

Mathew Dooley – A Roscrea Man in the American Civil War

by Joe Coughlan.

In 1861 the American Civil War began when eleven southern states formed The Confederacy on the issue of the abolition of slavery. After four years of fighting 600,000 soldiers died, The Confederacy collapsed, slavery was abolished and civil rights and freedom for slaves began. Nearly 200,000 Irish fought in this war with 150,000 on the Union and 50,000 on the Confederate side. Unlike the great war most of them made their lives there and never came home and so there was not a lot known about it here. Like the Great War it is very likely a number of these came from the Roscrea area. Among them was one Roscrea man Mathew Dooley whose career and life afterwards are interesting.



2nd New York Artillery

Mathew Dooley was born to Mathew and Judy (whose maiden name was Keene) of Grove Street Roscrea on April 22nd 1839. Along with his twin brother Denis he was baptised in St Cronan's Church. At the age of 20 Mathew decided to go to America to seek a better life. He sailed from Ireland to Liverpool where he boarded a ship named the Cultivator bound for New York; arriving on 11th of April 1861.

On October 11th after only six months in New York, Mathew enlisted as a private in G Company of the 2nd New York Heavy Artillery. At that time more than 400,000 men were recruited in New York - many of these as they came off the boat at Ellis Island. 51,000 of those recruited in New York alone were Irish Immigrants. Mathew signed up to serve three years.

Mathew took part in many battles during his time with the Union Army including the Battle of Bull Run which was fought on August 28th - 30th 1862 in Prince William County, Virginia. Confederate General James (Stonewall) Jackson captured the Union supply train which was under General Pope. The Confederates drove back the Union Army with 25,000 men in five divisions. It was the biggest battle of the war and both sides suffered heavy casualties with more than 4,500 killed. The Confederate Army outnumbered the Union by five to one. Matthew also took part in the Overland Campaign which was a series of battles fought during May and June 1864 which led to the Siege of Petersburg which brought an end to the war.

Mathew Dooley was discharged from the army on October 14th 1864 with a wound to his right leg. After the war he went back to New York and worked for some time as a plumber where his sister Julia Casey and his niece Ellen Gillen lived. In 1877 he decided to enter a home for National Disabled Volunteer Soldiers. He seems to have been very troublesome as he was admitted to and discharged from twenty-one homes during the rest of his life. In 1878 he decided to return to Roscrea where he is recorded as having drawn his pension of three dollars a week. After a couple of years he returned to America where he spent the rest of his life in and out of homes. Apart from his wound Mathew was beset by a number of illnesses which made him more dependent on the homes as he got older. He died on June 2nd 1917 aged 78.

This is just the story of one man from Roscrea who fought in the American civil war. In all likelihood there are many more like him who fought on both the Union and Confederate sides.