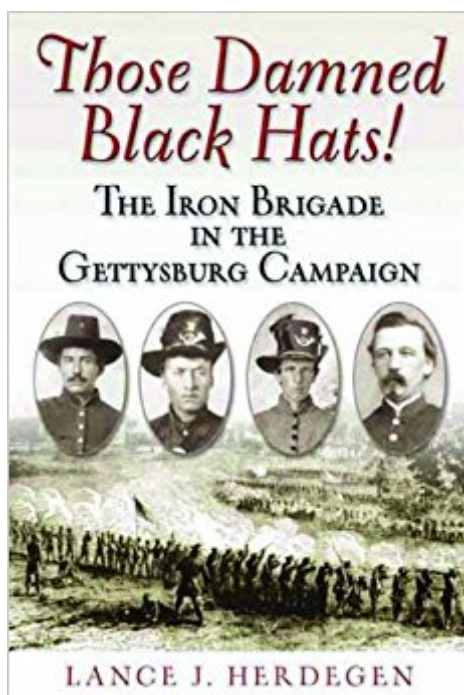


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Those Damned Black Hats!: The Iron Brigade In The Gettysburg Campaign



Synopsis

WINNER FOR OPERATIONAL / BATTLE HISTORY, 2008, ARMY HISTORICAL FOUNDATION DISTINGUISHED BOOK AWARD

The Iron Brigade— an all-Western outfit famously branded as The Iron Brigade of the West— served out their enlistments entirely in the Eastern Theater. Hardy men were these soldiers from Indiana, Wisconsin, and Michigan, who waged war beneath their unique black Hardee Hats on many fields, from Brainerd's Farm during the Second Bull Run Campaign all the way to Appomattox. In between were memorable combats at South Mountain, Antietam, Chancellorsville, Mine Run, the Overland Campaign, and the grueling fighting around Petersburg. None of these battles compared with the 14-hour-long battle of July 1, 1863, at Gettysburg, where the Iron Brigade was all but wrecked.

Lance Herdegen's 'Those Damned Black Hats! The Iron Brigade in the Gettysburg Campaign' is the first book-length account of their remarkable experiences in Pennsylvania during that fateful summer of 1863, and winner of The Army Historical Foundation Distinguished Writing Award for Operational / Battle History, 2008. Drawing upon a wealth of sources, including dozens of previously unpublished or unused accounts, Herdegen details for the first time the exploits of the 2nd, 6th, and 7th Wisconsin, 19th Indiana, and 24th Michigan regiments during the entire campaign. On July 1, the Western troops stood line-to-line and often face-to-face with their Confederate adversaries, who later referred to them as those damned Black Hats. With the help of other stalwart comrades, the Hoosiers, Badgers, and Wolverines shed copious amounts of blood to save the Army of the Potomac's defensive position west of town. Their heroics above Willoughby Run, along the Chambersburg Pike, and at the Railroad Cut helped define the opposing lines for the rest of the battle and, perhaps, won the battle that helped preserve the Union.

Herdegen's account is much more than a battle study. The story of the fighting at the Bloody Railroad Cut is well known, but the attack and defense of McPherson's Ridge, the final stand at Seminary Ridge, the occupation of Culp's Hill, and the final pursuit of the Confederate Army has never been explored in sufficient depth or with such story-telling ability. Herdegen completes the journey of the Black Hats with an account of the reconciliation at the 50th Anniversary Reunion and the Iron Brigade's place in Civil War history. Where has the firmness of the Iron Brigade at Gettysburg been surpassed in history? asked Rufus Dawes of the 6th Wisconsin. Indeed, it was a fair question. The brigade marched to Gettysburg with 1,883 men in ranks and by nightfall on July 1, only 671 men were still to be counted. It would fight on to the end of the Civil War, and do so without its all-Western makeup, but never again was it a major force in battle. Some 150 years after the last member of the Iron Brigade laid down his life for his country, the complete story of what the Black Hats did at Gettysburg and

how they remembered it is now available in paperback. REVIEWS: " . . . brings to life the story of the men who sacrificed so much. . . . Herdegen is able to weave all of the letters and personal accounts into a seamless story that is hard to put down. . . . a great tribute to the men who served in one of the most famous units in the Civil War." • Collected Miscellany, 1/2009
About the Author:
Award-winning journalist Lance J. Herdegen is the former director of the Institute of Civil War Studies at Carroll University. He previously worked as a reporter and editor for the United Press International (UPI) news service covering national politics and civil rights. He presently is an historical consultant for the Civil War Museum of the Upper Middle West.

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Customer Reviews

"much more than a battle study" a first class account of one of the most famous fighting brigades of our American Civil War. (LONE STAR) " brings to life the story of the men who sacrificed so much " Herdegen is able to weave all of the letters and personal accounts into a seamless that is hard to put down. " a great tribute to the men who served in one of the most famous units in the Civil War. (Collected Miscellany) --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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consultant for the Civil War Museum of the Upper Middle West.

The Iron Brigade (or the Black Hats) was one of the great fighting units of the Union Army of the Potomac. One unique factor was that all the regiments for the brigade came from the West--Indiana, Michigan (the 24th Michigan joined the brigade later in its existence), and Wisconsin, and the troops were proud of that. Their inaugural battle as a brigade was a toe-to-toe exchange of fire with the Stonewall Brigade at Brawner's Farm (or Groveton). And they held their own. They, according to one story, earned the sobriquet "Iron Brigade" at South Mountain, as General George McClellan allegedly noted that the brigade was made of iron. But its legend culminated at the great battle fought at Gettysburg--when the unit was pretty much wrecked. What makes this book special is its human perspective. Using letters, diaries, etc., we get a much more ground level view of the men in the Iron Brigade--from privates to regimental leaders. It is a wonderful match for Nolan's early 1960s volume, "The Iron Brigade." Where does the title come from? Comments attributed to some Confederates advancing up McPherson's Ridge at the first day of Gettysburg. . . . They thought they were fighting militia and dismounted cavalry. When they saw the high black hats (Hardee hats) of the brigade, it is alleged that one of the southerners cried out: "There are them black hatted fellows again. Tain't no militia; it's the Army of the Potomac." On the first day at Gettysburg, General John Buford's cavalry were engaged by forces in the division of Harry Heth. They held their own for awhile, but the numbers pressing against them were too much for them to hold all morning. At that point, General John Reynolds, commanding the First Corps, arrived, moving the troops of his First Division onto the field. He personally arranged for the Iron Brigade to take on an advancing Confederate brigade under Archer. He was killed, but the Iron Brigade routed their counterparts. And bought precious time for the Army of the Potomac. As the day wore on, the Union forces could not stand the pressure from North and West; the brigade retreated sullenly, making a final stand on Seminary Ridge before the Union forces finally broke. Only remnants of the Iron Brigade remained. Yet the survivors stubbornly participated over the next two days. The story of the Black Hats continues, as a much reduced force, having Eastern units swell its ranks. Thus ended their sense of uniqueness as a Western unit. Although the brigade continued after Gettysburg, it was no longer a major fighting force as it had been. A terrific view of the individuals within the Iron Brigade as well as a good account of their exploits. If interested in unit histories--especially those looking at the individuals within the unit--this is first rate.

Though I've read all of Mr. Herdegen's books that pertain to the Iron Brigade, this, in my opinion, is

the best of the lot. While the author does a masterful job of chronicling the Iron Brigade's history from its inception to its arrival at and participation in the battle at Gettysburg, it is the individual soldier vignettes and the brigade's associated nuances, both of which are generously interspersed throughout the book, that make this volume special. The following case in point concerns the authors entertaining explanation of how the various Iron Brigade regiments and its associated artillery, Battery B, 4th U.S. Artillery, received their nicknames, "If it was the 'Ragged Assed 2nd' and 'Calico 6th,' the 7th Wisconsin became the 'Huckleberries.' One officer recalled that they were always talking about 'pies and things to eat,' while the men of the 19th Indiana were simply 'old Posey County' or 'Swamp Hogs, Number 19' . . . the infantry volunteers and regulars serving with Battery B of the 4th U.S. Artillery became the 'One hundred forty thieves' for their admired ability to carry foraged goods on their limbers and caissons. When the 24th Michigan was added to the Western Brigade in 1862, the Wolverines became 'the featherbeds' because they were slow to enlist and brought so many creature comforts from back home." I highly recommend this book to all Iron Brigade aficionados, those especially interested in the activities of the Army of the Potomac's First Corps at Gettysburg and Civil War historians in general.

This book was a great if easy read for anyone interested in the Civil War. Actually, however, I would like to rate the book as five stars minus. First, what is good/great: The author puts a heavy amount of human interest into a story that could be essentially dry, particularly due to the amount of scholarly research the work displays. I found myself sincerely interested in what happened to the Iron Brigade personnel and read quickly to find out. That's why I titled my review in terms usually only given to suspense novels. In addition, the action at Gettysburg was easy to follow and the maps helped significantly. Checking the brigade's action with the OR, I found that the author's account was fully supported. I am always impressed by a work that can be quickly checked and its veracity supported by contemporaneous accounts and reports. Indeed, the Iron Brigade sacrificed itself on the first day of Gettysburg to pave the way for the Union army's ultimate victory. Whether Reynold's death caused the brigade to suffer higher casualties is an interesting controversy, but there is no doubt at all that the brigade earned itself the highest possible honors in the battle. There is much here to learn and digest, and the reader will come away the better for reading this book. On the other hand, allow me to indicate what I thought needs to be fixed for a second edition: The action of the Brigade at Gainesville should be expanded fully as Gainesville was a really remarkable fight that greatly impressed the Confederates. The wounded were left on the battlefield to suffer for two days while the battle of 2nd Manassas raged over them, and this story should include their

trials. The same is true for the Iron Brigade at Turner's Gap where Gibbon adopted the novel formation of advancing his two lead regiments, the 7th Wisconsin and 19th Indiana, in ten columns of two men abreast. At Gainesville the Iron Brigade left 30% of its number on the field as dead or wounded, at Turner's Gap they lost about 280 men out of the slightly more than 1100 that went into the battle. I understand these fights were not in the main theme of this book, but they significantly impacted the Iron Brigade, and almost any book about the brigade is incomplete without them. In addition, the author takes us well beyond Gettysburg to the reunions and many personal stories after the war, so the book is hardly only about the Iron Brigade at Gettysburg. Last, and certainly least, there are a few typos in the book, like "Pettigrew Brigade" rather than "Pettigrew's Brigade" but they were not so egregious as to be distracting. I include this comment only in rebuttal to the reviewer who gave the book only two stars. I heartily recommend this book to all and commend the author for writing it. I would, however, like to see a single book covering the whole history of the Iron Brigade as above. The author's research and scholarship is impressive as well as his writing, and an expanded book would be most welcome.

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