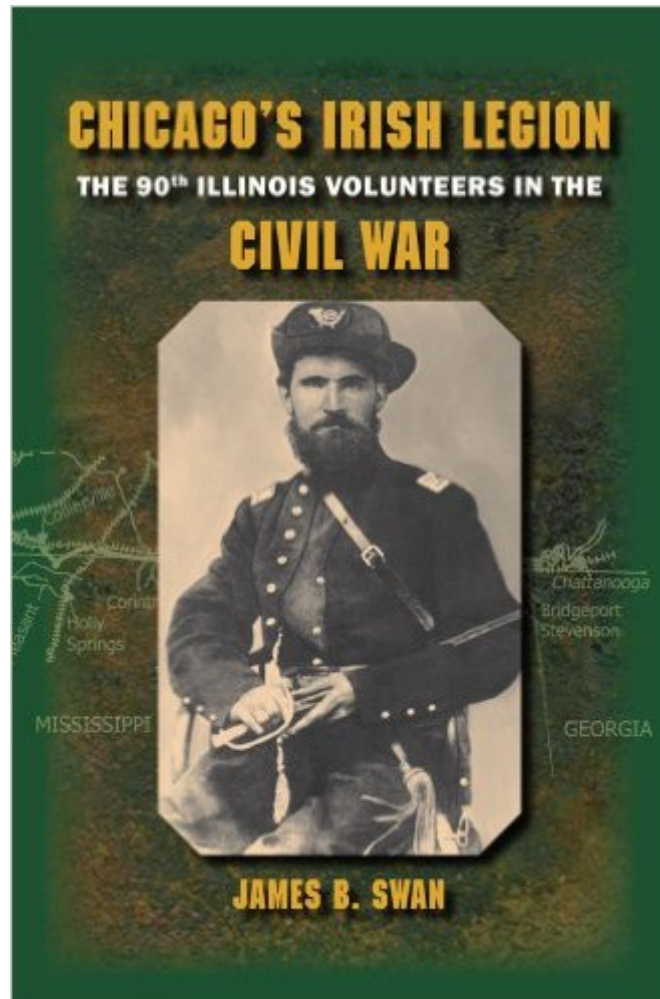


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# Chicago's Irish Legion: The 90th Illinois Volunteers In The Civil War



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Dr. Swan has written an excellent regimental history of the 90th Illinois. Combining his academic background with his personal connection to the regiment through his family, Dr. Swan has done excellent research, digging out old collections of letters, together with trips to Ireland and the National Archives in Washington, D.C. Key to the 90th is Colonel Tim O'Meara, a hero of the battle of Balls Bluff, Va. in October 1861 while serving with the 42nd NY Tammany Jackson Guards. Dr. Swan unravels the politics that led O'Meara to gain command of the 90th through the help of General Michael Corcoran. Mr. Swan also has included several striking several photo-portraits of members of the regiment, including Colonel O'Meara decked out in his Hardee hat. These have probably never seen light before this book. There is also a complete roster and a superb description of the 90th's action at Missionary Ridge. Highly recommended!

This is a very refreshing book. It is a great read. The Civil War has become so popularized in modern literature that hard research is becoming harder to find. In this milieu, James Swan's book sets exactly the right tone. It is entertaining enough to keep the attention of a broad readership but is also filled with a great deal of original research that will engage the dedicated student of Civil War history. From all appearances, many years of work with new and original documents went into this manuscript. The text is very carefully put together. But there is also a lightness in the recounting of how normal human foibles affected the day-to-day functioning of this unusual group of soldiers. There may be several "unexpected" audiences for this book, apart from those with a keen interest in the Civil War. There are important parts of the history of Chicago here. And of course anyone of Irish descent or otherwise interested in how the immigrant Irish acclimated to the dominant US culture should find this book quite interesting. The formation of the 90th Illinois regiment was very much a search for acceptance by impoverished refugees in a new land. But it

was an acceptance that carried a very high price. More than 60% of the regiment did not come home, or at least did not come home in the ordinary course of things. What exactly is a deserter is often a highly debatable characterization. And then there is a fascinating portrayal in the book of the role of the local Catholic Church in gathering men to send off to battle. This is an aspect of the church in America that is seldom explored. Its theological implications hark back to much earlier times in distant lands. James Swan nicely brings all of these divergent themes together. The reader is inevitably required to think about a lot of things that are not obvious in a book that seems to be about a single Civil War regiment.

Just finished reading Chicago's Irish Legion. Dr. Swan's description of the 90th in the Washington Grand Review brought tears to my eyes. That would have been a sight to see! I didn't understand how the 90th's Quartermaster Sheridan, following capture by the Confederates, would be held at St. Louis pending his exchange, as that city was controlled by the North. A bit of research indicated such "gentlemen's agreements" for exchanges occurred during the early part of the war. Dr. Swan's mention of 90th troops needing to delouse themselves brought to mind another book, The Diary of a Napoleonic Foot Soldier by Jakob Walter.

This book is my favorite book now. It describes in detail what my blood relative went thru while serving in the 90th. He was a 1st LT and Dr. Swan describes a battle my relative fought in. I love the detail in this book, like describing how the regiment was treated by the local Plantation owners families while they were stationed near Holly Springs/ Coldwater Station and how the regiment was formed. Nice pictures of my relatives Commanding officer. I'm very fortunate to be able to buy a book that describes what life was like for my relative. Priceless !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

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