



General Robert E. Lee surrounded by cheering 4th Texans at the Wilderness (1864).

The Texas Brigade

James H. Hillestad chronicles the role of the shock troops of Robert E. Lee's Army

The Origins

The Texas Brigade — often called Hood's Brigade, as it was commanded by General John Bell Hood — served in every major battle of the Army of Northern Virginia except Chancellorsville.

Organized in 1861, it initially comprised the 1st, 4th and 5th Texas regiments, with the later addition of the 3rd Arkansas Infantry. Its reputation for fighting was established at the Battle of Antietam and confirmed during the Battle of Gettysburg at Devil's Den and Little Round Top.

The Wilderness

The great spring campaign of 1864 was underway in Virginia. On May 3, the Union Army had begun to cross the Rapidan River approaching the "Wilderness," a densely forested region choked with underbrush and stunted trees, and the site of the previous year's battle of Chancellorsville.

The numbers did not favor Lee. Two divisions of Hill's Third Corps and three divisions of Ewell's Second Corps would be facing four Federal corps. Longstreet's First Corps would not be on hand until May 6. At 5 a.m. on the 6th, the Union II, V, and VI Corps smashed into the Confederate Lines. It was then that the Texas Brigade arrived on the field, under the command of Brig. General John Gregg.



The 1st Texas charges past the Dunker Church at Antietam (1862).

Enter the Texas Brigade

Upon seeing the Texans, Lee called out “The Texas Brigade always has driven the enemy, and I want them to do it now. And tell them, that they will fight today under my eye — I will watch their conduct. I want every man to know I am here with them.”

As the battle lines surged around and past him, Lee, in the grip of great emotion, cried out, “Texans always move them!”

A courier in the Texas ranks turned to a comrade, and with tears coursing down his cheeks, exclaimed, “I would charge hell itself for that old man!”

As the 800 members of the Texas Brigade moved across the fields, Lee rode

Federal corps designations used numbers or Roman numerals while Confederate corps were identified by spelling the numbers.

with them. The Texans, now fearful for Lee’s safety, cried out, “Go back, General Lee, go back!” Lee eventually acceded to their plea and fell back. Fired by Lee’s inspiration, the Texans charged

into a Union meat grinder that killed or wounded one out of three of them.

Of the 5,353 men who enlisted in the Brigade, only 617 remained to surrender on April 9, 1865 at Appomattox Court House in Virginia. The Texas Brigade, along with the Stonewall Brigade from Virginia, were considered to be the shock troops of the Army of Northern Virginia.

BELOW
At Gettysburg, the 5th Texas attacks Little Round Top (1863).

BELOW LEFT
Battle flags of the Texas Brigade.



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