
THE WAR TIME CHAPLAINS OF THE SIXTY-NINTH REGIMENT OF NEW YORK

No greater fighting Regiment has ever existed than the One Hundred and Sixty-Fifth Infantry of the Rainbow Division, formed from the old Sixty-Ninth Regiment of New York. One of the most outstanding characteristics of the Regiment was its deep sense of religious responsibility, inculcated by one of my most beloved friends - Father Duffy.

General Douglas MacArthur
24 January 1940

Today we honor our war time Regimental Chaplains from the Civil War through World War II. No other American regiment has such a well known tradition of its war time padres than New York's Fighting Sixty-Ninth. Its most famous Chaplain is surely Father Francis P. Duffy of World War I fame. His statue stands today in Duffy Square, at the northern end of New York's Times Square. Father Duffy is best remembered as the priest and friend who roamed the trenches in France hearing confessions, bringing communion and giving last rites to the wounded. Popular with the officers and men alike, his influence and judgment was felt by all ranks of the Sixty-Ninth.

Our first war time Chaplain was the Rev. Thomas F. Mooney of St. Brigid's Church on East 8th Street. It was from this Irish neighborhood the Regiment was initially organized in 1851. He left New York City on 23 April 1861 with the Sixty-Ninth for the defense of our Nation's Capitol. He said mass on the voyage from New York to Baltimore and while the Sixty-Ninth labored to build Fort Corcoran at Arlington, VA, Mooney was replaced with Father Bernard O'Reilly, S.J. who served with the Regiment at its baptism of fire at the Battle of Bull Run.

Later, upon the organization of the Sixty-Ninth Volunteers for service with the legendary Irish Brigade, a French-Canadian Jesuit became Chaplain, the Rev. Thomas Ouellet. He was joined with two "Congregation of Holy Cross" Chaplains in the other two New York regiments of the Brigade, Rev. William Corby of the 88th N.Y. Vols. and Rev. James M. Dillion of the 63rd N.Y. Vols. It was Corby who gained fame for his general absolution to the Irish Brigade on the battlefield at Gettysburg in 1863. After the war he became President of Notre Dame University, where his statue is fondly referred to as "Fair Catch Corby."

In the Spanish-American War the Friendly Sons of Saint Patrick presented a Mass Tent to the Sixty-Ninth's Chaplain, Rev. William J.B. Daly. This gesture began a strong friendship between the Regiment and the Friendly Sons that commenced in earnest during the Mexican Border Service in 1916 and on through World War I. It was repeated again in World War II, with the Regimental Chaplain as the designated person of contact.

At the Regiment's first campaign in the Pacific in 1943, Jesuit Chaplain Stephen Meany landed with the Sixty-Ninth on Makin Island in the Japanese held Gilberts. Throughout the night on the transport he heard the confessions of the men, and at 2 a.m. said Mass. Six hours after landing on the beach he was severely wounded four times by enemy machine gun fire while administering first aid to a wounded soldier of the Sixty-Ninth.

For this heroic action he was awarded the Silver Star. His inspiration in joining the Society of Jesus was the life of Father William Doyle, a Jesuit Chaplain of the Royal Irish Fusiliers, killed in World War I.

It was on Okinawa that the Sixty-Ninth lost its first Chaplain on the field of battle. Father Lawrence Lynch, a Redemptorist, joined the Regiment just before the Okinawa campaign in 1945. He said he was "Brooklyn's gift to the Fighting Sixty-Ninth." He was killed by Japanese artillery fire while giving communion to a wounded member of the Regiment.

The Chaplains of the Regiment were known for their own deep personal piety and, above all, for their unflinching commitment to the welfare of all the men they served in the Fighting Sixty-Ninth.

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69th Regiment of New York
"The Fighting 69th"