

H-Net Reviews

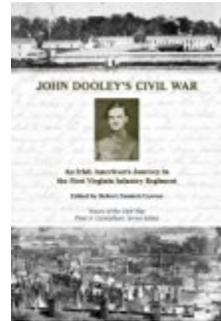
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Robert Emmett Curran, ed. *John Dooley's Civil War: An Irish American's Journey in the First Virginia Infantry Regiment*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2012. xxxi + 516 pp. \$59.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57233-822-7.

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey



John Dooley's experiences during and after the Civil War offer unique insight into the daily life of a soldier in the Army of Northern Virginia. Robert Emmett Curran's edition of the Dooley papers deviates from the original published collection and incorporates the entirety of the Dooley collection, including not only his war journal, but the other writings compiled during and after the conflict. Curran's methodology links these diverse accounts and creates a riveting narrative that makes for an informative and captivating read. Curran's task was made considerably easier by Dooley's own self-awareness and reflection on his service. While soldiers' diaries are, more often than not, bland accounts of daily life in the army, Dooley's writings are different. They illuminate the trials and tribulations of military service in the Army of Northern Virginia and provide insight into the war, politically, socially, and militarily, from the perspective of this private-turned-captain.

Dooley's accounts of the war force the reader to reconsider preconceptions of early Confederate success. As a soldier, Dooley was both excited and reticent in his soldiering, and the wartime and postbellum accounts suggest that Southern nationalism was an incredibly complex set of ideologies. "I was happy enough to witness this terrible slaughter and route," he wrote after Second Manassas. The zeal that came with victory was tainted by death, a reality of war that plagued Dooley as he watched friends and comrades fall around him. By the time the 1st Virginia marched north to Maryland, their brigade had "no more than 400, four hundred: ten times less than its compliment" (p. 41). When Ambrose Burnside advanced against his position on the right of the Confederate lines at Antietam, the regiment had seventeen active men (p.

47). Dooley's accounts of the aftermath of the Maryland invasion, including service in the Shenandoah Valley, at Fredericksburg, and in South Carolina, provide insight into Longstreet's movements in the month before Gettysburg.

Wounded during Pickett's Charge, Dooley spent the two years as a prisoner of war before being exchanged in the early spring of 1865. The accounts from this period provide perspective of life in Northern prison camps. Although Dooley was saved from a worse fate by his promotion to captaincy in April, his tenure at the camp at Johnson Island was, nevertheless a time of considerable struggle as he fought to overcome the wounds he received at Gettysburg while simultaneously dealing with the hardships of Civil War prisons. Perhaps equally important to the narrative are Dooley's reflective accounts of news from the front as it reached the prisoners. Confederate prisoners of war closely followed news from the front and their morale reflected the ebbs and flows of Confederate success and failures, and his writings provide insight into the uncertainty of news, underscored by the continued hope for victory. Upon release from prison, his narrative take on a sense of hopelessness as he and his comrades returned to a nation on the verge of capitulation, the early success of the Confederacy long forgotten, replaced by uncertainty, confusion, and an encroaching Federal army.

Robert Emmett Curran's edition of John Dooley's papers provide an excellent source for historians of both the Civil War as well as the nineteenth-century immigrant experience. Irish Confederates are often overlooked in favor of their Northern counterparts. While

Dooley's accounts deal first and foremost with the war, his links to the cause of Irish nationalism and, especially, his connection with nationalist John Mitchell, should not be ignored. Consequently, this collection illustrates the important ideological connections between immigrants north and south and, at times, the irony of Irishmen fighting on opposite sides in America's struggle for national survival.

As a whole, this collection represents a thoughtful and unique means of combining a number of sources to create an intricate and intriguing narrative. Curran's introduction, as well as his choice to preface each chapter by placing Dooley's experiences within the context of the

broader war, is vital to the success of this book. The author's own analysis does not overwhelm Dooley's recollections, and are appropriate to setting the stage while not detracting from the sources themselves. While the final product is impressive in its breadth and scope, it is marred to some degree by the fact that much of the narrative is derived from accounts written after the war and thus suffers to a degree from the persistence of the Lost Cause ideology. The fact that Curran combines wartime and postwar sources, journals, and reminisces, however, helps to balance these memories with actual experiences, creating a well-rounded account of the wartime experiences of an Irishman in the Confederate service.

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