

## Chapter XI.

Rev. Peter Fossot S. J.

Chaplain 37<sup>th</sup> N. Y. Vol.

This application to Archbishop Hughes for  
a Chaplain to the 37<sup>th</sup> - Father Fossot appointed  
- His zeal in the service and obedience to  
orders - His narrow escape at Fort Mifflin

- His Capture - His duties in camp and  
services in the field - Raising a New Flag  
Father Fossot's prayer and address -

His exertions to raise money to send to Ireland of

His labors in the Interior loved and revered him

Long before the complete organization  
of the 37<sup>th</sup> Regt. of N.Y., formerly known  
as the 75<sup>th</sup> Regt. of State Militia, or  
"Irish Rifles," when, as yet, no com-  
missions had been issued to the  
officers and the men were kept  
in barracks at Broadway Park  
Bloomingdale Road, it was sug-  
gested by Adjutant Cornelius  
Murphy & Dr. O'Meara that  
a deputation should wait on Arch-  
bishop Hughes, requesting him  
to appoint a chaplain for the  
regiment. Accordingly a <sup>committee</sup> deputation  
of the officers waited on his grace  
to represent the general wish of  
all, at the same time requesting  
the appointment of Rev. M. Meagher  
S. J. who had previously when asked  
by the doctor, expressed his willingness  
to accompany the regiment provided  
he could be spared from <sup>his</sup> college duties  
and authorized by his superiors. <sup>But</sup> Other  
important work had been ~~about~~ assigned

This ~~reverend~~ gentleman, who was  
 subsequently sent on a mission  
 to Liebec, and, the Rev Peter Tisdor  
 of the same order, was at once appoint-  
 ed - Father Tisdor <sup>then</sup> ~~was~~ <sup>then</sup> pro-  
 fessor in St John's College, Fordham  
 N.Y. but, at the call of duty, like a true  
 soldier of the cross, with all the aid  
 of his illustrious order ~~to the flower~~  
~~of the Church~~ - he abandoned his  
 books his classes and collegiate  
 quiet for the din of arms, the field  
 of battle, the hardships and priva-  
 tions of a soldier's life, for all of  
 which, surely, there is no one so  
 well adapted, as well by tradition  
 as by profound knowledge of human na-  
 ture, and the military discipline de-  
 served by the followers of Loyola,  
 the Soldier Saint. The Regiment  
 received him with the utmost respect and  
 he forthwith set to work at his sacred calling.  
 Father Tisdor was born a subject of  
 the King of Sardinia, in the year 1823, in  
 the ancient Duchy of Savoy, <sup>Since</sup> ~~which~~ ceded  
 to France to which it originally belonged  
 by right as well as by its kindred popu-  
 lation which is chiefly French. That his  
 early life gave promise of more than ordinary  
 grace and goodness, no one who has had the happiness

of even a casual acquaintance with him, could fail to perceive in later years. His preliminary studies were completed at the Jesuit College of Milan, within shadow of the grand old Cathedral of St. Charles Borromeo, where no doubt he distinguished himself by studious habits, devotion to learning, piety, absorbing zeal and patient perseverance, all which qualities he afterwards exhibited in their greatest perfection, and for practical application to the salvation of his fellow-men, for whose spiritual welfare he always shows the most affectionate solicitude, never wearying in his efforts to bring back ~~the~~ straying sheep by gentle persuasion to the peaceful pasture and the security of the fold. His classical attainments <sup>were</sup> of the highest order.

From the almost monastic seclusion of the College in Milan he was sent to the United States, where he arrived in the year 1846 and immediately commenced his theological studies in St. Johns College, preparatory to ordination for the American Mission. At the conclusion of this course he was ordained by Archbishop Bedini, when that distinguished prelate visited the United States, in the capacity of Papal Nuncio.

When Father Tissot first joined the 37<sup>th</sup>, his health was so much impaired by constant study and close attention to the routine duties of a college professorship, to which his priestly functions were superadded, that some apprehensions were felt and expressed by anxious friends as to his physical ability to endure the hardships of Campaign life, but these fears were speedily dissipated, for before the regiment had been long in camp, a gradual & steady improvement taking

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the plan of extreme debility, the flick of health soon irradiating his pale and wasted cheeks, and emaciation (resulting from ascetic habits, studious & prayerful vigils) giving way to a state of physical health to which he had long been a stranger.

He soon adapted himself, with the well-known facility of his illustrious order to the strictest discipline of a soldier's life, being always one of the first to obey orders, and among the earliest "to pack his knapsack," and fall into line, ready to move, even at the most unreasonable hour, observing a most enviable coolness and self-possession in the midst of the most bewildering bustle and confusion, hurry & excitement, incident to sudden military movements caused by the near approach or presence of danger. On such occasions, it was an impressive and memorable sight to ~~watch~~<sup>see</sup> the good Father's quarters crowded by a throng of eager penitents, who not only ~~submitted~~<sup>contributed</sup> to him ~~all~~ their spiritual treasures, but fairly loaded him down with deposits of money, watches, jewelry, letters, testamentary deeds, and any considerable article which it was desirable to preserve for absent relatives. The good souls thought that he at least would be secure and saved from molestation, but with all this, his burning zeal and devotion to duty often urged him into the thickest of the fight, and on more than one occasion his life was in imminent danger, for at Fran Oaks his horse was shot under him,

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and again he was taken prisoner and carried to Richmond. Whether he was obliged to go on foot, the enemy having appropriated his horse.

When the orders to move admitted of no delay, and the men could not leave their ranks, he was constantly among them, encouraging, advising, and listening to hasty communications, and when immediate action was imminent and there was no time for even a hurried prayer, he used to pronounce a general benediction which all received with bared heads, reverently bowed. After such an <sup>inspiration</sup> even a coward learns to be a soldier and the brave man is invincible.

During an engagement he was hovering around the ~~field~~ of battle, riding back and forth, whenever the indications were that the fight was at its hottest; ready to succor all, without exception, physically & spiritually, and to the wounded soldier no face was more familiar <sup>than</sup> that of the Chaplain of the 37<sup>th</sup>. Every one knew and loved him, from the General in chief down to the ~~officer's servant~~ lowest camp follower.

After the battle, when his labors accumulated to such an extent, ~~that~~ and his activity became so energetic, that, for a delicate frame, his physical endurance seemed superhuman. ~~He~~ was sustained only by the most intense interest and zeal he manifested for the service of his Master.

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In camp his duties were equally engrossing. Before his own quarters could be rendered tolerably comfortable, his chapel claimed the first attention. Mass was celebrated every morning, and often that confessions were heard, letters written and received, visiting flocking from all parts of the army to avail themselves of the good father's services - Among them it was quite common to see officers of every grade from the Major General to the second Lieutenant, kneeling devoutly in the little chapel preparatory to confession and communion - The French princes de Joinville & Charles were frequent visitors both at Sunday Mass and on other occasions - Numerous converts were received and instructed, among whom were three Major Generals & their families and unknown the respect entertained for Father Dissot that crowds attended his services from all the neighboring regiments in preference to those of their own chaplains, and so universal was the feeling of reverence for his character that Protestant chaplains yielded him the palm with an easy grace. But his modesty and humility were such as to disarm even jealousy, and <sup>his</sup> great toleration and love for all endeared him to even the hardened and depraved who often the good man would feign a virtue they

could not feel.

With all his intense zeal and absorbing interest in the work of his master, he was never morose, dull or forbidding in general society; on the contrary, he was quietly gay, and playful as a boy, interesting himself in the conversation whatever it might be, chatty, social, unassuming, full of charity for the great and little foibles of poor humanity, so gentle in reproof that the heart was touched <sup>at once</sup> and humbled without an effort. A splendid scholar in ancient & modern literature, he rarely showed his great learning, except to a bookworm like himself, and his delight was to puzzle his companions not so much by a display of knowledge, as by asking for information which he alone could impart. Extremely temperate in eating and drinking, he would be naturally a great restraint on the freedom & indulgence of a military mess-table, but he had the happiest knack of seeming to ignore the little excesses or improprieties of those with whom he associated, so that the fault was corrected and cottoned for, spontaneously, as it were, but in reality because of the silent influence of his presence. Thus without seeming to do so, he gave tone to his associates who learned, apparently without an effort to adapt themselves to the good man's example, and the officers & men were always a model of propriety of quiet rational employment.

He took a deep interest in every thing connected with the Regiment, its good name, the temporal as well as spiritual welfare of all its members. For all these purposes, he kept a roster of the entire Regiment, which included not only their names, but their addresses at home and the names of their nearest relations. This he kept with such perfect system that he could frequently refer to for information which could not be obtained from the proper officers.



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Into all the patriotic celebrations of the  
time he entered with the heartiest concurrence,  
and in this way nothing was ever attempted  
without his cooperation and approval. Thus,  
while the regiment was encamped near Alexandria  
in the early part of January 1862, on the occasion of  
raising a new national flag, the ceremony  
was marked by a most impressive  
religious ceremonial. An altar was erected  
at the foot of the flag-staff, and after Mass  
at which the whole brigade assisted, inclu-  
ding General Richardson & <sup>my</sup> ~~his~~ Father  
Jesse pronounced a fervent prayer,  
"begging God to defend the cause of right  
and unity against rebellion war and  
dissension of every kind. He prayed that  
peace with its countless blessings would  
again pervade the land, from the snow clad  
hills of Canada to the Gulf of Mexico, and  
East and West from Ocean to Ocean. For more  
than three fourths of a century, the <sup>banner of</sup> stars & stripes  
had been the emblem of a united people;  
had floated proudly amid the boundless wealth  
of commerce; in every sea and mart,  
in every quarter of the globe, respected  
and feared by despots, but to peoples who  
longed and yearned for liberty, it was a  
beacon light, guiding them westward to liberty  
and empire, "no pent up Ithaca", but  
a boundless wealth of continents. He  
hoped his hearers of the 37<sup>th</sup> would bring  
back the flag without a stain of dishonor  
imprinted on its sacred folds. He exhorted  
them to behave like men and good Christians,  
and thereby merit honor and reward not alone





Bulletin which was publicly acknowledged with thanks <sup>+ blessings</sup> to the subscribers.

Occasionally the good forest would be molested into an impromptu race either by the Colonel or some other mounted officer, especially if then happened to be any question of his horse's speed or endurance. And, though not a good horseman, he made it a point not to be beaten too often or too much. He thus acquired considerable skill in riding and it served him well in the prosecution of his sacred functions throughout the Army and also in regaining his health and keeping it up to the standard required by his incessant labors.

~~Altho' my friends and countrymen!~~  
~~When you need a champion again,~~  
~~the best man for your money and~~  
~~your noble welfare is the learned~~  
~~Jesuit, who is, far excelling the~~  
~~flower of Chivalry with the same~~  
~~devotion to his sacred calling is so for-~~  
~~gorgetfully intense and absorbing, that~~  
~~earth and hell combined cannot crush~~  
~~it, even martyrdom serves only to inflame~~  
~~it more and make it triumphant in~~  
~~the end; whose knowledge of mankind is~~  
~~so extensive that he is near a palook,~~  
~~though his mission may be, in the most~~  
~~widely separated regions, in the full blaze~~  
~~of civilized intelligence, or the lowest stratum~~  
~~of human existence, when the soul seems to~~  
~~be a mere animal instinct, and the only~~

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beam of intelligence that illumines the  
dense darkness of the brutal savage is  
the agent of cruelty and destruction.

Good bye, dear Father Piest! May  
you live long to bless mankind and  
guide the rising generations, who sadly need  
your example and teaching. And O, be  
member <sup>your</sup> poor "Irish Rifles", in your  
holy prayers. And when sin and temp-  
tation shall assail us, your sweet  
sad pitying face will rise up before  
our mental sight and beckon us  
once more onto the right way and  
be our guiding star to Heaven.

D.P. This is the best I can  
do - I hope with answer -  
If you could be so kind as to  
write me I will have a proof  
of this  
D.P.