



Horse Sweat and Powder Smoke: The First Texas Cavalry in the Civil War (Williams-Ford Texas A&M University Military History Series)

Stanley S. McGowen

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The 1st Texas Cavalry Regiment, also known as the 1st Texas Mounted Rifles, was Texas' first contribution of soldiers to the Civil War. The regiment was the first Confederate unit organized in Texas and the longest to serve, participating in Indian skirmishes on the frontier as well as in full battles against the Union.

In *Horse Sweat and Powder Smoke* Stanley S. McGowen describes and honors one of the most unique and successful military units in Texas history. He provides the first complete history of the 1st Texas Cavalry Regiment, documenting their origins from the Confederate Committee on Public Safety's request for mounted units to the appointment of Henry McCulloch to colonel of cavalry.

McCulloch, a former Texas Ranger, was swift and effective at motivating his fellow Texans to arms, notably Captains James B. "Buck" Barry and Thomas C. Frost. The regimental commanders, McCulloch, Augustus Buchel, and William Yager, were acknowledged for their emphasis on precise discipline and gentlemanly conduct, and their training methods were valuable in that soldiers learned both cavalry and infantry maneuvers, as well as saber fighting and the proper care of horses and equipment. As many commanders maintained lax rules of propriety and organization, the 1st Texas Mounted Rifles remained a cohesive and loyal unit, disbanding only under the proper orders. Even after, as the Confederacy fell around them, the troops remained steadfastly loyal to their fellow fighters.

McGowen examines the vast range of territory that the unit covered, including Louisiana swamps, the Red River Valley, along the Rio Grande, as well as the Gulf Coast line. He discusses their involvement in the controversial campaign known as the Battle of the Nueces, casting doubts on the common interpretation of the German immigrants, sympathetic to the Union, as defenseless farmers. McGowen asserts that while there was bloodshed on both sides, the Germans were not the innocent victims that many historians have claimed, and that the cavalry was not the bloodthirsty gang many thought.

Horse Sweat and Powder Smoke clearly portrays the heroism and individuality of Texas' first mounted unit in the Civil War. By combining the history of the unit with profiles of the men who led it and who gave it its unique spirit and character, as well as accounts of the battles, raids, and skirmishes in which the unit participated, McGowen provides a valuable history of men whose recognition is long overdue from those whose homes, values, and way of life were defended by their actions.

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