*ery and the American West* is a book of formidable erudition and scope but one whose persuasiveness is limited by the views and events it fails to consider.

WILLIAM EARL WEEKS is lecturer in history, San Diego State University, San Diego, California.


Of all the brigades that comprised the great armies of 1861–1865, few acquired nicknames that survived their disbanding at war's end. A major exception to this general rule is the “Iron Brigade” of midwesterners that achieved undying fame in the Army of the Potomac. Formed in August, 1861, the brigade soon stabilized its composition as the 2nd, 6th, and 7th Wisconsin Infantry regiments and the 19th Indiana Infantry regiment. The only completely midwestern brigade in the eastern theater, it was otherwise notable only for its vigorous refusal to conform to the norms of soldiering prevalent in the East. In an effort to improve his command's deportment, Brigadier General John Gibbon instituted several disciplinary measures, including the requirement that brigade members wear the high-crowned regular army dress hat. On the afternoon of August 28, 1862, Gibbon's “Black Hat Brigade” stumbled into a vicious firefight at Brawner's Farm near Groveton, Virginia, a battle that changed its reputation forever but cost it one-third of its strength. Relatively uninvolved at Second Manassas, the unit played a much more significant role in the Antietam campaign. In a stiff fight at Turner's Gap the brigade came directly under the eye of George McClellan. At Antietam it again took horrendous casualties in the famous “cornfield” and shortly thereafter began to style itself the “Iron Brigade.” Reinforced by another western unit, the 24th Michigan, the brigade ultimately achieved immortality at great cost during the first day at Gettysburg. At a much reduced strength the Iron Brigade survived into 1864, but Grant's punishing Overland campaign eventually caused its amalgamation with other units at Petersburg.

Alan Nolan first told the story of the Iron Brigade in a classic work published in 1961. Now Alan D. Gaff and Lance J. Herdegen add new titles to the unit's already extensive bibliography. Both authors have trod this ground before, Gaff in a book on the Brawner's Farm fight and Herdegen in a work on the 6th Wisconsin at Gettysburg.
Gaff’s *On Many a Bloody Field* essays to be a history of Company B, 19th Indiana Infantry, the Richmond City Greys, but in reality it is a detailed history of the regiment itself. Using a wealth of personal accounts, Gaff portrays the regiment’s entire war service: its first year of inaction; its decimation at Brawner’s Farm, Antietam, and Gettysburg; its amalgamation with other units and ultimate disappearance. At every turn the stories told are personal. This effective technique causes the reader to identify strongly with individuals, rejoicing for them as they survive battles and rise in rank, weeping for them as they are grievously wounded or killed. The author’s material does not permit a focus on Company B, but he remains with it whenever he can. The fact that Company B returned to Indiana in 1865 with only ten survivors of its original 115 men makes the human cost of the Civil War at the community level gruesomely apparent. Few modern studies portray the life, internal economy, and death of a Civil War regiment as well as this one. *On Many a Bloody Field* is a superb addition to the literature of Indiana’s participation in the conflict.

Herdegen’s *The Men Stood Like Iron*, although well written and handsomely produced, is less successful than Gaff’s work as a contribution to Civil War scholarship. Much like Nolan earlier, Herdegen has chosen to emphasize the brigade’s transformation from indiscipline to heroism in its first eighteen months. While Gaff wanted to study a company but was forced to examine a regiment, Herdegen proposed to study a brigade but let his sources confine him primarily to the 6th Wisconsin regiment. The book begins with Gettysburg, then flashes back to 1861 and carries the brigade forward until the post-Antietam army reorganization. Indeed, the Iron Brigade appellation stems from this period (although its exact origins are somewhat unclear), but the unit’s marches and battles have been recounted with clearer focus elsewhere. Inadvertently, Herdegen’s narrative leaves the impression that the Iron Brigade was the 6th Wisconsin and a few friends who rotated in and out of the saga. Those interested in Indiana’s Civil War history will find little of interest here except a gracefully written but episodic and partial account of the war service of a famous brigade.

William Glenn Robertson is deputy director and chief of staff rides, Combat Studies Institute, United States Army Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas. He continues to work on a study of the Chickamauga Campaign.


The material culture of American religion has a topography that spans an extraordinary range of architectural forms and a wide