



Canada under Attack: Irish-American veterans of the Civil War and their Fenian campaign to conquer Canada (Amazing Stories)

Cheryl MacDonald

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Most history books make a joke of it, but Canada faced a serious military threat in the 1860s -- and came under multiple attacks by military forces based in the United States. It took the combined effort of British troops in Canada and the Canadian militia -- plus some good luck -- to repel the invaders and end the threat. The experience helped push Confederation to fruition in 1867.

Cheryl MacDonald offers a fast-paced account of these events. Irish-Americans who had fought in the US Civil War emerged from that war with new military skills. There was widespread unemployment. Many Irish immigrants were fervent supporters of the Irish independence movement. Irish leaders saw an opportunity to cause problems for the hated British authorities -- and to bargain for Irish independence -- by using their new military prowess to attack Britain's North American colonies. Many expected Canadians to welcome a defeat of the colonial rulers.

In this book, Cheryl MacDonald describes how the Fenians mounted their attacks into what is now Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, and New Brunswick. Among the many colourful characters in her story are Canada's first spymaster, Gilbert McMicken, who organized a network of agents providing intelligence on the Fenians, and Thomas D'Arcy McGee, a one-time Fenian supporter who became a key colleague of John A. Macdonald -- until McGee's assassination in Ottawa by a Fenian sympathizer.

In the background, playing an ambiguous role, were key American politicians. They were torn: many vigorously supported US expansionism, and saw Canada as the next addition to the Union after the successful addition of Florida, Texas, California, and Louisiana -- with Alaska to come in 1867. After the disastrous Civil War, they were not ready to go to war with Britain and face its overwhelming naval power and its naval bases in Halifax and Victoria. A Fenian success, however, promised a possible back-door way to annexing Canada or some of its parts -- the West and B.C., for instance.

This book, which reflects the findings of recent scholarship on this tumultuous period, is a short, readable overview of the drama and conflict as Britain's colonies coalesced in the Canadian Confederation. These events place a different light on the atmosphere around the negotiations by politicians that led to the Confederation deal in 1866-67.

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