

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Ethnic units were a prominent feature of American Civil War armies on both sides. Much history and myth surrounds, in particular, the role of the Irish in the war. They were politically opposed to President Lincoln and the Republican Party, they were prejudiced against African-Americans, and Anglo-Americans discriminated against them. The Civil War did not completely resolve these issues. However, understanding the Irish experience in the war is essential to understanding the American experience of the war.

Colonel James A. Mulligan commanded the 23rd Illinois Infantry Regiment, also known as the Chicago Irish Brigade, during the Civil War. Although he was not born in Ireland, Mulligan was an ardent supporter of the country and its people. He also tried to improve the poor image Americans had of Irish immigrants. When the Civil War began, Mulligan saw an opportunity for the Irish to gain greater acceptance in American society. Consequently, he and other prominent

Irish-Americans in Chicago organized an all-Irish regiment. The men of the regiment elected Mulligan as their colonel and commanding officer.

Colonel Mulligan and his Irish Brigade distinguished themselves wherever they served, from Missouri to West Virginia, during the war. His experience with them alone provides valuable insight to the Irish role in the war. However, Mulligan was Irish-American and he was raised in an affluent home. His birth in this country and higher social standing gave him a perspective that grew out of experiences with both cultures. The following study of the life of Colonel Mulligan examines the unique perspective he had of the Irish and American experience in the Civil War.

Emporia State University

LAY ME DOWN AND SAVE THE FLAG:

THE LIFE OF COLONEL JAMES A. MULLIGAN

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO:

the Department of Social Sciences

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

Master of Arts

BY

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CHS	Chicago Historical Society
ISHS	Illinois State Historical Society
<u>O.R.</u>	<u>The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies</u>

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps one of the unique aspects of the American Civil War was the diversity of its combatants. Both the Union and Confederate armies enlisted men not only from all the states and territories, including African slaves and American Indians, but also many men who were foreign born. Immigrants from around the world, from as close as Mexico and Canada to as far as Russia and Eastern Europe, were found fighting for either side.

Foreign born volunteers in the North, however, greatly exceeded those in the South.¹ Nearly one-fourth of the two and a half million enlistments into the Union Army during the Civil War were natives of another country.² In many instances, immigrants and the sons of immigrants would join the army *en masse* forming regiments and brigades consisting entirely of troops with the same ethnicity. While the vast majority of soldiers were natives of the United States, the Union Army was viewed as an army of

¹ Ella Lonn, Foreigners in the Union Army and Navy (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 1.

² Ibid, 581.

"foreigners" by many people throughout the country, especially southerners. The Confederate Army, however, had very little ethnic diversity, with foreign born soldiers numbering only in the tens of thousands.³

The reasons for more northern than southern immigrant volunteers are simple. First, there were close to four million foreign born persons in the northern and border states at the start of the Civil War.⁴ They represented a little over one fifth of the total population of northern states.⁵ Since most of these immigrants were also males of military age,⁶ any army which recruited from the North would certainly have a sizeable number of foreign born volunteers. Second, the U.S. Army, before the Civil War, consisted largely of immigrants. Most Americans scorned military service except as officers and the army was forced to find recruits elsewhere in the populace. Once hostilities began, foreign born soldiers, unlike many of their officers, continued in service to the United States. Third, and

³ However, the exact number of foreign born soldiers in the Confederate Army is not known. Bell I. Wiley, The Life of Johnny Reb: The Common Soldier of the Confederacy (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1943), 324.

⁴ Lonn, Foreigners in the Union Army and Navy, 1.

⁵ Ibid, 582.

⁶ Ibid, 573.

finally, immigrants believed that by fighting for their new country they would gain full acceptance into American society. Most Americans at this time were staunch nativists, who at best mistrusted the vast numbers of immigrants that entered the country each year. By volunteering in large numbers, each ethnic group hoped to overcome its stereotype through a massive show of loyalty and bravery. Almost 500,000 foreign born volunteers served in the Union Army during the Civil War.⁷

The majority of antebellum immigrants to this country were English, German, or Irish. From 1850 to 1860, over one half of the 2,600,000 new immigrants to the United States came from German states or Ireland.⁸ In the Union Army, their proportion jumped to over two-thirds of the foreign born volunteers. The Germans were the most numerous, with over 200,000 serving in the blue uniform of the Union Army. Irish volunteers, on the other hand, numbered a little over 144,000 despite their being the most numerous immigrants to this country when the war began. The reasons for this disparity were mainly due to changes in immigration and differences in views. From 1850 to 1860, German immigration

⁷ Lonn, Foreigners in the Union Army and Navy, 2.

⁸ Marcus Lee Hansen, The Atlantic Migration, 1607-1860: A History of the Continuing Settlement of the United States (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1940), 280.

exceeded that of the Irish, who up to that point had been the leader. Again, men of military age are usually the first to move to a new country hoping to find a job and a place to live so they can send for the families after getting established. Many Germans also were staunch Republicans who fought for their party as much as their new country. The Irish, on the other hand, were mostly Democrats who had to choose between staying loyal and supporting their political enemies or joining their political allies in rebellion. For the most part, the Irish remained loyal to the Union. However, their lower number of enlistments in the army reveals that many of them did not support the Union, even if they did not go to the other side.

The Irish had reasons not to support the Union. Since their first arrival in large numbers early in the eighteenth century, they had been treated like the garbage of Europe. "Anglo-Americans saw Irish Catholics as a social plague destroying their cities, filling their jails, hospitals and asylums, and overburdening their limited social welfare system."⁹ Earlier immigrants and even, to a certain extent, the large numbers of new Germans in this

⁹ Lawrence J. McCaffrey, Textures of Irish America (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992), 2.

country had accustomed Americans to ethnic groups who shared similar beliefs and seemed to assimilate into society without much effort. Americans, however, were shocked by the Irish immigrant. Their abject poverty, lack of education, and few work skills made them inordinately dependent upon society for relief, and upon the factories and mills of a growing industrial America for work. In this, the Irish violated the American ideal of the independent, yeoman farmer. According to this ideal, Americans did not need to live in the city. They did not need to be a wage laborer or to be dependent upon charity. Americans believed the Irish to be incapable of fitting into American society. They were viewed as cultural inferiors whose only value was as manual laborers in jobs too dangerous or too menial for "Americans."

Another cause for Irish reluctance in supporting the Union was religion. The Irish who immigrated to the United States were overwhelmingly Roman Catholic. Most Americans, however, were Protestant, as were most German immigrants at that time. They maintained the hostile feelings toward the Catholic Church that many European Protestants held. The dogmas, liturgies, and hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church had no place in an "enlightened" world and especially not in the land of the free. Protestant

Americans believed the Irish to be poor and vulgar precisely because they were held in ignorance by the Church. They even saw in the large number of immigrants a sort of invasion by Rome to subjugate Americans to papal authority. Unfortunately, such irrational sentiment was present in much of America and led to a growth in nativism.¹⁰ Many Americans adopted the extreme opinion that America was only for Americans and that there was no place here for Catholics.

The powerful Democratic politics of the Irish also caused friction between them and many Americans. The "Boss" system of many city governments infuriated most northern Republicans. Americans who believed political activity was an individual responsibility were frightened by the party politics of the Irish. Furthermore, "the popular belief that they (the Irish) voted as a bloc for whomever the 'boss' favored convinced many Americans by the mid-1850s that the Irish threatened democracy, the free enterprise system, and the nation itself."¹¹ The result was a renewed growth in nativist sentiment. Americans believed they had to stop the influx of foreigners and limit the powers of

¹⁰ McCaffrey, Textures of Irish America, 2.

¹¹ Joseph P. O'Grady, How the Irish Became Americans (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1973), 40.

those already here. A few demanded radical action such as violence and threats to intimidate the Irish voter. Most Americans, however, limited their nativism to excluding Irish from society and supporting limitations on immigration and voting. The Irish, who had come to America to better their status in life, found they were not welcome and that they could not depend upon most Americans to help them succeed.

The final reason for Irish uncertainty in their support of the Union was the changing goal of the war. Until the Emancipation Proclamation, President Lincoln's primary goal for the war was to restore the union. The Irish, as did most people in the north, understood the damaging effect a divided country could have on its people; so, they eagerly volunteered to prevent this sort of chaos from taking control of their new country. This goal, however, changed to the abolition of slavery with the Emancipation Proclamation. Lincoln needed a crusade in order to keep the nation focused on continuing the fight. Two years of war had not brought either side close to victory and northerners were growing demoralized by their losses. Northerners even began to question the rightness of their goal: How could the South be wrong when they fight so hard and have won so many battles? The Irish, however, did

not want the war to become a matter of freeing the slaves. Abolition, in their minds, would destroy decades of their work towards gaining acceptance in American society.

They had no love for the Negro, nor did America's blacks have any love for them. Many Americans considered Negroes of more value than 'paddies,' and the immigrants discovered this as soon as they landed, often from the attitude of the Negroes themselves. Much of this antagonism existed because the Irish could find work only at the lowest economic level and often had to do what was considered too dangerous for the more valuable Negro.¹²

Freed slaves were a potential threat to the economic security of the Irish and their progress towards naturalization. They believed the wage labor market would be flooded with more workers than jobs, driving down earnings and taking jobs away from new immigrants.

The Irish categorized free African-Americans as cheap and scab labor competition. They feared that the end of slavery would increase the number of unskilled African-American job seekers, further delaying Irish achievement of economic security.¹³

The Irish, in line with the Catholic Church's view on abolition, had no desire to become involved in the moral dilemma of having to use violence(war) in order to bring about a good end. They believed that the attempt to abolish

¹² O'Grady, How the Irish Became Americans, 43.

¹³ McCaffrey, Textures of Irish America, 22.

slavery would create this dilemma. The seemingly simple question of the expansion of slavery into the new territories had created a bloody border war between Kansas and Missouri, and had become a major cause of the Civil War. The Irish believed, as the Catholic Church preached, that violence against your fellow men violated the peaceful teachings of Christ.¹⁴

Why, then, did large numbers of Irish and Irish-Americans eagerly volunteer to serve the Union and continually sacrifice themselves on the war's battlefields? Why did they support a society which treated them like second class citizens and which considered them of less value than the African slave? Why did these Catholics become defenders of a critical and untrusting, mostly Protestant nation? Why did this largely Democratic group choose to side with their Republican opponents? Why did they fight against a South which claimed to be fighting for the same political independence as Irish nationals? Why did they sacrifice their lives for a cause that came to embrace the abolition of slavery and which they believed would cause the loss of Irish jobs to freed slaves?

¹⁴ John Francis Maguire, The Irish in America, The American Immigration Collection (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1969), 459.

The reasons for the Irish serving in the Union Army were not much different from those for other volunteers from the North. In fact, "most ethnic recruits displayed the motivations and behavior of their non-ethnic counterparts."¹⁵ They believed firmly in the Union. To allow it to dissolve would be to allow the nation itself to crumble and fall. They believed that southerners were the aggressors, who had attacked the United States, and needed to be driven off. The Irish, however, had other motivations for volunteering.

First, as the largest group in the Democratic party in the North, Irish-Americans were viewed with suspicion after the start of the war. They were thought to have held sympathy for the South because of their opposition to Lincoln and his policies. Northern Democrats had also supported Lincoln's primary presidential opponent Stephen Douglas. So, in order to demonstrate their loyalty when the war began, Irish-Americans sought appointments in the Army.¹⁶ They also encouraged Irish immigrants, whom they sponsored and represented, to enlist with pleas to honor the

¹⁵ William L. Burton, "Ethnic Regiments in the Civil War: The Illinois Experience," Selected Papers in Illinois History, 1980 (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Society, 1982), 36.

¹⁶ H.G. McPike to Illinois Governor Richard Yates, 4 September 1861, Yates Family Papers, Illinois State Historical Society, Springfield.

old country by serving the new. If the Irish-American politician helped his own career, then so much the better.

The second reason Irish-Americans chose to fight was to overcome the tremendous prejudice of Americans. By their service, they believed they could change the image of the Irish as unproductive, dirty, and antisocial. They also wanted to show that they were not incapable of becoming good Americans. "By facing the Confederate army in battle, and doing their duty bravely, these Irish would also face down the old enemies, the nativists, and relieve any doubt that they deserved to be called Americans."¹⁷

The third reason to fight for the Union was that the war offered an excellent opportunity for Irish nationals to organize and to train to liberate their own country. Although they desired a place in American society, "the Irish could never separate their American experience from their attitudes toward England and Ireland."¹⁸ Thus, if what they did in America could benefit their homeland, they would do it. The war may have even provided the chance for a direct confrontation between England and the United States

¹⁷ Ann Kathleen Bradley, History of the Irish in America (New York: Chartwell Books Inc., 1986), 61.

¹⁸ Burton, "Ethnic Regiments in the Civil War," 39.

if England had chosen to side with the Confederacy. Such a confrontation could not but help Irish independence.¹⁹

Unlike other ethnic groups who had to form their own units because of language problems or race, Irish-Americans and Irish immigrants had little trouble joining most units. However, many of them chose to form their own companies, regiments, and brigades, which distinguished them from the rest of the army. Almost every state in the North had an Irish unit of one size or another and of every type from infantry to supply. Though they looked much like the rest of the Union Army, the Irish always stood out on the battlefield as they fought beneath their bright green flags. Why, then, did the Irish form their own units risking not only their lives but also the status of the Irish in American society?

First, and probably foremost, the Irish wanted to be with others with whom they shared a common outlook, just as they had done in ethnic enclaves in urban areas.²⁰ They were among friends and family who knew them and what they needed. They were led by prominent Irish-Americans who were confident of their men and committed to their welfare, much as they had been when they were civilians. Simply, a

¹⁹ Bradley, *Ibid*, 60.

²⁰ Maguire, The Irish in America, 551.

soldier in an Irish regiment was a part of a close knit group that was more like a family than a military unit. The homelike atmosphere of the unit provided them with a sanctuary from the hardships of an army at war.

The second reason the Irish chose to form their own units was because of their history. Ireland's past is filled with many battles and wars, especially against enemies who had enslaved them. As a result, the Irish developed a reputation as a nation of warriors and fighters. No one in the world was more aware or proud of this reputation than the Irish themselves. They could recount every victory and every defeat with equal pride or bitterness. In pre-Civil War America, this martial spirit manifested itself in the rise of Irish militia, fire, and police companies that celebrated their heroic past. During the war, Irish-Americans leaders continued to use this theme of the warrior tradition to rally volunteers to the green battle flags of their homeland in defense of their new home.

Third, a few volunteers joined these units because they wanted to train for a war against Great Britain. Irish nationals, many of whom were officers in the Union Army, actively recruited and raised money in these units for the Irish independence movement. However, they could only get a few volunteers despite raising a large amount of money for

an army. An invasion of Canada was organized by former soldiers after the war in the hope that they could draw Great Britain and America into a war. Unfortunately for both Irish and American pride, this ragtag force was quickly overwhelmed by the Canadians and forced to return to the States.²¹ Few Irish-Americans, it seems, were interested in using their war experience to fight for Irish independence, although they continued to send financial support.

The fourth and final reason the Irish and Irish-Americans formed their own fighting units was so they could be distinguished from the rest of the army and thus be recognized for their achievements. The individual soldier could not influence public opinion. His actions, for the most part, were those of an individual. However, when the Irish Brigade made its incredibly brave but futile charges up Maryes Heights at Fredericksburg, all the Irish, whether they were there or not and serving in the army or not, became heroes. "The war gave them the opportunity to earn a new reputation and to take another step toward becoming Americans."²² Irish units gained for themselves and all Irish-Americans a reputation of toughness and bravery, a new

²¹ Maurice Matloff, ed., American Military History, Volume I: 1775-1902 (Coushohocken, Pa.: Combined Books, Inc., 1996), 301.

²² O'Grady, How the Irish Became Americans, 46.

image that would not have been possible without the formation of these distinctive units.

Ethnicity was as much a motivator for Irish-American volunteers as their loyalty to the Union. "For if they fought as American citizens; they also fought as Irish exiles."²³ Despite many reasons for not fighting, Irish-Americans and Irish immigrants were motivated by a pride in their heritage to support their new home in its time of need. They also wanted to forge a new image in American society by proving that they were equal to the task of being fully American. Until the Civil War, the Irish in America had to repress their ethnicity to do this. The war provided the opportunity for the Irish in America to become Americans without sacrificing their ethnicity to do so.

Understanding the relationship between Irish ethnicity and Irish participation in the Civil War is essential to understanding the American experience of the war. The Irish in America represented a significant, yet ideologically separate, segment of northern society. Irish-Americans were overwhelmingly Democratic and yet stayed loyal to the Union. They supported Stephen Douglas for president but fought for Abraham Lincoln. They opposed abolition but continued to fight for the North even after the Emancipation

²³ Maguire, The Irish in America, 552.

Proclamation. In fact, the Irish seemed to oppose everything about the war. Pride in their ethnicity seems to have been the only motivation for them to fight.

How, then, did Irish ethnicity effect their participation in the Civil War? The following study of the life of Colonel James A. Mulligan, a first generation Irish-American and the commander of the 23rd Illinois Infantry Regiment, the Chicago Irish Brigade, may provide an answer. He was both Irish and American at a time when most people were one or the other. As a result, he had developed a perspective of society that reflected the values and beliefs of both cultures. Colonel Mulligan's own experience in the war and his unique perspective of society provide the contrast necessary with which to examine the influence of ethnicity upon Irish participation in the war.

CHAPTER 1

MULLIGAN'S BIRTH AND CHICAGO

During the first half of the 19th century, millions of Irish came to America to escape English rule and the harsh penal codes which restricted their religious, political, and economic freedoms. These immigrants, for the most part, arrived destitute and with no skills other than their manual labor. Lacking the funds to move inland, Irish immigrants were forced to settle in the east coast cities where they landed, adding to the already increasing problems of an industrialized urban society.

Although the Irish found the religious and political freedoms they sought, economic opportunity for their unskilled labor was not promising. Industry in America was just beginning to grow and its labor needs were quickly filled from a much larger supply of native-born workers. Factories and mills could afford to turn away workers they did not want. Farming required money the Irish immigrant did not have. Those who could afford to buy a farm and equip it discovered that "Irish peasants were among the most inefficient farmers and were not equipped for life in rural

America."¹ After spending many years in crowded cities, most Irish immigrants who managed to move west discovered they did not know how to farm. The only possibility for work left to the Irish immigrant was manual labor. More specifically, the Irish literally had to dig themselves out of the debt under which their trip to the United States had placed them. Risking their lives on the rapidly expanding railroads and canals was the only way most Irish could get out of the slums of eastern cities.

The Erie Canal and its branches, of all the engineering projects in American history, are perhaps the most closely connected with the Irish immigrant in this country. "Without Irish labor these canals could not have been built at this time," and without the canals and railroads, the thousands of Irish who came to the United States would have continued to wallow in the slums of big cities.² Irish shanty towns grew all along the Erie Canal in cities like Utica, Rochester, and Buffalo. The success of these boomtowns, in turn, attracted even more workers to the interior as other regions of the country clamored for their own canals. The three thousand Irish working on the

¹ McCaffrey, The Irish Diaspora in America (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 63.

² Alexander C. Flick, ed., History of the State of New York (Long Island: Ira J. Freeman, Inc., 1962), 7:25.

Erie Canal in 1818 grew to over five thousand laboring on four major canal projects in 1826.³ Even before the completion of the Erie in late October of 1825, the "Great Canal Law," passed the previous April, authorized surveys for seventeen new canals.

The Irish who came to these canal cities were strong and willing workers despite low wages and harsh living conditions. Often, their "new" lives were not much better than what they had experienced in the city slums. John Hughes, Catholic Archbishop of New York, once remarked that the Irish were "the poorest and most wretched population that can be found in the world."⁴ However, the Irish condition in America, Hughes also wrote, "was not more deplorable, no more squalid than the Irish hovels from which many of them had been 'exterminated.'"⁵ Life in the United States, even in the city slums, was not any worse than it was in Ireland. The Irish, in fact, were used to the poverty and hardship which was they had also experienced in their homeland. They did not believe poverty and hardship would simply end by immigrating to America or even in

³ McCaffrey, The Irish Diaspora, 64.

⁴ Jay P. Dolan, The Immigrant Church: New York's Irish and German Catholics, 1815-1865 (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1975), 33.

⁵ Ibid, 37.

migrating west with the canals and railroads. The Irish wanted, instead, only the chance to decide for themselves what status or position they would hold in life. In the United States they found the opportunity to improve their condition.

One of the main canal cities in New York that attracted sizeable Irish settlement was Utica. The Erie Canal brought the first wave of Irish to Utica in the 1810's and 20's. From 1833 to 1837, another canal project, the Chenango, from Utica to Binghamton, attracted another wave of Irish immigrants. Many of these new workers did not bring their families, coming alone instead to earn the money necessary to send for them. Family reunions, however, must have taken quite some time, as canal laborers earned as little as 50 cents a day, averaging from \$8 to \$12 per month.⁶ In addition, "life on the canals and railroads was tough and unhealthy, encouraging the Irishman to drink his salary and troubles away."⁷ The Irish laborer would sometimes just abandon his family altogether and continue to move west with his work.

⁶ Ronald E. Shaw, Erie Water West: A History of the Erie Canal, 1792-1854 (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1966), 91.

⁷ McCaffrey, The Irish Diaspora in America, 64.

Utica, however, still attracted many Irish families, from New York and other eastern seaboard cities, with the hopes of work and better living conditions. A few of these early arrivals, like businessman James Devlin and members of the Devereux family, even rose to successful positions in the city. In turn, their influence upon banking and business in Utica encouraged further Irish settlement.⁸ In fact, by 1820 there were enough Irish to warrant the building of a frame church-a considerable investment for a poor community.

Among the Irish immigrants who came to Utica in the 1820's were James and Elizabeth Mulligan. Based on the scant information available, they seem to have differed little from the mass of Irish who came to the United States at that time. James, however, was probably one of the few recent immigrants fortunate enough to find work on the canals. Labor on the Erie canal was often recruited locally when it neared its completion, and it is likely he had previous experience on canals in Ireland. There were few other work choices for men who were generally denied the opportunity to succeed in both their old and new homes. Just to obtain the bare necessities of life like food, shelter, and clothing, Irish men like James had to perform

⁸ Flick, History of the State of New York, 7:31.

long hours of backbreaking work. Actually, men like James were lucky if the few pennies they earned even paid for basic needs.

Elizabeth, on the other hand, like many young Irish women in America at this time, probably had an easier time finding steady employment. The growth of industry had brought an increased demand for women laborers as well as domestic servants. Textile mills desired immigrant women because they would work hard for little pay. Also, the work was not as physically demanding as other unskilled labor, so a woman could be as productive as a man but for less money. Irish women, however, were often sought as servants for elite and middle-class families. Typically the product of a large family, where she may have had responsibility for some or all of the household duties, a young Irish woman was well suited for the role of domestic servant. She also had the added advantage of being able to speak the language. Thus, as the men worked steadily westward on the canals and railroads, their female counterparts soon followed, filling out the textile mills and becoming the servant girls in America's homes.⁹

Whatever job Elizabeth Mulligan may have had, however, came to an abrupt end when she became pregnant late in 1829.

⁹ O'Grady, How the Irish Became Americans, 27.

Although working class women could expect to work until the baby was born, they most certainly experienced difficulty in keeping up with their duties. A pregnancy potentially threatened their financial status. Women were often dismissed from jobs because no employer was willing to keep, let alone continue to pay, someone who could not work for even a week. There was also no guarantee that, if a woman lost her job because of a pregnancy, she would get her job back once the child was born. Needless to say, life had suddenly become harder for the Mulligan family.

James Mulligan, the only son of James and Elizabeth Nixon Mulligan, was born on June 25, 1830 in Utica, New York.¹⁰ Even at birth his Irish heritage was quite evident with his pale skin, red hair, and dark eyes. His later experiences as adventurer and soldier would also suggest that James had a strong body as well. Though they both would not survive to see their child grow to prominence as both an Irishman and American, the pride the Mulligans must have felt at the birth of such a fine boy surely provided hope that he would someday be a credit to his heritage.

Although James was apparently a healthy child, the Mulligans had him baptized at St. John's Catholic Church in

¹⁰ Sister Mary Eleanor Nash, "Colonel James A. Mulligan, Chicago's Hero of the Civil War" (M.A. Thesis, Saint Louis University, 1929), 1.

Utica only three days after he was born.¹¹ The death of an infant was common in those days and Catholics had their children christened into the church as soon as possible. It provided a sense of comfort to these Irish parents, whose only hope in this world was eternal life in the next, to know that their child was also guaranteed the same salvation.

The Mulligan family also faced, during these first few years in New York, other frightening prospects which not only tested their faith but also their determination to become successful Americans. Epidemics of various kinds rampaged throughout the country even in the cities of the east. Entire regions often became stricken by disease, as unwitting victims carried it from one town to the next. In Utica, for example, a cholera epidemic broke out in August of 1832 after it had been carried there by some Canadian boatmen on the Erie Canal.¹² It could have been through sheer force of courage or desperation that the Mulligans resisted the panic and mass exodus which ensued after the outbreak.

¹¹ Photocopy of baptismal record for James A. Mulligan from the 1830 baptismal record for St. John's Catholic Church on file at St. John's Catholic Church in Utica, New York.

¹² Shaw, Erie Water West, 224.

Another hardship the Mulligans faced during James's early life was the growth of anti-immigrant sentiment, or nativism. Many Americans blamed the social problems of this country upon the rapidly growing cities and an increasing immigrant population. Nativists believed, writes James Hennesey, that "the shaping of a cosmopolitan society (urbanization and industrialization) threatened the values of village-green America."¹³

Beginning in the 1820's, nativism grew to a public outcry for action against anything foreign. The most prominent targets for these attacks were the Irish who were the most numerous immigrants at this time. The predominate reason, however, for anti-Irish sentiment was because they were Catholic. Roman Catholicism was viewed by a predominately Protestant America as a great threat to individual liberty. The Reverend Horace Bushnell echoed, and perhaps encouraged, this anti-Catholic sentiment when he wrote in 1847: "Our first danger is barbarism (the influx of foreigners). Romanism next."¹⁴ New York, especially in the west along the Erie Canal, was filled with this anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic sentiment. Americans pushed for

¹³ James Hennesey, American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 118.

¹⁴ Ibid, 119.

harsher restrictions on immigration and immigrant labor. They launched vicious campaigns in pamphlets and public lectures against the church and its clergy. In fact, this region was so remarkable for its religious fervor and attacks on Catholicism, resulting from a huge evangelical revival during this period, that it has been called the "Burned-over District."

Historian Whitney R. Cross, however, found in his research of this region that the Erie Canal itself, and not the Irish immigrant, was the primary influence upon this public outcry against immigrants and the church.¹⁵ The canal had brought a wave of New Englanders who, like the immigrants, were looking for work. Their presence increased awareness of and sensitivity to religious issues. New York, in general, had not been a state known for nativist sentiment, and it had been "spared the disgraceful anti-Catholic riots which had took place in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts."¹⁶ These new workers, however, were from the more violently anti-Catholic regions of New England and they brought their hatred of Catholics to New York.

¹⁵ Shaw, Erie Water West, 219.

¹⁶ David M. Ellis and others, eds., A History of New York State (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 286.

Another change created by the canal which influenced the growth of anti-Catholicism was a rise in the social activism of women. The Erie Canal had brought more trade goods westward freeing many women from the chore of making their own household products. They used this additional time to increase their involvement with social reform and religious activities. A wave of revival created by the Great Awakening had renewed interest in religion and the morality of society. Unfortunately, the Irish in America were often on the opposing side or were the targets of these women crusaders. Much of Irish culture, such as drinking and a fervent devotion to Catholicism, was viewed by Protestant Americans as immoral and the result of an unreformed soul. They believed that if the Irish immigrant could not be turned from his "hedonism" by education and reform he should be rejected by American society. Thus, when these women activists discovered they could not "reform" the Irish, they attacked them and the church.¹⁷

Although too young to have witnessed the growth of nativism in New York, James Mulligan would most certainly have been raised with the understanding that to be Irish and Catholic in America was to be viewed with suspicion and hostility by the rest of American society. However, as he

¹⁷ Shaw, Erie Water West, 219-220.

grew to adulthood and witnessed attacks against his heritage and culture, Mulligan realized that his birth in the United States placed him in awkward yet advantageous position. On the one hand, he was able to personally enjoy the benefits of full citizenship from which his parents and other Irish immigrants like them were excluded. On the other hand, his status as a native-born American also provided the opportunity for him to improve the standing of his Irish heritage in American society. All he had to do was to show Americans that the Irish were interested in becoming citizens and a valued part of society.

Mulligan began his journey towards this goal when his family moved to Chicago in 1836. Although it was always on their minds, prejudice did not force his family to leave New York state but rather a lack of work. The last of the great canal projects in New York were near completion and the Mulligans, along with thousands of other builders along the canals, faced unemployment. Also, a general economic decline throughout the United States threatened any possibility for continued work in the region where the demand for labor was low and the supply of workers was high. Thus, the Mulligans decided to move west in the hopes that the growing cities of the Midwest would offer a better

opportunity for work and perhaps a chance to finally settle down.

Chicago was only a town of little over 3,500 inhabitants in 1836. However, it was also one of the fastest growing cities in the Midwest, quickly becoming a center for commerce in the region. Chicago's location was ideal for the development of shipping and freight centers, and both the ambitious and the desperate held great hopes for its success. The canal project linking Lake Michigan with the Des Plaines River alone created a land boom between 1835 and 1837 that saw the price of land around the city soar to as high as \$11,000 per acre.¹⁸ The demand for labor also brought a rush of unskilled workers, like the Mulligans, looking for better jobs and a home to settle.

Soon after their arrival in Chicago, however, James Mulligan, senior died. How he died is not recorded, but what security he provided was shattered and James and his mother were suddenly left without any significant means of support. Usually such a tragedy also spelled disaster for a widow with a young child, but Elizabeth Mulligan soon remarried. Her second husband was a prosperous Irish-American, Michael Lantry. Lantry had a farm in Grosse

¹⁸ Howard B. Furer, Chicago: A Chronological History of Chicago, 1784-1970, American Cities Chronology Series (Dobbs Ferry: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1974), 3-4.

Point, part of what is now Evanston, Illinois, and a successful teaming (wagon transport) business in Chicago. Where James and his mother had faced poverty and hardship, even while his father was alive, Lantry's wealth and American birth now offered them comfort and, especially for James, greater opportunity. James would be educated, trained in a skill or profession, and become a leader of his community.

James's climb to success began with a post-secondary education at St. Mary's on the Lake. Other more prestigious institutions could have provided him with a slightly better education but they were mostly controlled by Protestants and were often unabashedly anti-Catholic. Catholic schools were more familiar and supportive to students of the same faith, while the training was similar to that of other American schools.¹⁹ James was thus instructed in all the traditional subjects. History and literature became favorites in which he would never lose interest. In fact, many of his personal writings from college to his death are filled with critiques of books and plays, and references to both Irish and American histories.

The most lasting influence of James's education, however, did not come from what he learned but from the

¹⁹ Hennesey, American Catholics, 107.

opportunity to apply himself to his fullest potential. School taught him to read and write, but his character was molded by the faculty's encouragement to excel. James's love of reading and gift for oratory especially flourished under instruction at Catholic school. An account by one of his daughters, J.C. Carroll, reveals how much this devotion to books affected James's life:

Reading was his great delight and he recounts the difficulty he experienced in deciding between the relative value of a new book to wile away the long winter evenings or a visit to the first circus which visited Chicago...The book won for the circus meant an hour or two in wonderland while the book could be read and reread.²⁰

Of course, this devotion to reading did not solely come from his Catholic education, but school provided a supportive atmosphere in which he could develop the values taught at home. W.J. Onahan, one of Mulligan's friends, noted that the education he received and the influence of a wise mother "gave early token of future excellence-a character pure, high-minded, chivalrous, loyal to faith, and hence loyal to every duty of life."²¹ James would do

²⁰ Memo by J.C. Carroll, unknown date, Box 1 (Letters), James A. Mulligan Papers, Chicago Historical Society, Chicago.

²¹ Nash, "Colonel James A. Mulligan," 2.

nothing to discredit these lessons learned both at home and in the classroom.

James completed his education in 1850 with the distinction of being the first graduate of St. Mary's on the Lake in Chicago.²² He then took up the study of law at the office of Hugh T. Dickey, where his talent for oration and desire for public service seemed to be best served. His career choice was additionally dictated by the growth of the railroad, which threatened any future he might have had with his stepfather's teaming business. With a large surge of Irish immigrants to Chicago because of the potato famine, James also saw an opportunity to become involved in politics.

Political power was the only means by which Irish immigrants could protect themselves against the constant inequities they faced in society. As their numbers increased every year, the Irish became a significant influence upon government, particularly in the cities of the northeastern seaboard. Many Irish political leaders, however, were not born in Ireland. They were first or second generation Americans, like James and his stepfather. Irish-Americans had greater opportunity than recent

²² George B. Holderith, "Colonel James A. Mulligan and the Chicago Irish Brigade in the Civil War" (M.A. Thesis, Notre Dame University, 1932), 2.

immigrants and were viewed with less hostility by American society. New immigrants who knew little of this country and its people, trusted Irish-Americans to protect and support them. The Irish-American, at the same time, would also advance his own position in American society, by serving and promoting the Irish community as a whole.

Mulligan choice of a political career was rewarded almost immediately. Hugh Dickey, under whom Mulligan was studying to become a lawyer, was a friend of the Central American adventurer John Lloyd Stevens, who at the time was planning a trip to Panama to survey for a railroad being built across the isthmus. While discussing the expedition with Dickey, Stevens mentioned he required a good secretary to aid in his survey. Dickey recommended James for the job, despite his relative youth and inexperience, and arranged an interview so Stevens could meet him. According to an early 20th century biographer of Mulligan, when Stevens and Mulligan finally met, the latter's fine character and devotion to duty so impressed Stevens that he offered James the position on the spot. Unable to resist the call to adventure, James accepted the job.²³

Mulligan's journey to Central America lasted only a year, and unfortunately there is no record of his

²³ Nash, "Colonel James A. Mulligan," 3.

experiences while with John Lloyd Stevens. Such an adventure most certainly would have left a lasting mark upon his life. Mulligan was part of one of the most important engineering projects of the century and the connection with the work of his father was probably not lost in the excitement of an exotic locale. The building of the railroad across the Isthmus of Panama was a great accomplishment that, like the canal and railroad projects in the United States, not only realized faster travel between the east and west but also broadened America's view of its position in the world. As Mulligan would note later in his war journal, his Central American experience had a profound effect upon him. He came to believe that great deeds need great men in order to achieve them. Making a place in American society for the Irish immigrant was a great deed in need of some great men.

When Mulligan returned to Chicago in 1851, he renewed his study of law at the office of Grant Goodrich and then with Isaac N. Arnold. He was admitted to the bar in 1855 and became a partner of Henry S. Fitch, the son of U.S. Senator Fitch from Indiana.²⁴ Most of the firm's clients were ordinary citizens who only needed simple law services,

²⁴ William J. Onahan, "Recollection of Colonel Mulligan and the Irish Brigade," copy of a speech given at Camp Mulligan, Ill., Unknown Date, Mulligan Papers, CHS, 2-3.

such as notary public or wills, and Mulligan had little court experience. The Fitch and Mulligan partnership also seemed, based upon their records, to have paid little and they often operated in the red. However, Mulligan was successful in using his status as a lawyer and an officer in the local militia to gain support for his political ambitions from the Irish in Chicago.

Part of Mulligan's rise in popularity among the Irish, as well as an additional source of income, came as a result of his moonlighting as an editorialist. He contributed many articles to journals both in the east and west, and he was even the editor, from 1854-55, of a Catholic paper, The Western Tablet.²⁵ Although a devote Catholic and a dedicated Irish nationalist, most of Mulligan's topics were criticisms of the latest literature. In fact, he was so devoted to criticism that he even took time during the war to review books in his journal. Mulligan also loved the theater and commented on the performance and players.

His writings were highly literate and reflected a well-trained intellect. They not only analyzed the merit of a piece of literature or the quality of a performance, but also commented on its social implications. In a letter to

²⁵ Nash, "Colonel James A. Mulligan," 3.

Mulligan, who was editor of The Western Tablet at the time, one of his subscribers praises his abilities:

I look upon The Western Tablet as a personal friend and look eagerly to its weekly return. I never liked the paper previously to your connection with it. You appear the champion of the truth, but in using skillfully all the weapons at your disposal you do not forget meekness and gentle admonitions will turn aside the murderous blow and draw back the ignorant wanderer. Your leading articles are excellent taking passing events as their theme but treating the subject not as a matter of history but prying into the causes explaining the origin, the natural course and the events as consequences of the first errors.²⁶

Mulligan, however, did not write much about his faith or Ireland, although he was an ardent supporter of both. He reserved these views for his growing political career. A born orator, Mulligan first spoke out as a college student about the poor condition of Ireland and of her people who had found a new home in the United States. "His eloquence upon Irish subjects is still a memory among those who had the pleasure of hearing him."²⁷ Later, as a rising star in the Democratic party in Illinois, he applied similar skill

²⁶ Joseph P. Collins to James A. Mulligan, 20 May 1855, Box 1(Letters), Mulligan Papers, CHS. Mulligan added a bit of blasphemous wit to his editorship at the Western Tablet by signing his articles and editorials with the pseudonym "Satan."

²⁷ Nash, "Colonel James A. Mulligan,"6.

and devotion in defense of his party and its leaders, especially Stephen Douglas.

Early in 1858, Mulligan's political ascendancy was given a boost when he was appointed to a clerkship in the Department of the Interior at the Indian Bureau. His primary duty was copying reports about the various Indian tribes across the country. However, his diary shows that his year of service was spent mostly in developing a disdain for Washington, the people who lived and worked there, and its politics. He writes on his first day:

Here all the devout worshipers of mammon pay annual visits, loving homage. Piety comes here to die. Poverty to wither. Justice and honor a soliloquy's livelihood and quickly yield to a consumption peculiar to these parts. There is a tradition current that truth and manhood visited this place at its founding, but were set upon and stoned from the village. A poor house has been erected to commemorate the event.²⁸

The rest of his entries, excerpted in Sister Mary Nash's 1929 thesis, differ little from this censorious barrage. In fact, his diary reads more like a daily editorial column than as an insight into the private life of its author.

Mulligan's criticisms of Washington and its politics, however, provide a valuable example of the Irish and Irish-

²⁸ Ibid, 1a-2a.

American position during a time of crisis and growing division in the United States. His diary particularly sheds light on his feelings about how politics work. Although he gained his clerkship by appointment and through the favor of a political ally, Mulligan abhorred the "favor" system of promotion where an individual rises through the ranks by who he knows rather than how well he performs his duties. He also despised compromise, which he referred to as lying. In fact, his support of Stephen Douglas lessened somewhat because of Douglas's willingness to compromise his positions. Mulligan was an idealist in a town full of politicians. He would never be at ease among them so long as he hated the inner workings of their system. After a year, he was quite ready to leave.

Upon his return to Chicago in December of 1858, Mulligan resumed his law practice and political activities. However, as tension grew between the North and the South, his role in politics overshadowed his neglected law career. Mulligan spent more and more of his time in speaking out for a moderate approach to the slavery issue. Like many of his fellow Democrats in the North, he regarded both Republicans and southern Democrats as extremists whose unwavering attitudes would only lead to war. He argued for a more

moderate approach to the extension of slavery and supported the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854.²⁹

In the 1860 presidential election, Mulligan actively campaigned for his friend Stephen Douglas, who was the leading Democrat in the North and the chief proponent of maintaining the status quo. Northern Democratic support for the Union, however, was unwavering. When Abraham Lincoln won the election and the southern states began to secede, Mulligan and most northern Democrats remained loyal to the United States. The war Democrats, as they were called, rejected the claim by their fellow Democrats in the South that they had the right to rebel. They supported fully Lincoln's efforts to restore the union. Again, Mulligan was at the forefront of his party at this time of crisis. When war finally broke out in 1861, his voice was second only to Stephen Douglas among Democrats in Illinois.³⁰

Mulligan's leadership in the Irish community of Chicago also grew during these two years. Although he had not been born in Ireland, Mulligan was considered by new immigrants as one of their own. He was Irish by heritage, and spoke out against the mistreatment of the Irish by both the English and Americans. He was also popular for his

²⁹ Nash, "Colonel James A. Mulligan," 6.

³⁰ Ibid, 7.

ardent defense of the Catholic faith and for his glorification of the Irish people. At political rallies before large cheering crowds, he praised the noble Irish and exhorted all Americans to welcome "his people" as true citizens and patriots. Mulligan's popularity resulted in his election to command one of the Irish militia companies in the city, Shield's Guards.³¹ Typically, these units were showpieces for social gatherings and appointments to command them were intended to enhance the social and political status of the officer. However, Mulligan took his assignment seriously and he studied military history and Army tactics manuals in order to better train his men.

Despite his busy political activities, Mulligan also had an active social life which he had maintained since college. A tall, handsome man, he was popular with, as well as attracted to, many women. Also, as a rising star in the Democratic party and the son of a wealthy merchant, Mulligan was considered as an ideal prospect for marriage. His diary, however, shows that he was quite critical of women and often appraised them like he would a play or a novel. Such selectivity may have been the reason he did not marry until he was almost thirty.

³¹ Holderith, "Colonel James A. Mulligan," 2.

In October of 1859, Mulligan had married seventeen year old Marian Nugent. Aside from her age, she was in every way his equal—well educated, attractive, and ambitious. Each would share completely in the other's life and fortunes for many years. Marian followed her husband in all his work even if it meant braving the hazards of the battlefield to give him aid when he was wounded. He was utterly devoted to her and dedicated everything he did to her honor. Mulligan credited her support as the main reason for his success. Their union was hailed as one of the most beautiful marriages in the city and they were prominent at many of Chicago's social events.³² James Mulligan was a handsome and successful leader of the community, and Marian was a beautiful and inspiring wife. Their marriage appears to have been truly founded in love. The coming of war, however, would change their lives forever, to his glory and her sorrow.

³² Nash, "Colonel James A. Mulligan," 8.

CHAPTER 2

THE BATTLE OF LEXINGTON

When President Lincoln made his call for 100,000 volunteers to put down the rebellion in the South, Mulligan and other leaders of the Irish community in Chicago formed a committee to recruit an all Irish regiment. On April 20th, 1861, they posted the following advertisement in the Chicago Tribune:

Rally! All Irishmen in favor of forming a regiment of Irish volunteers to sustain the government of the United States in and through the present war, will rally at North Market Hall, this evening at 7 ½ o'clock. Come all. For the honor of the old land, rally. Rally for the defense of the new.¹

The rally drew a large crowd with some 325 men signing up in just the first hour and a half, and 1200 more during the next week.² By recalling the past military exploits of the Irish, Mulligan knew, as did most leaders of ethnic units, he could recruit many men of Irish background eager to live up to their cultures reputation. An all-Irish

¹ Holderith, "Colonel James A. Mulligan," 164.

² History of Chicago, vol. II (Chicago: The A.T. Andreas Company, 1885), s.v. "The Twenty-Third Illinois Infantry Regiment," 190-191.

regiment also garnered political support by demonstrating the patriotism of the Irish for their new home and the loyalty of a largely Democratic group in a Republican North.

After enough men had been recruited, Mulligan and the other sponsors of the regiment organized it and the men elected their officers. Unlike many other volunteer units, however, the officers of the "Chicago Irish Brigade" were all elected. "Not an appointment in it," noted a contemporary historian.³ Unfortunately, once all was ready and the regiment was offered for service, the Irishmen were informed that the recruitment quota for the state had already been filled. Disappointed but not discouraged, the regiment appointed Mulligan, whom they had elected as their colonel and commanding officer, to go to Washington to make a direct appeal to the War Department. Armed with a letter of recommendation from Stephen Douglas, Mulligan made a personal appeal to President Lincoln for whatever service he desired. Impressed by Mulligan's bearing and intelligence, Lincoln accepted the request on May 17th, and the "Chicago Irish Brigade" entered into service as an independent regiment. A month later, they were officially mustered in as the 23rd Illinois Infantry.⁴

³ Holderith, "Colonel James A. Mulligan," 9.

⁴ Burton, "Ethnic Regiments of the Civil War," 33.

Upon Mulligan's return, the regiment was quartered in an old brick building on Polk street known as Kane's Brewery. Mulligan dubbed this, their training camp, Fontenoy Barracks,⁵ after a famous battle in which another Irish brigade had been decisive in helping the French defeat the British. Again, Mulligan knew by drawing comparisons between his Irish recruits and their past was important for maintaining their ethnic identity. The Irish might fight for their new home but they needed something more than just loyalty to the Union. They were holding up the honor of their homeland while they were also fighting for a place in American society.

Training proceeded quickly as Mulligan applied his education and prior experience as a militia officer to the new recruits. He also had the assistance of the men from the Irish militia companies which had formed the core of his regiment. After only a month, however, Mulligan and the Twenty-third were ordered south to Missouri to join General Fremont's Army of the West. The hard work of the previous month showed on their uniforms when they marched out of Chicago on July 14th. A Chicago Tribune editorial observed:

Hard usage had made their single
military suit look quite unlike
freshness and that, although in

⁵ Nash, "Colonel James A. Mulligan," 12.

material the men are a credit to any section, they are in outfit a disgrace to Chicago as a city, Cook as a county, and Illinois as a state.⁶

On July 21st, after their arrival in St. Louis, the regiment was armed and equipped from the arsenal there. The Irish were then ordered on the July 23rd to the state capital, Jefferson City, to protect the pro-union legislature. Federal officials feared that Missouri's strongly secessionist governor, Claiborne Jackson, would try to use the state militia to take control of the loyal legislature. Volunteer regiments raised throughout the region were rushed to Jefferson City to insure Missouri remained in the Union. Mulligan's Irish Brigade set up camp on a broad hill which commanded the town and the surrounding countryside. They then settled down for a month of guard duty and continued training.

The Irish presence was warmly greeted by the townspeople, and Mulligan and his officers were eagerly welcomed by society. The Missouri Democrat raved: "It is surely a regiment of bold disciplined and willing men, who upon occasion, will make themselves rivals of the favored

⁶ History of Chicago, 192.

'69th.'" ⁷ Daily parades at their well kept camp drew large audiences, and the officers were guests at all the most prominent social occasions. Mulligan was especially favored among the social circles. The Missouri Democrat described him: "The colonel, who has gathered about him this capital display of arts and arms, is a young, cool, daring officer, possessing the respect and confidence of his men in an unusual degree."⁸ As in Chicago, Mulligan's personal charm and political influence gained him popularity even within social circles from which he would have normally been excluded because of his Irish heritage and Catholic faith.

While the Twenty-third was in Jefferson City, Missouri's internal division grew into open warfare. Federal troops under the dynamic command of General Nathaniel Lyon moved to secure the state by defeating Governor Jackson's only strength, the state militia. The first step was the securing of the capital. Next, Lyon maneuvered his army to try to bring the militia, who were commanded by the very capable General Sterling Price, to battle. Many people in the state in fact supported the south and also wanted to secede, but only Governor Jackson and the state militia had the power to free themselves of

⁷ Nash, "Colonel James A. Mulligan," 15.

⁸ History of Chicago, 192.

Union control. If Lyon crushed these secessionist forces, he would effectively gain control of Missouri.⁹

On August 9th, Lyon finally met Price in battle at Wilsons Creek in southwest Missouri. Unfortunately, Lyon was killed and his army was routed from the field. General Price, seeing an opportunity to regain control of Missouri, led his army north. With his only aggressive commander dead and most of his units spread throughout the state, General Fremont issued frantic orders to find and intercept Price. One such order arrived at the headquarters of the Irish Brigade in Jefferson City on August 31st. Colonel Mulligan was instructed to take his regiment to Lexington where they were to establish a camp and defend the town.¹⁰

When General Price marched his army north, the goal of his campaign was the Missouri River. It was the key to Union power in the state as their main line of communication and supply. Sizeable garrisons were located in major cities on the river connecting the east part of the state with the west. Several minor garrisons were also located on the river to further secure it. If Price could capture one of

⁹ Jay Monaghan, Civil War on the Western Border, 1854-1865 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1955), 142.

¹⁰ Colonel James A. Mulligan, "The Siege of Lexington, Mo.," Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, vol. I (New York: The Century Co., 1884-87), 307. Mulligan also provides an excellent description of the battle from the perspective of a participant.

these towns, he would greatly disrupt federal ability to control Missouri.¹¹

Unfortunately for Fremont, the hot, wet weather limited his ability to find and intercept Price's army. Also, with many of his units spread throughout the state, commanders could not quickly gather a large enough force to confront the Confederates. Many of the messages between federal units at this time, in fact, described the concerns commanders had about the size of Price's army.¹² Thus, while Fremont's Army of the West hesitated, Price marched north towards Lexington and Mulligan.

When Mulligan and the Irish Brigade arrived at Lexington, there was already a sizeable force garrisoned at the town. Colonel Peabody commanded an infantry force of several hundred men from the 13th Missouri and the Home Guards, and Colonel T.M. Marshall commanded 600 troopers of the 1st Illinois Cavalry. Colonel Mulligan assumed command

¹¹ Christopher Phillips, Damned Yankee: The Life of General Nathaniel Lyon (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 221-22.

¹² The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies series I, vol. 3 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), 171-193; cited hereafter as O.R.. I have drawn many of my descriptions and officer viewpoints of the battles described in this paper from the letters and reports throughout this record. Many of my descriptions are a summary of several reports by various officers involved in the events, unless cited otherwise.

of the entire garrison as the senior colonel.¹³ He had over 3,000 men with which to defend Lexington which he immediately set to fortifying a commanding position near the town.

The center of Mulligan's defenses was a large brick building known as the Masonic College. Sitting on a slight rise between the old settlement and the new town of Lexington, the College had a good view of the surrounding area. Colonel Marshall, who had been sent by General Grant to fortify the town,¹⁴ had first chosen the site and had completed crude earthworks around it before Mulligan took command. Mulligan set up his headquarters in the College when he arrived on September 9th and he also had his troops improve and expand the defenses. The entrenchments consisted of a ten foot earth wall and a ditch that was eight feet wide. The entire camp sat on a bluff overlooking the Missouri river and could hold up to ten thousand men. A hospital was later established in a house just outside the defenses.¹⁵

¹³ Harold F. Smith, "Mulligan and the Irish Brigade," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society, vol. 56, no. 2 (Springfield: ISHS, 1963), 167. Smith provides an excellent description of the siege of Lexington, Mo., which I have used in my own description of the battle.

¹⁴ O.R., I, 3: 453.

¹⁵ Smith, "Mulligan and the Irish Brigade," 168-69.

On the day after Mulligan's arrival, however, things began to go awry for the federal forces. On that morning, Mulligan had sent, on the steamer Sunshine, Lieutenant Ryan and a squad of men from Company "I" back to Jefferson City to deliver a message to his commanding officer, General Davis, urgently requesting reinforcements. The steamer and its passengers, however, were captured only 40 miles down river by Price's Confederates. Davis, as a result, was not aware of Mulligan's situation until September 12th, by which time Price had already laid siege to Lexington. Colonel Davis further delayed any action by waiting requesting and waiting for orders from General Fremont in St. Louis. This delay of several days insured Mulligan would not be relieved.

Once surrounded, Colonels Mulligan, Peabody, and Marshall held a council of war to determine their course of action. Another message had been sent to General Davis before Price cut them off, but they did not know if the request for reinforcements had been received.¹⁶ As Mulligan and his officers discussed their options on the night of the 12th, most of his subordinates advocated retreating to the north bank of the Missouri. After listening to their arguments and reviewing his orders, however, Mulligan

¹⁶ Mulligan, "The Siege of Lexington, Mo.," 308.

decided to hold their position at Lexington. "We'll fight 'em!" he defiantly announced to the council.¹⁷

The two armies which faced each other on September 12th, 1861 were equally matched although the Union forces were outnumbered by more than three-to-one. Mulligan's command of 3,000 men held a good defensive position, which was unapproachable from one side. The federal troops were generally of better quality than Price's state militia and volunteers. The Rebel army, however, balanced the contest with greater numbers. Price and his men were also more experienced than Mulligan's troops.

After surrounding Mulligan, Price immediately tried to storm the federal positions. However, the Rebels were repulsed with heavy losses and retreated to Old Lexington seeking the shelter of its buildings. Seeing that it was too costly to make another such assault, Price laid siege to the fortifications. He would wear down the defenders with hunger and thirst first and then attack with overwhelming force. Price also sent out raiding parties to neighboring towns adding to the confusion of where his army was located and perhaps keeping reinforcements from arriving.¹⁸

¹⁷ Smith, "Mulligan and the Irish Brigade," 169.

¹⁸ Albert Castel, "The Siege of Lexington," Battle Chronicles of the Civil War: 1861 (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1989), 116-25. This article provides a good overview of the Siege of Lexington, Missouri. I have used it to help write my description of the battle.

For the next six days, Mulligan's small garrison fought bravely repulsing the many probing attacks of Price's army. The Union guns even forced the enemy in Old Lexington to retreat after destroying the buildings in which they hid. The stubborn defenders, however, were steadily being worn down by the tight siege. They had been cut off from their supply of water and their food was nearly exhausted. More significantly, in repulsing the numerous Rebel attacks, Mulligan's command was running low on ammunition. Mulligan could only hold out for a few more days before he ran out of ammunition all together.¹⁹ He needed reinforcement if he was to hold out longer.

Federal troops, however, were far away. General Fremont had not heard of the siege until September 18th, a full day after Price's army had surrounded Mulligan and three days after he had asked for more men. Only then were troops dispatched to reinforce the defenders at Lexington. Union commanders, however, still moved cautiously because they feared confronting Price's large army without a sizeable force of their own, even if he was laying siege to a fortified position. Fremont himself encouraged this cautiousness when he sent orders to his commanders to move

¹⁹ History of Chicago, 192. This article provides a good description of the siege of Lexington, Mo. which I also used in my description of the battle.

on Price but they were allowed to proceed at their own discretion. Thus, while federal troops cautiously and slowly closed on Lexington, Mulligan's command deteriorated and Price was given time to plan for his final assault.²⁰

By the morning of September 18th, Price had gathered his entire army of nearly 10,000 men and thirteen guns around Lexington.²¹ At 9:00 a.m., he launched his assault. The defenders held well against this first onslaught of enemy troops, but by noon, the Rebels had occupied the Anderson House and were now able to shoot down into the Union entrenchments. Although the capture of the house still left the assault a hundred yards short of the fortifications, Mulligan immediately called for a counterattack. Rebel snipers were pouring heavy fire into his lines and the house had to be retaken. Two attempts by Colonel Peabody's loyal Missourians, however, were repulsed. The amount of open ground between their lines and the house provided a perfect field of fire for the Rebels defending it. Finally, Captain Gleason led a company of the Irish Brigade, the Montgomery Guards, in a successful attack on the house recapturing it. During this assault on a supposedly neutral site, only thirty of eighty Irishmen

²⁰ Monaghan, Civil War on the Western Border, 191-92.

²¹ History of Chicago, 192.

made it to the house. Captain Gleason himself was wounded twice while leading the successful counterattack. The only real success for the Rebels in the siege so far had been quickly overturned.

As darkness fell, the Rebel bombardment of the Union positions came to an end after almost ten continuous hours of firing. Mulligan's troops still held tenaciously to their fortifications. The Union defenses up to this point seemed almost impregnable despite almost a week of siege and many assaults by the enemy. On the evening of the September 18th, however, General Price developed a unique plan which promised success. Taking hemp bales from the warehouses on the docks of Lexington, the Rebels created a sort of moveable breastworks. During the assault, these bales which had been soaked with water, would be slowly rolled in front of the advancing Rebels. They could then stay behind them, using them for cover from Union fire. The simplicity and ingenuity of this tactic rivaled even the Trojan Horse.²²

Price launched his assault the next morning, this time with his soldiers slowly advancing behind the cover of the hemp bales. By the afternoon, the Rebels had overrun the northern side of the fortifications held by Peabody's Missourians and threatened to take the entire camp. Again,

²² Monaghan, Civil War on the Western Border, 192.

Mulligan called upon his Irish to repel disaster. Taking men from his regiment located on the other side of the camp, he personally led a counterattack which pushed the Rebels back and captured some of their flags. Mulligan had regained his original positions but at a high cost. Over 100 bodies lay atop the breastworks alone. Mulligan himself had been wounded in the leg and there were several holes in his shirt from near misses.²³

Morale among the defenders was at its lowest point since the siege began. Even the stalwart Irish began to grumble about the futility of continuing the battle. The lack of food and especially water for days had taken its toll and now they had only enough ammunition to fight off one more attack. Peabody's Missourians had suffered the most as they had born the brunt of the Rebel attacks. By the morning of the 20th, they had had enough and their officers raised a white flag above their entrenchments. Mulligan was incensed by this mutinous act and he had the flag hauled down, but the Missourians refused to fight any longer and moved to the inner line of trenches. With his men near the breaking point, Mulligan desperately searched for a way out of this hopeless situation. He ordered an attack by his regiment with the intent of breaking a hole

²³ Nash, "Colonel James A. Mulligan," 19-20.

through the Rebel lines. Their attempt was easily repulsed and the assault commander, Colonel White, was killed. As his troops retreated back to their trenches in the waning light of the day, Mulligan saw his last hope for success crushed in the faces of his defeated men.²⁴

That evening, Mulligan convened another officers meeting to discuss surrender. This time everyone was in agreement that it would be useless to resist any longer. They had run out of food and water, and they had no ammunition left. The relief force, it seemed, was not coming. Further fighting would only stall the inevitable and waste lives. The next day, Major Moore would be sent to ask General Price for terms of their surrender.²⁵

Price's reply was for the immediate and unconditional surrender. Unlike the defenders, he knew that federal troops were not far away and that he had to end the siege immediately before they closed on him while he was still concentrating on capturing Lexington. Mulligan reluctantly accepted the terms and presented his command for surrender that afternoon. Only he was to be held prisoner, however. His men were paroled and officers were exchanged, but he refused to be exchanged for any officer of lower rank than

²⁴ History of Chicago, 192.

²⁵ Ibid.

his own. So, while his command returned to the North, Mulligan went south with Price's victorious army as it retreated before the advancing federal forces.

Mulligan and his wife, who had joined her husband after the siege, were treated as honored guests during their "captivity" in Price's army. General Price shared with the couple all the comfort he enjoyed.²⁶ The couple had an irresistible gallantry which was much admired by their captors. Mulligan's bravery and skill during the siege had won him the respect of his opponents, which had prompted Price to refuse the colonel's sword in the surrender. Marian's courage and devotion to her husband also melted the heart of her husband's enemies, and they could not refuse her desire to tend to his wounds. On October 30th, Mulligan was finally freed when he was exchanged for Brigadier General D.M. Frost.²⁷ As Mulligan was only a colonel, his exchange for an officer of higher rank was a sign of respect for him.

Colonel Mulligan's release was greeted with much celebration in the North. Enthusiastic crowds lined the stops all along the couple's train ride from St. Louis to Chicago. They were similarly welcomed home when they

²⁶ Nash, "Colonel James A. Mulligan," 22-23.

²⁷ Smith, "Mulligan and the Irish Brigade," 172.

arrived in Chicago. A parade and a rally were given in honor of Mulligan and his Irish Brigade and they were proclaimed heroes of the city. Mulligan, however, refused the offer of an even larger celebration so that he could reform his regiment and get back into the action. His men had been disbanded after being paroled and he needed time to gather them before requesting that the Irish Brigade be reactivated.

Mulligan encountered problems again when he tried to reform his regiment. General Henry Halleck, who took over the Army of the West from Fremont, had difficulties working out the circumstances of the Twenty-third's parole. The Missouri State Guard was not a part of the Confederacy at the time of the siege and therefore had no real power to issue paroles to Mulligan's men. Paroles were promises of freedom in exchange for an oath to never fight again against your enemies, and breaking this promise caused numerous problems with political negotiations. An argument could have been made that since the Missouri State Guard was not officially a part of the Confederate military that any unit paroled by them did not have to honor that parole. Halleck, it seems, simply disbanded the Irish Brigade rather than deal with the complications of putting a paroled unit back into the army. Once again, Mulligan went to Washington to

make a direct appeal to President Lincoln.²⁸ Once again he was successful, and General George McClellan restored the Twenty-third to active service on December 10th, 1861.

While in the east, Mulligan visited the camp of the famed "Fighting 69th," an Irish regiment from New York. He and his wife were welcomed warmly and were also treated to a parade in New York City in which Mulligan was honored as a hero. On December 20th, the praise of his actions culminated in a joint resolution by Congress which hailed his bravery as well as that of the Irish Brigade and they were authorized to inscribe "Lexington" on their colors. The resolution was introduced by Illinois Rep. Isaac N. Arnold, under whom Mulligan had once studied law.²⁹

By the end of the year, Mulligan was back in Chicago to reorganize and recruit his regiment. Part of his efforts included lectures throughout the North in which he spoke of his experiences at Lexington and as a prisoner of General Price. The money he collected went to the families of his men that were killed during the siege. His speeches also helped bring new recruits to fill out the depleted ranks of the regiment. By this time, most northerners had been jolted by the reality that this war would not be won in only

²⁸ Nash, "Colonel James A. Mulligan," 30.

²⁹ History of Chicago, 193.

a few, relatively bloodless months. Volunteers were not quite so eager or numerous as when the war first began. Mulligan, however, still received almost daily requests for transfers or commissions to his Irish Brigade. One example, from an entire company of men in the 24th Missouri Volunteers, typifies these many requests:

They back up this respectful application on the grounds that, as Irishmen, their feelings, tastes, and sympathies are incompatible with those surrounding them, the regiment being principally composed of SW Missourians...We have no chaplain,,,and this regarded in a just & discerning way, ought furnish alone sufficient reason for granting us the favor we seek.³⁰

All the letters were like this one. Men respectfully asked for the honor to join Mulligan's command. Sometimes, they wrote of how they were mistreated in their units or they lacked a priest. They praised him and the reputation of his regiment, as well as desired to be with other Irishmen. Most significantly, they all wanted to serve with Mulligan because he was willing to fight.

This reputation as a fighter and a brave soldier never left Mulligan. Even the fact that he had been defeated at

³⁰ Co. K, 24th Missouri Vol. to Colonel James A. Mulligan, 13 January 1862, Box 1(Letters), James A. Mulligan Papers, CHS.

Lexington did not deflate the public view of him as an excellent military leader. In fact, he was not blamed for the loss and capture of his command. The adjutant general's report on events surrounding the siege stated that the fault lay in General Fremont's sluggish pursuit of General Price. Fremont's delays, intentional or not, allowed Price to outmaneuver his forces and to lay siege to Lexington. The report further stated that most officers in the Department of the West, as well as the investigators in the adjutant general's office, were of the opinion that General Fremont was incapable of commanding the department.³¹

In all fairness, Fremont was not the only officer who was guilty of sluggishness in the Department of the West. After the defeat and death of General Lyon, many of Fremont's subordinates were seized with timidity. Lyon was the only federal commander aggressively trying to secure Missouri for the Union. His death created a void that was too great for any other officer, including Fremont, to fill. Thus, rather than rushing to confront Price's bold move northward, Union leaders sent a flurry of messages to each other requesting instructions on what they should do. The main theme of most responses was to go slowly and to wait for someone else to take decisive action. They feared what

³¹ O.R., I, III: 546-547.

had happened to Lyon might happen to them. So, when they were given orders which allowed them to proceed cautiously, they did so and only made a mild effort to relief Mulligan at Lexington.

Colonel Mulligan, however, was not completely blameless in the loss of Lexington. The site he had established for his fortifications, although on commanding ground, was too large to be adequately defended by the small number of men in his command. The larger area of his position also prevented him from being able to take the time to build good fortifications. Nevertheless, Mulligan's men fought hard and would have held out for much longer if they had access to water and more ammunition. Credit must also be given to General Price for his ingenious tactic of using hemp bales as moveable breastworks to get his assault troops close to the federal trenches. This factor and Mulligan's men running low on ammunition were the most likely reasons for the loss at Lexington. Mulligan, therefore, freely claimed, which he did in lectures after the battle, that he and his men were the only reason Union troops held out as long as they did at Lexington. Mulligan and his Irish Brigade were national heroes for their brave stand at Lexington and blame for the loss was shifted elsewhere or

simply ignored by a public eager for some success even in defeat.³²

³² Colonel Mulligan's lectures after the battle centered, naturally, on his account of the events which took place there. His recollections were later consolidated into a written account in volume 1 of Battles and Leaders of the Civil War. Some of his story, especially regarding the odds he faced and the role of his Irish regiment, were exaggerated.

CHAPTER 3

WEST VIRGINIA

In January 1862, the Irish Brigade was assigned to guard confederate prisoners at Camp Douglas just outside of Chicago. Colonel Mulligan assumed command of the camp, and the regiment continued to enlist and train new recruits. They even recruited from among the prisoners.

While at Camp Douglas, Colonel Mulligan showed he was as compassionate towards a defeated enemy as General Price had been after the siege of Lexington. He not only improved conditions at the camp with better food and medical care, but he personally worked to get the prisoners pay. Although the latter effort would bring charges of mismanagement after his departure, Mulligan was generally praised for his improvements to the prison. A Chicago Tribune editorial echoed the public's sentiments:

The discipline was strict but humane. The officer who then commanded the post (Camp Douglas) was as chivalrous a soldier as ever led a regiment in the field.¹

¹ Chicago Tribune, clipping from the scrapbook of Marian Mulligan, unknown date, James A. Mulligan Papers, CHS.

On June 14th, 1862, Mulligan and the Irish Brigade left Chicago by train to join the Union army in the east. The regiment, however, was stopped short of its destination, Annapolis, Maryland, in order to help defend Harper's Ferry from Confederate attack. Four days later on June 23rd, Mulligan and the Irish Brigade were permanently assigned to the Rail Road Division guarding the Baltimore and Ohio railroad line in West Virginia. They were ordered to New Creek, West Virginia to guard the federal supply depot there and to establish a base camp for their operations. The Brigade arrived on June 24th and immediately began construction of a fortified camp. As senior officer, Mulligan assumed command of all the troops at New Creek, which not only included his regiment but also another from Pennsylvania and a light artillery battery. Mulligan was formally given command of the post at New Creek on July 6th.²

The post at New Creek was an important depot on the B&O Railroad line. It provided storage and distribution of federal supplies that moved between the western and eastern states of the Union. Like other stopping points along the line, it was protected by troops from the newly formed Railroad Division under the command of Brigadier General

²James A. Mulligan, Special Order No. 45, 6 July 1862, Orders Book-- Railroad Division, vol. 42, Department of West Virginia, National Archives, Washington D.C..

Benjamin F. Kelley. His command was, in turn, a part of Major General Wool's Department of the Ohio. It was Wool who had stopped Mulligan and his Irish Brigade at Harper's Ferry, and he was also the one who requested more regiments for defense of the B&O in the Shenandoah Valley.³ Mulligan was thus diverted from service in the more glamorous eastern theater to the dirty, little war being fought in the Appalachian Mountains. He would never again attain the same level of national attention that he had received for Lexington, but his efforts in West Virginia would be more significant than his week of glory in Missouri.

In addition to guarding a vital link in the Union communications and supply system, the Railroad Division also sat astride the strategically important Shenandoah Valley. Running north and south, this valley provided an easy route for Confederate invasions of the North. It also had the advantage of hiding an army's movements from enemy view, unless they too were in the Valley. In fact, General Robert E. Lee used the Shenandoah Valley to move his army unmolested into Pennsylvania during his 1863 Gettysburg Campaign. Thus, Mulligan and the other commanders of the

³ O.R., ser. I, vol. XII, part III, 402-403. Few descriptions of the Civil War in West Virginia exist and most that do are as small footnotes to larger events elsewhere. I have used the O.R. and Mulligan's diary for the description of Mulligan's service in West Virginia, unless otherwise noted.

Railroad Division were not simply supply guards but also a source of information and deterrence for Confederate activity in the Shenandoah.⁴

Federal operations in West Virginia created a demand for unique leaders to combat the Confederate guerillas, for which there was no formal training. Fighting a guerilla war required more independence of action and personal initiative than most officers were trained to exercise. The use of large formations of men in tight, closely moving formations on most battlefields of that time, in fact, was not conducive to individuality and initiative. There were, however, especially in the large volunteer armies of the American Civil War, men who, either by personality or experience, flourished under such unique demands. Confederate Colonel John Mosby and General J.E.B. Stuart were quite successful when given an opportunity for independence of action. These unique leaders were aggressive, charismatic, and creative. They usually commanded the fanatic devotion of their men but were often scorned by fellow officers. Although these unique men were quite successful at a difficult task, they often did not receive the recognition they deserved and, for the most

⁴ Russell F. Weigley, A Great Civil War: A Military and Political History, 1861-1865 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 371-72.

part, wanted. Many of them became disgruntled with the regular military because of this lack of recognition. Mulligan, despite some moderate rewards for his service, became such an officer.

Mulligan positioned his command around New Creek in much the same manner that American troops would be deployed in Vietnam a century later. He assigned small detachments of men, usually less than 100 each, to set up posts in the surrounding villages and on key geographic positions, like road junctions or mountain passes. These units were no more than a days march from another post nor a days ride from Mulligan's headquarters. At New Creek, he also created a rapid reaction force of several hundred men that could be sent out in a moments notice to reinforce a post that was under attack by a larger enemy. This reaction force always included some cavalry, to provide speed and mobility, and artillery, to provide firepower. Mulligan also fortified New Creek and maintained a large reserve force for defense of the depot. He could also use these troops to form a strike force to hit enemy held positions or units nearby.

The strategy proved successful. The small posts acted as an early warning system for Confederate raiders. If the enemy force was small, the post would hold until reinforcements came from New Creek. If there was a large

number of Confederates, they would delay the enemy so that Mulligan could gather a large enough force to confront them. The posts would also collect valuable information about enemy troops in the area through patrols and contact with the local citizenry.

In addition to these measures, Mulligan also instituted strong discipline among the officers and men. He expected his officers to be professional soldiers, proficient at the art of war. In addition to drill and inspections, Mulligan established a library so his officers could study the military works he had chosen himself. The enlisted men were constantly drilled and expected to maintain a military bearing at all times. At one point he even established a money pool from the fines that men of the regiment paid for swearing. Several brief entries in the Records Book notes that Mulligan himself paid the fine a few times. Another measure he took to help maintain discipline was to close the liquor shops in his area. He also punished any man who was found drunk on or off duty. In a letter to General Kelley, he wrote:

I have closed all beer &
liquor shops at this post. It
aids materially to the order and
discipline of this place. Now
they steal down to Piedmont: will
you permit me to close them there
too. There is no need of this

'stuff' here. The water is good
and the coffee excellent.⁵

For the most part, Mulligan's disciplinary efforts were successful. His troops seemed to handle camp life well and were steady in combat. Many of the local citizens sent letters speaking of how well they were treated whenever they came into contact with Mulligan's Irish. Desertions, as with any isolated post, were still common though they did not happen as frequently. When a soldier is close to home, the temptation to go there and not to return is often too great to resist.

On October 8th, Mulligan was given leave to go to Washington, D.C. "For the transaction of business connected with his command."⁶ He had been plagued since Camp Douglas with accusations of mishandling regimental funds and prisoner money. He wrote the following in his personal diary about the state of his economic affairs:

Were that I were now there and
conscience and I were starting
afresh with a new set of books.
The present lot are blurred and
blotted and want balance. When
again in order, with darling as

⁵ James A. Mulligan, Orders and Letters Book-23rd Illinois Volunteer Infantry, 21 July 1862, Mulligan Papers, CHS.

⁶ James A. Mulligan, Special Order No. 66, 8 October 1862, Orders Book-Railroad Division, vol. 2.

bookkeeper, they will always bear inspection.⁷

Mulligan's diary, however, reveals the true nature of his visit to Washington. He writes, "Shall I leave Washington with eagles (the insignia for the rank of colonel)-only!"⁸ He believed that he was to be promoted to brigadier general. Other prominent Irish leaders were in Washington at the same time as he, and he believed that their presence indicated the intention by the War Department to create an Irish Division. Mulligan thought that, if such a unit was to be formed, he would be promoted to brigadier general and given command of one of the Irish Division's brigades. Again, he writes in his diary:

It would be the measure of his (General James Shields) ambition to have united under him brigades commanded by Meagher, Corcoran, self and others. Thirty thousand, aye ten thousand Irish he (General Shields) said could turn the tide of any field.⁹

Mulligan, however, had doubts if a division of Irishmen would really be formed. Even after meeting with

⁷ James A. Mulligan, Personal Diary, 24 October 1862, James A. Mulligan Papers, CHS.

⁸ Ibid, 13 October 1862.

⁹ Ibid, 24 October 1862.

General Shields and others, he seemed to believe that their plans would not be realized. In the same entry in which he wrote of the hope for such a formation, Mulligan adds:

Politics will prevent the
'Powers' from organizing such a
force. Its discipline would be
dangerous. Its democracy
terrible. Its prestige
overshadowing.¹⁰

Mulligan was a politician who, despite his self-proclaimed idealism, knew the realities of American government. Republicans would not tolerate the creation of such a politically dangerous group as an all-Irish division. Irish-Americans were one of the most powerful groups of Democrats in the North during the war and thus a main source of opposition to complete Republican control of the government. Inconsequential as their political efforts may have seemed, the Irish in America would not be allowed to gain any leverage. A division of Irish troops, despite their record of loyalty, might become the political tool of their leaders. If they chose not to fight at a critical point in the war, their action would have serious political as well as military repercussions. Mulligan probably knew that Republicans were willing to lose a battle rather than lose their political power. Thus, they would never allow

¹⁰ Mulligan, Personal Diary, 24 October 1862.

the formation of an Irish division even if it could sweep the entire Rebel army from the field because it was too much of a threat to their control of the American government.

After three weeks, a disappointed Colonel Mulligan returned to New Creek without the promotion he desired. Although his wish for command of a brigade in an Irish division was unrealized, he was happy to leave Washington. He wrote in his diary: "I am glad to get away to the mountains from this impatient, fretting city...the business is too big for the brains conducting it."¹¹ Mulligan for the second, and last time, left Washington with a great disgust for its politics and society.

Messages and letters from his brother-in-law, who was Mulligan's aide-de-camp, speeded his return. Since the regiment's reorganization, division had developed among the officers of the regiment. Supporters of Mulligan were on one side and supporters of his second-in-command, Lieutenant Colonel James Quirk, another. Never one to relinquish control of his Irishmen, Mulligan limited Quirk's duties even when he took Mulligan's place as commander of the regiment. He wrote of this distrust in his diary:

I am telegraphed that our
little Lt. Col. is getting
restive, forgetting the line

¹¹ Mulligan, Personal Diary, 1 November 1862.

between his place and duties and the place and duties of the colonel. I must return and discipline him.¹²

Three days later, on November 4th, he returned to West Virginia and his isolated command. If he had a dislike for Republican politics before his final trip to Washington, he came back with an even lower opinion. He had failed to win the promotion he sought by trying to curry favor with the powers that be. Throughout his writings, he had denounced the favor system of promotion, especially in the military. However, he tried to win promotion in precisely this manner when he went to Washington because he thought it was the only way to get his general's star. The disappointment he felt from this failure can be seen in his continual disparagement of the administration and its conduct of the war. He believed that they did not take the war seriously as evidenced by their not promoting him. This resentment at how he was treated, along with his disgust with the war, would keep him from any further personal appeals to win promotion. He consequently threw himself into his work, determined to win promotion by his own hands without humiliating himself, as he had done in Washington. He had won fame once, in Missouri, and he now sought to do it again

¹² Mulligan, Personal Diary, 1 November 1862.

in West Virginia, this time securing the promotion he greatly desired.

After his return, however, he realized that it would be hard to win fame in such a remote country and by simply guarding a railroad from a few rebels. He needed to confront an enemy army on a battlefield in order to win any glory. In West Virginia, he guarded supplies and chased off Confederate raiders who were barely one step above thieves. Many of his journal entries were filled with a wish that enemy commanders would stand and fight. The nature of war in this region frustrated his hopes for glory. By January 1st of 1863 he became impatient for action. He writes, "I have seen nothing since (last January) of war, except the army and felt it only in a few midnight marches and the watching of outposts: nothing more."¹³

Mulligan believed he was no longer a part of the "real" war. While he ran around the mountains of West Virginia chasing an elusive enemy supported by the local citizenry, other less capable commanders were earning glory in the east and the west. For all of his talk about democracy and the ignorance of the "noodle brain" politicians, however, Mulligan would have merely replaced the tyrants in Washington with tyrants from West Point. He wrote, after

¹³ Mulligan, Personal Diary, 1 January 1863.

McClellan was removed from command of the Union Army, "There's a need for a man of strong sense and fierce will. Something with a Roman smack about it."¹⁴ Mulligan, like most men of the Union Army, had loved McClellan. He often wrote about how things were never the same after he left and attributed the downfall of other commanders to their friendship with the "Little General." Regardless of his lack of glory, Mulligan's work was recognized and he was promoted to command of a brigade a week after McClellan's fall.

Always the professional, he diligently set out to turn his new command into the best outfit in the army. His journal from this period, however, reveals a disgust at not being given a brigadier's star to go along with assignment as a brigadier. He wrote, "Since my appointment as Mock Brigadier, the papers have taken me up to congratulate me, saying some kind things in the belief the promotion is bonafide."¹⁵ Advancement in command did not mean a thing to Mulligan if it did not come with a commensurate advancement in rank. He believed a promotion must be visible to everyone not just an understanding between commanders.

¹⁴ Mulligan, Personal Diary, 12 November 1862.

¹⁵ Ibid, 20 December 1862.

Mulligan continued to fume as the winter set in and limited or stopped operations in the region.

Mulligan began the second year of the war with a melancholy that became a recurring theme in his writings after his deflated return from Washington. Expressing himself in typical flowery prose, he began his New Year's journal entry with a blessing and lengthy prayer for a year "fruitful in good and brave deeds." He followed this hopefulness, however, with a few sobering notes, "The serious past is the joke. We laugh where men of old thought & shuddered and girded their loins for the immortal struggles of history. We burlesque the flowing of blood and the squandering of money."¹⁶ Two days later he added an even more striking entry about the Emancipation Proclamation:

President's proclamation published:
something about freeing Niggers. These
niggers keep this part of the world in
business. We kill our white brother to
save our black cousins. We endanger a
Republic to preserve a plantation. We
have forgotten Washington to exalt
Frederick Douglas. Sambo is the burden
of our prayers and peccadilloes. For
him we issue unlimited Greenbacks. For
him we drill and destroy uncounted
lives. We create major generals to
guard him and his interests and
brigadiers forever sing his praise.
Unnumbered colonels proclaim his

¹⁶ Mulligan, Personal Diary, 1 January 1863.

inalienable rights and pocket two hundred dollars per month. Governors divide their allegiance between Uncle Sam and Uncle Tom and Congress is proud to become his magnificent servant. Ladies praise him, the Senate praise him and the great army of noodles generally think him a big thing.¹⁷

Mulligan's reaction was typical of Irish-American outrage at the Emancipation Proclamation. He shared the Irish-American hatred and fear of blacks, especially free blacks. However, his bigotry is all the more deplorable because it is motivated less by fear and more by hate and politics. Unlike the poor Irish immigrant, he did not face the prospect of losing employment to freed slaves. He did not face a return from the war to an impoverished family with little hope for the future. He hated blacks because "his people" hated them.¹⁸

Although Mulligan never forgot his anger at the change in the war's focus wrought by the Emancipation Proclamation, he soon cooled down when confronted by the demands of war. The very day he wrote this harsh entry, he was recalled to New Creek to organize reinforcements for Moorefield, which was reportedly threatened by a large force of Confederates under the command of Brigadier General William E. Jones.

¹⁷ Mulligan, Personal Diary, 3 January 1863.

¹⁸ James M. McPherson, Drawn with the Sword: Reflections on the American Civil War (Oxford, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1996), 91-94.

"Grumble" Jones had recently taken command of the Confederate Army's Valley District and he had orders from General Lee that "the enemy, if possible, must not be allowed to remain on the South Branch of the Potomac, but must be driven across the Potomac River."¹⁹ Lee added some advice: "If by any means you could cut off the enemy's communication with the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, it seems to me he could not retain his position where he now is."²⁰

Jones' followed these orders less than a week later when he organized a surprise attack on Moorefield. Mulligan was glad to have some action and he was quickly roused from his gloomy thoughts a few days prior. Even after a forced march of more than forty miles, Mulligan and his command were excited by the prospect of a battle. He wrote in his journal: "Pressed forward: no dinner, the men panting and blistered from travel but eager and determined."²¹ In the meantime, Jones had not deployed his forces properly to face this new threat and withdrew from Moorefield. He would later claim a "partial victory" because he had captured close to 100 federal troops and captured or forced the enemy

¹⁹ O.R., I, 21: 1080.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Mulligan, Personal diary, 4 January 1863.

to destroy thousands of dollars of valuable supplies.²² On January 6th, however, Mulligan, unaware that Jones' force had retreated, arranged his men in line of battle and advanced on the enemy's camp. Undoubtedly, he was disappointed to find the camp empty as he probably would have relished the chance to fight a larger enemy force. However, this was the nature of warfare in the mountains of West Virginia-march and countermarch after an elusive enemy only to find they had slipped away just as they were "trapped."²³ All Mulligan could do was to report his findings to his superiors and ask for further instructions. Two days later, he was ordered to return to New Creek.²⁴

After his return to New Creek, Mulligan quickly boarded a train to join his wife and children who were staying in Cumberland. As had been the case in Missouri, Marian Mulligan followed her husband wherever he was sent, and stayed as close to him as possible. She had stayed with him and nursed his wounds after his capture at Lexington. Now she was at her husband's side in West Virginia, but this time with two infant children. Marian's devotion to her

²² W.E. Jones to R.H. Chilton, Report, Assistant Adjutant-General, Army of Northern Virginia, 6 January 1863, in O.R., I, 21: 747-48.

²³ Weigley, A Great Civil War, 55.

²⁴ Mulligan, Personal Diary, 8 January 1863.

husband even included her accompanying him on a few midnight marches and checking of posts early in the morning.²⁵

Despite the threat of Rebel raiders, Mulligan did not seem to have been concerned about the safety of his wife and children while they were with him. Indeed, he seemed happier when they were near. He was also more irritable when they were away. During one of the family's few separations, his journal entries clearly reveal the loss he felt.

Worked pretty hard all day, but find it a little weary without pet (Marian Mulligan). I never knew how much I loved the girl-that darling wife of mine, 'till separated. It is a happy thing for a man in this damnable world to have a pure trusting loving woman to anchor by.²⁶

His desire to have his wife at his side, however, was not merely the lamentations of a lonely husband with an empty bed at night. He had a passionate love for his wife which is revealed by a journal entry filled with thoughts of his wife. For example, he wrote:

Several years ago tonight (in '57 I think) standing in the starlight, chatting with a pretty wee thing, indeed

²⁵ Nash, "Colonel James A. Mulligan," 29b. Sister Mary copied one of Mulligan's wartime journals, covering 26 July 1863-5 January 1864, in her thesis. I have also used her copy of the journal to help write my description of Mulligan's activities in West Virginia.

²⁶ Nash, Ibid, 41b.

flirting with a handsome saucy girl on her mother's steps I seized the chance, her attention being turned to a star, to snatch my first kiss from her and run away. Since then I have taken a great many and held my ground. That pretty saucy wee thing two years afterwards became my Darling wife.²⁷

Marian Mulligan, for her part, returned her husband's love and devotion with equal measure. She followed him and his fortune without failing to be at his side when he needed her most. Twice during the war, this included crossing enemy lines after he had been captured.

Mulligan remained in Cumberland with his wife for the rest of January. During this time, he headed an officer review board examining the competency of officers in the division. His enthusiasm for military subjects, which he had avidly pursued since he was a schoolboy, received quite a shock from the ignorance of many of the officers he examined. He complained greatly of the their incompetence and even recommended a few be discharged. In his journal he wrote, "many of them couldn't tell the composition and dimensions of a hand pike."²⁸ Mulligan, like these despised men, was not a professional soldier. He had no military experience before the war other than in the militia and what

²⁷ Nash, "Colonel James A. Mulligan," 32-33b.

²⁸ Mulligan, Personal Diary, 16 January 1863.

he had read about wars and the fighting of wars. He had shown he was a capable officer at Lexington although he lost that battle. However, he approached his role with more professionalism than many of his fellow officers. He also took his duties more seriously than would be assumed of someone who simply volunteered to improve his political influence. He avidly read the histories of famous generals as well as professional publications on military subjects. He even mentioned several times in his journal that he had read Dennis Hart Mahan's Outpost.²⁹

His literacy on the subject of war did not make him a good leader, of course. His diary suggested that his men respected and followed him because he did not demand more of them than what he expected from himself. Others, including the enemy, admired and liked Mulligan because he was brave and did not back down from a fight. He lived up to the principle that "a leader must lead from the front." Admiration and loyalty from his men, however, did not necessarily guarantee success. The Union Army had a fanatical love for McClellan, but he failed to win a battle while in command of that army. Mulligan's voracious

²⁹ Dennis Hart Mahan was an officer in the U.S. Army who studied and wrote about the art of war. His most important book, Advanced Guard, Outpost and Detachment Service of Troops, with the Essential Principles of Strategy and Grand Tactics, or Outpost, was one of the textbooks used at West Point and was carried by most of the top leaders on both sides in the Civil War.

appetite for books on war and the military made him a skilled soldier and he tried to instill the same sense of professionalism in his men. He spent many nights walking the outposts checking on the alertness and bearing of his sentries. He maintained strict discipline even while his men were in camp and he drilled them often. He even used his own money to establish a library for the regiment.³⁰

His expectations for his men, however, sometimes led to disappointment. Numerous journal entries describe his coming upon a sleeping sentry, finding lax discipline in an outpost, or berating an officer for ignorance of his duties. Mulligan was not a martinet or a harsh disciplinarian. He wanted his men to be good soldiers, not fearful ones, and they responded well to his leniency by fighting hard in battle. In one incident of dereliction of duty, he shows how he valued a few firm words over a firm hand.

Riding home I came upon the pickets neglecting their duty. I called the sergeant out and being myself out of kilter, reprimanded him with fury, promising him court martial or a reduction before night. There was a furious buckling on of belts and shouldering of muskets as the frightened guard wondered what had happened and I rode off. I arranged for the care of Phil's [his horse] eyes, but couldn't proceed with my work, the case of the sergeant troubled me. While there was

³⁰ Nash, "Colonel James A. Mulligan," 47b.

room for complaint, I was afraid, I had been too harsh, and, in stripping [the sergeant of his rank] would wrong him. He might have a family, reducing him would reduce their comforts; disgracing him would surely sting his poor wife. I sent for him, and, he came full of apprehension. I inquired about his family. He has a wife in his heart and a baby at home, three stripes on his arm, and, his words full of regret, and, his face full of penitence. I talked to him till he cried and forgave, and then I felt better. The forgiveness smote clean through his heart. He will now become a soldier trusty as steel.³¹

Despite his demands for discipline, Mulligan knew that he needed to gain the trust and confidence of his men if he wanted to lead them effectively. Had he commanded his men with nothing but unceasing demands for improvement and harsh reprimands, he would not have had their loyalty nor their best effort.

Mulligan's character and professionalism as a leader are most evident in the actions of his men. One particular event occurred in April of 1863 when Brigadier-General "Grumble" Jones encountered a company of Mulligan's Irish Brigade. Jones had led his brigade of 1,500 Confederate cavalrymen north out of Virginia to raid the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. His approach route, however, took him through a portion of Mulligan's command. At Greenland Gap,

³¹ Nash, "Colonel James A. Mulligan," 45b.

he encountered Company "G" of the Irish Brigade, led by Captain Wallace, and a company of the 14th West Virginia Infantry. At the approach of the enemy, Wallace immediately threw his 52 men into a log church and the 34 men of the 14th West Virginia into two adjacent log houses. The charging Confederate horsemen were greeted with a heavy fire that repulsed their first two attacks. Jones, trying to save himself time and lives, then sent a flag of truce to demand the beleaguered garrison's surrender. He argued that he outnumbered them greatly and that it was pointless to continue to fight. Wallace refused, stating, "go back with that rag, I don't care if he has a million men; I will not surrender until compelled."³² Jones then dismounted some of his men and ordered another assault. Again the rebels were repulsed by the heavy fire of the defenders, but they reformed for another attack. The battle raged until evening and the repulse of another Confederate charge. After his men had withdrawn, Jones again sent a flag of truce to demand the surrender of the federal outpost. This time, he threatened to use his cannon on the small log buildings. Wallace, unmoved by even this threat replied, "tell him he has got none; if he has, bring them on. We are Mulligan's

³² Martin Wallace to James F. Cosgrove, 11 June 1863, in O.R., I, 25:108-110.

men, and we will fight to the last crust and cartridge."³³

But, night fell and darkness filled Greenland Gap.

Finally, under cover of darkness, Jones launched his last attack. This time he was able to get men close enough to the church and the houses occupied by Wallace's men to set fire to them. The brave defenders continued to fight as the buildings burned around them. However, they were compelled to surrender when the roofs collapsed. Despite the desperate nature of the struggle, neither side experienced many casualties with the Confederates receiving the most, many of whom were officers. Although he had lost the battle and was captured, Captain Wallace held out for four hours against a vastly superior enemy. More importantly, this delay in the Confederate raid provided valuable time for other Union posts to prepare for Jones' attack, and perhaps saved numerous lives and valuable property from destruction. At the end of his report on the battle, Wallace stated that he desired to live up to the example Mulligan had set in Missouri. Wallace wrote, "I strove to imitate Lexington."³⁴

Four days later, on the 29th, Mulligan himself came up against Jones' force as it continued its raid on the B & O.

³³ Martin to Cosgrove, Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

After arriving at and securing Grafton, he sent a detachment to reinforce Fairmont, but the garrison there had already surrendered. When the train carrying the reinforcements arrived, they were immediately attacked by Jones.

Outnumbered and located in a bad position, Mulligan's men skirmished with the Rebels for three hours before they were finally forced to withdraw back to Grafton. Mulligan reported, "GENERAL: After a fight of three hours, our forces have been drawn back from Fairmont to Grafton. I will be attacked here to-night."³⁵ The attack never came, however, as Jones moved his brigade south to Buckhannon to link up with Brigadier-General Imboden's brigade of Partisans and Rangers.

After the two Confederate forces united they decided to split up so that Imboden could take prisoners and captured supplies south as Jones marched west to destroy the oil fields located near the Ohio border. When their raid against the B & O Railroad was complete, Jones' brigade had marched over 700 miles in 30 days, much of it through the rugged mountains and wintry weather of West Virginia. Mulligan, like the other Union commanders along the B & O, was surprised by the sudden attack of such a large force. Since

³⁵ James A. Mulligan to B.Gen. Roberts, 29 April 1863, in O.R., I, 25: 110.

most of his command was spread out in their winter quarters, he could not organize a sufficient force rapidly enough to confront the raiders. He was extremely pleased, however, that the one Union success during this Confederate attack came from the men of his brigade, especially those who were members of his former unit, the Irish Brigade. The valiant defense of Greenland Gap garnered more praise for his leadership and the quality of his men. In a letter to Captain Wallace, Lieutenant Nugent writes of Mulligan's pleasure, "Colonel Mulligan directs me to say that in the name of the Irish Brigade, he thanks you and the company for your gallant fight at Greenland Gap worthy of your old Lexington renown. God bless you all."³⁶ He included a box of smoking tobacco and a box of chewing tobacco as a "small token of their regard and to cheer up our brave boys."³⁷

Jones' and Imboden's raid on the B & O Railroad drew Mulligan away from Hooker's Chancellorsville campaign in progress at this time. The federal troops in West Virginia, however, were in no position to assist in offensive operations. Most of them were still spread out along the B & O in their winter quarters. The district was also short

³⁶ James Nugent to Martin Wallace, Orders Book-5th Brigade, 1st Division, Military Department of West Virginia, letter, 4 June 1863, Mulligan Papers, CHS.

³⁷ Ibid.

of men, maintaining just enough to keep the railroad and thus communications open to the west. Jones' and Imboden's raid would also set the stage for Lee's invasion of the north planned to begin less than a month later.

CHAPTER 4

GUERRILLA WARFARE

Early in June 1863, Lee once again called upon his commanders in the Valley District to demonstrate against federal forces in West Virginia. He wanted to prevent the troops guarding the B & O Railroad from reinforcing the Shenandoah Valley, through which he planned to march the Army of Northern Virginia into Maryland and Pennsylvania. To this end, he ordered Imboden to advance on Romney, West Virginia with his entire command. From there, he would continue north to the B & O Railroad where he would drive off any federal troops and burn the bridges between Cumberland, Maryland and Martinsburg, West Virginia. Imboden would then join Lee's army when it drove north. From June 7th to the 27th, Imboden's partisan rangers rode along the B & O wrecking track and occupying Union forces pinned in West Virginia. He even captured Mulligan's wife and children when he raided Cumberland on the 17th. Noting this event in his journal, Mulligan warned, "Be very careful of them, be very courteous to them Imboden or I'll follow

you with a vengeance."¹ Two days later, Cumberland was recaptured and Mulligan was reunited with his family. Imboden had already moved east to protect the flank of Lee's army as it advanced through the Shenandoah Valley. On the 27th, he joined Lee and was again placed on the left flank of the army to shield it as it advanced into Maryland and Pennsylvania. He was also assigned the task of collecting supplies and forage for the army.²

As Lee moved toward his fateful battle at Gettysburg, Mulligan speculated in his journal about the significance of Lee's movements:

Maryland is overflown with their host and they are breaking over the lines of Pennsylvania. Lee is lusting for Washington or Baltimore. There's big history molding. The future Bancrofts will have stores of material, rich in courage, in skill, in blood, in wrecks. Not the tale that Sullust tells nor the Phillipic that Cicero utters can reach the criminal grandeur of the treason that stalks about us.³

Mulligan, however, was not a part of the "big history molding" near Gettysburg. Federal troops were still recovering and repairing from the damage done by Imboden's

¹ Mulligan, Personal Diary, 17 June 1863.

² R.E. Lee to S. Cooper, Annual Report, January 1864, in O.R., I, 27, II:316.

³ Mulligan, Ibid, 23 June 1863.

raid along the B&O Railroad. They, and Mulligan with them, would not be ready to move to General George Meade's support until after the battle had been decided.

On June 24th, as a part of the many changes made to the Union Army, the Military District of West Virginia was reorganized into the Department of West Virginia. Brigadier-General Benjamin F. Kelley, Mulligan's division commander, was assigned a few days later as its new commander and Mulligan retained command of his brigade. On June 28th, General Joseph Hooker was replaced by General Meade as commander of the Army of the Potomac, which Mulligan noted with some satisfaction. He wrote, "The evening paper announces that General Hooker is relieved of the command of the Army of the Potomac at his own request. He should be more prompt in his requests."⁴ Like most men in the Union Army, Mulligan merely noted the passing of yet another commander without much hope for the next. This pessimism became more apparent later that day when he added more news to his entry.

A little later the operator telegraphs me from Wheeling that Dix has invested Richmond, that Meade is fighting Lee successfully at Gettysburg, Pa., that Rosecrans is driving Bragg, that Grant has captured Vicksburg; reading through the cavalcade of wonders.

⁴ Mulligan, Ibid, 30 June 1863.

All of which I believe to be more glorious than truthful.⁵

Mulligan closed his "Red" journal on the very day Lee was repulsed from Gettysburg. Mulligan did not note the truth of the rumors, of a victory at Gettysburg, which he had dismissed only a few days earlier. By July 7th, Meade was certain that Lee's army was in retreat and he ordered his forces to close and follow the fleeing Confederates. Mulligan was ordered to move his brigade to Hancock, Pennsylvania where the rest of Kelley's department was concentrating.⁶ From there, they would join with other federal troops pursuing Lee's army as it retreated back to Virginia. However, Meade cautiously pursued Lee, losing any chance to catch the battered Confederate army and denying Mulligan an opportunity to fight a pitched battle against the South's greatest general.

From Hancock, Mulligan moved with the rest of Kelley's command to Fairview, Pennsylvania, where they were joined on July 13th by Brigadier-General William Averell's independent cavalry brigade. The next day, Kelley moved all of his

⁵ Mulligan, Ibid.

⁶ Itinerary of the Army of the Potomac and Cooperating Forces, 5 June-31 July 1863, in O.R., I, 27, I: 146. Pages 146-50 describe the movements of General Kelley's Department of West Virginia under whom Mulligan was serving. I used this itinerary plus the report of Kelley in O.R., I, 27, II: 280-81 to describe their role in the pursuit of Lee's army after the Battle of Gettysburg.

forces from Fairview to Williamsport, Pennsylvania on the Potomac River, where Meade had finally gathered his army to pursue Lee. From that point, each corp spread out along the river to cover the various crossing points over the Potomac. On July 15th, Kelley moved his small corp west to Indian Springs, Maryland where they then turned south to cross the Potomac River at Cherry Run. Averell's cavalry crossed first on the 16th to scout ahead and to screen the rest of the division when it crossed the river the following day. Mulligan was put in command of the second crossing. As the rest of the division crossed the river on July 17th, Averell's cavalry encountered Rebel troops on the road to Hedgesville. The Union troopers easily swept the Confederates aside, which allowed Mulligan and the infantry to move into Hedgesville the next day without trouble. Late in the day on July 18th, Averell's cavalry, scouting towards the divisions next objective-Martinsburg, again encountered enemy cavalry acting as a rearguard for Lee's retreating army. The union troopers also captured a supply train from General Rodes' infantry division. Fearing that he may have encountered a much larger force of Confederates, Kelley withdrew across the Potomac and asked for confirmation of

Lee's position.⁷ Kelley, however, had his cavalry stay on the south side of the river to watch and report the enemy's movements.

On the 19th, Mulligan again directed the crossing of the Potomac River and the occupation of Hedgesville. Kelley sent his cavalry forward to Martinsburg where they encountered strong pickets. Pursuant to his orders not to engage the enemy in a fixed battle, Averell withdrew his cavalry. Rodes' rearguard then advanced on the retreating Union cavalry chasing them to Hedgesville. Having gained the protection of his own infantry, Averell turned his cavalry around and drove off the pursuing Rebels. Again confronted with a superior force, Kelley waited for the Confederates to continue their retreat before following. Mulligan, however, remained behind in Hedgesville with his brigade to await orders to return to West Virginia. Kelley and the rest of the department occupied Martinsburg on July 25th and Winchester, Virginia the following day. Lee's army had escaped.

Mulligan played only a small part in the Battle of Gettysburg. As with most operations of the Army of the Potomac, the troops in West Virginia could lend little

⁷ B.F. Kelley to Adjutant General, Letter, 18 July 1863, in O.R., I, 27, II: 281.

support. Kelley's command was barely large enough to protect the B&O Railroad as it stretched across the mountains and valleys of the department. Their value was not in helping to fight the Army of Northern Virginia, but in keeping open the line of communication and supply between East and West. The men and officers of the Department of West Virginia did not just guard a railroad, they protected one of the Union's vital lifelines. However, their small service in pursuit Lee's army did not go unnoticed or unrecognized. In his annual report to the Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, Major-General Halleck, General-in-Chief of the U.S. Army, mentioned their "valuable service" to the army during the Gettysburg campaign. He wrote:

The operations of our troops in West Virginia are referred to here as being intimately connected with those of the Army of the Potomac. The force, being too small to attempt any important campaign by itself, has acted mostly upon the defensive, in repelling raids and breaking up guerilla bands.

When Lee's army retreated across the Potomac in July last, Brigadier-General Kelley concentrated all his available force on the enemy's flank, near Clear Spring, ready to co-operate in the proposed attack by General Meade. They also rendered valuable services in the pursuit, after Lee had effected his passage of the river.⁸

⁸ Henry W. Halleck to Hon. E.M. Stanton, Annual Report, 15 November 1863, in O.R., I, 27, II: 17.

After regaining all they had lost when Lee marched through to Pennsylvania, Kelley's command returned to their posts along the B&O Railroad. On August 1st, Mulligan was ordered to proceed with his command to the Northwest Pike near Winchester and thence on to Burlington, West Virginia, where he was to wait for further orders. Mulligan's wife and children, who had joined him in Hedgesville, would travel with him. After briefly marching south, Mulligan and his men turned west just before reaching Winchester and crossed the Little North Mountain. Twelve miles northwest of Winchester, they reached the broad, flat road of the Northwest Pike. The march to this point had been difficult and the men were weary, but upon reaching the Pike, they let out a cheer.⁹ Once on the road, the men moved quickly, reaching Burlington on August 7th. In less than a week, Mulligan had marched without incident his infantry, his supply wagons, and his wife and children through almost 100 miles of the most active guerilla region of the war. Lee had used almost every resource in Virginia for his Gettysburg campaign; and with his defeat, the Confederacy was unable to do anything about Union movements.

Mulligan's command remained alert, however, during their march. As veterans of the guerilla war in West Virginia,

⁹ Nash, "Colonel James A. Mulligan," 6b.

they knew that they could never let their guard down while in enemy country. If they needed a reminder about the nature of war in this region, all they had to do was look around. Every village or farm had the marks of war on them as did the people. Mulligan first thoughts about the effects of the war on this region turned towards the people, although not in kindness. "This country is filled with extortioners. I do not wish to hear any more of the fine Old Virginia hospitality. They are sharpers. They give nothing for nothing not even good manners, which however, is their rarest commodity."¹⁰ Mulligan was a part of an occupying army in the minds of the citizens of West Virginia. They were the enemy with whom they would seldom cooperate and then only if the price was right. Mulligan also despised rebellion in all its forms and hated the people who espoused its virtues. In his mind, the South was merely reaping what it had sown. He had some cause, therefore, to be angry with the people and unsympathetic to any suffering the war had caused them.

Although Mulligan seemed to dismiss the sufferings of West Virginians, he was always aware of the feelings the effects of the war created. During their march, he and his men passed through the burned remains of a small village

¹⁰ Nash, Ibid.

called Frenchtown. His staff commented that two Union regiments had set fire to it due to the support its citizens offered rebel guerillas. A discussion then developed about the necessity of the act to which Mulligan added a few comments. Later, he wrote in his journal, "This guerilla business being one of the meaner modes of assassination and taken in connection with the fact that our own lives at the very moment of argument were liable to its assaults make the friends of Frenchtown few."¹¹ Frenchtown and others like it along the Pike were a constant reminder to Mulligan and his men of the real cost of war. Mulligan continued, "The pike we are traveling is sadly in need of repairs and with neglected farms and burnt villages speaks well of the neglects and cruelties of war."¹² With his thoughts again focused on his duties, Mulligan made only one more comment about the countryside through which his command marched. Ignoring what many people would have viewed as a rustic and quaint scene, Mulligan wrote of how an abandoned church on a hill near the town of Romney would make a good outpost for that town. Fortunately, he and his men did not have to make use of such a position or any like it as they did not

¹¹ Nash, Ibid, 7b.

¹² Ibid, 8b.

encounter the enemy during the entire march. Mulligan and his command arrived unscathed at Burlington on August 7th.

After their arrival, the Mulligan's men set up camp and he sent his wife and children north to Cumberland.

Mulligan, as was his practice in the past, stayed with his command and lodged his family in a nearby town. He could visit them or they would travel to the camp to see him.

Several events, however, distracted his attention while he awaited orders in Burlington. First, on August 8th, he received what he called a rumor that his step-father,

Michael Lantry, had died. "To my relief," he wrote later,

"found the rumor groundless."¹³ On the 9th, a Sunday, he

wrote that the absence of a chaplain in his command had caused him and the Irish Brigade "great uneasiness."¹⁴

Eventually, the regiment would get a new chaplain but

Mulligan, as the brigade commander, attended mass at a

nearby church. Finally, his hopes for promotion were

cautiously fueled by "news" that Kelley was to be promoted

to major general and he to brigadier. He wrote, "It is

supposed that 'Colonel Mulligan' will be assigned a division

having conducted the retreat (before Lee's army) from Back Creek to the Potomac which is held as the moving cause of

¹³ Nash, Ibid, 9b.

¹⁴ Ibid, 10b.

the general's advancement."¹⁵ Four more days passed before he received orders to move the brigade, but still there was no promotion.

Early on August 14th, Mulligan marched his brigade south for Petersburg, West Virginia. His orders were to establish a strong camp there so he could support operations by Brigadier-General Averell's cavalry against Huntersville and Lewisburg, West Virginia.¹⁶ Also, in order to maintain communications with Kelley at New Creek, Mulligan had to leave a company of infantry at both Burlington and Williamsport on the road between Petersburg and New Creek. On the evening of the 14th, he camped by the road south of Williamsport, where Marian and the children joined him. The next day at noon, Mulligan arrived at Petersburg and met with General Averell, who was anxiously awaiting supplies for his expedition. Mulligan was not in Petersburg long, however, before he found another reason for establishing a garrison in the town. He wrote, "blast the churlish heart of this Burgh. I'll teach it Christianity without a chaplain. It is my experience that secession and bad

¹⁵ Nash, Ibid.

¹⁶ B.F. Kelley to Wm. W. Averell, Orders, 14 August 1863, in O.R., I, 29: 39-40.

manners are kith."¹⁷ His anger, however, was mainly due to the difficulties in finding lodgings for his wife and children. Eventually, he finds a suitable place, though the owners were, what he called, "intensely treasonable."

After establishing his camp and setting his men to fortifying the position, Mulligan assigned the troops under his command to their posts. First, he established his headquarters in Petersburg and assigned most of the brigade, including his Irish Brigade, to be its garrison. Mulligan then sent a battalion of infantry and a section of artillery to Moorefield. Finally, in accordance with General Kelley's order to maintain a line of communication with New Creek, Mulligan assigned an infantry company to Burlington and to Williamsport. After he inspected the placement of troops at Moorefield, Mulligan reminisced in his journal about his encounter with General Jones near the town the previous year.

Moorefield looked bright and quiet and treasonable as ever. It is a fine village for Virginia and I only wish Jones had shown more mettle last winter, for Moorefield would look well in golden letters on our flag. I speak with due respect for Jones and due appreciation of the quality of his troops; but I would surely have beaten him.¹⁸

¹⁷ Nash, "Colonel James A. Mulligan," 12-13b.

¹⁸ Ibid, 14b.

For the next couple of months, Mulligan and his men enjoyed an Indian summer which was interrupted only by an occasional call to arms. Marian Mulligan, as usual, was his constant companion and a frequent visitor to the camp. Often, they would ride in the morning and spend the rest of the day in some social activity. As usual, he continued his reading. Mulligan, however, was bored from inaction, which he often wrote about in his journal. Thus, when Imboden threatened Moorefield, he eagerly rode off in personal command of the relief force. His excitement was barely contained as he later wrote of the engagement that followed.

Ordered a section of the Battery and the Irish Brigade to move, dined, all the staff are buckling on their armor; mounted, said a brief prayer; moved at 2 p.m. Entered the Gap and had advanced about three miles and reached one of its lofty ledges when surrounded by staff (Martin, James, Wallace, Moriarity, Tom, Hickey, and one of the cavalry orderlies) was slowly riding in advance of the skirmishers, when a single shot came clear and echoing through the defile. It was on my right and rear. I turned my head and with a single look in the direction of the shot resumed my course. Scarcely done, when hundreds of rifles rained ball upon our group. Lexie [his horse] became frantic and held me under the fire while he performed feats that would have made a circus rider rich. Still it rained, twigs, dust and splinters of rock were going about freely under the wicked shower of slugs. "Shall we go forward, Colonel" said the staff. "To the

command, gentlemen," was the reply. Having at length controlled Lexie, I galloped back to the Battery commanding "unlimber and give them grape." Several of the horses have already fallen in the harness but the guns were soon making the gorge ring with young thunder. My hat was gone, and my horse unmanageable I dismounted and taking my position with the artillery, ordered up a detachment of the Brigade. It came forward rapidly, under the gallant Saxie, who cleaned the ledges so clean that no rebel dared to longer lodge in them, when things were settled we fell back out of the Gap and returned to camp. Not an officer, wonderful escape, was touched. My orderly had four balls through his horse and clothes. And one I found driven through the left breast of my green shirt.¹⁹

Fortunately, when Mulligan and the relief force tried another route the next day, they only encountered the retreating Moorefield garrison. Several days later his cavalry reoccupied Moorefield. He wrote, "Much disappointed that Mr. Imboden made so brief and profitless a stay."²⁰

On September 11th, however, Imboden and McNeill returned to Moorefield to deliver an embarrassing blow to Mulligan's brigade. Major Stephens, commander of the Union garrison there, had heard that the rebel guerillas were nearby and he took two companies out to ambush the Rebels. McNeill, however, bypassed the ambush site and surprised the Union

¹⁹ Nash, Ibid, 19-20b.

²⁰ Ibid, 22b.

troops in their camp. He captured 146 men without a fight, but Major Stephens escaped. A relief force from Petersburg succeeded only in killing or capturing a handful of McNeill's men. Mulligan took some pride in this small victory as the relief force was made up men from his old regiment, the Irish Brigade.. He wrote, "I have faith in Saxie, faith in Wallace, faith in all the men I trained. They will speak by the rifle, by the bayonet, and by the wild yell as they go charging on. They are good boys both; both good boys. Bully for the Irish Brigade."²¹

As the month passed and winter began "skirmishing pretty actively with the retreating summer," Mulligan's command continued to fortify and prepare their winter quarters. The only actions were a few skirmishes and the strengthening of outposts when enemy raiders threatened. Moorefield seemed to have been the Confederate's primary target, with skirmishes there on September 11th, 21st, and 27th. Mulligan also returned to what he called "my old business 'Watch Dog of the sleepy camp'"²² On the 25th, he heard a rumor that he was to be promoted to command of a division. This attempt to "trifle with me" insulted Mulligan's pride. "It [the division] more needs my care than its pitiful honors. A

²¹ Nash, Ibid, 23b.

²² Ibid, 28b.

sham general of Division is even worse than a Sham general of Brigade in as much as the Sham is greater."²³

Early in October, Marian Mulligan departed for Chicago to visit her family. Her brother, Lieutenant James Nugent, who was a member of the brigade staff, accompanied her and the children. Mulligan escorted them for a part of the "happy journey" and then he returned to "Camp Comfort." He continued his routine of riding and reading during the day, and making the rounds of his pickets at night. However, the absence of his wife and the relative inactivity had him yearning for action again. He wrote on October 19th, "These long sunny days are becoming very tedious I'm growing weary of Petersburg. I want some activity or change or anything."²⁴ On the 20th he continued, "moping for something to do and in good keeping with that feeling hesitating to do the little that I ought."²⁵ Finally, on the 22nd, his boredom was relieved by a summons to headquarters. Excited by the prospect of a change of scenery, he immediately started for Cumberland.

Mulligan arrived at department headquarters on October 24th and reported to General Kelley. He was informed then

²³ Nash, Ibid, 28b.

²⁴ Ibid, 34b.

²⁵ Ibid.

that the Railroad Department was being reorganized and that he would command one of its two divisions. His new command stretched from Sleepy Creek to the Ohio River. "One half of the state of Virginia," he later wrote. He also added that he had marched and fought over almost every part of it.²⁶

Mulligan returned to Petersburg briefly to collect his belongings and gather his staff before moving to his new headquarters at New Creek. After his arrival there on October 29th, he closed the month of October with the following observation:

After almost four months marching and skirmishing, feasting and fasting, eluding Ewell and Imboden, watching Lee and avoiding him, with an additional bullet through my shirt and an additional stock of experience in my heart, with many things I have forgotten and many more things to learn, I am again snugly ensconced in my old quarters in the Armstrong house, looking out on the old homelike objects Fort Fuller, Piano Fort, Queens Cliff, and the slope and streams and wood, so often crossed and traversed on midnight rounds or delightfully sauntered over with my Darling, Darling wife.²⁷

Mulligan spent most of November organizing and familiarizing himself with his new command. As commander of a division spread over such a large area, he did not involve

²⁶ Nash, Ibid, 37b.

²⁷ Ibid, 38-39b.

himself directly in the activities of his men. He sent orders directing his subordinates to action rather than leading the men himself, which was his practice even as a brigade commander. The first test of his resolve to command rather than charge into the fray came on November 16th when the supply train to Petersburg was captured and plundered by McNeill's Partisans. Mulligan, resisted the urge to charge out at the head of a relief force and let his cavalry do the chasing. The rebels, however, eluded his cavalry and made their escape south. Mulligan was incredulous. He could not believe that a force with fewer than 200 men, loaded down with booty, was able to escape a well-mounted force of over 1,500 troopers. "It must have been a paltry pursuit," he wrote. "I hope better when I have this command a few days longer in hand."²⁸ However, he did not fail to give credit to the skill of the rebel leader. "I admire McNeill dash, energy and skill. These qualities bring success; are success."²⁹

November also offered Mulligan a chance to expound on his favorite topic-politics and the war. On November 1st, he wrote a lengthy journal entry on what he observed to be "the many odd things and contrivances, chances, fortunes,

²⁸ Nash, Ibid, 56b.

²⁹ Ibid.

blunders, successes and peculiarities that has marked the war."

Maj. Gen. Grant is the favorite hero, made by Donelson and Henry, nearly unmade by Shiloh, but restored to supreme favor by Vicksburg. I know him. He is an ordinary man; but had the fortune to have considerable friends at court, such as A. Lincoln. He was assigned to large bodies of western men fighting by the banks of the Mississippi, for the Mississippi, that filled its fertile valley and he succeeded in many of his engagements; when his battles failed him, to their credit be it spoken-his friends supported him-and profiting by this experience, he was made a splendid name. His was the exceptional case. McClellan, the first soldier of the War, failed by the political intermeddling of others to take Richmond and his was the fate of Buckingham-'off with his head.' Buell hesitated at something and his jugular was severed. The other day at Chattanooga, Rosecrans failed to whip everybody, Bragg, Polk, Longstreet and several others included, and straight away is relieved and sent to campaign at the Burnett House in Cincinnati. And this same Rosecrans is the most skillful and desperate fighter in the field, and so it goes. And what is to come yet? A great contest for a great country is sliding into a wretched jangle of parties Miserable copperheads and Miserable Abolitionists in hate and blood struggling for the mastery, despise and trample upon the few who remember their country. O! That Douglas had lived; that some man had lived with head and brain big enough to embrace and comprehend the nation and scourge the

bigotry that neglected its country to advance its party.³⁰

Mulligan, of course, needed no excuse to write about his views on politics. However, he wrote this passage in his journal after 17th New York Infantry Regiment passed through New Creek on its way to Grant's army in the west. Mulligan must have felt the war was passing him buy like the 17th New York passed buy New Creek. On the other hand, his next entry on November 4th was likely motivated by the political significance of that day--election day. In this entry, he clearly defined his political loyalties.

One year hence the ballot will be cast for Mr. Lincoln's successors. In so changeful a time and people as this it is difficult to surmise the movement that the 4th Nov. '64 will inaugurate and determine. But I will hazard a suggestion. Mr. Lincoln will be the nominee of the Republican Party and the representative of the school that will save the Constitution from infringement by others; and advocate the restoration of the Union under contingencies, advocacy a Pope-like prosecution of the war. His rival will be General McClellan presented as the exponent of the Union without condition, the Constitution without infraction and the war conducted as Turenne would have conducted it, with skill, energy and magnanimity. We shall see.³¹

³⁰ Nash, "Colonel James A. Mulligan," 40-41b.

³¹ Ibid, 43b.

Mulligan's predictions were a mixture of what he hoped would happen and what he knew would happen. He wanted McClellan to be president but Mulligan wrote as if he knew McClellan would not be elected. Mulligan believed that Abraham Lincoln would be reelected though he feared that Lincoln's election would divide the North and weaken it. He would never see, however, that if there was any division created by President Lincoln, it was due to his death and not his election.

As with November, Mulligan and his command saw little action in December as they sat in their winter quarters. On December 10th, he dispatched Colonel Thoburn, who commanded his old brigade in Petersburg, and two regiments to support General Averell on a raid against the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad.³² On the 28th, rebel troops were sighted around Moorefield and rumored to be headed for Petersburg. The threatened attack did not occur, but Mulligan, who was in Petersburg, warned Colonel Thoburn to be alert for more attacks. He believed that the enemy would try to dislodge his forces from that area.³³

³² Wm. W. Averell to B.F. Kelley, Report, 20 December 1863, in O.R., I, 29, I: 927.

³³ Nash, "Colonel James A. Mulligan," 59b.

Mulligan had gone to Petersburg to discuss reenlistment with his old regiment, the Irish Brigade. He had already decided that he would reenlist. He wrote, "have talked it over with Darling and have concluded that this is our vocation."³⁴ On December 27th, he held a meeting with the officers of his staff, many of whom had also been members of the Irish Brigade. They too decide to reenlist, and accompany him to Petersburg. When Mulligan met with the officers of his old regiment the next day, they encouraged him to talk with the "boys" that afternoon. "'Now,'" he told the assembled regiment, "'was the time, if they didn't go [returned to Chicago to reenlist], Amen, I would.'"³⁵ He talked for 15 minutes but they did not respond to his speech with any of the enthusiasm they had shown him before. His hopes for their rallying behind him, as they had when he first raised the regiment and they elected him colonel, must have been crushed. Of course, the men of the Irish Brigade still had four months left of their three year enlistment, and the war must have seemed like it would never end.

³⁴ Nash, Ibid, 58b.

³⁵ Ibid, 59b.

CHAPTER 5

THE BATTLE OF KERNSTOWN

"So ends the year of 1863," Mulligan simply stated in his journal. However, the new year began in much the same way as the old ended. Mulligan still commanded the Second Division of the Department of West Virginia, protecting the vital Baltimore and Ohio rail line. His wife and children had returned to join him at New Creek. His troops were mostly in winter quarters, and the enemy appeared only to harass outposts or to raid supply trains. The weather was cold and snowy. He, like the rest of the department, expected little else. During this lull in activity, Confederate Major-General Fitzhugh Lee appeared in a dramatic fashion that Mulligan must have appreciated.

Fitzhugh Lee commanded a division in Lieutenant-General J.E.B. Stuart's cavalry corp, Army of Northern Virginia. After the retreat from Gettysburg, Fitz Lee's division had been detached for service with the Valley District.¹ Like

¹ F. Lee to J.A. Early, Report, 11 January 1864, in O.R., I, 33: 7-8. My description of Lee's raid on the B&O Railroad is primarily based on the account of this source.

many Confederate cavalry officers, Fitz Lee was aggressive and inventive, which were necessary qualities for the raid he lead against the B&O Railroad. Although he had the element of surprise, Fitz Lee had the difficult task of leading his men across mountainous terrain in the middle of winter and attacking a fortified enemy. Snug in their posts, the federal troops were surprised to see such a large force of rebel cavalry. For their part, Union commanders responded to this threat with a flurry of messages but little action. Unfortunately for Fitz Lee's troopers, the weather had been so cold and wet that they could not get their cannons across the mountains and their ammunition was damp. When they arrived at their objective, Petersburg, they discovered that any attack on the fortifications there would have been futile without cannons.

Where other officers would have seen this check in their operations as a failure and they would have retreated, Fitz Lee saw an opportunity. Believing that he might do more damage if he attacked the B&O, he decided to attack New Creek, one of the Union's supply depots on the railroad. The Confederate cavalry continued north, into more snow and colder temperatures. They captured and plundered the supply train bound for the garrison at Petersburg, which turned out to be Fitz Lee's only success. They made it to within six

miles of New Creek before Fitz Lee decided to turn back and returned to Harrisonville, Virginia in the Shenandoah Valley. In his report to Major-General Jubal Early, commander of the Valley District, Fitz Lee cited the weather as the chief cause for his retreat. He could not move his cannons to support his operations, and most of his men were too frost bitten and tired to make a spirited attack upon the Union posts. In fact, Fitz Lee's command was so weary from traveling the icy mountain roads that he returned by an easier route although it exposed his command to possible attack. Weather continued to hamper any operations for the rest of the month. By January 28th, however, conditions improved enough that General Early himself led another expedition against Mulligan's exposed outposts at Moorefield and Petersburg.² This time, he took a large force of infantry and artillery, and he also used the drying valley roads. The Rebels easily swept aside the pickets outside Moorefield and he occupied the town on September 29th. Early then halted to wait for the rest of his troops to join him. Once his two brigades were united, he would then attack Petersburg. While he waited for his second brigade to join him, Early sent his first brigade to attack a Union

² Early to R.E. Lee, Report, 6 February 1864, in O.R., I, 33:43-44. My description of Early's raid on the B&O Railroad is primarily based upon the account of this source and General Kelley's report to Henry Halleck, cited later.

supply train he heard was heading his direction. This brigade would then, after it had captured the supply train, join him and the other brigade at Petersburg. The brigade assigned to capture the supply train encountered the Irish Brigade who had blockaded the road west of Moorefield. The rebel cannons and their greater numbers forced the Irish to retreat. When the Irish encountered the supply train, they turned to fight the advancing Confederates. Again, the federal troops were overpowered and forced retreat, abandoning the supply wagons. The Irish Brigade and the escort for the supply train escaped capture by retreating through the mountains to New Creek. Loaded down with captured federal supplies, Rosser's brigade did not pursue the retreating Union soldiers but turned south towards Petersburg to join with Early and the rest of Early's division. In Moorefield, Early's other brigade commanded by Colonel Jackson had arrived and they too moved towards Petersburg.

Colonel Thoburn's brigade in Petersburg was isolated and greatly outnumbered after the Irish Brigade had been forced to retreat to New Creek. So, he withdrew the rest of his troops from Petersburg before the Confederates arrived. The next day, January 31st, Early's division entered the town and destroyed the Union fortifications. Again, he divided

his command. Early, with Jackson's brigade, the captured supplies, and the prisoners, returned to Moorefield. Rosser's brigade followed Patterson's Creek north to destroy the bridges on the B&O Railroad. Fearing that the enemy might move on New Creek or his headquarters at Cumberland, General Kelley held Mulligan at New Creek as the Rebels advanced up Patterson Creek Valley. When Rosser's brigade reaches the B&O, he swept aside the outposts guarding the bridges and set fire to them. Reinforcements from Cumberland arrived in time to drive away the Rebels and to save one of the two bridges the Confederates had set on fire. Rosser's brigade quickly retreated south towards Moorefield and the rest of Early's command. Kelley, who was having trouble concentrating his scattered forces, ordered Mulligan to pursue the retreating Confederates. On February 4th, Mulligan and some of his cavalry arrived at Moorefield just as the Confederates were withdrawing. His small force skirmished with Early's rearguard, but they could do little to stop the Rebels. Mulligan had too few men and they were too tired to make a spirited attack. The next day, after he was certain Early's division had completely withdrawn, Mulligan ordered his troops back to their posts, except for Thoburn's brigade which he stationed at Burlington.³

³ Kelley to Halleck, Report, 10 February 1864, in O.R., I, 33: 29-33.

Bad weather again hampered operations for both sides during the rest of February. Mulligan, however, engaged his men in patrols to Moorefield and Petersburg, which had been abandoned. After Early withdrew, Kelley felt that any troops sent back to those towns would be exposed to attack. So, he did not reestablish outposts there. Kelley, however, still wanted to maintain a federal presence in that area to prevent the Confederates from recruiting and gathering supplies. Consequently, he ordered Mulligan to keep careful watch on the area around Moorefield and Petersburg. While leading one of these patrols, Captain Wallace surprised several Confederates at Moorefield and made a notable capture. One of the Confederates Wallace's patrol captured was Lieutenant Parker who had commanded the detail which escorted Captain Wallace to Richmond after he had been captured at Greenland Gap the previous May.⁴

Late in February, Mulligan sent the cavalry of his division to Petersburg from where they could launch a raid on the saltworks at Franklin. Unfortunately, The extended Union supply lines were attacked by Rebel guerillas. McNeill's partisans captured the Union wagon train between New Creek and Petersburg, which forced the Federal cavalry to withdraw. Mulligan found himself on the defensive again.

⁴ Mulligan to Kelley, Report, 16 February 1864, in O.R., I, 33: 158.

There was little activity during March and April in the Department of West Virginia. Most endeavors involved small raids by Rebel guerillas on the B & O Railroad or against the scattered Union troops defending it. Mulligan and the rest of the department were even more restricted than their Confederate opponents. Major General Franz Sigel, who replaced Kelley on March 10, complained that his new command was unable to engage in offensive operations.⁵ His first report to the Adjutant-General, in fact, stated that his troops could barely hold onto the railroad.⁶ Mulligan, however, made several requests to send his cavalry to attack the enemy, but Sigel refused. In one reply, Sigel's adjutant wrote, "The general deems your information important, but does not wish just now any extensive cavalry expedition undertaken. For the present he desires simply the country on your front and flank well scouted, and the cavalry prepared for future important movements."⁷ Sigel added the next day, "There are no cavalry of any importance between New Creek and Parkersburg, and therefore, in case of a raid in that direction, much depends upon the cavalry of

⁵ Sigel, General Order #8, 10 March 1864, in O.R., I, 33: 664.

⁶ Sigel to A.G., Report, 29 March 1864, in O.R., I, 33: 762-65.

⁷ Sigel to Mulligan, Letter, 23 March 1864, in O.R., I, 33: 720.

your division."⁸ Mulligan's cavalry was the only cavalry in their region and Sigel did not want to be without it in case the enemy should attack them.

Sigel was also under pressure from the growing demands for more troops the new commander of the Union armies, General Ulysses S. Grant, was making of all his departments. On March 29, Grant asked Sigel for "not less than 8,000 infantry, three batteries of artillery, and 1,500 pick cavalry" and which were to concentrate at Beverly, West Virginia in order to "make a southward move."⁹ This order effectively reduced Sigel's command by a third. Over half of these men would come from Mulligan's division. The 23rd Illinois and the 54th Pennsylvania, however, remained to defend New Creek and Cumberland. As a result of these transfers and subsequent reorganization of the department, Mulligan's division was disbanded. The troops still under his command were organized into the 2nd Separate Brigade and he was assigned as its commander.¹⁰ In all probability, Mulligan and the Irish Brigade, arguably the most experienced commander and unit in the department, were not

⁸ Sigel to Mulligan, Letter, 24 March 1864, in O.R., I, 33: 726.

⁹ Grant to Sigel, Order, 29 March 1864, in O.R., I, 33: 765.

¹⁰ Sigel, Special Order #68, 6 April 1864, in O.R., I, 33: 813.

assigned to this new field force because their terms of service would expire in a month.

Mulligan and his regiment returned to Chicago on April 23 for a well earned rest. During the three years the Irish Brigade was in active service, its numbers had been reduced from 800 to 350.¹¹ Although Mulligan and his regiment had an excellent battle record, only about 200 men enlisted with the Irish Brigade during its stay in Chicago. Most of them also were not Irish. So, when the Twenty-third Illinois returned to West Virginia a month later, it was not only below half strength but it was Irish in name only.

During Mulligan's and the Irish Brigade's furlough, Sigel led a newly created Union army into the Shenandoah to push the Confederates out of the valley. However, he and his men were routed by a Rebel army led by Major-General John C. Breckinridge at the Battle of New Market on May 15. Four days later, Major-General David Hunter was appointed the commander of the Department of West Virginia and Sigel was reassigned to the Reserve Division guarding the B&O Railroad.¹² Hunter immediately went on the offensive with a new field army made up of troops drawn from his department and from the Army of the Potomac. At the Battle of

¹¹ History of Chicago, 194.

¹² Hunter, Special Order #102, 22 May 1864, in O.R., I, 37, I: 518.

Piedmont, Hunter's army won a stunning victory over the Rebels and, for the first time since the war began, Union troops drove the Confederates completely out of the Shenandoah Valley. Hunter, under pressure from Grant to keep pushing the Rebel forces in West Virginia, began an even more ambitious campaign to capture the valuable rail center of Lynchburg. Thus, when Mulligan and the Irish Brigade returned to West Virginia on June 6, they had a new commander the men called "Black Dave" and a renewed hope that they would see more action.

Mulligan and his men's optimism, however, was quickly crushed when they were reassigned to the Reserve Division guarding the B&O Railroad. Mulligan wasn't even given command of a brigade, although he was again a part of Kelley's forces stationed west of Hancock.¹³ After leading several expeditions against his old foes, Imboden and McNeill, Mulligan and the Irish Brigade were ordered east to Martinsburg to support Hunters campaign against Lynchburg by protecting his line of supply. Hunter, however, was routed before he could reach his objective and he retreated north into the Kanawha Valley, West Virginia. Mulligan and the rest of Sigel's small division were now the only Federal troops left in the Shenandoah Valley.

¹³ Kelley to Sigel, Letter, 8 June 1864, in O.R., I, 37, I: 607-608.

On June 28, Lieutenant General Jubal Early led his veteran corps into the Shenandoah Valley. General Lee explained Early's orders in a letter to the Confederate Secretary of War.

Finding that it was necessary to detach some troops to repel the force under General Hunter, which was threatening Lynchburg, I resolved to send one that would be adequate to accomplish that purpose effectually, and, if possible, strike a decisive blow. At the same time General Early was instructed, if his success justified it, and the enemy retreated down the Valley, to pursue him, and, if opportunity offered, to follow him into Maryland. It was believed that the Valley could then be effectually freed from the presence of the enemy, and it was hoped that by threatening Washington and Baltimore General Grant would be compelled either to weaken himself so much for their protection as to afford us an opportunity to attack him, or that he might be induced to attack us. After the retreat of General Hunter toward Western Virginia his pursuit by General Early was attended with great difficulty, owing to the obstacles in the way of supplying our troops. At the same time the presence of General Hunter's forces in the Kanawha Valley endangered important interests in southwestern Virginia. It was thought that the readiest way to draw him from that region would be to push down the valley and enter Maryland, and at the same time it was hoped that the other advantages of such an invasion before alluded to might be secured. In addition to these considerations there were other collateral results, such as obtaining military stores and supplies,

that were deemed of sufficient importance to warrant the attempt.¹⁴

Sigel's Reserve Division was located at the upper end of the valley near Martinsburg and Harper's Ferry, so no Federal troops hindered Early's rapid advance from the south. As he neared Martinsburg, Early divided his forces hoping to trap Sigel between them. Sigel, however, had no desire for a fight and he began to withdraw his troops across the Potomac to Maryland Heights near Harpers Ferry. He carried away or destroyed as much of the stores of the depot there as possible. Unfortunately, his wagon train, loaded with the supplies from Martinsburg, fell behind and was threatened with capture. Boldly, Mulligan, who now commanded a brigade, marched forward with his small force of infantry to stem the tide of advancing Confederates and save the train. On the road to Shepardstown, he encountered one of Early's infantry divisions led by Major-General Robert Ransom, and forced it to deploy for battle. Mulligan then made a fighting withdraw to stall the enemy and kept Ransom from bringing his greater numbers to bear against the small Union force. Although the supply train was captured, Mulligan's day long holding action allowed Sigel to withdraw

¹⁴ Lee to Secretary of War, Letter, 19 July 1864, in O.R., I, 37, I: 346.

all of his command to Harpers Ferry without much loss.¹⁵ He then joined them, burning the bridges over the Potomac after he crossed to Maryland Heights.

At first, Early tried to draw the Union forces out of their entrenchments on Maryland Heights by pretending to withdraw. Sigel, however, did not fall for the trap and Early continued his advance on Washington. He could not afford any more delays as they would give General Grant more time to reinforce the capital. On July 9, Early was held up by a stubborn Union defense, under General Lew Wallace, at the Battle of Monocacy. Although Early still reached Washington, the delays caused by Mulligan and Wallace ensured that he would not be able to attack the city before Union reinforcements arrived there. If Early had made it to Washington just a day earlier, only 10,000 green or invalid soldiers would have manned the forts surrounding the capital to face his 20,000 fresh veterans. As it was, Early's corps arrived at Washington on July 11 to discover that two veteran corps from Grant's army had reinforced the city's defenses. All the Confederates could do was skirmish for a day with the Union defenders and retreat quietly that night. On July 14, Early's men crossed the Potomac ending the South's last invasion of the North. Early failed to achieve

¹⁵ Sigel to Adjutant-General, Letter, 3 July 1864, in O.R., I, 37, I:176.

much beyond retaking the Shenandoah and scaring a few politicians. Grant did not fall for the bait; he neither weakened his position nor made an attack on Lee.¹⁶

On the same day Early crossed the Potomac, General Hunter arrived in Harpers Ferry to once again take command of his troops. Only General Sigel's Reserve Division was available to him but the rest of his troops would arrive soon by train from the Kanawha Valley. General Grant, however, had decided to place someone more trustworthy in command of his forces. He ordered Hunter to turn his men over to General George Crook, who would then report to General Wright commanding the pursuit of Early. On July 18, Early surprised Crook and Wright as they crossed the Shenandoah and pushed them back across the river in retreat. Stung by this sudden blow, the pursuing Union troops fell back to find a way around the Confederates. Hunter, still looking for a way to be a part of the action, intervened by sending the last of his troops west to intercept the Rebels. General Averell moved his cavalry to Stephenson's Depot behind Early's corps to threaten the Confederate rear. Hunter also sent an infantry brigade, commanded by Colonel

¹⁶ Thomas A. Lewis, ed., The Shenandoah in Flames: The Valley Campaign of 1864 The Civil War series (Alexandria, Va.: Time-Life Books, 1987), 84. My description of Early's march to and retreat from Washington is primarily based upon the description from this source in addition to the reports in O.R., I, 37.

Rutherford B. Hayes, down the Shenandoah to threaten the Rebel flank.¹⁷

Thus faced by enemy troops on three sides, Early's corps retreated to Strasburg detaching Ramseur's division to Stephenson's Depot to delay Averell's rapid advance. The next day, however, Wright turned the VI and XIX Corps around and headed back to Washington. Early seemed intent only on retreating, so Grant ordered Wright to withdraw his reinforcements. Only Hunter's command continued the pursuit of the Confederates. On July 20, Ramseur, believing he faced only a small force of federal cavalry, turned and attacked Averell's division. The Union troopers repulsed the Confederate attack and Ramseur's men retreated south to rejoin the rest of Early's corps gathered at Strasburg. Averell's men pursued the Confederates until he reached Kernstown, just south of Winchester, Virginia, where he waited for reinforcements. Two days later, the rest of Hunter's command, including Mulligan's brigade, joined Averell in Kernstown. Hunter, however, did not retain command of his men for long as they were reassigned to the Army of the Kanawha Valley commanded by General Crook. Mulligan, who had been commanding a brigade to this point,

¹⁷ Lewis, Ibid, 89.

was given command of the second division in Crook's new army.¹⁸

On July 23, heavy skirmishing between his troops and the Confederates led Crook to believe that the enemy had sent a strong force to probe the Union lines and delay their pursuit. He arrayed his men in line of battle that night and made plans to counterattack the enemy. Mulligan's division led the Union attack on the following day. As they advanced, however, Mulligan's men ran into larger numbers of enemy skirmishers than was expected and his division was forced back by the heavy fire of the enemy. Convinced that he had run into a much larger force of Confederates, Mulligan sent his aide and brother-in-law, Lieutenant James Nugent, to inform General Crook. Crook, however, rebuffed the younger James and ordered that Mulligan continue his advance. "Colonel Mulligan," he said, "is mistaken. I have full and accurate information. There is nothing in his front but a few bushwhackers. I have sent General Averell's cavalry to their rear. Colonel Mulligan must move forward. Why, I haven't heard a half dozen shots fired this morning." "General," replied Nugent, "if you'll get a little nearer the front, you may hear as many as a dozen."¹⁹ He then

¹⁸ MGen. Crook, General Order #6, 22 July 1864, in O.R., I, 37, I: 417.

¹⁹ Nash, "Colonel James A. Mulligan," 40.

spurred his horse back to Mulligan's side to relay the general's reply.²⁰

Mulligan, who had charged to drive off the enemy skirmishers, was forced back to his original position by the heavy fire of the Rebels. When Nugent returned with his orders, the full Confederate line of battle appeared out of some woods on the Union front and side. The enemy line easily overlapped Mulligan's, and his troops were exposed to flanking fire. Again, he withdrew his division and reformed it to face the steadily advancing Confederates. Mulligan's men held for some time, as he rode up and down the line encouraging his men, but the enemy once again threatened to overlap the division's flanks and encircle it. Unable to withstand such a heavy fire from both the front and sides, his men fell back. While he was trying to organize an orderly withdraw of his division, Mulligan was shot several times and fell from his horse. His men immediately came to his aid and tried to carry him from the field. During this rescue attempt, Mulligan's brother-in-law, young James Nugent, was also shot and killed. Afraid that the regiment's colors would be captured if his men remained on the field, Mulligan ordered his men to "Lay me down and save

²⁰ O.R., I, 37, I: 315-318. These reports of the Battle of Kernstown by Mulligan's subordinate officers provide a good description of the engagement.

the flag."²¹ They regretfully obeyed and he was left on the battlefield, where he was captured.

Mortally wounded, Mulligan was carried to a nearby farmhouse where he remained until his death two days later. Crook's army, in the meantime, was broken and chased all the way back across the Potomac. Early then sent out his cavalry to tear up the B&O Railroad and to forage for supplies in Maryland and Pennsylvania. On August 7, Early's Washington campaign finally ended with the defeat and retreat of his cavalry at the Battle of Moorefield.²² Three days later, a stronger revitalized Union army, under the capable command of Major General Philip H. Sheridan, marched for the last time into the Shenandoah Valley. After only three months of fighting, Sheridan accomplished what other Union commanders had failed to do in three years. He ended Confederate control of the Shenandoah Valley.

Upon hearing of her husband's wounding, Marian Mulligan immediately set out from Cumberland to join him. She had little hope of reaching him, as the Valley was again in the hands of the enemy whose marauding bands of cavalry raided as far north as Pennsylvania. Undaunted, however, she rode forward into Rebel lines escorted only by Lieutenant Martin

²¹ Nash, "Colonel James A. Mulligan," 42.

²² Lewis, The Shenandoah in Flames, 91.

Russell, Mulligan's cousin and also a member of the Irish Brigade.²³ After crossing into the valley, they were halted by a picquet of Early's cavalry and taken to Brigadier-General John McCausland, who commanded the brigade. McCausland, however, mistrusted his two prisoners and, if Lieutenant Russell had not privately sent a letter to Early, would have kept them there indefinitely.²⁴ This delay prevented Marian from reaching her husband until the day after he had died. In fact, conditions were such that his body was already placed in a coffin when she arrived at the house where he died, and they would not allow her to see him.²⁵ Weariness from her grief and travel overcame her and she was forced to rest for a day before returning with her husband's body. Unfortunately, she could not take her brother's body as well, for it was never found after the battle.²⁶ General Early arranged for a hearse and an honor guard to escort them to the railroad where a train would carry Marian Mulligan and her husband's body to Chicago.

James Mulligan was given a hero's funeral and thousands of citizens visited his side as he lay in state at Bryan

²³ Nash, "Colonel James A. Mulligan," 43.

²⁴ Ibid, 44-45.

²⁵ Ibid, 45-46.

²⁶ Ibid, 42.

Hall. Up to that time, only Stephen Douglas' death received as much attention in Chicago. Mulligan was buried in Cavalry Cemetery and slipped into the memories of only those knew him. On May 30, 1885, twenty years after his death, a monument, paid for by funds appropriated through the Illinois State Legislature, was dedicated to his memory. Like Mulligan's funeral, the unveiling of his monument attracted a large number of family, friends, and admirers. The monument stands today at the entrance to Cavalry Cemetery. One of its faces bears the following tribute:

In memory of
James A. Mulligan,
Colonel Twenty-third Illinois Volunteers,
Irish Brigade.
Born Utica, N.Y. June 25, 1830.
Wounded in Battle
At Kernstown, Va.
July 24, 1864
Died July 26, 1864.
"Lay Me Down and Save the Flag."²⁷

²⁷ Nash, Ibid, 55.

EPILOGUE

In his writings about ethnic regiments in the Civil War, William L. Burton called Mulligan a "professional ethnic." Professional ethnics were men who used their ethnicity to achieve personal advantage.¹ For example, a professional ethnic would emphasize the heritage of his parents to get immigrants of the same background to vote for him. Mulligan, Burton argued, used his Irish parentage and knowledge of Irish history to convince the Irish of Chicago to raise a regiment and to elect him colonel of it. After his defeat at Lexington, he then exaggerated his role and that of the Irish Brigade in order to build up his own reputation and political influence.

Undoubtably, Mulligan used his ethnic background to help raise an Irish regiment and to attain election as its colonel. Mulligan also exaggerated the role he and his regiment played in the Battle of Lexington. However, he was not insincere about his pride in his ethnicity, as Burton implied in his writings. Mulligan's devotion to Ireland was as real as any native of that country, and it was not just a

¹ William L. Burton, "Ethnic Regiments of the Civil War," 33.

tool to help his position in Irish-American society. E.D. Cooke, a contemporary of Mulligan's, spoke of his true intentions to the Illinois State Legislature. "His was no clap-trap devotion, no simulated patriotism born of sordid motives or personal ambition. It had its promptings and inspiration on a more solid and generous foundation, based upon an earnest and intelligent love of the land of his forefathers, a loyal attachment to principle and a love of liberty."² Mulligan's ethnicity was genuine. This sincerity is quite apparent in his writings, especially those from before and during the early part of the war.

Mulligan was raised a staunch Irish Catholic. He maintained this devotion throughout his life and often depended upon it for morale support. For two years, Mulligan edited the Western Tablet, a Catholic publication, in which he defended the church with zeal and humor. Someone who was not dedicated to his faith or merely wore it to earn favor with others would not devote time and energy to such endeavors. Mulligan's other writings, especially his personal diary, show that he was truly a religious man. The fact that he was troubled by the absence of a priest in the regiment, even if it was for a short time, does not seem to be the reaction of a man who was pretending to believe.

² Nash, "Colonel James A. Mulligan," 6.

Mulligan certainly did not live up to the expectations of his faith at times, as shown in his numerous contributions to the brigade's swearing roll.³ However, he was a devout Catholic who practiced his faith every day, and he did not back away from his faith when it was expedient for him.

Mulligan's Catholicism was not merely a devotion to faith, but it also carried with it a fanatic devotion to the land of his forefathers. "In fact," Jay Dolan writes, in The Immigrant Church, "among the Catholic Irish, it was difficult to distinguish between nationality and religion."⁴ Mulligan, however, was not born in Ireland, where devotion to Catholicism was a means by which the people maintained Irish culture in the face of English attempts to Anglicize them.⁵ His devotion to his Irish heritage was due to his love for the church and to his Catholic education, which stressed patriotism along with fidelity to faith.⁶ Mulligan's personal diary and notebooks from St. Mary's of the Lake College, in fact, are filled with comments about Irish history and his love for the subject.

³ Swearing Roll, Letters and Orders Book, 5th Brigade, 1st Division, 3 October and 17 November 1863, Mulligan Papers, CHS.

⁴ Dolan, The Immigrant Church in America, 54.

⁵ James S. Olson, Catholic Immigrants in America (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1987), 15-46.

⁶ Dolan, *ibid*, 118.

Mulligan's devotion to Ireland, however, was not limited to giving money to support its independence movement and to relieve the suffering of its people. When he was a young man, he made a temperance pledge in support of Irish nationalism. "Ireland Sober Is Ireland Free," trumpeted O'Connell, the father of Irish nationalism.⁷ The Catholic temperance movement in the United States, which was led by Friar Theobald Matthew, was also viewed as a way for the Irish to gain greater acceptance.⁸ Mulligan never broke this pledge, even on his death bed when he was offered some brandy to comfort him and his wounds. "No," he said, "in all my life I never drank and now that I am to die, I think it is too late to begin."⁹

The most compelling evidence, however, of Mulligan's sincerity about his heritage was his war record and service in the Union Army. Unlike many political ethnics who used command of ethnic units for personal advancement, Mulligan was devoted to proving the Irish were worthy of becoming Americans. In the same journal entry in which he stated his desire to have an Irish brigade made up of Irish regiments from the northwest, he added that such a force would reflect

⁷ Lawrence J. McCaffrey, Textures of Irish America, 58.

⁸ Olson, Catholic Immigrants in America, 15-46.

⁹ Nash, "Colonel James A. Mulligan," 47.

favorably upon all Irishmen in the United States. He wrote, "I think there is an opening for a splendid record for the western Irishman."¹⁰ Mulligan did not seek action to help his own position in life. He wanted to prove in combat that the Irish were worthy of being Americans. There were more profitable and less dangerous ways for him to improve his station in society.

Mulligan was always at the front of a battle and was wounded numerous times before his death. As he attained higher and higher positions of command, he did not need to be as close to the action. Mulligan could have stayed at headquarters in the rear and later trumpeted that he had experienced the war. Instead, he led his men through some of the toughest battles. Mulligan's courage and aggressiveness was part of the reason why the Irish Brigade followed him. He did not ask them to do anything or risk anything that he wasn't willing to do or risk himself. Mulligan named his regiment the Irish Brigade so as to instill in his men the same sense of pride and unity that the achievements of past Irish Brigades instilled in him. However, as the war reduced the ranks of the regiment and the men tired of fighting, their interest in the glory

¹⁰ Mulligan, Personal Diary, 29 October 1863.

achieved by Irish in the past lessened.¹¹ They focused more on Mulligan's actions in battle and how he treated the men under his command. Mulligan must have known this because he constantly sought to improve his skills as an officer.

Finally, Mulligan did not benefit much personally from his use of ethnicity. It did not win him promotion, which he wanted greatly. However, he did not want a simple promotion to brigadier-general, which he had actually refused.¹² He wanted to command a brigade of Irish regiments from the northwest. Mulligan's ethnicity also failed to win him fame and recognition. He earned that through hard work and bravery on the battlefield. In a letter recommending Colonel Mulligan for command of a division, a position which is usually filled by a major-general, Brigadier-General Kelley never mentioned Mulligan's Irish characteristics. "At this point," he wrote, "Col. J.A. Mulligan, Twenty-third Illinois Volunteers Infantry, is the senior officer, and in him I have all confidence. His long experience in, and thorough knowledge of, that section of country, and his recognized ability as an officer, point to him as the one who is, under existing circumstances, best

¹¹ William L. Burton, Melting Pot Soldiers: The Union's Ethnic Regiments (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1988), 138.

¹² Nash, "Colonel James A. Mulligan," 30.

fitted to command."¹³ Mulligan's abilities were recognized not only by his long-time commanding officer. Kelley stated in Mulligan's promotion letter that he was considered by many officers to be an able leader. Numerous other correspondences in The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies also reflect the high regard with which officers on both sides held Mulligan. His reputation as a good officer, however, was made by his desire to be one, not by the green shirt he wore nor the history he recited. The truth is that he sought no reward or advantage through his ethnicity. He wore his a green shirt and recited Irish history because he was proud to be Irish-American and he wanted his fellow countrymen, American and Irish, to recognize the greatness of both nations.

Since ethnicity was important to Mulligan, how much did it effect his participation in the Civil War? At first, he was very concerned with both his Irish identity as well as that of the regiment. Mulligan, in fact, referred to the 23rd Illinois as the Irish Brigade in all but his official correspondences. This name, Mulligan's friend, William J. Onahan, wrote, "touches and thrills the Irish heart. It recalls to mind the historic renown of the defenders of

¹³ Kelley to Adjutant-General, Report, 1 July 1863, in O.R., I, 27, III: 481.

Limerick, the brave men who followed Lord Clare and Sarsfield into exile, and who fought under the French banners on almost every continental battlefield during the century with splendid valor and enthusiasm."¹⁴ Mulligan believed in the influence the name "Irish Brigade" had with the Irish. Onahan again wrote

No one was more familiar with the history of the French-Irish Brigades than Colonel Mulligan. He knew the story by heart. He also knew and realized the glamour and power exercised by the historic name over the mind and heart of the average Irishman. It was a name to conjure with. It stirred emotion, it stimulated enthusiasm. The name and the green flag would be a powerful incentive and spur to the soldier in the front of battle to emulate for the honor of the "old sod" the deeds and bravery which won enduring renown for their countrymen on their fields of glory in another age. All these considerations, I have little doubt, were in Colonel Mulligan's mind in adopting the patronymic "Irish Brigade" for his Illinois regiment.¹⁵

Onahan added further in his article that Thomas Meagher also had the effect of this name in mind when he formed the famed Irish Brigade in the Army of the Potomac. If someone doubted Mulligan's reasoning for giving his regiment the

¹⁴ William J. Onahan, "Chicago's Irish Brigade and Colonel James A. Mulligan," Chicago Record Herald, 29 September 1908, typed copy in James A. Mulligan Files.

¹⁵ Ibid.

name "Irish Brigade," he made it clearer by naming their training camp Fontenoy Barracks. Fontenoy was a famous battle of the Seven Years War in which a Brigade of Irishmen serving in the French Army played a significant role in defeating the opposing British army. Mulligan made it plain why he chose to call his regiment the Irish Brigade.

Mulligan's ethnicity was not limited to honoring Irish history. Numerous contemporary accounts, including his own wartime journal, noted that he wore a green shirt under his uniform. Green was, and still is, the color most associated with Irish ethnicity. During the American Civil War, Irish units were identified by their green battle flags. Mulligan also maintained a pledge of temperance in support of Irish nationalism, which he had made as a child. Proponents of the Catholic temperance movement in America not only believed that temperance would help free Ireland but that it would also gain greater acceptance of the Irish in American society.¹⁶ Mulligan extended this belief to his regiment when he took measures in New Creek, West Virginia to keep his men from drinking. One such measure was to close all the bars and taverns in and around the Irish Brigade's camp. Mulligan wrote in a letter to his commander, General Kelley, "There is no need of this 'stuff' here. The water is good

¹⁶ Olson, Catholic Immigrants in America, 15-46.

and the coffee excellent."¹⁷ He did not write later of how effective this measure was or if he tried any other measures, but he also did not complain again of a drunkenness problem among his men. Another way Mulligan demonstrated his ethnicity was by giving money to the Fenian Brotherhood, an Irish nationalist group.¹⁸ Although no clear records exist proving he was a Fenian, Mulligan certainly supported the organization with monetary contributions. Finally, Mulligan greatly desired to command a brigade in an all-Irish division. He even went to Washington D.C. in October 1862 to lobby for the formation of an Irish division and his promotion to command one of its brigades. Mulligan's desire to stay with his fellow Irish was so great that he refused President Lincoln's offer to promote him to brigadier-general because he would have to leave his regiment.¹⁹ He was never offered a promotion to brigadier again, but he died leading his Irish regiment in battle.

Mulligan's enthusiasm for Irish ethnicity, however, declined as the war progressed, particularly after his

¹⁷ James A. Mulligan, Orders and Letters Book-23rd Illinois Volunteer Infantry, 21 July 1862, James A. Mulligan Papers.

¹⁸ Burton, "Ethnic Regiments in the Civil War," 33.

¹⁹ Onahan, "Chicago's Irish Brigade."

failure in Washington to win command of a brigade in an Irish division. Several reasons may account for his seeming lack of interest. First, Mulligan was given greater leadership responsibilities, eventually leading to command of a division. These responsibilities and the stress of fighting probably superceded concerns about his ethnicity. Second, Mulligan led more and more non-Irish troops as he was promoted. Consequently, he lost some of his ethnicity every time he moved farther away from his enclave, the Irish Brigade. Third, and finally, Mulligan stated in his journal that he was frustrated by the politics involved with fighting the war. He believed that officials in Washington were more concerned with holding on to their political power than with winning the war. They would not allow, he wrote in his journal, a division of Irishmen to be formed because it threatened their positions in the government.²⁰ His being Irish, Mulligan may have reasoned, also threatened "the powers that be", so he toned down his ethnic rhetoric.

Another reason for the seeming decline of Mulligan's interest in his ethnicity may simply have been that he was American. Like an actor who falls out of character during a play, Mulligan's identity as a middle class American may have gradually asserted itself during the war. He was not,

²⁰ James A. Mulligan, Personal Diary, 24 October 1862.

however, superficial about his ethnicity. He was truly proud of his Irish heritage, but he was not born and raised in Ireland nor was he poor like most Irishmen. He was Irish in name only. Like most Irish-Americans today, Mulligan was more American than Irish. The war and his devotion to his ethnicity had shifted his cultural loyalty.

The Civil War changed Mulligan by forcing him to demonstrate his loyalty to the Union and America. Despite many differences with President Lincoln and the Republicans he continued to fight. Mulligan remained in the army after the Emancipation Proclamation, which he despised. He even reenlisted in 1864 for the duration of the despite no longer being in command of his beloved Irish Brigade. Mulligan's American side asserted itself during the war because he was fighting for America.

Mulligan's life and experience in the Civil War represent a unique perspective on American society of that period. He was both Irish and American when most people were one or the other. Mulligan himself believed that both cultures needed to be brought together in America. He also believed that, in order to do this, the Irish in America needed to prove they could be Americans. Mulligan tried to prove this by being Irish. He supported Irish nationalism, he was a staunch Catholic, he spoke out against the poverty

and hunger experienced by the Irish in both Ireland and America, he glorified Irish history, and he commanded an Irish regiment in the American Civil War. However, Mulligan, like the Irish in America, experienced resistance to his efforts and his ethnicity lessened as the war progressed.

Finally, Mulligan's early death prevents a complete evaluation of the effect ethnicity had on his wartime experience. He had no accounts from later in life to compare with those he wrote before and during the war. Up to the last day of his life, in fact, Mulligan's ethnicity was complex and hard to detect how important it really was to him. On the day he died, he wore the green shirt he always wore under his uniform. He was in the front battle line leading his Irish Brigade as he had always done since they elected him as their colonel. He was commander of a division, a position normally filled by a major-general. His final words to his men were "lay me down and save the flag."²¹ Mulligan fought and died an American, but he lived life like the Irish warrior-poets he so admired.

Colonel James Mulligan's fame has faded and he is scarce remembered by even the most avid student of the American Civil War. His name no longer carries with it the same

²¹ Nash, "Colonel James A. Mulligan," 42.

effect that it had during his life. He also knew that a reputation lived on after death so long as it is remembered and honored by others. Perhaps he envisioned his own resurrection in the future when he wrote this final entry in his "red" journal:

With all the glory in the past and the fourth of July tomorrow my little war journal goes the way of all great things-to the shelf. At least until other men and other times can do justice to their memory.

J.A.M.²²

²² James A. Mulligan, Personal Diary, 3 July 1863.

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