

AN IRISHMAN AND A CAUSE

Mike Bell

In the acclaimed film, *Gettysburg*, whenever General John Buford (Sam Elliot) is seen with his staff, one of those staff members is often in the shot with his hand on his hip. Not something many folks would likely pick up on, but I knew I had seen that pose before.



Gen. John Buford and aides. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Civil War Photographs, reproduction number LC-DIG-cwpbh-03218. (Cropped for presentation.)

In the photo, Captain Myles Keogh, a member of General Buford's staff, is standing to the left of the general, with his hand on his hip and his other on the back of Buford's chair. Clearly the actor playing Keogh saw this picture and chose to replicate it throughout the film.

But who was Myles Keogh? Born in Ireland in 1840, Keogh had immigrated to America soon after the Civil War broke out. He already had military experience, having served with the papal armies during a crisis in 1860. He was decorated and later served in the Papal Guards.

In short order upon his arrival in the states, Keogh secured a captain's commission. In those early months, he would serve on the staff of both General James Shields and later General McClellan. He saw a great deal of action in the eastern theater, including time as an aide to Buford. He was with Buford until the general's passing in December of 1863. Keogh would later serve under General George Stoneman and would see action in the western theater, including time as a prisoner of war. When the war ended, Keogh held a brevet rank of lieutenant colonel.

He was soon assigned to the 7th Cavalry as a captain and fought across the plains with General George Armstrong Custer. It is thought that Keogh introduced Custer to the Irish drinking song *Garryowen*, a song which became the Seventh's own.

On June 25, 1876, Keogh rode into battle along the banks of the Little Bighorn as commander of Co. I of the 7th. Although the hard drinking and hard fighting Irish soldier of fortune did not survive, his horse Comanche did.



"Comanche." [1887]. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, John C.H. Grabill Collection, reproduction number LC-DIG-ppmsc-02554. (Cropped for presentation.)

Originally buried on the battlefield, Keogh's remains were later reinterred at Ft. Hill Cemetery in Auburn, NY. Nearby are the graves of fellow Civil War

veterans General Emory Upton and Harriet Tubman, as well as Secretary of State William H. Seward. It is fitting that four who fought so hard to preserve the union keep watch together over our nation's progress.



Grave of Colonel Keogh [April 1879]. Photo courtesy of the Montana Historical Society Research Center. (Cropped for presentation.)



Myles Keogh gravesite, Ft. Hill Cemetery, Auburn, NY. Photo by author.