

By the Noble Daring of Her Sons: The Florida Brigade of the Army of the Tennessee

Jeff Giambrone

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Review

Giambrone, Jeff

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Sheppard, Jonathan *By the Noble Daring of Her Sons: The Florida Brigade of the Army of the Tennessee*. University of Alabama Press, \$49.95 ISBN 978-0-8173-1707-2

Shining a Light on the Little Known Roll of Floridians During the War

The service of Florida's sons in the Civil War, in particular those men who served in the Army of Tennessee, has received scant attention from historians over the years. This oversight has been ably corrected by Jonathan C. Sheppard, author of *By The Noble Daring Of Her Sons: The Florida Brigade of the Army of Tennessee*. A Visiting Assistant Professor of History at Florida State University, Sheppard is very knowledgeable about the Floridians who fought in the Army of Tennessee: he wrote both his Master's Thesis and PhD dissertation on the subject. Although the Florida Brigade of the Army of Tennessee was not formed until November 1863, the book covers in detail the complete wartime histories of the regiments that would comprise the command: the 1st, 3rd, 4th, 6th, and 7th Florida Infantry Regiments, and the 1st Florida Cavalry Regiment, Dismounted.

Prior to the Civil War, thousands of Southerners were drawn to Florida by the abundance of inexpensive, good quality farm land. Most of these immigrants were from Georgia and South Carolina, and Sheppard points out that "These new residents not only wished to re-create their societies within Florida but also sought political dominance. What resulted then were communities of Georgians and South Carolinians who maintained close ties with their native states and eventually helped push Florida toward secession" (3). After the election of Abraham Lincoln as president in 1860, Floridians quickly organized a secession convention, and on January 10, 1861, the delegates voted 62-7 in favor of leaving the Union.

With a new nation to defend, thousands of men rushed to join the military. Sheppard notes that "Throughout the spring and summer of 1861, Florida armed

her sons for war. The basis of the Florida Brigade, the 1st, 3rd, and 4th Florida Infantry Regiments, mustered into service during this initial wave of patriotic fervor" (10). The 1st Florida Cavalry completed its organization in January 1862, followed shortly thereafter by the 6th and 7th Florida Infantry Regiments. The initial service of these units was within their home state, but soon the growing war would call these Floridians to fight and die on battlefields far from their homes.

The 1st Florida was the initial unit from the state to see a major battle, fighting at Shiloh on April 6-7, 1862. The unit suffered 16 killed and 57 wounded in the battle, but their bravery on the battlefield had been noticed: Sheppard writes that "Shiloh brought Florida positive attention as a state across the Confederacy for the first time during the war" (44). The Battle of Perryville, Kentucky, October 8, 1862, brought more accolades to Florida's soldiers: the 1st and 3rd regiments fought well, and as Sheppard noted: "Kentucky served to transform the surviving Floridians from inexperienced volunteers to seasoned campaigners" (91). As 1862 ended, the Army of Tennessee fought one last battle for the year at Murfreesboro, December 31 – January 2, 1863. The 1st and 3rd Florida (Consolidated) and the 4th Florida suffered what Sheppard describes as "irreplaceable casualties" but "The latter regiment's green soldiers were now veterans" (108).

At the Battle of Chickamauga, September 19 – 20, 1863, the inexperienced soldiers of the 6th Florida Infantry, 7th Florida Infantry, and the 1st Florida Cavalry, (Dismounted), were engaged in their first significant combat of the war. On the first day of the battle they were desperately engaged while forcing a Union brigade from the Viniard Cornfield. In this action the 6th Florida suffered heavy casualties: 35 killed and 130 wounded. Sheppard notes that it was in this battle that Colonel Jesse Johnson Finley, commander of the 6th Florida, "developed into an effective combat leader" (148). His military prowess would have an important impact on the soon to be created Florida Brigade, as Finley would be its first commander.

In the wake of their victory at Chickamauga, the Rebels laid siege to the Federals in Chattanooga. It was during this period of relative inactivity that General Braxton Bragg undertook a reorganization of the Army of Tennessee. As part of this effort, Special Orders No. 294 was issued on November 12, 1863, to place all of the Florida regiments in the army into one brigade. Command of this new brigade went to the senior regimental colonel, which happened to be

Finley. Colonel Finley commanded the brigade until his wounding at the Battle of Jonesboro on August 31, 1864. Sheppard says of Finley that "During his tenure of command he demonstrated two qualities necessary in an effective leader: empathy for his troops and effective leadership on the battlefield" (197).

Finley's Florida Brigade fought with the Army of Tennessee until the end of the war. They generally fought well, but their legacy was marred by two poor performances during the Nashville Campaign: they were routed from the field at Murfreesboro on December 2, 1864, and on December 16 the brigade all but fell apart during the Union assault on Shy's Hill. Sheppard wrote of the Florida Brigade's tainted legacy: "Ferocious fighters, the Florida Brigade's units had given their all on the battlefields in which they fought. Over the course of the war, one in every three became a battlefield casualty, and hundreds more died of disease. Their disastrous performances late in the war during the engagements fought outside Murfreesboro and Nashville however caused their reputation to suffer. Today these soldiers are mainly remembered for those disasters" (222).

With *By The Noble Daring Of Her Sons*, Jonathan C. Sheppard has done a masterful job of telling the story of Finley's Florida Brigade. His thorough research into the primary sources related to the men who fought in the brigade pays big dividends, as the reader is able to truly understand what the Floridians experienced during the war. While the book could have used more maps to illustrate the actions in which the Florida Brigade was engaged, this is only a minor criticism. Sheppard's work will stand as the definitive work on the Floridians who served in the Army of Tennessee for many years to come.

Jeff T. Giambrone is an historian with the Mississippi Department of Archives & History. His latest book is: Remembering Mississippi's Confederates, published by Arcadia in 2012. Mr. Giambrone can be reached at Championhilz@att.net