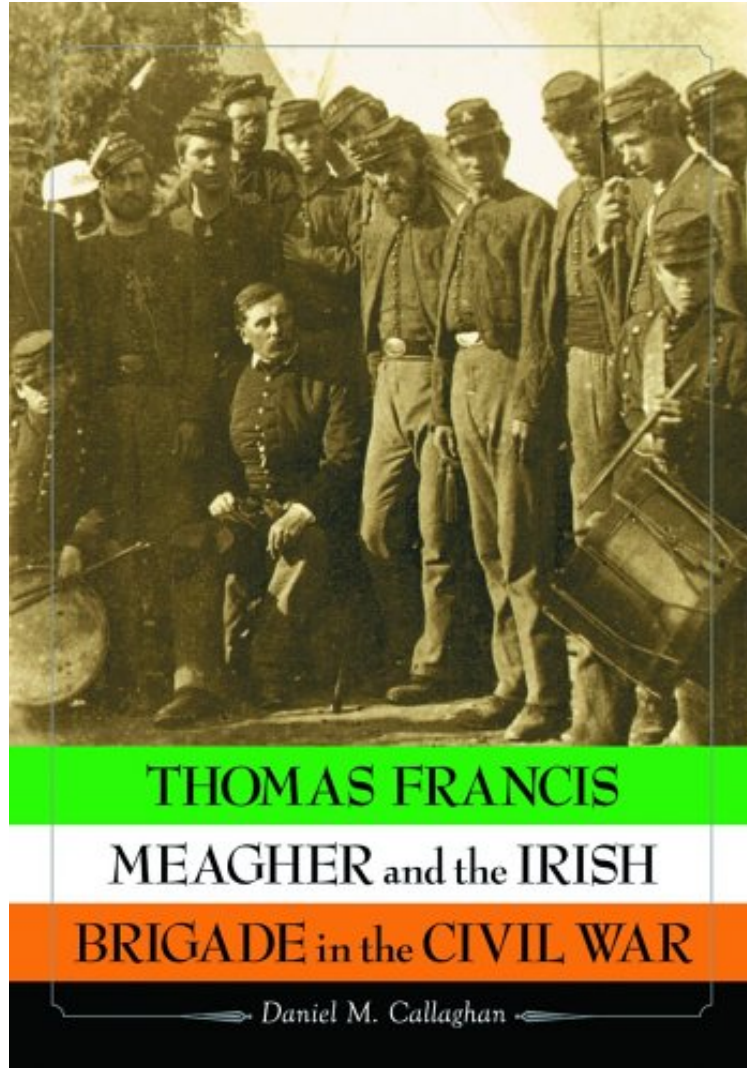


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Daniel M. Callaghan

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Daniel M. Callaghan : Thomas Francis Meagher And the Irish Brigade in the Civil War before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Thomas Francis Meagher And the Irish Brigade in the Civil War:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A good read, but not the unbiased account it claims to beBy CFSUPDATESubsequent to reading this book, I read "My Life in the Irish Brigade," the memoir of Pvt William McCarter. With the added context of McCarter's account, it seems obvious to me that the Callaghan had an axe to grind with General Maegher. Its not that the information he presents is false, but rather that he omits almost any information that would tend to present Maegher in a more favorable light. For example, while he retells McCarter's

tale of saving the drunken Maegher from falling in a campfire, he omits McCarter's stories which illustrate Maegher's good nature, care for his men, and ample generosity. Perhaps, the author is trying to bring some balance to the historical narrative about Maegher by citing mostly negative episodes, but that is no better than a biased account which favors Maegher. Changing my rating from 4 to 3 stars.

ORIGINAL REVIEW I am a civil war reenactor and read this book to enrich my reenacting experience (my unit depicts the 88th NY). Callaghan's work is a quick read at just under 200 pages. He has a nice writing style that pulls you through the story, much like a good work of fiction. He follows the Irish Brigade from their initial recruitment until they were mustered out of service in 1865. For those wanting to do more detailed research, the book includes detailed footnotes to many primary sources, including ethnic newspapers of the day. Callaghan does a good job of giving a broad brush description of the major battles, so that the reader can understand the context of the Brigade's actions without getting bogged down. There aren't many illustrations, but the one's provided complement the narrative nicely. Simplified battlefield maps illustrate the Brigade's movements. The political leanings and enlistment motivations of the New York Irish are very well covered. Callaghan states that he is trying to be more objective than past accounts, which I gather often mythologized the Irish Brigade. His treatment of General Maegher, however, struck me as a bit unfair. Undoubtedly, Maegher, who was something of an ethnic celebrity before the war, was a political general. Callaghan convincingly documents Maegher's issues with alcohol and it seems pretty clear he was not respected by officers of the regular army, the War Department, or the Lincoln Administration. However, Callaghan gives Maegher virtually no credit for the Irish Brigade's battlefield performance, which ranked it among the elite units in the Federal Army until it was finally "used up." At a minimum, Maegher must be given some credit for appointing superior subordinate officers and NCOs and maintaining a high level of unit cohesion and morale. While it's likely that Maegher was drunk at some of the Brigade's major engagements, it must also be noted that the Brigade's performance didn't suffer because of it as both Federal and Confederate officers marveled at how the Brigade acquitted itself in battle. A related criticism is that Callaghan doesn't adequately account for the Brigade's superior battle field performance. If it wasn't Maegher's leadership, then was it the result of their training? regimental commanders? NCOs? the unit's ethnic bonds? It certainly wasn't their equipment, as the Brigade was initially equipped with smooth bore muskets, putting them at a distinct disadvantage (not really touched on at all). In the end, the lack of an explanation seems to imply that Irish are just natural fighters. I purchased the hardback version new a \$49.95. While it may seem a bit pricey in comparison to some of the related books on the Irish Brigade, I felt like I got my money's worth. Callaghan packs a lot of information into a few, well written words... no fluff here at all. The book met my expectations in every respect.

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When President Abraham Lincoln issued his call to arms in 1861, the 63rd, 69th and 88th New York Volunteers were among the first to step forward to defend the Union. Comprised primarily of first and second generation Irish immigrants, these three regiments were later joined by the 28th Massachusetts and the 116th Pennsylvania. Although many of these Irish men were decidedly anti-Lincoln—blaming the northern abolitionists as much as the southern rebels for the nation's plight—they worked around their dilemma by pledging their allegiance to their new country and its flag rather than its president. Suffering heavy casualties, this Irish Brigade under the command of Thomas Francis Meagher became one of the most legendary fighting groups of the Civil War. This work provides a balanced, historically factual picture of the Irish Brigade and its commander by re-examining and re-interpreting existing accounts. It presents an unbiased account of the role that the Brigade played in the confrontations, during the Seven Days' battles, at Sharpsburg, Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville. The author examines the ways in which contemporary sources distorted the historical actualities regarding the Irish Brigade—attempting to write into the annals of legend a story which needed no embellishment—and the tempering effect which chronological distance has produced, resulting in more critical and dispassionate publications. The effect of politics and political manipulation on the Irish regiments is also discussed. Sources range from memoirs published by brigade veterans in the years immediately following the war to letters and memoirs published as recently as 1996.

"well-written...solid...recommended"--Choice.-well-written...solid...recommended---Choice.
 About the Author Daniel M. Callaghan has written on politics and education policy. He lives in London.