

COLONEL ROBERT NUGENT

Two years after the organization of the 69th New York Militia, Robert Nugent, a native-born Irishman, was commissioned as Captain in the regiment, August 25th, 1853. He was promoted to Major June 6th, 1854 and commissioned Lieutenant-Colonel on August 26th, 1859. He accompanied the regiment to Washington but a fall from his horse prevented his participation in the battle of Bull Run. However, the discerning eye of the brigade commander, Colonel W. F. Sherman, selected him and two other officers of the 69th New York Militia, Captains James Kelly and Patrick Kelly, for regular army captain's commissions as reward for their services. The war careers of these officers were to prove the wisdom and perspicacity of the later famous general's selection.

Assigned to the 13th U. S. Infantry, he obtained leave of absence from this regiment to assist in the formation of the Irish Brigade, and on November 1st, 1861, was commissioned Colonel of the first regiment of the brigade, the 69th New York Volunteers. Cool, calm, imperturbable, with a high order of personal courage and initiative, he admirably displayed all these qualities in action, and, in Colonel Nugent, the first Old 69th had one of the best leaders that it has been the good fortune of succeeding 69th's to have had, either in war or in peace.

Wounded severely at Fredericksburg and while on convalescent leave, Col. Nugent was appointed Assistant Provost Marshal for the first nine Congressional Districts of New York, vice Simeon Draper, resigned. The Provost Marshal General, James B. Fry, in

a letter to Governor Horatio Seymour, dated April 24, 1863, and to Mayor George Opdyke of New York City, dated April 25th, announced the appointment of Col. Nugent as Assistant Provost Marshal in New York City, described the colonel as "an officer of superior ability and a gentleman of attainments." The Boston Pilot, in commenting on this appointment, said in its issue of May 16th, 1863:

"Col. Nugent's appointment and management are likely to render a very objectionable office less offensive to the public always and deservedly jealous of their rights."

These nine congressional districts embraced:

- First: Counties of Suffolk, Queens, Richmond and Kings, excepting the first sixteen wards of Brooklyn.
- Second: The City of Brooklyn—the first twelve and nineteenth wards.
- Third: First, Second, Fifth and eighth wards of New York.
- Fourth: Fourth, Sixth, Tenth and fourteenth wards of New York.
- Fifth: Seventh and thirteenth wards of New York, and thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth wards of Brooklyn.
- Sixth: Eleventh, fifteenth and nineteenth wards of New York
- Seventh: Ninth, sixteenth and twentieth wards of New York.
- Eighth: Twelfth, eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth, twenty-first and twenty-second wards of New York.
- Ninth: Counties of Westchester, Rockland and Putnam.

In his instructions to Col. Nugent, the Provost Marshal General wrote under date of July 7th, 1863:

"Should you consider it most expedient to do so, you are at liberty to execute the draft in New York

by districts, in one or more at a given time,
rather than simultaneously throughout the city.*

"In compliance with this order, Provost Marshal
Jenkins, of the ninth congressional district in
New York, publicly announced through the press
that on Saturday, the 11th, the ballots would be
publicly counted at the corner of 46th and 3rd Ave.
and that immediately thereafter the wheel would be
turned and the draft begin.**

No trouble was experienced and the next day, Sunday, July
12th, the names of the conscripts selected were published. The
following day, Monday, the dreadful riots commenced. There were
no militia in the city to be called upon, all the regiments having
been called out for duty elsewhere due to Lee's invasion of
Pennsylvania, and the defence of the city rested upon the police
force and a small number of soldiery. The following morning
Colonel Nugent reported by wire to his chief in Washington:

"The mob, some 10,000 strong, burned yesterday the
offices of the marshals of the ninth, eighth and
fifth districts. So far, the other offices are
unharmd. The records, books and papers have been nearly
all saved. There are detachments of regular troops
and marines in the city numbering over 400, under
the command of General Harvey Brown, by order of
Major-General Wool. The police force have rendered
efficient service.

The mob, this morning, is, I understand, engaged in
burning private property in the upper part of the
city. The draft is for the present suspended.
I was placed in command of the arsenal last night,
by order of General Wool, and relieved this morning.
The arsenal is safe. My own dwelling has been gutted,
and I understand has been burned down. The excitement
in the city is intense."

The New York World reported:

"On Monday evening, about the hour of 7:15 p. m. a
large crowd assembled on 4th Avenue and 86th St.
numbering nearly 1000 persons, men and boys. They
first proceeded to the house of Col. Nugent, in 86th

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near Fourth Ave. which they completely destroyed inside, pitching light and available articles into the street.....The crowd only spared the building from the lighted torch on account of a foreman of one of the fire companies having property next door to Col. Nugent's residence, and in which he, the foreman, lived."

The mob threatened to hang Col. Nugent and diabolical threats WERE made against him. Later in the evening, Col. Nugent wired Washington;

"City in intense excitement. Business suspended. Rioting in every ward. Records secure on Governor's Island excepting eighth and ninth districts; still I think they are safe. Gen'l Wool has now 1000 soldiers, inadequate, I fear, to repel attacks from so many different points. It is a spontaneous movement. No organization. Principally for plunder. Mayor's residence burned.* Mob more formidable than yesterday."

The following day, July 15th, Col. Nugent reported:

"Recommended that when order was restored, draft to be resumed one district at a time. It (the riot) has now assumed the character of an organized mass of plunderers and the public generally have lost sympathy for it."

On this date the militia regiments began to return to the city, together with picked middle-western troops from the Army of the Potomac, and order was soon restored. On August 19th the drawings proceeded peaceably.

Recent research has shown that these riots were skilfully and executed designed by Southern agents but at the time blame was placed upon 'the Irish Catholic mob.' A volunteer who served during the first two days of the riots, William Osborn Stoddard, wrote:

"By a little after 1:00 P.M. of Thursday, the work of distributing the 69th regt. as garrison of a number of important points was completed. Had it

been in the city on Monday, there is no manner of doubt but that it would have aided the many Roman Catholic Irish Metropolitans and their priesthood in redeeming that nationality from the disgrace and opprobrium cast upon it by those who hastily described the miscellaneous rabble as 'an Irish Catholic mob.' It was this which stung the worthy Archbishop. In no sense was there any religion mixed up with these riots. Nothing but aimless brutality and crime.**

A more recent writer said:

"New York had reason to oppose the draft. It was based upon partiality and its application to New York was unfair and dishonest. If an enemy were trying to stir up discontent he could have conceived of no measure so suitable as the draft laws as they were ~~applied~~ applied. The poor, who had suffered through unemployment and inflation, were drafted while the war profiteer was able to pay for exemption or substitutes. Moreover, there is no doubt that the quota for New York was excessive and that in the individual district they were unfairly applied. Indeed Nugent, in charge of the draft in New York City, had been Colonel of the famous 69th.../As such he had a position high in the affections of the New York Irish, but on Monday evening, his house was destroyed by the mob and all the easy movable articles appropriated. There were numerous other victims of Irish blood. It was not the Irish as Irish who revolted, but the penniless Irish laborer who saw his life thrown away in a cause, abolition, in which he had no interest.***

In the meantime, Col. Nugent's old regiment, the 69th N.Y. Volunteers, reduced by casualties to a battalion of two companies, had played its memorable part in the wheatfield of Gettysburg and remained in the field following the retrograde movement of The Army of Northern Virginia. Numbering 75 men, and under the command of Captain Richard Moroney, the 69th, with the ^{remnants of the} other two New York reg-

* Page 275, The Volcano under the City, by a Volunteer Specialist.

)(William Osborn Stoddard. Published 1887 by Fords, Howard & Hulbert.

** Page 104-124, Discontent in New York, 1861-1865, by Brother Lee, Catholic University of America Press, copyright 1943.

iments of the Irish Brigade returned to New York in January, 1864, to recruit and reorganize, returning to the front after the thirty day furlough. Colonel Nugent remained in New York on recruiting service for the Second Army Corps in addition to his duties as Assistant Provost Marshal until November 1st, 1864, when he was appointed to the command of his old brigade, in compliance with S. O. No. 555, Hqs. 1st Division, Second Army Corps, dated October 31st, 1864.

Upon assuming command, his first order to the brigade was:

"In assuming command of the old Irish Brigade, it gives me much satisfaction to know that, although fearfully decimated by the casualties of a campaign in which its officers and soldiers endured, with a cheerfulness unsurpassed, unusual dangers, hardships, and privations, they still maintain their old reputation for bravery and patriotism. The record of the brigade has been a bright one; it has proved its fidelity to the Union by its courage and sacrifices on many a battlefield. Never has a regimental color of that organization graced the hall of its enemies. Let the spirit that animates the officers and men of the present be that which shall strive to emulate the deeds of the old brigade."

^A ^{HONOR}
One further great ^A devolved upon Col. Nugent. April 7th, 1865,

marked the last day of fighting for the OLD 69th and the Irish Brigade. On that ^A day the brigade was on picket duty and had been engaged with the opposing pickets ~~at~~ most of the day. The division was then commanded by Gen. Nelson A. Miles and the Second Corps by General Humphries. That afternoon General Grant sent the first of his three letters to General Lee demanding the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia:

Headquarters Armies of the United States
April 7, 1865-5:00 P. M.

General R. E. Lee,
Commanding C. S. Army:

hopelessness of further resistance on the part of the Army of Northern Virginia in the struggle. I feel that it is so, and regard it as my duty to shift from myself the responsibility of any further effusion of blood, by asking of you the surrender of that portion of the C. S. Army known as the Army of Northern Virginia.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,
 U. S. Grant
 Lieutenant-General,
 Commanding Armies of the United States.

This letter was sent to General Humphries for delivery, in turn sent to General Nelson A. Miles and then delivered to Col. Nugent. The letter, accompanied by his aide, Captain John Oldershaw, passed through his brigade lines, approached the Confederate pickets and duly delivered the letter to the Confederate major in charge.

"The letter passed thru my lines under a flag of truce, and the reply of General Lee was returned through the same channel."*

"It was the chance of Gen. Grant riding to the left to see Gen'l Sheridan, instead of coming to our front, where Lee expected him, that prevented the the surrender being made on our(your)front."

Letter of Chas. A. Whittier to Gen. Nelson A. Miles.**

For his services during the war, Colonel Nugent was brevetted as Major in the regular service for gallantry and meritorious service in the battle of Gaines Mill, Va., June 27th, 1862, as Lieutenant-Colonel for gallant and meritorious service in the battle of Fredericksburg, Va., Dec. 13th, 1862, as Colonel for gallant and meritorious service in front of Petersburg, Va., April 2nd, 1865, and as Brigadier-General of Volunteers March 13th, 1865, for gallantry and meritorious service during the war.

*page 41, Personal Recollections, General Nelson A Miles,
 The Werner Co., Chicago, New York 1896.

**page 44, Ibid.

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His name is carried on the Honor Roll of the Fourth (D) Company, of the 7th New York, in the official history of that organization.

After the war, Colonel Nugent assumed his regular army commission as Captain in the 13th Infantry and during this service, this regiment or detachments of it, engaged in a dozen engagements with the Sioux, Bloods, Blackfeet and Piegan Indians in Montana and the Dakotas. He was promoted to Major in the 24th U. S. Infantry on June 10th, 1876, retired from the Army on March 20th, 1879 and died in Brooklyn, N. Y., on June 20th, 1931. The obituary notice that appeared in the New York Times, June 21st, 1931, reads:

Bvt. Bg. Gen'l Robert Nugent died at his home 332 McDonough St., Brooklyn, last night. A cancer, caused by a bullet wound in the stomach, while in command of his regiment, the 69th N.Y. Vols. was the cause of his death. Altho the general had been ill for more than ten years he had been confined to his bed but for two months.....A short time after this battle he was sent home to recuperate. He started to return to the front to rejoin his regiment but was informed that he had been appointed Provost Marshal for the Southern District of New York..... The wrath of the mob turned against him personally and his home was burned down to the ground. His wife and children had a narrow escape from the hands of the rioters.

In 1865 after the 69th had been mustered out of service, Gen. Nugent rejoined his regiment, the 13th Infantry. He served with this regiment until 1876 when he was made a major and transferred to the 24th regiment. In these two regiments he gained a reputation as an Indian fighter. In 1879 he retired from the service and had lived in New York ever since. He leaves a widow, three daughters and one son. He will be buried at the National Cemetery at Cypress Hills, according to a wish expressed before his death. He was a member of Lafayette Post, G.A.R., of the War Veterans Assn. of the 7th Regt. and an honorary member of the Old Guard.

THE SIXTY-NINTH NEW YORK VOLUNTEERS.
The Old 69th.

When the 69th New York State Guard was mustered out of Federal service on August 3rd, 1861, a large majority of its members volunteered for a period of three years, forming the nucleus of the 69th Regiment of Volunteers, recruited under special authority from the War Department, turned over to the state September 2nd, 1861, and organized as the First Regiment of the Irish Brigade, November 2nd, 1861.

The term, Irish Brigade, owes its origin to the arrival in France in 1691 of five regiments of infantry, under the command of Lord Mountcashel, Lord Clare, the Honourable Arthur Dillon, and Col. Fielding, and its strength estimated at 2013 officers and men. Between the arrival of this brigade and the year 1745, thousands of Irishmen died in the service of France. In November 1803, the First Consul decreed the formation of an Irish Legion, composed of Irish exiles or sons of Irishmen born in France. This Legion followed the fortunes of Napoleon in Holland, Portugal, Spain and Germany and was dissolved with the fall of the Empire. Other Irish regiments served in the Spanish Netherlands in 1652 under the command of Marshal Turenne and the Duke of Lorraine.*

The new 69th was mustered in the service of the United States between September 7th and November 17th, 1861. The majority of the men were recruited in New York City, Company D principally in Chicago, Ill, Company F partly in Brooklyn, N. Y., and Company K partly at Buffalo, N. Y.

*O'Hart, Irish Pedigrees, P. Murphy and Son, New York, 1915.

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As previously mentioned, Robert Nugent was commissioned Colonel of the regiment when Brigadier-General Thomas Francis Meagher received his commission in that grade.

Captain James Kelly was mustered in as Lieutenant-Colonel and was to render capable and distinguished service. He was rewarded with a captain's commission in the regular ~~army~~ army by Col. W. T. Sherman for his services at Bull Run and assigned to the 16th U. S. Infantry from which he obtained leave of absence. He was 34 years of age.

Captain James Cavanagh of the 69th Militia was mustered in with the rank of Major, November 8th, 1861, date of commission December 20th, 1861, with rank from November 2nd, 1861. Wounded in action at Fredericksburg December 13th, 1862, he would be honorably discharged for disability as a result of this wound, and was to give subsequent service in the 69th Militia. He was likewise 34 years of age.

1st Lieut. James J. Smith, 69th Militia, was ~~was~~ mustered in as 1st Lieutenant and Adjutant, November 8th, 1861. He was wounded in action August 25th, 1864, at Ream's Station, was mustered out November 9th, 1864, near Petersburg, Va., reenrolled and mustered in as Lieutenant-Colonel February 16th, 1865. For his distinguished service, he was brevetted Colonel of United States Volunteers, from April 9th, 1865. Lieut. Smith was 29 years of age.

On the non-commissioned staff, and to be commissioned later, was Quartermaster Sergeant Patrick Buckley, Aged 36. Destined to meet a soldier's fate on the field in front of Marye's Heights, he would write an epic chapter in the history of the Old 69th.