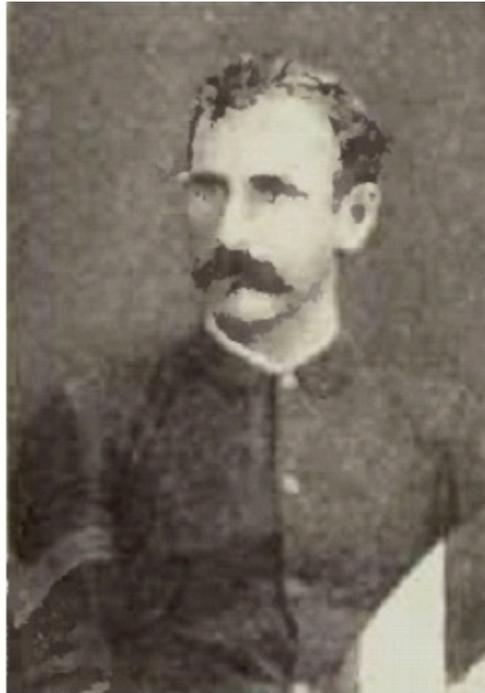


ALEXANDER DUNN and the American Civil War

By Brian McConnell*



Born in Aghabog Parish, County Monaghan, Ireland in 1833, it was doubtless not the expectation of Alexander Dunn, when he moved to the United States of America in March 1860 with his wife and two children that he would four years later be serving as a Private in Company D of the 153rd Regiment Ohio Volunteer Infantry in the Civil War.(1)

After enlisting on July 2, 1863 in the Ohio National Guard , he was mustered into service in the newly created 153rd Ohio Regiment on May 2, 1864 at Camp Dennison, Ohio. Alexander Dunn and his Regiment spent most of May and June performing guard duty at Harper's Ferry, West Virginia and along the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. The 153rd Ohio Volunteer Infantry Regiment was a 100- day regiment called up in the spring of 1864 to support President Abraham Lincoln's plan to achieve victory over the Confederate armies and bring an end to the War for Southern Independence. Lincoln's plan was the creation of ninety-six 100 day regiments from existing state militia units called into Union service for 100 days to free up front line troops to attack further south.(2)

Colonel Israel Stough commanded the 153rd Regiment which numbered 909 men. The Regiment was strung out along approximately 35 miles of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, primarily in Hampshire County, West Virginia where the rail line followed the winding Potomac River as through heavily forested and rugged mountain terrain in the lower Shenandoah Valley. Control of the Shenandoah Valley changed hands as Confederate forces led by Lieutenant General Jubal Early and his Army of the Valley pushed Union forces back several times.

Confederate cavalry brigades struck the 153rd on two occasions in July. In the first a force was sent to destroy the railway bridge over the South Branch of the Potomac at its confluence with the North Branch. Led by Brigadier General John Imboden's Northwestern Virginia Brigade, the considerably larger Confederate forces encountered a union scouting party and captured 34 men and killed one officer of the 153rd en route to the bridge.

Imboden's force continued north reaching the south branch of the railway bridge on July 3 and found it heavily defended and protected by a blockhouse and an armored car with a 12 pound gun. He attacked the next morning and successfully used his own horse drawn artillery pieces to destroy the armored car, but his soldiers were unable to dislodge the Union troops from the blockhouse. Before the brigade had reached the bridge, a portion of it, McNeil's Rangers, split off and moved upriver to attack the somewhat smaller bridge at Patterson's Creek. It was also defended by a blockhouse but the Confederates succeeded in doing some damage with their artillery piece until they saw an approaching armored rail car and then moved off to rejoin the brigade.

On July 6th the 153rd was attacked by the Confederate brigade at the bridge at Big (Great) Cacapon and successfully defended it. They were also attacked the same day at the railroad bridge at Sir John's Run but beat back the Confederates with assistance of ironclad railway cars under the command of the 2nd Maryland Regiment. Imboden's Cavalry brigade then moved east to rejoin Early's Army for the advance on Washington.

At the same time as Imboden's brigade had been attacking bridges, another Confederate Cavalry brigade led by Brigadier General John McCausland had headed towards North Mountain (west of Martinsburg) to destroy bridge over Back Creek. It burned the bridge, then attacked the Union garrison near Hedgeville on July 4th, capturing more than 200 soldiers, mainly from the 153rd. After the Confederates had moved off, the 153rd were ordered to complete blockhouses in anticipation of other attacks. Later in July Early's army came again and destroyed 75 miles of railway line between Cumberland and Harper's Ferry bringing further combat for the 153rd.



Infantry at Harper's Ferry, West Virginia

At the end of July, Colonel Stough and the 153rd were moved to Old Town, Maryland on the Potomac River to block a Confederate withdrawal across the river into West Virginia. The 153rd lay in the path of McCausland's force of approximately 3000 cavalry and a heavy artillery battery. The battle started on August 2 and initially Stough was successful in throwing the Confederates back, however, with superior numbers they were able to flank the Ohio troops. Stough retreated back across the river with the 153rd to the blockhouse at Green Springs, West Virginia. The 153rd received support there from the 2nd Maryland Regiment with an ironclad car but Confederate artillery knocked it to pieces.

The Confederates completely surrounded the blockhouse and sent a note demanding Colonel Stough to surrender. McCausland recognized him as an officer with whom he had past battles with and agreed that upon surrender the union soldiers would be immediately released with their private property and permitted to transport the wounded by handcar to Cumberland. This was the last documented engagement of the civil war for the 153rd Regiment in which Alexander Dunn served. When the Regiment was mustered out on September 9th, there remained 753 men.

When Alexander Dunn first arrived in America he settled with his wife Margaret and two young children in Clermont County, Ohio. Although it might seem he would have been far from the conflict of the civil war this was not the case. On July 14, 1863, General John Hunt Morgan led approximately 2,000 Confederate cavalymen into Clermont County as part of an attempt to draw Union forces away from the southern conflicts. Morgan's Raiders, as they became known, crossed the Little Miami River at Dungan's Crossing, and attacked bridges, railway lines and trains across the state before leaving.

Alexander Dunn was the third member of this family to come to the United States. In his family of seven siblings, a sister Elizabeth and a brother John, came to Ohio before him and may explain how he choose there to live. Later another brother, William, also moved to Ohio in 1869 from Ireland. Perhaps they left in hopes of finding prosperity in America. The Dunns were Presbyterians. They were descended from Scots who moved to Ireland from Scotland in the 17th century and known as Ulster Scots.

Members of the Dunn family attended Drumkeen Presbyterian Church, in County Monaghan which was constructed in the early 1800s. In the graveyard behind the church some of their relatives were laid to rest.(3) The church has remained active into present times and one of its most prominent members is Heather Humphreys, member of the Fine Gael party who represents the people of the Cavan - Monaghan constituency in government.



Drumkeen Presbyterian Church, first built 1803

Alexander Dunn was my great great great uncle. As the marriage certificate below indicates his sister Margaret married my great great grandfather William McConnell in Drumkeen Presbyterian Church in 1863. Their father, Alexander Dunn, is shown as a farmer. One of the witnesses was William Dunn, brother of Margaret.

1863. Marriage solemnized at Drumkeen in the parish of Inchaboy in the County of Monaghan

No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the Time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
55	27 th February 1863.	William McConnell	36	Bachelor	Carpenter	Monaghan	William McConnell	Farmer
		Margaret Dunn	36	Spinster		Croppagh	Alexander Dunn	Farmer

Married in the Drumkeen M. Ch. according to the Form and Discipline of the Presbyterian Church, by license by me, William Costello

This Marriage was solemnized between us } William McConnell } in the Presence of us, } Thos. Smith
 } Margaret X Dunn } } William Dunn

During his service with the 153rd Ohio Regiment Alexander Dunn was promoted to Corporal on June 10, 1864. He was admitted to hospital in Cumberland, Maryland for intermittent fever on August 2, 1864. Approximately one week later, on August 10th he returned to duty. His military record also indicated he was 5' 8" in height, with a light complexion, hazel eyes, and auburn hair.

After his service in the American Civil War, Alexander Dunn returned to Clermont County, Ohio. However, he did not remain there. His wife Margaret Mills, who he had married in 1857 before leaving County Monaghan, Ireland, for America, died in November 1870 near Cincinnati, leaving three children: Mary Elizabeth, who became proprietor of a hotel in Elkhorn, Colorado; Alexander, who went gold mining in the Cripple Creek gold region; and John, who graduated in 1897 from the law department of Colorado State University in Denver and became a United States Senator of Alaska. In Alexander married Josephine Crozier, a widow, of Claremont, Ohio, and had six children, Mary, Frank, Thomas, Arthur, Charles, and Clarence.(4)

Alexander relocated to Cass County, Iowa in 1872, in 1882 to Williams Township, and in 1893 to a farm he was the first to occupy and improve in Cedar Township. For many years he was a Justice of the Peace in Iowa. He was re-elected to the office for three terms, or six years in Cass County, two terms in Calhoun County, and served three terms in Cedar Township. He received a pension for his service in the Civil War.

NOTE:

* This article was completed on April 12, 2014. To contact the author, Brian McConnell, email brianm564@gmail.com

(1) Alexander Dunn was born on April 20, 1833. Also see Roster of 153rd Regiment Ohio Volunteer Infantry at http://www.civilwarindex.com/armyoh/rosters/153rd_oh_infantry_roster.pdf

(2) "The 153rd Ohio Volunteer Infantry Regiment - A Brief History", by David G. Davis, 2004 at http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ohclark/CivilWar/153rd_ohio_volunteer_infantry_re.htm

(3) "The Drumkeen Story - A Story of Aghabog Presbyterians, 1803 - 2003", by David Nesbitt, published by Cahans Publications, Monaghan, Ireland, 2003

(4) "The Pioneer History of Pocahontas County, Iowa", by Robert E. Flickinger, published by Fonda Times, Fonda, Iowa, 1904