

Daniel Edgar Sickles, Major General US Army

One of the more controversial Union generals, Daniel Edgar Sickles, was born on October 20, 1819, in New York City to Susan Marsh Sickles and George Garrett Sickles, an old Knickerbocker family. He studied law at New York University and upon graduation he assessed his chances for success in various fields and decided on politics. He opened a law practice, joined the Democratic political machine Tammany Hall, which controlled New York City, received an appointment to the American Legation in London, won a seat in the New York State Senate in 1855 and was elected to the House of Representatives in 1856 and 1858.



While Sickles gained importance in the political world, his scandals became more notorious. He was infamous for womanizing and engaging prostitutes. He opened his law office without having passed the bar. In 1853, he married the daughter of a close friend, he was 33 years-old and his wife, Teresa Bagioli (Photo), was fifteen and pregnant. He was censured by the New York State Assembly for bringing a prostitute onto the senate floor. The same prostitute accompanied him on a trip to England where he presented her to Queen Victoria using the name of a political opponent.

Despite all his scandals, when he was elected to the US House of Representatives, he and his wife were welcomed into the cream of Washington's social circles. Teresa was a beautiful young lady and could speak five languages. Sickles was an accomplished politician who could charm anyone he met. One of the couple's closest friends was a United States attorney, Philip Barton Key (Photo). Philip was the son of Francis Scott Key, author of *The Star-Spangled Banner*. "Whenever Sickles had to work late or was out with another woman, he would ask Key to accompany his wife to social events. This led to the relationship between Key and Teresa to exceed the bounds of friendship. Following Sickles' reelection to the house in the 1858-49 winter, the affair between the lovers was one of Washington's best-known secrets, but Sickles was totally ignorant of the affair until February, when someone slipped him an anonymous note with details of the affair. Beside himself over Teresa's infidelity, he forced her to write a detailed confession and sign it with her maiden name. The next day he was overcome with anger when he spotted Key sending her a signal from outside the house.



himself.

Sickles grabbed two derringers and a revolver and chased Key to Lafayette Park, directly across Pennsylvania Avenue from the White House. In the park, he shot Key in the groin. As one adulterer begged for mercy, the other fired at point-blank range (Photo). Key was struck in the chest and fatally wounded. Upon regaining his composure and realizing he had just committed murder before dozens of witnesses, Sickles walked to the attorney general's office and surrendered

Sickles pleaded not guilty by reason of temporary insanity, the first time that plea had been used in the United States. His attorney was Edward Stanton (Photo), later Lincoln's Secretary of War. Stanton made Sickles to be the real victim, having been betrayed by the lecherous Key who corrupted the 23-year-old wife of an honorable husband. He claimed that Key's death—or Sickles' insanity, which caused it—was completely justified. The verdict came in as not guilty and newspapers across the country praised the verdict as justice having been done. Sickles was soon to lose the goodwill of the public and the press he had gained as a result of the trial and the verdict. Sickles forgave Teresa and they were again man and wife but remained estranged.



His wife had betrayed him, deceived him and caused the death of a man through her adultery. How could an honorable man ever forgive her? Sickles' popularity, so recently never higher, plummeted, and he did not seek reelection in 1860. In March of 1861, he returned to New York as an unpopular and unemployed politician who was ignored by many of his former friends and in total disgrace.

After the secession of South Carolina and Lincoln's call for 75,000 volunteer troops, Sickles saw an opportunity to regain his lost prestige. Becoming a military hero was a lot more glorious than serving the public as a politician. He immediately sought New York Governor Edwin Morgan's permission to raise eight companies of volunteers.

Permission was granted and Sickles immediately went to work. He chose Captain William Wiley as his second in command and they recruited many of their old Tammany hall friends to bring in volunteers. They contacted newspapers for press coverage and touted their unit as being composed entirely of "picked men, Democratic...in politics, but Union to the very marrow of the back bone." They had filled their quota within two weeks and Governor Morgan authorized Sickles to recruit four more regiments to form a full brigade, and this would mean that as commander Sickles would most likely become a Brigadier General.

The pursuit of that rank would become Sickles' obsession in the coming months. From disgraced politician to respected general was a phoenix's rebirth, and Sickles worked feverishly to complete his transformation. Sickles called on men of importance for support and spoke wherever potential recruits might assemble. An old friend of his, Charles K. Graham, was persuaded to take charge of a regiment. Graham had served in the U.S. Navy during the Mexican War and was working as a construction engineer at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, a position of considerable power and patronage. Graham brought with him not just military experience and managerial expertise, but also more than 400 Navy Yard workers and sailors. Sickles had connections with the New York Fire Department, and an entire regiment of firemen became the brigade's 4th Regiment. They were Zouaves, imitators of colorful French Algerian troops. Sickles also found real Zouaves, French veterans of the Crimean War, who were living in New York. These men joined an independent Zouave Company that would become Company B of the Fifth Regiment.

The congressman's past disgraces were forgotten in a time of crisis and men signed up to be part of the brigade the famous Sickles promised would be the best in the Union. For all his charms, it was apparent he was driven by more than mere patriotism. He was

a Democrat, many of whose former political friends were now in the service of the Confederacy. He was from New York City, whose economy rested on Southern merchandise and whose streets teemed with poor immigrants. He represented Tammany Hall, the corrupt political machine that relied on the votes of those very immigrants. In short, many viewed Sickles' city, his background and his brigade as morally bankrupt.

Farmers and townsmen of Republican upstate New York immediately complained to Governor Morgan that the "state" brigade was drawn too much from Democratic New York City. They resented that their counties would not be included in the brigade and that their state would be represented by a murderer and scoundrel.

Morgan ordered Sickles to disband 32 of the 40 companies he had raised. Sickles was outraged. He was being told to send away willing volunteers when the country was in danger. What's more, with the loss of his brigade, he would no longer be eligible for a general's star. Morgan, Sickles believed, had no authority over what he saw as his brigade. He had recruited the men without any help from the state government. Sickles departed for Washington to plead his case with President Lincoln. He urged the president to make his brigade a part of the Federal troops and take them from under the control of Morgan.

President Lincoln desperately needed these men to put down the rebellious South, plus they were mostly Democrats which would show that the North was united in the desire to hold the Union together. On the other hand, Lincoln could not afford to offend the governor of the most populous state and delayed his decision. Sickles returned to New York to train his troops until the Secretary of War Cameron addressed and solved the problem.

By June of 1861, Sickles had a real problem, the state of New York ordered the unit disbanded and there were no resources for pay or operating support coming from the state or the Union. All the bills were going directly to Sickles and his problems were rapidly mounting. He was in debt far more than he could ever pay, he had no real authority over the men, even though he called himself general, his troops were beginning to leave. If his plan failed he would again be ruined, lose his chance for a generalship, and be sued by his creditors.

Sickles was finally saved because of the troubles his country was having. The Union badly needed the troops which caused Cameron to accept Sickles and his men. They were sworn into service as 1st through the 5th U.S. Volunteer Infantry Regiments. This allowed the federal government to pay for the soldiers' upkeep and provide for their equipment. Daniel Sickles had emerged from his dispute with Governor Morgan victorious. However, it did not name Sickles as the leader nor did it pay for his debts.

The First Battle of Bull Run, aka the Battle of Manassas, would save Sickles again. When this battle began, the Union soldiers were sure this great battle would put an end to the Rebel uprising and their service would be at an end. It did not quite work out that way. The Rebels put the Yankees to flight which left Washington exposed to a Rebel attack. All available units were called in to defend the city. Sickles' regiment headed South and he left Captain William Wiley to worry about the debts. This almost ruined Wiley who received no help from Sickles, and he came to despise his former friend.

When reaching Washington, and coming under the command of regular Army generals, Sickles brigade would not be disbanded or expected to pay its own way. However, Sickles was still not given command of his unit. All generals had to be approved by the Senate and this caused some problems for Sickles. If he could kill his wife's lover, he might make some rash decisions in battle. The Senate was controlled by a Republican majority and Sickles was a Democrat. Many of his Democrat friends had sided with the Confederates and there was a concern he might take his brigade to the South as well. These factors held up his confirmation through the winter of 1861-62 and on May 13, 1862, Sickles (Photo) was finally confirmed as a brigadier general by the Senate in a vote of 19 to 18. He was assigned command of his brigade, known as the Excelsior Brigade. He was not often in command of the brigade—only at Fair Oaks and the Seven Days battles. While he was recruiting replacements for his command back in New York, he missed the Second Battle of Bull Run (Manassas). But he was promoted to corps commander before the next big battle at Chancellorsville.



On the second day of Gettysburg he suffered what was probably his most notorious event of time in combat. He was assigned to protect the Federal's left flank along the Round Top. He felt his position was too low and too long, and in defiance of direct orders to the contrary, he advanced the Corps into the famous Peach Orchard. This resulted in Confederate General James Longstreet's command overrunning the III Corp and causing its disappearance. Sickles was always courageous on the battlefield, but during his withdrawal from the Peach Orchard he took a shell in his right leg and within half an hour the leg was amputated. He also suffered the wrath of General George Meade, Commander of the Army of the Potomac. Sickles donated the severed leg (Photo) to the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, where it resides today. He would often visit his leg at the Museum. He was denied further field command and was assigned a series of special missions by the War Department.



After the war, he was made colonel of the 42nd Infantry when the regular army was reorganized in 1866. In 1867, he was brevetted regular army major general for his role in the battle and three decades later was awarded the Medal of Honor. In 1868, President Lincoln dispatched him on a tour of Union-held Southern territory for an appraisal of the effect of amnesty, Negro progress and Reconstruction

He next performed a diplomatic mission to Colombia; served as Military Governor of South Carolina; and in 1869 retired from the Army with the rank of Major General in the Regular Army. At that time, President Grant appointed him Minister to Spain, where he was chiefly distinguished diplomatically by becoming the intimate friend of Isabella, the former Queen of Spain. Teresa took ill and died of tuberculosis in 1867 at about the age of thirty-one. Sickles remarried a young Spanish woman he met while he was minister to Spain, and had two children with her.

He served again in Congress from New York, 1893-95; and for many years was the Chairman of the New York State Monuments Commission, a position from which he was removed in 1912 by reason of alleged misuse of funds. Sickles lived out the remainder of his life in New York City, dying on May 3, 1914 at the age of 94. His funeral was held at St. Patrick's Cathedral in Manhattan on May 8, 1914. He was buried in Section 2 of Arlington National Cemetery.

