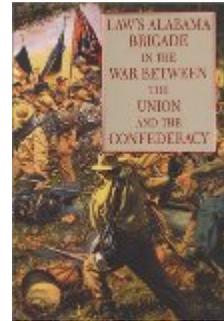


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Morris Penny, J. Gary Laine. *Law's Alabama Brigade in the War Between the Union and the Confederacy*. Shippensburg, Penn: White Mane Publishing, 1997. xxi + 458 pp. \$37.50 (paper), ISBN 978-1-57249-024-6.

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Anyone with an interest in the battle of Gettysburg is familiar with the famous stand taken on Little Round Top on the second day by Joshua Chamberlain's 20th Maine. Chamberlain's men and Colonel Strong Vincent's Union brigade saved the left flank of the Union army and may have influenced the outcome of the battle. While the legend of the defenders of Little Round Top continues to grow in movies and books, little has been written about their opponents on that day, including Evander Law's Alabama Brigade. In the short time the brigade existed (1863-1865), Law's Alabamians participated in some of the most desperate contests of the war.

The authors, J. Gary Laine and Morris M. Penny, have a personal interest in the history of the brigade. Both are descendants of men who served in its ranks. The work will be attractive to all students of Alabama Confederate history. Laine and Penny carefully follow the brigade through each campaign from 1863 and give the reader a detailed account of each regiment's role in battle. While some might find the battle narratives a bit confusing, they are supported with a generous number of good maps that trace the path of each regiment in the fighting. The authors also spice the narrative with letters from home and interesting stories of individual actions in the field and camp, including the story of a duel fought behind the lines during the siege of Suffolk.

Laine and Penny begin with a very brief introduction to the service of Evander McIver Law and the regiments that would later make up the brigade. Law, a graduate of the South Carolina Military Academy (now known as the Citadel), had been working as an instructor at a military prep school in Alabama when the war began. The first regiments that would later make up part

of the brigade were the 4th and 15th Alabama, formed in 1861. In 1862, Law rose to command the 4th and later the brigade in which it served. Several other regiments were raised in Alabama during the spring of 1862. These men enlisted to avoid the Confederate Conscription Act and formed the 44th, 47th and 48th Alabama. The scattered regiments were united in January 1863 to form Law's Alabama Brigade of Hood's Division, Longstreet's Corps.

Law's brigade saw its first action as a unit during James Longstreet's siege of Suffolk, Virginia, in the winter and spring of 1863. Later, after John Bell Hood had been wounded in the battle of Gettysburg, Law assumed command of the division and led the attack on Little Round Top. The brigade then traveled with Longstreet to support Braxton Bragg's attack on the Federals at Chickamauga and continued on to Tennessee and Longstreet's siege of Knoxville. In 1864, the brigade returned to Virginia to take a major part in the battle of the Wilderness. The unit spent the rest of the war suffering the hardships of the nearly ten-month siege of Petersburg. Upon Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox, 973 of the 6,260 men who had served with the brigade were still with the colors.

While the book is a valuable addition to the history of Civil War brigades, it has a few flaws. One drawback to the study is its lack of a clear focus. The authors have attempted to tell two separate stories and complete neither one. The story of Evander Law and the history of the regiments that made up his brigade are both incomplete. To begin with, when one hears mention of "Law's Brigade," the first question becomes, which one? Law was wounded during the battle of First Manassas and then rose to command a brigade that included

the 2nd and 11th Mississippi, 6th North Carolina, and 4th Alabama. Under Law's command, this brigade distinguished itself during the Peninsula campaign, Second Manassas, and at Antietam. But the authors narrow this story to only a few paragraphs, which leaves the reader wanting much more. Law's Alabama Brigade was not formed until 1863, and even then Law was not in direct command of it for much of the time. In fact, William Flake Perry commanded the brigade far longer than Law. Even during the last days of the war, Law was not with the brigade; he was in temporary command of Matthew C. Butler's South Carolina cavalry brigade in North Carolina.

Much of the study follows Law in his personal spats with other Confederate general officers. Law provides a perfect example of the petty jealousies that plagued the southern command system throughout the war. Although the authors provide an enlightening account of Law's personal battles, many readers might disagree with their interpretation of his actions. When Longstreet attempted to promote a senior brigadier (and one of Law's personal rivals) Micah Jenkins to command of Hood's division, Law became completely insubordinate. He thought the job should have been his. Rather than accept Longstreet's decision and do his duty, Law tendered his resignation to Longstreet and went to Richmond.

Instead of retiring from the service as he stated he would do when he resigned, Law began a personal campaign to discredit Lee's "Old War Horse." Once at the capitol, Law conveniently lost track of his written resignation and began to pressure politicians and government officials to override Longstreet's recommendation of Jenkins, or at least to transfer the Alabama brigade. When that did not work, Law worked to trump up charges against Longstreet. Longstreet learned of this when he discovered a petition signed by some of the officers from Law's brigade in which they asked to be transferred out of the division. That was too much. Longstreet called for Law's arrest and court-martial for having lost his resignation and inspiring insubordination within the brigade. But Jefferson Davis and Confederate Inspector General Samuel Cooper intervened and restored Law to his command over the objections of Longstreet and Lee.

When Law attempted to return to his command, Longstreet again ordered his arrest. Longstreet explained that "to hold me at the head of command while encouraging mutinous conduct in its ranks was beyond all laws and customs of war" (James Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox* [1969], p. 549). Longstreet gave Davis an

ultimatum: Either hold Law for trial or relieve Longstreet of his command. After a protracted stand off, the situation was defused when Law was transferred out of the division. What is interesting about this is that the authors find little to blame in Law's conduct. In fact, they argue, the real culprits were the authorities in Richmond who acted far too slowly to resolve the spat between Jenkins and Law over who would command Hood's division. Many readers may not find that argument a convincing excuse for Law's dishonesty and blatant insubordination. Not even the greatest Longstreet detractors could condone such action.

Another problem with the study can be seen in its treatment of the regiments in Law's Brigade. The 4th and 15th Alabama had been in the field since 1861. The 4th earned a fighting reputation during the battle of First Manassas and later on the Peninsula. The 15th became a member of Thomas J. Jackson's legendary "foot cavalry" in the Shenandoah Valley. Even the 44th, 47th, and 48th Alabama had fought at Cedar Mountain, Second Manassas, and Antietam prior to the formation of the brigade. The difficulty here is that the authors confine the early war records of these units to a few short paragraphs and really only begin their story in 1863, almost two years into the war. Perhaps the authors would have been better served to concentrate on compiling complete histories of the regiments that made up the brigade.

While *Law's Alabama Brigade* is a welcome addition to the narrow field of Civil War brigade histories, it is a hard fit. During the war, soldiers saved their strongest loyalties for their regiments. One of the reasons for this is that most regiments remained intact during the war while brigades were formed and split up quite often. This becomes obvious when one compares the five hundred or so regimental histories that have been written over the years with the relative handful of brigade histories. A few brigades did become famous during the war. Some of the better known units included Jackson's Stonewall Brigade, Hood's Texans, and the Kentucky Orphan Brigade. The Federal army had a few well known units as well. The Iron Brigade, or Black Hats, and the Irish Brigade both stand out. But these famous units are the exception.

The work has a few stylistic problems that readers might find bothersome as well. In addition to some spelling and grammatical errors, the authors constantly stop the flow of the narrative during or after battle descriptions to discuss conflicting sources. It is rare when Civil War eyewitness accounts agree on small or even large details, and it is best to leave the discussion of pri-

mary and secondary sources in the endnotes rather than in the narrative. For example, in the middle of their description of Gettysburg, the authors note that the long standing argument over Longstreet's actions on July 2nd is a subject that has "been studied in considerable depth by Freeman, Coddington, and Pfanz" (120). The problem with that statement is that none of those authors is introduced in the text or even listed in the index. The reader is left to guess their identify. Unless readers are familiar with Douglas S. Freeman's *Lee's Lieutenants* (1942), Edwin B. Coddington's *The Gettysburg Campaign* (1968), and Harry W. Pfanz's *Gettysburg, The Second Day* (1987),

they will be hard pressed to know. The discussion of primary and secondary sources is best left in the endnotes.

Still, many of these points are matters of style and interpretation and should not override the book's overall contribution. Laine and Penny have produced a valuable addition to the history of Confederate brigades and Alabama troops in the war.

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