



Colonel Corcoran, Who was Chosen by Lot for Death

Around the tall, commanding figure of Colonel Michael Corcoran, of the New York "Fighting Sixty-ninth," a storm raged in the summer of 1861. Corcoran had been chosen by lot to meet the same fate as Walter W. Smith, privateer of the schooner *Enchantress*, with a prize-crew from the Confederate privateer *Jeff. Davis*, who was captured July 22, 1861, tried for piracy in the United States Court in Philadelphia, October 22d-28th, and convicted of the charge. Soon after the news of his conviction reached Richmond, Acting Secretary of War J. P. Benjamin issued an order to Brigadier-General John H. Winder to choose by lot, from among the Federal prisoners of war, of the highest rank, one who was to receive exactly the same treatment as prize-master Walter W. Smith. He also ordered that thirteen other prisoners of war, the highest in rank of those captured by the Confederate forces, should be served as the crew of the *Savannah*. It fell to Colonel Corcoran to become the hostage for Smith. Since only ten other Federal field-officers were held as prisoners, three captains were chosen by lot to complete the quota, and all were placed in close confinement. **The United States was forced to recede from its position, which was untenable. Judge Grier, one of the bench who tried Smith in Philadelphia, aptly remarked that he could not understand why men taken on the sea were to be hanged, while those captured on land were to be held as prisoners or released.**