

Gen. James J. Byrne

Abt. 1841 - August 13, 1880

The early history of James J. Byrne is a bit of a mystery. Born to unknown parents on an unknown date sometime around 1841.¹ Some sources stated he was born in Ireland, while other sources state he was born in New York. Regardless, he was likely of Irish descent.

Not much is known about James until the start of the Civil War as he enlisted into the 163rd Infantry on July 28, 1862 in New York City at the age of 21. On October 15, 1862, he was promoted to the rank of Major. Within just a few months of his promotion, he was resigned to the 63rd New York² Infantry and later moved to be in the 18th New York Cavalry at the rank of Colonel. During his time with the 18th New York Cavalry, he reached his top rank of General. He remained with the unit until he mustered out on May 31, 1866 in Victoria, TX.³ After the war, James stayed in Texas and in 1868 he was a U.S. Marshall for the Eastern District of Texas. By 1869, there was even mention that he would be a good candidate to be Governor of Texas. It was said that he was an “educated and accomplished gentleman, honorable, generous [sic] in all instincts, won his spurs and his rank by gallantly fighting for the Union, when its very existence was a hazard...He was a fighting general during the war, and carries honorable scars on his person to attest his bravery.”

By the mid 1870's, James relocated to Fort Worth where he became a land agent and surveyor for the Texas & Pacific Railway. James married Mrs. Lilly *Loving* Wroten of Fort Worth on September 20, 1876 in Dallas, Texas. He was noted as being the “handsome young General.” The couple honeymooned in Marshall, Texas before returning to Fort Worth.⁴ Less than one year after his marriage to Lilly, they experienced the birth of their first and only child, Ida Delacy Bryne, on September 9, 1877. Sadly, Ida died less than 2 years later on June 2, 1879 in Fort Worth.

By 1880, James was still working for the T&P Railway and now had the title of Chief of Surveying.⁵ Most of his work led him to survey work in West Texas. “In the summer of 1880, Byrne set off on a 600 mile trip west to El Paso to find the best route through the Guadalupe Mountains. Once in El Paso, Byrne continued onward toward Fort Quitman (located South East of El Paso) en route to Fort Davis. Among the members of the T&P survey party working in the

¹ *New York in the War of the Rebellion*, 3rd ed. Frederick Phisterer. Albany: J. B. Lyon Company, 1912, pg. 1103. New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center. Accessed on 16 Sept 2023; https://museum.dmna.ny.gov/application/files/7915/5421/3771/163rd_Infantry_CW_Roster.pdf.

² *New York in the War of the Rebellion*, 1912, pg. 1103.

³ *New York in the War of the Rebellion*, 3rd ed. Frederick Phisterer. Albany: J. B. Lyon Company, 1912, pg. 1089. New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center. Accessed on 16 Sept 2023; https://dmna.ny.gov/historic/reghist/civil/rosters/cavalry/18thCavCW_Roster.pdf

⁴ “Connections: Premonitions and Pirouettes.” *Hometown by Handlebar*, 13 August 2022. Accessed 16 Sept 2023; <https://hometownbyhandlebar.com/?p=3600>.

⁵ “J.J. Bryne, Land Locator and Surveyor,” *Fort Worth Daily Democrat*, Fort Worth, Texas, Vol. 3, No. 350, Pg. 4, Ed. 1 Wednesday, August 20, 1879. Accessed 16 Sept 2023 ; <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph1048968/m1/4>.

area was Pat Dowling, an infamous Irishman and former soldier. Dowling and Byrne spent some of the long, lonely nights drinking together. One night at Ysleta Station the talk turned to death and dying, and Byrne blurted out, 'Pat, I'm not afraid to die, but I don't want to be buried where the wolves can get me.' The men made a solemn pledge to each other and shook hands to seal it: If either were killed, the other would return his body to civilization for a decent burial. It was after this Byrne penned a couple of lengthy and detailed farewell letters to his wife." Oddly this premonition was about to come true.

"On Tuesday morning, August 10, Byrne set off from Fort Quitman...headed for Fort Davis in a ...stagecoach. The only other person with him was his driver. They were about nine miles from Fort Quitman, just passing Quitman Canyon, when intercepted by a band of Apaches. Bullets soon smacked through the passenger compartment, striking Byrne in the hip and small of the back. Although his hip was shattered, neither wound was immediately fatal. One witness to the poor health of James said "I never saw a man die braver in my life." James died on August 13, 1880 and was initially buried at the post cemetery at Fort Quitman.⁶

True to this promise, Pat Dowling would later go back to retrieve James' body on a trip that spanned 52 days and 1,350 miles. Byrne's funeral was held on November 21, 1880 at the Episcopal Church in Fort Worth⁷ and his casket was described to be of fine craftsmanship costing \$200 (approximately \$6000 today).⁸ He is laid to rest next to his daughter in Pioneers Rest Cemetery.

⁶ Selcer, Richard F. "A Premonition Of Death: General James Byrne," HistoryNet.com, 1 Mar 2017. Accessed 16 Sept 2023 ; <https://www.historynet.com/a-premonition-of-death-general-james-byrne/>.

⁷ "Arrival of Gen. Byrne's Remains" and "Church Chimes," Daily Democrat, Fort Worth, Texas, Vol. 4, No. 309, Pg. 4, Ed. 1 Sunday, November 21, 1880. Accessed 17 Sept 2023 ; <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph1048853/m1/4>.

⁸ "Personal," Daily Democrat. Fort Worth, Texas, Vol. 4, No. 262, Pg. 3, Ed. 1 Tuesday, September 28, 1880. Accessed 17 Sept 2023 ; <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph1048752/m1/3>.