THE FIGHTING DOCTOR

Bernard John Dowling Irwin in the Civil War

JOHN H. FAHEY MD

REPRINT
NORTH & SOUTH, VOL. 9, NUMBER 1, MARCH 2006

John H. Fahey, M.D.

THE "FIGHTING DOCTOR"

Bernard John Dowling Irwin in the Civil War

THE FIRST MEDALS OF HONOR were awarded to the surviving members of Andrews' Raiders for their role in the "Great Locomotive Chase" of 1862. But the first action for which the medal was awarded took place more than a year earlier, when an "Irishman doctor... red head[ed] and hot tempered" led a party of volunteers one hundred miles through a snowstorm to render aid to soldiers trapped by the famed Indian chief Cochise at Apache Pass.[1] For this and other actions out West in the antebellum years, Bernard John Dowling (B.J.D.) Irwin earned the sobriquet "the Fighting Doctor."[2] As his career during the Civil War would demonstrate, the title was most appropriate.

B.J.D. Irwin was born in 1829 in rural western Ireland to an affluent landowning family who provided him with tutors in the romance languages and classics. His uncle was a member of the renowned Connaught Rangers, and young Irwin became enamored of tales of warriors and heroic deeds, dreaming one day of being in the military himself.

After his family relocated to New York in 1845, Irwin began the study of medicine. While still a student, he enlisted in the famed 7th New York State Militia. On the evening of May 10, 1849, as a nineteen-year-old private, Irwin saw his first action when the 7th was called on to quell the infamous Astor Place riot, during which the besieged regiment fired upon a mob of rock-throwing theater goers, killing twenty-three.[3] After graduation from medical school in 1851, Irwin spent several years working in local hospitals before being accepted into the medical corps of the U.S. Army as an assistant surgeon. On the morning of October 25, 1855, "after adieux and parting drinks," he set sail from New York City with Colonel B.L.E. Bonneville and six hundred new recruits and headed west for the Department of New Mexico via the Gulf of Mexico.[4]

Irwin was fascinated with the West and its exotic locale. Like other military physicians, he made weather observations, collected mineral, plant, and animal specimens for museums back east, and penned elaborate reports describing the country through which he traveled.[5] While visiting Tucson in 1857, Irwin identified a meteorite buried in the street being used as an anvil by local blacksmiths, and he arranged to have it shipped back to the Smithsonian, where it is on display today next to the Hope Diamond.[6]

In December 1858 Irwin was assigned to Fort Buchanan south of Tucson, where his commanding officer was a foul-mouthed but brilliant West Pointer named Richard Stoddert Ewell. Together with three other bachelor adventurers—Edward Cross of New Hampshire fame; Sylvester Mowry, a prominent politician and entrepreneur; and Paddy Graydon, an unabashed adventurer—Irwin rode across the Santa Cruz Valley. An accomplished marksman (a local newspaper once reported how Irwin had completed a remarkable shot, killing two antelope with one bullet) and horseman, Irwin would join Graydon and Ewell as they raced their mounts against each other and marauding Apaches.[7]

All, however, was not youthful exuberance. Irwin quickly earned a reputation as a competent and reliable surgeon who could be called on in an emergency to help the settlers in New Mexico Territory deal with the results of Indian depredations and other disasters. One of Irwin's more famous cases required him to ride over eighty miles to a Butterfield Stage station to tend to a stagehand who had been brutally attacked by Mexicans. As he would with many of his cases, Irwin wrote up his account and published it in a prominent medical journal.[8]

In February 1861, with civil war brewing back east, a young West Point graduate named Lieutenant George Bascom confronted Cochise at Apache Pass and found himself outnumbered and surrounded. When Bascom sent out for medical help, Irwin did not wait for the reinforcements from nearby Fort Breckenridge to escort him. Riding over one hundred miles with Graydon and fourteen other volunteers, Irwin arrived too late to help the white hostages, who had been executed by Cochise. In retaliation, the hot-tempered Irwin urged the

Above: Bernard John Dowling Irwin's Medal of Honor, awarded in 1894, which is displayed at Fort Riley, Kansas. His many other medals, which include an 1896 and 1903 version of the MOH, are in the possession of the Irwin family.

Opposite: Photograph of Irwin taken c. 1868, when he and General George Armstrong Custer hunted together. *Courtesy of the Irwin family.*

execution of six Indian captives, one of whom was the chief's brother.[9] Cochise subsequently admitted that his war with the white man began with this incident. Later, when Cochise's Apaches made a foray against Fort Buchanan, Irwin headed out with the mounted infantry to track them down. Riding too far in front of the troops, Irwin suddenly found himself face to face with Cochise. The two threatened and swore at each other until the rest of the soldiers rode up and Cochise withdrew.[10]

The Civil War broke out in April, and in late July Fort Buchanan was abandoned and Irwin was ordered east. When Texas rebels under Albert Sydney Johnston made an incursion into southern New Mexico, Irwin was forced to destroy all his belongings, including his manuscripts, Indian trophies, and family heirlooms, and travel across the windswept plains from Colorado to St. Louis with only the clothes on his back.[11] Despite the trauma of loosing all his possessions, the prospect of joining the war back east was nevertheless exciting for someone who admitted to having an "ambitious determination to achieve a reputation," and as soon as he arrived in Missouri Irwin requested to be sent to "Virginia or some other field of active operations."[12] This "other field" would be in the western theatre, where Irwin would serve with Brigadier General Don Carlos Buell's Army of the Ohio.

In January 1862 Irwin reported to Brigadier General Jeremiah T. Boyle's unattached Eleventh Brigade outside Co-

THE TUCSON METEORITE

On December 26, 1863, the following notice appeared in newspapers throughout the country: "The Smithsonian Institute has received an immense meteorite from California, which immediately attracts the attention of all who visit the museum. It is in the shape of a ring, the greatest diameter being over four feet. It was presented to the institution by the Ainsa family of California and will be known as 'Ainsa meteorite.'" Surgeon B.J.D. Irwin, who at the time was busy taking care of casualties in the aftermath of the Vicksburg Campaign, would not hear about the Smithsonian's new acquisition for another two years. Upon doing so, he immediately dashed off an angry letter to the director of the Smithsonian, Joseph Henry, initiating a twenty-year feud over what is arguably one of the most famous attractions at the institute—the Tucson or "ring" meteorite.

Irwin had begun collecting specimens for the Smithsonian in the late 1850s while stationed in New Mexico Territory. When he came across an unusually shaped meteorite buried on a dusty Tucson street being used as a blacksmith's anvil, Irwin claimed it for the museum, and in 1860 contracted with a local Mexican agent named Jesus M. Ainsa to have it shipped back to Washington. When Ainsa's younger brother Santiago finally arrived with the meteorite in Washington in 1863, the flamboyant Mexican presented it to the Smithsonian as though he were the original discoverer, not merely the transporter. The meteorite was an immediate hit at the newly organized "National Museum."

After reading Irwin's 1865 letter in which the Irishman cried foul, Joseph Henry acknowledged the museum's error, but stated that once a specimen had been named it couldn't be changed. He offered a compromise—to call the meteorite the Irwin-Ainsa. But Irwin declined the offer, stating that he would rather not have his name attached to the meteor at all, if the only option was to be linked forever by name with someone he thought a scoundrel. Henry relented, and promised to rename the object the "Tucson" meteorite.

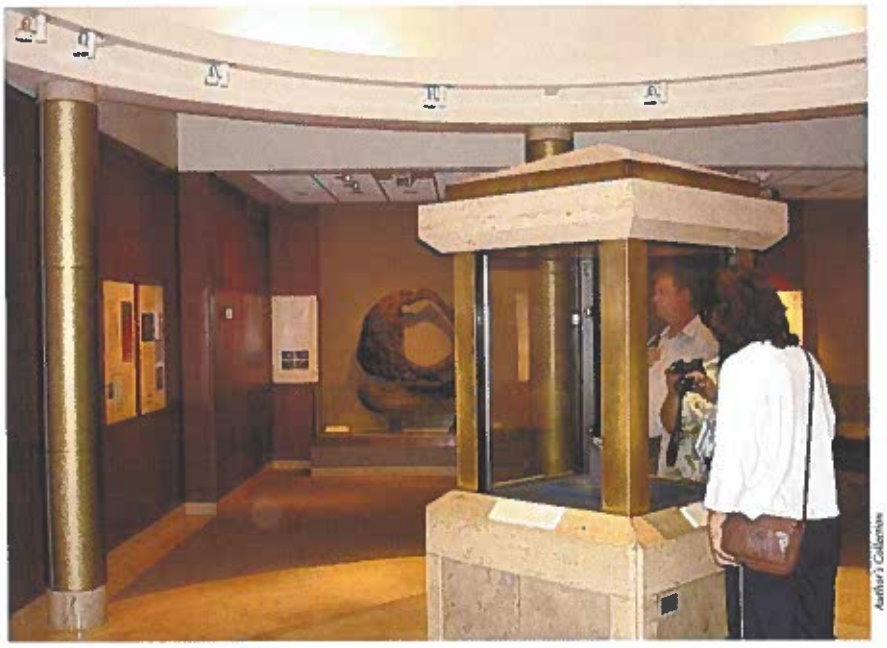
Ten years later, Irwin was stationed at West Point and involved in preparing for the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition. Imagine Irwin's reaction when he read that one of the centerpiece attractions at the exposition was to be the "famous IRWIN-AINSA meteorite" on loan from the Smithsonian! He sent off another angry letter of protest, and again received profuse apologies from Henry and a promise to correct the error. Irwin was sorely disappointed and embarrassed, however, when as part of the army's official delegation to the Philadelphia Exposition in 1876, he visited the meteorite and saw the name "AINSA" in paint, plainly visible underneath a small paper label that had been hastily affixed identifying the specimen as the "Tucson" meteorite.

Irwin jotted off yet another angry letter to Henry, and this time he prevailed. Although the Smithsonian's annual report for 1886 referred to the specimen as the "Signet, Irwin, or Ainsa meteorite," it acknowledged that the iron was a gift from Dr. B. J. D. Irwin. Additionally, the Smithsonian's visitor's guide for the same year called it "The Great Tucson Meteorite," the name by which it is known today. □

Courtesy Smithsonian Institution

Right: Illustration of the Tucson meteorite included in the Smithsonian's annual report for 1886. Clearly visible on the side of the meteorite—that not normally seen by the viewing public—is the inscription: "The Irwin Meteorite—from Tucson, Ariz. Weight 1400 Lbs."

Below: The Smithsonian Institute, where the meteorite is on display today next to the Hope Diamond.



Author's Collection

lumbia, Kentucky. Although senior by virtue of being in the regular army, Irwin was junior in rank to many of the volunteer regimental and brigade surgeons. He was therefore given the title of medical inspector, so that he could exert influence over the volunteer doctors, many of whom knew nothing of military operations. Throughout February, Irwin suffered with Boyle's 2,800-man brigade as Union forces stalled in central Kentucky. The men ailed from exposure and contagious diseases, demonstrating that military medicine was not always a matter of gunshot wounds and amputations. Then, in early March, Irwin with Boyle and the Eleventh Brigade were recalled to Nashville, where the doctor met the larger-than-life commander of Buell's Fourth Division, William "Bull" Nelson.

Nelson, who stood six feet, five inches tall and weighed three hundred pounds, was an Annapolis graduate who in 1861 had been dispatched to Kentucky by Abraham Lincoln to help the Union cause there. Nelson was rewarded for his efforts by being promoted a brigadier general in the volunteer army and given command of one of Buell's divisions. An effective combat leader, Nelson had a reputation for being an overbearing autocrat with a seaman's coarse vocabulary. Although there is no record of their first meeting, the chemistry between Irwin and Nelson must have been immediate.

Both men were tall—Irwin, at six feet, three inches, was one of the few people who could stand and look Nelson in the eye. Both were ambitious, goal oriented, and had short-fused tempers. Like Irwin, Nelson was cosmopolitan—well read, had been to Europe, loved classical music, spoke multiple languages, and was an accomplished horseman. And Nelson, who loved to entertain by showing off his prodigious memory and endless supply of sea stories, found that Irwin could match him story for story with his tales of his exploits out West. It came as no surprise when, as Irwin wrote later, "at the request of General Nelson, I was ordered to his staff."[13] On March 16, 1862, as Buell's Army of the Ohio headed out of Nashville, Irwin and Nelson rode together for the first time.

Generals in Blue

Courtesy the Irwin Family

Brigadier Generals Jeremiah T. Boyle (far left) and William "Bull" Nelson.

Below: New York's 7th Regiment fires on the mob outside the Astor Place, May 10, 1849.

Buell had been ordered to move his army to Savannah, Tennessee, where he would link with U.S. Grant's force. Nelson was convinced that Grant's army was in danger in its encampment at Pittsburg Landing, across and ten miles down the Tennessee River from Savannah, and when Buell's army was delayed at the Duck River to rebuild damaged bridges, Nelson persuaded Buell to allow him to proceed on ahead. His men made a bundle of their pants, attached them to their bayonets, and, on a cold and disagreeable morning, waded across the freezing waters of the Duck River.

For eighty miles there was only one winding, hilly road for the troops to follow. Irwin would occasionally ride up front with Nelson, but spent most of his time back with the other brigade and regimental surgeons. Although reports

History of the Seventh Regiment of New York, 1806-1889, Volume First

from Fort Donelson regarding the large numbers of casualties incurred at the fighting there had given medical planners some indication of what they might expect, no one then riding toward the Tennessee River could envision how the scope of casualty care was about to undergo a radical and irrevocable transformation. Even Irwin, who had gained experience taking care of battle injuries out West with the Apaches, was not completely prepared for the experience that lay ahead.

The spring rains had turned the road into a muddy quagmire, and as the days warmed up heat exhaustion became a problem. Although everyone knew they were marching to meet the enemy, most of the Federals thought that contact with the rebels was at least two weeks away. Only Nelson had an unrequited sense of urgency, and when the division passed through the town of Waynesboro, Nelson ignored Grant's advice to rest and pushed on to Savannah.

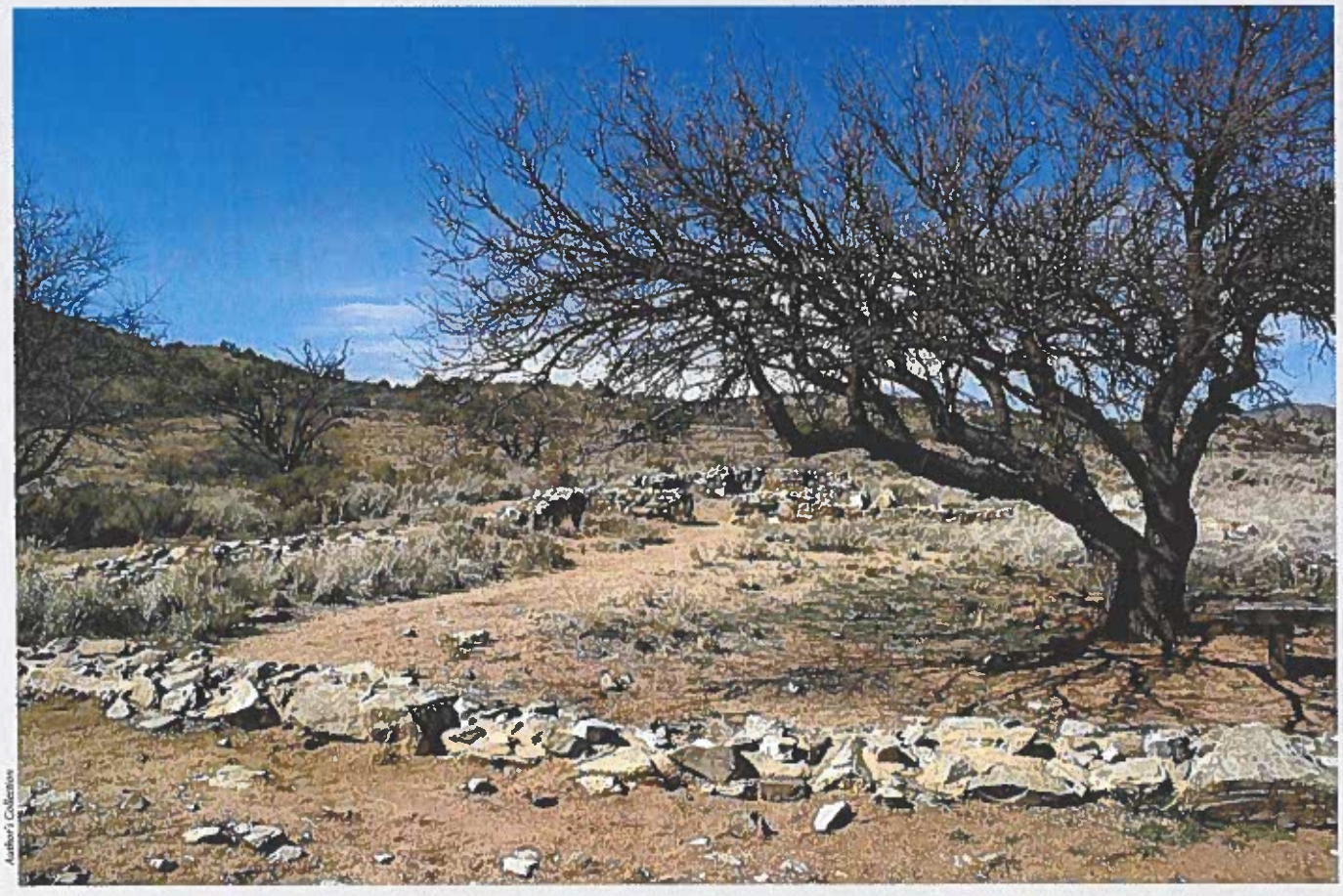
Irwin arrived with Nelson at Savannah early Saturday afternoon, April 5. The recent rains had stopped, the sun had broken through the clouds, and the peach blossoms were in bloom. The scene along the banks of the Tennessee was one of tranquility. Irwin accompanied Nelson on a visit to Grant, who ordered Nelson to remain at Savannah rather than proceed across the river. Nelson protested Grant's decision, but to no avail. That night Nelson was agitated, and he spoke of the man who had grown up ten miles away from him in Washington, Kentucky, and who now commanded the Confederate army threatening them: "Sydney Johnston is not a man to be underestimated. I think Grant is wrong. We should be over there now."[14]

Sunday, April 6, dawned bright and clear. Irwin took a few moments to work on a medical article about his experience the previous year at Apache Pass.[15] Suddenly the quiet was interrupted by the distant booming of cannons and fusillade of gunfire—it soon became apparent that a major battle was underway at Pittsburg Landing. Mounted on his huge bay horse, Nelson rode through the camps, admonishing the regiments to be ready to move at a moment's notice.

When no boats arrived to ferry his men, Nelson ordered his division to move out, using a guide to help find their way through the swampland along the river. As messengers from the battlefield updated Nelson, it became clear that his worst fears had been realized. In the early hours of Sunday morning, Albert Sydney Johnston's Confederates had attacked Grant's unprepared troops and were pushing them back into the river.

The first day's fighting at Shiloh has been described as an Armageddon—more casualties were generated on that day than in all previous American conflicts combined. Doctors and hospital orderlies in blue faced a daunting task. As Johnston's rebels forced Grant's Federals to abandon their camps and hospital supplies, members of the medical staff stayed put and treated the wounded. As one doctor present that day, H. Wardner, wrote to the *Chicago Medical Examiner*, "They had just started to bring casualties when ... the balls, shells and bullets came in such volleys over our heads, that we knew the enemy to be rapidly advancing...and about ten minutes later had the dissatisfaction of seeing our depot in the possession of the enemy...."[16] Like many of the Union troops, Wardner sought refuge in the high bluffs near the landing, where a log cabin served as a makeshift hospital.

Below: The ruins of the stage station at Apache Pass, where Irwin tended to the wounded during the "Bascom Affair" in February 1861.



Author's Collection

Back on the other side of the river, Nelson's division was hurrying to get to the scene of the fighting. Irwin rode alongside his general, and with their escort of a hundred horsemen, left a trail in the muddy swampland that the infantry had no difficulty in following. Unfortunately, such was not the case for Irwin's heavy medical wagons and ambulances, which could not make it through the deep mud. "The command was put in motion for the front minus some very essential portions of the equipments needed in battle," wrote Irwin. "The absence of ambulances, medicine-wagons, and the Medical Purveyor's supply train left us devoid of the ordinary provisions for the treatment of wounded, save such instruments as were carried in the knapsacks of the hospital orderlies or in the saddle bags of the Medical Officers."[17]

When the Fourth Division finally arrived across from Pittsburg Landing late in the afternoon they found a panorama out of Dante's *Inferno*. Smoke hung over the trees on the opposite shore, as both Federal and Confederate cannons continued to tear up the earth and the fragile bodies of the combatants. For half a mile along the river several thousand frightened and hysterical troops swarmed the shoreline or jumped into the water.

Nelson commandeered one of the troop transports and rode over to Pittsburg Landing with Irwin, Colonel Jacob Ammen, and members of Ammen's Tenth Brigade. Nelson was furious, and swore all manner of profanities at the panic-stricken troops cowering at the landing. Chaos and the acrid smoke of gunpowder permeated the scene. Dead and wounded soldiers lay everywhere, some trampled by the retreating forces.

Wounded and dead soldiers, shell-shocked stragglers, and newly arriving troops crowded around a log cabin on the bluff overlooking the landing. Nelson's troops had to force their way through the men cowering by the river bank. The general ordered Ammen's brigade surgeon, Dr. Joshua Bradford, to help out in the hospital that had been set up in a log cabin near the landing, while Irwin went from brigade to brigade along the Union line of battle making sure the regimental and brigade surgeons were ready for an advance.

The marshy swamp through which Nelson's men marched on the way to Pittsburg Landing.

A CASE OF SEVERE PUNCTURED WOUND:

Body Transfixed by a Bayonet!—Recovery

by B. J. D. Irwin, M.D., U.S.A., Medical Inspector, 4th Division, Army of the Ohio

In the early part of February, 1861, the various tribes of Apache Indians, inhabiting the mountainous regions of Arizona broke into open hostilities against the government, perpetrating atrocities and unheard of cruelties upon the unfortunate white settlers, and torturing their luckless captives in the most barbarous and cruel manner. Unfortunate prisoners were starved, others tied up for slow target practice, and some were hung up by the feet and broiled to death by fires built beneath their subverted heads! It was during the enactment of this ferocious crusade, that the following interesting case came under my supervision.

A small party of our troops was hemmed in, in one of the gorges of the Chirricahui Mountains, by superior numbers of Indians, who were endeavoring to capture our slender force. We held some prisoners of theirs as hostages for the safety of some citizens in their possession, whom we desired to exchange. On a certain occasion, the prisoners in our possession made a simultaneous attempt to break away from our guards. One robust athlete, aet. about 25 years, was knocked down by the sentinel by a blow from a musket on the back of the head, and *held pinned to the earth by a bayonet* which transfixed his body. The weapon entered the abdomen in the anterior upper angle of the left hypochondriac region, passed directly backwards and downwards, and made its exit a little below the posterior corresponding space, about two inches from the vertebral column. The victim was held in that position for some moments, until succor arrived to secure him and his desperate associates. A paroxysm of momentary weakness was all that appeared preternatural in him. The amount of hemorrhage was very slight, and the man did not present any of the symptoms to be expected from so serious a lesion. He was tied and placed on his back; kept strictly quiet, and the cold water dressing applied—*snow-water* was used from necessity. The diet allowed was of the sparest kind Not a bad symptom appeared, and on *the fourth day* the wounds were healed by adhesive inflammation. He complained but little of any pain or distress, which I attributed to the innate pride of his stoical character; being a brother of the chief [Cochise] of his tribe, he held it beneath his dignity to manifest any show of physical or moral suffering. On the ninth day he walked to the place of execution, where he, with five of his companions, was hung to the boughs of two stately oaks, overshadowing the graves of some fourteen of our citizens, whom the savages had treacherously tortured to death while prisoners in their hands. As we were desirous of making a lasting example to our treacherous foes, the bodies were allowed to remain suspended permanently, which prevented my making a post-mortem examination of the body of the one whose case I have described. □

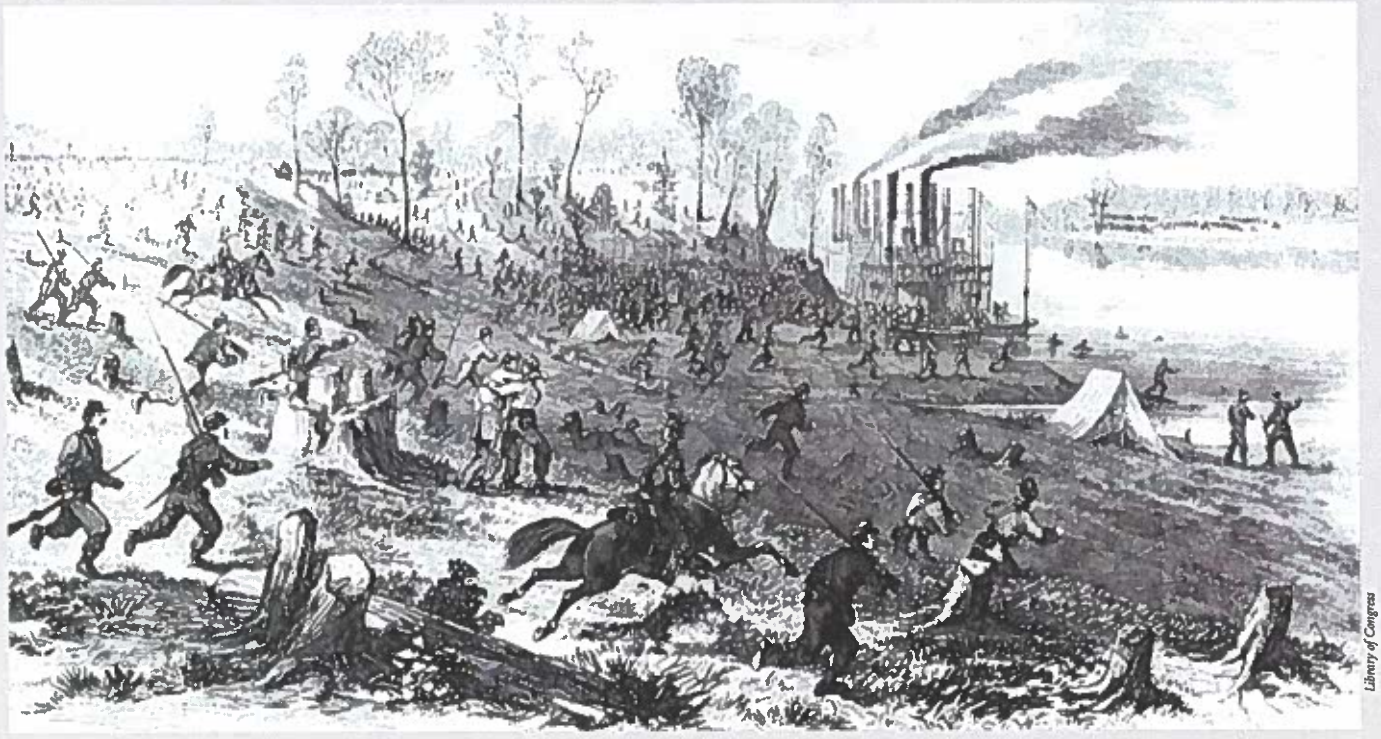
—"Field of Shiloh," Tenn., April 18, 1862
[from *American Medical Times*, May 17, 1862]

That evening it started to rain, at first lightly, then heavily and incessantly. The cries of the wounded could be heard across the battlefield. Irwin later expressed his frustration that "during the route and confusion of the surprise on the morning of the first day of the battle many of the wounded were necessarily abandoned to their sad fate and remained where they fell...[suffering] from exposure and privation....The temperature most fortunately was mild and balmy and a heavy rain fell during the night which in a measure served to allay the thirst of those unable to procure water."[18] After ensuring that his brigade surgeons and medical officers were in place Irwin waited uneasily for dawn, knowing there were not enough resources to care for the large numbers of men already wounded, let alone those who would be injured during the renewed fighting.

With first light of the new day, the second day of the battle at Shiloh began. Nelson's Fourth Division distinguished itself against the Confederates, who were slowly but inexorably driven back. Writing a year later, Irwin was still emotional about their performance: "Onward they pushed with the confidence and courage of veterans who had never known what repulse or disaster meant. It was a glorious sight to behold their advances and hear their loud shouts of triumph."[19]

His horse severely wounded, Irwin dismounted near Colonel Sanders Bruce's brigade and went over to assist Dr. Samuel Menzies and his regimental doctors in their field "operating" hospital. Several times the hospital came under fire, but Irwin and his medical personnel continued to operate even as "the pattering of rifle bullets ... and screaming shells burst in uncomfortable proximity." Irwin noted that, "At or about one o'clock P.M. the left wing of the line had swung well around ... and in changing the position of the operating hospitals, one of them was moved forward to a deserted farmhouse, situated on an open level piece of unbroken ground....The proximity of this field hospital to the recaptured camp of a division of our troops, defeated and made prisoners on the preceding day, suggested the utilization of the abandoned tents for the benefit of the wounded; and as soon as the battle ceased, the hospital tents, commissary tents, and wall tents were accordingly taken possession of and in a short space of time were removed to and pitched in regular order on the level ground by which the farmhouse was surrounded.... Long into the night the ambulances continued to bring in the wounded who, af-

Author's Collection



Library of Congress

Right: View of Pittsburg Landing from across the Tennessee River, where Nelson's men embarked.

Below: Demoralized Union soldiers crowd the bank of the Tennessee as Nelson's men begin arriving toward the end of the first day's fighting at Shiloh.

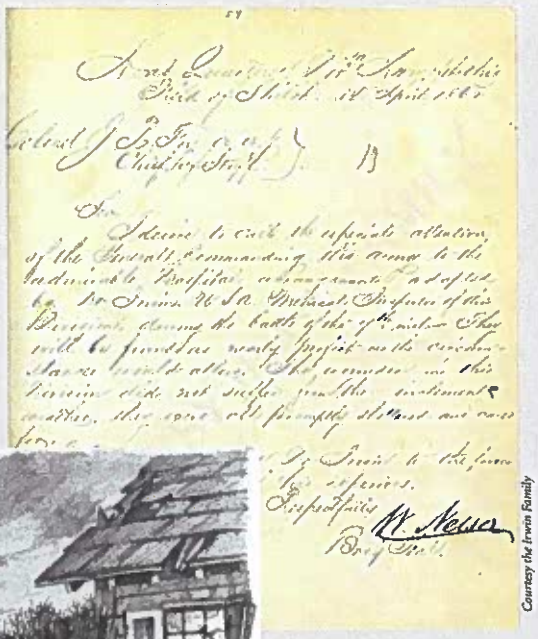
ter receiving the necessary professional attendance, were made comfortable as possible by being supplied with an abundance of warm food, good bedding and shelter from the inclement weather."[20] Irwin had come across the abandoned camp of the 55th Illinois Infantry, and took their tents, kettles, food, and other supplies to set up the first full-service hospital ever established on a battlefield. Irwin's hospital was capable of providing not only emergency surgery but also definitive post-operative care.[21] This was in sharp contrast to the care being provided at other makeshift hospitals, where, in the words of one veteran of the battle, "the wounded had to lie on the bare ground, without shelter of any kind exposed to a drizzling rain throughout that day and night."[22]

By Monday afternoon, the Confederate forces were in retreat, and the survivors were left to deal with the carnage. Surgeons tried their best to save the wounded, but they were overwhelmed. The medical system was neither equipped nor organized to take care of so many patients. In the days following the battle help started arriving and patients were taken to other cities, where hospitals were set up by the various state sanitary commissions. But Irwin's patients did not have to be evacuated in unstable condition. As Dr. Robert Murray, Buell's medical director, commented in his official report of the battle, Irwin's patients were so well cared for they were the last to be evacuated from the field.[23]

Word of the success of Irwin's tent hospital soon spread. Grant ordered that all available tents be provided for the wounded, and Irwin was officially commended for his action. Nelson was also hailed as a victorious hero and promoted to major general. The days after Shiloh were heady indeed for both Nelson and his now famous medical inspector.

In the aftermath of Shiloh, Major General Henry Halleck arrived from St. Louis and assumed command of the Federal forces. As supplies flowed down from the north, large tent hospitals like Irwin's became more commonplace, allowing combat casualties, as well as the sick, to remain close to their units.

For almost the entire month of May 1862 Halleck advanced toward Corinth at a glacially slow pace. Finally, around the end of the month, Nelson took one of his brigades and rode against the Confederate breastworks at Corinth. Once again Irwin was in the forefront of the action: "During the siege our division occupied an advanced position and was the first to enter the town of Corinth—our loss amounted to some 120 *hors de combat* [out of action in a seriously wounded condition], the greater part of which occurred ... while a brigade of our division, which I accompanied into action, made a reconnaissance in force of the enemy's works."[24]



Courtesy the Irwin Family

Above: Irwin's field commendation.

Left: Patients arrive throughout the evening at Irwin's field hospital at Shiloh. *Courtesy National Parks Service.*

The 100,000-man army assembled by Halleck was now split. Grant was sent south toward Vicksburg, while Buell was ordered east toward the critical railhead at Chattanooga. Throughout June and July the Army of the Ohio plodded along hot, dusty roads in northern Mississippi and Alabama, constantly harassed by Confederate guerillas intent on disrupting fragile supply lines. Buell lost the initiative and assumed a defensive attitude as he worried incessantly about where the Confederates might attack him. Residents of Indiana and Ohio grew particularly agitated at having a large Confederate force under General Braxton Bragg loose somewhere to the south threatening to march up through Tennessee and Kentucky and attack them on their home ground.

Confederate major general Kirby Smith welcomed the chance to threaten Indiana and Ohio, and he began to move his army up through eastern Tennessee. Meanwhile, the frightened governors of the northern states had raised thousands of new recruits and sent them to loosely organized training camps outside Louisville, where they were arguably more of a menace than the enemy. There was a desperate need for someone to whip them into shape. "Bull" Nelson was given the job.

Irwin later wrote that "on the 15th of August Nelson ... was directed to proceed to Kentucky to organize a new Army. I accompanied him as a member of his personal staff and was announced as Medical Inspector of the Army of Kentucky which was rapidly increased by the addition of new levies until it amounted to 50,000 men of all arms." In a classic understatement, Irwin went on to note, "The rapidity with which these troops

were sent into the field gave me a great amount of extra labor as they came wholly unprepared for field service."[25]

When Nelson arrived in Richmond, Kentucky, he wrote that "there is no discipline among these troops. Straggling, marauding, plundering is the rule; good conduct the exception. I find this town literally over run. I have ordered everybody to their camps, and shall enforce the strictest discipline."[26] Irwin too recalled that the state of the troops was deplorable. "I lost no time in informing myself of the condition and wants of the eight new regiments just concentrated from Indiana and Ohio. They had been only from fourteen to twenty days in the field, and had but few medical officers, who had neither medicines, instruments, ambulances, tents, nor camp equipage to enable them to perform their duties."[27]

No one knew if the Confederates were coming with just a raiding force of cavalry or with a full army of infantry and artillery, or even where they were. Unhappy with the tactical location of the recruits around Richmond, Nelson decided to move them west toward the town of Lancaster. On August 30 Irwin was with Nelson's staff in Lancaster while the recruits were still outside Richmond. Nelson himself was in Lexington, but in a major breech of military protocol he had not told his aide where he was going. While Nelson was away, Kirby Smith led his army of 19,000 combat-hardened Confederates against the untrained recruits in Richmond.

When Nelson's staff, including Irwin, heard that a battle was in progress twenty-eight miles away, they set out immediately and arrived on the field about 11:00 a.m., only to find that the inexperienced Union forces were already retreating. Irwin tried with the rest of the staff to rally the collapsing army. When Nelson finally arrived he was furious, riding through the frightened troops, screaming obscenities, and brandishing his sword, striking some with the flat of his blade. According to legend, Nelson, drawing himself up to his full size, hollered out that the enemy was incompetent, not able even to hit a target as large as he, at which moment he was promptly struck twice by gunfire.

Nelson continued to ride, "raging and roaring like a wounded lion," but his army was gone. Irwin and members of Nelson's staff were able to lead the wounded general away a short distance. As Irwin tended to his general, a small group of rebel cavalry approached. Cautioning Nelson to remain quiet, Irwin went forward to meet them. Stating that he was a doctor and should be taken to where he could help the wounded, the cavalry obliged and led Irwin away, leaving Nelson untouched. With the aid of his staff, Nelson painfully remounted and rode off the battlefield, which by then was totally in the hands of Confederate forces.[28]

Irwin was now a prisoner of war. The next morning he was brought before Kirby Smith, who agreed to parole Irwin in order to oversee the treatment of the wounded. Irwin was greatly aided by the citizens of Richmond, who volunteered to assist him in his efforts. He did complain, however, about a lack of proper hospital attendants. "Those detailed from among the [Union] prisoners of war deserted their posts, despite all our efforts, at the first opportunity. Being recruits, they possessed no feeling of sympathy for their wounded comrades, such as old soldiers are wont to evince for each other."[29]

Irwin obtained permission from Smith to go to Cincinnati to have the necessary ambulances, nurses, and supplies sent back to Richmond. And for the second time in eighteen months, he found that he had lost all of his personal possessions. "My horse and equipments, sword, pistol, etc. were taken from me, against which I remonstrated to General Kirby Smith," but to no avail. He was able only to keep his medical kit. Twenty years later his claim against the government for the loss of his horse and equipment was still working its way through the federal bureaucracy.[30]

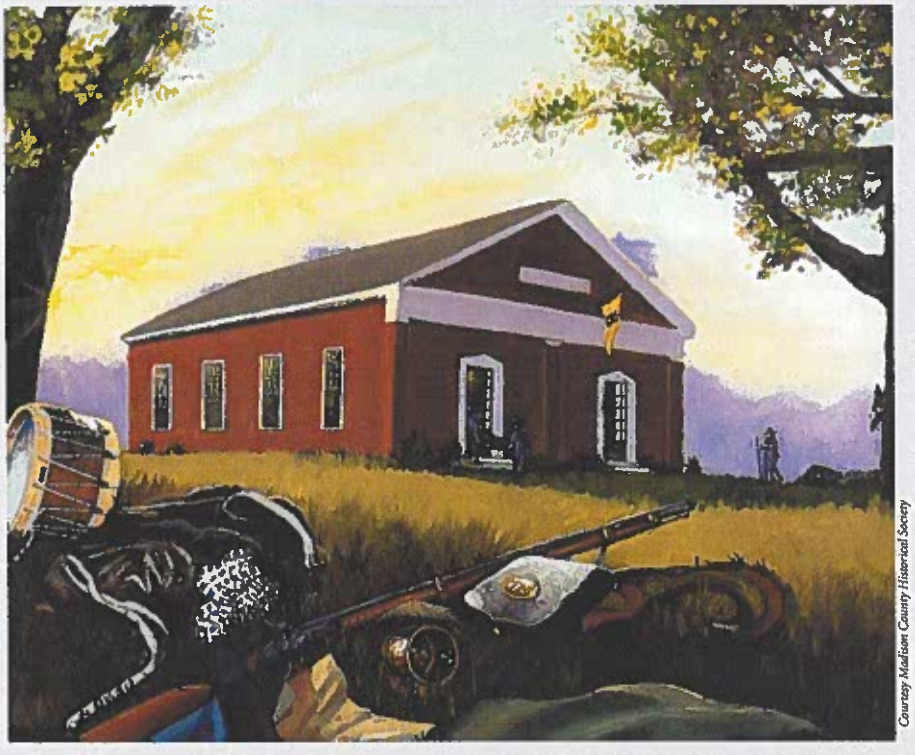
In Cincinnati, Irwin was reunited with the convalescing Nelson. Far from being discouraged, Nelson was planning the resurrection of his army with a vengeance. The disastrous outcome at Richmond now had the citizens of Cincinnati

Library of Congress

U.S. Army Military History Institute

Right: Major General Kirby Smith (left) and Brigadier General Don Carlos Buell.

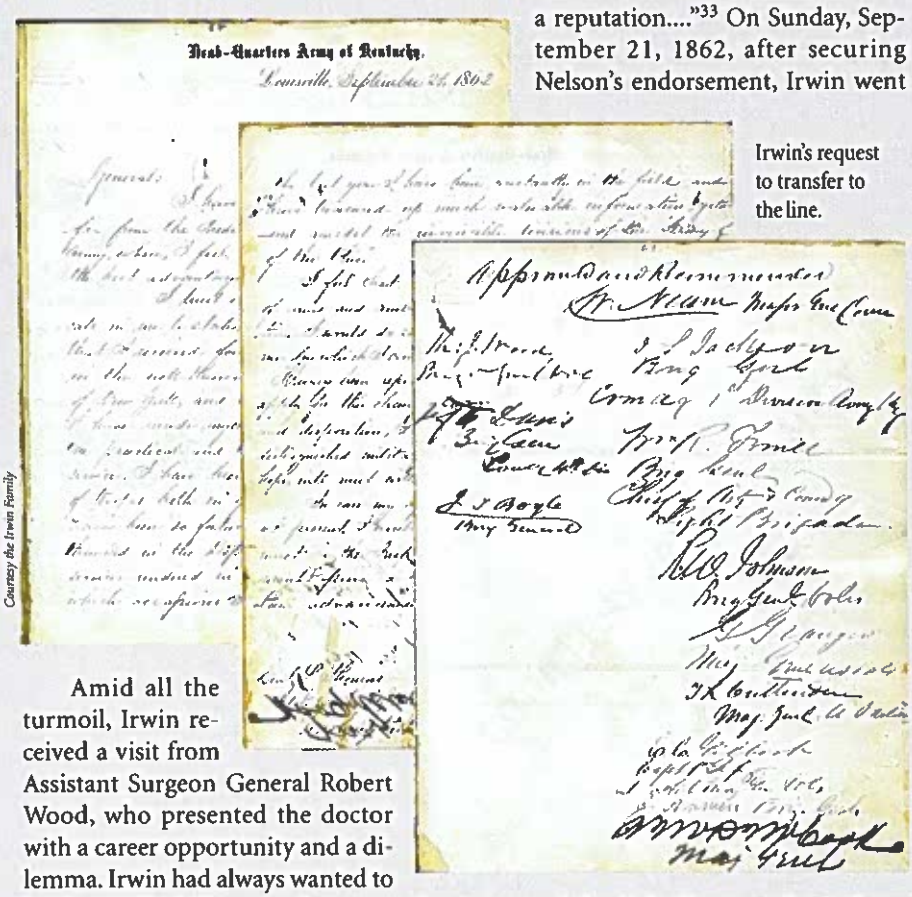
Below: The Mount Zion Church, used by Irwin as a field hospital during the Battle of Richmond. *Artist Timothy Pack.*



Courtesy Madison County Historical Society

and Louisville in an even greater frenzy. The Confederate army had demonstrated that it was not only nearby, but also dangerous. Meanwhile, Buell's army was still hundreds of miles to the south. Nelson's sick room became the center of attention, as visitors such as Phil Sheridan came and went and the plans for the defense of Cincinnati and Louisville were prepared.

In the middle of September 1862 Nelson returned with Irwin to Louisville, where he established his headquarters in the famous Galt House amid an atmosphere of controversy, rumor, and political manipulation. Emotions were running high over Buell's lackluster performance as commander, and most believed it was only a matter of time before Buell would be replaced. Military men and politicians alike were openly hostile to Buell, and one, Governor Oliver Morton of Indiana, had a personal vendetta against both Buell and Nelson, who he blamed for the loss of Indiana recruits at Richmond.[31]


Courtesy the Irwin Family

Irwin's request to transfer to the line.

Amid all the turmoil, Irwin received a visit from Assistant Surgeon General Robert Wood, who presented the doctor with a career opportunity and a dilemma. Irwin had always wanted to be the medical director of an army, the highest position available to a medical officer in wartime, and Wood was now offering him just such a position. Wood was having problems with the medical situation in Helena, Arkansas, where hundreds of men were dying in disease-ridden camps, and he offered Irwin the position of medical director of the Army of the Southwest. The dilemma was that Nelson had recently suggested a different career path to his friend Irwin, one that appealed more to Irwin's ambition and adventurous temperament.

Ever since Apache Pass Irwin had walked a narrow path between healer and warrior. He believed that "a medical officer has a right to aspire to be something more than a mere doctor to be patronizingly approved of by his comrades of the line."[32] Nelson told Irwin that if he applied for a transfer to the line, Nelson would secure for him command of one of his regiments. Even as Wood was preparing for Irwin a set of orders to Arkansas, Irwin drew up a formal request to transfer to the line, "having been repeatedly advised by military friends to apply for this change as being more suitable to my habits and disposition, and with my natural taste for the profession of arms and ambitious determination to achieve a reputation...."[33] On Sunday, September 21, 1862, after securing Nelson's endorsement, Irwin went around the Galt House and got eleven other generals to sign his request, including a recently arrived member of Buell's staff, Brigadier General Jefferson C. Davis.

On September 25 Buell arrived in Louisville along with the rest of the Army of the Ohio, and preparations began for a new offensive against the Confederates. Irwin was informed by Colonel Wood that he been promoted to full surgeon (major) and was told to report to his office in St. Louis. For Irwin it was a bittersweet experience, but he knew where his duty lay, and he reluctantly made ready to depart.

Saturday the 28th was Nelson's thirty-eighth birthday, and a large party was held for him at the Galt House.[34] Amid the politicking and celebration, Nelson took time to acknowledge Irwin's service publicly. Afterward Nelson told Irwin to put in his request, and that he still looked forward to having Irwin return in the future to assume command of one of his regiments. Then, promising one day to ride together again, they said goodbye. It was the last time they would see each other.

The next day, Sunday, Irwin boarded a train headed for his new assignment. He wrote later that "the day after I had left and while enroute I read a telegraphic notice of the shooting of Nelson."[35] Major General William "Bull" Nelson was dead, the victim of one of the war's most bizarre incidents.

Twenty-three years later, in 1885, Buell's chief of staff, James B. Fry, wrote to Irwin asking the doctor to refresh his memory about the incident. Fry had read "a newspaper account of the killing of General Nelson by General Davis. The story was grossly incorrect, and furthermore was unjust to Nelson. I thought I would answer it." Irwin's response to Fry formed the basis of Fry's article, "Killed by A Brother Soldier," published in 1885, which has long been one of the main sources about the incident.[36]

During that last hectic week in September 1862, Irwin had been staying at the Galt House in the room next to Nelson's. Irwin had overheard Nelson criticize Davis for not doing his job properly. Davis took offense at Nelson's tone, and asked Irwin to come into Nelson's room to witness how disrespectful Nelson was in berating him. Nelson agreed, saying, "Yes doctor come in here and witness this," and then promptly fired Davis and told the stunned brigadier general to be out of town by sundown.

Davis left Louisville seething with anger and reported to Major General H.G. Wright in Cincinnati. Since Buell

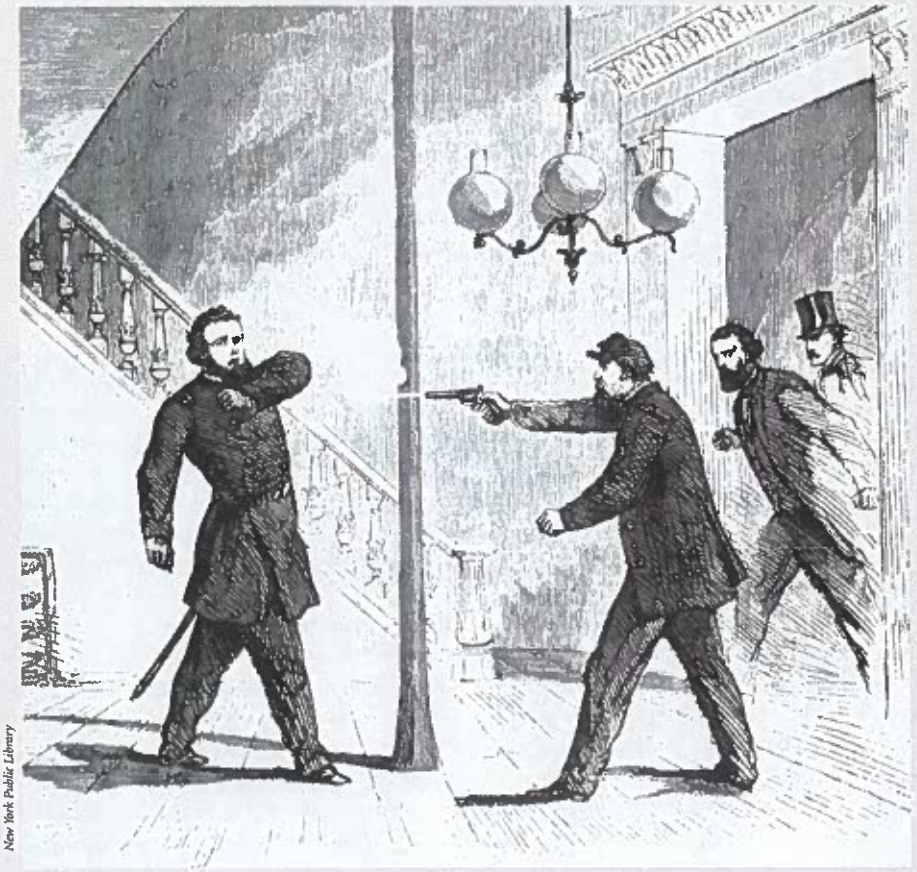
had by then arrived in Louisville, Wright sent Davis back with orders to report to Buell and stay away from Nelson. But Davis first paid a call on Nelson's nemesis, Governor Morton, who convinced Davis that he should demand satisfaction from Nelson.[37]

On Monday morning, September 29, 1862, Davis entered the lobby of the Galt House in the company of Governor Morton. Davis sought out Nelson and demanded an apology. Nelson haughtily refused and Davis flipped a card into Nelson's face. The three-hundred-pound Nelson promptly slapped the 120-pound Davis across the face with the back of his hand, turned, and walked away. Davis grabbed a pistol from someone nearby, called out to Nelson to turn around, and shot him in the chest at point-blank range. Nelson was dead within minutes.

Although Davis was arrested, he was never brought to trial, resulting in one of the great controversies of the war. Conspiracy theories have abounded that pro-abolitionists such as Morton influenced Lincoln to keep the War Department from pursuing the matter given Nelson's anti-emancipation views. In any event, a perception was allowed to develop that Nelson was somehow at fault for his own murder, and until Fry's article, few had taken up Nelson's cause.

In his letter to Fry, who was present at the shooting, Irwin noted, "I never saw General Davis from the day of the altercation until several years after when I accidentally met him in 1879 at General Sheridan's quarters in Chicago, but I am not aware that he ever discussed the unfortunate affair or expressed any regret for his action."[38] Irwin went on to express appreciation that someone was going to "do justice to the reputation and memory of as true a patriot and as brave a soldier as ever confronted an enemy. Indeed I have often wondered that some one of the many warm friends of General Nelson had not at least endeavored to set the matter right.... [I]t was understood and rumored at the time that General Jim Jackson or General Terrill would hold General Davis to personal account for the killing of Nelson, but the death of both these officers a few days later at the battle of Perryville left the affair to others who, in the excitement of those troublesome and stirring days soon forgot what they owed to the reputation and memory of the generous and daring soldier who saved Kentucky from the toils of secession."[39]

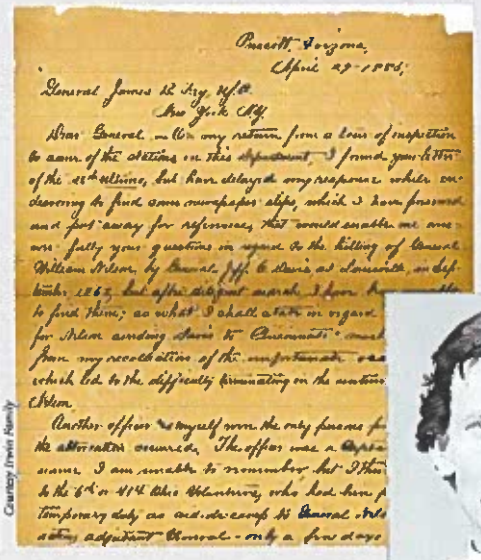
The loss of his friend and mentor was a major blow to Irwin, and following the murder, he withdrew his request to transfer to the line. Colonel Wood re-



New York Public Library

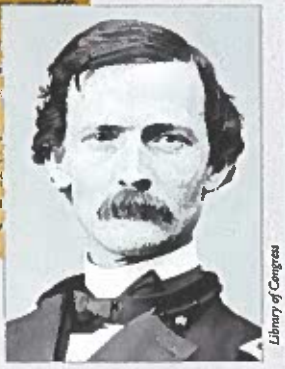
This depiction of the shooting of General Nelson appeared in the October 18, 1862, issue of the *New York Illustrated News*.

Library of Congress



Courtesy Irwin Family

Above: Governor Oliver Morton of Indiana (left), and a reproduction of Irwin's letter to James B. Fry that includes his account of Nelson's murder.



Library of Congress

Generals in Blue

Right: James B. Fry (left), Buell's chief of staff, and Brigadier General Jefferson C. Davis.

iterated how badly Irwin was needed in Arkansas, and in October 1862 he reported to the Army of the Southwest as medical director. Irwin immediately understood why Wood had been so anxious for him to take the job:

> Without an exception, I found every camp defective in its sanitary police. Very little attention has been observed in laying out the camps, especially where the troops pitched their tents ... drainage has been ignored and the use of latrines appears to be unknown. Squalid negligence and filthy habits disgust the stranger at every turn. Dead horses and other animals have been allowed to fester and decay even in some of the public streets of this miserable town.... The accumulated filth and offal from the camps of thirty thousand men for several months render Helena and its marshy environs the most disgustingly filthy place extant.[40]

Irwin immediately set about cleaning up the camps; after "five months of unremitting toil," he noted, "I succeeded in getting my department regulated."[41]

In January 1863 Irwin accompanied the expedition against Fort Hindman, also known as Arkansas Post, though he arrived too late to participate in the fighting. The thrill he had experienced riding at the side of Nelson was missing. In addition, divisions were being detached from the Army of the Southwest to support Grant's Vicksburg Campaign, leaving only a shell of an army behind. Disappointed with his current assignment, he lobbied Colonel Wood for a bigger job, and in March was ordered to Memphis as superintendent of all Federal hospitals there. Noted Irwin, "Twelve large and commodious general hospitals were rapidly fitted up so that the month of May found me providing for five thousand invalids. During the campaign of Vicksburg ... the hospitals under my control at Memphis afforded accommodations to some fifty odd thousand sick and wounded soldiers."[42]

Managing a complex hospital system in a large southern city under occupation was a far cry from the more familiar field duty Irwin was used to. A certain degree of finesse was required, which Irwin often found challenging. In a famous confrontation with "Mother" Mary Ann Bickerdyke, the celebrated nurse who had been at Shiloh and Corinth, and who was a favorite of generals including Sherman and Grant, Irwin found himself in a losing position. Trying to save money, he had issued an order to dismiss the contraband cooks and laundresses employed by Bickerdyke in the Memphis hospitals and replace them with convalescent soldiers. Bickerdyke went over Irwin's head and arranged for Major General Stephen Hurlbut, the military commander in Memphis, to countermand Irwin's order. Irwin was furious. When he threatened to run her out of town, Bickerdyke retorted: "It's of no use for you to try to tie me up with your red tape. There's too much to be done down here to stop for that. Nor is there any sense in your getting mad because I don't play second fiddle to you; for I tell you I haven't got time for it. And, doctor, I guess you hadn't better get into a row with me, for whenever anybody does one of us two always goes to the wall, and 'tain't never me!"[43] Irwin had learned the hard way what Sherman once said of the nurse known as the 'Cyclone in Calico': "She outranks me."

Irwin summed up the conflicting demands of his job when he wrote: "During my administration of affairs in Memphis Tenn., from March 1863 to July 1865, I performed no ordinary series of labor and had a most difficult task to perform in discharging my duties conscientiously to the government, to the thousands of individuals whose wants were entrusted to my care, and to the many conflicting interests or wishes of persons whose friends or relations were entrusted to me...."[44]

Since the war's early days Irwin had been transitioning from the youthful and sometimes rash "fighting doctor" to the more polished and mature senior medical officer who would one day rise to the

Library of Congress

Right: Mary Ann Bickerdyke.

Below: Photograph of the "Officers Hospital" in Memphis, 1863.

Courtesy the Irwin Family

highest ranks of the military bureaucracy. During the summer of 1864 he courted and married the daughter of one of his surgeons, and the transformation was almost complete.

In April 1865, as the war was winding down and Irwin was dismantling the vast medical system he had helped to build, he was called upon one last time to deal with the tragic horrors of war. Early on the morning of April 27 Irwin was roused from his sleep by a huge explosion on the Mississippi River. Running down to the waterfront, he found hundreds of burned and mangled victims of the steamer *Sultana* being washed ashore, and he began coordinating the relief efforts for the survivors. The overcrowded *Sultana* had been carrying 2,300 former Union prisoners of war home; the explosion killed 1,800, the worst riverboat disaster in history. Irwin was outraged at the tragic fate of soldiers who had survived the horrors of war only to be maimed and scarred during its closing days. In a letter to the surgeon general the day after the disaster, he wrote: "I have witnessed many horrible scenes of suffering and carnage but nothing that compared to that of yesterday. The sympathy for these soldiers is universal. There is a fearful responsibility resting on the parties who crowded those poor fellows onto an ordinary sized boat so that they had merely standing room offered to them. It is shocking to think that twenty hundred people crowded on a frail and ordinary sized steamer." Irwin was a vocal and passionate witness at the subsequent court martial hearings that ultimately held no one accountable.[45]

The war over, Irwin briefly served as acting assistant surgeon general in St. Louis after the retirement of Colonel Wood. Irwin was now approaching middle age and was ready for the next phase of his career. The railroad was pushing west across Kansas and Irwin successfully lobbied to be assigned there. In the spring of 1866 he reported for duty to Fort Riley as the post surgeon for the newly organized 7th U.S. Cavalry.[46] It would not be long before he would make the acquaintance of another general who would call him friend and who was doomed to an early and tragic death—George Armstrong Custer.

Irwin remained on active duty for another thirty years, serving with such notables as Custer, Benjamin Grierson, Wesley Merritt, and Nelson Miles. He was with General Phil Sheridan at the Philadelphia Centennial in 1876 when he learned of his friend Custer's death. In 1891, while on the staff of General Nelson Miles, he represented the surgeon general when the Association of Military Surgeons was organized, and in 1893 he helped plan for the Chicago Exposition. In 1894, with attention focusing on the Indian Wars, he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his exploits at Apache Pass.

After failing in a bid to become surgeon general, Irwin retired in 1894 to Chicago, where he helped organize the Order of Indian Wars and became a

DR. IRWIN AND THE WOMEN OF MEMPHIS

The red-headed, blue-eyed Irwin cut a dashing figure during the Civil War, and like many men of action he had a flair for women and romance. Although opportunities for the latter were limited while in the field, once Irwin assumed command of all Federal hospitals in Memphis in early 1863, he immediately became one of that city's most eligible bachelors. The only problem was that he was a Yankee, and Memphis was a very southern city.

Dr. Irwin, as he appeared in the winter of 1863.

When the Federals under Grant and Sherman captured Memphis in the summer of 1862, they discovered that most of the women there were Confederate loyalists who supported their husbands, brothers, and fathers off fighting in the rebel armies. Most of these Confederate women did everything they could to antagonize and harass the blueclad troops. But one aspect of the Federal occupation was supported by the city's residents, and that was the medical care that wounded and sick soldiers of *both* sides received. The women of Memphis worked in the city's hospitals, where they were joined by women from the North as well as from other southern states. Irwin, as superintendent of hospitals, came in daily contact with these women as he made his daily rounds, and while he often complained about the meddlesome interference of some of the more matronly and independent-minded nurses, there is evidence that he found time to socialize with the more attractive of their number.

Decades after the war, in 1892, the Association of Military Surgeons held its annual meeting in St. Louis. Irwin, who at that time was in Chicago on the staff of General Nelson Miles, could not make it, but he was remembered to those in attendance by a story that appeared in *Truth* magazine's society column, "St. Louis Social Realms." The magazine published a picture of Irwin taken during the winter of 1863 that had been submitted by "a stately dignified mother of five grown children," who in the winter of 1863 had come up from Louisiana with some other young women to work in the hospitals of Memphis. According to the magazine, "representatives from both sides of the strife met occasionally within the historic walls of the Gayoso Hotel." The column described the women as "typical Southern girls in all that the term implies, and quite prepared to appreciate chivalry and ideal manhood even though found in the enemy's camp. Nothing could have been more natural than the interest and friendship following upon the acquaintance with the gallant United States officers, who as a point of fact were rather given to admiring the typical Southern women." The article went on to assure its staid readers that "nothing more serious than the photograph [of Irwin] tendered and accepted by one of the young women resulted from that charming acquaintance of three or more weeks. This picture was confided to the front page of an elegant album and left with the young woman on the morning of her departure for Kentucky. Reluctantly handing the photo to us a few days ago, the assurance was emphatic that 'the picture was never half so handsome as the original. And had I not been engaged at the time, in fact was married two months from that date, there is no telling what turn the tides of events might have taken.'"

Though this particular woman escaped Irwin's charms, the doctor's days as a bachelor were numbered. While in Memphis, he fell for the visiting daughter of one of his surgeons. Irwin married Nettie Stahl of Quincy, Illinois, in June 1864. □

prominent member of the social set. In 1904, at the age of seventy-five, he was promoted to the rank of brigadier general in honor of his faithful service. Irwin's daughter Amy married Colonel Robert R. McCormick, the famous editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, in 1915, and Irwin's son George LeRoy graduated from West Point to become a brigadier general.

Irwin died after a brief illness in 1917 at his summer home in Coburg, Canada, surrounded by the mementos of his career out West as the "fighting doctor." He was buried with honors at West Point, only a few feet from the tomb of his friend George Custer. In a tribute that he would have appreciated, on February 7, 1958, the army hospital at Fort Riley was named in his honor, reminding all who seek care there of a man who devoted his life to his adopted country, his family, and his profession, and who lived a life that exemplified his belief that a medical officer had a right to aspire to be more than a "mere doctor patronizingly approved of by his comrades of the line."[47] □

JOHN H. FAHEY, M.D., retired in 2003 after thirty years in the U.S. Navy, during which time he was a flight surgeon, emergency physician, and commanding officer of the Naval Operational Medical Institute in Pensacola and the Naval Hospital in Great Lakes, Illinois. Currently in private practice in Illinois, he lectures to local and national groups on Civil War era military medicine and is working on a biography of Bernard John Dowling Irwin.

Acknowledgement: The author wishes to thank Mr. John D. Irwin for graciously allowing him access to his great-grandfather's papers.

NOTES:

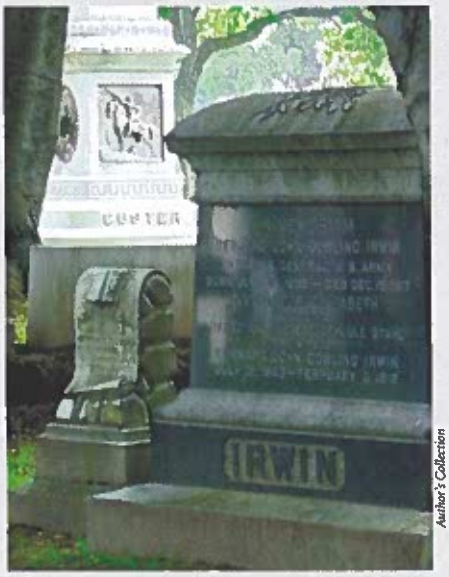
1. R.S. Ewell to Lizzie Ewell, November 28, 1859, Ewell Papers, Library of Congress.
2. M.L.Crimmens, "Recollections of the Old Medical Officers: Brigadier General B.J.D. Irwin—The Fighting Doctor;" *Military Surgeon* 62 (April 1928): 361.
3. Emmons Clark, *History of the Seventh Regiment of New York*, Vol. 1 (NY, 1890), 346.
4. BJD Irwin, *Letter and Dairy, 1855-1856*, Harold B. Lee Library, Special Collections, Bingham Young University, Salt Lake City.
5. Edgar E. Hume, *Ornithologists of the United States Army Medical Corps* (Baltimore, 1942), 231.
6. Richard Wiley, *The Tucson Meteorites: Their History from Frontier Arizona to the Smithsonian* (Tucson, 1987), 27.
7. Jerry D. Thompson, *Desert Tiger: Captain Paddy Graydon and the Civil War in the Southwest* (El Paso, 1992), 18; *Weekly Arizonian*, May 12, 1859.
8. BJD Irwin, "Amputation at the Shoulder Joint," *American Journal of Medical Science* 38 (October 1859): 350-353.
9. BJD Irwin, "The Chiricahua Apache Indians: a thrilling incident in the early history of Arizona territory," *The Infantry Journal* 32 (1928): 368-375.
10. Ida Irwin Small, "Extracts of Indian Fighting: Notes about my father" (1935) BJD Irwin Papers, National Library of Medicine, Bethesda, Maryland.
11. John P. Wilson, *When the Texans Came: Missing Records from the Civil War in the Southwest, 1861-1862* (Albuquerque, 2001), 108; *BJD Irwin Vs. The United States.* Court of Claims Congressional Case, No. 8069, filed October 27, 1890.
12. BJD Irwin to General H.G. Wright, letter dated September 21, 1862, Irwin Family Papers; BJD Irwin Letter April 6, 1866, submitted to Board of Officers for Recommendations of Brevets, Washington DC., Irwin Family Papers (hereafter cited as Irwin 1866).
13. Irwin 1866.
14. William Grose, *The Story of Marches, Battles and Incidents of the Thirty Sixth Regiment Indiana Infantry* (New Castle 1891), 101.
15. BJD Irwin, "Case of Severe Puncture Wound," *American Medical Times* 4 (May 17, 1862): 273. (See sidebar on p. 43.)
16. "Army Correspondence," *Chicago Medical Examiner* (May 1862), 294.
17. BJD Irwin, "*Report on the Establishment of Field Hospitals,*" letter to Surgeon General's Office, July 31, 1881, Irwin Family Papers; extracted in *Medical Surgical History of the War of the Rebellion* (*MSH*), Part 3, Vol. 2, p. 922 (hereafter cited as Irwin 1881).
18. BJD Irwin, "*Buell's Army at Shiloh,*" letter to Surgeon General's Office, June 18, 1863, in response to SGO Memo of May 1, 1863, requesting a summary of medical officers' narrative of the duties in the war to date, Irwin Family Papers (hereafter cited as Irwin 1863).
19. Irwin 1863.
20. Irwin 1881.
21. John H. Fahey, *Bernard John Dowling Irwin and the Development of the Field Hospital at Shiloh.* Presented at the 12th Annual Conference, National Museum Civil War Medicine, Richmond Va., October 1, 2004.
22. Edwin Hannaford, *Story of a Regiment: A History of the Campaigns, and Associations in the Field of the Sixth Regiment Ohio*

Courtesy the Irwin Family

Dr. Irwin in 1904 at age seventy-five.

Custer Battlefield Museum

General George Armstrong Custer as he appeared in 1875.



Author's Collection

Iwin's grave, with Custer's gravesite in the background. Photograph taken by the author at West Point in 2004.

Volunteer Infantry (Cincinnati, 1868), 286.
23. Robert Murray, *MSH*, Part 1, Volume 1, Appendix, Chapter 36, p. 39.
24. Irwin 1866.
25. Irwin 1866.
26. Nelson to Wright, August 27, 1862, in United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records* 129 vols. (Washington, 1880-1901), Series 1, Vol. 16 (2), p. 436.
27. Irwin 1866.
28. *MSH*, Part 1, Volume 1, Appendix, 247; Irwin 1866.
29. *MSH*, Part 1, Volume 1, Appendix, 247.
30. Third Auditor's Office, Treasury Department, Washington DC., Memo Dated July 8, 1886, rejecting Claim No. 1337 filed by BJD Irwin, January 27, 1863, in Irwin Family Papers.
31. Arthur A. Griese, "A Louisville Tragedy—1862," *Filson Club History Quarterly* 26 (April 1952): 139; Kirk C. Jenkins, "A Shooting at the Galt House," *Civil War History* 43 (June 1997) :101-118; Hambleton Tapp, "The Assassination of General William Nelson September 29, 1862, and Its Ramifications," *Filson Club History Quarterly* 19 (October 1945): 204.
32. Fred C. Ainsworth to BJD Irwin, May 5, 1904, Irwin Family Papers.
33. Irwin to Wright, September 21,1862.
34. W.B.Hazen, *A Narrative of Military Service* (Boston, 1885), 54.
35. BJD Irwin to James Fry, April 27, 1885, Irwin Family Papers.
36. James B.Fry, "Killed by a Brother Soldier," Military Service Institution (NY, 1885), reprinted in J. Montgomery Wright, "Notes of a Staff Officer at Perryville," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, Vol. 3, p. 338.
37. Jenkins, "A Shooting at the Galt House," 107.
38. Irwin to Fry, April 27, 1885.
39. Ibid.
40. BJD Irwin to Assistant Surgeon General Robert Wood, October 22, 1862, Irwin Family Papers.
41. Irwin 1866.
42. Ibid.
43. Mary A. Livermore. *My Story of the War: A Woman's Narrative of Four Years Personal Experience as a Nurse in the Union Army* (Hartford, 1889), 509.
44. Irwin 1866.
45. BJD Irwin to SGO, April 28, 1865. NARA, RG 112, E12; Jerry O. Potter, *The Sultana Tragedy* (Gretna, 2000), 113.
46. George E. Omer Jr., "An Army Hospital: from Dragoons to Rough Riders—Fort Riley 1853-1903," *Kentucky Historical Society* 23:4 (Winter, 1957): 337-367.
47. Fred C. Ainsworth to BJD Irwin, May 5, 1904, Irwin Family Papers.

(Paternal) Grandfather's name. James Residence. New York, N.Y.

Birthplace. Roscommon, Ireland Date of birth. May 7th, 1803.

Place of death. New York, N.Y. Date of death. July 3, 1858.

Remarks concerning him. A landed proprietor in Ireland. - Immigrated to United States 1848. Located in Chicago, Ills., but returned to New York, 1845.-

Children: Marie - Bernard J. O. - James G. - William H. - Albert A. - Herbert M Saidie M. - Jane J. - The Hibernian branch of the Irwin family are descended from the Irvines of Drum and of Bonshaw, Scotland, and their lineage is traced to the 10th century.

Date of marriage. June, 1845. Wife's name. Sabina ~~Maria~~.

Remarks on her parentage and ancestry. born May 16, 1803; died at New York, Jany. 16, 1868; eldest daughter of Bernard Darcy by his wife Mary, born 1769; dies April, 1859 daughter of Gerald Magawley Carey, Westmeath, Ireland, connected with many of the most ancient and noble families of Great Britain, and those of Daaff, Nugent and Magawley de Caley of Austria.

Great-grandfather's name. William Residence. Roscommon, Ireland.

Birthplace. Leinster, Ireland. Date of birth. circa 1770.

Place of death. Roscommon, Ireland. Date of death. circa 1810.

Remarks concerning him. Owned an estate of some 300 acres of land.-

Children: William, John, James, Mathew, Patrick, Rose, Margaret and Mary. - John, James and Mary came to the United States 1848. 5.- Patrick d.s.p. - Mary m. Ward d.s.p. - The others remained in and died in Ireland.)

Date of marriage. circa 1790. Wife's name. Mary Norton. (NUGENT)

Remarks on her parentage and ancestry.

"Above and Beyond the Call of Duty"

JOHN MULLALLY profiles Bernard J.D. Irwin, the Roscommon man who received the first US Medal of Honor

BERNARD J.D. Irwin wasn't thinking about medals, let alone the Medal of Honor, that February morning in 1861. Indeed there was no 'Medal of Honor' medal for American soldiers until it was established in 1862. Instead the Roscommon born Army Surgeon's mind was occupied with concerns for a young Arizona Territory boy and a group of fellow soldiers.

Days earlier Cochise, the Chiricahua Apache chief, and a band of Apache warriors had kidnapped the boy and a small group of U.S. soldiers in the Arizona Territory after the army had captured his brother and nephews.

When the army refused to make a prisoner exchange, Cochise killed his prisoners with exception to the boy. The U.S. army then killed Cochise's brother and nephews.

Second Lieutenant George Nicholas Bascom led a group of men of the U.S. 7th Infantry after Cochise, but was soon captured and taken prisoner along with 60 other soldiers, prompting a rescue mission by the army.

Accustomed to using his medical skills to save lives, Irwin was determined to now use his military skills to save his comrades. Unfortunately, only 14 men could be spared from the garrison, these to be Irwin's rescue party. No horses could be spared for the mission, so Irwin and his 14 soldiers departed Fort Breckinridge on mules.

Faced with a trek of 100 miles in the midst of a winter blizzard, the logistics of the mission were as improbable as the possibility of encountering the much larger enemy force, defeating them, and rescuing the captives. Nonetheless the Roscommon-born surgeon was determined to try.

'D-Day' came on February 13, 1861, when Irwin's small rescue party encountered Cochise and his warriors at Apache Pass, Arizona. But it wasn't a battle so much as it was a tactical engagement.

With a carefully laid out plan and maximum placement of his 14 men, Irwin succeeded in convincing the Indian warriors that he had arrived with a much larger force, causing them to withdraw.

Bascom's 60 men were liberated and joined Irwin and his 14 soldiers. The unified force then pursued Cochise into the mountains where they were able to engage him and rescue the captive boy.

Irwin subsequently served with the Union Army during the American Civil War. He was promoted to Captain in August 1861, and the next year was appointed medical director under Major General William 'Bull' Nelson. He was captured during the Battle of Richmond while attempting to save the wounded Nelson.

HE WAS promoted to Major in September 1862, and after his release the following month he became medical director in the Army of the Southwest. From 1863 to 1865, he was superintendent of the military hospital in Memphis, Tennessee, and in March of the latter year was brevetted to the rank of Colonel.

After the war, Irwin served as a senior medical officer at several posts, including at West Point from 1873 to 1878. He received promotions to Lieutenant Colonel in September 1885 and to Colonel in August 1890. He was retired shortly after his 64th birthday, and promoted to Brigadier General on the retired list in April 1904.

HIS SON George LeRoy Irwin (graduated from West Point in 1889) served in World War I and became a Major General in the Army. His grandson Stafford LeRoy Irwin (graduated from West Point in 1915) served in World War II and became a Lieutenant General in the Army.

His daughter, Amy Irwin Addams McCormick, was a nurse with the Red Cross during WWI. In 1915, she married the notable Robert Rutherford 'Colonel' McCormick owner and publisher of the *Chicago Tribune* newspaper.

Colonel Irwin M.O.H. is recognized as a pioneer of battlefield hospitals, a concept he helped foster during the Civil War. Irwin was also interested in natural history and while at Fort Buchanan, Arizona, in 1858-1860 he collected reptile specimens for the Smithsonian Institution.

In 1857, Irwin donated a meteorite to the Smithsonian Institution that came to be known as the Irwin-Ainsa (Tucson) meteorite.

Irwin's heroic rescue occurred almost a year before the Medal of Honor was introduced to the US Congress. Indeed, Irwin himself did not receive the Medal of Honor until January 24, 1894.... more than 30 years later. But his actions on the cold mornings of February 13-14, 1861 are recorded in history as the first Medal Of Honor Action. ■

Ireland's Own. 21/02/14
pg 51,33

(**PROOF of RECORD for Publication in the THIRD EDITION).**

Please make such corrections as may be necessary and return this proof, without delay, to Mr. JOHN MATTHEWS, 93 & 94, Chancery Lane, London, England.

3rd Son of William Irwin of Linster

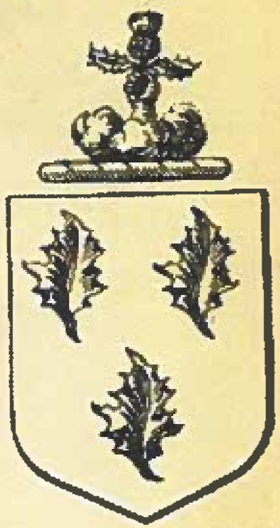
[O'Dowlings of Hy Kinsellagh, Wexford]

[Magawleys of Calrey and Kilkenny]

The Irish branches of Irwin descend from the Irvines of Drum, Aberdeen, and Bonshaw, Scotland

Captain U.S. Army.

(General) IRWIN, BERNARD JOHN DOWLING, ~~[illegible]~~ U.S.A., of Chicago, Ill. (Eldest son of James Irwin, of Roundfort, Co. Roscommon, Ireland, and N.Y. City, *b.* ~~24th May,~~ 1803; *d.* ~~3rd July,~~ 1858; *m.* ~~June,~~ 1825, Sabina Maria, *b.* ~~18th March,~~ 1803; *d.* ~~16th Jan.~~, 1868, dau. of Bernard Dowling, of Rahara, Roscommon, ~~and~~ *m.* Mary Stafford Magawley, of Gaybrook, Westmeath.—Descended from John Irwin, who served in the Parliamentary Army under Cromwell, and settled in Ireland.)



Born at Roundfort, 24th June, 1828; Graduated at the N.Y. Med. Coll., M.D. 1851; Col. and Assist. Surg.-Genl. U.S. Army, awarded Medal of Honour by Congress for distinguished gallantry in action against hostile Apache Indians; *m.* 20th June, 1864, Antoinette Elizabeth, daughter of Daniel Stahl, M.D., Surgeon and Brev. Lt.-Col U.S. Vols., and Terèsè, daughter of W. de Houle, and Terèsè Le Roy, his wife.

Issue.

(i.) GEORGE LE ROY, *b.* 26th Aug., 1868; *m.* Maria Elizabeth Barker.

(ii.) STAFFORD DOWLING, *b.* 11th Aug., 1874; *d.* 6th May, 1875.

(i.) IDA STELLA, *m.* (1stly) David Leonard Barnes; *m.* (2ndly) Arthur Atwell-Small, M.D., of Toronto, Canada.

(ii.) AMIE DE HOULE, *m.* Edward Shilds Adams. Shields

Arms—Argent, three holly leaves slipped vert.

Crest—A hand issuing out of a cloud grasping a branch of thistle proper.

Motto—Nemo me impune lacessit.

Residences—575 Division Street, Chicago; "Ne-su-na" Cottage, Cobourg, Canada.

Clubs—Onwentsia, Winter, Union League (Chicago), Cobourg Golf (Canada).

Societies—Loyal Legion, Army of the Cumberland, Army of the Tennessee.

Father's name, Bernard John Dowling Residence, U. S. Army.

Birthplace, Ireland Date of birth, June 7th, 1828.

Place of death, Date of death,

Remarks concerning him, Educated in New York City. Graduated M. D. by New York Medical College, 1851.- Assistant Surgeon, U.S. Army, August, 1856.- Surgeon 1867.- Served in various positions of distinction during War of Rebellion, for which awarded Medal of Honor by Congress. brevetted Lieut. Colonel and Colonel.- Promoted to Colonel, 1890.

Date of marriage, June 20, 1864. Wife's name, Antoinette Elizabeth,

Remarks on her parentage and ancestry, born July 31, 1843; only surviving daughter of Daniel Stahl, M.D., Quincy, Ill. by his first wife Teresa de Houle.

Names of her children, Ida Stella, born Nov. 13, 1866; Le Roy George, born Aug. 26, 1868; Annie de Houle, born April 15, 1871; and Stafford Rochfort, born Aug. 11, 1874, died May 6, 1875.

Adams-E.D.

After several years of careful thought and co-operation with the officers and Members of the Society, a new Constitution is (by other enclosure) submitted for the approval or rejection of Members. While this instrument is not perfect it is as near so as may now be made and its adoption is urged. The present "by-laws" are totally inadequate for the present requirements of the Society. It will be noted lady members are permitted to represent their territorial divisions on the Council; also that the Relief Fund and Meeting of Matrons are abolished.

Concurrent with the ballot on the Constitution the full quoto of officers provided for by the new code is to be voted upon. The nominations recommended for your suffrage are those made by Mrs. Annie O. LeRoy, of Rochester, Pennsylvania, at present Matron for her commonwealth, who kindly consented to take upon herself the responsibilities of this service.

Herewith enclosed are copies of letters referring to the gift of an American flag from the Society to the Chief of the Clan. In a recent letter to your Secretary from Dr. W. H. Irvine, of Fredericton, New Brunswick, this passage is found: "The Chieftain was greatly moved by the gracious action of your Society in presenting him with an American flag, and wrote me of the incident." But read, as told in one of the Chief's letters, how the people of the good sized town of Annan, Dumfriesshire, Bonshaw's neighbors, received "Old Glory."

A new and more comprehensive edition of the "Information" booklet is in preparation and will, together with a Roll of Membership, shortly be distributed to Members.

Fraternally yours,
Frank C. Irvine,
Secretary.

New Brighton, Pa., June 15th, 1918.

In Memoriam.

Brigadier-General Bernard John Dowling Irwin, Medical Corps, United States Army (retired), died at his country home in Cobourg, Ontario, December 15, 1917, after a short illness, at the advanced age of 87 years. He was born in County Roscommon, Ireland, June 24, 1830, received his early education from his father (James Irwin, of Round Fort House) and private teachers and, coming to America when a boy, first entered the Castleton (Vermont) Medical College (1850) but later studied at the New York Medical College, graduating from the latter in 1852.

After a term as intern at Emigrant's Hospitals, Ward's Island, and a later service of several months as an Acting Assistant Surgeon, he permanently entered the United States Army as an Assistant Surgeon, with rank of Lieutenant, passed through the various grades to Colonel and Assistant-General Surgeon, and, by operation of law, was retired upon attaining his 64th year. By Act of Congress of April 23, 1904, he was advanced to the rank of Brigadier-General (retired).

The General's career in the army was an exceptional one and his services to his adopted country not wholly professional. While yet a student in New York he joined the famous Seventh Regiment and thus got that first taste for military life which, in later years, was to earn for him the nickname of "The Fighting Doctor."

For "distinguished gallantry in action, February 13-14, 1861," he received the first Medal of Honor awarded by Congress. He volunteered to take a detachment of eighteen picked men to the assistance of troops besieged by a large body of hostile Apaches. At Apache Pass he had to fight a superior force of Indians, defeated them and succored the beleaguered soldiers.

During the Civil War, at the Battle of Shiloh and while attached to the Army of the Cumberland as Medical Inspector, he first put into service his field tent hospital. This innovation met with such success it was introduced generally into the Federal armies and later adopted by every civilized nation. On this battlefield the Government has erected a tablet bearing this inscription:

"First Tent Hospital ever erected in time of war was established by Captain B. J. D. Irwin, U. S. Medical Corps."

After the War Between the States General Irwin served as post surgeon at various army stations in the West until 1880, when he was attached to headquarters, Division of the Missouri, Chicago, as attending surgeon. In 1882, and until his promotion