



Confederate Catholics at War, 1642 - 1649 (Studies in Irish History)

Padraig Lenihan

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This book evaluates the Confederate Catholic war effort from the preceding phase of localized insurgency, through the formation of a national self-government in 1642, until the Confederate Catholic regime was finally subsumed in a broad pan-Royalist alliance in 1649.

While this alliance held out the prospect of significant religious and constitutional concessions this achievement was nullified by the subsequent Cromwellian catastrophe: the Confederate regime failed.

In attributing this failure to political factionalism, historians have neglected the potential and limitations of the Confederate war effort. This study does not substitute crude military determinism but acknowledges that political indecision and strategic incoherence inhibited the war effort at critical junctures. From the conflicting political priorities of Confederates two partially exclusive military strategies, insular, and expeditionary, can be identified. Both strategies were proactive and so demanded standing armies rather than local militia units.

This book emphasizes the crucial importance of the tax gathering apparatus in fueling the incremental growth of standing armies. In the absence of large scale foreign patronage, exacting money from an agrarian economy, rather than the shortages of material, or still less, manpower representing the crucial extrinsic limit to Confederate military potential. Given these limits, it was a considerable achievement to contain two British interventions (in 1642 and 1646/7 respectively).

The influence of the contemporaneous "military revolution" on the European mainland was mediated by the cadre of returned mercenary officers. Consequently, the Confederates developed a qualitative edge in fortification and siegecraft. The application of the continental model and the shift from putatively "celtic" or irregular tactics of raiding and running battles would be more problematic. This and other explanations for the poor battlefield performance of the Confederate armies are discussed.

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