


Brigadier General Daniel McCook Jr.

“Colonel Dan of the Tribe of Dan”

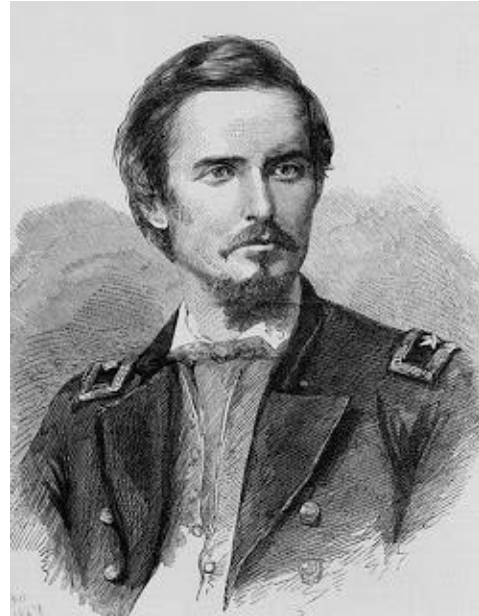
By Arley McCormick

 The day before his death, the members of the McCook family gathered to hear an official of the Federal Army inform Colonel Daniel McCook, Jr. that he had been promoted to the rank of brigadier general. Only 29-years-old, General McCook, uncomfortable and struggling to breathe, politely rejected the appointment saying, “It is too late now.” He died on July 17, 1864 from the wound sustained at the Dead Angle on Kennesaw Mountain, Georgia.

Daniel Jr. was the sixth son and the eighth of twelve siblings born to Daniel, a Presbyterian elder and Sunday-school superintendent, and Martha McCook at Carrollton, Ohio on July 22, 1834. All ten of their sons fought for the Union although not all during the Civil War.

Daniel, Sr. had two brothers, John and George, and between them, either fifteen or seventeen (the historical record is not clear) served. Hence the moniker “The Fighting McCooks” became a familiar term in the North during the war. Occasionally, people would speak of the “Tribe of Dan” or the “Tribe of John,” a reference to these warrior families. The McCooks had a reputation as leaders in the community with a manner about them that was regal, compassionate, and tempered with good judgment. Daniel, Jr. enjoyed reading, quoting poetry, and seemed to enjoy the fair ladies in any community where he lived.

When it was time for a formal education, Daniel, Jr. went south to LaGrange College in North Alabama. The college was respected and revered for a disciplined curriculum that included geography, mineralogy, grammar, arithmetic and the



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study of classics, both Greek and Latin. Upon graduating from LaGrange in 1858, he returned home to Steubenville, Ohio to study law.

The entire country was consumed in a hostile political climate. It was no surprise that Dan McCook, Jr. followed the action and on January 1, 1859 he added his name to the partnership of a Leavenworth, Kansas law firm that became *Sherman, Ewing, & McCook*. Leavenworth was a bustling little city competing with the Missouri cities of St. Joseph and Kansas City for people and industry and near the center of the most savage repercussions to the Kansas-Nebraska Act. It was an ideal location for an ambitious lawyer.

William Tecumseh Sherman took him under his wing and became well acquainted with Dan McCook’s skills. Daniel’s quick

thinking was very useful. Late in the spring of 1859, an Irishman came into the Leavenworth law office with a legal problem regarding the boundary of his rented property. Sherman, jotting down the necessary information, quickly passed the case to McCook. Over a month passed and the excited Irishman returned to the office looking for McCook. In Daniel's absence, he spoke to Sherman again explaining he must go to court immediately and Sherman sent him to the court to find McCook. The Irishman quickly returned and Sherman found himself poorly prepared and in front of the judge requesting a continuance. The offended party and his witnesses were present and standing before the judge. The judge denied the continuance and Sherman lost the case. Upon returning to the law office Daniel was informed of the judge's decision. He thought for a minute and then advised his client that the judge's decision would take 10 days to enforce and he should immediately return to his shanty, pick it up, and move it to unclaimed property there-by he would not have anything on the disputed property that could be confiscated or subject to the award decree. The Irishman followed the recommendation and thus avoided further financial loss.

1859 passed and the political climate became more aggressive and violent. John Brown raided Harper's Ferry in October and was hanged in December. As the divisiveness between North and South deepened, young Daniel made every effort to lead a normal life. In 1860, Daniel McCook's reputation as a lawyer was well established. Julia Elizabeth Tibbs of Platt County, Missouri captured his heart and they were married that year.

While Daniel, Jr. was fighting legal battles in Kansas, 63-year-old Daniel, Sr. was making ready to fight a battle of a different sort in Washington D.C. On Friday, April 12, 1861, at 4:30 a.m., Confederate batteries

fired on Fort Sumter. The following day, the fort was surrendered and evacuated. Six days later, Daniel McCook, Sr. and 60 other western supporters conducted dismounted drill on the velvet carpet of the East Room of the White House. The men were recruited earlier in the lobby of the Willard Hotel and marched up Pennsylvania Avenue and announced to the president they had come to save him from the hands of 15,000 Southerners rumored to be marching toward the capital to hang him.

On May 1, 1861, Daniel McCook, Jr. became the captain of the Shield Grays, an infantry company formed at Leavenworth and on June 3rd, they were ushered into the 1st Kansas Infantry. Nearly a month later on July 1, 1861 his brother, Private Charles Morris McCook, was killed at the Battle of Bull Run. Their father watched the Confederates overwhelm his brother's unit and shouted for him to surrender, but he reportedly responded, "Father, I will never surrender to a rebel!" Private McCook was dead at the age of 19.

The 1st Kansas Infantry marched off to the August 10, Battle of Wilson's Creek but Daniel fell ill with pneumonia and missed it. The 1st Kansas Infantry took massive casualties and after the battle, Daniel McCook's brother, Brigadier General Alexander McCook, secured an appointment for him as Assistant Adjutant General on his staff with the 2nd Division Volunteers of the Army of the Ohio. Captain McCook joined the division on November 9, 1861. With his brother's division, he crossed the Tennessee River onto Pittsburg Landing on April 7, 1862, where he was involved in General Grant's counterattack on the left flank of the Union line. He accompanied the division to the siege of Corinth that began in April 1862.

In May 1862, the Ohio Governor, David Tod, requested that young Dan McCook come to Columbus and recruit soldiers for

the newly formed 52nd Ohio Infantry. His recruits were from various counties and population centers in Ohio. On July 15, 1862, McCook was appointed the colonel of the new regiment and promptly and affectionately referred to as “Colonel Dan” by his men.

August 6, 1862 was another devastating day for the McCook family. Brigadier General Robert McCook, a respected and revered commander who had returned to his unit prematurely, ill and not totally recovered from a wound, was shot and killed by Rebel partisan cavalry near Huntsville, Alabama. The uproar and misinformation surrounding his death spread quickly throughout the north and all the way to the White House. Colonel Dan was training, equipping, and preparing his regiment for the front line when he received the news. He had little time to mourn, as his regiment loaded on trains on the August 25, destined for Louisville, Kentucky. In Cincinnati, the train halted for the representatives of the city to present a silk national flag inscribed “*McCook’s Avengers*” in reference to the killing of his brother who was 34 years of age. The regiment arrived in Lexington the following day, and the first mission was to provide the rear guard for units badly defeated at the Battle of Richmond, Kentucky. The 52nd Ohio arrived in Louisville on September 6 and became part of the 36th Brigade, 11th Division, Army of the Ohio.

Colonel Daniel McCook moved up to command the 36th Brigade in the 11th Division, III Corps at the Battle of Perryville, which took place on October 8, 1862. He provided valuable service and was held in reserve. His cousin, Major General Edward Moody McCook, commanded the II Corps. The Union Army reorganized several times in the months following Perryville and Stones River. Daniel was in command of the 2nd Brigade, 2nd Division, Reserve Corps,

Army of the Cumberland when more bad news was delivered. Daniel McCook Sr., his father, and the patriarch of the “Tribe of Dan,” was killed at the Battle of Buffington Island on July 19, 1863. Daniel McCook Jr. would soldier on, participating in several minor engagements between Perryville and Chickamauga. The real trial began, however, when Sherman initiated the Atlanta Campaign.

After Chickamauga, Dan’s brother Alexander was dragged through court-martial proceedings for his conduct while in command. He was relieved from command and no longer served in the Western Theater. Daniel, a colonel commanding a brigade – normally a brigadier general’s position – was no longer held in reserve. His brigade would participate aggressively in the Atlanta Campaign and was nearly always engaged in the fighting.

Kennesaw Mountain loomed near the prize – Atlanta, Georgia. Colonel Daniel McCook Jr., Commander of the 3rd Brigade in the 2nd Division of the XIV Corps; Army of the Cumberland, met his Waterloo on June 27, 1864. The entire leadership from General Henry Thomas down had surveyed the Confederate defense along the ridge line, and determined that Cheatham Hill offered the best opportunity for successfully routing them. It was the shortest distance between the Union line and the flags of the two seasoned Confederate divisions of Major Generals Patrick R. Cleburne and Benjamin F. Cheatham, facing them along a fish hook.

Even with the shorter distance, it would have been difficult. The units had to cross a small valley with a creek, up a gentle slope toward a wooded ridge and hilltop where the opposing troops had dug in with solid earthwork, entanglements out in front, and the flanks of the Union regiments would be exposed to artillery as well as infantry weaponry. As the brigade officers mused that this was the best opportunity for

success, they knew speed would be essential. Once on the move, they must keep moving and quickly.

At sunrise, the units marched from their assembly area to within 600 yards of the Rebels. The brigades formed in closely packed columns with ten paces between each line. On the order, “check cartridge boxes” then “fix bayonets,” troops knew battle was imminent. Colonel Daniel McCook Jr. had dismounted his horse and strolled to the front of his command. Along the way, he could hear occasional recommendations from his officers and men to remain at the rear of the column. He turned, faced his command, offering encouragement and a quote from Horatius:

Then out spake brave Horatius,
The Captain of the Gate:
To every man upon this earth
Death cometh soon or late.
And how can man die better
Than facing fearful odds,
For the ashes of his fathers,
And the temples of his gods.

If the Confederate line had not observed the Union preparation, they soon heard and felt 15 minutes of artillery fire raining down. Then there was silence. The Union line was not ready. At this hour, the direction was to wait while the leading regiments aligned properly. Two cannons would fire to signal the advance. There was no doubt the Confederate line was waiting – ready to unleash hell.

It was mid-morning before the signal came and the trumpets blared, the unfurled flags waved in a slight breeze that marked the center of each regiment. McCook’s skirmishers moved out from beneath the cover of brush and trees followed by the waves of regiments.

The time had come. “Quick March!” came the order, followed by the instruction,

“Maintain your Interval!” A final warning from the commanders, “Steady boys!” was followed by the release, “Double quick!” Over 1800 yelling blue clad demons of the brigade charged up the slope toward the Rebel line.

Patrick Cleburne’s division and artillery crews watched as the Federals headed their way. The first Federal Regiment was 40 yards away from the breastwork when the Confederate line erupted. It smashed the heads of the Union columns and orderly redeployment became impossible. The surge of blue continued to move as men at the rear pushed and crowded, tripping and falling, making it impossible to maintain order or lines. Each soldier struggled alone in a crowd running pell-mell into the slaughter. Four color bearers fell in turn and there were no tactics, just fighting with both sides firing their weapons into one another’s faces, stabbing with their bayonets, swinging their rifle butts like bats, and throwing stones or chunks of wood. Dead bodies collapsed on top of the wounded. Rifles became foul with burnt powder.

Reinforcement for the Rebels came as Col. Daniel McCook, Jr. reached and leapt to the top of the parapet, slashing with his sword at Rebels who tried to stop him with their bayonets. He bellowed above the melee, “Forward the flag!”

A private screamed at the commander, “Colonel Dan, for God's sake get down, they will shoot you!”

“God damn you!” the Colonel yelled back, “Attend to your own business!” The private’s observation was realized as a Rebel bullet pierced his chest and McCook fell down from the earthwork onto the bodies of his fallen troops.

“Stick it to them, boys,” he gasped as he was quickly carried to the rear. The “Dead Angle” was indeed the end of the battle, the war, and the life of Colonel Daniel McCook Jr.

The Colonel was removed from the battlefield and treated at an aid station but it was certain that the bullet piercing the right side of his chest, four inches below the collar bone, struck the lung. The only possible result was a slow, lingering death. Arrangements were made quickly to remove him to his home in Steubenville, Ohio.

On July 17, 1864 he died. The final remarks he made to his command must certainly have been learned at LaGrange

College in Alabama. He served in a Brigadier General position from September 1862 until his death. Another "Fighting McCook" was heralded in the papers and gazettes around the north as the fourth McCook to sacrifice his life for the cause. His death left his wife, Julia, and newborn baby girl without a husband and father. His remains were buried in the Spring Grove Cemetery, Spring Grove, Ohio.



The Narrative can be found in the TVCWRT book published in 2012 titled, *North Alabama Civil War Generals; 13 Wore Gray, the Rest Blue*. Complements of the TVCWRT.