



# **An Irishman in the Iron Brigade: The Civil War Memoirs of James P. Sullivan (The Irish in the Civil War)**

*William J.K. Beaudot*

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No soldier went off to the Civil War with quicker step than 17-year-old James Patrick Sullivan. A hired man on a farm in Juneau County, Wisconsin, he was among the first to answer Lincoln's call for volunteers in 1861. Sullivan fought in a score of major battles, was wounded five times, and was the only soldier of his regiment to enlist on three separate occasions. *An Irishman in the Iron Brigade* is a collection of Sullivan's writings about his hard days in President Lincoln's Army. Using war diaries and letters, the Irish immigrant composed nearly a dozen revealing accounts about the battles of his brigade—Brawner Farm, Second Bull Run, South Mountain, Chancellorsville and Gettysburg as well as the fighting of 1864. Using his old camp name, Mickey of Company K, Sullivan wrote not so much for family or for history, but to entertain his comrades of the old Iron Brigade. His stories—overlooked and forgotten for more than a century—are delightful accounts of rough-hewn Western soldiers in the Eastern Army of the Potomac. His Gettysburg account, for example, is one of the best recollections of that epic battle by a soldier in the ranks. He also left a from-the-ranks view of some of the Union's major soldiers such as George McClellan, Irvin McDowell, John Pope, and Ambrose Burnside. *An Irishman in the Iron Brigade* is in part the story of the great veterans' movement which shaped the nation's politics before the turn-of-the-century. Troubled by economic hardship, advancing age, and old war injuries, Sullivan turned to old comrades, his memories, and writing, to put the great experiences of his life in perspective.

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