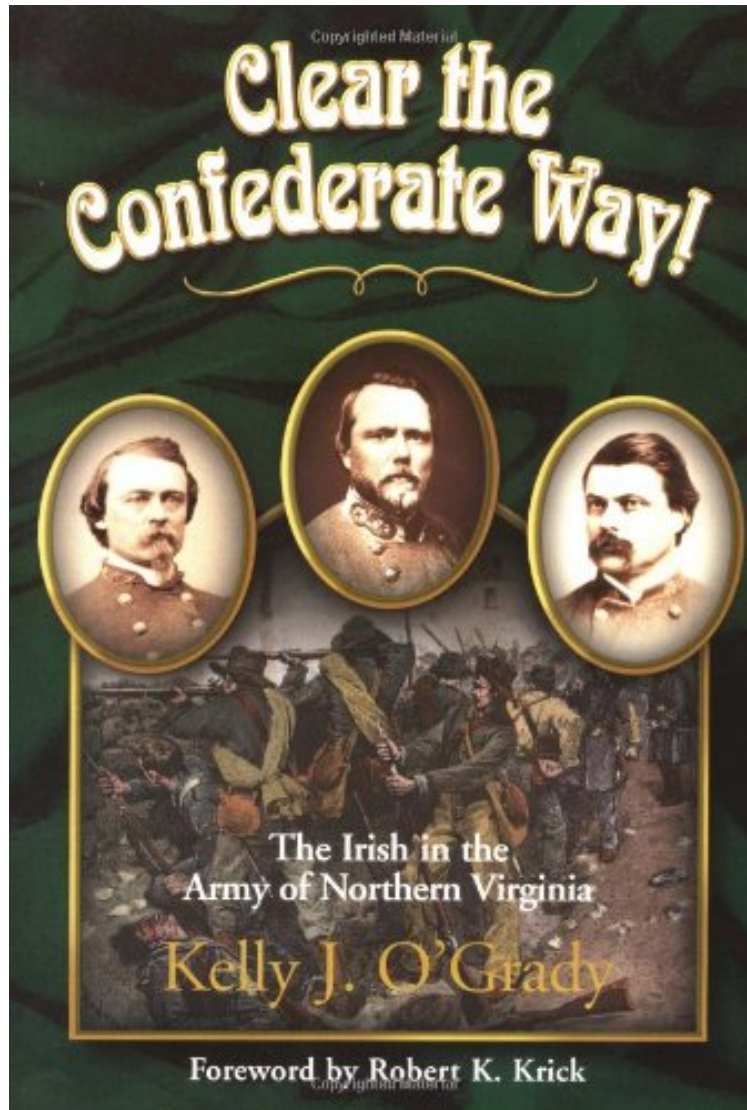


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# Clear the Confederate Way! The Irish in the Army of Northern Virginia

*Kelly J. O'Grady*

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**Kelly J. O'Grady** : **Clear the Confederate Way! The Irish in the Army of Northern Virginia** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Clear the Confederate Way! The Irish in the Army of Northern Virginia:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Four StarsBy Sally VogelIt was a good book but wish it had more about the Missouri Irish Confederates.34 of 37 people found the following review helpful. The other side of the storyBy A CustomerThis is bound to be a controversial book, because it says what a lot of today's Americans of Irish

descent would like to brush under the rug: That yes, there *were* Irish Confederates, and that they were committed officers and soldiers, passionate in their reasons for fighting for the South. This book puts Irish participation in the Civil War in its proper historic context. At the time, the Irish who lived in the North were the victims of the worst kind of bigotry--they were systematically cut out of employment opportunities and otherwise damaged by a nasty, nativist, "Know Nothing" campaign against immigrants. In the South, many Irish were also near the bottom of the socioeconomic scale, but they were not loathed just for their Irishness, and there they had a chance to better themselves. The book also makes the point that for the Irish on both sides, the war was not about slavery or racial bigotry. Irish Union soldiers weren't abolitionist liberators. Many were swept into the Irish Brigade by the charming harangues of their homeland hero Thomas F. Meagher. Others were simply trying to assimilate into their new country or were fighting because they couldn't get out of it. Irish Confederate soldiers were mostly non-slaveholders who fought *not* to support the peculiar institution but because they believed the mostly agrarian South (like agrarian Ireland at the time) should be self-governed, not dominated by puritanical Northern industrialists (who seemed an awful lot like the puritanical English industrialists). The author convincingly builds these points and then tells the rest of the Confederate Irish story, battle by battle and officer by officer. This book is a thoroughly researched, interesting and well-written work of Civil War scholarship that actually finds something new to say about a much-rehashed war.

8 of 17 people found the following review helpful. Interesting, but meandering history of Irish Dixie  
By John J. Ross  
This history of the Irish in the army of Robert E. Lee is valuable, if only because the topic has been so little explored. In fact, the ambiguous loyalties of the Irish during the Civil War were covered up in the past by Irish Americans keen on garnering support for Irish independence by playing up Irish participation in the Union Army. Irish in the South were staunch supporters of the Confederacy, for a variety of reasons. Catholics and Jews were more accepted in the South than the North, probably because their common whiteness was more important than any denominational differences from their Protestant neighbors. The Catholic Church was soft on slavery in general, and prominent bishops and lay Catholics in the South were vocal supporters of the peculiar institution. For example, Supreme Court Justice Roger Taney, author of the loathsome Dred Scott decision, was a good Maryland Catholic. The average Irish labourer, North and South, dreaded the potential competition for low wage jobs that would arise from emancipation. Irish intellectuals, such as the rebel John Mitchel, sympathized with the South as a weak, agrarian underdog trying to free itself from the domination of a ruthless, capitalistic, imperialistic Yankee/Puritan juggernaut, thereby recasting the war as a variation of the ancient Anglo-Irish struggle. Mitchel also rationalized the institution of slavery as humane, compared to the prevailing feudal system in Ireland which had allowed the starvation of millions. The lot of the Irish soldier in Lee's army was as bad as his Northern counterpart. Confederate officers seem to have been as profligate of the lives of their Irish soldiery as their Northern counterparts, although the grim butchery of the Civil War knew no ethnic boundaries. O'Grady is particularly insightful on the battle of Fredericksburg, debunking the many myths which have arisen regarding the Union Irish Brigade and its less than heroic commander, General Thomas Meagher. Despite its many strengths, O'Grady's book does have serious flaws. The narrative tends to break down into a somewhat dull retelling of the individual careers of Irish Confederates. There are a few odd digressions. Notably, O'Grady gushes at length in praise of the narcoleptic, semi-sane Stonewall Jackson in tones more suited to an infatuated schoolgirl than a dispassionate historian, for no particular reason, except perhaps for Jackson's distant Ulster ancestry.

Irish participation in the Confederate forces has received considerably less attention than that of the Union. This detailed study examines Irish troops in the Confederacy, their attitude toward pro-Union Irishmen, and offers some informed speculation on the influence of Irish tradition and history on their battlefield actions.

About the Author  
Kelly J. O'Grady has penned numerous book reviews and articles on a variety of historical topics. *Clear the Confederate Way! The Irish in the Army of Northern Virginia* is his first full-length effort. He makes his living as a historian in Fredericksburg, Virginia.