

"Bevil" Dan Sickles & the 1876 Election

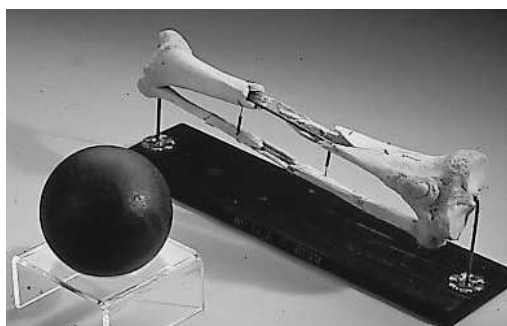
No one with warm blood flowing through his veins can read the life of Daniel Sickles without a certain thrill of admiration. His was truly the adventurous spirit. A politician, volunteer soldier, Minister to Spain, and a Representative in Congress, Sickles' career was also replete with many personal scandals.

Sickles volunteered to fight in the Civil War and quickly rose to Major General in the Union army. At the Battle of Gettysburg, however, he insubordinately moved his troops to a position in which they were virtually massacred and his leg was destroyed by cannon fire.

After the war, he served in the New York State Assembly but was censured for escorting a known prostitute, Fanny White, into its chambers. He also took her to England with him (leaving his pregnant wife at home) and presented her to Queen Victoria, using as her alias the last name his political opponent.

In 1859, across the street from the White House, Sickles shot and killed Philip Barton Key--son of Francis Scott Key and U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia—in broad daylight after Sickles discovered he was having an affair with his wife Teresa.

Sickles was charged with murder but acquitted in the very first use of temporary insanity as a legal defense in U.S. history. His team of lawyers included future Secretary of War Edwin Stanton.



Sickles' femur bone & cannonball.

Sickles later served as US foreign minister to Spain. He continued his reputation as a ladies' man in the Spanish royal court and was rumored to have had an affair with Queen Isabella II, earning him the nickname "the Yankee King of Spain".

The Election of 1876

The first returns on election day indicated a clear victory for the Democratic presidential nominee, Samuel Tilden of New York. He had won his home state, the swing states of Connecticut, New Jersey, and Indiana, and was expected to carry the solid South and most of the West. Both Tilden and his Republican challenger, Rutherford B. Hayes, went to bed assuming that the

Democrats had won the White House for the first time in 20 years.

At midnight, on his way home on election night, Sickles stopped by the Republican headquarters to check the returns. Almost all the workers had gone home assuming defeat, but Sickles realized that if Hayes lost no more Northern states but won Florida, Louisiana, and South Carolina, he could still win the Electoral College by one vote. Sickles rushed off telegrams to Republican leaders in those states, under the signature of Republican national chairman Zachariah Chandler, who was sleeping off a bottle of whiskey, urging them to hold their states for the Republicans. At 3 a.m., Republican governor Daniel Chamberlain responded: "All right. South Carolina is for Hayes. Need more troops."

Union troops were still stationed across the South during Reconstruction and their duties included guarding election offices. Chamberlain needed these troops to ensure they could fix the election for Hayes.

A democratic committee wrote, "We can prove beyond a shadow of doubt that Louisiana and Florida voted for Tilden by decisive majorities, and we are prepared to show up the villainous frauds of the Returning Boards. All we ask is investigation by this commission."

Despite the loud and repeated protests of Democrats, the commission did not investigate and the election results were finalized at Hayes 185 Tilden 184. Sickles, the one-legged, one-man, Republican midnight election team had gotten his victory.

Name _____

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|---|----------|
| 1. Which was not a <u>scandal</u> that affected Daniel Sickles? | 1. _____ |
| a. Murdering his wife’s lover | |
| b. Losing his leg in the Civil War | |
| c. Having an affair with the Queen of Spain | |
| d. Taking a prostitute to England | |
| 2. How can you best infer that Sickles had good lawyers? | 2. _____ |
| a. One was the Secretary of War | |
| b. He only served a short prison sentence | |
| c. He used the very first temporary insanity defense | |
| d. He was wealthy and famous | |
| 3. Based on the passage, what adjective best describes Sickles’ military career? | 3. _____ |
| a. Disobedient | |
| b. Well-trained | |
| c. Respectful | |
| d. Scandalous | |
| 4. You can infer from the passage and your knowledge of history that the south mostly voted: | 4. _____ |
| a. Republican | |
| b. Democratic | |
| c. Free-Soil | |
| d. Whig | |
| 5. Why did Daniel Chamberlain telegraph: “Need more troops”? | 5. _____ |
| a. He was commanding a regiment at Gettysburg | |
| b. To protect the election office | |
| c. To help former slaves vote | |
| d. To make sure Florida elected Hayes | |
| 6. What part did Sickles play in getting Hayes elected? | 6. _____ |
| a. Campaigning on Hayes behalf in New York City | |
| b. Appealing to the Queen of Spain to endorse Hayes | |
| c. Telling Republican governors to hold their states | |
| d. Sending Union troops to the South | |
| 7. Someone from what political party most likely gave Sickles the nickname “Devil”? | 7. _____ |
| a. Republican | |
| b. Democratic | |
| c. Free Soil | |
| d. Whig | |
| 8. Do you agree or disagree with the opening line of this passage? Explain your answer using information about Daniel Sickles contained in the passage. | |