Granbury's Texas Brigade: Diehard Western Confederates

A. Wilson Greene

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cwbr>

Recommended Citation

Greene, A. Wilson (2012) "Granbury's Texas Brigade: Diehard Western Confederates," *Civil War Book Review*. Vol. 14 : Iss. 3 .

DOI: 10.31390/cwbr.14.3.19

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cwbr/vol14/iss3/18>

Review

Greene, A. Wilson

Summer 2012

Lundberg, John R. *Granbury's Texas Brigade: Diehard Western Confederates*. Louisiana State University Press, \$39.95 ISBN 978-0-8071-4347-6

A New Approach to Unit History

Brigadier General Hiram Granbury commanded the brigade that bore his name from November 1863 through the battle of Franklin a year later. Granbury's Texans earned a well-deserved reputation as one of the best units in the Army of Tennessee's premier combat division, led by the incomparable Major General Patrick Cleburne. John R. Lundberg's study, an adaptation of his doctoral dissertation at Texas Christian University, directed by the esteemed Steven E. Woodworth, is the most detailed and scholarly examination of this infantry brigade yet written.

Granbury's Brigade found its origins in a mixture of infantry and cavalry regiments recruited in Texas during the first year of the war. Most of what would become this brigade was captured in early 1863 at Arkansas Post, while the 7th Texas Infantry followed a unique path, having been captured almost a year earlier at Fort Donelson. Lundberg traces the unit's history through four phases: the formation of the regiments and their respective captures; the 7th Texas's fight at Raymond through the battle of Chickamauga; the formation of the brigade and its first combat at Missionary Ridge through its practical demise at Franklin; and its postscript as a unit from Nashville to surrender in North Carolina in April 1865.

In many ways, Lundberg's work conforms to the traditional framework of unit histories with a narrative emphasis on the soldiers' experiences in battle, of which there was much. These Texans played critical roles in some of the Army of Tennessee's most important engagements including Missionary Ridge, the Atlanta Campaign, and the bloody disaster at Franklin. The author's assertion that "Granbury's Texas Brigade served as the shock troops, the diehard

Confederates of the Confederate Army of Tennessee, for roughly a year, from its formation in November 1863 to November 1864" rings true (3).

Perhaps due to its pedigree as a Ph.D dissertation, Lundberg applies an academic patina to this largely conventional combat history that gradually becomes a distraction. Citing studies of Confederate military motivation such as Larry J. Daniel's *Soldiering in the Army of Tennessee* (1991), Gary Gallagher's *The Confederate War* (1997), and Jason Phillips's *Diehard Rebels: The Confederate Culture of Invincibility* (2007), Lundberg asserts that Granbury's Texans demonstrated that strong leadership at the brigade and divisional levels and local combat success trumped the army's dismal combat record. Moreover, the willingness of these soldiers to continue their military service proved that Confederate nationalism motivated their determination to see the war through to a successful conclusion.

These theories are entirely plausible and very well might be true but Lundberg does little to substantiate his thesis, other than repeating it in the opening and concluding paragraphs of every chapter in a stunningly tedious fashion. In fairness, a dearth of primary sources may explain this lack of documentation. Lundberg clearly did his homework and mined all the logical repositories searching for appropriate contemporary accounts. Correspondence between Texas soldiers serving east of the Mississippi and the folks at home was limited by geographic and military considerations.

The author's thesis that dedication to Confederate nationalism explained the unit's steadfast performance on the battlefield, absent any significant evidence, reduces one of the book's primary tenets to mere speculation and ignores factors such as fealty to comrades, peer and community pressure, and even lack of alternative courses of action to account for the Texans' continued service. For example, Lundberg states that because the 7th Texas "accepted capture and imprisonment" at and after Fort Donelson (did they have a choice?) their "early devotion to the Confederacy" manifested itself (38). Of course, the vast majority of soldiers in the Army of Tennessee did not desert the ranks and Lundberg's implication that the absence of wholesale demoralization marks Granbury's brigade as special lacks credibility. Similarly, Lundberg finds the brigade's willingness to continue with the army after the bloodbath at Franklin "amazing" although no brigade in Hood's army practiced mass desertion after that unfortunate attack.

Ironically, Lundberg documents a relatively high desertion rate among the cavalry regiments, particularly when they were converted to infantry. However, he explains that these deserters left the ranks due not to a lack of nationalism but merely because they sought to serve closer to home. He can document that some of these men joined local units in Texas but little in his source material speaks to the question of nationalism. Similarly, Lundberg tells us that experience as prisoners of war reinforced Confederate loyalty among the men who surrendered at Arkansas Post but one looks in vain for significant evidence to substantiate this theory. This reviewer is skeptical that the Texans “rejoiced at the end of the Atlanta Campaign” and that their “morale soared” in early September 1864 without strong substantiation to counter the grimmer conventional depiction of Hood’s army at that time (198).

Undocumented assertions are not limited to questions of motivation. Lundberg states that the 7th Texas was disheartened by the defeats at Raymond and Vicksburg and “only too happy to get out from under [Joseph] Johnston” in late July 1863, both plausible sentiments but lacking proof (73). In Chapter Six Lundberg states that “the shared experience of incarceration...served to deepen [the] loyalty [of the Texans] to the Confederacy and to each other” but fails to offer more than a single episode of insubordination toward a Union surgeon to buttress his claim (75).

Granbury's Texas Brigade devotes little attention to the internal workings of this storied unit, other than tracing its various additions and deletions and its succession of commanders (although the 35th Tennessee is added to the brigade when Lucius Polk is wounded in June 1864 and promptly disappears from Lundberg’s narrative). Readers will learn little about the brigade’s administration, logistics, unit politics, racial attitudes, or other activities off the battlefield. Lundberg tells us, quite provocatively, that “many Texans gained furloughs to return home” in the late winter of 1864 but fails to explain how these men managed to make the long trek between Dalton and Texas and then find their way back to the army in time to participate in the spring campaign (137). He dismisses in a single paragraph the intention of some brigade members to “Kill every damn one” of the African American troops they captured in Dalton during the fall (201). These topics would have been at least as interesting as often familiar descriptions of the combat performance of Cleburne’s Division on various battlefields.

More troubling, Lundberg's operational accounts suggest that he possesses an imperfect understanding of the brigade's campaigns and their geography. For example, in his examination of the Vicksburg Campaign we are told that Grant crossed the Mississippi River at Grand Gulf on May 1, that he intended to capture Jackson prior to the battle of Raymond, and that his entire army subsequently marched to the Mississippi capital. The chapter on Chickamauga incorrectly locates Lee and Gordon's Mill upstream from McLemore's Cove, places Dug Gap south of Negley's position in the cove, misspells the Viniard farm, and misidentifies the officer responsible for the fatal gap in the Union line as Charles Woods. Readers will be surprised to learn that Joe Hooker captured the summit of Lookout Mountain during the middle of the morning of November 24 or that Dallas, Georgia lies sixteen miles south of the Chattahoochee River—and there are others. It is disappointing that LSU Press's readers and fact checkers failed to catch these bloopers.

The book includes adequate maps and a good collection of appropriate illustrations. The appendices detailing casualties and demographic information about the brigade's members are helpful and illuminating.

Granbury's Texas Brigade provides a workmanlike unit history, written substantially in the narrative tradition of such studies. It provides some new insights on the brigade's combat record and a detailed and enlightening description of the regiments' origins and military experience prior to their heyday as the Army of Tennessee's premier fighting force. The author's thorough research, particularly in the regimental records at the National Archives, has yielded an abundance of valuable quantitative data. Lundberg's effort to endow his book with an additional layer of relevance—perhaps in an attempt to elevate a dissertation from the mere recounting of events—succeeds less well. He fails to convince us that Granbury's Brigade evinced loyalty to the army or a degree of Confederate nationalism much different than most veteran brigades in the Army of Tennessee—no matter how often he repeats it.

A. Wilson Greene is the author of The Final Battles of the Petersburg Campaign and Confederate Petersburg: Confederate City in the Crucible of War. He is at work on a multi-volume history of the Petersburg Campaign.