

Stephen Joseph McGroarty

Stephen Joseph McGroarty was born in Mountcharles, County Donegal, Ireland in 1830. He emigrated with his family in 1833 to Cincinnati and attended St Xavier from 1840 – 1844. He worked in the dry goods business for several years before studying law and subsequently became a member of the Ohio Bar. After practicing law for a brief period in Toledo, he returned to Cincinnati and earned a reputation as an outstanding trial lawyer, particularly in criminal cases.

When the Civil War began, McGroarty raised a company of Irish Americans for service in the 10th Ohio Volunteer Infantry Regiment, which was organized at Camp Harrison, then north of Cincinnati, now the present-day Hamilton County fairgrounds.

The 10th was commanded by well-known Cincinnati, lawyer, politician, and celebrated poet William Haines Lytle (for whom Lytle Park and One Lytle Place are named). Lytle received the command, with the rank of Colonel, because of his prominence and because he was a Democrat, and the support of that party was vital for the Union war effort. Similarly, McGroarty was assigned command of the company he raised and given the rank of Captain, bypassing typical enlisted service because of his professional standing as an attorney.

McGroarty commanded his company during the 10th regiment's early operations, including garrison duty and movements in western Virginia (now West Virginia). He was severely wounded at the Battle of Carnifex Ferry on 10 September 1861, however, as he received a bullet wound to his lungs. The battle occurred in present-day Nicholas County, West Virginia and was a Union victory that contributed to the withdrawal of Confederate forces from that region and the creation of the State of West Virginia two years later. The severe nature of his wound, which was thought to be mortal at the time, led to his resignation from the army in October 1861.

McGroarty's wound turned out not to be fatal, and he recovered (somewhat). He then accepted a commission as a Lieutenant Colonel in the 61st Ohio Volunteer Regiment, which was organized and mustered into federal service in April 1862 at Camp Chase, near Columbus, Ohio. McGroarty assumed command of the 61st on 23 September 1862 with the rank of Colonel and served for the remainder of the war in this regiment as its commanding officer.

Under Colonel McGroarty's command, the regiment participated in most of the major engagements fought by the Union Army of the Potomac in the Civil War's Eastern Theater from September 1862 to October 1863, including the Second Bull Run (Manassas),

Chancellorsville, and Gettysburg campaigns. In April 1864, the 61st relocated to Tennessee and was assigned to the Army of the Cumberland and participated in the Atlanta Campaign, the March to the Sea, and the Carolinas Campaign.

During the Atlanta Campaign, at the Battle of Peachtree Creek on 20 July 1864, he received



a particularly severe injury when a minie ball (bullet) shattered his left elbow, rendering his arm nearly useless and exacerbating previous injuries. His arm was later amputated. McGroarty continued field command, however, and received additional, multiple wounds, demonstrating his frontline exposure while leading his men. His last battle was at Bentonville, North Carolina, in March 1865, shortly before the surrender of the Confederate Army of the South near Durham, North Carolina on 26 April 1865.

McGroarty's performance of duties as a Colonel commanding a regiment was exemplary and was recognized as such by his brevet promotion to Brigadier General of U.S. Volunteers for "gallant and meritorious services" in campaigns in Virginia, Tennessee, and Georgia. He received this promotion shortly before the fighting ceased. (At the time of the Civil War, the only official personal decoration for valor in combat was the Medal of Honor; there were no other types of military medals. As a result, brevet promotions were conferred as recognition for gallant service. A brevet promotion allowed the awardee to wear the higher rank, but the recipient was paid at his lower, permanent rank and assigned duties consistent with that permanent rank.)

McGroarty left the army after the conclusion of the war. Subsequently, President Andrew Johnson appointed him Collector of Internal Revenue for the Second District of Ohio, a position he held for approximately two years. This role involved overseeing federal tax collection in the immediate postwar reconstruction period.

Due to his local prominence, pre-war service as an attorney in Cincinnati, and his excellent war record, McGroarty was elected Clerk of Courts of Hamilton County in the Ohio state elections in October 1869. He never assumed this office, however, as he passed away in the suburb of College Hill from complications from his numerous battle injuries on 2 January 1870, before the scheduled start of his term. He was 39 years old. His grave is in Spring Grove Cemetery, where he lies beside his wife, Mary Octavia Knaggs. They had no children.