



Chicago's Irish Legion: The 90th Illinois Volunteers in the Civil War

James B. Swan



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Extensively documented and richly detailed, *Chicago's Irish Legion* tells the compelling story of Chicago's 90th Illinois Volunteer Infantry, the only Irish regiment in Major General William Tecumseh Sherman's XV Army Corps. Swan's sweeping history of this singular regiment and its pivotal role in the Western Theater of the Civil War draws heavily from primary documents and first-person observations, giving readers an intimate glimpse into the trials and triumphs of ethnic soldiers during one of the most destructive wars in American history.

At the onset of the bitter conflict between the North and the South, Irish immigrants faced a wall of distrust and discrimination in the United States. Many Americans were deeply suspicious of Irish religion and politics, while others openly doubted the dedication of the Irish to the Union cause. Responding to these criticisms with a firm show of patriotism, the Catholic clergy and Irish politicians in northern Illinois—along with the Chicago press and community—joined forces to recruit the Irish Legion. Composed mainly of foreign-born recruits, the Legion rapidly dispelled any rumors of disloyalty with its heroic endeavors for the Union. The volunteers proved to be instrumental in various battles and sieges, as well as the marches to the sea and through the Carolinas, suffering severe casualties and providing indispensable support for the Union. Swan meticulously traces the remarkable journey of these unique soldiers from their regiment's inception and first military engagement in 1862 to their disbandment and participation in the Grand Review of General Sherman's army in 1865.

Enhancing the volume are firsthand accounts from the soldiers who endured the misery of frigid winters and brutal environments, struggling against the ravages of disease and hunger as they marched more than twenty-six hundred miles over the course of the war. Also revealed are personal insights into some of the war's most harrowing events, including the battle at Chattanooga and Sherman's famous campaign for Atlanta. In addition, Swan exposes the racial issues that affected the soldiers of the 90th Illinois, including their reactions to the Emancipation Proclamation and the formations of the first African American fighting units. Swan rounds out the volume with stories of survivors' lives after the war, adding an even deeper personal dimension to this absorbing chronicle.



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