



Hood's Texas Brigade: The Soldiers and Families of the Confederacy's Most Celebrated Unit by Susannah J. Ural.

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Review by Robert L. Glaze, Georgia Military College (rglaze@gmc.edu).

Unit histories represent some of the Civil War's earliest literature. Barely had arms been stacked at Appomattox Court House before veterans began recounting their wartime experiences. While sometimes merely encyclopedic, early unit histories tended to be bathed in romanticism, myopia, and often self-aggrandizement. As fruitful for scholars of memory as for military historians, these works demonstrate that soldiers' communal bonds and struggles were central to their wartime experience.

While never vanishing from the war's literature, unit histories have experienced a scholarly renaissance in recent years. No more exemplary work has emerged than *Hood's Texas Brigade* by historian Susannah Ural (Univ. of Southern Mississippi). Seamlessly melding military and social history, the book is a model for scholars striving to avoid the "drums and bugles" stigma that has plagued the genre. Indeed, Ural explicitly conceptualizes it as a community study as much as a traditional unit military history.

Although her book features a compelling narrative, Ural's analysis of the brigade's unique character is its greatest asset. While Gen. John Bell Hood's Texans echoed the values and sentiments of their fellow Confederates, Ural highlights what made them distinctive.

While the men's wealth and slave-owning status reflected the norm among mid-nineteenth-century Texans, their ideological dedication to the Confederacy sets the Texas Brigade apart from their fellow Confederates. The volunteers and families who comprised this unit never lost their determination to help in Confederate independence. These men could have served close to home, but they insisted on fighting more than a thousand miles from their families because that is where they believed they could help most. (4)

The author's probing analysis of this determination leaves little doubt that Hood's Texans were indeed one of the Confederacy's elite units.

The Texas Brigade's success was grounded in the men's strong self-identity as Confederates, in the mutual respect between the brigade's junior officers and their men, and in their constant desire to maintain their reputation not just as Texans but also as the best soldiers in Robert E. Lee's army and all the Confederacy. (5)

While the men took immense pride in their membership in the brigade, their devotion to the Army of Northern Virginia was another galvanizing force. Echoing the findings of Gary Gallagher and Caroline Janney,¹ among others, Ural shows that the Texas Brigade, like so many others, made no distinction between Robert E. Lee, the Army of Northern Virginia, and the Confederacy as a

1. Respectively, *The Confederate War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U Pr, 1997), and *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation*. (Chapel Hill: UNC Pr, 2013).

whole. Even in 1865, despite their state of origin and service in the western theater, Hood's Texans saw Virginia as "the decisive epicenter of the war" (205).

Their devotion to each other, their commanders, their cause, and their army allowed the men to maintain superb morale for most of the war. This early enthusiasm carried them through the first months of the war, helping them endure travel, drill, boredom, inept and unpopular leaders, and disease. Rumors of peace in early 1862 were greeted with anger and disappointment as the men had yet to see battle.

Even some of the war's significant Confederate cataclysms did not damage the brigade's spirits. Thanks to early victories, supportive loved ones, and an iron faith in ultimate victory, Hood's Texans retreated from Antietam convinced that it would only delay the inevitable Rebel victory. Though many Confederates welcomed news of Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation with abject and often apocalyptic horror, the Texans' were unbowed, believing Confederate victory would nullify emancipation. Faced with the likely destruction of their cherished racial hierarchy, Hood's Texans remained unshakably confident in themselves and their cause, even after the dual disasters of Gettysburg and Vicksburg.

The nadir of the unit's morale came in the wake of Chickamauga. Transferred west as part of Gen. James Longstreet's corps, the men found themselves fighting far from the Old Dominion and General Lee. Furthermore heavy casualties, distrust of the Army of Tennessee and its commanders, and lack of supplies and food led to increased desertions. Nevertheless, the unit's morale was boosted by its reunion with the Army of Northern Virginia and their fighting spirit persisted through the Overland Campaign and into the Siege of Petersburg.

The author also debunks the long-held supposition that Texans were less loyal to the Confederacy than older southern states. The infancy of Texas statehood did little to lessen its volunteer's commitment to the Rebel cause. This was especially true in Eastern and Central Texas, which provided most of the brigade's recruits. Even rumors of an imminent Federal invasion of Texas did not keep the men who ultimately comprised Hood's brigade from lobbying for deployment to Virginia. Confederate nationalism was ubiquitous in the brigade.

True to her book's subtitle, Ural makes exceptional use of family correspondence, a boon to the social historians among her readers. Home-front and battlefield morale are tandem phenomena; the Texan soldiers' families were a source of both concern and encouragement. The author's discussions of the home front show that, even hundreds of miles from home, Texan soldiers considered family life a vital part of their wartime experiences.

Hood's Texas Brigade is a first-rate unit history, but also an exemplary brief for the value of blending military and social history. Susannah Ural's well written, convincing, and thoroughly researched book should be read by Civil War historians of every ilk.