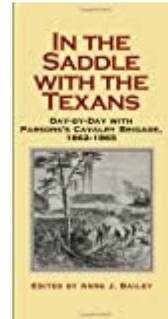


Anne J. Bailey, ed. *In the Saddle with the Texans: Day-by-Day with Parsons's Cavalry Brigade, 1862-1865.* Abilene: McWhiney Foundation Press, 2004. 414 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-893114-48-7.



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The Unglamorous Life of Texas Cavalrymen in the Trans-Mississippi

In recent years, historians have done much to rescue the Trans-Mississippi region from relative anonymity. In particular, a small cadre of historians, including Anne J. Bailey, Alwyn Barr, Norman Brown, Richard Lowe, Thomas Reid, and this reviewer, have focused attention on Texas Confederates who served in the Trans-Mississippi. Although participating in few full-scale battles, Texans campaigned actively and helped prevent a successful enemy occupation. William Henry Parsons's Texas cavalry brigade, consisting of the Twelfth Cavalry, the Nineteenth Cavalry, the Twenty-first Cavalry, the Thirtieth Cavalry (added late in the war), and Charles L. Morgan's regiment served actively in the Trans-Mississippi. Anne J. Bailey wrote ably about this aggressive brigade in her narrative history, *Between the Enemy and Texas: Parsons's Texas Cavalry in the Civil War* (1989). *In the Saddle* is a transcription of the brigade's order book and may be used as a companion to Bailey's earlier work as well as a stand-alone reference work.

The Nicholas P. Sims Library in Waxahachie, Texas, owns the original order book. With the aid of graduate assistant Carlyn E. Kahl, Bailey transcribed the order

book and preserved the original flavor of it with some minor exceptions. The order book begins with the June 1862 operations of the Twelfth Texas Cavalry in Arkansas, continues through the creation of the brigade and its subsequent campaigns in Arkansas and Louisiana, and ends with the disbanding of the unit in May 1865. There are only two significant gaps in the order book; the book contains no documents relating to the 1863 Missouri raid by the Nineteenth and the Twenty-first Texas Cavalry, and the order book contains relatively few documents about the brigade's Red River campaign service in 1864. The editor has wisely supplemented the order book by including period newspaper descriptions of the Texans battling at Cotton Plant, Arkansas, raiding in northeastern Louisiana in 1863, and campaigning along the Red River. Bailey presents the documents in chronological order and divides them into logical chapters. An introduction accompanies each chapter and provides a military context for the documents. The book concludes with one appendix containing several captured orders relating to the First Wisconsin Cavalry and a second appendix listing the officers of Parsons's cavalry brigade.

So, what kind of information is actually included in the order book? The orders document what initially appear to be mundane topics such as appointments, condition of animals, disciplinary actions, examination boards, leaves of absences and furloughs, promotions, purchasing of horses and provisions, special details, and scouting. However, examining the entire range of documents reveals the actual, unromantic inner workings of a Civil War cavalry brigade. The average Civil War buff has probably never realized that some Confederate cavalrymen drove hogs and “Beavs” (p. 102), “butcher[ed] hogs,” (p. 135) “haul[ed] corn,” (p. 137) and “shell[ed] corn” (p. 137) in addition to their scouting duties. These Confederates were often required to be a self-sufficient, mobile community. Bouts of undisciplined behavior, a relatively typical trait of Trans-Mississippi Confederates, afflicted Parsons’s brigade. Some problems included “annoying citizens” (p. 309), “break[ing] open the doors of Masonic

Hall in Silver Lake Ark” (p. 151), card playing while on sentry duty, desertion, stealing property, and straggling. Evidence of the slow collapse of the Trans-Mississippi can be seen as discipline problems surged and as the men found it increasingly difficult to obtain supplies. In the closing year of the war, shortages of beef, forage, and stationery were noted.

Throughout the book, Bailey includes a number of helpful footnotes that identify soldiers as well as provide additional information concerning topics mentioned in the orders. This is not a book that most readers will read cover to cover, but it serves as an important reference source. Those with an interest in Parsons’s brigade will find much of value in this volume as will scholars with a more general interest in the Confederate Trans-Mississippi and Confederate cavalry. It is sources like this order book of Parsons’s Texas cavalry brigade that add richly to our understanding of the “real” war.

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