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Edwin Adams Davis. *Fallen Guidon: The Saga of Confederate General Jo Shelby's March to Mexico*. College Station, Tex.: Texas A&M University Press, 1995. 173 pp. \$27.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-89096-683-9; \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-89096-684-6.

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In the final days of the American Civil War, the Trans-Mississippi South was in chaos. Edmund Kirby-Smith, from his headquarters in Shreveport, had lost control of the various units in his vast department, and rioting, looting, mutiny, and insubordination were rampant. Not all of the Rebel units abandoned military discipline, such as it was, and some even became increasingly loyal to the ideals of the Confederacy once their cause seemed lost. One such unit was Brigadier General Jo Shelby's Missouri Iron Brigade. Composed of Missouri and Arkansas cavalry, this organization refused to surrender and instead opted to retreat as a group to Mexico and thus delay the inevitable.

This book is a reprint of the late Edwin Adams Davis's original, published in 1962 by Stagecoach Press. Identical to the first edition, Texas A&M Press's version saves the title from obscurity and is one of the first in a series of reprints that will be issued from College Station.

Fallen Guidon traces Shelby's move from North Texas to the Mexican Border, across to Piedras Negras, and then down a line of march through the interior of that nation to Mexico City. The general's original intention 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, the Confederates symbolically buried their battle flag in the bottom of the river and moved across to start their new lives as hired guns following their brigade guidon.

Shelby's plans, however, came unhinged. 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. Thus, the

erstwhile Rebels declared their preference for yet another lost cause and in opposition to the forces of national self-determination. Loyal to the wishes of his men, Shelby acquiesced, promising to lead his troops to the court of Maximilian himself in Mexico City.

The brigade's cross-country trip is the fascinating part of this book. Encounters with Republican troops, bandits, partisans, and Indians keep the narrative flowing while providing insight into the conditions in the interior of 1865 Mexico. The Missourians also encountered French anti-insurgent troops at Monterey who, as circumstances would have it, also employed a few dozen unforgiven North American rebels. Plunging deeper into the country, the ex-Confederates recalled stories of their childhood regarding the last gringo invasion of Mexico, and followed chivalric pursuits that involved dueling and the rescue of Mexican damsels in distress. Not all French commanders were happy to see the southerners and eyed them with some suspicion. Eager to prove their loyalty, the Iron Brigade engaged in some freelance formal combat at Matehuala, where the Missourians and Arkansans rescued the French 82nd Line Regiment from certain disaster at the hands of Mariano Escobedo's Juarezistas.

Shelby's martial successes earned him an audience with the Emperor. When the forces arrived in Mexico City, however, the Austrian told the ex-Confederates to go home. Maximilian had, at the time, a surplus of Europeans at his disposal and did not care to antagonize the government of the United States by employing former Rebels. Crushed, the hard-riding Iron Brigade held its last review while in Mexico City, then disbanded. Most of the men, including Shelby, went home, but some of the ex-Confederates went on to serve alongside Union veter-

ans with the Juarezistas.

Davis wrote an entertaining book. Because it lacks notes, index, and bibliography, however, it serves more to intrigue than to enlighten. Shelby's saga, and its retelling in *Fallen Guidon*, spawns many questions. Where or what are the good English-language books on the French intervention in Mexico? What role did former Yankees and Rebs play in that conflict? Is there a succinct military history of the campaigns in Maximilian's Mexico? In what numbers did American Civil War veterans serve? And, are there primary sources from

American adventurers in Mexico?

Nevertheless, *Fallen Guidon*, though not a powerful work of scholarship, is an entertaining and useful book for students of both the American Civil War and the French adventure in Mexico. It is approachable history.

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