Daniel McLaughlin was born 1832 in Kilmacrenan, County Donegal, Ireland. He immigrated to the United States, landing first in New York City in July 1855. Daniel settled first in Norristown, Pa., near Philadelphia, where he worked in an iron foundry for his childhood friend, Daniel Dougherty. When Daniel Dougherty decided to homestead in Iowa in 1855, Daniel moved to Fond du Lac, WI to join his older brother John. He apparently worked as a laborer for several years.

Daniel was mustered in to the Union Army on Feb 20, 1862 in Fond du Lac as a private in Captain Patrick O'Connor's Company ("C") of the 17th Regiment of the United States Wisconsin Volunteers to serve for three years. He is described as five foot ten inches tall, fair complexion, and light hair. His regiment, known as the "Irish Regiment," was organized at Camp Randall, Wisconsin, in early 1862 and was ordered to St. Louis, Mo., on March 23rd. The regiment trained in St. Louis at Benton Barracks until April 10, when it was ordered to Pittsburg Landing, Tennessee, to take part in the siege of Corinth, Mississippi.

He served as a wagoner on the march from Pittsburg Landing to Corinth. This troop movement was part of Grant’s campaign that was the first real success for the North and ultimately led to Union control of the Mississippi River. The severity of the weather is well-described in accounts of the campaign. One can only imagine the miserable conditions slogging through knee-deep mud!

He contracted an acute lung infection in the course of duty that put him out of commission. Daniel was treated at the Regimental Hospital at Corinth and returned to duty for a time. He was never in action. Declared unfit for duty in August, he was at Columbus Kentucky Hospital on the Mississippi River on Nov. 15, 1862; and at Sister's Hospital in St. Louis from Nov. 25 until discharged from duty, on Dec. 16, 1862.

He returned to Fond du Lac, married Julia McMonagle and established himself as a merchant. They had several children and then moved to Dougherty, IA in the
1870’s on farm land next to other Irish immigrants including Dan Dougherty. He died 7 Nov. 1886 in Dougherty, Iowa and was survived by Julia and several children.

This is obviously an inconsequential service record from a military history perspective. But even this small bit leads to three interesting threads:

1. The history of the 17th Wisconsin
2. The practice of medicine during the Civil War
3. Military records as a source of genealogical information.

1. The 17th Wisconsin
The regiment went on to have a decorated career in Grant’s Central Mississippi campaign. Their charge at the Battle of Corinth in October 1862 was a critical turning point in favor of the Union. The 17th fought many battles including Vicksburg, Kennesaw Mountain, Atlanta and joined Sherman’s march to the sea. They were in the Grand Review in Washington, DC at the end of the war. It is interesting that when their original 3 year enlistment was up, 7/8ths of the regiment re-enlisted. Along with several other Union regiments serving under green battle flags, the 17th helped establish the illustrious reputation of Irish-American soldiers in the Civil War.

2. Medical Practice:
Daniel's illness was identified on his discharge as "phthisis pulmonatis well-marked and progressing" but referred to as "pleuro pneumonia" in his application for a pension and as "tuberculosis" in the verification from the Surgeon General's Office in 1883. "Phthisis" is simply an old term for tuberculosis. An important part of the specificity of the diagnosis depended on finding "tubercles" in the lungs at autopsy, and it wasn't until 1867 that Robert Koch, a German professor, immortalized himself by proving that the tubercle bacillus is responsible for this disease. The “germ theory” was new and had not generally replaced ancient Greek humoral theory (blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm) and miasma in 1862.

There is no way to prove whether or not Daniel really had tuberculosis or some other infectious lung disease. Stethoscopes were a new tool. Well-trained physicians of the day were good at describing symptoms and physical findings. Tuberculosis and bacterial pneumonia can mimic each other closely. In the
absence of x-rays (discovered in 1897), any means of culturing bacteria, or an autopsy (Dan's good fortune!), his physicians could not make a specific diagnosis.

The working conditions to which he was exposed during the war certainly wore down his resistance and exposed him to many other men who could have been contagious for tuberculosis or other types of infectious pneumonia. Bacterial pneumonia killed 30 to 70% of its victims until the discovery of penicillin. Influenza and measles are two viral diseases capable of causing a destructive pneumonia. Histoplasmosis is a fungus common in the Mississippi River area that could have been responsible. Survivors often had complications such as a lung abscess or bronchiectasis that led to prolonged recovery with substantial risk of permanent pulmonary disability. The only treatment was rest and nutrition. Daniel was lucky to live 18 more reasonably active years.

3. Clues to genealogy:

There are literally thousands of Irish immigrants named Daniel McLaughlin who arrived at Eastern seaports during and shortly after the potato famine. My family had searched in vain for a precise connection back to Donegal. When Daniel’s Civil War military record was obtained from government archives, it contained several affidavits regarding his disability that provided the necessary clues. So, most importantly, his friend, Dan Dougherty stated:

This is to testify that I have known Daniel McLaughlin from boyhood until the year 1858 and that he did work for me several years at the Iron Furnace and that he was at all times considered an able-bodied man while he worked for me and always considered to be a very healthy man never complained of any disease until I met him after he came home from the U.S. Service he was complaining then of lung disease. I have been called to go see him when it was thought by me and all present that he could not live one hour. I consider him a broken down man and from all I know of him he contracted his disease or diseases in the U.S. Service. I further say that I am not interested in any manner in this matter further than when called upon to make a true statement.

Signed: D. Dougherty

With this and a few other sources of information, it was possible to track down the farm where he grew up in Whitehill, Kilmacrenan, Donegal. Many family members have had the pleasure of visiting the home site, now abandoned, usually guided by Neil Doherty.

NOTE: This summary was prepared for PSCWRT by John F. (Jeff) McLaughlin. The vast majority of the genealogical work was done by John Dennis McLaughlin, Daniel Joseph McLaughlin and Thomas J. McLaughlin.