

Hood's Texas Brigade in the Civil War

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Review

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Williams, Edward B. *Hood's Texas Brigade in the Civil War*. McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, \$45.00 ISBN 978-0-7864-6860-7

New Study on one of the Confederacy's Most Prominent Regiments

Hood's Texas Brigade remains arguably the best-known Confederate unit from the Lone Star State, but it has been more than forty years since a new comprehensive history of these men appeared in print. The first such effort, of course, was Joseph B. Polley's very personal account, which was published in 1910, followed almost sixty years later by Harold B. Simpson's popular history, subtitled "Lee's Grenadier Guard." The latter proved to be only one of four volumes on Hood's Texas Brigade by Simpson, who also edited several memoirs concerning the Texans. Edward B. Williams, an independent scholar, promises to stand on the broad shoulders of these two story-telling giants and provide an updated account grounded in the new research that has been unearthed in the past decades. While he is a smooth writer himself, and his book will take its place on the working bookshelves of many scholars and buffs alike, he does not deliver a study with the analytical edge most academics demand today.

Those who are familiar with the history of Hood's Texas Brigade will find many well-known stories in this volume, while those who have not studied its campaigns will encounter much to entertain and educate them. There are single chapters devoted to each of the primary engagements: Gaines Mill, Second Bull Run, Antietam, Suffolk, Chickamauga, Knoxville, and Appomattox. The fighting in the Wilderness provides material for two chapters, as does the final siege at Richmond and Petersburg. Not all of the favorite tales are here—the story of George A. Branard being blasted at Gettysburg is absent—but there are enough to satisfy most of those who are interested in a lively narrative. Williams is quite politic in his story-telling—for example, in the Wilderness it was "several Texans" who grabbed Traveller's bridle and urged Gen. Robert E. Lee to abstain from leading them into combat (221). The author prudently refrains from

choosing one name from among the multitude who claimed that honor then and after the Civil War. There are a few missteps, however, in recounting some incidents, such as having John Marshall lead the way into an icy creek in March 1862 on page 29 and having John Bell Hood himself do the honors on page 52. It is also highly doubtful that Hood's Texans originated the Rebel Yell, as Williams has a Wisconsin major claim on page 108. But in the balance, these minor points do not outweigh the value of this work as a fine narrative.

Where academics, and even some laymen, will find fault is in the lack of analysis. While there is a chapter devoted to the "Anatomy" of the brigade, only officers receive much attention (25). There is little discussion of the men in the ranks, whence they came, or what happened to them outside of the war. The author makes no use of compiled service records, pension records, tax rolls, census materials, or even the most recent editions of memoirs to tell the reader more about Hood's Texans. Other scholars have made some attempt to analyze social origins within the brigade, modeling their work after similar studies of other units, but there are no citations to them here. There is a hefty bibliography, but at crucial moments such as when Williams provides appendices on battle casualties, Simpson becomes the principal source of information (along with the published estimates of Frederick Phisterer). There is no discussion of recruiting during the war, and conscription is dismissed with a reference to Simpson declaring there was only one draftee in the whole brigade. A quick survey of the compiled service records for Company F of the 4th Texas Infantry would reveal the names of four men who were drafted and another who was paid to be a substitute for a fifth conscript, and there were certainly more like them.

This is a labor of love by a skilled writer, not an academic. While some will rightly celebrate that fact, as academics are often sadly lacking in story-telling skills, there is still much of the tale of Hood's Texas Brigade to be told. Williams has provided an entertaining narrative, not an incisive analysis of the Texans and their colleagues from South Carolina, Georgia, and Arkansas. As such, it serves as a complement to Polley and Simpson. It will be much cited in other works, and it will be often used to compile lectures for classrooms and public forums. But those who want more analysis will have to wait.

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