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Review of Myles Keogh: The Life and Legend of an "Irish Dragoon" in the Seventh Cavalry

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Myles Keogh: The Life and Legend of an "Irish Dragoon" in the Seventh Cavalry. Ed. John P. Langellier, Kurt Hamilton Cox, and Brian C. Pohanka. El Segundo: Upton and Sons, 1991. Foreword, introduction, afterword, contributors, bibliography, index. 206 pp. \$75.00.

During the summer of 1990, the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum hosted a symposium of Custer scholars and buffs. Rather than devoting their exclusive attention to the subtleties of the legendary 1876 "Last Stand," these researchers examined the life of the second most recognized soldier to emerge from the fight at Little Big Horn—Captain Myles Keogh. The product of their labors has now been published as eighteen loosely integrated essays in this oversized and expensive book that comprises volume 9 in Upton's "Montana and the West Series." Because of its dimensions, its inclusion of more than sixty photographs, and its rather esoteric nature, some critics will categorize this as a "coffee-table" publication that warrants no further attention. But to do so would be a major mistake, because the authors have provided fresh information on the frontier army, its ethnic dimensions, its social relationships, and the power of printing press and cinema in perpetuating its popular imagery.

The best articles in this collection deal with the background of Keogh. A broad overview of the Irish contribution to the American army between 1776 and 1876 is followed by a solid biography of Keogh's transition from youngest son of Irish landed gentry to a professional soldier who briefly served the Pope. Greater

glory and experience came from his participation in the American Civil War where he made contacts with important military and political figures who helped promote his subsequent career, the subject of a third chapter. A fourth selection reveals this "Irish Dragoon's" long and affectionate friendship with the Martin family of Auburn, New York—especially Nelly who was the last romantic interest of his life. A fifth chapter provides excellent detail about Keogh's respected position within the Seventh Cavalry in the decade following the Civil War. Although there was evidence of his melancholy moodiness and possible problems with alcohol, he remained popular among officers and enlisted men alike.

A second section of this book deals with that fateful day of 25 June 1876 at the Little Big Horn. Editor John P. Langellier provides an examination of the possible movements of Keogh's command in the battle as gleaned from Indian and white accounts. Pursuing a similar goal through the study of archeological evidence, Richard A. Fox, Jr., presents a sophisticated study of how Custer's command was cut to pieces.

A final selection of articles dramatizes the importance of myth in American military history. Father Vincent Heier's interesting essay traces the evolution of Keogh's heroic image in fiction, poetry, and film. Likewise, Francis Taunton briefly analyzes the various memorials and monuments created for the dashing captain. Finally, Elizabeth Laurence convincingly demonstrates that part of the Keogh legend rested upon the fate of his horse "Comanche," who was erroneously identified as the sole survivor of Custer's Last Stand.

Although this book will probably find its largest audience among Custer buffs, it deserves a wider reading from persons interested in the so-called New Military History.

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