

**Review of Steven Harris's book *Duffy's War: Fr. Francis Duffy, Wild Bill Donovan, And The Irish Fighting 69th In World War I*. 2007. *Journal of New York Irish History Roundtable*, 21, 58-59**

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Few men have been both brilliant intellectuals and great wartime humanitarian activists while in the midst of combat. Father Francis Patrick Duffy (1871-1932) was such a man. Canadian born Duffy was ordained a priest in 1896, a Vatican II Roman Catholic decades before Pope John XXIII's modernization of the Church. He was editor of the liberal publication THE NEW YORK REVIEW (thought to be in the heretical modernist genre by archbishop Corrigan of New York), instructor at St. Joseph's Seminary in Dunwoodie, Yonkers, and a priest in the Bronx before the war and in Manhattan after the war. He was the Chaplain of the 69th Regiment of New York Infantry (National Guard) in both the Spanish American War and the Great War.

Duffy's memoir, *Father Duffy's Story* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1919), written in part by Joyce Kilmer, gives a detailed history of the 69th (called the 165th in World War I), including how it was led (at times by Ivy Leaguers), recruited (rather, it received transfers from other units to form the Rainbow Division—the 42nd), trained (superficially at Ft. Mills), and the combat experiences of his flock: the mostly Irish-Americans of New York City who comprised 85% of the almost 4,000 recruits who sailed to France in 1917.

Poles, Italians, Germans, and French comprised the rest. Duffy's memoir recounts the unique story of the 69<sup>th</sup>, from the specific recruiting strategies used by the Catholic Church, to the baseball game fundraiser organized by the City of New York.

Another approach to Duffy's story has just been published, which is indispensable in the reconstruction of the social and cultural context of World War I, as well as the military history aspects of it: Stephen L. Harris's

*Duffy's War: Fr. Francis Duffy, Wild Bill Donovan, and the Irish Fighting 69<sup>th</sup> in World War I* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2008).

*Duffy's War* is Harris's last volume of his World War I trilogy on New York's National Guard Regiments of the Allied Expeditionary Force, and it breaks new ground in a number of ways. First, he has painstakingly researched the book and given us access to new primary sources—especially family collections of relatives and participants' diaries and letters (I counted 30 families). How he tracked these down started with his perusal of the pre-France departure roster of the 3,600 men of the 69th, followed by the reading of the obituaries; and then the computer-enhanced search for the families' current addresses (see pages xii-xiii for the details of the research trail). Secondly, he used the standard archives that historians of this topic would customarily use, but he mined those holdings for the light they cast on the various aspects of the 69th's history. Additionally, he brought a popular history structure, scope, and methodology to the analysis of those documents.

The author's approach has more positive than negative elements in it. On the positive side, the scope and sequence is mostly chronological. The Prologue begins with a flashback, which captures the June 29, 1932, memorial held at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York, where more than 25,000 mourners came to say good bye to "America's most famous priest" (xvii). It ends with an account of the somewhat Machiavellian behind-the-scenes-moves by Father Duffy himself to have Wild Bill Donovan made commander of the 69th. In between these Duffy bookends of the Prologue and the Epilogue, one finds 24 chapters (probably better had they been reduced in number by half) whose headings are often quotes from Donovan or Duffy (e.g., Chapter 23 from Donovan: "You Expected to Have the Pleasure of Burying Me"). Harris cites Duffy's memoirs 112 times. Letters from Donovan to his wife Ruth are cited less often, but his battlefield orders are added.

The one unfortunate drawback to the Harris book is the lack of a quantitative historical analysis- standard fare

for most social historians today. Missing are charts, tables, graphs, and other analytical illustrations. Consequently, name dropping in the sense of a list of who's who in the USA in the era of the Great War dilutes the narrative: Teddy Roosevelt's son Quentin, General Douglas MacArthur, and General George Patton are some of the more

obvious ones used repeatedly. Additionally, while the four battlefield maps Harris presents are very useful, his frequent reference to geography in narrative descriptive text provides confusion rather than clarity. Next, the writing style attempts to provide a community context with reference to the addresses of the soldiers, but tables of the type used by Robert Ernst in *IMMIGRANT LIFE IN NEW YORK CITY* would have been more enlightening. Lastly, while writing style is ultimately a subjective evaluation, Harris's overly flowery narrative wears out the reader. When he could have inserted a picture of the scenes of the areas of staging and carnage (Luneville, Bacccarat, Champagne, the Ourcq, St. Mihiel, and the Argonne), instead, he chose graphic language describing what a medic in the field discovered (235): "Men piled in great heaps, the dying with the dead- legs, arms, heads and torsos; bold, red or clotted

black; torn, seared, crying flesh." A very good project for a graduate student would be to take Harris's book in

conjunction with Duffy's and impose charts and tables customary for serious historical writing. The veterans of the Great War deserve nothing less.