

Morton's Pet?: An Examination of the Nineteenth Indiana Volunteer Infantry in the Civil War, 1861-1863

JARED CROCKER

On April 16, 1861, Governor Oliver P. Morton of Indiana called upon “the loyal and patriotic men of this State” to aid the President in suppressing “an armed rebellion . . . organized in certain States of this Union.”¹ While this call was just for the first six regiments requested of Indiana under Lincoln’s initial call for 75,000 soldiers, it is fitting to apply this call to all soldiers from Indiana who volunteered to fight for the Union during the Civil War. Other calls for volunteers were subsequently issued as it became apparent that the war would not end quickly. One of these regiments formed under a subsequent call is arguably the most renowned regiment furnished by Indiana, the Nineteenth Indiana Volunteer Infantry Regiment of the renowned Iron Brigade.

History knows them as the “pet” of Governor Morton and by extension the Republican political machine in Indiana. Morton is widely considered one of the most important governors during the Civil War and was connected through friendship or by alliances to various politicians in Indiana and the nation. When referenced in secondary literature, the status of the relationship between the regiment and the governor is simply stated, “the Nineteenth was the Indiana governor’s pet,” a fact that was supposedly noticed by rival ambitious officers.² A more detailed reason why the regiment was a pet of Morton was because Morton, Solomon Meredith (the first colonel of the Nineteenth), and Company B of the Nineteenth were from Wayne County.³ However, when primary sources are consulted, it is shown that the regiment did not materially benefit from being the “pet regiment” of Governor Morton. In fact, there is little evidence that the regiment was treated any differently or had anything in its organization that truly set it apart from the majority of regiments in the Federal Army. If any favoritism was shown to the regiment it was not shown to the regiment per se but to the regiment’s first colonel, Solomon Meredith, an unsavory political operator who used his connections to advance himself through the ranks and win glory for himself. Regiments that were officered by political appointees with little experience tended to have problems: they were undisciplined in camp and ineffective during drill and on the battlefield. The Nineteenth Indiana experienced all of those problems, but between August 1862 and July 1863 produced a fighting record that made it one of the best regiments in the Army of the Potomac. This is mainly due to the training and iron discipline of their most formative brigadier, John Gibbon.

Once civil war began, Indiana found itself woefully unprepared. On February 11, 1861, Indiana had merely “\$10,368.58 in actual cash” in its coffers, and the majority of this “could not be touched for general or military purposes.”⁴ This lack of funds was of serious consequence as the federal government was “unable to furnish clothing and equipment required by the large force so suddenly brought into service.”⁵ Thus, it fell upon the state to provide equipment for its soldiers.⁶ Governor Morton stated at the beginning of the war, “The stock of arms on hand belonging to the Government was small and generally of a very inferior quality.”⁷ In spite of laws to reorganize the Indiana Militia in 1861, there were only a dozen companies with an aggregate strength of “about five hundred men.”⁸ These laws, therefore, were effectively useless. What these laws did allow for was the conferring of “honorary military titles.”⁹ This rendered the quality of the men as “wholly raw and inexperienced.”¹⁰

The regiment was the mainstay of the American Army in the mid-nineteenth century. In the volunteer service the regiment was recruited from a single state and consisted of two elements, the staff and the line, with an official aggregate strength in excess of 1,000 men.¹¹ The line was divided into ten companies of 101 men each; these companies, when at all possible, were recruited from a single county.¹² These numbers, though, were the “on paper” recruitment strength. As time went on, even before a regiment went into combat for the first time, their numbers would fall

¹ Oliver P. Morton of Indiana: Sketch of His Life and Public Services (Indianapolis: Journal Company, 1876), 15.

² Lance J. Herdegen, *The Men Stood Like Iron: How the Iron Brigade Won its Name* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 29.

³ Alan T. Nolan, *The Iron Brigade: A Military History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961), 21.

⁴ W.H.H. Terrell, *Indiana in the War of Rebellion: Report of the Adjutant General*, Vol. 1. (1869. Reprint, Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1960), 3.

⁵ W.H.H. Terrell, *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Indiana*. Vol. 1. (Indianapolis: Alexander H Conner, 1869), 311.

⁶ Terrell, *Indiana in the War of Rebellion*, 1: 8-9.

⁷ W.H.H. Terrell, *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Indiana*. Vol. 1. (Indianapolis: Alexander H Conner, 1869), 311.

⁸ Terrell, *Indiana in the War of Rebellion*, 1: 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 1: 2.

¹⁰ Terrell, *Indiana in the War of Rebellion*, 1: 106-107.

¹¹ The “line” refers to the actual combat component of the regiment and this name comes as a result of their use of linear tactics and their lack of specialty; for example, European armies contained regiments of guard units and grenadiers.; William F. Fox, *Regimental Losses in the American Civil War, 1861-1865: A Treatise on the extent and nature of the mortuary losses in the Union regiments, with full and exhaustive statistics compiled from the official records on file in the state military bureaus and at Washington*. (Albany: Albany Publishing Company 1889), 5.

¹² Fox, *Regimental Losses in the American Civil War*, 5.

below the initial muster count (or their strength on paper) as men died from disease, deserted, were discharged or placed on detached assignments, or transferred to other regiments. The Nineteenth Indiana had an aggregate strength of 1,054 men on their muster date of July 29, 1861, but when they went into their first major engagement at Brawner's Farm on August 28, 1862, the Nineteenth had an aggregate strength of approximately half their original recruitment number.¹³

It has been noted that one of the reasons the Nineteenth was a pet of the governor lay in the fact that Wayne County provided a company for the regiment. The following Indiana counties provided companies for the Nineteenth: Delaware, Elkhart, Johnson, Madison, Marion, Owen, Randolph, and Wayne. Wayne County was the home county of both Morton and Meredith. Using William F. Fox's study on Civil War regiments as a guide, it is apparent that Company B was not special; thus detracting from the idea that this company, and by extension the regiment, were the favorite of Governor Morton.

Wars are fought by the youth of a country, and this war was no different. Federal soldiers in the Civil War period were a mean age of 25 with the mode age being 18.¹⁴ Company B more or less matched the national average, with a mean age of 21 and a mode age of 18.¹⁵ European armies of the period often designated that the premier company of a regiment be comprised of the tallest men in the regiment. In Fox's treatise he states that the average height of a Union soldier was five feet eight and one-quarter inches; for Company B the average height was five feet eight and two-thirds inches.¹⁶ Company B did possess a greater proportion of farmers than the national average, but this can easily be excused by acknowledging that in the antebellum period, Indiana, like other states in the Old Northwest Territory, was largely a rural state, thus it would naturally have a greater number of enlisted farmers. While in other occupational fields Company B does not match the national average. The men were simply representatives of the vast majority of American society west of the Appalachian Mountains, in 1861. Company B could be unique in that only a single soldier was of non-native birth, but as Indiana had not received many of the immigrants that had begun inundating the states east of the Appalachian Mountains and north and west of Indiana, this is not a surprise or reason to mark the company as any more than a simple oddity.¹⁷

Another way to see if the regiment deserved the designation of "pet" is to examine whether any favoritism was displayed in its officer corps. When Indiana entered the war "there were but few men of any military skill or experience."¹⁸ On July 22, 1861, Congress conferred upon the governors of the various states the right "to commission all regimental and company officer required for the volunteers."¹⁹ This assignment of officers was a very important piece of patronage that a governor could wield in any way he desired. Like all governors, Morton appointed the few men with any prior military experience to positions within the line and staff of the state's military. To satisfy various political factions, he then turned to filling the rest of the positions with the leading men of the state.²⁰

Among the first of the officers appointed to the Nineteenth was Solomon Meredith of Wayne County. Meredith was a native of Guilford County, North Carolina, and a member of the yeomen class, but moved to Indiana as a young adult in May 1829.²¹ The yeoman class was the echelon of Southern whites who owned land but did not own slaves in the antebellum period. Meredith would become a fixture in Indiana's political life, holding a variety of positions.²² As one of the leading members of the Republican Party in Indiana he represented Indiana at the 1860 Republican Convention in Chicago, being "one of the most useful and energetic abettors."²³

For the ranks of lieutenant colonel and major, Morton appointed Robert A. Cameron and Alois Bachman respectively. Cameron was a native New Yorker who arrived in Indiana in 1843.²⁴ Cameron graduated from the Indiana

¹³ Terrell, *Indiana in the War of Rebellion*, 1: 561 and 564.; In John Gibbon's report of the Battle at Brawner's Farm he stated that his brigade lost a total of "751 men, or considerably over one-third the command." Assuming that 751 men was one-third of the command then the brigade would have totaled 2,253 men which divided by four (the number of regiments in the brigade) then each regiment of the brigade would have 563 men in each regiment. See John Gibbon's Report for the engagement near Gainesville and the Battle of Bull Run, September 3, 1862 Official Records of The War of the Rebellion, Series 1, 53 vols., (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1880-1898), 12: 377.

¹⁴ Fox, *Regimental Losses in the American Civil War*, 5.

¹⁵ Muster Roll, Company B Nineteenth Indiana Volunteer Infantry, July 29, 1861, microfilm, slides 5-6, 5054. Nineteenth Indiana Letterbook 1861-1864: Clothing and equipment Book Description, Co. B Muster and Payrolls. Indiana State Archives, Commission on Public Records. Hereafter the Indiana State Archives is cited as ISA.

¹⁶ Muster Roll, Company B Nineteenth Indiana Volunteer Infantry, ISA.

¹⁷ Emma Lou Thornbrough, *Indiana in the Civil War Era: 1850-1860*. (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau and Indiana Historical Society, 1965), 127-128.

¹⁸ Terrell, *Indiana in the War of Rebellion*, 1: 106.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Thornbrough, *Indiana in the Civil War Era*, 127-128 and 129-130.; Nolan, *The Iron Brigade*, 59.

²¹ Theo T. Scribner, *Indiana's Roll of Honor*, Vol. 2 (Indianapolis: A.D. Streight, 1866), 77.

²² *Ibid.*, 78-81.

²³ *Ibid.*, 79, 81.

²⁴ James Sutherland, *Biographical Sketches of Members of the 41st General Assembly, State of Indiana*, (Indianapolis, 1861), 91, quoted in Nolan, *The Iron Brigade*, 21.

Medical College in 1850.²⁵ Similar to Morton and Meredith, Cameron was a pre-Kansas-Nebraska Democrat who joined the emerging Republican Party in the mid-1850s. Bachman was described by one of his contemporaries as “young, rich, educated, with a physical presence rarely equaled.”²⁷ Prior to the war, Bachman formed and commanded one of the few active militia companies in Indiana.²⁸

As the war progressed, vacancies opened among the ranks of the officer corps of the various regiments. Volunteer companies and regiments were local units whose men and officers were often intimately connected through bonds of kinship and friendship, thus promotion by seniority was deemed ineffective in the volunteer service.²⁹ Since this was the case, it was deemed that if men from the outside – regardless if it was at the company or regimental level – were promoted and given command over men of whom they had no prior connection, it would cause “the greatest injury and demoralization” to the men and be counterproductive.³⁰ Any vacancy in line officer positions was filled by the “promotion of the next officer in the ‘regular line’ in each company.”³¹ When vacancies occurred in the staff component of a regiment, the position was filled by promoting officers from the company level of the regiment. This was the general rule. The only times that this rule was not followed was when the next officer in line was rendered unacceptable due to “incompetency, immoral habits, or unfitness be presented by the regimental officers.”³² Just as the governor had the right to commission the original officers, he retained the right for the entirety of the war to commission new officers to fill these vacancies.³³ The Nineteenth promotions at the company were determined by seniority within the company, with only one exception as the next available officer had not received enough experience to take command of the company should that need arise.³⁴

Just as the ranks of the officer corps thinned, the ranks of the enlisted men also diminished for many of the same reasons, but rarely would the enlisted strength of a regiment ever approach the strength it possessed on its date of muster.³⁵ This did not mean that officers would not try and reinforce a regiment. For example, Brigadier General John Gibbon requested that Major General George B. McClellan endorse his request for Morton to fill the depleted ranks of the Nineteenth – one of the regiments in his brigade – from the newly formed, but not yet equipped, regiments, and McClellan gave this request his endorsement.³⁶

Brigadier General Thomas J. Wood also requested that Governor Morton replenish the ranks of the Indiana regiments under his command.³⁷ Wood, though, inadvertently stated in an August 22, 1862, letter why Morton, like other governors, would not fill the ranks of existing regiments. Wood stated that by reinforcing regiments the number of officers would not be increased.³⁸ For Morton, new regiments meant a need for more officers allowing him to spread this patronage even though it denied depleted regiments much needed manpower. It is for this reason that the Nineteenth would never enter battle with more than half of its original muster strength, thus arguing against the Nineteenth Indiana being a “pet” regiment.

At the time of the Civil War, armies were transitioning from the musket, which had been the mainstay of armies for the preceding two centuries, to the rifle musket and the first viable breech loading and repeating rifles; both of which increased an infantryman’s range, accuracy, and rounds fired per minute.³⁹ As the federal government was ill-equipped to arm the hundreds of thousands of volunteers at the start of the war, it was the responsibility of the equally ill-equipped states to arm their volunteers, prior to entering the federal service. Indiana, for example, possessed “less than five hundred stand of effective first class small arms” at the start of the war.⁴⁰

²⁵ Sutherland, *Biographical Sketches*, 91.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ David Stevenson, *Indiana’s Roll of Honor*, Vol. 1. (Indianapolis: self-published, 1864), 381.

²⁸ Stevenson, *Indiana’s Roll of Honor*, 382.

²⁹ Terrell, *Indiana in the War of Rebellion*, 1: 110.

³⁰ *Ibid.* The exception, though, was in the newly organized regiments officers were appointed from preexisting regiments at the governor’s discretion.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 111.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 106.

³⁴ Letter, Solomon Meredith to Oliver P. Morton, February 15, 1862. Oliver P. Morton Papers, Microfilm, ISA.

³⁵ The Nineteenth Indiana was fortunate to report to their station with a full complement of enlisted personal. In an August 22, 1862, letter Thomas Wood wrote to Governor Morton requesting more men be sent to the Indiana regiments in his division as they had been dispatched without their full complement of men. See letter. Thomas J. Wood to Oliver P. Morton, August 22, 1862, Collection number SC 2820, Oliver P. Morton Letters 1862-1864, Indiana Historical Society. Hereafter the Indiana Historical Society is cited IHS.

³⁶ Letter, John Gibbon to Seth Williams (Assistant Adjutant General of the Army of the Potomac), October 7, 1862, Collection number M 0203, Solomon Meredith Papers, IHS.

³⁷ Letter, TJ Wood to OP Morton, August 22, 1862, Oliver P. Morton Letters 1862-1864, IHS.

³⁸ Wood to Morton, August 22, 1862.

³⁹ Earl J. Hess, *The Rifle Musket in Civil War Combat: Reality and Myth* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008).

⁴⁰ Terrell, *Indiana in the War of Rebellion*, 1: 3.

Since Indiana was initially responsible for arming its soldiers, it is reasonable to suspect that if the Nineteenth was a particular favorite of Governor Morton, or of any major player in state or federal politics, then that regiment should have been armed with one of the various types of rifle muskets or breech loading rifles. Morton stated in an address to the Indiana General Assembly that the State of Indiana ceased to arm the vast majority of its soldiers at the request of the federal government, as the federal government would arm soldiers in the federal service.⁴¹ Thus, if Governor Morton showed particular favoritism to the Nineteenth in terms of arming the regiment, it would have been seen at the onset of the war.

The State of Indiana armed all or the majority of the Eighth, Seventeenth, Nineteenth, Twenty-First, and Twenty-Sixth Infantry Regiments between June 30, 1861, and September 7, 1861.⁴² Of these regiments, the Seventeenth, Nineteenth, Twenty-First, and Twenty-Sixth received an assortment of arms including Enfield Rifle Muskets, unspecified rifle muskets, percussion muskets, and muskets altered to percussion.⁴³ Of these regiments, the Nineteenth received only 192 Enfields – out of 929 firearms issued – as opposed to the Twenty-Sixth who received 182 Enfields and 124 unspecified rifled muskets out of 910 firearms issued.⁴⁴ Of the 666 firearms issued to the Eighth in this two-month period all firearms were one of the varieties of rifle muskets available.⁴⁵ Thus, it can be concluded that the Nineteenth initially was not armed more adequately than the other regiments armed by Indiana in 1861.

The Nineteenth was never armed with anything better than the Springfield or the Enfield. If a letter of request by Meredith for firearms existed, it was the federal government, not the state government that rearmed the regiments, as Morton had stated before the General Assembly.⁴⁶ In a January 1862 report on his division (the division to which the Nineteenth was assigned to), Major General Irvin McDowell stated that nearly all regiments in his division were armed with some form of rifle musket including the Springfield, the preferred rifle musket of the Army of the Potomac.⁴⁷ Even though the Nineteenth was the only regiment to possess the Springfield in its brigade, at least one other regiment was rearmed with the Springfield within a month, long before the brigade entered into battle.⁴⁸ It is reasonable to suspect that if the Nineteenth were a “pet” regiment then they should have received firearms other than the Springfield or the Enfield, which were being issued to virtually all other infantry regiments in the Federal Army.

Firearms were only a part of what made an infantryman complete. The soldier also needed clothing, food, and tents. Governor Morton could have influenced the supplying of the regiment. “During the first months of the war there was no Federal Quartermaster in the State, and the general government furnished no supplies of any kind for the equipment of Indiana troops” so “all necessary supplies were furnished by the State.”⁴⁹ After the regiments entered federal service, the federal government provided for the majority of the needs of the men. At times, though, “the State also furnished larger supplies from time to time, since that, were required for the health and prompt equipment of our troops, and where the Government has failed or was unable to furnish them in time.”⁵⁰

Camp Morton served as the initial training ground for many of the volunteer companies in Indiana. William R. Moore, of Company K of the Nineteenth, noted that while at Camp Morton, he and all the other men ate very well and had access to daily rations of soft bread and “plenty of other good provisions.”⁵¹ The companies of the Nineteenth had not been singled out for better treatment, as all companies assembled at Camp Morton at the time received the same food. This richness of food, though, was not to last when the Nineteenth reached the Army of the Potomac. In June 1862, the regiment returned to garrison duty at Fort Craig after many weeks of campaigning in northern Virginia; William R. Moore wrote home to state that for the first time in weeks the regiment received soft bread. Moore found this fact worthy of note as during this campaign the regiment had only hardtack and salt pork.⁵²

Before the Nineteenth was stationed at Fort Craig, the regiment was stationed on the Kalorama Heights. Disease became rampant at this camp site as it was a plowed up tobacco field with “warm, flat, and unpalatable” water.⁵³

⁴¹ Terrell, Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Indiana, 1: 311.

⁴² Regiments listed in the order of the date that they were armed.

⁴³ Inventory, July 22, 1861, Ordinance Records 1861-1863, Microfilm, 70-71, ISA.; Inventory, August 5, 1861, Ordinance Records 1861-1863, Microfilm, 84-85, ISA.; Inventory, September 3, 1861, Ordinance Records 1861-1863, Microfilm, 95, ISA.

⁴⁴ Inventory, August 5, 1861, Ordinance Records 1861-1863, Microfilm, 84-85, ISA.; Inventory, September 3, 1861, Ordinance Records 1861-1863, Microfilm, 95, ISA.; Inventory, September 3, 1861, Ordinance Records 1861-1863, Microfilm, 95, ISA.

⁴⁵ Inventory, September 7, 1861, Ordinance Records 1861-1863. Microfilm, 98, ISA.

⁴⁶ Terrell, Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Indiana, 1: 311.

⁴⁷ Irvin McDowell’s Report on the state of his division, January 26, 1862, Official Records of The War of the Rebellion, Series 1, 53 vols., (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1880-1898), 5: 708.

⁴⁸ Rufus R. Dawes, Service with the Sixth Wisconsin Volunteers (Marietta: E.R. Alderman & Sons, 1890), 35.

⁴⁹ Terrell, Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Indiana, 311.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ William R. Moore, Draft I, 69, Collection number M 0212. William Robey Moore Papers and Manuscripts, IHS.

⁵² Moore, Manuscript I, 69.

⁵³ Letter, A.F. Scott to Oliver P. Morton, January 11, 1862, Governor Oliver P. Morton Papers, Microfilm. ISA.

The regiment was moved to the opposite bank of the Potomac, but they were camped “in an old field” where they were “compelled to work in ditches during the day and stand on picket at night for some two weeks,” during which time it rained nearly every day and the men lacked adequate tents and blankets.⁵⁴ These inadequate tents had been provided by the State of Indiana.⁵⁵ By December, the Nineteenth was suffering from much higher sickness and mortality rates than any other regiment stationed along the Potomac.⁵⁶ This compelled the army high command to once again transfer the regiment, this time to Fort Craig, where their health improved.⁵⁷ It is highly doubtful that Morton had any role in the reassigning of the Nineteenth, as A.F. Scott, as agent of the state, wrote to inform Morton of the condition of the Indiana regiments along the Potomac.

As regiments were supplied by the Federal Government, there was little that the State of Indiana could do for its soldiers. William R. Moore noted two instances of the federal government aiding the regiment in the early months of the war. Moore noted that the uniforms issued by the State of Indiana were of a poor quality; in fact, after three months they began to fall apart, earning the regiment the name the “ragged assed Nineteenth.”⁵⁸ Meredith took this issue not to Morton but to President Lincoln. After Meredith explained the situation, Lincoln responded that he would ensure that the regiment received new uniforms, and he did.⁵⁹ The second event occurred while the regiment provided a guard detail at Arlington House. Arlington House served as the headquarters of Major General McDowell’s division. On what Moore called a “cold frosty morning,” McDowell inquired as to the location of his overcoat and Moore made it clear to McDowell that the regiment had none. According to Moore, McDowell responded that he would see to the issue and as there is no complaint about McDowell not seeing to this, it is assumed the regiment received new overcoats.⁶⁰

However, these equipment deficiencies occurred largely at the beginning of the war and also after the ignominious series of defeats culminating at Fredericksburg and the subsequent Mud March. The Mud March is the name of the campaign that Ambrose Burnside attempted in the first weeks of 1863 after the fiasco at Gettysburg. The objective was to turn the flank of the Army of Northern Virginia, but it became bogged down due to inclement weather on the north bank of the Rappahannock and was cancelled. After Joseph Hooker was appointed to command the Army of the Potomac, the Indiana regiments no longer suffered from supply deficiencies. It was reported that in April, less than a month before the Battle of Chancellorsville, the morale of the men was very good and they “were well clothed . . . [and had] good and healthy food.”⁶¹

Regiments were but a small part of an army. These were grouped in brigades and in the federal service these brigades tended to come from a number of states; this reduced the power that a single state politician could have over the regiment. Even though a state politician had little direct influence on most brigades in the federal service, there was indirect influence that could be applied. This indirect influence was channeled through the manipulation of federal politicians and bureaucrats. In the case of the Nineteenth, it was at the brigade level that any favoritism shown to the Nineteenth could be observed. It was noted that “in the politically charged army,” the favoritism shown to the Nineteenth at the brigade level was well known to other officers.⁶²

The Nineteenth was initially assigned to the brigade of Brigadier General Rufus King alongside three Wisconsin regiments. Upon the reforms in the Army of the Potomac in the winter of 1861 and 1862, a new commander was needed for King’s Brigade and this new commander was the recently promoted Brigadier General John Gibbon. Gibbon had been a career regular army officer since his 1847 graduation from West Point until he received a commission in the volunteer service in 1862. Gibbon was one of the officers from the seceded states who chose to stay loyal to the federal government.

Meredith had high praise for the military precision of his regiment in drill and presentation and cited guests, such as Lincoln, certain federal generals, and British officers praising the regiment.⁶³ Regular officers thought otherwise. Irvin McDowell, in a report on the state of his division, noted that the Nineteenth was the least disciplined regiment in King’s Brigade.⁶⁴ In fact, McDowell noted a “special report will be made as to this regiment after a special

⁵⁴ Letter, A.F. Scott to O.P. Morton, January 11, 1862, Governor Oliver P. Morton’s Papers, ISA.

⁵⁵ Letter, David Bachman to Oliver P. Morton, December 2, 1861, Governor Oliver P. Morton’s Papers, Microfilm, ISA. In the same letter it was noted that in contrast to the Nineteenth Indiana, the Sixteenth and Twenty Seventh Indiana were in a good condition.

⁵⁶ Letter, A.F. Scott to O.P. Morton, January 11, 1862, Governor Oliver P. Morton’s Papers, ISA.

⁵⁷ Scott to Morton, January 11, 1862.

⁵⁸ William R. Moore, 87, William Robey Moore Papers and Manuscripts, IHS.

⁵⁹ Moore, 87-88.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁶¹ Letter, P.L. Martin to Oliver P. Morton, April 15, 1863, Governor Oliver P. Morton Papers, Microfilm, ISA.

⁶² Herdegen, *The Men Stood Like Iron*, 29.

⁶³ Solomon Meredith Diary for 1862, Thursday May 22, 1862.; Meredith Diary for 1862, Saturday, July 12, 1862.; Meredith Diary for 1862, Thursday March 27, 1862, Solomon Meredith Papers, IHS.

⁶⁴ Irvin McDowell’s Report on the state of his division, January 26, 1862, Official Records of The War of the Rebellion, 5: 708.

inspection.”⁶⁵ It is quite likely certain problems with the regiment were bound to be a result of their indifferent officers who enjoyed the privilege of being excused from certain duties by General King.⁶⁶

The men and officers of the Nineteenth would find that Gibbon was even more concerned about the discipline of the men than McDowell. In a letter to his wife, Gibbon stated he was “hard at work” drilling the brigade and was attempting to “indoctrinate the officers and men into the ways of the regulars.”⁶⁷ While on campaign in the late spring and summer 1862, Gibbon noted that the brigade was discarding at an alarming rate supplies issued to them by the federal government. In response to this Gibbon issued General Order 58 stating he was unsatisfied with the amount of baggage that his brigade discarded; of his four regiments, he called out the Nineteenth as the regiment most guilty of wasteful discarding of baggage.⁶⁸ Gibbon ordered that if the men of the regiment were not in possession of the clothing that had been issued in May, then their pay would be deducted for the cost of the missing clothing even if the soldier had yet to exceed his yearly allowance for clothing.⁶⁹

Meredith and the Nineteenth had a particular problem with Gibbon and his command style. Private Moore did not take kindly to this, for as a volunteer he merely wished to “know enough of military requirements to put down the rebellion” and then once it was done he was “going home to do other things.”⁷⁰ Many of the other enlisted personnel thought along those lines. Another soldier wrote of Gibbon, “if we ever get in a fight he will be the first to fall.”⁷¹ It is reasonable to suspect that other soldiers in the Nineteenth had similar thoughts of killing Gibbon – though none acted on this desire. In the soldier’s mind, killing Gibbon would have been for the ‘betterment’ of the regiment by eliminating someone for whom they had no respect and who appeared to have no respect for them.

Colonel Meredith took a much more subtle way to try to improve the regiment and remove a man with whom he did not get along. At first Meredith attempted to have Brigade Orders Number 58 rescinded, but he was unsuccessful.⁷² As a player in Indiana politics, Meredith had a number of connections and he attempted to use them to convince McDowell to transfer the regiment to another brigade.⁷³ It was within the purview of divisional and corps commanders to shift regiments within their units to accommodate a variety of issues, such as problems among the officers.⁷⁴

Two allies that Meredith called upon were fellow Hoosiers: Secretary of the Interior Caleb Blood Smith and Senator Joseph A. Wright. On June 18, 1862, Smith wrote a letter to Major General Irvin McDowell explaining his thoughts on the situation in Gibbon’s brigade. He stated there was “a want of cordial feeling and harmony” and the situation was “very uncomfortable [for the regiment] and may prove detrimental to the service.”⁷⁵ While acknowledging his lack of military knowledge and stating that what he knew of Gibbon’s military record led him to have no complaints, he saw “that a mutual confidence and respect between officers and men is an essential element of strength in an army.”⁷⁶ Wright was much more subtle in his request to McDowell than Smith. He simply requested that McDowell place Meredith and the regiment in “a situation as may be in accordance with his [Meredith’s] wishes” so as to allow Meredith and the regiment to be in a situation where they might “distinguish themselves in maintaining the flag of our glorious Union.”⁷⁷ What Meredith clearly wanted was the transfer of the regiment. Morton’s connection to this event is unknown. It would be surprising, however, if Morton was not aware of the issue. The fact that Morton did not attempt to affect a transfer of the regiment shows that it was not his “pet.”

While Meredith was unable to get the regiment transferred, he received something much more valuable. John Gibbon was promoted to command the Second Division of the First Corps after the Battle of Antietam, and Meredith

⁶⁵ McDowell’s Report on the state of his division, January 26, 1862, Official Records of The War of the Rebellion, 5: 708.

⁶⁶ Gibbon, *Recollections*, 35-36.

⁶⁷ Letter, John Gibbon to Frances Gibbon, May 15, 1862, Box 1, Folder 2, John Gibbon Manuscript and Papers, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, quoted in Steven J. Wright, “John Gibbon and the Black Hat Brigade,” in *Giants in Their Tall Black Hats: Essays on the Iron Brigade*, ed., Alan T. Nolan and Sharon Eggleston Vipond (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 55. Quoted from *Iron Brigade General 39*, George G. Meade Jr., editor *The Life and Letters of George Gordon Meade, Major General, United States Army* (New York, 1913), II, 125.

⁶⁸ Orders, Brigade Orders Number 58 for Gibbon’s Brigade. June 13, 1862, Solomon Meredith Papers, IHS.

⁶⁹ Letter Solomon Meredith to JP Wood. June 26, 1862. Solomon Meredith Papers. IHS.; Brigade Orders No. 58. Solomon Meredith Papers. IHS.

⁷⁰ William R. Moore. Manuscript I, 101. William Robey Moore Letters and Manuscripts. IHS.

⁷¹ Thomas Crull. Manuscript. Thomas Crull Letters. Privately held by Thomas R. Pratt, Santa Barbra California, quoted in Alan D. Gaff, *On Many a Bloody Field: Four Years in the Iron Brigade* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996) 133.

⁷² Letter, Solomon Meredith to J.P. Wood, June 26, 1862, Solomon Meredith Diary and Papers. IHS.

⁷³ Initially, Meredith in the company of Indiana’s two senators and the Secretary of the Interior, attempted to convince Secretary of War Stanton to transfer the regiment, Stanton refused this request. Meredith Diary for 1862. Tuesday, June 17, 1862. Solomon Meredith Papers. IHS.

⁷⁴ John Gibbon gave one such an example of this in his *Personal Recollections*. After he was given a division following the Battle of Antietam, he shifted regiments around to produce a combination of brigade commanders that was to his liking. Performing such transfers was fairly easy in the Federal army as senior colonels of brigades often commanded those brigades as a result of a dearth of brigadier generals. John Gibbon, *Personal Recollections of The Civil War* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1928), 100.

⁷⁵ Letter, Caleb B. Smith to Irvin McDowell, June 18, 1862, Box 13, Nineteenth Indiana Letterbook, 1861-1864, Microfilm. ISA.

⁷⁶ Letter, C.B. Smith to Irvin McDowell, June 18, 1862, Box 13, Nineteenth Indiana Letterbook, 1861-1864, ISA.

⁷⁷ Letter, Joseph A. Wright to Irvin McDowell, June 18, 1862, Nineteenth Indiana Letterbook 1861-1864, Microfilm. ISA.

received command of the now famous Iron Brigade, even though other colonels in the brigade were senior to Meredith.⁷⁸

Gibbon, in his *Personal Recollections of the Civil War*, wrote about Meredith receiving command of his old brigade. Even though Gibbon never referred to Meredith by name he wrote that Meredith achieved the rank of brigadier general of volunteers “by political influence . . . a position he was in no way fitted to fill” and “returned to the army with a strong letter from a prominent politician requesting that he be placed in command of my old Brigade.”⁷⁹ Gibbon explained that Meredith received the promotion for “distinguished services in the battle of Antietam, where the Lt. Colonel of this regiment was killed commanding the regiment.”⁸⁰ Meredith, however, was not even on the field at Antietam, let alone in command of the regiment. He was on leave as a result of wounds he had received at the Battle of Brawner’s Farm and was suffering from exhaustion. Gibbon’s suspicions that Meredith received his promotion due to political means were confirmed when he confronted Joseph Hooker over this issue, as it was partly due to Hooker’s recommendation that Meredith received a brigadier generalship. Hooker told Gibbon, after extensive inquiry, “the officer had so many strong friends that he could not resist their solicitations!”⁸¹ It is reasonable to suspect that Morton was one of these friends, but he would have been only one of many friends. It was simply strong connections that won Meredith the promotion. Hooker had made it no secret that he desired the command of the Army of the Potomac, thus securing Meredith’s promotion and putting him in the good graces of men who could place him in that command.

Meredith won more than just the command of the brigade; he won the fight over which officers became the major, lieutenant colonel, and colonel of the regiment. With the respite that occurred after the Battle of Antietam, John Gibbon recommended to George McClellan that Captain John M. Lindley be promoted to lieutenant colonel and Captain William W. Dudley to the rank of major. McClellan endorsed these promotions in a letter to Governor Morton on October 2, 1862.⁸²

Meredith, not surprisingly, had other thoughts about who should fill the vacated positions of lieutenant colonel and major. Meredith recommended to Morton a different arrangement, depriving Captain Lindley of this promotion. Lindley found this arrangement unacceptable as both men promoted (one of whom was Captain Dudley) were both junior to him, and he expressed this opinion to Morton.⁸³ As Lindley was not endorsed by Meredith, it can be assumed that he lacked the correct connections and relationships to those men who could make promotions happen.

Meredith got his promotion to brigadier general soon after this round of promotions, necessitating the filling of his position as colonel. It was typical for the next officer in line of seniority in the staff component to receive promotion when a vacancy opened. Thus it is natural to assume that the newly promoted Samuel Williams and Dudley would both be promoted, thus making the only vacancy that of major. But it was not that easy. With the colonelcy now vacant it was the coveted prize among the officers of the regiment.

Captain Luther B. Wilson of Company E, who was on leave, returned and claimed that he had a commission directly from Morton himself installing him as the new colonel of the Nineteenth.⁸⁴ Needless to say this caused issues in the regiment’s officer corps as the colonelcy was a coveted post for many other officers of the regiment. Even though Meredith had no active role in the regiment (as he was now a brigadier) he saw that it was necessary to give his opinion on the matter. Meredith only knew of this situation from hearsay. He may have wanted Wilson in command of the regiment to appease one of his political allies. Meredith stated that while he would “do anything in his power” for “John Bunson [the political ally in question] and his friends” and “accommodate them through Captain Wilson” it could not be done due to the current political environment of the regiment.⁸⁵ The officers and the men would not accept a Wilson promotion over the heads of his superiors and it would damage the morale of the regiment, particularly now that the army was once again on an active campaign.⁸⁶ Finally this issue was sorted out with the promotion of Williams and Dudley to Colonel and Lieutenant Colonel, respectively.

⁷⁸ When Rufus King was promoted to divisional command, Colonel Lysander Cutler, commander of the Sixth Wisconsin in this brigade, took temporary command of the brigade as the senior colonel. Meredith Diary for 1862, Thursday, March 13, 1862, Solomon Meredith Papers, IHS. Thus simply by seniority, which was one of the key determinisms of promotion, Colonel Lysander Cutler should have been promoted to command the brigade permanently, after Gibbon’s promotion, instead of temporarily as he did. The fact that there were other colonels his senior in the brigade is stated by Meredith himself. Solomon Meredith Diary for 1862, Thursday, March 13, 1862, Solomon Meredith Papers, IHS.

⁷⁹ Gibbon, *Personal Recollections of The Civil War*, 107-108.

⁸⁰ Gibbon, 108.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁸² Letter, George B. McClellan to Oliver P. Morton, October 2, 1861. 19th Indiana Volunteer Infantry Correspondence, Microfilm. ISA.

⁸³ Letter, John M. Lindley to Oliver P. Morton, December 2, 1862, Nineteenth Indiana Letterbook, 1861-1864. Microfilm. ISA.

⁸⁴ Letter, Solomon Meredith to Oliver P. Morton, December 2, 1862, Nineteenth Indiana Letterbook, 1861-1864. Microfilm. ISA.

⁸⁵ Letter, Solomon Meredith to OP Morton, December 2, 1862, Nineteenth Indiana Letterbook ISA.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

The Nineteenth on the whole was no different from other regiments raised by the State of Indiana or those of the other states, thus its designation as a “pet” of Governor Oliver P. Morton needs to be investigated. The enlisted soldiers and the officers were typical of a nineteenth-century regiment. The appointment of Solomon Meredith, while political, was not the only one Governor Morton made nor was Morton only indebted to him and other officers in the regiment. The Nineteenth also did not receive any better treatment than any other regiment, when they were armed and supplied by the state. After the regiment entered into federal service it did not receive better treatment in the field. While the rank and file did not particularly benefit from their connection to Governor Morton, Meredith did benefit occasionally. His connections to the Indiana political machine gave him to leverage to get his way, most important to get a star on his shoulder straps and command of the Iron Brigade.

It is necessary to state that if the Nineteenth was a “pet” of Morton as a result of the favored status that Meredith possessed, then “pet regiments” abounded in the Civil War, for politics was a pastime in nineteenth-century American life. Nearly every single officer, even West Pointers and noncommissioned officers, at one time or another attempted to use their political connections to obtain higher commands or they were the beneficiaries of their higher command as a result of who they knew. Thus, Meredith, and not the Nineteenth Indiana, was Morton’s true pet.
