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Walker's Texas Division, C.S.A.: Greyhounds of the Trans-Mississippi (Conflicting Worlds)

Richard G. Lowe

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Colorfully known as the "Greyhound Division" for its lean and speedy marches across thousands of miles in three states, Major General John G. Walker's infantry division in the Confederate army was the largest body of Texans—about 12,000 men at its formation—to serve in the American Civil War. Walker's unit remained, uniquely for either side in the conflict, a stable group of soldiers from a single state from its creation in 1862 until its disbandment at the war's end. Richard Lowe's compelling saga shows how this collection of farm boys, store clerks, carpenters, and lawyers became the trans-Mississippi's most potent Confederate fighting unit, from the vain attack at Milliken's Bend, Louisiana, in 1863 during Grant's Vicksburg campaign to stellar performances at the battles of Mansfield, Pleasant Hill, and Jenkins' Ferry that helped repel Nathaniel P. Banks's Red River campaign of 1864.

Lowe evokes the trans-Mississippi theater, with its battles in the hills, prairies, and swamps of Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas—vitally important and influential in the war's course even though outdazzled by eastern landmarks such as Gettysburg and Antietam. The author makes vivid the growing challenge that confronted the Confederate cause in 1862 and gave rise to the Greyhounds. Using a database of information collected on 2,200 soldiers, he calculates that Walker's enlisted men were somewhat older, more likely to be married, and more often heads of households than their counterparts, both Rebel and Yankee. Their financial assets and casualty statistics mirrored those of Texans generally, casting doubt on the slogan "a rich man's war and a poor man's fight." And although the Confederacy may have erred in not sending the division east of the Mississippi River to fight in larger campaigns, Lowe's book yields the poignant conclusion that the Greyhounds were content to remain where they were to shield their families from an invading enemy and the devastation of war.

The only modern history of these soldiers, Lowe's study is also a rarity in its scholarly examination of an entire Civil War division. Moreover, his skillful blending of narrative drive and demographic profiling represent an innovative history of the period that is sure to set a new benchmark.

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