flags of the 63rd New York Volunteers, Irish Brigade* (Notre Dame: Archives of the University of Notre Dame, 2001), 16.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

⁴⁴ *Songs of the Irish Brigade, Irish Volunteers*, http://irishvolunteers.tripod.com/songs_of_irish_brigade.htm (accessed August 9, 2005).

without a brief sketch or two of these men at play. These men, hard, fast, and reckless fighters on the field, gamboled and played as hard as they fought, with a careless abandon almost child-like in its execution. In this, as in their prowess on the battlefield, they declared their lineage. It is reasonable to say that if the Celts can be identified as a warrior race, they can as well be identified as a race of merry revelers, gifted with a frolicsome temperament and a sanguine spirit rarely compromised even in times of hardship or trial. Their history proves this. Such was the case of the Irish Brigade during the Civil War. From the very eve of the conflict they showed themselves as ready for celebratory revelry as skirmish and campaign. Conyngham gives a riotous picture of Christmas in the Irish Brigade while the unit was still in their initial quarters in Washington that first December in 1861. The author reflected that there were few that Christmas Eve who did not consider what “affliction” the next Christmas might hold for them and those they loved back home, but such grave realities failed to dampen the spirits of the men of the Brigade.

If any indulged in such reflections, the lively tones of Johnny O’Flaherty’s fiddle, and the noisy squeaks of his father’s bagpipes, soon called forth the joyous, frolicsome nature of the Celt.

Groups were dancing, around the fire, jigs, reels, and doubles.

Even the colored servants had collected in a little group by themselves, and while some timed the music by slapping their hands on their knees, others were capering and whirling around in the most grotesque manner, showing their white teeth, as they grinned their delight, or “yah-yahed,” at the boisterous fun.

The dance is enlivened by laugh, song, story, and music; and the canteen, filled with wretched “commissary,” goes freely around, for the men wish to observe Christmas-times right freely. . . .

The dance was followed by songs; and those soft, impassioned Irish airs, “The girl I left behind me,” and “Home, Sweet Home,” flowed sweetly and softly from hearts that felt their full force; but as the strong political songs of “The

Rapparee,” and “The Green above the Red,” and “Fontenoy,” were chorused by a hundred throats, that dark group of soldiers, scattered around the fire, looked as if ready to grasp their muskets and rush on some hidden foe.

These innocent and exciting revels continued until the tinkle of a small bell from a rustic chapel suddenly hushed the boisterous mirth, and all arose, reverentially doffed their hats, and proceeded to the chapel.⁴⁵

The festivities ended with devotions to the solemnity of Christmas Eve, during which Father James M. Dillon of the 63rd New York chanted a Low Mass to an “attentive audience” spilling out of that small, country chapel and forced to kneel “on the damp ground under the cold night air.”⁴⁶

It was much the same for the Brigade on the various St. Patrick’s Day celebrations throughout the war, though these commemorations were more revelatory and perhaps, a shade less devotional. Of these, St. Patrick’s Day 1863, despite the heartbreak of Fredericksburg but a few months passed, was arguably the high-water mark of revelry, in Bilby’s assessment, “the most significant non-combatant event that army ever experienced.”⁴⁷ It was as though the Irish Brigade rallied in bold defiance of the great losses at Marye’s Heights, their talents at merrymaking knowing no bounds. All chief dignitaries of the Army of the Potomac attended, including Major General Joseph Hooker who had then just succeeded Ambrose Burnside in command of the Army of the Potomac.⁴⁸ Irish officers and dignitaries attending were courted in grand style, the quartermaster having secured from Washington “thirty-five hams, and a side of an ox roasted; an entire pig, stuffed with boiled turkeys; and unlimited number of chickens,

⁴⁵ Conyngham, 79, 81-82.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 82.

⁴⁷ Bilby, 74.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 75; Corby, 142.

ducks, and small game. The drinking materials comprised eight baskets of champagne, ten gallons of rum, and twenty-two of whiskey,” little expense being spared on culinary delights.⁴⁹ With bands in concert and races of every kind-- mule, foot, and sack—staged for the enlisted men, it is easy to imagine the song and mirth, the dance and good-natured rivalry with which the day was filled. The heart of the celebration, however, was the “Grand Irish Brigade Steeple Chase,” for which “a large concourse of at least ten thousand had assembled,” a faithful recreation of a favorite pastime from the Ould Sod.⁵⁰ Father Corby, after devoting several pages in his *Memoirs of Chaplain Life* to his building of a “rustic church” for the day’s celebratory Mass, concedes, with unbridled enthusiasm, that this steeple chase fair won the day over every other event and activity:

Well-described, the scene would outshine the grandest pageants related of the most gallant Knights of Ivanhoe. Many festive celebrations had I seen before, but this surpassed my wildest fancy. The very exciting race most graphically depicted in “Ben Hur” between the hero, Ben Hur, and his rival, Messala, would seem tame in comparison. On those plains in Virginia, you might find, not one, but hundreds of the character of Ben Hur, educated, handsome, fashioned after the noblest type of manhood, spirited and brave as any knight that ever stood in armor. They were equally ready to dash into the smoke of battle and up to the cannon’s mouth . . .

Those who were to enter the steeple-chase assembled in the uniforms prescribed, and no one rode except commissioned officers. Over the vast plain could be seen the thousands who assembled to witness the day’s doings, riding backward and forward, dashing over fences, fallen trees, streams, and ditches. When you met them, you could see fire flash from their eyes, exhibiting the wild impatience of the ancient Greeks waiting for the gates to open on the Olympian games.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Conyngham., 373

⁵⁰ Ibid., 372, 374.

⁵¹ Corby, 143-144.

Neither of the subsequent St. Patrick's Day celebrations could compete in memory with that of 1863, a day in which the irrepressible frivolity and high spirits of the Irish Brigade were etched in the minds of many. Soon there would be little left of that once valiant brotherhood, the war exacting a greater and greater price for the Union cause. If St. Patrick's Day 1864 was celebrated, as the *Irish American* reported, "with considerable spirit," it was only with "something of the usual éclat" and offered the celebrants but a "pretty fair steeplechase." By March 17, 1865, the last St. Patrick's Day in the army, few were there to celebrate the sacred toils of the Great Saint of Ireland. A visitor to the festivities in 1865 believed it "an affecting thing to see that handful of earnest Irish heroes, the remains of many terrible campaigns, casting aside the drilled sedateness of the soldier" to celebrate the day.⁵² But faithful to their uncontrollable Irish natures, cast aside they did.

Given all of the above, it is not difficult to see the uniqueness of New York's Irish Brigade among the many and diverse fighting units that participated in the Civil War, a brigade which was purpose-driven and hallmarked in the minds of many, then and thereafter, by an inexorable fighting spirit. Whether at work, rest, or play, the Brigade proved itself a singular military unit, defined by its ethnicity, recognized for its audacity, undaunted by the vicissitudes of war, and, perhaps, a little mad, for all that:

For the great Gaels of Ireland
Are the men that God made mad,

⁵² Bilby, 98. The author cites the *Irish American*, April 19, 1864, in the former quote, *The Pilot*, April 1, 1865, in the later.

For all their wars are merry
And all their songs are sad.⁵³

If it can be maintained that the Irish Brigade was a remarkable and even exclusive entity in the war, the men of the 63rd New York State Volunteer Regiment, as the following pages will make plain, significantly contributed to the myth of the unit's celebrated tenacity and grit.

⁵³ Attributed to Gilbert Keith Chesterton, English writer and humorist, 1874-1936.

CHAPTER TWO

A MATTER OF RANK, A QUESTION OF WORTH

The company commanders of the new regiment [the Third Irish Regiment] were generally superior to those of most volunteer groups having considerable military experience.

Rev. Patrick D. O'Flaherty
*A History of the Sixty-ninth Regiment in the Irish Brigade, 1861-1865*⁵⁴

The history of the 63rd New York State Volunteer Infantry in relation to Meagher's Irish Brigade is distorted by two erroneous beliefs, one regarding the timing of its organization, the other the worth of its men, particularly its officers, and the value of their performance in the field. Regarding the former, it might be rashly assumed that, of the four regiments authorized to form in 1861, the 63rd New York State Volunteer Infantry, because of its eventual designation as the Third Regiment of the Irish Brigade, consisted, perhaps, of the cast-off recruits of the 69th and 88th New York Regiments. Nothing could be further from the truth. In reality, the regiment was already forming while the Brigade was still in the planning stages, complete and independent by the time Meagher was actually in the throes of organizing the Brigade.⁵⁵ History appears to have lost this truth, or forgotten it; but it was fully recognized at the time and most evident in the negotiations between the two organizations during their attempts to merge from September to November in the autumn of 1861. Regarding the latter belief, that the 63rd New York consisted of men poorly trained or of less experience than the other two core regiments, there is no real evidence to be found. The two major unit sources for the 63rd

⁵⁴ O'Flaherty, 3.

⁵⁵ Bilby, 20.

New York were repositories of sound men and officers with much fighting experience to their credit. The first and primary source for the 63rd was the independent Third Irish Regiment, the entirety of it eventually mustered into service as the 63rd New York State Volunteer Infantry. The second source, by transfer of a number of officers and men late in 1861 and early in 1862, was the 37th New York Irish Rifles, a unit praised for having faithfully guarded the stores and ammunition at Fairfax Station during the retreat at First Bull Run. In defense of the 63rd as regards both these issues, rank and worth of officers, it is helpful to examine these two charges separately.⁵⁶

New York's Third Irish Regiment, or Third Independent Irish, organizing as First Bull Run veterans were returning from the front, was fully formed and officially accepted by the War Department by late July of 1861.⁵⁷ It was a force of 800 men under the command of a Lieutenant Colonel P. D. Kelly, consisting of companies largely from within New York City proper and the borough of Brooklyn, but also from as far away as Boston and, eventually, Albany.⁵⁸ Before July was out, P. D. Kelly offered the command of the Third Irish Regiment to Meagher himself, Kelly stating in a letter to Meagher that the regiment would be ready to "enter the field in a very short time."⁵⁹ Though Meagher declined the offer stating that his ties to the 69th were too strong to break, this offer confirms that the Third Irish was already established and seeking a colonel while

⁵⁶ Conyngham, 30.

⁵⁷ An unidentified newspaper clipping on file at the New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center, Saratoga Springs, New York (New York State Military Museum) states that the recruiting offices of the Third Irish Regiment were set up at City Hall and at 232 Atlantic Street in Brooklyn, the men housed initially at Camp Carrigan on Staten Island.

⁵⁸ O'Flaherty, 3, identifies him as a Patrick Kelly.; Boyle, 58; Frederick Phisterer, *New York in the War of the Rebellion* (Albany: J. B. Lyon Co, 1912), III, 1587.

⁵⁹ Michael Cavanaugh, *Memoirs of Gen. Thomas Francis Meagher, Comprising the Leading Events of his Career* (Worcester, MA: Messenger Press, 1892), 410. As noted in O'Flaherty, 3, P. D. Kelly's letter to Meagher was dated July 31, 1861. See Boyle, 60, for a lengthier treatment of Kelly's letter.

Meagher was still a free agent and in the process of creating the Brigade.⁶⁰ But this claim of organizational superiority can be placed in further relief by the debate it caused when the Third Irish sought inclusion into the Irish Brigade.

In early August, soon after this offer of command was made to Meagher, the Third Irish encamped at the Old Quarantine Hospital on Staten Island and still without a commander by the time September had arrived, entered into good will negotiations to join the Irish Brigade.⁶¹ A major debate ensued almost immediately regarding which unit position the Third Irish would assume as it had begun its organization before any other regiment of the Brigade. Officers of the Third Irish, understandably, vied for first position. Unfortunately, officers of the 69th contended the same, as the 69th had been assured first position upon recruitment. Nugent, by then the colonel of the 69th, was quick to squelch all argument. Upholding the 69th's standing bid for first position, Nugent published a letter in *The New York Tribune*, dated September 10, 1861, stating that all organizational positions within the Irish Brigade had already been allotted and would not change. The sponsors of the Irish Brigade proved to be immovable.⁶² By the end of negotiations in November, the Third Irish, by this point in time officially mustered into service as the 63rd New York, in a spirit of benevolent charity, conceded the first position in the Brigade to the 69th and was officially welcomed into the Irish Brigade.⁶³

⁶⁰ Boyle, 60.

⁶¹ The camp consisted of seven hospital buildings to which was added a new mess hall and a cook house, the regiment enjoying the patronage of many on the Island while quartered there. See O'Flaherty, 3.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., 5. Negotiations were completed on November 13, 1861. This would have been the finalization of the deliberations. The Brigade position would have been decided upon before all matters could be subsequently closed.

It is essential to note with regards to this concession that during these negotiations the 63rd New York conceded the first position in the Brigade for the second position, not the third, but would be known, thereafter, as the Third Regiment of the Irish Brigade.⁶⁴ Hence, the reason for the belief it was third to form. That the regiment understood that its position in the Brigade was to be that of the second regiment was evident during the ceremony for the receipt of its Colors early in November. During the ceremony, the regiment's chaplain, Father James M. Dillon, declared: "Then go forth to battle, my friends and comrades, and never let it be said that the Sixty-third regiment—which is to hold the second place of honor in the Irish Brigade—permitted their flag to fall into the hands of the enemies of the Union and liberty."⁶⁵

It is unclear as to why this shift in position took place. It may have been a matter of the second position already having been allotted the 88th New York, to which, given Nugent's published letter, there could be no further argument; or it may have been due solely to the numerical designation of the regiment's original name. More than likely, it was a matter, on the part of the Brigade sponsors, of recognizing only those regiments created specifically for the Irish Brigade. In any case, the 69th publicly laid claim to the first position in the Brigade for no other reason than because it was the first regiment to meet its minimum quota of men.⁶⁶ Decidedly, this was not the case given the evidence already presented. But if this was the standard by which position in the Brigade was to be determined, then the agreement of the Third Irish to take a position other than first was

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Corby, 296.

⁶⁶ Bilby, 22.

more than charitable. All these contentions aside, it is clear that the 63rd New York was in existence long before its sister regiments had met their state quotas and could not have been the recipient of the inferior cast-offs of its Brigade companions as has been charged. This accusation of inferiority of its men, particularly its officers, is unfounded and bears closer examination.

In mid-September, while negotiations to merge with the Irish Brigade were still in the initial stages, the Third Irish moved from Staten Island's Old Quarantine Hospital to training grounds on David's Island, off New Rochelle, in Long Island Sound.⁶⁷ Shortly thereafter, as has been stated, on or about November 2, the regiment was officially mustered into service, by Special Order No. 460 of New York's Adjutant General's Office, as the 63rd Regiment of New York State Volunteers, seven hundred New Yorkers arriving that day by steamer to see the muster ceremony on David's Island.⁶⁸ Ten companies made up the 63rd regiment at muster, A through K, and all except three were composed entirely of Irish men from the city and its environs. Companies A and E each included Boston Irish in its ranks, and the whole of Company K was from Albany and under the command of a Captain James Branigan, or Branagan.⁶⁹ The week of November 9th, *The Irish American* newspaper proudly announced the muster to the city and with it a roster of the field, staff, and company officers of the 63rd, extolling their virtues. The

⁶⁷ O'Flaherty, 5.

⁶⁸ See Appendix A and Phisterer, III, 2587, the latter also cited in O'Flaherty, 19. There are discrepancies as to the actual date of muster. Dyer's Compendium, Part I, records an organizational date-range between August 7th and November 4th. No muster date is recorded.

⁶⁹ Company K was formed under the name "Faugh-a-Ballagh," as noted earlier, Gaelic for *Clear the way!* This recruitment area information was recorded by the New York State Division of Military & Naval Affairs and retrieved through the *New York State Military Museum*, <http://www.dmna.state.ny.us/historic> (accessed autumn 2006).

paper had enthusiastically supported the regiment from early September on and had avidly reported recruitment of officers as they were conscripted, hailing them in one article as “splendid specimens of the bone and muscle of Ireland.”⁷⁰ The paper stood on solid ground in its assessment. Contrary to contemporary cries of inferiority of the 63rd's officers and staff to those of its sister regiments, that final roster contained the names of some of the most extraordinary company commanders available among Union volunteers at the time.⁷¹

The low esteem in which the officers of the 63rd New York have traditionally been held may be due, in no small part, to the fact that the regiment, then under the command of its first colonel, Richard C. Enright, departed from New York for Washington in a widely publicized and greatly defamatory drunken dockside brawl, an event to be more closely examined in the following chapter. Enright was originally major of the Third Irish Regiment and while it was yet quartered on Staten Island, assumed the position of lieutenant colonel at P. D. Kelly's retirement, the colonelcy shortly thereafter.⁷² This dockside episode involving the regiment and its new colonel was a disastrous and luckless affair and was made even worse by Enright himself, who not only failed to rectify the situation but, managed to alienate himself from his fellow officers, as well, by refusing to accept responsibility for the happening. As already stated, this lamentable event, for a number of reasons, will be treated at length in the following chapter. It is enough to propose here that the incident may have dealt so

⁷⁰ *The Irish American*, September 9, 1861.

⁷¹ O'Flaherty, 5. Several posts as reported by the paper at the time of muster had not been filled but would be by the time the 63rd departed the city for Washington later in the month. See Appendix B.

⁷² It is unclear as to why P. D. Kelly retired from the regiment at this time.

injurious a blow to the reputations of the 63rd and its officers that neither fully recovered from it. It is a sad set of circumstances, for the regiment, as noted above, contained an exemplary cadre of officers whose experience and reputations were consummate, seasoned officers who were graduates of rigorous military training and veterans of lengthy and difficult campaigns. Justification of their worth is long over due.

But there has never been a need to justify the worth of the officers of the 63rd's sister regiments. In vivid contrast, the military prowess of the officers of the 69th New York State Volunteers, alive and well today as the *Fighting 69th*, was never in question, either then, or now. Nearly 500 of its original core, the 69th New York State Militia, after its baptism of fire at Bull Run, joined the new 69th regiment that autumn of 1861 without much prodding.⁷³ This was instant glorification of the regiment in the public's eye, a transfusion of hero's blood into the incarnation of the old militia. In addition, Robert Nugent, as mentioned earlier, stepped into the place of colonel for the new regiment, his military experience as major, then lieutenant colonel of the militia deemed to be of inestimable worth. But many of Nugent's fellow officers were every bit as experienced and war-savvy as he. A number of them were war veterans from around the world, having served in Syria as Hungarian Hussars, as officers in the British armies of both the Crimea and India and as defenders of the Pope in the Papal Brigades of 1860 and 1861.⁷⁴ A number, as well, had distinguished themselves in the late Mexican war, or were experienced cavalry men from cavalry units such as those of the 1st and 6th New York. Moreover, the 69th could boast one or two officer transfers from Meagher's Zouaves and

⁷³ Jones, 93.

⁷⁴ Morris, 3.

the receipt of officers from other state militias in addition to their own, among them the civilian corps of the 37th, 32nd, 9th, and 79th New York State. But the regiment received officers from militias outside the state, as well, one officer, a Captain D. S. Shanley, having transferred from the far away Chicago Shields Guards in which he had served as a lieutenant. Admittedly, there was little doubt that the officers of the 69th were a force to be reckoned with in the war that loomed ahead.⁷⁵

As to the worth of the officers of the 88th New York State Volunteers, we have, by popular opinion in 1861 and thereafter, an officer pool second only to the 69th. It is difficult to contest the consensus. To begin with, the regiment contained a sizable band of veterans from the illustrious British regiment known as the *Connaught Rangers* and was often referred to by this very name. Not surprisingly, this close association with so famed a military unit created a powerful martial identity for the 88th and its officers. But, like the 69th, the officer corps of the 88th could also boast a good number of veterans of the Papal Brigades and, again like the 69th, several officers from the sanctified 69th Militia itself, among them Major James Quinlan, commander of the militia's Engineer Company.⁷⁶ But far and away, the 88th's greatest claim to fame was that it was the one regiment of the Irish Brigade most closely associated with the Brigade's founder, Thomas Francis Meagher. It was a filial relationship in every way. By the fall of 1861 and with little ceremony, the nucleus of the 88th received into its officer corps and ranks many of Meagher's Zouaves who, like the men of the 69th Militia, were now proud and honored

⁷⁵ Sean Kane, "American Civil War, 1861-1865," *Dùn Laoghaire Genealogical Society Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Summer 1998), 76-83.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Winter 1989/90), 163-170.

veterans of the Battle of Bull Run.⁷⁷ With its connection to Meagher and the *Connaught Rangers*, it is easy to understand why there was little questioning the military proficiency of the 88th's officers either within the Brigade, itself, or in the popular press at the time. Though the 88th disbanded after the war, it, like the *Fighting 69th*, enjoyed a glorious renown which has lasted to the present day.

Using as benchmarks the experience and merit of the officers of both the 69th and 88th regiments, it can be asserted, without qualification, that the value of the officer corps of the 63rd New York was considerable. From its organization early in 1861, the regiment could also boast officers who had military experience in either the American or British armies or who had served valiantly in Ireland's Rebellion of 1848 or in the Papal War of 1860. It could also claim an officer or two from the hallowed ranks of the 69th Militia, though, admittedly, not many. Most notable among the few, however, was Lieutenant Henry McConnell, of County Cork, adjutant for the 63rd and a lost hero at Antietam's Sunken Road.⁷⁸ Mirroring the composition of the 69th and 88th's officer corps again, the 63rd also received experienced men from militias outside the city, most often from in and around Albany. Case in point, Captain John Sullivan, born in the town of Belturbet, County Cavan, was an experienced militia man before the war, serving in the Albany Montgomery Guards of the 25th New York State Militia. He joined the 63rd as First Lieutenant of Company K in 1861 and was later promoted to captain after serving at Antietam. He fell mortally wounded at Fredericksburg, just as the battle was closing, and

⁷⁷ Burton, 121, notes that Meagher's wife took great delight in the 88th, the *Irish American* adoringly praising the regiment throughout the war years as "Mrs. Meagher's Own." In point of fact, the regiment received its regimental Colors from the grand lady's hand.

⁷⁸ Kane, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Summer 1999), 41-42

was brought back to Albany for burial with full honors later that December. Another Albany militiaman was Lieutenant Patrick Maher, originally from Roscrea, Tipperary, Second Lieutenant and treasurer of the Emmet Guards and a twelve-year veteran of the same militia as Sullivan. Maher had previously accompanied the 25th New York to Virginia as sergeant, Company B, of the Montgomery Guards. Upon expiration of his service, however, he joined Captain Michael O'Sullivan's Company F of the 63rd New York, his son, Daniel, enlisting with him. Maher was later upgraded to Commissary Sergeant of the 63rd, and thereafter promoted in the field to First Lieutenant for bravery and courage at the Battle of Antietam. The actual commission for this first lieutenancy, however, was received only days before his death from wounds received at Petersburg. He was buried with honors in Albany by his original company, the Emmet Guards.⁷⁹

Given this regimental profile, there is little to disprove the statement that the 63rd was on level ground with the 69th and 88th regiments in the make-up of its officers. The 63rd, like its Brigade companions, had exceptional leaders, an uncontested fact recognized, if not by the press at the time or by history, thereafter, by its sister regiments, and many another. Of those with experience in the American Army, the 63rd could claim Captain John C. Lynch, a Galway man and organizer of Company C, who had served in the 7th Regiment and died a major at Chancellorsville.⁸⁰ First Lieutenant Joseph C. McDonough, Company A, was a veteran of the late Mexican War and later, fought at

⁷⁹ Rufus Wheelwright Clark, *The Heroes of Albany. A memorial of the patriot-martyrs of the city and county of Albany, who sacrificed their lives during the late war in defense of our nation 1861-1865, with a view of what was done in the county to sustain the United States government; and also brief histories of the Albany regiments* (Albany: S. R. Gray, 1866), 447-449, 575-576. The chronological order of Maher's promotions in this source is somewhat confusing and difficult to track. The best effort has been made here to present an accurate history of Maher's service in the 63rd.

⁸⁰ Conyngham, 569; O'Flaherty, 3; Bilby, 78.

Antietam as captain of Company E.⁸¹ Captain Joseph O'Neill, a Cork native, organizer of Company A, and eventually promoted to major while in the 63rd, served in the regular army, as well, for a stint of ten years. Both O'Neill and McDonough would be remembered years later for their commanding strengths at Malvern Hill in *Memoirs of Chaplain Life: Three Years with the Irish Brigade in the Army of the Potomac* written by Father William Corby, C. S. C., chaplain of the 88th New York.⁸² Of veterans of the British Army, the 63rd was fortunate to have in its ranks Captain James McCaffery, of Company F, who served ten years as a soldier for Great Britain. It was fortunate, as well, to have on staff Thomas O'Hanlon, Engineering Officer, who had served fourteen years in the British Army, ten of which were in India.⁸³ Here was an impressive array of experience and strength with which no one could find fault. But the collective value of the officers of the 63rd only grows when the Papal soldiers and Irish revolutionaries in its ranks are taken into account.

In March of 1860, the Papal States were threatened with seizure by Garibaldi's Piedmont-Sardinian forces in their violent attempt to unite the Italian peninsula. Pope Pius IX, fearing annexation, organized his defenses at home and then called upon, among others, the young men of Ireland to help defend the Temporal Power. It was a noble mission, and a thousand or more young Irishmen responded enthusiastically to the call. Upon arrival, they almost immediately formed themselves into a battalion, officially

⁸¹ O'Flaherty, 3; New York State, *Annual Report of the Adjutant-General of the State of New York for the Year 1901: Registers of the Sixty-third, Sixty-fourth, Sixty-fifth, Sixty-sixth, Sixty-seventh, and Sixty-eighth Regiments of Infantry*. No. 27 (Albany, New York: J.B. Lyon, 1902), 119. (Hereinafter cited as *Annual Report of the Adjutant-General of the State of New York*.)

⁸² Conyngham, 566-67; O'Flaherty, 3; Corby, 288-90.

⁸³ O'Flaherty, 3.

known as the Battalion of Saint Patrick and, outfitted in green Zouave uniforms, acquitted themselves valiantly in defense of the Pope. It was no enviable task. Many left the safe ranks of the British Army, where good food and water were plentiful, quarters sound, and pay a shilling a day, for service under the Italians, where food was not always eatable, quarters often infested with mosquitoes and fleas, and pay, if received, a penny half-penny and no more. No one could say, thereafter, that the Irish defended the Papal States for gain.⁸⁴

Given these negative experiences in a foreign land, the veterans of the Papal War were nothing if not seasoned soldiers, sobered by the realities of combat and deprivation. Any Civil War regiment who could number them among its ranks was fortunate, and the 63rd New York was such a regiment. But not only did the 63rd have veterans of this war in its ranks, it counted among its officers a number of decorated members of the Battalion of Saint Patrick, as well, that is the elite group of the Battalion's officers recognized by Pope Pius himself.⁸⁵ One of these honored veterans was Captain Michael Walsh, or Walshe, Company H, from Drogheda, County Louth, a self-directed man who had worked tirelessly along side Dr. Philip O'Hanlon, later Quartermaster of the 63rd, for the organization of the Third Irish in the summer of '61.⁸⁶ Walsh, a valued officer in the Papal Army, had been personally decorated by the famed General Christopher Léon Louis Juchault de Lamoricière, Papal Commander and Chief of the Pope's forces, for

⁸⁴ G. F. H. Berkeley, "The Irish Battalion in the Papal Army of 1860," (Dublin and Cork: Talbot Press Ltd., 1929), 35.

⁸⁵ O'Flaherty asserts that the inclusion of these Papal officers into the 63rd New York, of whom the two officers profiled here were but two, made the regiment "a unique organization even for the Irish Brigade." See O'Flaherty, 70.

⁸⁶ O'Flaherty, 5.

meritorious service, as Catholic and soldier, in defense of the Papal States.⁸⁷ This was the Holy See's official recognition of courageous and selfless military service. In this, there can be no argument that Walsh was a soldier, as the Roman's would gauge, worth his weight in salt. In company with Walsh, both in defending the Papal States and as a fellow officer of the 63rd, was First Lieutenant John H. Gleason, also of Company H, who would perform bravely and with great bearing throughout the war and muster out a Brevetted Brigadier General and Major General by war's end. Like Walsh, Gleason had also been decorated for his services in the Papal Army, having received the Papal Medal, *Pro Petri Sede*, for defending the Throne of Peter.⁸⁸ As officers, both Walsh and Gleason brought with them experience in battle few could offer the 63rd New York during its initial recruitment buildup. But to these accomplished and distinguished veterans, the 63rd could add yet another assemblage of experienced soldiers: the Irish revolutionaries of the Young Ireland Movement of 1848. Gleason doubled his worth in this regard having fought not only for the Pope but, a faithful Tipperary man, as a Young Irishman, as well.

Little need be said about Ireland's Great Famine of 1846 to 1849. It was a dark chapter in Ireland's history and England's, as well, an episode that saw the death by starvation of half the Irish population of 8 million.⁸⁹ The initial result of this decimation was a premature and badly botched affair called the Rebellion of 1848, poorly planned and badly executed, in which an Irish nationalist revolutionary movement known as

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸⁸ John H. Gleason, Civil War Service Records, National Archives, Washington, D. C. Box: 551; Extraction: 53; Record: 1314.

⁸⁹ For a thorough account of the Great Famine, see Thomas Gallagher's *Paddy's Lament, Ireland 1846-1847: Prelude to Hatred* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1982).

Young Ireland attempted to redress the wrong. The movement had been founded by Meagher and social conservative, William Smith O'Brien, in 1845 to combat government abuse of the Irish people, an ideological association proposing bloodless reform. Nevertheless, it contained young men fully prepared for armed confrontation. The revolt was quickly suppressed by British authorities and known thereafter as "The Battle of Ballinacorney," or "The Battle of Widow McCormack's Cabbage Patch," because it took place in and around the widow's house and garden. It was simply too soon for a rebellion. The Irish peasantry, weakened by starvation, was little able to understand or care about the greater issues at hand and, accordingly, gave little aid to the revolutionaries. When the smoke cleared, the organizers and rebels received death sentences for their involvement in the revolt, thereafter commuted to sentences of exile to various parts of the world.⁹⁰ The full story of the uprising is far more complicated than need be treated here. It is enough to say that the participants in the Rebellion of 1848 were rebel soldiers, many finding themselves, by various means and after a time, on America soil and fighting in the Civil War. Three of the most colorful among the Young Irelanders, outside of Meagher, himself, were officers in the 63rd New York.

John Gleason, as mentioned above, was one of those Young Irelanders of 1848 and had come from a long line of Irish revolutionaries. Years after the Civil War, one of Gleason's seven brothers, Patrick Jerome Gleason, in a bid for mayor of Long Island City, stated that his father, a farmer and miller from Borrissleigh, Tipperary, had always taken part in Irish revolutionary societies. Incarcerated by the Crown in 1807 for

⁹⁰ Tasmania, New Zealand appeared to be a favored destination. Meagher was sentenced there, but escaped a year later.

insurrection, the senior Gleason was said to declare to the court that he was “‘the father of seven boys’” and that he “‘thanked God that they were all rebels.’”⁹¹ John Gleason, a 6-foot-7 monolith of a man, as hard a drinker as a fighter, proved true to his birthright, bringing the experience he had as a Young Irelander rebel to the 63rd New York in a decisive and highly visible way, most notably, as will be seen, at Antietam.⁹²

With Gleason in the Young Ireland Movement was another future officer of the 63rd, an Irish revolutionary with an even greater profile than Gleason in the Rebellion of 1848, Captain John J. Kavanagh, Company I. Born in Annagh, County Wexford but raised in Dublin, Kavanagh had been a president of the Lord Edward Fitzgerald Club, a political organization in support of the Young Ireland Movement, and a member of the Council for Irish Confederation, as well. As such, he had been acquainted personally with O’Brien and Meagher.⁹³ Positioned center-stage the day of the uprising, Kavanagh was severely wounded at The Battle of Ballingarry, shot through the thigh in the courtyard of the McCormack house, the bullet grazing an artery above the knee.⁹⁴ Losing a great deal of blood, Kavanagh was removed from the scene. As one of the wounded who survived, his participation in the uprising became legend, thereafter. Kavanagh recounts the aftermath of his ordeal in the following paragraph:

⁹¹ *The Brooklyn Eagle*, November 3, 1883, “A Man for the Times: A Sketch of Mr. Patrick J. Gleason, the Democratic Candidate for Mayor of Long Island City.”

⁹² John H. Gleason, Civil War Service Records.

⁹³ Mimeographed Copy of Typescript Manuscript Entitled “A Memoir of John J. Kavanagh—Octr 21st 1848—member of the Council of the Irish Confederation and President of the Lord Edward Fitzgerald Club—Dublin—.” Prepared by Col. Stephen D. Rockstroh, James Kavanagh’s great-grandson, 1971. (Hereinafter cited as *A Memoir of John J. Kavanagh*.)

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 48; C. G. Duffy, *Four Years of Irish History, 1845-49* (London: Cassel, Petter, Galpin and Co., 1883), 686. This book is cited in the *Journal of Old Wexford Society* in a two-part article series entitled *James Kavanagh: The Young Islander* by Edward Culleton. The dates of Culleton’s articles were not available to the researcher.

How long I lay there I know not, as I was in a dreamy stupor. I dare say it was about two hours, and, I was bleeding all the time. After coming to a little, O'Donnell came to me again, and after a short time brought me some tea, and some bread which was really delicious, he, and another man now carried me down five or six fields to the road, where O'Donnell (who is a brother of Surgeon O'Donnell's of Liverpool) had been promised that a car would be waiting to bring me on to Kilkenny, as I told him I wished to go there, when he got to the road there was no sign of any car there, so they brought me into a little cottage by the roadside there where . . . poor O'Donnell dressed my leg and stopped the bleeding.⁹⁵

Kavanagh escaped to America, via France, becoming one of the organizers of the 37th New York Irish Rifles when the Civil War broke out.⁹⁶ This regiment, as stated earlier and to be treated more closely below, was a secondary source of officers, Kavanagh among them, for the 63rd New York. Like Gleason, seasoned by involvement in the Young Ireland Movement, Kavanagh would prove his worth as an officer in the 63rd, though in a more definitive way, at Antietam.

The third veteran of The Battle of Ballinarry to grace the officer corps of the 63rd was, perhaps, the most illustrative of the caliber of fighting men of which the Third Regiment was composed. Boyle, after offering several disparaging remarks about the 63rd's top-ranking officers in 1861, writes:

The real heart and soul of the regiment was a most warlike medical man, Dr. Lawrence Reynolds, a graduate of the College of Surgeons in Dublin and a genuine man of the world. His wit was renowned and he could whip up a poem to

⁹⁵ *A Memoir of John J. Kavanagh*, 50.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 53-55; Conyngham, 282-83.

celebrate everything from a battle to a cockfight. He was also an organizer for the Fenian Brotherhood and would become Head Center of the “Potomac Circle.”⁹⁷

Boyle finally hits the mark here. Lawrence Reynolds, a Waterford native, was, by all accounts, a brilliant and commanding personality. Son of an Irish barrister, Paul Reynolds, Esquire, and nephew to a respected professor of Kilkenny College, Reynolds began his medical career as an apothecary in his native Ireland, only later moving on to a surgeon’s career. But in addition to surgeon, he was a classical scholar, a wit, a champion chess player, an expert violinist, a persuasive speaker, and a gifted raconteur whose poetic eloquence earned him the title “poet laureate of the Brigade.”⁹⁸ Accordingly, his influence was felt not only within the 63rd New York but in the other Irish regiments, as well. There is little to refute the statement that the doctor, by sheer wit and presence, helped define the tenor and direction of the entire Brigade.⁹⁹

Reynolds’s history was well known throughout the Brigade, of course. Although well into his fifties by the Civil War, he, too, had been a Young Irelander and had taken part in the Rebellion of 1848. He was a close friend of Meagher, another Waterford man, and like Meagher, exiled.¹⁰⁰ For the men of the Brigade involved in the Fenian Brotherhood, laboring faithfully for the liberation of Ireland from British rule, Reynolds

⁹⁷ Boyle, 70.

⁹⁸ *The Oswego Commercial Times*, Saturday, January 19, 1850; *Oswego Morning Post*, May 10, 1882; *The Oswego Palladium-Times*, November 20, 1945; Conyngham, 567; Bilby, 74. See Appendix C for an example of one of Reynolds’s poems: *Poetical Address, Delivered by Doctor Lawrence Reynolds, 63rd Regiment, N.Y.S.V., Before the Irish Brigade, in Camp, Near Falmouth, Va., On St. Patrick’s Day, March 17, 1863. Published by Michael O’Sullivan.*

⁹⁹ Reynolds joined the 63rd as surgeon on March 26, 1862, originally having been Assistant Surgeon for the 24th Regiment. *The Oswego Palladium-Times*, November 20, 1945; *Annual Report of the Adjutant-General of the State of New York*, 158.

¹⁰⁰ *The Oswego Daily Palladium*, April 25, 1887; *The Oswego Palladium-Times*, November 20, 1945.

was the hub of the wheel. Fenian organizational meetings took place regularly wherever his quarters were struck and which usually became, by his jovial orchestrations, good-will gatherings of frivolity and merriment. The following is Bilby's account of a typical Fenian meeting under Reynolds's supervision:

After dispensing with preliminary business and reception of new members at a typical meeting, Doctor Reynolds, it was fondly remembered, stirred up a batch of milk punch: "The whiskey is good and in good quantity. Condensed milk and nutmeg are added in judicious doses by an experienced hand, who does not forget to add a little hot water just to mix it well. Now begins the fun." The "fun" of the Circle seemed to revolve around declamations of poems and stories of "the Ould Dart," [Ireland] well lubricated with punch. Revolutionary plotting, if any, seems to have been held to a minimum.¹⁰¹

Though not a field officer, Reynolds, as the above indicates, was an undisputed leader in the Irish Brigade and few remembered him in the years ahead without fondness.¹⁰² For our purposes here, it is essential to note that Reynolds remained a vibrant and charismatic force throughout the war as a member of the 63rd New York State Volunteers, mustering out with the regiment in 1865.¹⁰³

Of further interest here as regards this extraordinary doctor, if not as it pertains to his military career, as it pertains to his worth as a humanitarian leader, is Lawrence Reynolds's post-war story. It is an absorbing narrative, exemplifying the best of Reynolds's character as that which served him well in the post-war community to which he retired. But Reynolds's post-war story no doubt echoes faithfully those same personal

¹⁰¹ Boyle, 316; Bilby, 74. Bilby cites Thomas Francis Galwey, *The Valiant Hours* (Harrisburg: The Stackpole Co., 1961), 75, in this paragraph. Galwey was an officer in the 8th Ohio Infantry. "Circle" refers to Reynolds's Potomac Circle of the Fenian Brotherhood.

¹⁰² Father Corby declared in his *Memoirs* that "Dr. Reynolds had no superior." See Corby, 30.

¹⁰³ *Annual Report of the Adjutant-General of the State of New York*, 158.

strengths which so impressed and motivated the men of his regiment and the Irish Brigade, as well. In various local newspaper accounts from 1882 to as late as 1946, from Oswego County, New York where Reynolds resided both before and after the war, an admirable portrait emerges.¹⁰⁴ It is, in every way, the story of a singular man who remained faithful to the highest ideals of his youth and to those inner lights which made him so beloved by the men who served with him in the Civil War.

Reynolds, continuing the medical practice left limbo in 1861, amassed a large following of Oswego inhabitants over the years both as patients and friends. Given the evidence, he was greatly loved in the county not only for his medical expertise and learned ways, but for his personal grace and affectionate ministrations to the poor. He amassed a great fortune, nearly \$30,000, but by wise investment, only, as his practice, apparently, lent itself more to barter and trade. Substantiation of this may be found in a reflective article from 1945 which reported that he was financially careless in his medical practice never “exacting in collecting the fees he had earned.”¹⁰⁵ At some point, and by means not articulated in the papers, he lost nearly all his fortune. Well into his eighties, now, Reynolds found himself financially compromised and soon after, fell prey to a land swindle in Garfield, Kansas, where a former Oswegonian had lured him, for the price of his remaining fortune, with the promise of 100 acres of wheat-producing land. Never suspecting the lie, Dr. Reynolds sent the money requested and announced to his community his plans to retire in Kansas. All of Oswego mourned his decision, feting him

¹⁰⁴ Reynolds settled in Oswego County upon his arrival from Bermuda where he, allegedly, had been exiled for his participation in the Rebellion of 1848. His arrival in Oswego may be dated somewhere around 1850. See *The Oswego Palladium-Times*, November 20, 1945.

¹⁰⁵ *The Oswego Palladium-Times*, November 20, 1945.

at public gatherings throughout the county until his day of departure. It was a sad farewell soon to be followed by a sadder tragedy. Upon his arrival in Garfield, the doctor found neither money, nor land, as no recording of ownership of the proposed acres had been made on Reynolds's behalf. Not surprisingly, his would-be real estate partner never materialized. Reynolds found himself heartbroken and penniless in a foreign land.¹⁰⁶

Doubtless, this would have been a miserable end for Lawrence Reynolds if the story ended here. Mercifully, it did not. With the help of former patients and friends in Oswego, the beloved doctor was brought home to New York, where musical recitals had been given for his benefit and pictures of the doctor sold for the purpose of bringing him back from Kansas and caring for him upon his return.¹⁰⁷ *The Oswego Daily Palladium* wrote:

Thursday evening in the Academy of Music the sympathizers with Dr. Lawrence Reynolds, who is sick, disabled and destitute in a little town in Kansas, will join in as entertainment for his benefit, which we hope will be generously patronized. In his sphere as a doctor, as an active worker and speaker, in the campaigner of his political party, as an officer during the war of the rebellion and as a friend and sympathizer always with all who were distressed, Dr. Reynolds now deserves a hearty and substantial testimonial from a town in which he has done so much for the public good, and where he so long lived, an honorable, honest and useful life. We hope there will be nothing half-hearted about this affair, but that it will have the same cheery, genial air that always characterized the doctor himself.¹⁰⁸

The community anxiously awaited Reynolds's return, making a public announcement in the *Palladium* on March 20, 1883 that a Mr. George Morgan had

¹⁰⁶ *Oswego Morning Post*, May 10, 1882; *The Oswego Palladium-Times*, November 20, 1945.

¹⁰⁷ *Oswego Morning Post*, May 10, 1882.

¹⁰⁸ *The Oswego Daily Palladium*, June 14, 1882.

received a telegram from Chicago announcing Dr. Reynolds's arrival that coming Thursday on the 3:30 train.¹⁰⁹ The doctor was lovingly cared for by the community upon his return, living in broken health for the next five years in a friend's private home. He died on the morning of April 25, 1887, precipitating glorious testimonials in the papers to his exploits in Ireland, his revered service as surgeon of the 63rd New York, and his worth as a doctor and a friend.¹¹⁰ Soon after, a "Reynolds Monument Fund" was created by the people of Oswego so that "on 1888, Decoration Day, when the battle-scarred veterans go to place their mementoes of flowers on the graves of their departed dead, they will not have any difficulty finding the tomb of our venerated and universally regarded friend."¹¹¹ Dr. Lawrence Reynolds, surgeon of the 63rd New York State Volunteer Infantry, was 85-years-old at the time of his death, his funeral one of the largest attended in the city at that time.¹¹²

Towards the end of 1861 and into the New Year, the 63rd New York received, by way of transfer, a number of men and several officers from the 37th New York Irish Rifles, the transfers only adding to the admirable worth of the 63rd New York's corps of officers. The Irish Rifles, as noted above, provided critical support at the Battle of First Bull Run by guarding the army's stores and ammunition at Fairfax Station. It was, in every sense, a unique regiment, organized with the help of the 69th Militia in a somewhat

¹⁰⁹ *The Oswego Daily Palladium*, March 20, 1883. Reynolds apparently traveled as far as Chicago on his way back to New York and may have been a resident there for a time because of ill health.

¹¹⁰ *The Oswego Daily Palladium*, April 25, 1887.

¹¹¹ *The Oswego Daily Palladium*, April 29, 1887.

¹¹² *The Oswego Palladium-Times*, November 20, 1945. Dr. Reynolds never married, and it is not surprising to learn that he had "a clerical disposition" when tending to the wounded of the Irish Brigade as his original intention was to have become a Roman Catholic priest. One of his poems, *Sweet Mary, Queen of Love*, was set to music and sung each year for May devotions in Oswego's St. Mary's Church. See *The Oswego Daily Palladium*, April 25, 1887; *The Oswego-Palladium Times*, May 25, 1945.

amusing way. During recruitment in April of 1861, 1,000 slots were allotted the 69th as one of seventeen, three-month regiments to be mustered by the state of New York. In its zeal and by mistake, however, 1,800 were recruited by the militia by mid-April. When the 69th departed suddenly for Washington on April 23, by necessity it was forced to leave 800 recruits behind. Little could be done about the predicament, and it was not judged a happy state of affairs. But the recruitments were not in vain. When New York soon after received permission from the War Department to recruit thirty-eight additional two-year regiments, the 37th New York Rifles, one of these additional regiments, took these 800 militia recruits into its ranks.¹¹³ This made the 37th, in one way, a hybrid of the 69th Militia. But the 37th was a sound and admirable organization all on its own, composed, even before its inclusion of the 800 above, of many of the experienced officers and men of the disbanded 75th New York State Militia. It was an entirely worthy regiment and, according to Boyle, could claim a place in rank unique to all other regiments in the state:

This was the first Irish organization to be accepted for service outside the state militia regiments and the first to be accepted for long-term service of two or three years, rather than the three months asked for by the Lincoln administration. The green flag carried by the 37th still hangs in the state capitol in Albany with the legend, "The First regiment of Irish Volunteers in the Field." The later fame of the Irish brigade and the Corcoran Legion should not rob the 37th of its proud claim. It was indeed the first Irish regiment of volunteers mustered into the service of the United States.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Boyle, 26-27.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 32-33. Among the Irish, the alacrity with which a unit responded to the call to arms was a source of great pride. The claim of first place as a regiment or brigade bespoke great valor and courage.

During that time in which the 63rd received its transfers from the 37th New York, the unit, along with the other regiments of the Brigade, was safely quartered in Washington at Fort Corcoran within Camp California, the former named for Col. Corcoran, the latter for the Brigade's Second Corps Commander, Major General Edwin Vose Sumner who had recently returned from that state.¹¹⁵ Camp headquarters for the Irish Brigade was called "Druid's Grove," by many accounts a spectacular, if garish, affair, a site bedecked with all the accoutrements of war and trophies from Meagher's recent expedition to Central America, among them a jaguar skin.¹¹⁶ Round about the Grove, days of hard drilling ended with the fiddle and the bow and songs and tales of ancient wars and Celtic knights.¹¹⁷ But however comfortable and semi-bucolic the setting and diversions, George B. McClellan, Major General of the Union Army, had serious organizational problems to correct. Crippling errors in staffing had to be redressed and most notably those involving the commissioning of the army's field officers. Unsound staffing procedures created numerous problems for the army in the beginning. They were sometimes ridiculously arbitrary. As a result, the corps were riddled with weak spots of command in many places, and McClellan set about replacing the weakest links. Qualification boards were set up and soon men without military

¹¹⁵ As noted earlier, the Brigade was in the First Division of this Second Corps and was commanded at this time by Brigadier General Israel B. Richardson. Richardson would be replaced after his death at Antietam by Major General Winfield Scott Hancock, Hancock remaining with the Brigade until the Petersburg Campaign in 1864.

¹¹⁶ Bilby, 25. Conyngham notes that Meagher draped his bed with a large buffalo robe and contrived a large chimney and fireplace in the rear of his tent. See Conyngham, 75.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

aptitude or skill were, sometimes unceremoniously, weeded out.¹¹⁸ These activities proved critical to the overall health of the Union Army.

It was during this reconstruction that the 63rd's Colonel Enright was discharged, resigned, or removed. No one seems to know which, though he was, most likely, removed due to the departure incident back in New York City, an objectionable affair and clear evidence of his inability to command or to work cooperatively with his fellow officers.¹¹⁹ Regardless, in his place was transferred the Lieutenant Colonel of the 37th New York, John Burke, a man of numerous commendations up to that point in time and who, apparently, was Meagher's own choice for the position.¹²⁰ Also from the 37th, though transferred a few weeks earlier than Burke, the 63rd received James D. Brady who stepped into the position of First Lieutenant of Company B, replacing Phillip Connelly.¹²¹ Brady would be made Adjutant shortly thereafter, perhaps by Burke's patronage because of their previous association, and end the war as the 63rd New York's last colonel.¹²² It was at this time, as well, that the 63rd received Kavanagh as Captain of Company I,

¹¹⁸ Boyle, 77.

¹¹⁹ Bilby, 25, believes that Enright resigned in protest against Meagher's receipt of Brigade command, Enright having been one of Meagher's detractors. Other than that Enright "resigned" the day Meagher became brigadier general (February 5, 1862), there is no real evidence to support this. In fact, the dates may not coincide. See Boyle, 77.

¹²⁰ Ibid.; John Burke, Civil War Service Records, National Archives, Washington, D. C. Box: 551; Extraction: 18; Record: 2676. Burke's career, unfortunately, did not end commendably due wholly to a series of events which were, perhaps, beyond his control. Vindication of Burke as an officer will be offered in the following chapters. Burke may have been an Irish revolutionary before the Civil War. O'Flaherty, page 58, identifies him as such but can offer only a newspaper article, *The New York Tribune*, September 13, 1861, as a source.

¹²¹ Connelly was discharged on December 6, 1861. Brady was in place the following day. See *Annual Report of the Adjutant-General of the State of New York*, 27 & 11.

¹²² James H. Bailey, "Colonel James Brady of Virginia," Article Series. *The Catholic Virginian* (July 9, 16, & 23, 1948). Brady, as the 63rd's last colonel, received the unit's famed ethnic green flag for safe keeping, later donating it to the University of Notre Dame. See Lysy, 15, 50-51.

another fortunate transfer.¹²³ As noted, the 37th New York Irish Rifles was a respected regiment of long standing, its history noteworthy and its officers highly regarded.¹²⁴ The transfers of Burke, Brady, and Kavanagh into the 63rd New York's corps of officers were advantageous events. The training and military skill of these men further strengthened an already remarkable coterie of knowledgeable and experienced officers.

In final argument as to the worth of the officers of the 63rd New York, it is uncertain but worthwhile speculating here that Lieutenant Colonel P. D. Kelly, noted earlier as the ranking officer of the Third Irish Regiment and later resigning before the regiment was mustered in as the 63rd, may have been Colonel Patrick Kelly of the 88th New York. Patrick Kelly was a man greatly respected for his military skill and sympathetic treatment of the rank and file, the second commander of the Irish Brigade, taking charge after Meagher resigned his commission in the days following the Battle of Chancellorsville.¹²⁵ Patrick Kelly joined the 88th as a lieutenant colonel in December of 1861.¹²⁶ This was the same rank of P. D. Kelly when he left the Third Irish Regiment in August of 1861, shortly after having offered the command of the Third Irish to Meagher. The ranks and time frame would match, assuming standing rank was honored. If this is correct, it soundly counters the argument that the 63rd's officers were inferior from inception to those of the 69th and 88th.¹²⁷ Why P. D. Kelly left the Third Irish is

¹²³ *Annual Report of the Adjutant-General of the State of New York*, 89.

¹²⁴ There was, however, an unfortunate incident involving the 37th's colonel at the time, Judge John McCunn, who was found guilty of a drunk and disorderly charge stemming from an episode at Willard's Hotel in Washington. He was court martialed for it, but allowed to resign quietly. See Boyle 77.

¹²⁵ Arguably, Kelly was the Brigade's finest commander.

¹²⁶ Conyngham, 558.

¹²⁷ William Rose, of Petersburg, Virginia, retired Chief Petty Officer in the United States Navy and Civil War re-enactor, has proposed this theory to the researcher.

unknown, but, apparently, it was not with animosity. A letter from Kelly to the editor of *The New York Herald*, dated August 26, 1861, states: “To prevent any misrepresentation in relation to my position in the Third Irish Regiment, I beg leave to say that I have retired from the command of the Third regiment. At the same time, while I am unable to be with the regiment in person, I will be with them in heart and soul.”¹²⁸ To have numbered the 88th’s Patrick Kelly among its original officer cache lends great leverage to the argument that the 63rd New York State Volunteer Regiment was a regiment with a sound and able-bodied pool of high-ranking military personnel, on par, in everyway, with those in the other core regiments of the Irish Brigade.

¹²⁸ This article is included in a small collection of newspaper clippings on the 63rd New York at the New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center, Saratoga Springs, New York.

CHAPTER THREE

REGIMENTAL IDENTITY AND THE TEMPERANCE PLEDGE

They looked magnificent, and many encomiums were passed by the visitors upon their soldier appearance, which indeed, were well deserved, as a finer body of volunteers could scarcely be collected together.

--upon presentation of the Colors to the
63rd New York State Volunteer Regiment¹²⁹

From the beginning there appeared to be a curious dichotomy between the 63rd New York and the other two core regiments of the Irish Brigade. As mentioned earlier, the 63rd, then the Third Irish Regiment, did not remain in camp on Staten Island long but was transferred within weeks of arriving to new campgrounds on David's Island in Long Island Sound. In this choice of campsite, the 63rd was isolated in its training from the 69th and 88th regiments who trained together on the camping grounds at Fort Schuyler in the East River.¹³⁰ In addition, the formal presentation of the 63rd's Colors was held at a different time and place than was the presentation of Colors to the other two regiments. The flags of the 63rd were presented on November 6, 1861, on the training grounds at David's Island. The flags of the 69th and 88th were presented on November 18th during a more impressive and far more widely attended affair before the Madison Avenue home of Catholic Archbishop John Hughes.¹³¹ It may have been nothing more than poor timing for both these curiosities. Negotiations to merge the 63rd with the Brigade were still taking place when the 63rd changed camps, and moving to Fort Schuyler would not have

¹²⁹ *The Irish American*, November 16, 1861, "Presentation of Colors."

¹³⁰ Bilby, 15.

¹³¹ Corby, 295; Bilby, 22. The 2nd Battalion of Light Artillery, the Fifth Regiment, trained with the 69th and 88th at Fort Schuyler, as well, and received its Colors during the same ceremony. See O'Flaherty, 26.

been an option. As regarded the receipt of Colors, the 63rd may have received its flags prior to the other two regiments simply because it was that much further along in the process of training. Regardless, its separateness in training and the formal receipt of its Colors fostered, perhaps, the perception that the 63rd was different from its sister regiments. Newspaper accounts during this time always reported news of the 63rd separate from that of the 69th and 88th and implied an exclusiveness to the 63rd's training and future service. By way of example, in one article from *The Irish American*, doubt that the 63rd would even fight along side the other two regiments of the Brigade was specifically raised.

This fine body of Irish American soldiers has been organized, under the annexed order of the Adjutant General, as the 63rd Regiment of New York State Volunteers, the regimental organization being completed by the annexation of a company from Albany under Capt. Branigan. We understand the regiment is under orders to be ready to start as the 9th inst. Its destination is not specified; but we hope the War Department will not separate so fine a corps from its kindred organization in the Irish Brigade.¹³²

The above stands as an illustration of how disjointed the relationship between the 63rd regiment and the 69th and 88th was and how differently the 63rd New York may have been assessed from the very beginning as regarded its worth and relationship to the Irish Brigade. But it will be our objective here to examine yet another way in which the 63rd New York was distinguished, or set apart from, the other core regiments of the Brigade, this, however, because of a singularly laudable undertaking. The task will better define the regimental identity of the 63rd, an identity decidedly different but as noble and as war-

¹³² *The Irish American*, November 9, 1861, "The 3rd Irish Regiment."

worthy as that of the 69th and 88th regiments. It will be necessary to examine here, as well, an unfortunate event related to this distinctiveness, an episode which may well have compromised the regiment's reputation, at least in the beginning of the war.

In the spring of 1861, Notre Dame rallied to the needs of the North. Though its Congregation of the Holy Cross was weak in numbers, its Superior General, Father Edwin Sorin, dispatched, in stages, seven priests to minister to the soldiers at the front.¹³³ The men in the core regiments of the Irish Brigade, both officers and privates, were almost exclusively Catholic. Accordingly, Notre Dame allotted each unit its own priest.¹³⁴ There is much in the historical record to assert that the most famous of these three chaplains was the 88th's Father William Corby, C. S. C. who would write of his war experiences years later in his famed *Memoirs of Chaplain Life*, noted above. Corby, later a president of Notre Dame University, would become immortalized after the war in picture, poem, statuary, and song as the priest who gave absolution to the entire Irish Brigade at once before the battle at Gettysburg. But without taking anything away from the good Father for merit, or deed, perhaps the most tireless and dedicated priest among the chaplains of the Irish Brigade was the 63rd's own Father James M. Dillon, from all accounts, an assiduous shepherd, dying only three years after the war ended, at the age of 32, from a chronic lung disability. His religious order maintained ever after, however,

¹³³ Notre Dame Archives, *The Story of Notre Dam*, Chapter IX, <http://archives.nd.edu/hope/hope09.hym> (accessed October 6, 2006), 1. This was the founding Order of Notre Dame. Surprisingly, it was not an Irish Catholic order, but a French Canadian Catholic community.

¹³⁴ Corby, 21.

that the young priest's death was hastened by the deprivations he suffered while tending his flock in the 63rd.¹³⁵

The 63rd New York officially received Father Dillon as its chaplain in the fall of 1861, while the regiment was still in training on David's Island.¹³⁶ Prior to his muster, in the summer of 1861, the priest had been sent by Notre Dame directly to Washington where, amid the sea of tents struck in anticipation of battle, he witnessed first hand the results of the vices of camp life upon the young soldiers. Father Corby observed that "[s]eeing the result of the camp life on the young men composing these skeleton commands, the good chaplain [Dillon] of the Sixty-third was determined to guard his boys against the prevailing vices, especially that of drunkenness, which was the predominant failing, and had always been characteristic of camp life."¹³⁷ Father Dillon did not lose his resolve or direction upon mustering in. He was convinced that the military success of the 63rd regiment lay in the men's commitment to abstain from "the evils of intemperance," which he declared the "father of all crimes, especially among those with the Irish blood in their veins."¹³⁸ The young priest's concerns were justified. While alcohol abuse was an unremitting problem in many a Civil War unit, whiskey was the "particular bane of Irish regiments," and many men succumbed to it.¹³⁹ Father Corby conceded it a special curse of the Irish, and Colonel James P. McIvor of the 170th New York, initially a captain in the famed 69th New York Militia, spoke for many a field

¹³⁵ *The Story of Notre Dame*, 2. The chaplain of the 69th New York was Father Thomas Ouellet, a French Jesuit.

¹³⁶ Corby, 291. Father Dillon was mustered into service on October 30, 1861 and discharged because of illness on October 18 of the following year. See Corby, 297.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 291.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Burton, 153 and 118.

commander in the following official letter on the subject: “I beg leave most respectfully to request that you will not sell any more Whiskey to the officers of the 170th Regt N. Y. Vol unless on an order approved by and signed by a Field officer of the Regt, for if you do I assure you that before four weeks expire there will not be a Line officer for duty in the Regt.”¹⁴⁰ But, perhaps, the diary entry of the chaplain of the 37th New York Irish Rifles offers the clearest picture in the fewest words, “Pay Day, and of course drinking. Such a picture of hell I had never seen.”¹⁴¹

In order to recognize fully the 63rd's pledge of abstinence as an extraordinary act of commitment and resolve, it is important to make clear that the problem of alcohol abuse extended far beyond the Irish regiments and was endemic and troublesome in both armies. Severe and widespread attempts to curtail it often proved frustrating and fruitless for those in command, though official regulatory means to do so actually predated the war, itself. Article 29 of the *Articles of War*, by way of example, first published by the Federal government in 1806 and later adopted by the Confederate Army, specifically prohibited camp sutlers from selling liquor on pain of losing their selling permits, altogether. Article 46, by the severity of the punishments meted out, gave an even clearer picture of the problem: “Any commissioned officer who shall be found drunk on his guard, party, or other duty, shall be cashiered. Any non-commissioned officer or soldier so offending shall suffer such corporeal punishment as shall be inflicted by the sentence of a court-martial.”¹⁴² And apparently, these court martials were not far and few

¹⁴⁰ Corby, 291; Burton, 118. McIvor's letter was dated December, 1863.

¹⁴¹ Burton, 127, takes this quote from A. Milburn Petty's "History of the 37th Regiment, New York Volunteers," *American Irish Historical Society Journal* 30 (1932): 101-24.

¹⁴² War Department, United States, *1806 Articles of War*, *Official 10th Texas Infantry Website*, <http://>

between. In February 1862, while reviewing a case of insubordination in Joseph Hooker's Division, said case stemming from alcohol abuse, McClellan articulated his and many another's frustration caused by this all-pervading and habitual misuse of liquor:

No one evil agent so much obstructs this army . . . as the degrading vice of drunkenness. It is the cause of by far the greater part of the disorders which are examined by court-martials. It is impossible to estimate the benefits that would accrue to the service of the adoption of a resolution on the part of officers to set their men an example of total abstinence from intoxicating liquors. It would be worth 50,000 men to the armies of the United States.¹⁴³

According to his fearful concerns as regarded this "degrading vice of drunkenness," Dillon took matters into his own hands. On Sunday, November 17th, while the regiment was still in training and after the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, Father Dillon proposed a Temperance League to 700 men of the 63rd New York State Volunteers. Chaplain Dillon's pulpit speech to the men of the 63rd on that day, as Father Corby remembered it, is worthwhile reproducing here:

"Show me," he said, "an Irish Catholic who is not addicted to the vice of drunkenness, and I will find a good citizen of the Republic. Give men an abstainer from the cup that inebriates and I will show you an obedient, brave soldier willing to die for the flag. History is full of incidences where ignominious defeat has followed dearly-bought victory, owing to the indulgence in strong drink. I have in my mind," he went on to say, "one conspicuous example in the hopeless struggle of Ireland, in '98, where the insurgents met disaster after routing the enemy,

members.aol.com/SMckay1234/index2.htm (accessed October 2, 2007). The *1806 Articles of War* were revised in 1857. War Department, United States, *1857 U. S. Army Regulations, U. S. Regulars Civil War Archives*, http://www.usregulars.com/1857%20Regs/57regs_main.html (accessed October 2, 2007).

¹⁴³ Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill, 1952), 252.

because they gave way to festivity when they should have taken advantage of their dearly bought success.¹⁴⁴

“You are going to the war my comrades. Many of you will find a grave in the sunny South. I can not say how many, but the number will be large, as it will not be a holiday excursion. The South has a population of five millions, and vast wealth. So has the North. Believe me, the longest purse will carry the day. It is my honest opinion that the Irish Brigade, to which you will be attached, under the leadership of the chivalrous Thomas Francis Meagher, will be always in the van, in the post of danger, the post of honor. It has been ever thus. It is a tribute to your Irish valor, and you should be proud of it.

“Go, then, to the front as temperate men. If you do, you will be equal to all emergencies. I will give you an opportunity to be temperate soldiers, for I propose this very day—now and here—to organize a temperance society *for the war*.

“How many will join it? Let every officer and man present do so, and God will bless them!”¹⁴⁵

The harvest, apparently, was great. Father Corby concludes his reminiscence of the above scene by stating that after his speech Father Dillon requested that those not willing to fall in under the banner of temperance fall back. Not one out of the 700 men in his hearing that day did so. After all names had been taken, the priest led the men in the recitation of the temperance pledge. Corby recalled that the voices of the 700 as they pledged sounded “like surf on the beach, only a few rods distant.” The Pledge read as follows: “I promise, with the Divine Assistance, to abstain from all intoxicating liquors, and to prevent as much as possible, by word and example intemperance in others.”¹⁴⁶

It is evident in Father’s Dillon’s speech that he was not only calling the 63rd to temperance but to a full recognition of who they were as Irishmen and soldiers. The regiment was responding as much to a martial call as to the sensibleness of remaining

¹⁴⁴ Father Dillon is referring here to the Irish Rebellion of 1798, a revolt against the British dominated Kingdom of Ireland. The revolutionaries, called “The United Irishmen,” were influenced by the ideas of the American and French Revolutions.

¹⁴⁵ Corby, 291-92.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 293.

temperate while in life-threatening circumstances. It was nothing less than a plea for military excellence, and the men of the 63rd New York rallied. With an eye on the singularity of the undertaking, though the need, apparently, was universal, at no time during the conflict were the 69th or the 88th New York regiments offered or pursued the institution of a sanctioned temperance league within their ranks. Again, the 63rd New York was separate from its companions, but in this a most commendable way. The movement proved effective. After temperance had been pledged, so noticeable was the decline in wayward activities in camp and so marked the added attendance at Daily and Sunday Mass, that Father Dillon, much encouraged by the response as Corby tells us, had medals struck to commemorate the pledge. These medals were still in the possession of surviving “Medal Men” of the 63rd, or their descendants, over thirty-years after the war.¹⁴⁷ Amazing evidence as to how seriously many took their commitment that November 17th. That all of those 700 men remained faithful to their pledge is highly unlikely, and Corby tells us as much. But as testimony to the many who did, Corby ends his account of the 63rd's Temperance League as follows:

McClellan's grand army of over 100,000 fighting men in[f]ested the Confederate capital the summer succeeding (June 1862). The Irish Brigade was among them, including the “Temperance Regiment.” The camps were right in the swamps of the dreaded and poisonous Chickahominy, a disease-breeding and poisonous spot. The water was so execrable that commissary whiskey was dealt out daily to the officers and men, at the expense of the government. Even then malaria, dysentery, fever and ague, and kindred troubles were fearfully prevalent.

The men who wore the temperance medals received their rations with the rest, but they absolutely refused to touch the stuff.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Corby, 293-294. See Appendix D for a rendition of this Temperance Medal.

¹⁴⁸ Corby, 294.

Regarding the taking of this temperance pledge as a singular and notable event, the 63rd may well have been exceptional not only among the Irish Brigade, but all other Irish regiments, as well. As to the army as a whole, Dillon's Temperance Regiment was a rarity, to be sure. In the Union Army there were perhaps only two other regiments who could claim the same commitment to abstinence: Iowa's 24th Infantry, mustered in specifically as a "Temperance Regiment" in the summer of 1862 and Maine's 13th Volunteer Infantry. The latter, however, was recognized as a temperance regiment solely because of the fanatical commitment of its commander to the cause of prohibition.¹⁴⁹

It was because of the 63rd's commitment to abstinence that its departure fiasco, while under Enright's command as mentioned earlier, was made all the more onerous, for the regiment left New York City for Washington, via several ports of call, drunk and brawling and without any vestige of order or direction. Given the regiment's Temperance Pledge, this seems, from our present perspective, an ironic and even comic event. But the event at the time was no laughing matter. It may well have damaged the 63rd's reputation, the eminence of both its officers and men, irreparably. At the very least, the incident seriously compromised the regiment's standing in the Brigade at the very beginning. Less than two weeks after Father Dillon's temperance pledge was taken, the 63rd departed from New York in an unceremonious way, inebriated and

¹⁴⁹ *Civil War Genealogy*, http://groups.msn.com/CivilWarGenealogy/regimentsia_msnw?action=get_message&mview=0&ID_Message=442&LastModified=4675579553105707855; *Gunbroker*, <http://www.gunbroker.com/Auction/ViewItem.asp?Item=64231350> (accessed winter 2007). The 13th Maine was known as a "Temperance Regiment" simply because its colonel, Neal Dow, was a staunch prohibitionist, later hailed the "Father of Prohibition" for his post-war activities in this area. As a regiment, the 13th Maine did not take a unit pledge, per se.

unmanageable, with a number of them left behind to be rounded up later and sent to the front by separate transport.¹⁵⁰ It was the very definition of a public disgrace, and it will be speculated below that the service of the 63rd New York may have been kept idle during the ensuing Peninsula Campaign to prevent further dishonor to the Brigade. Only with its wide scale slaughter at Antietam does the regiment redeem itself.

As noted above, the 69th and 88th New York State Volunteers, along with their respective colonels, Robert Nugent and Henry M. Baker, received their regimental Colors on November 18th as both units stood in formation before the Madison Avenue home of Catholic Archbishop Hughes. Judge Charles Daly presented the flag to each regiment, offering eloquent words of praise for the Irish Brigade as he did so, while the Vicar-General of the Diocese, Father Storrs, standing in for Hughes, gave the benediction. At the conclusion of the ceremony, to rousing music and deafening huzzahs, the 69th New York, the only regiment prepared to deploy that day, marched down Broadway to the Battery as men in the crowd waved their hats and women their handkerchiefs in fond farewells. Once dockside, the men boarded the ship waiting for them, sailed across the bay to Washington-bound trains, and were gone.¹⁵¹ Scenes of this nature don't get any more quaint or picturesque than this. Ten days later, the 63rd New York would follow the 69th down Broadway and to the front. Unfortunately, the departure of the 63rd was not quite as charming or quaint.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ O'Flaherty, 30.

¹⁵¹ Boyle, 68-69.

¹⁵² Boyle, 68-69; O'Flaherty, 25-27

The 63rd New York received its Colors nearly two weeks earlier than did the 69th and 88th regiments but remained on David's Island another three weeks before its marching orders came through. This deployment delay was one of several the regiment had suffered since leaving Staten Island, one administrative mishap after another impeding the 63rd's exit from the state. Originally, it was slated to deploy as early as September; but, apparently, the delivery of its regimental uniforms was delayed.¹⁵³ Later, its departure for Washington was compromised by the repeated failure of the government to pay the men and their officers in a timely fashion, decidedly an uncomfortable situation for all involved.¹⁵⁴ The end result was uncertainty among the ranks as regarded deployment and, perhaps in no small measure, feelings of abandonment and neglect by the regiment, as a whole. But on November 26th, the paymaster came through, the regiment finally notified it would be leaving for Washington the day after next, November 28th--Thanksgiving Day 1861.

On November 28th, the 63rd New York followed in the footsteps of the 69th, down Broadway to the Battery, making "a brilliant display under the mellow light of a Thanksgiving Day sun" before an enthusiastic and cheering crowd.¹⁵⁵ Up to this point in the story, all was as it should be and was in no way different from the deployment of the 69th a week, or more before. At the piers, however, the day took on a darker hue. Some sort of altercation between guards and admirers of the 63rd took place upon the regiment's arrival at the Battery, and all order was lost. Though it is unclear as to what exactly

¹⁵³ *The Irish American*, November 9, 1861, "The 3rd Irish Regiment;" O'Flaherty, 4.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

happened next, liquor was, apparently, introduced into the mix and a good number of the men became drunk. Brawls broke out, two deaths took place, and a fair number of the 63rd broke rank and disappeared into the city. Enright ordered the ship out into the harbor during the episode, where it weighed anchor for a time and then left for the trains waiting across the bay.¹⁵⁶ The regiment departed for Washington, thereafter, leaving a good number of the men behind.¹⁵⁷ Those left behind were “collected” in the days ahead and delivered to Washington in installments.¹⁵⁸

How, exactly, the 63rd New York State Volunteer Infantry, Father Dillon’s Temperance Regiment, managed to leave New York City in a soddened state may never be known. Several theories seem to be favored, however, one a good deal more vindicating than the others. Boyle, who throughout his work is more cautionary than not about the worth of the 63rd, is wholly negative with regards to the affair; and Joseph G. Bilby, in his *Remember Fontenoy!*, if not forthcoming with a clear account of the incident, is deprecatory, at best, especially as regards the officers of the regiment.¹⁵⁹ Boyle maintains, apparently using but one primary source on the matter, that women following the 63rd were repulsed by the guards at the Battery’s piers, the gates to the piers being summarily closed.¹⁶⁰ In retaliation, a good number of the regiment responded by breaking rank and heading for saloons and drinking establishments within the Battery

¹⁵⁶ Boyle notes several ships in the retelling of the incident. See Boyle, 70.

¹⁵⁷ Boyle, 71, relates that at their Philadelphia stop-over that night, only 300 of the 63rd, “still ‘very drunk,’” were served food at a “vintage USO.” He does not speculate that the residual of the regiment was left behind but that, perhaps, those not served “could not abide the sight of food.”

¹⁵⁸ O’Flaherty, 30.

¹⁵⁹ Bilby, 27, states that the men of the 63rd were so drunk and “rowdy,” thereafter that their own officers appeared to be frightened of them.

¹⁶⁰ *The New York Times*, November 30, 1861.

area.¹⁶¹ “And so,” Boyle writes, “the 63rd New York left their home city in an alcoholic haze.”¹⁶² A simple enough scenario. But how, precisely, the men of the 63rd managed to break rank for parts unknown after the pier gates had been closed is never addressed by Boyle.

A more credible version of the 63rd's departure for Washington, by virtue of the use of not one, but several contemporary accounts, is that of O’Flaherty in his previously cited history of the 69th New York.¹⁶³ In an account far more kind to the 63rd New York, O’Flaherty reports that as it was Thanksgiving Day, the 63rd's march to the Battery “was impeded by wives, children and sweethearts who pushed through the ranks to snatch a final kiss.” These interruptions, in turn, resulted in a further delay at Pier One which, most likely, was the real cause of the incident. As it was Thanksgiving Day and no food had been provided the regiment up to that point, the unit became “dissatisfied.” Friends, but mostly peddlers at high prices, placated the men with whiskey. Given their empty stomachs, the results were inevitable. According to O’Flaherty,

Many of the hungry men became drunk instantly, and since the liquor was of low quality some of the soldiers became violent and two deaths resulted. Great difficulty was experienced in separating the men from their friends and families, but at last amid arguments and fights most of the men were rounded up and put on board the steamer. Some jumped overboard and attempted to swim to shore. Colonel Enright ordered the ship to pull out and anchor in mid stream. The colonel wished to wait until all the men were assembled, but was persuaded by Lieutenant Colonel Fowler and Major Lynch to set sail for Amboy, New Jersey.

¹⁶¹ Boyle, 71.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ O’Flaherty’s sources include *The Pilot*, December 7, 1861; *The Irish American*, November 30 and December 7, 1861; *The New York Herald*, November 29 and December 6, 1861; *The New York Tribune*, November 30 and December 7, 1861.

Here there was a shortage of railroad cars, and after a considerable delay the regiment set out over one hundred short.¹⁶⁴

O’Flaherty further notes that the 63rd arrived in Washington on December 1, 1861 in “a somewhat battered condition,” and orders were issued back in New York on December 5 for those not accounted for.¹⁶⁵ These stragglers were eventually sent on to Washington to join the 63rd and the other core regiments of the Brigade. It was a very public affair, spectacularly recounted in a number of newspapers at the time and to the great detriment of the regiment’s reputation.¹⁶⁶ Though there may be no convincing way to portray the 63rd’s departure in a favorable light, O’Flaherty’s account somewhat extricates the regiment from the lower rungs of society to which both Bilby and Boyle would consign it. Unfortunately, this justification, if we can term it such, was not forthcoming at the time. As will be seen below, the reputation of the regiment and the regiment’s officers received greater censure in the press during the months that followed, due not only to the negative effects of the New York departure but to the boorish behavior, thereafter, of the 63rd’s own commanding officer, Richard C. Enright.

Enright was an unfortunate choice for colonel of the 63rd, and the regiment suffered for it. He was not only young and inexperienced, but, as the days following the departure incident would prove, a man wholly without insight or a sense of personal

¹⁶⁴ O’Flaherty, 30. It is unclear in O’Flaherty’s account as to whether the two deaths alluded to here were due to direct violence or from drowning after jumping into the river and attempting “to swim to shore.”

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ See note above on O’Flaherty’s sources.

accountability.¹⁶⁷ In the end, the 63rd would endure not only the stigma of their New York departure but the public's loss of confidence in its field officers, as well, due almost entirely to Enright who, perhaps, was emotionally unable to take responsibility for his own command. For months after its very public and ill-favored departure, the 63rd New York and its officers were scrutinized by the press. Everything the regiment found itself involved in was examined in the papers and found wanting. A running comparison developed between the 63rd and 69th regiments. Newspapers continually pitted the two regiments against each other, and the 63rd invariably came in second in the assessment.¹⁶⁸ At the heart of this was the judgment of the press that the officers of the 63rd were second-rate officers and could not compete with those of the First Regiment. It appeared to be an inescapable judgment, and Enright may have further complicated the situation.

As training continued, Enright began to complain that he and the 63rd, at the instigation of a few conspiring officers, were being treated unfairly in a number of camp situations. His complaints were trivial, at best, and continued for weeks.¹⁶⁹ Perhaps realizing that the negative press coverage and poor treatment of the 63rd were the results of the 63rd's embarrassing departure, Enright, at last, laid the blame for the fiasco at the feet of his fellow officers. He claimed there had been trouble in training the 63rd from the very beginning, due in no small part to the inability of the company officers to discipline their men. He called for the resignation of a number of them, maintaining that they alone were responsible for the disgraceful deployment of the regiment. Other than Enright's

¹⁶⁷ Boyle, 70

¹⁶⁸ O'Flaherty, 57.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 62.

claims, there is no evidence that the officers of the 63rd were lax in training the unit on David's Island or that the 63rd showed itself to be a difficult regiment so early in the war. There is every reason to believe, however, given Enright's situation, that his charges were nothing more than smoke and mirrors, tactics to divert attention and blame away from himself.

The officers named by Enright, captains James McCaffery, Company F, and George Tobin, Company D, and lieutenants John Gleason, Company H, William Fennon, Company F, and John Carty, Company G, complied with his request to resign.¹⁷⁰ Before leaving, however, they asked Enright for a letter confirming that they had not resigned because of acts of cowardice. Enright, apparently not just young but naïve, as well, wrote them a letter in glowing and becoming terms. The men summarily presented the letter to the then visiting Governor of New York, Edwin D. Morgan, contending that they had been forced to resign without justification and requesting they be reinstated as officers of the 63rd. A battle ensued between Enright, the officers, and Governor Morgan as to who was the trustworthy party in the matter and ended with Enright threatening to resign if the resignations were rescinded. A review board was set up, and though the reasons for the action were never clearly stated, Enright was removed and later replaced, as noted above, by Colonel John Burke of the 37th New York Irish Rifles.¹⁷¹ Enright, not surprisingly, refused to take the action bravely on the chin. Over the next few months he contested forcefully and openly both his removal as colonel of the 63rd and Burke's appointment as

¹⁷⁰ O'Flaherty, 58. The author identifies Lieutenant John Carty as a "Carty." There is no "Carty" named in the *Annual Report of the Adjutant-General of the State of New York* for the Sixty-third New York.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

same. But the powers involved knew that they had made the appropriate decision and were immovable. In the end, Enright was restored to his rank but failed to be reinstated as colonel of the 63rd New York. His career with the Irish Brigade was soundly over by summer of that year.¹⁷²

Enright, however, had done damage to the regiment that could not be undone or addressed as cleanly or as finally as was his removal. For many, the men of the 63rd New York State Volunteer Infantry were damaged goods, as it were, untrustworthy and inferior, at best. The consensus was that it was a “problem outfit” from the onset and now with the faithless and self-serving actions of Enright, came an even greater condemnation of its officers.¹⁷³ This, perhaps, was the more severe blow. Men could be trained and whipped into shape once strong and experienced hands were firmly in place; but if those hands were palsied in anyway, what hoped remained? It was the fate of the 63rd New York to labor under the burden of this opinion in the first eight months of its service, for they were, as records show, kept at arms length during the Peninsula Campaign of 1862. As regards this campaign, a quick glance at a comparison of the engagements of the three New York regiments of the Irish Brigade confirms that the 63rd New York’s performance was outdistanced by the other two regiments.¹⁷⁴ The 63rd spent a good portion of this campaign either guarding batteries or on picket duty, much to the dissatisfaction of Meagher who complained of their separation from the rest of the Brigade in the following report for the Battle of Fair Oaks.

¹⁷² Ibid., 60-63.

¹⁷³ Bilby, 27.

¹⁷⁴ See Appendix D.

In making this report I find but one circumstance which diminishes the pleasure I feel in speaking so laudably of those whom I have the honor to command, and this circumstance is the withdrawal of the Sixty-third New York Volunteers, commanded by Colonel John Burke, which regiment, between 11 and 12 o'clock p.m. of the 31st of May, on our march from the camp at Tyler's farm, were ordered by General Richardson, commanding division, to fall back and defend the batteries of the division that were impeded in the mud and could not be brought to the front without assistance. These orders were executed by the Sixty-third New York Volunteers with promptness and full efficiency, and I but imperfectly convey the conviction of its comrade regiments of the brigade in saying that the participation of the Sixty-third New York Volunteers in the dangers of the day would have added to whatever credit the rest of the brigade has had the fortune to acquire.¹⁷⁵

The 63rd's colonel, John Burke, also registered a like complaint by noting in his own report on Fair Oaks the discontent of the men themselves in the segregation of their regiment from its Brigade companions.

I reported my regiment to General Richardson for duty about 7 o'clock last night, and it was assigned by him to support Captain Pettit's battery, which, position it continues to occupy. The conduct of the officers and men under my command during all the hardships which they endured is deserving of praise, each performing his duty willingly, cheerfully, and promptly. Their only regret was that they were deprived of the honor of fighting with their own brigade.¹⁷⁶

Apparently, these protests were of little consequence. In the ensuing Seven-Days' Battles, the 63rd spent the first stage of it on picket duty and only became truly engaged

¹⁷⁵ United States War Department, *The Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*, 128 vols. (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1880-1901). *The Making of America Collection. Cornell University Library Digital Collections*, <http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/moa/browse.monographs/waro.html> (accessed autumn 2006), Series 1-Volume XI/1 [S# 12], Report No. 12 (Brigadier General Thomas Francis Meagher). (Hereinafter the entire work will be cited as *Official Records*.)

¹⁷⁶ *Official Records*, Series 1-Volume XI/1 [S# 12], Report No. 13 (Colonel John Burke).

during the last stage, at the Battle of Malvern Hill. Ironically, even here the 63rd was sent, at the close of the struggle, to guard yet another battery of artillery.¹⁷⁷ By this time, though mitigating circumstances were at play, the men must have felt as though they had been type-cast for the duration of the war.¹⁷⁸ But for all the resistance and protest, it would only be at Antietam that the 63rd New York redeemed itself in any real way.

Attempting to define fully the true regimental identity of the 63rd New York State Volunteers, it may be well to end here on a note about the regiment as other than a military unit. The 63rd was also a brotherhood of Irishmen, many of them born in Ireland, others who, perhaps, felt as though they had been for all the hearthside stories and songs parents or grandparents had shared with them. If the men of the 63rd New York were committed and principled soldiers, as the previous pages hopefully have shown, many of them were also compassionate and caring men who did not fail to honor and care for their ancestral home or the Irish people who continued to suffer there.

In the spring of 1863, distressing reports of the suffering poor in Ireland reached the Irish Brigade which had just emerged from a winter of relative comfort and ease. Father William Corby wrote, “We saw the papers very regularly, even if we had to pay a high price for them. Every day we were expecting the orders to march; . . . Before starting, we resolved to do some act of charity, that the Lord might remember us in our own days of distress.”¹⁷⁹ On a Sunday soon after, while the men attended Divine Service, a collection was taken up by the officers and men to show “their love for their brethren

¹⁷⁷ *Official Records*, Series 1-Volume XI/2 [S# 13], Report No. 20 (Thomas Francis Meagher).

¹⁷⁸ When the command to guard this battery was received through an aid of McClellan, Meagher had only the 63rd New York to send at the time. See previous footnote.

¹⁷⁹ Corby, 146.

down in the land of bondage.”¹⁸⁰ The result was a collection of \$1,240.50 from two of the regiments of the Brigade, the 88th and 63rd New York, and an undisclosed amount from the 94th New York State Volunteers. The money was sent by Father Corby to the Archbishop of New York. Father Corby’s accompanying letter to the Archbishop well defines the sacrifice. The priest wrote as follows:

[W]ith that noble charity and love of country, which has, and I hope ever will, characterize the Irish emigrant in America, the remaining few of the Irish Brigade have spontaneously, and without any concert of action, come forward to contribute their mite to the general subscription, and that, too, when I have reason to know that over \$35,000 were, after last pay day, sent to their wives and children in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, and other parts of the country.¹⁸¹

The 88th New York, Father Corby’s own regiment, donated \$771.50 of the money collected, more than half of the total. But it should be noted that their chaplain spear headed the effort. Not to discredit its charity, the 88th’s response to the drive may have been as much a show of support of their priest as an act solely of charity for the poor in Ireland. The 63rd New York, however, had no regimental affiliation to Father Corby and yet donated \$355.00 of the total amount. It is interesting to note that though Father Corby mentions in his letter to the Archbishop the intent of the 69th New York to contribute to the fund at a later date, there is no mention in his *Memoir of Chaplain Life*, thereafter, of the First Regiment of the Irish Brigade having done so.

If the 63rd New York State Volunteer Regiment has been eclipsed, historically, by the fame of the Irish Brigade’s more flamboyant regiments, as acknowledged above, it

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 147.

has not been because of a lack of resolve or battle courage on the part of its men. Rather it has been, perhaps, solely because of the unfortunate chain of events, one more peculiar or ill-timed than the next, related here, a series of events-so tainting the regiment and its officers that even valor in battle and honorable death, thereafter, failed to wholly exonerate them: a curious displacement of rank, an inopportune and drunken departure from camp, and the foolhardy actions of a fledgling first colonel. Still, the true worth of the 63rd must be discerned, in the end, not from these hapless events or even from the above evidence of the regiment's compassion for the Irish poor, endearing though it may be, but from those very merits the regiment later gained on the field and in the trenches. The following chapters will focus on these achievements in detail.¹⁸²

¹⁸² Ibid., 147-151.

CHAPTER FOUR
IN THE FACE OF GALLING FIRE:¹⁸³
ANTIETAM

The officers and men [of the 63rd] all acted with a coolness and heroism worthy of honorable mention . . . permit me to congratulate you that your gallant little brigade has once more crowned itself with fresh laurels, and given additional and bloody proofs of its devotion to the Constitution and the flag of our beloved country.

Lieut. Col. Henry Fowler
Sixty-third New York Infantry
Report on Antietam¹⁸⁴

On September 17, 1862, General George S. McClellan's Army of the Potomac and General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia came together at the small crossroads town of Sharpsburg, Maryland. There, amid undulating hills of corn and wheat and along the shores of a nomadic creek known as Antietam, the armies would fight ferociously and with total abandon in three separate engagements. The stakes were high. If McClellan's forces succeeded, this Southern advance, the first of Lee's attempts to invade the North, would be roundly and soundly checked. If Lee's forces succeeded, the South, after many hard months of fighting in the Tidewater of Virginia, would have demonstrated it could take a winning offensive beyond its own territory. In the end, neither army won. Though the Battle of Antietam would be viewed a technical win for the North, so horrendous was the loss of life on both sides, it amounted to little more than a stalemate. By sundown of that day, the number of dead, wounded, or missing, North

¹⁸³ "His [Meagher's] men, in face of a galling fire, obeyed the order, when the whole Brigade advanced to the brow of a hill, cheering as they went." See Conyngham, 305.

¹⁸⁴ *Official Records*, Series 1-Volume XIX/1 [S# 27], Report No. 49 (Lieutenant Colonel Henry Fowler).

and South combined, totaled 23,000. In the face of such carnage, no army could claim absolute victory. A grim and questionable honor, the 17th of September would be known forever after as the single bloodiest day in American military history. The Irish Brigade, who would lose more than half its number in the fiercest fighting of that day, would forever call it, as only the Irish would, “the glorious 17th.”¹⁸⁵ To better understand the pivotal role played that day by the Irish Brigade, and in particular the 63rd New York State Volunteers, a brief overview of the battle is in order.¹⁸⁶

The prelude to the Battle of Antietam is a bazaar tale involving unbelievable carelessness and tragic delay, twists of plot most often found in poorly-contrived fiction. On September 13th and by a curious fate, Lee’s tactical plans for invading the North fell into McClellan’s hands. They disclosed the fact that Lee had, at that moment in time, divided his army into four separate parts to facilitate the South’s invasion of Pennsylvania. Here was the optimum opportunity to strike the Army of Northern Virginia swiftly and decisively before it could unite once more. Maddeningly, McClellan failed to do so. It will little serve us here to recount the moves each army made in the days immediate to the battle. It is enough to say that on the morning of the 17th, Lee had thwarted the Union forces and successfully reunited a large portion of his army on high ground, at Sharpsburg Ridge, northwest of the Antietam. It was a fair and enviable position. Unfortunately, it was also a stand which placed Lee’s army with its back to the

¹⁸⁵ Corby, 371.

¹⁸⁶ Frederick Tilberg, “*Antietam National Battlefield Site, Maryland*,” Handbook Series, No. 31. Rev. 1961 (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1961), http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/history/online_books/hh/31/index.htm (accessed autumn 2006). The following account of the three phases of the Battle of Antietam is taken from this source.

Potomac, offering no viable means of escape in the event of defeat. Lee was outnumbered two-to-one, roughly 40,000 Confederate troops to 87,000 in McClellan's Union forces. A loss here would not only doom Lee's invasion of the North, but virtually destroy his entire army. Neither side could trivialize the reality of the situation. Realizing the possibilities, McClellan planned to hit Lee's forces on three fronts at once, flanks and center, in a finely attenuated execution using Major Generals Joseph Hooker's First Corps, Joseph K. F. Mansfield's Twelfth Corps, Edwin Sumner's Second Corps, and Ambrose Burnside's Ninth Corps.¹⁸⁷ Inexplicably, the orders came slow and the advances became uncoordinated. The battle was fought in three separate phases: morning, midday, and afternoon, both sides paying a high price for the disordered advances of the Union forces.

The morning phase involved intensive fighting in a cornfield northeast of the Hagerstown Pike, the left flank of the Confederate line. From 6:00 am to 9:00 am, both armies raged furiously at one another with the ownership of the field passing back and forth a number of times during these first three hours of conflict. The assault began at dawn with Hooker's First Corps launching an attack from the North Woods against divisions in Jackson and Longstreet's corps. Around 7:30, with Hooker's corps battered back across the cornfield, Mansfield's Twelfth Corps advanced from its shelter in the East Woods eventually immobilizing a division of Jackson's corps in the West Woods opposite, at a small Dunker church on the far side of the Hagerstown Pike. It was a

¹⁸⁷ Major General Fitz John Porter's Fifth Corps and Major General William B. Franklin's Sixth Corps were also present at the Battle of Antietam but held in reserve.

pathetically small accomplishment, given the losses on both sides, amounting to little more than an isolation of a small portion of a larger corps.

The last segment of the morning phase came close upon 9:00, with the arrival upon the scene of Sumner's Second Corps, Major General John Sedgwick and Brigadier General William H. French's Second and Third Divisions, respectively. Believing a head-on assault on the West Woods would soundly end the battle, Sumner led his divisions across the Hagerstown Pike to confront the remaining divisions of Jackson's corps. The assault went horribly awry. Believing both divisions were following him, Sumner carried through, not realizing that somehow French's division had veered off to a sunken road towards the south, perhaps drawn there by the sound of pronounced enemy fire. Assaults on this sunken road would become the stage for the midday phase of the battle; but at this moment in time, Sedgwick's division marched into the West Woods completely unattended. With both flanks exposed, the division was ambushed by 10,000 Jackson Confederates and lost 5,000 men in twenty minutes. The morning phase of the battle, for the most part, ended here. For all the carnage that morning, the Union forces drove back Jackson's line, but, ultimately, failed to break it.

The midday phase of the Battle of Antietam is the chief concern in this chapter. However, for the sake of a comprehensive account of the entire battle, and to better define the success of the midday phase, due in no small part to the valor of the Irish Brigade, we must first briefly recount here the afternoon and final phase of the conflict. It was, in the end, of even lesser accomplishment than the morning phase, a glorious mismanagement of time and sacrifice of life involving Burnside's Ninth Corps. By all

calculations, given the numbers on the Union side, this third phase of the battle should have been a quick and effortless victory for McClellan. Burnside's corps was composed of 8,000 seasoned troops and was never up against more than 3,000 Confederates in the four and half hours of this final stage. This concluding attack at the Battle of Antietam, however, proved to be a seminal example of both negligence and the lost chance.

On the morning of the 17th, it was Burnside's directive to take the 12-foot wide Lower Bridge over Antietam Creek, east of Harper's Ferry Road, and, in a pincher-like movement, head northwest through the town of Sharpsburg to take Lee's forces on the Confederate right flank. The success of this directive was crucial as it would soundly cut off any line of retreat for Lee's remaining army. Between 9:30 and 1:00, Burnside's Ninth Corps repeatedly attempted to cross the bridge but were held back by fire from, roughly, 500 Georgians, of Brigadier General Robert Toombs's division, positioned on a steep wooded bluff 100 feet above the Lower Bridge. Though greatly outnumbered, the Georgians staved off several advances of the Ninth Corps during these hours, Burnside inexplicably unaware of how small a force was pitted against him. At 1:00, Burnside's corps crossed the Lower Bridge, at last, and gained the much-desired western bank of the Antietam. After taking a two-hour rest to replenish and reorganize, the corps moved on towards Sharpsburg. Regrettably, that two-hour respite proved to be yet another fateful delay in a day defined by slow starts and missed opportunities. By 3:30, the Union forces had relentlessly forced the Confederates into the streets of Sharpsburg, and the outcome looked favorable for Burnside's troops. Within minutes, however, the tide turned. A. P. Hill's division marched into Sharpsburg from Harper's Ferry to the south where it had

been stationed by Jackson to safeguard Federal property taken at that location earlier in the month. Hill's division slammed into Burnside's right flank and drove the Union forces back to the bridge they had only lately crossed at great price. The afternoon phase and the battle at Antietam came to a close.

The outcome of the midday phase of the battle at Antietam may be the only real victory that can be rightly accredited to the Union forces that fateful day in September. The phase, from 9:30 to 1:00, involved a fierce advance against the Confederate center and would result in the only real breakthrough of the Confederate line the Northern forces achieved that day. Though the opportunity the breakthrough presented was badly utilized by McClellan, thereafter, the feat cannot be trivialized. It was a hands-down tactical success, a dearly-won noonday triumph fought at great cost before a worn depression, or sunken road, known from that time on as the Bloody Lane. If we accept this, then no unit can be attributed the victory more justly than Meagher's Irish Brigade who led the charge on that lane when the moment was most desperate. And the 63rd New York State Volunteer Infantry, which held the crown of the hill that day before the Sunken Road, fought as faithfully and paid as dearly as any other regiment in that Brigade.¹⁸⁸

The Irish Brigade led the Union forces into Sharpsburg the day before the battle, having led the pursuit of the rebels from the last pre-battle engagement at South Mountain, through Boonsborough and Keedysville, and up the Sharpsburg Turnpike. At this turnpike, the 63rd New York drew the shortest straw, as both it and the 88th were ordered to halt and deploy to the right of the pike while the 29th Massachusetts and the

¹⁸⁸ Corby, 373.

69th New York deployed to the left. Even though the 63rd and 88th were protected on the right by a large hill, the enemy's well-trained and accurate artillery fire "annoyed" them through the night and a number of "good men" of both regiments were lost.¹⁸⁹ At 9:30 the next morning, Richardson's entire First Division was ordered to cross Antietam Creek at Pry's Ford, to the north, and move by flank on a line parallel to the creek and into the field of battle, forming "by brigades in a ravine behind the high ground overlooking Roulette's house [farm]."¹⁹⁰ Father Corby recounts that the men were ordered to march to this site in double-quick time. As they did so, he reined in his horse to ride up and down the line shouting for the men to make an Act of Contrition. A foreshadowing of Gettysburg, the priest had just enough time to offer the men full absolution from his saddle. In twenty, or thirty minutes, over 500 of them would be dead.¹⁹¹

At the above-mentioned ravine, east of the Roulette property, the Brigade was ordered to drop their cartouche boxes short of falling into final formation. They did so without complaint, and Meagher's Irish Brigade was placed on the right flank in the following order from right to left: 69th New York, 29th Massachusetts, 63rd New York, and 88th New York. Accompanying the Irish that day, though slow to position, would be Brigadier General John C. Caldwell's Third (First) Brigade on the left and the 53rd

¹⁸⁹ *Official Records*, Series 1-Volume XIX/1 [S# 27], Report No. 48 (Brigadier General Thomas Francis Meagher). Meagher's report appears to be incorrect. He states that the Brigade approached Sharpsburg from the direction of Boonsborough and Keedysville and places the 63rd and 88th New York on the left-hand side of the Sharpsburg Pike. This is not possible. They would have camped to the right-hand side of the pike as defined above.

¹⁹⁰ *Official Records*, Series 1-Volume XIX/1 [S# 27], Report No. 39 (Major General Winfield Scott Hancock).

¹⁹¹ Corby, 112. Father James M. Dillon, Chaplain of the 63rd, was ill at this time and on leave. He did not accompany the 63rd New York into battle here. See Corby, 114.

Pennsylvania Volunteers, then commanded by Colonel John R. Brooke, in the rear.¹⁹²

Due to some confusion during the battle, however, these brigades were deployed later than the moment required. Though it is debatable that a more timely deployment of these two units would have made for a better outcome at the Sunken Road, it would have, at the very least, lowered the death count of the Irish Brigade. Be that as it may, for the 63rd New York, its position in line that day, left center, would prove to be yet another short straw drawn by the regiment at the Battle of Antietam.

From the low ground behind the Roulette Farm, General Meagher could project up the sharp rise to where the remnants of French's Third Corps were engaged. Though he could not identify the enemy's main position from where he stood, he could see Confederates on high ground preparing to attack the left flank of Brigadier General Nathan Kimball's Brigade. Meagher immediately ordered the Irish Brigade to deploy their battle line with its right flank anchored at the Roulette Farm. They did so with precision, forming at the low-end of a large cornfield, out of sight of the Confederate skirmishers positioned on that rise in the distance.¹⁹³ During this same time, Doctor Lawrence Reynolds, now senior Brigade surgeon and with no glorious illusions of war left in him, made haste to prepare a makeshift field hospital for the hard work ahead. He soon staked out a site in the shadow of a large haystack positioned in the middle of a grassy field, fully sheltered from enemy fire. Riding over to the Brigade's field musicians, he ordered them to stack their instruments, prepare the site, and ready

¹⁹² *Official Records*, Series 1-Volume XIX/1 [S# 27], Report No. 39 (Major General Winfield Scott Hancock).

¹⁹³ Joseph Bilby and Stephan D. O'Neill, eds., "My Sons Were Faithful and They Fought:" *The Irish Brigade at Antietam: An Anthology* (Hightstown, NJ: Longstreet House, 1997.), 15. (Hereinafter cited as "My Sons Were Faithful.")

themselves to aid the wounded at this “straw-stack” hospital.¹⁹⁴ With this, the day’s work began.

As soon as the Brigade moved out of the depression and over the hill, the Confederates opened fire. It was a merciless lead rain, made worse by the relentless peppering by sharpshooters from the Piper Farm, 100 yards further east. Here Rebels had taken even greater advantage of their position by shimming up to the tops of a few standing trees where they could pick off the men of the Brigade selectively. They inflicted the greatest damage at those times when the men of the Brigade were forced to stop in the advance to tear down chest-high fences positioned in their path. This happened twice, and it was during such an interval that Meagher lost one of his best staff officers, the 63rd’s own First Lieutenant James E. Mackey, to a fatal wound in the thigh. Soon afterward, Captain James Turner of the 88th, a war correspondent who was then writing about the war under the nom de plume, *Gallowglass*, was wounded and carried off to the hay-stack hospital.¹⁹⁵ This wholesale devastation continued until “two old British soldiers” of the 88th, Sergeant Charles M. Grainger and W. L. D. O’Grady, who had traded their limited range smoothbore muskets for Enfield rifles, disposed of the snipers in quick order.¹⁹⁶

As the Irish continued their advance up that rise, the enemy blew great, gapping holes in their ranks along the entire length of the line. But with the grace of ballroom dancers, the New York and Massachusetts men soundlessly closed ranks and marched on,

¹⁹⁴ “My Sons Were Faithful,” 18; Corby, 113.

¹⁹⁵ “My Sons Were Faithful,” 18. *Gallowglass* is Gaelic for *Foreign Warrior*.

¹⁹⁶ Corby, 371-72; Bilby, 54-55.

holding their fire as Meagher had directed them.¹⁹⁷ In the end, though battle reports conflict, the Irish Brigade neared the rise just as an attack by Confederate Major General D. H. Hill's division, of Jackson's Corps, was launched on Kimball's left flank. The Irish Brigade "smashed into the flank attack on Kimball and stopped it cold," breaking up the enemy line and sending the Confederates on a dead run back to that main position Meagher was unable to identify while standing at the Roulette Farm--the Sunken Road.¹⁹⁸

The Sunken Road was a winding lane between the Roulette and Piper farms used through the years as a shortcut around the town of Sharpsburg. Wagons, carts, and livestock had eroded the path into a worn depression several feet deep. The Confederates used the road that day to their greatest advantage, the Union forces little realizing the impenetrable position of the Confederates until they had cleared that final rise and stood fully exposed to those enemy guns. Upon the crest, Richardson's Second Brigade became easy prey for the entrenched rebels. Consequently, due to this exposure, prolonged and merciless, and to the tenacity of the Irish Brigade, what followed the rout of Hill's Confederates would be, arguably, the fiercest fighting of the day. Here the killing began in earnest.

As the Confederates drew back to the Sunken Road, the Brigade continued toward the rise in pursuit. They were alone. Neither Caldwell nor Brooke's brigades were in position to aid them. Meagher was on horseback, positioned on the right flank along with the 69th New York and keen to reprise The Battle of Fontenoy, a legendary battle in which 18th-century Irish mercenaries gloriously defeated the British in defense of France.

¹⁹⁷ Bilby, 55.

¹⁹⁸ Boyle, 188-189.

Wheeling around to James Kelly, commanding lieutenant colonel of the 69th, Meagher ordered the same maneuver that won the day at Fontenoy--two volleys at the rise, then charge with the bayonet—and sent the same directive to the commanders of the other three regiments.¹⁹⁹ At this point, if it is possible when the subject is war, our story takes a turn for the worse. Because of its position in line, the 63rd New York crested the hill first that day; and though accounts of those first few moments on the rise vary from witness to witness, the regiment apparently drew its third and final short straw before the Sunken Road. Its commander, the only full colonel in the Brigade that day, John Burke, abandoned his command. He had dismounted earlier and was seen lying behind a hill nearly a half mile behind his regiment.²⁰⁰ As there was no one to receive Meagher's orders, confusion reigned. The next in command, Lieutenant Colonel Henry Fowler, recognizing the situation, rushed to the right flank of the 63rd to take command, leaving the left flank exposed. There was nothing to help it. At that very moment, Colonel Carnot Posey's 16th Mississippi, part of Featherston's Brigade of R. H. Anderson's Division, the latter having newly arrived to aid Hill, sprang out of the Sunken Road.

¹⁹⁹ The remaining commands of the day were as follows: the 29th Massachusetts, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph H. Barnes; the 63rd New York, Colonel John Burke; and the 88th New York, Lieutenant Colonel Patrick Kelly. It must be noted here that this was a fool-hardy maneuver. As was the case in many battles during the Civil War, directing men to charge while holding fire was certain death. The directive not to shoot until one saw the whites of the enemy's eye may have been effective in the American Revolution; but by this war, the long-range Enfield rifle had been created, and the game rules changed. Men, especially those with antiquated muskets, didn't stand much of a chance in a charge as that above. Meagher, apparently, was either insensible to this or was unconcerned. His negligence was obvious, however, as he insisted the Irish Brigade be armed with .69 caliber M1842 Springfield smoothbore muskets to force the men to fight at close-range. Meagher's incompetency, carelessness, and poor example as a brigadier general is another study, entirely. We may briefly note here that Meagher failed to charge with his men at Antietam under suspicion of misconduct. There were reports he had his horse shot out from under him, but still others that he fell from his horse intoxicated. See O'Flaherty, 158; Jones, 142; Burton, 123.

²⁰⁰ "My Sons Were Faithful," 19.

With the first real volley of the conflict, Posey's men collapsed the entire left wing of the 63rd. Nearly half of the 63rd's companies were decimated.²⁰¹

Though a full exoneration of Colonel John Burke may never be possible, some insight into his behavior that day will be offered before closing this chapter. What is of the utmost importance here is not only the heart-rending sacrifice of the 63rd in those first few moments of the confrontation, but the extraordinary courage and obstinacy exhibited by the men left standing as they doggedly advanced upon the enemy in the Sunken Road. Despite a horrendously crippling blow, the 63rd New York, now at half strength and with its command compromised, remained focused and continued on.

That fearful volley of the Mississippians took an appalling toll upon the 63rd. The regiment, for the moment, was unable to return fire. But it did not take long to rally. It soon responded with a rage and fury that only the half-mad exhibit. The death toll of the regiment mounted. In the minutes to follow, it lost the brave John Kavanagh of Ballingarry fame, a group of riflemen from the road blowing him backwards into his own men as he led a charge at the head of his company.²⁰² Gone, too, was Lieutenant George Lynch, of Company G, only twenty-eight years old and the son of an ailing mother, who died as he lived "quietly hand[ing] his sword, watch and ring to a comrade, to be sent to his family" and "facing death with a self-possession and courage that marked the true

²⁰¹ Ibid.; Joseph E. Gannon, "The Deadliest Day: The Irish Brigade at Bloody Lane, September 17, 1862," *The Wild Geese Today*, <http://www.thewildgeese.com/pages/antietam.html> (accessed September 11, 2006), 3.

²⁰² "My Sons Were Faithful," 76-77; Ibid., 21. Kavanagh, not quite thirty-seven at his death, left a wife and seven children behind. See Conyngham, 568.

soldier.”²⁰³ But these were just two of the many. A wounded Captain Michael O’Sullivan, of Company F, recounted the loss or maiming of a number of the regiment in a letter back home to Albany as he lay in a Keedysville hospital that very day. He wrote with an anguish of which we may only imagine of those “Albanians” of whom he had direct knowledge, alluding to many more casualties by promising to “endeavor to account for them all” at a later date:

We have fought the enemy and our brigade has been cut to pieces! Every man of my company has been killed or wounded with the exception of eleven. I received a rifle shot in the left thigh, going completely through – fortunately without touching the bone. Poor Lt. Henry McConnell was shot through the brain and never spoke again. P. W. Lyndon, my First Lieutenant, was shot through the heart. Only one Captain (O’Neill) remained on the field. James De Lacey is killed – as also Tim Kearns. Lt. Sullivan, Terry Murray, and the two Mahers are all safe. Major Bentley is slightly wounded. Sergeant John Dwyer (printer) [also, regimental historian] is wounded in the head. Sergeant Major Quick and M. McDonald are not touched. All the line officers of our regiment are either killed or wounded, save one Captain and five Lieutenants.²⁰⁴

It was of “[p]oor Lt. Henry McConnell” that Father Corby wrote, singling him out of the hundreds of wounded that lay in Reynolds’s straw-stack hospital. It is a vivid account of the after-battle horrors of but one of the intrepid 63rd: “Here I saw one poor man with a bullet in his forehead, and his brains protruding from the hole made by the ball. Strange

²⁰³ “My Sons Were Faithful,” 78; Corby, 373-374; *Annual Report of the Adjutant-General of the State of New York*, 104.

²⁰⁴ “My Sons Were Faithful,” 79. No source was given for this quote, though a possibility might be O’Sullivan’s Civil War Service Records, Box 553; Extraction: 107, Record 2770. For a brief military sketch of O’Sullivan, see Conyngham, 569.

to say, he lived three days, but was speechless and deaf, and had lost his senses entirely.”²⁰⁵

As the evidence makes plain, that opening volley did not break the 63rd. The survivors stubbornly remained on the field taking action where they could as it was not always plain who was in command. So ruthless were the enemy guns that regimental authority passed quickly from one field officer to the next as each new man was downed by rebel fire. When Fowler had moved suddenly to the right flank to take Burke’s command at the beginning of the conflict, a momentary massing of the flags in that quarter drew intense fire from the Confederates. The right wing soon caved in. Fowler now wheeled back to the left position to find Major Richard C. Bentley and Captain Joseph O’Neill, the latter’s Company A having fallen earlier on the right, trying to rouse what was left of the 63rd’s left flank. Fowler was soon wounded and taken from the field, the command passing to Bentley. Bentley, in turn, was wounded, the command next passing to Captain O’Neill, who, for a brief moment of time, was not even aware that he was now the commanding officer. The best sense of the confusion and carnage comes from Fowler’s field report to Meagher:

It is now a solace to my mind, while suffering from my wound, to testify how gallantly and promptly each officer in his place and each company moved forward and delivered their fire in the face of the most destructive storm of leaden hail, that in an instant killed or wounded every officer but one and more than one-half of the rank and file of the right wing. . . .

In the early part of the action [Capt.] P. J. Condon and Lieut. Thomas Cartwright, both of Company G, fell wounded while gallantly cheering on their men bravely at their post, as also Capt. M. O’Sullivan, Company F, while Lieut.

²⁰⁵ Corby, 113.

P. W. Lydon, commanding Company D, Lieut. Cadwalader Smith, Company C, and Lieutenant McConnell, of Company K, bravely rallying the gallant remaining few, fell pierced by bullets, instantly fatal.

As the right wing had fallen before me, I hastened to the left, where I found the major (Bentley) close upon the line, and Capt. Joseph O'Neill, Company A, whose command had fallen around him on the right, now assisting the major on the left. Here also was the stalwart Lieutenant Gleason, Company H, raising and supporting the repeatedly falling colors, with Lieut. John Sullivan commanding and pushing forward Company K; and here lay the slender form of Captain Kavanagh, Company I, cold in death; the brave and enthusiastic Lieut. R. P. Moore Company E, passing from right to left, boldly urging his men to stand firm, and the gallant Lieut. George Lynch, second lieutenant Company G, bravely pressing on until he too fell, mortally wounded. The killed died as brave men, sword in hand, and amid the thickest of the fight. Major Bentley was now wounded, and retired to have his wound dressed.²⁰⁶

This above account underscores how combat attrition was the chief means of promotion that day before the Sunken Road. Many in the 63rd stepped up in rank as those above them were killed or wounded on the field. A case in point was Sergeant William J. Daly of Kavanagh's Company I, who "reached the pinnacle of his career at age 22" fighting at Antietam. With the death of Kavanagh, command passed that day to Captain Thomas Touhey, then First Lieutenant William Meehan, and next by turn Second Lieutenants Patrick Gromley and John Hurley, all in succession. With each commissioned officer casualty, whether killed or wounded, the next took command until the leadership fell, at last, on the then ranking sergeant, Daly. Daly assumed the rank of Second Lieutenant of Company I without flinching and then led the men, as directed, a few hundred yards to the rear for reorganization. While realigning the company, he was

²⁰⁶ *Official Records*, Series 1-Volume XIX/1 [S# 27], Report No. 49 (Lieutenant Colonel Henry Fowler). Battle reports often conflict. Though witnesses report that the Confederates collapsed the left wing of the 63rd New York in that first volley, Fowler holds out here that the right wing was the first to succumb entirely to enemy fire. Regardless, it is evident by the losses that neither flank fared well. The exact order of devastation may be difficult to ascertain.

hastily made First Lieutenant of Company D by order of Major Bentley and told to lead an assault to retake the regiment's previous position. Daly did so, directing his new command forward by using his rifle "as a baton." Company D defiantly marched to the Sunken Road and directed its fire accordingly. In the process, Daly was struck in the foot, the shot shattering the bone. He lost much blood during the ensuing hours but remained in command the entire day. He was officially commissioned a First Lieutenant after the battle and later assigned to regimental headquarters as a color bearer. He resigned the following year because of medical issues.²⁰⁷

Perhaps the most glorious account of the valor of the 63rd at Antietam involved the color bearers of the regiment. The unit lost 16 color bearers that day, twice as many as the 69th, their deaths a testimony to the courage and determination of the 63rd in the face of overwhelming odds. Fowler wrote, "Our number now left was less than 50 men; our colors, although in ribbons, and staff shot through, were still there, sustained at a bloody sacrifice, 16 men having fallen while carrying them."²⁰⁸ Without mediation, the story of that gallant band is the stuff of legend and was to be recounted years later by many of the survivors of the Brigade. The youngest to carry the colors across the plowed field that September day was Private John Hartigan, of Company H, a boy of just sixteen. His actions were self-possessed, reckless, and bold, and few would forget the valor of this young sacrificial bearer of the flag. All were to report thereafter that they saw this mere boy taunt the men of the Sunken Road by gesture and word, waving the green flag of the

²⁰⁷ Justin L. Daly, "William J. Daly, Officer of the 63rd New York," *The Kepi*. Vol. III, No. 2 (April-May, 1985): 26-27.

²⁰⁸ *Official Records*, Series 1-Volume XIX/1 [S# 27], Report No. 49 (Lieutenant Colonel Henry Fowler).

regiment in a high, wide arch as he advanced upon the road. Father Corby wrote that he saw Hartigan “advancing in front of the line, defiantly wav[ing] the colors in the face of the enemy.” “Of such men as these,” Corby continues, “was the brigade composed, and it was with good reason, when Sumner next met it, that he hailed it as ‘Bravest of the brave!’”²⁰⁹

The story of Corporal John Dillon, Company F, yet another Waterford man and member of the 63rd's color guard, is equally inspiring.²¹⁰ During the course of the battle, the 63rd had eight corporals and three sergeants attending the colors, three flags in all: national, state, and the green flag peculiar to the Irish Brigade. Without regard for safety or self, Dillon secured and maintained the national flag during the battle, even after sustaining a serious wound to the leg. After the war, in Dillon's application for pension, the then commanding officer of the 63rd New York, Colonel W. H. Terwilliger, recounted Dillon's exploits at Antietam in detail:

The first color that fell was the green, which fell by the side of Corporal John Dillon who immediately dropped his musket and picked up [the] colors and flung them to the breeze; The next color that fell was the stars and stripes. He also picked them up, but two (2) being too much for him to handle, he gave the green flag to one of the other guards by the name of Ratican; he asked for the stars and stripes instead of the green, but Dillon told him it was [an] American day, and that to keep a good look out for him, and if he fell to take up the American flag.

All of the color guards, and the three sergeants were killed or badly wounded except Dillon. A half hour before they [the regiment] were relieved a bullet passed through his canteen, a little later a bullet or piece of shell struck the staff on the American flag breaking it into two pieces; he doubled it up together with the cords attached to the flag. A few minutes later the eagle was shot off the end of the staff. . . .

²⁰⁹ Corby, 373.

²¹⁰ Conyngham, 571.

I forgot to state before that Dillon was badly wounded in the leg. With the loss of blood and all he bound it up with a blouse and would not leave the colors to any one, until the company was relieved, then he gave them to Captain John H. Gleason, of Co. H, then two comrades assisted him to the rear, and he was sent to the hospital. . . . After his return from the hospital he was promoted to Color Sergeant in which position he done great to his country, his regiment, and himself.²¹¹

Terwilliger ends by stating, “No more faithful soldier was in the 63 regiment, N. Y. Vol.”

As regarded the state and green flags carried by the regiment that day, Sergeant Patrick H. Riordan gave the following account, without failing to mention Dillon or noting the valor of the 63rd, to *The Irish American* shortly after the battle:

Corporal Dillon, of Company F, after being badly wounded, carried the “Stars and Stripes” off the field, and had to leave them to get his wounds dressed. Sergeant Sheridan of Co. B, carried the State flag off the field, and your humble servant carried the “green flag,” as you know that the 63rd had three flags to defend on that eventful day. There are not many other regiments that would stand as the 63rd did on that day. About 46 men, officers and all, stayed on the field until they were regularly relieved, and brought their colors through, tattered and torn, off that bloody arena, and slept on that field that night within two hundred yards of the enemy. . . .²¹²

As remarkable a tale as Dillon’s was that of then Captain John H. Gleason, Company H, made mention by Terwilliger in the above report. No recounting of the courage of the 63rd at Antietam may be deemed complete without a retelling of Gleason’s valor. We need to recall for the full import of this tale that Gleason, veteran of the Young Ireland Rebellion and the Pope’s War of 1860, was 6 foot 7 and had long been dubbed

²¹¹ Lysy, 31. The author does not give the source of this quote. Most likely, it is from Dillon’s pension file.

²¹² Ibid.

“Big John Gleason” by the Irish Brigade. Extend such a man by the height of a flag staff, and it is incomprehensible that anyone so appointed would take on the risk of color bearer on an open field and in the face of a well-entrenched enemy. But Big John assumed just such a risk. Upon returning to the field with the colors Dillon had given him, he boldly advanced. “In a few minutes a bullet struck the staff, shattering it to pieces; Gleason tore the flag from the bottom staff, wrapped it around his body, putting his sword-belt over it, and went through the rest of the fight untouched.”²¹³ The 63rd New York Volunteer Infantry had much to mourn but still more to take great pride in when the sun went down on that sunken road.

At long last, their strength and cartridges nearly spent, the Irish Brigade was given the order to retire and to give position to Caldwell’s Brigade.²¹⁴ Curiously, Caldwell’s men had taken so long to form that Richardson, returning from bringing up the artillery and batteries, had to march the units into position, himself, quickly forming them behind the Irish Brigade. One wonders if Caldwell’s units would have ever formed as directed had not Richardson stepped in. But despite the horrific Confederate abuse and veritable abandonment by Caldwell, it is reported that the Irish Brigade, or what was left of it, departed the field in perfect formation “as steady as on drill.”²¹⁵ It was an amazing sight to see, and Richardson declared he would remember it always.²¹⁶ But the Brigade had

²¹³ Susan Provost Beller, *Never Were Men So Brave* (New York: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 1998) 60.

²¹⁴ Corby, 372; “My Sons Were Faithful,” 27.

²¹⁵ Corby, 373.

²¹⁶ Boyle, 192. Richardson reportedly made this promise to the 88th New York, to their colonel, Patrick D. Kelly, directly. The ordered exchange of position to which Richardson was responding, however, would have, because of the close proximity of the two regiments, included, perhaps, what was left of the 63rd, as well.

not retired for good. In the end, they finished what they had started. Caldwell's men would not see the victory alone. Corby writes, "Filling their cartridge boxes, the men of the brigade were quickly back in the fight, and, passing Caldwell's line, they poured a volley into the Confederates. Then came a wild cheer, rising in a volume of sound that for a moment drowned the roar of artillery; a charge, a fierce struggle, and the sunken road [was] cleared!"²¹⁷

Richardson did not live long to keep his promise. He was soon after wounded while positioning additional guns for what remained of the conflict. He died of his wounds the next day at McClellan's Headquarters, at the Pry homestead, and with his staff about him. Before dying, he offered these officers a testimony of his faith in their Irish Brigade: "I placed your brigade on the ground you occupied because it was necessary to hold it against all odds, and once you were there, I had no further anxiety in regard to the position."²¹⁸ There is little doubt that the Irish Brigade's presence at Antietam was a powerful one. As noted earlier, the breakthrough at the Sunken Road was the only real accomplishment the Union managed that day. And although McClellan failed to carry through on the victory by using his reserve Sixth and Fifth Corps to pursue the Confederates once they were on the run, the engagement was a sound triumph and bought dearly with the lives and agony of the Irish Brigade.²¹⁹

As these pages have recounted, the 63rd New York's actions that day before Hill and Anderson's Confederate stronghold were extraordinarily brave and meritorious and

²¹⁷ Corby, 373.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Boyle, 193-194. The author gently lays some of the blame for this failure upon Richardson's successor, Major General Winfield Scott Hancock, for not seeing soon enough the opportunity on hand.

made an inspiring impact upon the desperate conflict of the day. As none of the other regiments were forced to do, it fought at terrible odds because of a rending and debilitating beginning, faithfully seeing a desperate Brigade initiative through to its end. With a resolve both heartening and heartrending, the men of the 63rd, a good number of them gone, remained doggedly in the field, defiantly and relentlessly goading the enemy despite a horrific rain of fire and confusion in command. Exhausted, but in good order, they finally retired, but only to charge again in a final assault, fully breaching that dark and lethal depression, at last. The numbers bear testimony to their sacrifice. Though the 69th New York lost 61.8% of its forces at the Sunken Road to the 63rd's 59.2%, the slight discrepancy is due, no doubt, to the fact that the 69th began the conflict with fewer men, unless one takes into account the 120 new recruits Meagher brought with him from New York just short of the battle.²²⁰ It is possible, as the 69th's numbers were low, that these recruits were slotted for that regiment. Regardless, the 63rd New York sustained more casualties at Antietam than did the 69th, as indicated; more than the 29th Massachusetts, which fought in a natural depression that day, shielding it from enemy fire; and more than the 88th New York, which fought the Confederates just far enough over on the left flank of the Brigade to fare better than did the unfortunate 63rd.²²¹ All toll, the 63rd New York fought in the worst position, midst the greatest confusion, and with the least men before

²²⁰ Boyle, 193. The percentages here would include killed, wounded, and missing and are estimates. See Appendix G.

²²¹ The 88th New York lost, roughly, 33.8% in killed, wounded, and missing. See Appendix G; Bilby, 57.

the Sunken Road. Refusing to run from the “clash of spears,” they fought bravely to the end.²²²

A word, now, on Colonel John Burke and his abandonment of his men at the Sunken Road. There is little debating that up to the Battle of Antietam John Burke was a good soldier and a respected officer. It was mentioned earlier that his replacing Colonel Enright while the regiment was still at Camp California was considered a trade-up by those in authority and that he may well have been hand-picked by Meagher himself for the position. While still a Lieutenant Colonel in the 37th Irish Rifles, he was recognized, early in 1862, by General Samuel P. Heintzelman, Third Corps of the Army of the Potomac, and General McClellan, as well, for clearing out a stronghold of Texas Rangers in a tavern near Occoquan Bridge, Virginia. McClellan praised Burke and the regiment without qualification with regards to the engagement: “Their (37th’s) coolness under fire, and the discretion and judgment displayed by Lieutenant-Colonel Burke, have won the confidence of the commanding General, who recognizes in these qualities the result of discipline and attention to duty.”²²³ This commendation distinctly reveals an officer with a bright future, a soldier whose hallmark then was coolness, discipline, and discretion. We need little guess as to why, so early in the war, he moved unhindered to a regimental colonelcy of his own.

What on that rise leading to the plowed field had happened to this capable and promising young officer? The answer might be Burke’s participation in the battle at

²²² As noted earlier, each regimental flag of the Irish Bridge, the original for each New York unit and its numerous replacements throughout the war, bore a scroll with a Gaelic inscription on it. Translated, the inscription read: *Never retreat from the clash of spears.*

²²³ O’Flaherty, 59.

Malvern Hill. As has been noted, Malvern Hill was the 63rd New York's first and only major Peninsula engagement in those months prior to the battle at Antietam. Fierce fighting took place, but the 63rd had acquitted itself well. Unfortunately, Colonel Burke had been wounded in the engagement, a wound to the knee, and sent home to recuperate in New York. As to this, Meagher, apparently, was given much anxiety as to Burke's recovery. In a letter from Meagher, dated July 14, 1862, from "camp on the James River," the General writes to a convalescing Burke that he (Meagher) has taken great pains to have a Captain Joseph O'Donohue moved alongside Burke in the hospital that "two brave soldiers might have the consolation of being close together in their sufferings."²²⁴ It is more than apparent that this letter expresses not only great respect for Burke as a "brave" and wounded soldier but shows a great and marked concern for something beyond Burke's physical condition. The Brigade's commander seems to recognize here that Burke needs company, the near proximity of a comrade-in-arms for comfort and solace, and appears to go out of his way to both cheer him up and to cheer him on. The latter is most evident in the following excerpt of Meagher's letter:

Captain O'Neill is at present in command [of the 63rd], and fulfills his trust diligently and most zealously. For all that he will be one of the first cordially to greet you on your return to the command you have proved yourself so competent to hold, and the credit attached to which is due in the first instance, and the largest measure, to your unremitting efforts and devotion. To your incessant labors the 63rd stands this day indebted for its active and effective ranks. Since your appointment to the Colonelcy of it, its improvement in *every* respect has been marked and rapid; and you must have felt the satisfaction of having rendered it, in

²²⁴ *The Brooklyn Eagle*, July 23, 1862, "The Irish Brigade in the Recent Battles."

the celerity and precision of its movements, one of the most reliable in the service.²²⁵

Why did Meagher concern himself with positioning wounded officers near each other in a field hospital miles away?—or felt compelled to write such labored accolades? Perhaps it was because what truly ailed Burke was not merely a physical wound, but something more akin to battle fatigue or depression. Perhaps Meagher, having been apprised of the situation, attempted to address the matter as indicated above. It is conjecture, of course, but a sound one given the content of Meagher’s letter.

As sad fate would have it, the first battle Burke was engaged in upon his return was Antietam, hardly a gentle re-entry into the war. If the conjecture here is even partially correct, we can well imagine what happened a half-mile back of the 63rd New York that day when Burke dismounted and was seen “lying under a hill while his Regt. was fighting.”²²⁶ In today’s army, Burke may have been identified as shell-shocked and drugs and therapy prescribed.²²⁷ In 1862, he was court martialed for his abandonment of command and “discharged” from service on October 20, 1862.²²⁸

Upon closing this recounting of the 63rd’s involvement at Antietam, it bears repeating that the only real victory for the day’s battle was, arguably, the Brigade’s final breakthrough at the Sunken Road. If one acknowledges this, then the role of the 63rd in that impressive breakthrough must be considered not only pivotal, but singularly

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Major Charles Chipman, *Letter of Major Charles Chipman, 29th Massachusetts, to His Wife, Lissie, September 25, 1862, Bolivar Heights, near Harper’s Ferry*, http://www.geocities.com/a140_29th_mass/chip.html (accessed autumn 2006).

²²⁷ William Rose, of Petersburg, Virginia and noted previously, proposed this theory to the researcher.

²²⁸ *Annual Report of the Adjutant-General of the State of New York for the Year 1901*, 15.

praiseworthy. It must be remembered that as the Brigade advanced, unknowingly, toward the Sunken Road, the 63rd New York advanced over that fateful rise before all other Brigade units, consequently sustaining the first and most direct and devastating hit by enemy fire. But despite mayhem and disorder, and a high percentage of loss, the regiment remained center-stage and engaged, the loss of 16 color bearers a sound testimony to the unit's tenacity and nerve. Antietam was the 63rd New York's shining moment, a truth given little, if any, acknowledgement or laud today.

CHAPTER FIVE

“WE ARE SLAUGHTERED LIKE SHEEP, AND NO RESULT BUT DEFEAT.”
FREDERICKSBURG: THE FATE OF THE 63RD AND THE IRISH BRIGADE²²⁹

One of my men hearing the rumor [that the Union forces were preparing to charge Marye’s Heights], came to me, and said: “Father, they are going to lead us over in front of those guns which we have seen them placing, unhindered, for the past three weeks.”

I answered him: “Do not trouble yourself; your generals know better than that.”

Memoirs of Chaplain Life
Rev. William Corby, C. S. C.²³⁰

No matter how one tries to rationalize the actions taken during that bitter December of 1862, the Battle of Fredericksburg was murder simple, a dark and demoralizing episode in an already dark and disheartening war. For the Union, the battle was evidence of a befuddled administration and a weak and rudderless military command. For the Irish Brigade, it was nearly the breaking point of both its strength and its zeal. Of the roughly 1,200 men of the Brigade engaged that day, 545 became casualties, nearly a 50% loss; and not a man among the survivors of that battle would fail to recognize that the ill-conceived plans of those in authority had led them like lambs to the slaughter. Craig A. Warren, in ““Oh, God, What a Pity!”: The Irish Brigade at Fredericksburg and the Creation of Myth,” writes: “For many Irish, these grim [casualty] figures confirmed old suspicions that Northern leaders would waste Irish lives wantonly. It is therefore surprising that the historical record all but ignores the battle’s influence on

²²⁹ W. J. Nagel, *Captain Nagle’s Letter, 88th New York, Irish Volunteers*, http://irishvolunteers.tripod.com/nagle_letter.htm (accessed March 11, 2007). Captain Nagel’s letter was written to his father the day after the Battle of Fredericksburg and reads in part as follows: “Irish blood and Irish bones cover that field today. . . . We are slaughtered like sheep, and no result but defeat.”

²³⁰ Corby, 131.

Irish moral.”²³¹ Whether by intention or as a result of shameful negligence, the Irish at Fredericksburg were laid unceremoniously upon the sacrificial pyre of war. That they held true and remained committed to the Union’s cause, thereafter, defies understanding. It gives the greatest testimony, however, to their faith, their loyalty, and their resolve. Five Irish regiments fought that day and bore the brunt of the Confederate fury; and though the 63rd New York sustained the least casualties of the five, they fought as courageously as position and circumstance would allow.

After Antietam, a change in command took place which would pave the road to the tragedy of Fredericksburg. Failing to make good the opportunity presented him at Sharpsburg, McClellan negligently allowed the Army of Northern Virginia to withdraw unmolested to Southern soil. There it remained divided for a time with Longstreet in the Piedmont and Jackson in the Shenandoah Valley.²³² McClellan’s new objective, then, was to strike west and then down along the eastern slopes of the Blue Ridge Mountains, effectively walling in Lee’s forces in the Shenandoah.²³³ It was a promising plan. But it wasn’t until early November that McClellan finally got the Union Army up and moving again, and this was too slow for Lincoln.²³⁴ Once again, to the great displeasure of the troops, officers and the rank and file, McClellan was ceremoniously removed from command. In his place, Major General Ambrose Burnside, author of the Burnside’s Bridge fiasco, was installed as commander of the Army of the Potomac. This was the

²³¹ Craig A. Warren, “‘Oh, God, What a Pity!’: The Irish Brigade at Fredericksburg and the Creation of Myth,” *Civil War History*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (September 2001).

²³² William A. Murphy, “The charge of the Irish Brigade at Marye’s Heights in the battle of Fredericksburg, Virginia, 13 December 1862,” *The Irish Sword, Journal of the Military History Society of Ireland*, Vol. XXIII, No. 91 (Summer 2002), 22.

²³³ Boyle, 203-204.

²³⁴ Bilby, 62.

second time the command had been offered Burnside, and he finally acquiesced.²³⁵ He reportedly protested all the while that he was not right for the job.²³⁶ Someone should have believed him.

Upon taking command, Burnside summarily cast aside McClellan's plan to divide and conquer for what he believed would be a more decisive blow, an action long called for and which met with much approval in Washington: a march on Richmond. To achieve this objective, Burnside feigned an advance on Warrenton, where he had taken command of McClellan's forces, making it appear as though an attack on Culpepper Courthouse, and its environs, was imminent. The action, as Burnside conjectured, would keep Lee focused on Culpepper while he marched the Army of the Potomac southeast to the Rappahannock at Fredericksburg. Once over the Rappahannock, the army would take the city and move south along the railroad line to Richmond, all before Lee had time to act.²³⁷ That Burnside believed Lee's forces would remain docile and ignorant in the Warrenton area while the Army of the Potomac moved freely towards Richmond was surprisingly naive. Regardless, Burnside requested pontoon boats for the crossing of the Rappahannock and on November 15th, set off with his army for camp at Falmouth, north of the city.²³⁸

²³⁵ Boyle, 179.

²³⁶ Ibid., 209.

²³⁷ Boyle maintains, quoting William Swinton, historian of the Army of the Potomac, in *Campaigns of the Army of the Potomac*, 233, that Burnside intended to hunker down at Falmouth until spring and from there retrace McClellan's earlier movements on the Peninsula. The intention was, evidently, a private conjecture on Burnside's part as Lincoln was only aware of and approved, with caveat, the plan to take Richmond from the north. See Boyle, 209-210.

²³⁸ Ibid.

The plan to take Richmond hinged upon quick and decisive maneuvers that would outdistance Lee's Army, capture the city of Richmond, and dismember the Confederacy, at last. Unfortunately, Burnside was neither quick, nor decisive. By November 17th, two days after leaving Warrenton, only the Second Corps had arrived at Falmouth; and the pontoon boats were nowhere in sight. As had been directed, the Corps set up camp where they stood and began observing Fredericksburg from Stafford Heights on the north bank of the Rappahannock. From this location, a small Confederate force could be seen milling about on the far side of the river, on heights west of the city. Sumner was understandably alarmed and, reportedly, requested to cross the river at once to take the heights before the Confederates could establish themselves soundly on high ground. The moment was ideal as the river was fordable in several places and not much effort would be required. Burnside flatly refused, adamant that the Corps was to wait for the remaining Union forces and the pontoon boats to arrive.²³⁹ But it wasn't until two days later that the rest of the army reunited with the Second Corps. Eight days after that, the pontoons arrived. Delays the Union forces could ill afford. In that span of time, Longstreet and Lee had arrived and began entrenching their Confederates on the city's western heights, the very elevations which had so greatly concerned Sumner. On December 1st, Jackson arrived; and the die was cast.²⁴⁰ But Burnside would further delay attack by waiting until December 11th to construct the pontoon bridges over the

²³⁹ Bilby, 63.

²⁴⁰ Boyle, 210; O'Flaherty, 182. O'Flaherty cites December 11th as the day the pontoons were constructed.

Rappahannock.²⁴¹ These were all frustrating and questionable actions for obvious reasons, but most especially because Lincoln had only approved Burnside's march on Richmond upon the condition that Burnside move quickly, or not at all.²⁴²

The attack on Fredericksburg was splendidly conceived in the mind of Burnside and required a complete reorganization of the Union forces.²⁴³ For the purposes at hand, he restructured the army into a Right Grand Division and a Left Grand, with a Center Grand Division completing the trilogy. The Right Grand Division was placed under Sumner and consisted of the Second and Ninth Corps with Major General Darius Couch taking Sumner's place as commander of the former. The Left Grand Division consisted of the First and Sixth Corps and was under the command of Brigadier General William B. Franklin. The Center Grand Division, consisting of the Third and Fifth Corps, was under the command of an old rival of Burnside, Major General Joseph Hooker, who had been no more successful at the opening of Antietam than Burnside at its close. Believing numbers and structure would win the day, Burnside would eventually direct these newly tailored Divisions, 120,000 men, to engage a Confederate force of 78,000, the armies fighting within a natural arena bound on the east by the Rappahannock and on the west by a series of hills. But no manner of reorganization or restructuring would enable the Army of the Potomac to outdistance the advantage Burnside's disorder and delay had

²⁴¹ Delaying the construction of the pontoon bridges was Act One of the carnage at Fredericksburg. The engineers were forced to construct the bridges at this late date under heavy fire from General William Barksdale's Mississippians who were by then well ensconced in abandoned houses along the river's south bank. It took the 7th Michigan and the 19th Massachusetts to drive the Mississippians off so the bridges could be completed for the crossing. See O'Flaherty, 185-186.

²⁴² Boyle, 209.

²⁴³ *The Battle of Fredericksburg, 1862*. Frederick and Spotsylvania Military Park, *The National Park Service*, <http://www.nps.gov/archive/frsp/fredhist.htm>. The following account of the Battle of Fredericksburg is taken from this source.

given the enemy. With Jackson to the east and Longstreet to the northwest, planted firmly, now, along a five-mile front composed of those western hills, the Confederate line would prove impenetrable.

Seizing the opportunity Burnside had given him and under the watchful eye of Lee, Longstreet masterfully shored up the Confederate line in those days preceding the battle. Upon those western elevations, at places such as Taylor's Hill, Marye's Heights, Howison Hill, and Telegraph Hill, Longstreet positioned artillery units of massive capability, as well as five divisions of infantrymen along the baseline of the hills. At Marye's Heights, Longstreet positioned Brigadier General Thomas Reade Rootes Cobb's veteran Georgians, stationing them along a 600-yard portion of Telegraph Road and behind a most convenient stone wall. It would be here, on December 13th and before this stone wall, that Union forces, one brigade after another, would make a succession of ill-fated charges as the road upon which the Georgians stood was the corridor to Richmond. Ironically, in one of those uncanny twists of fate so common in the Civil War, the Irish Brigade would fight its own at this wall, as Cobb's Georgians were largely composed of Irishmen or men of Irish descent.²⁴⁴

Burnside's battle plan was simple. It called for an early morning assault on Jackson's Corps by Franklin's Left Grand Division with the objective of rolling up the Confederate right flank, west and then northwards towards the river, while another contingent of the Left Grand marched on Richmond by the Richmond, Franklin, and Potomac Railroad. Once Jackson's right was in the process of being rolled up and the

²⁴⁴ Cobb's Georgians consisted of Cobb's Legion, Phillips' Georgia Legion, and the 16th, 18th, and 24th Georgia infantry regiments. The 63rd New York directly faced the 24th Georgia.

march on Richmond begun, Sumner's Right Grand was to launch a diversionary assault upon Marye's Heights to cripple Longstreet's Corps and collapse the Confederate left. Hooker's Center Grand Division was to wait at the river in reserve and, in essence, serve as the clean-up detail for the day. If all went as planned, Burnside's Union forces would finish off The Army of Northern Virginia with a decisive one-two-punch and be dining in the Confederate capitol by evening. Unfortunately, very little of this plan was executed as Burnside had proposed, with wide-scale devastation the result. But it was a tragic outcome which Burnside's subordinate generals, almost to a man, had predicted. West Pointers and professional soldiers, alike, warned Burnside, even pleaded with him, that a frontal attack upon those heights was impossible and doomed. They knew all too well from grim and regrettable experience the effects of entrenched infantry on massed troops, and the unfavorable terrain littered with numerous obstacles to be scaled under relentless fire added to their anxiety and despair. Their protests proved useless. Wild with rage at their criticisms, Burnside turned a deaf ear to them all.²⁴⁵

Due either to Burnside issuing indefinite and confusing orders that morning, or Franklin simply committing too small a number to the assault, the Left Grand Division was soundly repulsed by Jackson's forces that day after a four-hour long confrontation which drove the Left Grand back over the railroad and through open fields to the Richmond Stage Road. Burnside, stationed at Union Headquarters on Stafford Heights, was unable to confirm any of this and became increasingly agitated as to the success or failure of Franklin's offensive. Though his original stratagem was to hold back Sumner's

²⁴⁵ Jones, 150-151.

Right Grand until Franklin was in the process of rolling up Jackson's Corps, Burnside, in either panic or despair, gave the order for Sumner's division to commence the attack on Longstreet's Corps with an assault upon Marye's Heights. It was the death knell for the Second Corps.

Sumner's Right Grand Division began its assault upon Marye's Heights at, roughly, noon that day. Though seven Union divisions involving three corps would try to take that impossible position by nightfall--French, Hancock, and Howard's Divisions of the Second Corps, Sturgis's Division of the Ninth Corps, Right Grand and Griffin, Humphrey, and Getty's Divisions of the Fifth Corps, Center Grand—it would be Couch's Second Corps, and in particular, Hancock's Division and the Irish Brigade, who would take the brunt of the fury unleashed at the stone wall. Never was a task more formidable. In addition to the impregnable Confederate position on the heights, the ground between the in-town position of the Right and Center Grand and the Confederate line was studded with redoubtable obstacles to the Union advance, none of which could be dispatched with the alacrity needed for a continuous charge. A canal, or millrace, was, perhaps, the most daunting of these, as only three, narrow bridges gave passage over the stream. But in addition, there were several fences that would have to be torn down under harrowing and tormenting fire from the heights. There was little to help the men consigned to this desperate and foolhardy operation.

French's Division was deployed first in the assault, dispatching first Brigadier General Nathan Kimball's Brigade, next Colonel John Andrew's Brigade, and thereafter the brigade of Colonel Oliver Palmer. As all expected but Burnside, the carnage was

immediate, horrific, unrelenting, and surreal, with not the slightest headway made into the breaching of that fortified wall. Once French's Division was spent, Hancock's Division moved in, first with Brigadier General Samuel Zook's Brigade, next with Thomas Francis Meagher's Irish Brigade, and followed, as at Antietam, by the brigade of Brigadier General John C. Caldwell. Still the mindless slaughter continued with a ferocity equaling, perhaps, even surpassing, that at Maryland's sunken road, the Confederates remaining fast and fixed behind the stone wall. At 3:30 that afternoon, Hooker's Center Grand was directed to advance, notwithstanding the desperate protests of Hooker himself to an immovable Burnside, with Major General George Griffin's Division leading the Center's assault. General Andrew A. Humphrey's Division was soon close on Griffin's heels, but with as little affect. It was all of a piece, death certain and swift. Short of nightfall, a final thrust by the division of General George W. Getty was began, but mercifully aborted soon thereafter by command of Hooker who could bare the bloodbath no longer. The insanity was over. Predictably, the assault of the Center Grand had no greater impact upon the Confederate stronghold than had that of the Right Grand earlier in the day, Burnside's reconstruction of his army for the taking of Richmond proving anything but grand and the fateful predictions of his subordinates lamentably substantiated.

The day before the battle, December 12th, the Irish Brigade rose before sunrise and marched from camp at Falmouth to the high ground at the Rappahannock in preparation for its crossing into Fredericksburg proper. Spirits were high and the brigade as confident as ever with the 14th New York cheering them on and the band of the 9th

New York playing the *Garry Owen* in their honor.²⁴⁶ As noted earlier, the delaying of the construction of the pontoon bridges created a dicey operation for the Union's crossing. However, by sunset, all required divisions were safely quartered in the town, though the lack of room in the narrow streets and the cold wind of that December night made it a difficult bedding-down for the troops. A sad preamble to the anguish they were soon to endure. It is uncertain, at this point, whether the men of the Brigade realized what the next day's orders would actually entail. There was some speculation that they would be part of a great simultaneous attack of all Union forces on Confederate troops in and around Virginia, a massive thrust that would break Lee's forces and send the Union ranks triumphantly through to Richmond.²⁴⁷ From our present advantage, it is somewhat painful to think on the Brigade's almost child-like trust of its superiors in this conjecture and in its unshakable faith in the might of the Union forces. But trust and loyalty were its hallmarks, and it is doubtful there were many in the Brigade that night who could have imagined they would take part the next day in a hopeless frontal assault on those western elevations where they watched, for weeks now, the Confederates digging themselves in firmly without the slightest hindrance from the Union side. Ignorance, in this instance, was a mercy.

The day of battle broke biting and raw with a light frost-turned-mist, and the Irish Brigade, consisting of five regiments that morning, mustered in just short of 8:00 in preparation to take the field. The three New York regiments, 69th, 88th, and 63rd, were

²⁴⁶ Bilby, 64; Boyle, 212. This was the Brigade's marching song and highly identifiable with the unit throughout the war. George Armstrong Custer was so enamored of the tune that he adopted it after the war as the rallying song for his ill-fated 7th U. S. Calvary.

²⁴⁷ O'Flaherty, 188.

commanded that day by Colonel Robert Nugent, Colonel Patrick Kelly, and Major Joseph O'Neill, respectively, all three regiments veteran troops of the Brigade, as we have seen.²⁴⁸ To the New York core, however, the 28th Massachusetts, commanded by Colonel Richard Byrnes, and the 116th Pennsylvania, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel St. Clair Mulholland, had been added. The former unit was an Irish regiment and a replacement for the all-Protestant 29th Massachusetts, the latter unit a fledgling regiment of troops and almost entirely green to combat. A much-needed infusion, the 116th Pennsylvania was added to the Brigade to compliment its now greatly depleted ranks due to its losses at Antietam. The addition of the 28th Massachusetts, on the other hand, was for an entirely different reason. At some point on the Brigade's travels from Sharpsburg, Maryland, southwest into Virginia, the officers of the Irish Brigade thought to honor their Protestant comrades in the 29th Massachusetts with their own green flag. On the Brigade's part, this gesture was considered an honor to and a filial embrace of those who died beside them at the Sunken Road. As was expected, the flag was graciously accepted by the 29th's commander, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph H. Barnes. Unfortunately, when Barnes learned that the 29th was now expected to carry the green flag into battle, all social niceties ceased. The 29th Massachusetts made it plain they were neither Irish nor Fenian and refused to confuse the issue by carrying the green flag onto the field. The Brigade's response was quick and decisive. The 29th was not only summarily transferred out of the

²⁴⁸ Major O'Neill was serving as commander of the 63rd New York as Colonel Henry Fowler and Lieutenant Colonel Richard C. Bentley were convalescing and on limited duties, respectively, due to wounds received at Antietam. *Official Records*, Series 1-Volume XX1 [S# 31], Report No. 65 (Colonel Richard C. Bentley); *Official Records*, Series 1-Volume XX1 [S# 31], Report No. 66 (Captain Patrick J. Condon).

Brigade, but out of the Second Corps, entirely. In its place came the 28th Massachusetts of the Ninth Corps, veterans of Second Manassas and Antietam—and Irish to its core.²⁴⁹

The statistics of the Brigade's casualties at the Battle of Fredericksburg that day give a skewed breakdown of each regiment's participation in that senseless assault.²⁵⁰ Ostensibly, it appears as though the 63rd New York State Volunteer Infantry, out of all five Brigade regiments fighting that day, not only lost the least in all battle categories, but, perhaps, only tangentially participated in the day's attack. Nothing could be further from the truth. Two providential events took place that day which spared the 63rd from greater carnage than their brothers, but fight they did, on the defensive, in support, and with complete abandon of self for cause. It does not serve us here to recount the entire Brigade's assault upon Marye's Heights in a blow-by-blow format. It is enough to state that once French's division and Zook's Brigade of the Second Corps had been decimated by the Confederate fire from the wall, the Irish Brigade sallied forth, impervious to danger, past scores of dead and dying men, testimony to the annihilation that awaited them. With "a half-laughing, half-murderous look in their eyes," the men of the Irish Brigade cast aside all fear and caution to take those terrible heights, retreating--bloodied, ragged, and depleted --only after command had been received.²⁵¹ And though the chaos of that "slaughter-pen" made it seem as though the Brigade "simply melted away before

²⁴⁹ Boyle, 206-208; Bilby, 63. At the inception of the Irish Brigade back in 1861, the 28th Massachusetts was considered for inclusion in the Brigade by Meagher and other Brigade officials. See Boyle, 74.

²⁵⁰ See Appendix I.

²⁵¹ This celebrated quote is from the diary of Thomas F. Galwey, second sergeant of the Hibernian Guards of the 8th Ohio, French's Division. Galwey was an "indefatigable chronicler of the Irish in the Army of the Potomac" and later became associate editor of the *Catholic World* and a professor at Manhattan College. The Hibernian Guards of Cleveland were an all-Irish company. See Jones, 154; Boyle, 162.

the grape and canister, and the tens of thousands of muskets well protected behind the carefully constructed breastworks,” it is a tribute to the Irish Brigade to note that when the battle smoke cleared, it would be bodies of Brigade men found closest to the stone wall.²⁵² Acknowledging all this, the following paragraphs will highlight, almost exclusively, the movements and actions of the 63rd New York in this theatre of death, to best defend the regiment’s participation on the field that day.

Sometime around mid-morning on the day of battle, Meagher brought the Brigade to full parade rest with the direction for the men, officers and the rank and file, to gather sprigs of green from nearby boxwood bushes to wear in their caps for the charge. As luck would have it, all but the 28th Massachusetts was without their famed green flag that day, the tattered green flags of the core regiments having been returned to New York for replacement and the 116th Pennsylvania, only 50% of it composed of Irishmen, having not been issued one.²⁵³ The boxwood would serve to remind all that day of the Brigade’s Irish identity and, in turn, help recover its gallant dead after the close of battle. St. Clair A. Mulholland, commander of the untried 116th Pennsylvania as noted above, wrote that “soon great bunches of the fragrant shrub adorned the caps of everyone. Wreaths were made and hung upon the tattered flags, and the national color of the Emerald Isle blended

²⁵² Corby, 131-132. Major William Horgan and Adjutant John R. Young of the 88th New York were found closest to the stone wall. See St. Clair A. Mulholland, *The Story of the 116th Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteers* (Philadelphia: F. McManus, Jr. and Company, Printers, 1903; reprint, ed. Lawrence P. Kohl, New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 50.

²⁵³ Conyngham, 241; Boyle, 215. There is currently an ongoing debate as to whether, or not the 116th Pennsylvania ever carried a green flag into battle. See David Kincaid, *The Irish Brigade’s Fifth Regiment: The 116th Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers*, <http://www.hauntedfieldmusic.com/IrishBrig.html> (accessed November 9, 2007), 1.

in fair harmony with the red, white, and blue of the Republic.”²⁵⁴ But this circumstance, the absence of all but one green flag for the Irish troops that day, and in addition, the greenness of the recruits of the 116th Pennsylvania, would prove fortuitous for the 63rd New York. These conditions would make the 63rd recipient of a gentler fate in the assault upon Marye’s Heights than that of the other regiments of the Brigade.

When Zook’s Brigade, or the remnants of it, was directed to retreat and the order given for the Irish to take the field, Meagher, as was his habit, gathered the Brigade together and waxed poetical on the greatness of Ireland and the valor of its honored dead. The speech was filled with Meagher’s typical rhetoric and bravado, reminding the men of their duty and promising to die a glorious death with them. “This may be my last speech to you, but I will be with you when the battle is the fiercest; and if I fall, I can say I did my duty, and fell fighting in the most glorious of causes.”²⁵⁵ While Meagher was yet speaking, a shell burst forth in the midst of the standing regiments killing three men of the 63rd New York outright. Their bodies, “mere masses of blood and rags,” were summarily carried down the line before Meagher could give a final word of encouragement.²⁵⁶ That this incident played a part in Meagher’s tactical decisions that day is highly unlikely, but it was only moments later that Meagher ordered the first of two formation changes given the Brigade that day which would eventually place the 63rd

²⁵⁴ Mulholland, 45.

²⁵⁵ O’Flaherty, 188. As at Antietam, Meagher failed to charge with his men because of “a most painful ulcer in the knee joint, which [he] had concealed and borne up against for days.” As Brigadier-General Hancock had ordered all officers to advance on foot, this appears to have been a fortuitous ailment for Meagher, who spent most of his time getting his horse “in care of [his] orderlies,” while his men advanced to their slaughter. See *Official Records*, Series 1-Volume XX1 [S# 31], Report No. 63 (Brigadier-General Thomas Francis Meagher).

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

regiment in the best of all possible positions in the day's assault. The regiments stood for battle that morning with the 69th New York holding the extreme right position, companioned in succession to its left by the 88th New York, the 63rd New York, the 28th Massachusetts, and the 116th Pennsylvania. The Brigade would lead by its right flank, led by the 69th in its honored position, with the 63rd holding center. But this formation did not deploy. Just short of the opening advance, to place the Brigade's one green flag where it could be most visible to all the ranks, Meagher directed the 28th Massachusetts to take the 63rd's center position in the Brigade, the command and the reason for it recounted by Meagher himself in his officer's report.²⁵⁷ As will be seen below, it was but the first of a two-part stroke of great, good fortune for the 63rd New York.

The Brigade began its attack that day by first crossing that impossible millrace, through which they could only advance now by the last of the three wooden bridges that once spanned it, a mere shadow of a bridge, at this point in time, held together by stringers alone.²⁵⁸ As was expected, the tally of casualties that day began in earnest here with each regiment exposed in turn to the fierce and brutal fire from the heights. Once over, dazed and wounded survivors found protection in a "slight fold in the ground" where they were able to throw off their haversacks and blanket rolls to prepare for the actual assault.²⁵⁹ But it was only a brief and comfortless respite. From this protected position, one-hundred and fifty yards from Marye's Heights, the men of the Brigade could see before them, in order of succession, a stubbled field, a snake-rail fence, a small

²⁵⁷ *Official Records*, Series 1-Volume XX1 [S# 31], Report. No. 63 (Meagher); Boyle, 215.

²⁵⁸ Jones, 153.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

bricked house, yet another fence--and sixty disheartening yards of wide open plain that led to that deadly stone wall at the base of the heights.²⁶⁰ No illusions regarding either the success of the day's assault or personal survival could have been left those men at this juncture. The 63rd, however, was about to be given a gift. As related in the official report of Lieutenant Colonel Richard C. Bentley, it was at this time that Meagher ordered the Brigade line straightened and, on the heels of this, another change in the battle alignment.²⁶¹ The 63rd New York, now standing in the original position of the 28th Massachusetts, was directed farther left in the Brigade's alignment to draw in for shelter the green troops of the 116th Pennsylvania, Meagher fearing the worst for these novices who would otherwise fight severely exposed to the enemy's fire.²⁶² A marvelous providence. By both a sad irony and an even stranger mercy, the 63rd New York's new formation position—the extreme left flank--would afford the regiment that day, though none realized it at the time, the choicest place in a naturally protected area in the line of assault. By roughly two-thirds in losses, the result would be a lower casualty count for the 63rd New York than for its companion regiments--and all because of a deep, elongated swale and an old fairground fence.

Almost immediately upon the order to press forward, the 63rd, “advancing double quick about 50 yards,” came upon “a line of troops lying on the ground, considerably obstructing the advance.”²⁶³ This line, remnants of French's division, failed to stop the 63rd who undauntingly advanced “over them at a run” without breaking stride. In like

²⁶⁰ Jones, 153.

²⁶¹ *Official Records*, Series 1-Volume XX1 [S# 31], Report No. 65 (Bentley), Boyle, 218. Bentley was present at the battle but did not actively participate due, as noted earlier, to wounds sustained at Antietam.

²⁶² Boyle, 218.

²⁶³ *Official Records*, Series 1-Volume XX1 [S# 31], Report No. 65 (Bentley).

manner, though far more threatening, a second and more intimidating obstacle jeopardized their advance, by all reports a derelict earthwork that divided the regiment squarely in two, setting the right and left wings of the unit out on a wide tangent from each other. The risk to the success of the regiment's assault was obvious. But to exacerbate their fate greatly, nearly simultaneous with this encounter, the 63rd's new commander, Major Joseph O'Neil, was hit and struck down, leaving Captain Patrick Condon, of Company G, not only in command but in the midst of a highly unfavorable circumstance. It was anything but a desirable receipt of authority. Springing into action, Condon straight away charged the regiment's wildly swinging left wing by its right flank, on an oblique and at a full run, to bring the unit's battle line in order.²⁶⁴ Deafening noise, appalling carnage, and chaos held the field, but the reunion, after a surprisingly brief time, was successful, the regiment joined together once more with little loss of step or momentum. It was a remarkable feat and one which would, to Condon's credit, be recounted in several of the Brigade's official reports, thereafter. Regardless, it is, perhaps, too easy, from a comfortable armchair position in the present, to imagine this incident as a clean and simple maneuver effecting an easy and expected end. Hardly that. To fully appreciate the courage and fortitude of the regiment in this traumatic scenario, it must be kept in mind that throughout the exercise to reunite, the men advanced doggedly through sheets of fire, with their heads bowed down, braced as "when walking against a hailstorm."²⁶⁵ Acknowledging this, it is important to point out that Condon commanded

²⁶⁴ *Official Records*, Series 1-Volume XX1 [S# 31], Report No. 66 (Captain Patrick J. Condon); Boyle 218.

²⁶⁵ Mulholland, 50. This, of course, was the condition under which all the Irish regiments fought that day.

brilliantly at a crucial and dangerous moment and that the men of the 63rd New York responded with an unaffected and flawless precision in the face of incredible conflict and chaos.

Though written accounts are either sketchy, or conflicting, it was after the abandoned earthwork had been successfully managed that the 63rd met with the best of all possible luck in that fearsome arena of death. Once the rampart had been completely cleared, the 63rd remained engaged for nearly three-quarters of an hour in a violent and relentless exchange of fire from the Confederates at the heights. Their contest, however, was, arguably, at a greater advantage than that suffered their companion regiments. According to all accounts, a long and shallow basin lay in the path of the advancing regiments that day, an extended swale running from a few yards south-east of the brick house mentioned above and parallel to that deadly stone wall.²⁶⁶ Unfortunately, only three of the regiments during the battle--the 28th Massachusetts, 116th Pennsylvania, and the 63rd New York--were able to take advantage of the much-needed protection the swale provided, the less fortunate 69th and 88th New York being almost totally exposed and suffering most severely from the enfilading fire from the north-west at Telegraph Road. Of the three protected regiments, however, the 63rd, in its extreme left position, fared best of all, as ostensibly, the swale was widest and deepest where they lay for cover.

Lieutenant John Dwyer, Company K and later regimental historian of the 63rd New York, recalls that the officers of the 63rd ordered the regiment "to fire lying down, and then turn

²⁶⁶ The Allen Stratton House, on the corner of Littlepage and Mercer Streets, was constructed in 1857-58 and is still standing today. Stratton was a master wheelwright. Corey Byers, "Candlelight Tour to Twinkle with Treasures," *The Free Lance Star*, <http://fredericksburg.com/News/FLS/2007/112007/11292007/332921> (accessed November 29, 2007). For a rudimentary layout of the depression as it lay in the line of the assault, see Bilby, 67.

over and load their guns again and again.”²⁶⁷ It was a lifesaving order without which “not a man or officer would have lived.”²⁶⁸ Doubtless, no man of the regiment that day, if not at the moment, then, assuredly, thereafter, missed recognizing a gentler fate in the placement of that depression in his path.

But, astoundingly, in addition to this great mercy, the men of the 63rd were also the most able of the regiments that day, given their placement in the Brigade’s formation, to take life-saving advantage of yet another fortunate circumstance. An old fairground fence, constructed of upright wooden planks, evenly spaced timber bars, and strategically placed posts, lay in their line of assault.²⁶⁹ This was a standing fence on a tangent to Mercer Street which, at this location and up to that point in time, hosted an open-air market, *The Mercer Square Market*, on old agricultural fairgrounds of the city. Though some of it was torn down by Cobb’s men before the battle, a fair portion of this fence remained standing during the conflict, with some Union men scaling it, others advancing under it, and still others using it as a shield. It was most effective in this last capacity, and because of the regiment’s extreme-left position that day, the unit advancing at a tangent along a broad expanse of the barrier, the 63rd New York used it to their best advantage. Though every attempt to tear away plank space in the fence drew fire from the heights above, many of the 63rd did just this, using the fence as a ready shelter while firing, thereby continuing their participation in the battle and at the same time

²⁶⁷ John Dwyer, *Address of John Dwyer Major 63rd N. Y. V.* (Hudson Falls, New York: Herald Press, 1914), 4. Dwyer was temporarily commanding Company B during the battle. See John Dwyer, “63d Regiment Infantry,” *Final Report on the Battle of Gettysburg* (Albany: J. B. Lyon Company, 1902), 501.

²⁶⁸ Dwyer, *Final Report on the Battle of Gettysburg*, 500.

²⁶⁹ Bilby, 67. The author is unclear as to his source for this physical description of the fence.

safeguarding their survival.²⁷⁰ Providence, then, in the ready shape of that natural depression and that old fairground fence, saved many a life in the 63rd New York that horrendous day.

Despite the highly providential changes in position for the regiment that morning, it is evident that the 63rd New York fought with as much courage and tenacity in the assault upon Marye's Heights as did its Brigade companions. It was only the miracle of that natural depression and then, the fairground fence which kept the casualty count for the regiment as low as it was. But even in light of this, there seems to be an inconsistency in the number of wounded, missing, and dead reported for the regiment when personal accounts at the close of the battle, and thereafter, are taken into consideration. These post-battle accounts plainly attest to the sacrifice of the regiment, both as regarded the caliber of its men and the number of them lost. The testimony of Colonel Patrick Kelly of the 88th New York and Colonel Richard Byrnes of the 28th Massachusetts, by way of example, bear this out. Both of these officers, in collaboration with each other as the battle closed, attempted to search the field for what remnants of the Brigade might be gathered up for removal to safer ground. Kelly administered to the 88th and 69th, finding nearly every officer of the latter a casualty. Byrnes, with a color bearer and ten of his regiment, went to minister to the 116th and the 63rd, finding "few of the 116th and even fewer of the 63rd," with Captain Patrick Condon, a wounded man under his arm, and several others of the 63rd agonizingly making their way down to the

²⁷⁰ Kris White, 2007, Interview by author, Fredericksburg, Virginia, March, 2. Kris White is an Interpretive Park Ranger for the National Parks Service at the Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park site in Fredericksburg, Virginia. (Hereinafter cited as *White Interview*.)

questionable safety of a drainage ditch.²⁷¹ And in an even more definitive way, the 63rd's own Lieutenant John Dwyer, as recorded by Father Corby in his *Memoirs of Chaplain Life*, further identifies the full measure of the 63rd's sacrifice in the following anecdote about Father Ouellet, chaplain of the 69th, only a few days after the debacle of Fredericksburg. There is little doubt here that, though substantially less than the other Brigade regiments, the 63rd had sustained great loss at Fredericksburg:

Passing an abandoned winter hut on the morning of the 16th, the attention of the writer [Dwyer] was attracted to the efforts of an individual to put his house in order once more. . . . It proved to be Father Thomas Ouellet, chaplain of the Sixty-ninth New York, of the Irish Brigade. The writer reined up a moment to witness the novel sight—a priest rebuilding his “homestead” unaided! He made sorry work of it, but appeared in no way disconcerted. Addressing him, the writer said:

“Good-morning, Father Ouellet.”

“Oh, good-morning, Lieutenant.”

“I fear, Chaplain, you are but an indifferent carpenter. The Sixty-ninth men would be only too glad to do that work for you. Why don't you ask Adjutant Smith for a detail?”

“Indeed, he furnished me with a detail, but the poor fellows are so used up with our experience at the Heights, there are hardly enough of them left to put up their own huts, and furnish men for guards and picket. They would willingly help me, but I sent them away.

“Then let me send you a dozen men of the Sixty-third. Several of them are carpenters.”

“Thank you very much, Lieutenant. But, I am sorry to say, you are no better off than the Sixty-ninth boys. You have not 100 men left in your whole regiment. You passed me Wednesday on the dock over in Fredericksburg, as you came out of the fight.”

The good man was correct. The Sixty-third did not muster fifty muskets after the assault.²⁷²

²⁷¹ *Official Records*, Series 1-Volume XX1 [S# 31], Report No. 68 (Colonel Patrick Kelly); Boyle 220; *Official Records*, Series 1-Volume XX1 [S# 31], Report No. 66 (Captain Patrick J. Condon).

²⁷² Corby, 304-305. As noted earlier, Father Ouellet was a French Jesuit. He was advanced in age, the oldest of the Brigade chaplains.

It is important to note that if “all of the Brigade was cut to pieces” that December day, the 63rd New York, no less than any other Brigade regiment, paid its dues in ways numerous and poignant.²⁷³ But there can be little doubt that the entire Fredericksburg experience was a harrowing and heartbreaking one for all who had been forced to labor in that abattoir. Evidence of this, relating specifically to the 63rd, may be found in Corby’s sad account of the one officer lost to the 63rd that day, Captain John Sullivan of Company K, a 25-year-old Albany native of Irish parentage and a greatly respected officer in the regiment and throughout the Brigade. It is a story that exemplifies the relentless and inescapable hand of death that heartrending day and, no doubt, one that was repeated in a multiplicity of variants throughout the day’s wretched conflict and all through those fearless and seemingly tireless, Irish ranks. Corby writes:

Just as the remnant of our brigade came out of action, Capt. Sullivan and I were talking in a street of Fredericksburg, and congratulating each other that a few escaped even without a wound. He left me to pass across the street, and as he reached the center—ten feet from where we had been talking—a cannon ball came down the street and struck him about four inches above the knee, and cut away his leg. I heard his confession at once, as I knew he could not live. He was carried to the rear, and all that could be done by the faithful surgeons was done; but he died that night. This was the experience of hundreds.²⁷⁴

In darkly ironic stories much like this one and in the horrific loss of life at the hands of a witless and insensible command, it is easy to see how the Battle of

²⁷³ As further testimony to the regiment’s sacrifice, O’Flaherty, citing *The Irish American* and *The New York Herald* as his sources, recounts that when the 63rd was ordered to provide a picket of fifty men sometime later in January, “the sick and even the drummer boys were used to make up the number.” See O’Flaherty, 210.

²⁷⁴ Corby, 132-133; Conyngham, 569-570; *Annual Report of the Adjutant-General of the State of New York*, 180.

Fredericksburg broke the spirit and resolve of the 63rd New York, and most assuredly, the Irish Brigade, as a whole. Perhaps the clearest picture of the traumatic effect of the battle on its participants, and in particular, of course, as testimony to the 63rd's active involvement that day, is the story of Major Thomas W. Cartwright, a native of Kings County, Ireland and the son of a career officer in the British army. Cartwright settled in New York City in 1835 and was, approximately, 57-years-old at the outbreak of the war. The *Annual Report of the Adjutant-General of the State of New York*, however, lists him as being 40-years-old at muster, at which time he was ranked first lieutenant and adjutant of the 63rd New York. The truth is evident. So keen was Cartwright to participate in the conflict that he out-and-out lied about his age by 17 years, or more, to do so, and we can only wonder at both the resolution and physical prowess of the man.²⁷⁵ Cartwright's two sons, George W. Cartwright, later Colonel of the 28th Massachusetts, and Thomas W. Cartwright, Jr., later captain, Company G, of the 5th New York State Volunteers, joined him in service, both giving their lives to the war with the latter, Cartwright's youngest, dying in Washington from wounds sustained at Fredericksburg.²⁷⁶ Not surprisingly, Marye's Heights finally broke the old man, as it assuredly broke many another. Cartwright's resignation letter, tendered just a handful of weeks after the battle, gives a piercingly sad picture of the physical and spiritual devastation Burnside's debauched assault had upon the Irishman. In it, Cartwright's lie at enlistment is made clear, as is,

²⁷⁵ *Annual Report of the Adjutant-General of the State of New York*, 21. Cartwright mustered in on September 16, 1861.

²⁷⁶ *New York Times*, June 22, 1883; *Brooklyn Eagle*, April 9, 1884; Boyle, 379-380; Bilby, 174; *New York State Military Museum*, <http://www.dmna.state.ny.us/historic> (accessed December 6, 2007), 2.

though stoically worded, the grief for the first of his sons lost. To Captain John Dwyer, Acting Adjutant, on February 5, 1863, Cartwright wrote:

I respectfully tender my resignation as Captain of Co. D for the following reasons:

The hardships and privations of a campaign of seventeen months has made sensible and very serious inroads upon my health resulting in general prostration of strength and incipient Pneumonia. My age also, now sixty years, prevents me from fulfilling the duties of my position with satisfaction to myself on advantage to the service.

The recent sudden death of my youngest son, Capt. Thos W. Cartwright, Jr. 5th NYSV, has produced painful results in my family rendering my presence with them imperative.²⁷⁷

Cartwright died at the age of 81, a customs officer for thirty years in New York's Customs House. He was survived by his two daughters and their families and loved and respected by many, as may be readily discerned in an article in the *New York Times* of 1883, announcing the occasion of a grand birthday memorial given in his honor.²⁷⁸ Cartwright died the following year.²⁷⁹

There was little left of the Irish Brigade after Fredericksburg. It was a mere shadow of itself, now, eventually requiring repeated reorganizations, consolidations and transfers of regiments to keep the semblance of it alive. After the loss at Marye's Heights, Meagher officially requested permission to travel back to the state of New York for fresh recruits for the Brigade, but was unceremoniously denied the trip. After Chancellorsville, he would again request the same and with a second denial, resign his

²⁷⁷ United States National Archives. *General Index to Pension Files, 1861-1934*. Index No. T288, Roll No. 75.

²⁷⁸ *New York Times*, June 22, 1883.

²⁷⁹ *Brooklyn Eagle*, April 9, 1884.

command in protest. Predictably, without these much-needed infusions into the ranks, the Brigade found itself, a few months later, at the climatic crossroads of Gettysburg, with a mere 2-company battalion per New York regiment, and, roughly, just 530 men in the whole of the unit.²⁸⁰ A sobering realization when one takes into account that many of the regiments began with nearly a thousand men, each, back in the autumn of 1861. Regardless, the Brigade, with ranks wasted and depleted, held their own in the Wheatfield that second day at Gettysburg, fighting only an hour's duration, but holding out longer than should have been humanly possible, losing one-third of the 530 with which they entered the field.²⁸¹ As for commanding the Brigade in its reduced state, the regiments endured, after Meagher's resignation, a steady stream of brigade commanders, some better than others, with several of superior shepherding abilities. But it would suffer, in the minds of many, its greatest loss of command in the death of Colonel Patrick Kelly, of the 88th New York, who died of wounds at Petersburg. Fundamentally, the Irish Brigade, as it was known up to then, ceased to exist with Kelly, for no succeeding commander could equal him in experience, leadership, or the Brigade's affection.²⁸² The glory days had come to an end, at last.

As for the 63rd New York State Volunteers, Major John Dwyer's eye-witness reports of the regiment's last campaigns give a good assessment of the unit's efficacy in battles following Fredericksburg, a brief, but concise historical accounting, largely free of aggrandizements. At the regiment's next engagement, Chancellorsville in the spring of

²⁸⁰ The 116th Pennsylvania and the 28th Massachusetts were still companion regiments in the Brigade.

²⁸¹ Boyle, 255-256, 270.

²⁸² *White Interview*.

1863, the 63rd appears to have lost little resolve or speed. Dwyer notes that the regiment distinguished itself in its preservation of the Fifth Maine Battery, stationed at the Chancellorsville House, exposed to a “destructive fire” and with guns so “nobly worked that every officer and man was either killed or wounded.”²⁸³ The defense was dramatic and skilled and obtained for the 63rd “a rousing cheer for the brave act from their comrades in the First Division.”²⁸⁴ It would be here, as well, that the regiment lost one of its most favored sons, Captain John C. Lynch, Galway-born organizer of Company C, who was killed instantly by solid shot which crushed his scabbard into his body, an event etched in the minds of many for years to come.²⁸⁵ After Chancellorsville, participation in the Wheatfield at Gettysburg that summer proved much the same for the regiment, with the unit and the “remnant of the old brigade,” as noted above, braving their part honorably. However, of the 80 men comprising the two companies of the 63rd that day, only 57 actively fought on the field, as 23 were put out hors-de-combat beforehand due to either sickness, wounds, or other disabilities. In this report, then, it must be recognized that nearly a full third of an already greatly reduced 63rd was soundly out of commission at Gettysburg. It did not seem to daunt the regiment much. Despite the handicap, those fighting 57 were all left standing at the battle’s close, unassailable to the end. They were

²⁸³ Dwyer, *Final Report on the Battle of Gettysburg*, 502.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁵ Conyngham, 569. So great was the evidence that Lynch had been the sole and faithful support of his widowed mother back in New York City, both before and during the war, that a pension to his mother was awarded after his death without much contention. Lynch’s letters to “[his] dear darling mother” included in the pension file are both endearing and poignant. After reading these letters, the affection in which he was held by so many in the Brigade is not difficult to imagine. See United States National Archives. *General Index to Pension Files, 1861-1934*. Index No. T288, Roll No. 292.

all that remained, however, of that once “gallant regiment,” a wafer-thin shadow of what it once was.²⁸⁶

By the Wilderness campaign of May, 1864, there came an infusion of new recruits and whole companies into the 63rd --Companies C, D, and E, recruited from New York and Brooklyn, the original A and B greatly augmented, and later, a Company F--all of which brought the regiment back to its original strength. But as one might reasonably expect, the composition of the regiment, now, was vastly altered, Irish recruits becoming scarce by this time in the war and the recruits being largely green.²⁸⁷ For all intents and purposes, this was another 63rd New York, entirely, though the name of the regiment and its flag remained. Notwithstanding, the tireless and seasoned veterans surely set the tone, the 63rd, and the greater Irish Brigade, of course, fighting bravely through those last eleven months of the conflict and bringing the war to a praiseworthy close. Dwyer writes:

From the opening of the campaign in May, 1864, through all the battles to Petersburg, the Sixty-third was constantly on duty, the battalion being commanded by Maj. Thomas Touhy (who died May 30, 1864, of wounds received in action in the Wilderness), and subsequently by Col. James D. Brady. It participated in all the vicissitudes and successes of the Second Corps, until the final victory at Appomattox, and the surrender of Lee in April 1865. In July,

²⁸⁶ Dwyer, *Final Report on the Battle of Gettysburg*, 503.

²⁸⁷ The scarcity of Irish recruits was due in no small part to the New York City Draft Riots in July of 1863. The poor New York Irish, greatly prejudiced against the blacks and forced to contend with them for low-paying jobs, rioted against the draft after Lincoln's *Emancipation Proclamation* was released. Though the Irish would willingly die for the Union, they would not die for southern slaves. See “New York City Draft Riots,” *The American Civil War Home Page*. <http://www.civilwarhome.com/draftriots.htm> (accessed December 10, 2007).

1865, the remnant was mustered out at Hart's Island, N. Y., and honorably discharged."²⁸⁸

Thus ended the regiment's war days, its survivors mustering periodically in the years to come for the erection of memorials, site dedications, and parades, only, commemorative events outright in their own honor, or, as in the dedication of the Gettysburg monuments in 1888, in recognition of their invaluable contribution to the lasting glory of the Irish Brigade.²⁸⁹

One final portrait, or more correctly, a final stroke to a portrait already presented, must be offered here in defense of the 63rd New York as a regiment of great merit and comprised of bold and singular men. It is a portrait striking and memorable and without which this argument would be incomplete. Recalling to mind the fearless preservation of the Colors at Antietam by the then Corporal John Dillon of Company F, the laudable actions of Sergeant John Dillon in his race with the Colors at Spotsylvania Court House, May 12, 1864, can only inspire and stir one's emotions further and offer greater validation of both the soldier and his regiment.²⁹⁰ Recovered from wounds received at Antietam, Dillon came back to active duty in the 63rd New York on January 14, 1863, missing, or rather escaping, the sad and traumatic events at Fredericksburg in full, but receiving, within the month, a promotion to Color Sergeant for his bravery in Maryland

²⁸⁸ Dwyer, *Final Report on the Battle of Gettysburg*, 503. James D. Brady, last colonel of the 63rd New York, was front and center at the Battle of Cold Harbor in June of 1864. Brady, then Captain of Company B, received a bullet during the battle which passed through his chest and arm to lodge in the spine of Colonel Richard Byrnes of the 28th Massachusetts, then commander of the Irish Brigade. Byrnes later died of the wound. See *Annual Report of the Adjutant-General of the State of New York*, 11; Bilby, 110.

²⁸⁹ *Final Report on the Battle of Gettysburg*. Albany: J. B. Lyon Company, 1902.

²⁹⁰ Kevin E. O'Brien, "Follow That Green Flag: John Dillon, Irish Brigade Color Bearer," *North & South*, Vol. 2, No. 5 (June, 1999), 62. May 12th was Dillon's 28th birthday.

and, later in June, a transfer to Company B.²⁹¹ Though a participant at Chancellorsville, Dillon became ill during the march north to Gettysburg and missed the war's high water mark, entirely, too unwell to share in the Brigade's involvement in the Wheatfield on the second day. Upon his second return to service, however, he fought at Auburn, Mine Run, and Bristoe Station, mustering out after the last of these, but reenlisting once more on December 21, 1863, at which time he was promoted to First Sergeant. Miraculously surviving the terrors of the Wilderness, Dillon found himself with his regiment on a dark and water-soaked May morning preparing for a surprise attack upon Lee's exposed flanks positioned at the "Mule Shoe" at Spotsylvania Court House.²⁹²

Sometime around 4 a.m. that morning, while the 63rd waited for the order to advance, Dillon's old Antietam comrade, Captain John H. Gleason, now of Company B, as well, whispered in his ear, "If you plant these colors in the morning on the enemy's fortifications, I'll try to get you promoted."²⁹³ Dillon's response was quick and certain. "Promotion or no promotion," he returned, "there is not a man in this brigade that shall get ahead of me. The Lord will spare me or I will die in the attempt."²⁹⁴ He made good on his boast. At the height of the advance upon the Mule Shoe, Dillon "struck out like a race horse with the regiment in hot pursuit" through Rebel shot, felled trees, and abatis of spear-like tree limbs spiked deep in the ground to reach the Confederate earthworks

²⁹¹ Ibid.; *Annual Report of the Adjutant-General of the State of New York*, 41.

²⁹² The Mule Shoe was so named for its shape. At the western portion of the Mule Shoe was the now famous "Bloody Angle," which saw 20 hours of fierce fighting that changed the course of the war. From this battle on in the Eastern Theatre, the second fought in General Ulysses S. Grant's Overland Campaign, the Union took lasting control over the Army of Northern Virginia.

²⁹³ O'Brien, 66. The author's source is Dillon's pension file.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

before anyone else.²⁹⁵ With one great, full-body motion, he slammed the National colors into enemy ground, justly claiming thereafter that he was the first Union soldier to plant the Stars and Stripes on Confederate turf at Spotsylvania. No one ever challenged his claim. As for Gleason, he was as good as his word. Dillon was promoted to Second Lieutenant of Company D in January of the following year under the captain's auspices.²⁹⁶

But Dillon's recognition did not end there. So esteemed were his military accomplishments at Spotsylvania Court House that on December 28, 1864, Captain Charles Terwilliger, then commanding officer of the 63rd New York, recommended Dillon for the Congressional Medal of Honor, Colonel Robert Nugent, then commander of the Irish Brigade, sanctioning the recommendation one day later. Regrettably, and for reasons unclear, Dillon never received that most esteemed and coveted of all military medals, having been honorably discharged on April 27, 1865 under some puzzling circumstances.²⁹⁷ But there can be little doubt that the recommendation and the medal were justly merited and may one day, yet, be honorably conferred. By all accounts, there were few who knew Dillon, or knew of him, within the regiment and the Brigade at large, who had little else but praise and admiration to offer in his regard. He was, quite possibly, "one of the most heroic men who served in the Irish Brigade."²⁹⁸

²⁹⁵ Lysy, 41; O'Brien, 66. The quote offered here is from Lysy's work and was taken from a postwar pension affidavit on behalf of Dillon by Terwilliger, his then commanding officer. Terwilliger was, according to Lysy, only a Lieutenant Colonel at the time of this testimony. Lysy cites Terwilliger as a full colonel when the officer offers testimony to Dillon's bravery at Antietam. See Lysy, 31.

²⁹⁶ O'Brien, 66.

²⁹⁷ United States National Archives. *General Index to Pension Files, 1861-1934*. Index No. T288, Roll No. 122/123; *Annual Report of the Adjutant-General of the State of New York*, 41.

²⁹⁸ O'Brien, 67.

But if Dillon's story is a commendable one, the previous pages have shown that he was only one of many remarkable men in the ranks of the 63rd New York State Volunteer Regiment. Others may stand with him as testimony to the unit's worth as a whole, on the battlefields of Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, Spotsylvania Court House, and others. Recognition must be given, as well, to the outrageous daring of Big John Gleason, the sacrifice of John J. Kavanagh, the faithfulness and compassion of Father James M. Dillon, and the gallant leadership of the accomplished Lawrence Reynolds. The lives of these men, those of the others of the 63rd treated here, and the many other men of the regiment whose stories have yet to come to light are the surest and soundest argument for the significant value of the 63rd New York as a unit committed to the Union cause, dedicated to personal valor on the field, faithful to its Celtic roots, and, in every way, on equal footing with the 69th and 88th regiments of the New York Irish Brigade.

CONCLUSION

IN THE SHADOW OF THEIR BROTHERS

Reflecting upon the effects of the Civil War on the nation--the Union restored, the displacement of State's Rights, and the abolition of slavery--Boyle asks: "Specifically, what was its [the Civil War's] effects on the Irish in America?"²⁹⁹ Concurring with John Higham, renowned sociologist in the study of American cultural ethnicity, Boyle offers that the Civil War was a turning point for the Irish in America, creating a drastic before-and-after graphic recognizable and irrefutable.³⁰⁰ If the nativist movement of the 1840's and 50's fostered a blatant anti-Irish sentiment in pre-war America, the sacrifice of the Irish soldiers in the Civil War turned the tide of popular opinion, at last. Treating the Irish Brigade specifically, Boyle writes: "Their sterling performance on the battlefield was rewarded by the disappearance of the ideas of nativism from public life. . . .The burning of Catholic churches stopped after Appomattox and would never regain its former appeal."³⁰¹ Further defining the war's effects, Boyle writes:

The most important thing that the Irish gained was a degree of self-confidence and self-respect for themselves that would carry them on. The NO IRISH NEED APPLY signs did not come down over night. No matter what the future held, they knew deep within themselves that the blood of the O'Kanes and Kellys, the Haggerty's and Horgans had not been wasted. They were losers no longer. A new world opened, and they entered it.³⁰²

²⁹⁹ Boyle, 389.

³⁰⁰ Boyle does not cite the work in which John Higham, 1920-2003, presents this view.

³⁰¹ Boyle, 389-90.

³⁰² Ibid., 390.

In like vein, Thomas O'Connor, author of *Civil War Boston: Home Front and Battlefield*, in an interview with Reis Oslin, staff writer of *The Boston College Chronicle*, states: "In 1855, we had the height of the 'Know-Nothing' movement, where the Irish were seen as unintelligent, disloyal, and dangerous. Even before the war was over, these same people were praised for their bravery and service to the Union." The greatest moment of recognition, O'Connor maintains, came in 1863 when John B. Fitzpatrick, Bishop of Boston, was given an honorary degree by Harvard University. It was an astonishing gesture, one of not only tolerance but acceptance of the Irish people as Americans. This would lead to even greater courtesies in the years ahead: full inclusion into the American culture and respect and even admiration for Irish ethnicity.³⁰³ But even Thomas Francis Meagher, himself, recognized, early on, the benefits of the war to the Irish in America. At a recruiting rally after the success of the Peninsula Campaign, and at which Massachusetts's Governor John Andrew presided, Meagher announced:

Here at this hour I proclaim it in the center of that city [Boston] where this insult was offered to the Irish soldier—"Know Nothingism" is dead. This war, if it brought no other excellent and salutary fruits, brought with it this result, that the Irish soldier will henceforth take his stand proudly by the side of the native-born, and will not fear to look him straight and sternly in the face, and tell him that he has been equal to him in his allegiance to the Constitution.³⁰⁴

It can be justly contended that few who fought beside Irish regiments in the Civil War survived the conflict doubting Irish faithfulness or ferocity in battle. As companions

³⁰³ Reid Oslin, "Civil War Boston," *The Boston College Chronicle*, January 29, 1998, Vol. 6, No. 10: 1-2, http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/rvp/pubaf/chronicle/v6/ja29/oconnor.html (accessed February 21, 2007).

³⁰⁴ Jones, 100.

and comrades, the Irish were generous and good-spirited; as soldiers, they were ever trustworthy and driven by the cause. Many are the stories of 11th-hour support and rescue by Irish regiments, and many too, those occasions when other regiments pealed forth the *Garry Owen* in gratitude and praise. An entirely conditioned response, for sighting the green flag in the distance was never a harbinger of defeat. More often, it was a pledge and a hope that victory, if not gloriously won, would be honorably conceded on the field, standards proudly withdrawn and arms at rest. In the end, and with more than a shade of irony, the Irish blood spilled in the American Civil War won the Irish in America those very triumphs denied them on their native soil: honor, respect, opportunity, and a fully-entitled citizenship. The Sons of Erin had found a free homeland, at last.³⁰⁵

With a singular vision and without counting the cost, the 63rd New York State Volunteer Infantry, Ireland's sons to the last, boldly played its part in obtaining all these many graces for the Irish people. But these would be hollow words if the 63rd's record did not speak for itself. In the face of the often dismissive assessment of the 63rd by contemporary historians of the Irish Brigade, William F. Fox's highly respected statistical source, *Regimental Losses in America's Civil War 1861-1865*, sets that record straight. Fox lists the 63rd New York among the top 300 fighting regiments during the Civil War, equal, in every respect, to those regiments having sustained the heaviest losses in hallmark battles, desperate and fierce.³⁰⁶ Though history has consigned the 63rd to those tall shadows cast by the 69th and 88th New York regiments, it was, in truth, anything but

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 255.

³⁰⁶ Fox, William F, *Regimental Losses in America's Civil War 1861-1865*, Chapter X, 18th ed. (Dayton: Morningside House, 1985), 202. See Appendix J.

inferior to them. The men of the 63rd fought nobly and died resplendently in the very same manner as did their brothers and were as great a credit as they to the New York Irish Brigade and to all the Irish and Irish-Americans who fought with or against them in that long, sad war. Their lives bravely and gloriously given, most notably before Antietam's Sunken Road, the 63rd New York State Volunteers, no less than its sister regiments, facilitated the acceptance of the Irish in America and helped to realize, in its own right, the 12th-century prophecy of St. Malachy of Armagh, Irish cleric and mystic, who maintained that the fraught and careworn Irish people would, one day, find glory in the West.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁷ W. H. Grattan-Flood, *St. Malachy*, trans. Michael C. Tinker, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09565a.html> (accessed January 13, 2007). St. Malachy's prophecies are renowned in the Church, and many Irish Catholics today readily acknowledge the fulfillment of the prophecy noted here, crediting its realization to the valiant sacrifice of the Irish soldiers in America's Civil War.

APPENDIX A
SPECIAL ORDER NO. 460

Special Order No. 460
General Headquarters State of New York
Adjutant General Office
Albany, November 3, 1861

In accordance with general orders No. 78, from this department, and with general orders No. 71, from the War Department, the organization heretofore known as the Third Irish regiment, and Captain Branigan's unattached company, now at Albany depot, are hereby consolidated into a regiment, to be known as the Sixty-third regiment (63^d) New York State Volunteers.

Companies A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H and I of the Third Irish regiment will form the first 9 companies of the regiment thus organized. Captain Branigan's company will become Company K of the regiment.

The following persons will be appointed field, staff, and company officers of the regiment thus organized, when they shall have passed the examination required by general orders No. 78, and will be commissioned whenever the field and staff and company muster rolls, certified to by the mustering officers, shall have been filed in the office at the Adjutant General of this State.

Colonel, Richard C. Enright;
Lieutenant Colonel, Henry Fowler;
Major, Thomas F. Lynch
Staff Officers—Adjutant, Thomas Cartwright; Surgeon--- ---; Assistant Surgeon
--- ---; Quarter master Phillip O'Hanlon, Jr.,; Chaplain --- ---.

Company Officers

Company A --- Captain Joseph O'Neill; First Lieutenant, Joseph McDonough;
Second Lieutenant, Thos. Twohy
Company B --- Captain John Warren; First Lieutenant, --- ---
Company C --- Captain John Charles Lynch; First Lieutenant, --- ---; Second
Lieutenant, Horace Russell
Company D --- Captain George Tobin; First Lieutenant, John Flynn; Second
Lieutenant, James J. McCormack
Company E --- Captain, James T. Pendergast; First Lieutenant, P. J. Gormley;
Second, Richard P. Moore
Company F --- Captain, James McCaffrey; First Lieutenant, William Fennon;
Second Lieutenant, P. W. Lydon
Company G --- Captain, Patrick G. Condon; First Lieutenant, John Canty; Second
Lieutenant, George Lynch

Company H --- Captain, Michael Walsh; First Lieutenant, John Gleason; Second Lieutenant, Cadwalader Smith

Company I --- Captain, --- ---; First Lieutenant, --- ---; Second Lieutenant, --- ---

Company K --- Captain, --- --- Branigan; First Lieutenant, --- ---; Second Lieutenant, --- ---

Brigadier General Yates is charged with the execution of the details of the order.

Captain Branigan will at once report, with his company, to General Yates, in New York.

By order of the Commander-in-Chief

Thos Hillhouse, Adjutant General

APPENDIX B
SIXTY-THIRD INFANTRY
THIRD IRISH REGIMENT
FIELD, STAFF, AND COMPANY OFFICERS
NOVEMBER, 1861

FIELD OFFICERS

Colonel: Richard C. Enright;
Lieutenant Colonel: Henry Fowler;
Major: Thomas F. Lynch

STAFF OFFICERS

Adjutant, Thomas Cartwright
Surgeon: David Reid Shanahan
Assistant Surgeon: George G. Gilligan
Quarter Master: Phillip O'Hanlon, Jr.
Medical cadet: George O'Hanlon
Chaplain: James M. Dillon, C. S. C.

COMPANY OFFICERS

Company A: Captain Joseph O'Neill; First Lieutenant, Joseph McDonough;
Second Lieutenant, Thos. Twohy
Company B: Captain John Warren; First Lieutenant: Phillip Connelly; Second
Lieutenant: Cock Malloy
Company C: Captain John Charles Lynch; First Lieutenant: Richard L. Ryan;
Second Lieutenant, Horace Russell
Company D: Captain George Tobin; First Lieutenant, John Flynn; Second
Lieutenant, James J. McCormack
Company E: Captain, James T. Pendergast; First Lieutenant, P. J. Gormley;
Second, Richard P. Moore
Company F: Captain, James McCaffrey; First Lieutenant, William Fennon;
Second Lieutenant, P. W. Lydon
Company G: Captain, Patrick G. Condon; First Lieutenant, John Canty; Second
Lieutenant, George Lynch
Company H: Captain, Michael Walsh; First Lieutenant, John Gleason; Second
Lieutenant, Cadwalader Smith
Company I: Captain: James O'Sullivan; First Lieutenant: William Meehan;
Second Lieutenant: Silas C. Hering, Jr.
Company K: Captain: James Branigan; First Lieutenant: John Sullivan; Second
Lieutenant: Henry McConnell

Source: New York State. *Annual Report of the Adjutant-General of the State of New York for the Year 1901: Registers of the Sixty-third, Sixty-fourth, Sixty-fifth, Sixty-sixth, Sixty-seven, and Sixty-eighth Regiments of Infantry*. No. 27. (Albany, New York: J.B. Lyon, 1902), 1-198.

APPENDIX C
POETICAL ADDRESS,
DELIVERED BY
DOCTOR LAWRENCE REYNOLDS,
63^D REGIMENT, N. Y. S. V.,
BEFORE THE IRISH BRIGADE,
IN CAMP, NEAR FALMOUTH, VA., ON
ST.PATRICK'S DAY, MARCH 17, 1863.

Abridged

ADDRESS

Whether he's fated in far lands to roam,
Or pines beneath a stranger's sway at home,
There is, in every year, one sacred day,
When Ireland's son feels full of hope and gay.
Sees sorrow's sad shade from life's scenes depart,
And faded joys flash fresh upon his heart;
While fancy tells the blissful time will come
When fame and freedom yet will bless his home.

Why should we not, on this our hallowed day,
On freedom's soil, feel full of hope and gay?
When every hill around, and every vale
Tells to all time a spirit-thrilling tale,
That here the conflict for the rights of man,
Man's natural rights and dignity began.
That hence were chased by freemen of all lands
The monarch's minions and his hireling bands.
That in this happy country, none shall bleed
For differences of thought, or race or creed;
But all shall dwell in holy unity,
The sons of order, love and liberty.

What has Columbia by just laws become?
Her children's Eden and the exile's home.
'Tis only on her shore, since time began,
Man walked in pride, and felt himself a man;
Looked up to God, and down on such vile things
As flattering courtiers and inflated kings.
Gave proud defiance to each threat'ning foe,
And cordial welcome to each child of woe.

Oh! Shall we ever, ever be again
The peaceful, happy people we were then?
Each by the other's skill and friendship blest,
The enterprising East, the fertile West,
The South by love cemented to the North—
The modern envied Eden of the earth.

Source: Lawrence Reynolds, *Poetical Address, Delivered by Doctor Lawrence Reynolds, 63rd Regiment, N.Y.S.V., Before the Irish Brigade, in Camp, Near Falmouth, Va., On St. Patrick's Day, March 17, 1863. Published by Michael O'Sullivan.* (Albany: Weed, Parsons and Company, Printers, 1863).

APPENDIX D
 COMPARISON OF ENGAGEMENTS
 THE THREE NEW YORK REGIMENTS OF THE IRISH BRIGADE
 THE PENINSULA CAMPAIGN OF 1862

| | K Killed | W Wounded | M Missing | T Total |
|--|----------|-----------|---------------|---------|
| 69th New York State Volunteer Infantry | | | | |
| Battles | K | W | M | T |
| Fair Oaks, Va. | 1 | 12 | 1 | 14 |
| Gainé's Mill, Va. | -- | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Peach Orchard, Va. | 1 | 1 | 4 | 6 |
| White Oak Swamp, Va. | 2 | 15 | 28 | 45 |
| Malvern Hill, Va. | 17 | 110 | 28 | 155 |
| | | | Overall Total | 222 |
| 88th New York State Volunteer Infantry | | | | |
| Battles | K | W | M | T |
| Fair Oaks, Va. | 6 | 19 | -- | 25 |
| Gainé's Mill, Va. | -- | 1 | -- | 1 |
| Savage Station, Va. | 1 | 20 | 55 | 76 |
| White Oak Swamp, Va. | 2 | 10 | 7 | 19 |
| Malvern Hill, Va. | 5 | 28 | -- | 33 |
| | | | Overall Total | 154 |
| 63rd New York State Volunteer Infantry | | | | |
| Battles | K | W | M | T |
| Fair Oaks, Va. | 1 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| On Picket, Va., June 24, 1862 | -- | 2 | -- | 2 |
| On Picket, Va., June 26, 1862 | 1 | 7 | -- | 8 |
| Seven Days' Battles, Va. | 2 | 17 | 51 | 70 |
| | | | Overall Total | 84 |

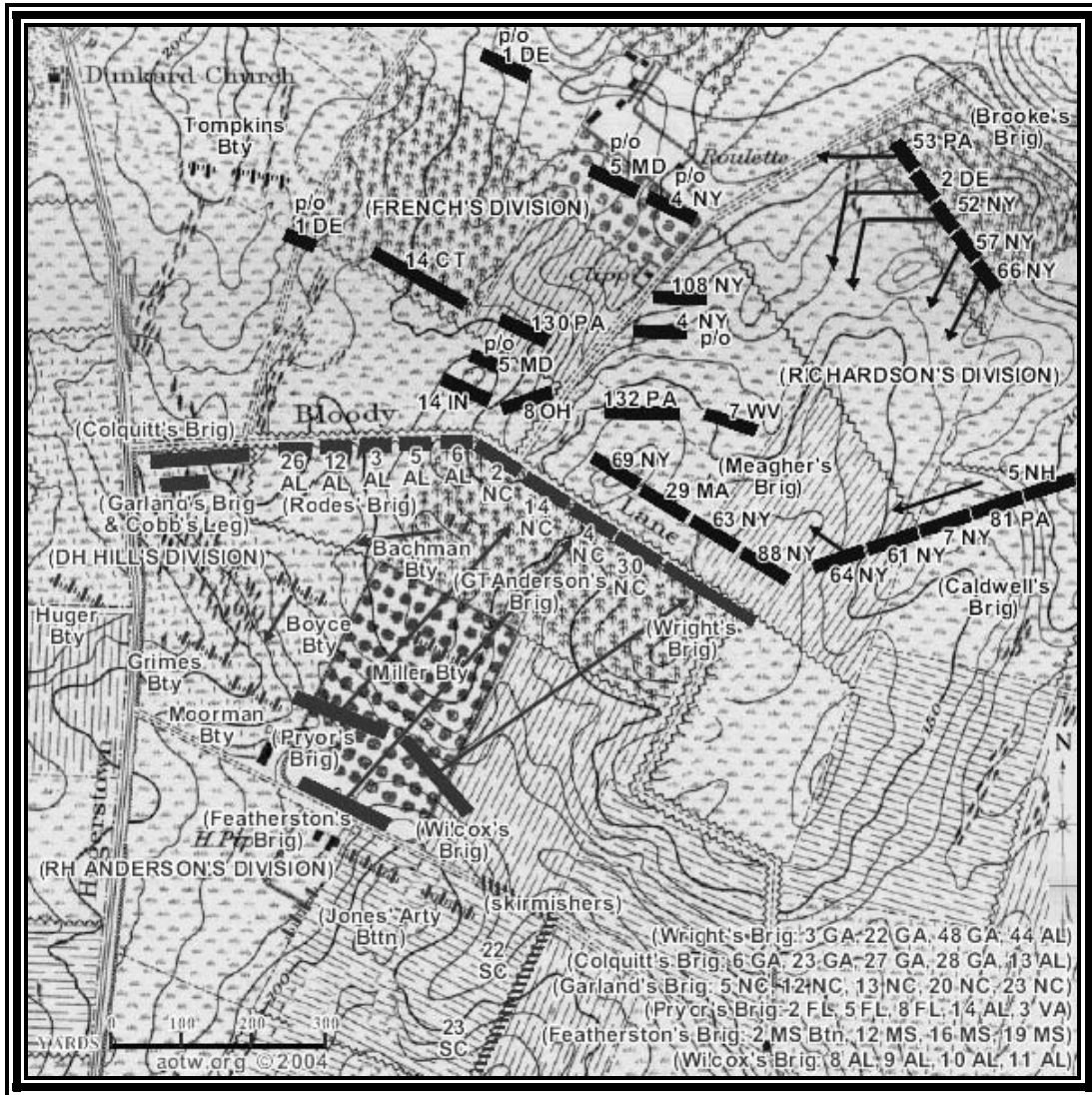
Source: William F. Fox, *Regimental Losses in America's Civil War 1861-1865*, Chapter X, 18th ed. (Dayton: Morningside House, 1985).

APPENDIX E
THE 63RD NEW YORK STATE VOLUNTEER INFANTRY
TEMPERANCE MEDAL
AS STRUCK BY REV. JAMES M. DILLON, C.S.C., CHAPLAIN



Source: Corby, Chapter XLIII. The Latin inscription reads: *This is the only Sign by which we hope to conquer.*

APPENDIX F
 RICHARDSON'S DIVISION ATTACKS THE SUNKEN ROAD
 10:30 O'CLOCK A.M., 17 SEPTEMBER 1862



Source: Antietam on the Web http://aotw.org/maps.php?map_number=7 (accessed autumn 2005).

APPENDIX G
 IRISH BRIGADE CASUALTIES AT THE BATTLE OF ANTIETAM
 SEPTEMBER 17, 1862

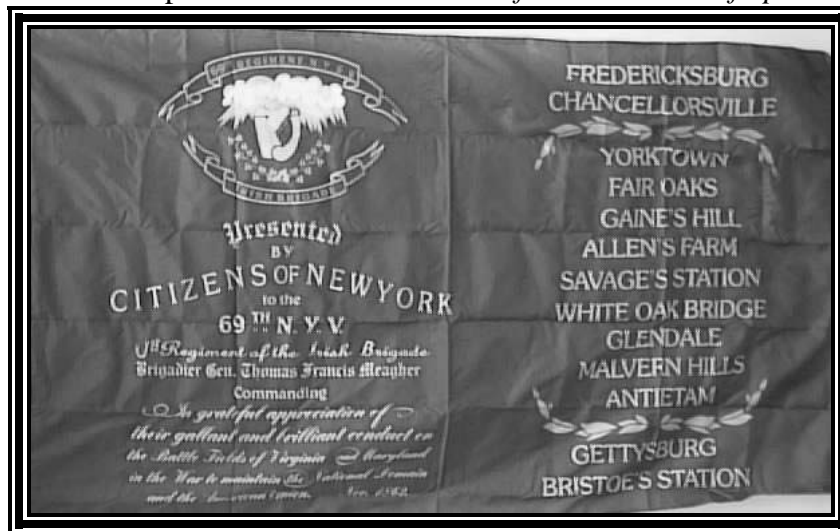
| <i>Second Brigade</i> | Killed | | Wounded | | Captured/Missing | | Combined |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|-----------------|
| | <i>First Division</i> | Officers Enlisted | Officers Enlisted | Officers Enlisted | Officers Enlisted | | |
| <i>Second Corps</i> | | | | | | | |
| Staff | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | 1 |
| 29th MA | - | 7 | - | 29 | - | 3 | 39 |
| 63d NY | 4 | 31 | 5 | 160 | - | 2 | 202 |
| 69th NY | 4 | 40 | 6 | 146 | - | - | 196 |
| 88th NY | 2 | 25 | 2 | 73 | - | - | 102 |
| Total Second Brigade | 10 | 103 | 14 | 408 | - | 5 | 540 |

Source: US Army Center of Military History <http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/topics/ethnic/irish/p192.htm> (accessed autumn 2006). The Staff Officer lost was First Lieutenant James E. Mackey, 63rd New York State Volunteer Infantry.

APPENDIX H
THE 69th NEW YORK STATE VOLUNTEER INFANTRY
REGIMENTAL FLAG



This is the flag of the 69th New York State Volunteer Infantry. All three of the New York regiments received this flag, with their corresponding number displayed, in November of 1861. The Gaelic inscription reads: *Never Retreat from the Clash of Spears.*



The 69th New York State Volunteer Flag created by Tiffany's of New York. This flag was presented by the Citizens of New York to each of the New York regiments in December 1863. They were solely commemorative and never used in battle.

Source: 63rd New York Irish Brigade <http://www.geocities.com/firstvirginia/63rdNY.html> (accessed winter 2007); Tara Hall <http://www.fighting69th.com/flags.htm> (accessed winter 2007).

APPENDIX I
 IRISH BRIGADE CASUALTIES AT THE BATTLE OF FREDERICKSBURG
 DECEMBER 11-15, 1862

| <i>Second Brigade</i> | Killed | | Wounded | | Captured/Missing | | Combined |
|-------------------------------------|--|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| | <i>First Division</i> Officers | Enlisted | Officers | Enlisted | Officers | Enlisted | |
| <i>Second Corps</i> | | | | | | | |
| 28th MA | 3 | 11 | 5 | 119 | - | 20 | 158 |
| 63d NY | 1 | 1 | 6 | 32 | - | 4 | 44 |
| 69th NY | 1 | 9 | 15 | 80 | - | 23 | 128 |
| 88th NY | 4 | 13 | 8 | 89 | - | 13 | 127 |
| 116 th PA | 1 | 6 | 11 | 56 | | 14 | 88 |
| Total Second Brigade | 10 | 40 | 45 | 376 | - | 74 | 545 |

Source: US Army Center of Military History <http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/topics/ethnic/irish/p129.htm> (accessed winter 2007).

APPENDIX J

FOX'S REGIMENTAL LOSSES
Chapter X.—63rd New York Infantry.
Irish Brigade--Hancock's Division--2nd Corps.

- (1) Col. JOHN BURKE.
 (2) Col. HENRY FOWLER.
 (3) Col. RICHARD C. BENTLEY; BVT. BRIG.-GEN.
 (4) Col. JOHN H. GLEASON; BVT. MAJOR-GEN.
 (5) Col. JAMES D. BRADY.

| Losses. | Officers. | En. Men. | Total. |
|---------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Killed or mortally wounded | 15 | 141 | 156 |
| Died of disease, accidents, etc | 1 | 62 | 63 |
| Died in Confederate prisons | | 30 | 30 |
| Totals | 16 | 233 | 249 |

Total enrollment, 1,411; killed, 156; 11.0 per cent.

| K | Killed. M | Missing.(+) | |
|----------|-------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| W | Wounded(*) | T | Total. |

| Battles. | K | W | M | T |
|--------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Fair Oaks, Va | 1 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| On Picket, Va., June 24, 1862 | .. | 2 | .. | 2 |
| On Picket, Va., June 26, 1862 | 1 | 7 | .. | 8 |
| Seven Days' Battle, Va | 2 | 17 | 51 | 70 |
| Antietam, Md | 35 | 165 | 2 | 202 |
| Fredericksburg, Va | 2 | 38 | 4 | 44 |
| Chancellorsville, Va | 1 | 3 | 2 | 6 |
| Gettysburg, Pa. (2 cos.) | 5 | 10 | 8 | 23 |
| Bristoe Station, Va | .. | 2 | 7 | 9 |
| Wilderness, Va | 9 | 78 | 8 | 95 |
| Spotsylvania, Va | 6 | 22 | 3 | 31 |
| North Anna, Va | .. | 4 | .. | 4 |
| Totopotomoy, Va | 2 | 4 | 2 | 8 |
| Cold Harbor, Va | 1 | 23 | 5 | 29 |
| Siege of Petersburg, Va | 11 | 48 | 19 | 78 |
| Deep Bottom, Va., August 14-18, 1864 | .. | 10 | 1 | 11 |
| Ream's Station, Va | .. | 4 | 23 | 27 |
| Sailor's Creek, Va | 1 | 4 | .. | 5 |
| Farmville, Va | .. | 1 | .. | 1 |
| Totals | 77 | 444 | 136 | 657 |

Present, also, at Yorktown; Gaines's Mill; Peach Orchard; Savage Station; White Oak Swamp; Malvern Hill; Mine Run; Pc River; Strawberry Plains; Boydton Road; Hatcher's Run; Appomattox.

Source: William F. Fox, *Regimental Losses in America's Civil War 1861-1865*, Chapter X, 18th ed. (Dayton: Morningside House, 1985), 202.

APPENDIX K
PHOTO GALLERY
THE MEN OF THE 63RD NEW YORK STATE VOLUNTEER INFANTRY



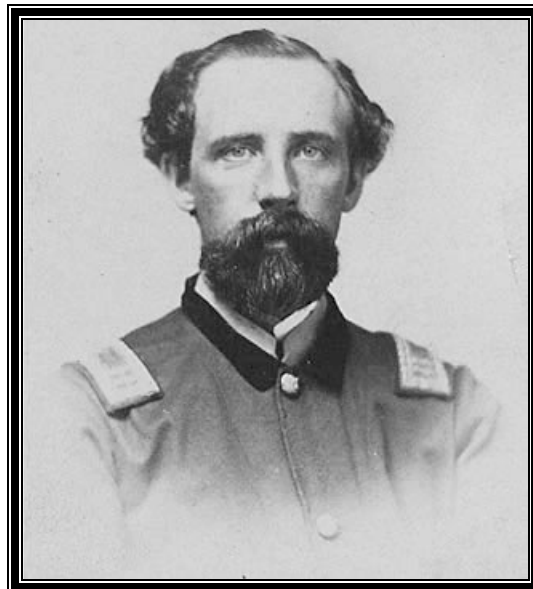
Timothy O'Neil wearing his Grand Army of the Republic veterans uniform in post war years. He joined the 63rd New York as a private on August 30, 1861 when he was only fifteen years old, having given his age as nineteen. He fought at Antietam and was promoted a sergeant shortly before his seventeenth birthday. He was born in Cork, Ireland on November 16, 1845. (Source: Neil Hanlon, great grandson.)



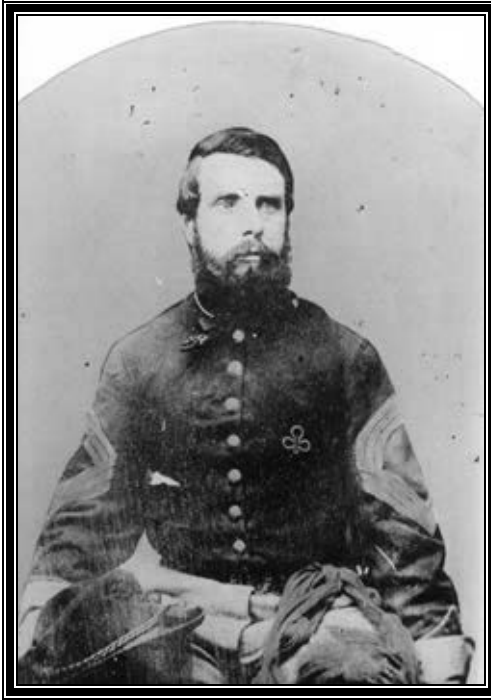
Portrait of Captain William H. Terwilliger, officer of the Federal Army, and officers, Company A, 63rd New York State Volunteer Infantry, vicinity of Washington, D.C. First Lieutenant William J. Daly, Company D, may be seated at center. The man seated to the far left in this picture and the soldier, with sword, standing beside him may be First Lieutenant Patrick Maher, Company F, and his son, Daniel. (Source: American Civil War <http://www.americancivilwar.com/ny63rd.html> (accessed autumn 2006); Mahers in the Early Wars <http://web.mac.com/jlmaher/iWeb/Site%203/9955F793-3021-41CD-ACE9-952CFEDC3492.html> (accessed winter 2007).)



Colonel James Dennis Brady (seated right), last colonel of the 63rd New York State Volunteer Infantry and men of the regiment. (Source: Sons of the Union Veterans Colonel James D. Brady Camp 63 <http://www.geocities.com/suvbrady/camp63.html> (accessed winter 2005).)



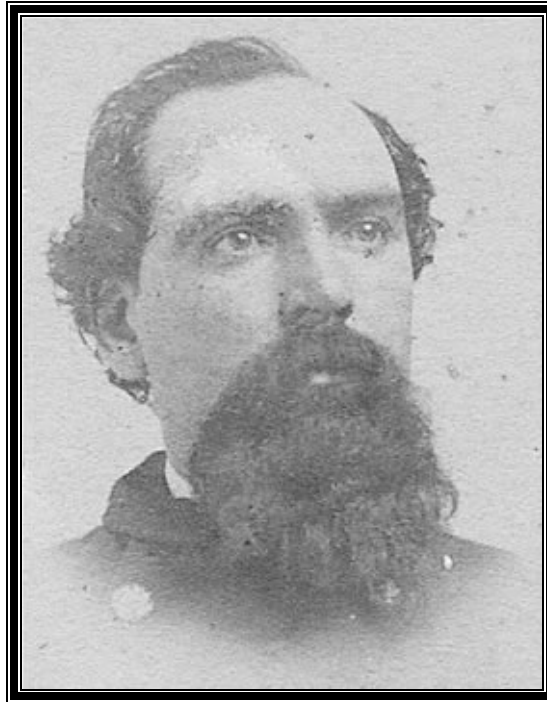
Captain John Dwyer of Company K. Dwyer was the regimental historian of the 63rd New York State Volunteer Infantry. (Source of this and the following photos: New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center, Saratoga Springs, New York <http://www.dmna.state.ny.us/historic/reghist/civil/infantry/63rdInf/63rdInfMain.htm> (accessed winter 2007).)



Sergeant James Collins, Company B. Collins was 29-years-old-upon enlistment. He died August 1, 1864 at Libby Prison, Richmond, Virginia.



First Lieutenant James L. Mackey, Company B. He was wounded at Antietam and died of his wounds on October 13, 1862.



Major Thomas Touhy, Company A of the 63rd New York State Volunteer Infantry. He was wounded at the Battle of The Wilderness and died of his wounds on May 30, 1865.



Corporal James Scott, Company E (standing) of the 63rd New York State Volunteer Infantry and First Lieutenant Charles Lewis of the 36th Infantry.

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