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## Fallen Guidon: The Saga of Confederate General Jo Shelby's March to Mexico

By Edwin Adams Davis. *FALLEN GUIDON: THE SAGA OF CONFEDERATE GENERAL JO SHELBY'S MARCH TO MEXICO*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995. 174pp. Maps and bibliographical essay. Cloth, ISBN 0-89096-683-4; paper, ISBN 0-89096-684-2. <http://www.amazon.com/Fallen-Guidon-Confederate-General-Shelbys/dp/0890966842>

A book review by CW5 Robert B. Reynolds

The Civil War ended with the surrender of General Robert E. Lee's Confederate forces to General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House on Palm Sunday, 9 April 1865. In the final days of the American Civil War, the Trans-Mississippi South was in anarchy. From his headquarters in Shreveport, Edmund Kirby-Smith had lost control of units. Rioting, looting, mutiny, and widespread insubordination were rampant. Not all of the Rebel units, however, abandoned military discipline. Brigadier General Jo Shelby's Missouri Iron Brigade was one such unit. Comprised of Missouri and Arkansas cavalry, the Iron Brigade refused to surrender. Shelby and his men, instead, collectively decided to find sanctuary in Mexico.

*FALLEN GUIDON* traces Shelby's movement from North Texas to the Mexican Border, across to Piedras Negras, and then down a "line of march" through the Mexico interior to Mexico City. The general's original vision was to offer his brigade's services to the forces fighting for Benito Juarez to restore the Mexican Republic. On reaching the Rio Grande at Eagle Pass, Texas, in June 1865, the Confederates symbolically buried their Rebel battle flag in the bottom of the river and moved across to start their new lives as hired guns following their brigade guidon.

However, Shelby's plans fell apart. After negotiating with the Juarezista garrison commander, the general learned that his men preferred to offer their sabers to the Imperialists working to prop up the tottering regime of the Hapsburg Prince Maximilian. The former Rebels declared their allegiance for yet another lost cause. The "Iron Brigade" siding in opposition to the forces of national self-determination. Loyal to the wishes of his men, Shelby submitted, promising to lead his troops to the court of Maximilian in Mexico City.

The brigade's cross-country trip is the interesting part of this book. Encounters with Republican troops, bandits, partisans, and Indians keep the story flowing while providing insight into conditions in the interior of 1865 Mexico. Dipping deeper into the country, the ex-Confederates recollected stories of their childhood regarding the last "gringo" invasion of Mexico, outlined chivalric pursuits that involved pistol duels, and a bloody rescue of a woman imprisoned in a hacienda. French commanders eyed them with suspicion. Keen to prove their loyalty, the Iron Brigade engaged in ad hoc warfare at Matehuala, where the Missourians and Arkansans rescued the French 82nd Line Regiment from sure disaster at the hands of Mariano Escobedo's Juarezistas.

Shelby's military successes earned him an audience with the Emperor. When Shelby arrived in Mexico City, however, the Austrian told the ex-Confederates to go home. At the time Maximilian had a surplus of Europeans at his disposal and he did not want to provoke the government of the United States by employing former Rebels. Broken, the hard-riding Iron Brigade saddled its last review while in Mexico City before finally disbanding. Shelby and most of the men went home. Some ex-Confederates went on to serve alongside Union veterans with the Juarezistas.

*FALLEN GUIDON* may not be an authoritative work, but it does provide some entertaining and useful tidbits for students of the American Civil War.

