

Playing Paddy Right: Some Basics of an Irish-American First-Person Impression

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Part 1

Author's Note: Precise figures on the number of Irishmen who served in the Civil War are not available, but typical estimates are 150,000 in the Federal army and about 40,000 in the Confederate army. Both armies, especially the Union forces, had many regiments that were distinctly Irish in their make-up--units such as the 69th New York, 90th Illinois 35th Indiana, 175th New York, and 10th Tennessee (CS) all made history as "Irish" regiments, often marching under green flags. However, at least eighty percent of the sons of Erin under arms in America in 1861-1865 served in "non-Irish" units (i.e. regiments that did not have a strong ethnic identity), so any living historian can opt for an Irish-American impression. While this article concentrates largely on Irish in the Federal army--especially in the eastern armies--much of it also applies to Irish in the Federal western armies and Confederate Irish.

Civil War reenactors often seek unique living history experiences, and most agree that the only way to achieve an "1860s moment" is to practice good first-person impression. Often, the more unique--within reasonable bounds--one's first-person, the better the living history experience. Few reenactors are afforded this opportunity as much as those who serve in the ranks of "Irish" regiments or who choose an Irish-immigrant portrayal. The rewarding aspects of an impression of an immigrant serving in the Union army are many but, as with any aspect of reenacting, it must be done correctly, in strict accordance with the way the brave men of the 1860s acted. Further, Irish-Americans have been subject to derogatory stereotypes over the centuries--stereotypes that some reenactors perpetuate through ignorance.

What components should factor significantly in an Irish impression? In no particular order, they are: Irish history, unit history, pre-war occupation, Irish language (English syntax, Gaelic phrases, and "the brogue"), common expressions used by Irishmen, religion, alcohol, Irish fondness for celebration and camaraderie, songs, beliefs and why they fought the war (Irish reasons were as many and as varied as "native" Americans' reasons), a desire to "blend in" with the general American population, and the Fenian Brotherhood. These are briefly sketched in this article.

What basic things should be avoided in an Irish impression? Simple: avoid stereotypes. Remember that Irishmen were multi-faceted individuals--not a faceless, homogeneous class. As the fictional Irishman, Buster Kilrain, says in the film, *Gettysburg*, "Any man that judges by the group is a peawit." People are individuals and should be portrayed as such. For instance, not all Irish were drunks, and not all were street brawlers; some were brave, some were cowardly, some were generous, some were miserly, some were extroverts, and some were introverts. Also in your Irish impression, try to avoid wearing or displaying excessive Irish symbolism. The modern-day "Kiss Me I'm Irish" t-shirt did not exist in the 1860s and most Irishmen desired most of all to blend in with the general population and be accepted as "Americans".

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Many reenactors seem to think that, if they wear one of those ridiculous, farby brass harps sold by the mass-market sutlers, or prominently place a shamrock on some component of their gear, they are doing "enough" to portray an Irishman. In short, if you have to display all sorts of Irish symbolism to show that you are an Irishman, then you are not doing your first-person impression correctly. The best bet is to ditch all of the brass harps, shamrocks, etc. from your hat, uniform, and kit, and concentrate instead on some of the aspects outlined in this article. Remember, as with portrayal of any ethnic group, negative generalities should be few and concentration on the wide range of individual personalities that would have been encountered should be paramount.

Recommended Reading: Reading is the best cure for ignorance. The overall scope of the beliefs, hopes, dreams, disappointments, aspirations, and experiences of these heroic men is best gained by reading the words of the Irish- American soldiers themselves. Fortunately, several good sources are now available in mass-market book form. Among the best of these are:

- *Irish Green and Union Blue: The Civil War Letters of Peter Welsh*, edited by Lawrence Kohl and Margaret Richard (Fordham University Press, New York NY, 1986).
- *My Life in the Irish Brigade: The Civil War Memoirs of Private William McCarter, 116th Pennsylvania Infantry*, edited by Kevin E. O'Brien (Savas Publishing, Campbell CA, 1996).
- *Memoirs of Chaplain Life: Three Years With the Irish Brigade In the Army of the Potomac*, by William Corby (Fordham University Press, New York NY, 1992 reprint).
- *Commanding Boston's Irish Ninth: The Civil War Letters of Colonel Patrick R. Guiney*, edited by Christian Samito (Fordham University Press, New York NY, 1998).

While not strictly history, the novel *Fredericksburg: A Novel of the Irish at Marye's Heights* by Kirk Mitchell (St. Martin's Press, New York NY, 1996) lends the reader insights into the everyday life and beliefs of Irish soldiers in both the Union and Confederate armies. Period Irish-American and Catholic newspapers (available on microfilm at selected public libraries and church archives) are excellent first-person sources, as are unpublished letters and manuscripts from the period.

The Non-Irish Component: It is perfectly acceptable to belong to an Irish unit and not be an Irishman. Fully one-third of units such as the 37th New York and 155th New York, for example, were not Irish-American. "Americans" as well as immigrants born in lands other than Ireland joined Irish units for a variety of reasons. While many things can be said about such impressions, in general, typical considerations for all Civil War first-person impressions apply to such portrayals with one exception: one would not find a blatantly anti-Irish bigot within the ranks of an Irish regiment. Yelling, "Fall in, you bloody micks!" in an Irish unit would be a very good way to quickly make a lot of enemies. If you portray a non-Irish person, then tolerance for foreign-born Celts and Catholics would be an essential part of your public personality.

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History: As with all first-person, the most important aspect of a proper Irish impression is some knowledge of the history of the person and people that you portray. A living historian, a reenactor with an Irish impression should know something about Ireland, its history, its myths, its legends, what county he was from, and what that county looked like. These men were soldiers for four or fewer years, but they were Irishmen all their lives. Many of the poorer immigrants fleeing from the Irish famine of the late 1840s came from the south and west of Ireland, so your first-person could well have hailed from counties within Munster (southern Ireland, including Cork, Kerry, and Limerick) or the Connaught (western Ireland, including Galway, Mayo, Roscommon, and Sligo), more so than from Leinster (eastern Ireland, including Dublin, Wicklow, and Waterford) or Ulster (partially Protestant northern Ireland, including Belfast).

Some knowledge of Irish history--especially the past 150-200 years of it (i.e. from Patrick Sarsfield's "Wild Geese" in the 17th-century, to the 1860s) is essential. Every Irishman, regardless of education, would know a fair amount about events in his own lifetime and his father's lifetime. Events such as the Penal Codes of the 18th-century (which basically made it a crime to be a Catholic); the bloody 1798 uprising (in which English forces slaughtered over 30,000 Irish peasants); the forced, much-hated Act of Union with Great Britain (1801); Daniel O'Connell's popular but doomed Repeal Association of the 1840s (an attempt to force England to repeal the Act of Union by non-violent means), the failed Young Ireland uprising of 1848 (a precursor to the Fenians); and, of course, the Great Hunger (the 1845-1850 potato famine) with its associated starvation, lethal epidemics, mass emigration, and "coffin ships", were all pivotal events in the recent history of Irish soldiers in the Civil War.

Forced emigration (i.e. eviction by landlords) during The Hunger, in particular, is the reason why many Irish fighting in the Civil War were in the United States in the first place. The famine ensured a deep-seated hatred of England which was fresh in the minds of the Irishmen of the 1860s and, indeed, lives on to this very day. Many of these events are at least briefly described in each of several good books on the Great Hunger, and it is recommended that any reenactor with an Irish impression read a minimum of one book on this subject. Excellent works in this vein include *The Great Hunger* by Cecil Woodham-Smith (1962) and *This Great Calamity: The Irish Famine 1845-1852* by Christine Kinealy (1995).

For those who wish to know more about Ireland's long military tradition, with an emphasis on ancient wars (and with a good account of the 1798 uprising), a good reference is *A Military History of Ireland*, edited by Thomas Bartlett and Keith Jeffery (1996).

Further, an Irishman would have had some knowledge of his American hometown's politics, especially if he was from a population center with a large Irish ghetto, such as New York City, Boston, Philadelphia, Buffalo, Chicago, etc. The Democratic Party was a large part of 1860s Irish-America, and the influence of local party bosses in institutions such as New York City's Tammany Hall cannot be discounted. Tammany Hall is where certain well-known Irish figures in the Civil War era, such as John O'Mahoney and

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Michael Corcoran, got their start. Other important Irish figures of the day included men such as John Mitchel, who had helped lead the 1848 uprising and later supported the Confederacy in the Civil War, and New York City's Archbishop Edwin Hughes, who was an outspoken proponent of Irish-American rights. Several influential Irish-American periodicals served the immigrant population, with the best known being the weekly newspapers Irish American (New York City) and The Pilot (Boston); Catholic newspapers, such as Buffalo's The Sentinel, also reported heavily on Irish-American politics and well-known ethnic personalities. Irish soldiers at the front eagerly snapped up copies of these periodicals when they were available and soldiers in the ranks were always aware of what was happening on the home-front.

Irish-Americans were particularly aware of their own accomplishments in the military in the Civil War, so some talk of such subjects should certainly find its way into your impression. Of course, any man would know and have an opinion about his own regimental and company commanders; it is totally essential for a reenactor to have a working knowledge of these individuals' names for various campaigns. An Irishman would certainly know the names of the battles in which his unit had participated, and he would probably talk endlessly about his own exploits in those actions. Further, he would know and take pride in the accomplishments of prominent Irish-American military leaders, chief among these were Brigadier Generals Thomas Francis Meagher, Michael Corcoran, James Shields (the only Federal general to beat Stonewall Jackson in battle), and "Fighting Tom" Sweeney (a well-known militant Fenian who commanded a division under Sherman in 1864); Irish-Americans also knew that Phil Sheridan was the first-generation son of Irish immigrants and claimed him as one of their own. A good example of this was the Irish Brigade soldier at Antietam who, while firing at the Confederates in the Sunken Road, hollered to the Rebels, "Shields beat you at Winchester and Meagher will thrash you at Sharpsburg!"

In short, there is no substitute for a good historical background when doing first-person impression. Such a background takes some time and effort to achieve. In the interim, it is recommended that all "Irish-American" reenactors determine what region and town in Ireland they are from, read one good book on the Famine, learn a small amount about the hometown politics that shaped their daily lives in America, and obtain a working knowledge of the history and commanders of their own regiment. These aspects are invaluable in a proper, in-depth portrayal.

Occupations: While tens of thousands of Irish emigrated to the United States prior to the Great Hunger, over a million more arrived on American shores between 1845-1852 as a result of the Famine. In contrast to earlier immigrant groups, which did not arrive in such numbers over such a short time, the Irish were largely unskilled labor, experienced only at working small, hardscrabble farms of a few acres or so. Upon their arrival in America, most Irish were penniless and took whatever jobs were available. In the 1840s and '50s, America was a rapidly growing, robust young nation with a great demand for strong backs and people willing to take menial jobs--the very jobs that many Irishmen took to support themselves and their families.

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Another reason why many Irish-Americans just "off the boat" could not better themselves was the prevailing social attitudes in the United States at the time. Irish were unskilled and Catholic, and hence were viewed as uncivilized and deserving only of menial jobs. It was Irish hands that built the canal systems, coal mines, roadways, and infrastructure in the 1850s and '60s. Irishmen also unloaded ships on docks, felled trees, and were laborers. While it is true that many Irish made their way into rural areas, most "Irish" Civil War living history organizations portray regiments that were largely urban in their make-up; as such, one would probably not find as many farmers in the ranks of, say, the 28th Massachusetts or 69th New York as there were dock workers, gravediggers, canal-builders, and men whose jobs included other types of physical, menial labor. Irishmen had their fair share of lawyers, politicians, and other "non-menial" jobs, but such types often wound up as officers--not as enlisted men. It is certainly not incorrect for an "Irish" reenactor to maintain that he was a farmer before the war but, keep in mind, your first-person was most likely from the city--unlike the majority of men who served in the blue ranks in the Civil War.

Speaking Like an Irishman: Irishmen did not speak English as their first language and most immigrants would have known their native tongue, Gaelic (note: the language's name is "Gaelic", not "Irish" or "Celtic"). Accounts of certain Irish regiments maintain that some recruits had a poor knowledge of English and used Gaelic as a first language. Regardless of your background, knowledge of a few basic Gaelic phrases lends a significant "air" to your Irish impression. Here a few basic Gaelic phrases for you to learn:

When greeting someone say: "Dia dhuit" (JEE-uh Gwitch). Used as hello (Literal translation: "God to you")

The response is: "Dia's Muire dhuit" (JEE-uss MwUR-uh Gwitch). Literally: "God and Mary to you."

If you are saying hello to more than one person, such as at the campfire in the morning: "Dia dhaoibh" (JEE-uh GEEV). Literally: "God to ye."

After greeting someone you might want to ask how they are. Unfortunately, there are three dialects of Gaelic: Connaught, Ulster, and Munster, and each says "How are you?" differently. The shortest and easiest to learn is: "Conas tá tú?" (KUN-uss TAW too? "How are you?")

Possible responses to "How are you?": Since most people usually answer that they are well, you can get by with: "Tá mé go maith" (TAW may guh MAH) "I am well."

Additional responses include: "Tá mé go measartha" (TAW may guh MASS-ur-huh) "I am middling." "Maith go leor" (MAH guh Lyor) "Good enough." "Nílím ródhona" (NyEEL-im ROH-ghunnuh) "I'm not too bad."

We all know some who should always use this one. "Go holc" (guh HULK) "Miserable."

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These responses are possible: "Crap leat" (KRAP lat) "Bugger off." "Tá slaghdán orm" (TAW SLY-dawn urrim) "A cold is on me." (I'm sick).

Any time someone does something for you, you can say: "Go riabh maith agat" (GUH ruh MAH UH-gut). "Thank you."

It seems that many "Irish" reenactors think that the principal aspect of a first-person impression is an Irish accent, or "brogue". Unfortunately, few reenactors can manage such a difficult task properly. First, the best way for an authentic impression with regard to "the brogue" is, if you cannot do it properly, do not try it at all. Many men in Irish regiments were born in America or Canada to immigrant parents and, most likely; such men would have had little or no Irish accent. Further, we have all seen those reenactors who embarrass Irishmen through public use of a bad accent--most of the really poor accents done by reenactors seem to be more of a British Cockney or Welsh or even Scottish accent than anything resembling the speech patterns of Ireland. But, if you want to try "the brogue" as part of your first-person, there are measures that can be taken to ensure that it is correct. The best way to affect a proper accent is to live and/or keep company with people born and raised in Eire. Failing that, one can resort to watching movies set in Ireland, but be careful--as with Civil War films, many movies having to do with Ireland are "pure Hollywood" and should not be relied upon as correct. Films that can be used as tools in the development of a half-way decent accent include *The Informer* (1935, four Academy Awards) with Victor McLaglen and Michael Collins, starring Liam Neeson; most of John Wayne's *The Quiet Man* was filmed on the Emerald Isle with Irish actors, so it too can be used as a tool. Avoid films such as *Far and Away*, and Sean Connery's British-accented Irish character in *The Untouchables*. Reenactors can rent movies such as *Michael Collins* for their home VCRs and watch them each a few times to study the fine points of both the accent as well as the language syntax.

Use of films should be only a starting point for affecting a proper "brogue". Keep in mind, there are as many different Irish accents as there are accents in the United States. Any Irish accent adopted as part of your impression should correspond with the region in Ireland from which your first-person hails. Further, if you wish to use "the brogue" as part of your impression, you cannot use 20th-century American phraseology with an accent and be correct--you must also study and use the language syntax of Irishmen. Irish syntax is heavy with use of propositions and has tenses that do not directly correspond to English. More than for learning accents, films such as *The Informer*, *The Quiet Man*, and *Michael Collins* can be used to gain a beginning knowledge of Irish phraseology. In addition to Gaelic phrases, a proper accent, and correct syntax, an Irish first-person impression may well include some period Irish sayings or clichés. Below is a selected list to incorporate into your everyday speech at events:

- What's good for the goose is good for the gander.
- The older the fiddle the sweeter the tune.
- It's no use boiling your cabbage twice.
- Theres no need to fear the wind if your haystacks are tied down.
- If you lie down with dogs you'll rise with fleas.

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- A wild goose never reared a tame gosling.
- As the old cock crows the young cock learns.
- Many an Irish property was increased by the lace of a daughter's petticoat.
- The best way to keep loyalty in a man's heart is to keep money in his purse.
- A narrow neck keeps the bottle from being emptied in one swig.
- If the knitter is weary the baby will have no new bonnet.
- It's for her own good that the cat purrs.
- Any man can lose his hat in a fairy-wind.
- It's no use carrying an umbrella if your shoes are leaking.
- It's difficult to choose between two blind goats.
- A silent mouth is sweet to hear.
- It's a bad hen that won't scratch herself.
- No matter how often a pitcher goes to the water it is broken in the end.
- There was never a scabby sheep in a flock that didn't like to have a comrade.
- A nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse.
- Every patient is a doctor after his cure.
- Neither give cherries to pigs nor advice to a fool.
- You'll never plough a field by turning it over in your mind.
- A scholars ink lasts longer than a martyr's blood.
- A turkey never voted for an early Christmas.
- The Irish forgive their great men when they are safely buried.
- The longest road out is the shortest road home.

Another item to add into your Irish-speaking impression is the tendency to incorporate religion into everyday speech. When exclaiming in disbelief, use "Jesus, Mary and Joseph!", "Holy Mary!" and other such terms. Another Irish habit is the use of the word "boyo" (pronounced, "boy-oh") in place of the American slang, "man"; this is used as: "You've done it this time, boyo!" All of these things--the accent, proper phraseology, at least a smattering of Gaelic, and some period cliches--contribute greatly to your Irish impression. An Irish reenactor should not physically appear to be Irish just by walking along, but proper speaking will let others know your impression right away. However, if you cannot do it properly, do not try "speaking Irish" at all--it's one of the toughest aspects of the impression and is the easiest to goof up. Keep in mind, if a real Irishman would laugh at your attempts to "speak Irish", then you need to do a lot more work on it.

Part 2

Religion: Many reenactors with Irish impressions give little thought to one of the most overriding aspects of an Irishman's life: religion. The vast majority of Irish in the Union army were Roman Catholics and were fairly devout in their faith. The Church of the 1860s played an even larger role in the lives of its flock than it does today, and the men of the Irish regiments took this devotion with them into the field when they enlisted. Attention to religion--most notably, Catholicism--should be an important part of your impression.

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Most Irish regiments had a Catholic priest for a chaplain. Religion was such a large part of the average Irish-American's life that many recruiting posters and newspaper ads included reassurances that a priest of the Old Faith would attend to the spiritual needs of the men while they were in Federal service. Those priests who withstood the rigors of campaigning became legendary--such as Father Paul Gillen (170th NY), Father Constantine Egan (9th MA), Father Thomas Ouellete (a French-Canadian in the 69th NY), Father James Dillon (63rd NY/182nd NY), and Father Peter Tissot (37th NY). Without doubt, the most famous chaplain of the Civil War was the Irish Brigade's Father William Corby--known for his devotion to the faith, and the almost father-like role he played in the lives of his men (although Corby himself was only 28 years old when he joined the 88th New York).

Irishmen were taught to look to priests as leaders in both religious and secular life, and the faith that was ingrained into them from childbirth helped to root into their everyday behavior reverence for God, the Church, and its leaders. In the book, *Melting Pot Soldiers*, William Burton states, "The Irish regiment was simply the military version of the Boston or New York neighborhood parish."

This is not to say that to have a good Irish-American impression you have to convert to Catholicism. However, a few minor additions to your impression will go a long way in this respect. All "Irish" reenactors should know the "Hail Mary" prayer and, especially, the sign of the cross. The sign of the cross uses the right hand, starts at the center of the forehead, goes down to the bottom of the ribcage, then to the right shoulder, and then to the left shoulder.

Irish-Americans of the 1860s often needed to carry with them some physical sign of their faith and, whether brought into the service by the men themselves or sent later by loving family and clergymen back home, many Irish carried a rosary, scapulas, or perhaps a small Bible (although it takes up much more room in the knapsack). The carrying of religious items is best expressed by a letter date June 27, 1864 from the Corcoran Legion's George Tipping: "There is one thing I am uneasy about--that is, I lost my Angus Dei and my crucifix from my neck. I think the string got wore out and it went. I am very sorry about it." Reenactors can carry a rosary or, like Sergeant Tipping, a simple cross on a string. Rosaries and crucifixes are available almost anywhere today--especially in religious stores; one need not have a rosary with a Celtic cross. Avoid rosaries with plastic beads and modern parts. In the field, carry the rosary in your hand or around your neck on the way into a reenactment battle and you can almost feel the comfort it would have brought to a soldier going to face death.

Prayer was a big part of Irishmen's lives. This is not to say that you need to pray in camp, although that is not a bad idea for a camp scenario. Pray when a real soldier would have done it most-- when you are receiving a "mock" General Absolution (a Catholic rite of absolving you of all your sins in one fell swoop, when no time was available for individual Confessions) prior to a battle. Pray the "Hail Mary" out loud as your company charges in battle--the real soldiers did so.

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Keep in mind, however, while most Irishmen in the Federal army were Catholics and refugees from the Great Hunger, if your impression is that of an Irish-American whose family has been in the United States for a while (prior to 1840 or so), chances were much higher that your first-person is a Protestant, likely of the Anglican church.

Why They Fought: One of the most basic aspects of a first-person impression is being able to answer the question, "Why am I here in the army?" Many "Irish" reenactors respond to this question with, "I'm here to defend the Union-- the land that gave the Irish freedom" or, "Britain is the Confederacy's ally and I'm Irish, so I fight against England's friends." While both of these statements can be correct for your impression, the real reasons why Irishmen fought in the Civil War are, of course, much more complex. For instance, while many Irish-Americans enlisted for idealistic motives, many also joined the army only for bounty money. One historian of Irish-Americans in the Civil War wrote, "Patriotism, love of adventure, the pursuit of glory, and other motives drove the [Irish] volunteer, but two motives predominate: the search for manhood, and economic opportunity."

One reason why young Irish-Americans enlisted in such numbers was the flowery recruiting oratory by influential Irish politicians; gaining a political career was as easy as recruiting a company and politics had everything to do with Irish motivations in the war. Why could Irishmen be swayed so easily in blocs? In his book *How the Irish Became Americans*, Joseph O'Grady wrote, "Constant harangues of politicians urging the Irish to think, act, and vote as Irishmen, and the arguments... that the [Irish] ex-peasant should neither ignore the old country nor forget his hatred of England combined to create strong feelings of cohesiveness." Both their political leaders and the Church fostered the idea of the Irish as victims in American society in order to sway the opinion of the masses--both for votes and for recruits.

Like most Americans, the Irish enlisted in groups. When the neighborhood political boss suggested enlistment for either the good of America, the death of the Confederacy, or as military training for a future conflict with England, men of military age listened. Of course, the vast majority of Irish were Democrats, and organizations such as New York's Tammany Hall put pressure on its constituents to enlist.

Many politicians/recruiters appealed to Irish nationalism to induce men to enter the ranks of the units they hoped to lead. William Burton writes, "(t)he Civil War as a training ground for a postwar army for the liberation of Ireland--many an Irish nationalist used this argument... Irishmen were constantly exhorted to fight for the honor of the old country, fight in the memory of ancient Irish heroes, fight as the 'Wild Geese' fought in the armies of...enemies of Britain. It took a wild leap of imagination, of course, to make a connection between enlisting in the Union army and adding to the luster of Ireland, but speakers had no trouble making that leap."

Many of the political speeches may have appealed to older Irish enlistees who grew up in Ireland and emigrated during The Hunger; statistics show that the average Irish soldier was older than his "native" American counterpart. As with "American" soldiers, many

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young Irishmen enlisted with their friends in search of adventure, or because peer pressure forced them to join up--such motivations for fighting are rarely heard among reenactors. Thus, if your first-person is an earlier-war enlistee, chances are he may well have enlisted for reasons ranging from patriotism to gaining training for a fight against England to simple love of adventure. The less-glamorous truth behind many such enlistments was political persuasion that often rested on far-fetched notions of Irish nationalism or stereotypes perpetrated by the Irish themselves. Curiously, in reading the letters and diaries of experienced Irish soldiers, one finds an absence of "fighting for Ireland's glory" as a popular motivation, although Lieutenant Joseph Abrahams of the 164th New York, a regular correspondent for the newspaper *Irish American*, typified in his public letters the well-worn attitude that Irish soldiers were fighting for the glory and eventual liberation of Ireland. Of the private writings of enlisted soldiers viewed by this writer, only Sergeant Peter Welsh's letters reflect any thoughts on the liberation of Ireland. However, it is interesting to note that most of the Canadian-born Welsh's writing in this vein was in a letter to his spouse's Irish father, while attempting to justify his abrupt enlistment into the army (something Welsh did without informing his wife).

Another reason for enlistment, more rare than is generally given credit but still true, was personified by those Irishmen who came directly from Ireland to enlist in the Federal army. Some enlistees (mercenary-types, mostly) came for the fighting, while others came for the pay offered by the army. There are other, less well-documented stories of Federal recruiters operating directly in Ireland during the war years, although many such tales were fabrications of Confederate agents attempting to subvert the number of ethnic enlistments in the North.

If your first-person is a later-war enlistee, chances are, he is in the army for less honorable reasons. By 1862, most Irish-Americans realized that their ethnic group had little to gain from the war and a lot to lose, and many of the men whose flowery speeches induced mass enlistments in 1861 were now themselves away from the podium and immersed in the gritty reality of the battlefield. Rising wartime inflation coupled with an Irish worker's usually-low wages, and the almost-obscenely high bounties offered for enlistment, drove many Sons of Erin to the recruiting office solely in search of bonus money and a regular paycheck. In *Melting Pot Soldiers*, Burton writes, "In April and May, 1861, ethnic recruiting posters used huge type and screaming headlines to attract eyes to [prominent Irish] leaders' names and ethnic ties. This gradually changed in the months and years that followed, until the most prominent feature of a recruiting poster was likely to be the bounty money and pay." Often such motivations drove "native" Americans just as much as the Irish. Such a brutally-honest portrayal, regardless of how common it was in 1862-1865, is seldom exhibited by reenactors.

Few Irish wanted to free the slaves, so that aspect has no place in your Irish first-person impression. No prominent Irish-American politicians were abolitionists, and the influential newspaper, *Irish American*, was openly pro-slavery and anti-black. As written by Burton, "Irish Catholics, for a variety of reasons, strongly opposed abolition, held contrary views about the nature of the Union, and frequently gave Irish nationalism [in Ireland] a higher priority than defending a national government headed by Republicans."

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Noted Civil War historian, Bell I. Wiley, in his book, *The Life of Billy Yank*, callously suggests of the Irish motivation for enlisting in the Federal army that, "it was quite possible that [the Irish's] predominant urge [for enlisting] was the sheer love of combat." Wiley was a respected historian, but this statement oversimplifies matters and plays on the Irish stereotype for fighting. However, in *Melting Pot Soldiers*, Burton writes, "(t)hat an Irishman's heritage made him a natural-born fighter was an argument used with such frequency [in recruiting speeches] that both the Irish and non-Irish came to accept it as fact. So firmly fixed was this stereotype that it is still used by historians ruminating about the role of the Irish in the Civil War."

When it came right down to it, most men's reasons for enlisting were straightforward. One historian has written of the typical Irishman's reasons for fighting for the North, "His concerns were remote from the florid language of the Corcorans and the Meaghers.... Most Irish-Americans were committed to America and themselves, not to historic and Old World quarrels and the furtherance of political careers of 'professional ethnics'." Further, the Irish did not fight either to end slavery or to support the Republican party.

Devotion to Family: One thing most Irish-Americans had in common was a strong devotion to their family. Families in Ireland had always been large and close; perhaps the abject poverty to which most inhabitants of the Old Sod were subject made the people attach greater value to things which could not be taken away, such as their family and their Catholic faith. Religion had a lot to do with the average Celt's devotion to his family, as Irishmen were taught by the Church that the family was a holy gift from God, to be cherished and nurtured always. Separations in Irish families were inevitably sad affairs, as witnessed by the "wakes" held in Ireland when part of a family emigrated overseas.

Upon entering the Federal army, like all soldiers through history, Irishmen missed their loved ones at home. This theme is prevalent throughout the letters of every Irish soldier, regardless of rank. On September 11, 1863, Colonel Patrick Guiney of the 9th Massachusetts wrote to his wife, "I await anxiously the coming of the snow-flakes so that...I may be able to see you." Sergeant Peter Welsh of the 28th Massachusetts was always concerned at his young wife's frail health and expressed repeated concerns over several years: "My dear wife I am sorry to hear your health is so bad. you will destroy your health if you do not try and make your mind easier and not fret and worry so much." (December 8, 1862) and, "do not neglect to use all the means in your power to restore your health for good health is the greatest temporal blessing." (April 10, 1863). On June 6, 1863, Private Edward O'Neil of the 164th New York wrote to his father that a recent letter he had received, "gave me great pleasure to hear that you were all well...I send my love and respects to Tim Hopkins and all inquiring friends. I also send my love and best respects to brother and sisters and to Uncle James, not forgetting father and mother." A typical closing of a letter from Sergeant George Tipping of the 155th New York to his large family was one on January 4, 1864: "I conclude this epistle by sending my love and respect to Mary, Margaret, Mary Ann, Katy, Lizzie, Bridget Allen, Edward George, and little Margaret, not forgetting yourself [wife]." In his letters home, Tipping had a habit common among Civil War soldiers: he spoke directly to his individual children,

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constantly praising them for good behavior from afar and giving them mild rebukes when he learned they had misbehaved. It is obvious that, like many Irish-Americans, Tipping was attempting to serve his adopted country and, at the same time, be a good husband and father, even though he was far away from home. Such letters do much to dispel the stereotype that Irish immigrants were wife-abusing habitual drunkards who regularly abandoned their families in search of their next drink.

Many Irish soldiers had large families, whether they were married with children, or younger soldiers who lived with their parents and siblings. Most soldiers worried that joining the army would place a financial strain on their family and, thus, sent home the majority of their pay. A common theme through the letters of all Irishmen in the service during the Civil War was a constant concern and speculation on the date of the next visit from the army paymaster. Sergeant Tipping once wrote to his wife that his pay was in his hand only thirty-five minutes before it was given to the quartermaster for express delivery home. On another occasion when the time between paymaster visits was long, Tipping worried that his wife and children would not have enough money to buy fuel for their fireplace during an exceptionally cold winter.

Irish soldiers at the front fretted constantly if regular mail from home was interrupted, thus severing their only tie to their families. Peter Welsh's words of November 30, 1862 perhaps sum this up best: "My dear wife, I feel very uneasy not getting any letters from you. I have not received any letters from you in over a month although I have wrote several letters to you since." A common theme of Irish soldiers in letters to their families was expressions of longing to again hold loved ones in their arms, repeated invocations to God to keep their family safe, and constant requests for additional writing materials and postage stamps. Other than military duties, the most common activity of soldiers was writing letters home-- something which is hardly ever seen in a typical reenactment encampment.

All reenactors should pack into their knapsack a few pieces of paper or a blank journal book, some envelopes, and writing implements. Even if you do not write a first-person letter, the opportunity to catch up on your "modern-day" letter writing in camp should not be neglected, and letter- writing provides a classic and totally-accurate "slice of life" camp impression.

Irishmen's devotion to family is something that living historians should not ignore. Irishmen felt lost without their family ties and longed more than anything to get back to their loved ones at home. Repeated expressions of homesickness for family, especially wives and children, is a "must" in the portrayal of an Irish-American soldier.

Alcohol and Fighting: The most common stereotypes perpetrated by reenactors are the alleged Irish propensities for boozing and brawling, and neither has any place in a proper first-person portrayal. One poor example witnessed by this writer was in October, 1997 at the Irish Brigade monument dedication ceremony at the Antietam battlefield; while the solemn ceremony was in progress, two "Irish" reenactors in the ranks jovially yelled to spectators that they had enlisted only for whiskey. If your pards think that the best Irish

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impression to show spectators or other reenactors is the tired old, "Paddy has a drunken camp brawl" scenario, and then it is time to educate them on some pertinent facts about Irish-Americans of the 1860s.

First, it is important to understand that Irishmen of the 1860s experienced a significant degree of discrimination from largely Protestant "native" Americans who, in attempting to demonize the less-skilled, Catholic immigrants, portrayed them in the popular press as hedonistic monkeys more prone to fight and drink alcohol than to take an honest job. Such stereotypes were often conceived as a means to "put down" the inherent threat to American jobs and religion posed by the masses of new immigrants. Of course Irishmen drank alcohol, and many did so regularly and sometimes to excess, but not in such numbers as to justify the stereotype. One Irish Brigade scholar asserts that fully one-quarter of the Irish-American population in the Civil War era were total abstainers, although this proportion may have been somewhat less among soldiers. One entire Irish regiment, the 63rd New York of the Irish Brigade, took a pledge of abstinence from alcohol.

So why did Irishmen develop a reputation as being boozers? One hypothesis is that, through the centuries, Irishmen generally had very hard lives, which perhaps explains their propensity to heartily celebrate even fairly insignificant occasions. Of course, as with most ethnic groups, such celebrations often included alcohol. Further, it seems that Irishmen may have a lower alcohol tolerance than other European ethnic groups. Former Irish Brigade Association president Liam Murphy who, while serving in the United States military once spent time training doctors to be army officers, stated, "There is a liver enzyme called ethyldehydrogenase [?] which metabolizes drinking alcohol. If a full-grown European can metabolize, say, one ounce of alcohol per hour, he must consume more than that for ethyl alcohol to show up in his bloodstream and, therefore, in his brain. If the standard is 1.0, then the Native American Indian runs at only 30 percent of the European norm and, according to the MDs I trained, the average Irishman metabolizes alcohol at only 70 percent of this norm." If the hypothesis of Murphy's former students, all medical doctors, is true, then the average Irishman experiences intoxication more quickly than most other ethnic groups.

Simply because "Paddy" may have gotten drunk does not necessarily mean that he turned into a pugnacious hoodlum at the same time. As with any ethnic group, intoxicated Irishmen are probably more prone to be "happy drunks" or to simply fall asleep than they are to commence brawling. Also, like all drinkers, a hung over Irishman was often a repentant man. Peter Welsh of the 28th Massachusetts, who shamefacedly enlisted in the Union army in the aftermath of a drunken binge, wrote to his wife on September 14, 1862, "You need not be afraid of my drinking now for there is no licker allowed in the army nor no person allowed to sell it to soldiers."

Regarding brawling, one acquaintance of this writer has put forth the credible idea that, at least prior to the Civil War, most Irish were mocked day in and day out by "native" Americans, and it is possible that most fights were provoked by non-Irishmen, thus contributing to an unwanted stereotype. Further, most Irish-Americans were manual

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laborers, giving them the physical power to defend themselves in the tough areas in which they worked and lived.

Reenactors should keep in mind that, regardless of whether their first-person impression is an Irishman, they are portraying soldiers in an army that enforced a code of conduct. Article 45 of the United States Army's Articles of War forbade inebriation on duty (with the specified penalty being a court martial); Article 29 forbade the selling of alcoholic beverages of any kind by regimental sutlers. Throughout the Civil War, commanders from the battalion level through the army command level issued periodic orders completely banning liquor from military camps. While it is true that some soldiers could find alcohol when in a static camp (surviving accounts from Irishmen such as the 155th New York's Sergeant George Tipping and the 170th New York's Colonel James McIvor recount incidents of intoxication among enlisted men in static camps), reenactors should keep in mind that the army did not encourage or tolerate drunkenness. Both McIvor and Colonel Matthew Murphy of the 182nd New York (to name only two) had reputations as being strict disciplinarians, especially when it came to drunkenness. If you wish to portray a drunk or a brawler at a reenactment, then be prepared for a first-person experience in period military punishment. Drunkenness and fighting by any soldiers, Irish or otherwise, would usually be subject to swift justice from a company or battalion commander.

Intoxication and brawling may have been more common in soldiers on furlough or leave, but it was most certainly uncommon in a military camp. In addition, most living history events are campaign scenarios, not depictions of static camps or garrison duty. While determined enlisted men may have been able to find booze when in a stationary camp, alcohol consumption on campaign was exceedingly rare and, as such, should have no place in your first-person impression or conduct at a reenactment. Lastly, if you insist on portraying a drunk in camp, then do not engage in stereotypical behavior by proclaiming that you want or "need" whiskey simply because you are Irish.

Fondness for Celebration and Camaraderie: Going hand-in-hand with the above section on drinking is the indisputable fact that Irishmen loved a good party. Several theories for this have been ventured, and among the most credible is that Irish people had such hard lives that almost any opportunity for conviviality and merriment was seized upon. Irish-Americans did indeed celebrate and "party down" in civilian life (perhaps contributing to the "drunken Irish" stereotype) and took such behavior with them into the army. Irish troops let their hair down in camp and celebrated when the opportunity arose. The famous tales of Saint Patrick's Days in the camps of the Irish Brigade, Corcoran Legion, and other green flag regiments are legendary. The Corcoran Legion was known for its huge parties on Christmas Day and, at one point when "bored" during the 1862 Peninsula Campaign, Meagher's Irish Brigade put on a huge, day-long party with horse races and myriad festivities for no special reason at all. This is not to say that Irish troops partied and drank at every occasion, and discipline in some Irish regiments was known to be strict. However, when duty requirements were lacking, it seems that many Irish troops took the chance to have a party, big or small, and the camps of the Celtic regiments were known as being homes to song, conviviality, and good times. Often members of non-Irish

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units were welcomed to such celebrations and, when not on campaign, the campfires of Irish regiments saw evenings of song, poetry recitations, and the telling of tall tales and folklore. As part of a good, Irish first-person impression, have a party in camp once or twice a year (although it should be period-correct and any drinking should never be out-of-hand) and invite as guests the men from the next company street or two over. One Irish-American reenactor summed it up to this writer thus: "While Irish soldiers were a lively bunch, they were devoted, hard workers--sort of a 'work hard/play hard' thing. This hard-work ethic is what I think made the Irish soldiers throughout history such valiant and valuable soldiers to the armies for which they fought."

Songs: Irishmen and Civil War soldiers were very fond of singing, so learning a few tunes to sing at the campfire or on the march is an easy way to improve your impression--plus, singing is as fun today as it was in the 1860s. One Irish-American reenactor aptly said to this writer, "We should all make it a point to learn more than, All for Me Grog. How I've grown to hate that song!" (Further, evidence suggests that All for Me Grog is not a Civil War-era song.)

The array of tunes sung by Irish-Americans in the Civil War is vast and, indeed, a paper much longer than this article can be written on the subject. Songs sung by the original Irish volunteers included sad melodies, patriotic (American) airs as well as tunes longing for Irish independence, "fun" songs, and everything in between. A very limited (although very popular in their day) selection of songs includes the sad The Minstrel Boy. The stirring Garryowen was the unofficial "theme" of the Irish Brigade and was heard in many other Irish regiments as well. Also heard in the Union army's camps were "rebel songs" about Irish independence including Risin' of the Moon, A Nation Once Again, The Wearing O' the Green, and others. Several songs of the day were written specifically about Irish soldiers and an impressive array of them has been collected on David Kincaid's 1998 compact disk, The Irish Volunteer, including the title song, Pat Murphy of Meagher's Brigade, and others. Irishmen of the Civil War were also American soldiers, so singing airs such as The Battle Cry of Freedom and John Brown's Body while on the march, together with old campfire-standbys such as Home Sweet Home, Just Before the Battle Mother, and others are also good ways to improve your impression. Desire to "Blend In": Many reenactors are proud of the fact that they portray an Irish-American and wish to inform all spectators and nearby reenactors of such. In fact, in 1861-1865, most Irish-Americans had no desire to make themselves stand out in a crowd simply because of their ethnicity.

The Irish Brigade's and Corcoran Legion's celebrations of Saint Patrick's Day were famous, but such notable displays of "Irishness" were the exception, not the rule, and were done by organizations rather than by individual enlisted men. An Irishman among fellow Irishmen experienced a felling of camaraderie and unity with familiar rituals such as attending Mass or telling tales of the Old Sod. However, if the Irishman were removed from his group of fellow Celts, chances are he would do little to call attention to himself. Why? Irishmen were the first large immigrant group that was different from the balance of American society. The only other large immigrant group, Germans who arrived in the United State in large numbers in the 1830s and 1840s, were largely skilled workers, were

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Protestant, and tended not to be as "clannish" as the Irish (in other words, substantial numbers of Germans did not live in German ghettos). The Irish were the second large group of ethnic immigrants to enter the young nation of America and, worse, they were mostly unskilled, rural, poorly educated, and Catholic. All these distinctions swiftly produced prejudice in "native" Americans which culminated in the anti-immigrant/anti-Catholic "Know-Nothing" movement that was popular in the United States in the mid-1850s. The blatant discrimination (such as the infamous "Help Wanted: No Irish Need Apply" signs) of the day, coupled with occasional violence directed against Irish-Catholics, contributed to an Irish-American desire to lay low, work hard, and try to gain acceptance as Americans rather than as Irishmen.

In the scope of an Irish-American first-person impression, it is best not to call attention to oneself simply due to one's Irish heritage. In this vein, it is recommended that living historians not wear brass harps on their uniforms or gear and that they not yell to all within earshot that they are Irish. By all period accounts, the one thing that made Irishmen in the ranks in the Civil War stand out among their non-Irish fellows was their conviviality, good humor, self-effacing attitude, ability to crack a joke, and their generally good nature in the face of adversity.

The Fenians: A long book can be written on the history and influence of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, more commonly known then and now as "the Fenians". The Fenian Brotherhood, named after mythic warriors of supernatural prowess who, as legend has it, defended Ireland from invasion in ancient times, was formed on Saint Patrick's Day, 1858 in Ireland. The Fenians had strong branches with popular support in both the United States and Ireland and their goal was to establish an independent Ireland free of British rule. The overall Fenian leader, headquartered in Ireland, was James Stephens. The Fenian chiefs in the United States during the Civil War were John O'Mahoney of New York City and, as the Fenians' military commander, Brigadier General Michael Corcoran (until his death in 1863). The Brotherhood was popular among Irish-Americans, but not all Irish regarded the Fenians with warm feelings and, even at the organization's zenith, only a small percentage of Irish-Americans were Fenians. In particular, the leading force opposing the Fenians was the Catholic Church, which actively discouraged its flock from Fenianism, and threatened with excommunication those church members who openly espoused the cause. Further, many leading Irish-Americans were either indifferent or hostile to the Fenians. Surprisingly, the men who led the 1848 Young Ireland uprising largely did not support Fenianism; Thomas Meagher, commander of the Irish Brigade, was indifferent to the Fenians and only became a member in 1864. Terrence McManus and John Mitchel did not support the movement, and Thomas D'Arcy McGee, the Irish revolutionary who made his home in Canada, was vocal in his opposition to the Fenian cause. Most ardent Fenians were not supporters of the Union war effort, and it was only in the initial patriotic rush to enlist in early 1861 and when the Fenian commander Michael Corcoran recruited a brigade of Irishmen in New York in 1862 that Fenians joined the Federal army in large numbers. (Many hardcore Fenians wanted to save Irish lives for the planned showdown struggle with England, rather than spill their blood in a purely "American" war.) As with most issues pertaining to Irish independence down through history, Fenianism both united and

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divided Irishmen at home and in the Diaspora. In the United States, the Brotherhood was a national organization, but most of its members' efforts were focused on their local chapters, known as Fenian Circles. Each circle was chaired by a man who held the title of "Center Circle" or "Head Center". A circle typically had 50-100 members. By 1865, the Fenians' national organization claimed a total of 613 circles throughout North America. New members were inducted into the Fenian organization after taking a solemn oath. Several versions of this oath exist today (and no doubt each was used by a circle somewhere), although all required obedience to Fenian leaders' orders, adherence to the cause of Irish independence, and a vow to fight England. The Brotherhood held national conventions for its general membership in Chicago in November, 1863, and in Cincinnati in 1865. The 1863 convention in Chicago was notable because, at that time, the American Fenians established an "Irish government in exile", including adoption of a constitution, election of a president (John O'Mahoney) and cabinet, and issuing bonds in the name of a future independent Irish nation. The Fenians raised substantial funds in a variety of ways, although their largest source of income was the Irish National Fair, held annually on Easter Sunday in Chicago.

A typical reenactor impression of a Fenian often involves inflamed oratory around campfires, a lot of "On to Canada!" talk, and protests to company commanders in the name of the Fenian Brotherhood. While Fenian circles did indeed exist in both the Union and Confederate armies, there is little evidence that their meetings included little more than camaraderie. Scant evidence has been discovered that Fenian meetings, especially those of army-based circles, had much in the way of rituals or "ceremony" about them. The larger issues of Irish nationality and plotting of military action against Britain were usually left to the Fenians' national leaders, most of whom avoided military service. The Fenians were, ostensibly, a "secret society", so members did not generally announce their allegiance to their officers or non-Fenians. The famous "On to Canada!" cry heard from so many reenactors is incorrect for a Civil War portrayal. While the idea of invading Canada (known in the 1860s as "British-America") and trading it for Irish independence seems to have been developed as early as 1863, it did not become policy until a national Fenian leadership meeting in 1865. Further if, sometime after 1863, a Fenian in the army had caught wind of the idea of taking Canada; he most certainly would not have blabbed it to others. A proper Fenian portrayal is a great living history experience and is good for promoting Irish heritage. However, as with all aspects of living history, moderation in this impression is required, along with adherence to historical fact.

Summing Up: The Irish-Americans of the Civil War were multifaceted individuals and should be portrayed as such by living historians. Perhaps, in *Melting Pot Soldiers*, William Burton summed it up best: "Time and again, the Irish became the tools of men who deliberately encouraged ethnicity because it served their purposes and not necessarily the purposes of those who were their pawns...The constant theme [in such talk and portrayals] is that all Irishmen are alike. [The saying goes that] in the Civil War they all fought courageously for the Union; they won the war for the North, and any evidence to the contrary is conveniently ignored." Burton writes that an unfortunate circumstance is when people adhere to "the image of the Irishman as a happy-go-lucky, even simple-minded, fellow who saw the war as a lark and who drank whiskey as part of his jolly

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nature. Such images are insulting, unhistorical, and a disservice to the memory of the soldiers who fought with the Irish Brigade and the other Irish regiments... Irish soldiers dying before the stone wall at Fredericksburg did not sacrifice their lives for Irish independence; for the most part, they fought for the same reasons their compatriots fought--to support their friends and comrades and to preserve the Union." Burton also writes, "When the ordinary soldier in the ranks of an Irish regiment committed his private thoughts to his diary or wrote letters to friends and family, his beliefs, interests, and hopes were largely indistinguishable from those of the Germans, Americans, and others. He wanted to survive the war, he wanted to help save the Union, and he hoped to better himself after the war." These men were religious, loved their families, and worried over economics. They remembered the Old Country but were making their lives in the New. And that's how they should be portrayed. Look at the aspects of your Irish first-person impression and give them some new thought. In the end, you may well find some things to improve upon and, when you do, you will discover a new, richer, more-rewarding living history experience and, further, you will do honor to those 19th-century men under who's flag you march.

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