



The **FLAGS** of **CIVIL WAR MISSOURI**







The **FLAGS** of CIVIL WAR MISSOURI

By Glenn Dedmond



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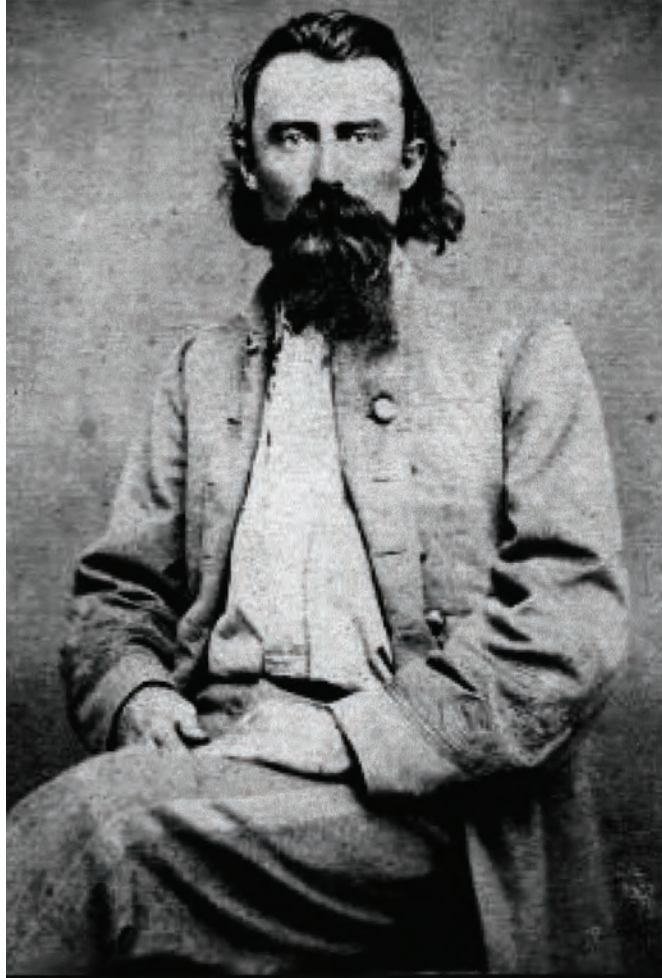


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*Dedicated to the memory of
Joseph O. Shelby,
our last Confederate general*

Never defeated; never surrendered.



“He fought like a man who invented fighting, and the men of the Missouri Cavalry Brigade looked on him as the perfect commanding officer; colorful and dashing, but with a recklessness so shrewd that it amounted almost to caution.”

Daniel O’Flaherty, biographer

“Shelby was the best cavalry general of the South. Under other conditions, he would have been one of the best in the world.”

Alfred Pleasanton, general (U.S.)



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Introduction

More than any campaign area of the War Between the States, there was in Missouri a dramatically clear depiction of the clash between the just and the unjust, between liberty and tyranny. The war in Missouri was more than just an encounter of two armies on the field of battle; it was a clash of ideals that resulted in a raw, personal, and bitter warfare between two armies that, though in physical appearance would seem very similar, in ideological thought could not have been more different. Aggressors only in retaliation for the injustices done to them, Missourians fought with unparalleled heroic tenacity for their homeland, their families, and their beliefs.

The first to answer the alarm in the defense of their homes were the men of the Missouri State Guard. In the truest tradition of the American Minutemen, these citizen-soldiers left hearth and home to stand between their loved ones and an invading army. Thomas Snead, in *The Fight for Missouri*, provides a stirring description of the Guard:

In all their motley array there was hardly a uniform to be seen, and then, and throughout all the brilliant campaign on which they were about to enter there was nothing to distinguish their officers, even a general, from the men in the ranks, save a bit of red flannel, or a piece of cotton cloth, fastened to the shoulder, or to the arm, of the former. But for all that they were the truest and best of soldiers . . . Among them there was hardly a man who could not read and write, and who was not more intelligent than the great mass of American citizens; not one who had not voluntarily abandoned his home with all its tender ties, and thrown away all his possessions, or left father and mother, or wife and children, within the enemy's lines, that he might himself stand by the South in her hour of great peril, and help her to defend her fields and firesides. And among them all there was not a man who had come forth to fight for slavery.¹

Participating in the massive invasion of Missouri were soldiers in blue from the neighboring states of Kansas, Iowa, and Illinois and from such faraway lands as Wisconsin, Minnesota, and even Colorado. Led by New Englanders recently arising from the trough of free-thinking liberalism or German immigrants schooled in the socialistic dogma of their mentor, Karl Marx, these troops waded into Missouri with a ferocious eagerness to crush the spirit of individual liberty. With impetuous violence, they burst into the state from three directions in an overwhelming juggernaut of force and arrogance and thrust the underarmed, underequipped defenders from their own land. Even at Elkhorn Tavern in Arkansas as Missourians fought alongside their adoptive brothers in hopes of once more entering the land of their fathers, more than half of the Union troops in combat against them were German immigrants. Most of the

soldiers of the Missouri Brigade would not see their homeland again until the flag of the oppressor flew over crushed hopes and an occupation army.

But bravely they fought on, from battlefield to battlefield, at times under the least adept of commanders, and in better times under the most deserving commanders, until, crushed by “overwhelming numbers and resources,” the undefeated Missourians, at the request of their leaders, finally laid down their arms. By their selfless actions and deeds, they bequeathed to their homeland a legacy of honor creating the most gallant and undersung, most noble and underappreciated, most courageous and unremembered organization of knights of the fray, the “forgotten orphans” of the Missouri Brigade.

After the battle at Elkhorn Tavern, Gen. Earl Van Dorn said of the Missouri Brigade, “During this whole engagement, I was with the Missourians under Price, and I have never seen better fighters than these Missouri troops, or more gallant leaders than General Price and his officers. From the first to the last shot, they continually rushed on and never yielded an inch they had won; and when at last they received orders to fall back, they retired steadily and with cheers. General Price received a severe leg wound in the action, but would neither retire from the field nor cease to expose his life to danger.”²


General Price’s Division was reviewed near Tupelo, Mississippi, by generals Bragg and Hardee, who declared it to be “the finest, most efficient, best drilled and most thoroughly disciplined body of troops in the Army of the Mississippi.” In his diary, Captain Covell remembered that “our regiment, the Third Infantry, received the highest of praise for its fine appearance. The ‘boys’ as they passed General Hardee in review, were, every one, doing their best—each man looking straight to the front, keeping step to the music, carrying his piece as steadily as though it had grown to his shoulder, the whole regiment moving as one man, when Hardee turned and exclaimed to Generals Bragg, Price, and Little, who were sitting on their horses next to him, ‘My God! Isn’t that magnificent?’ This, from the author of the ‘Army Tactics,’ the iron-gray veteran who had seen soldiers paraded from Oregon to the swamps of Florida—from West Point to the halls of Montezumas—*was* praise.”³

At the request of Pres. Jefferson Davis, General Van Dorn made an inspection of Price’s troops and reported the following to the president: “I have attended reviews of the armies of Generals Beauregard, Bragg, Albert Sidney and Joseph E. Johnston, and also in the old United States service, and I have never witnessed better drill or discipline in any army since I have belonged to the military service.”⁴

On January 8, 1864, the brigade was moved to Mobile, Alabama, and while there participated in a drill competition. This was quite an affair, with representative regiments from Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Texas, and Missouri competing, and generals Hardee and Maury serving as judges. The prize for winning was a stand of colors, a silk flag presented by the ladies of the city.⁵

The day was unusually bright, sunny, and clear, bringing out ladies, gentlemen, and children of the city as well as a naval contingency of Admiral Buchanan and his fleet officers. It was a gala day and every regiment performed at its best.

The Missourians were the last to compete, coming on the field at quick time to the cheers of the already excited crowd. Ladies waved handkerchiefs



as the handsome men in their fitted jackets of gray and full complement of equipment marched into line by platoons and saluted the judges. Colonel Riley, commanding the drill contingency, was given the orders to begin. Not even the judges knew that the drill would be done entirely by the bugle: “The bugle sounded ‘Deploy.’ Away went the men at the ‘double quick,’ deploying from the colors; then ‘commence firing’ which was continued, standing, kneeling, and lying down, then rally by fours, platoons, by companies, then thrown our skirmishers, the entire battalion on the run, wheeling, the men four paces apart, until it had completed a circle, never out of line, moving like a solid front, then rallying on the colors, the next movements in line of battle at a charge bayonet, all of this done at the double quick. It was a revelation to the crowd.”⁶ As the brigade left the field in perfect order at the double quick, the crowd cheered wildly and everyone, military and civilian alike, knew that they had seen drill as it should be. The prize flag was theirs.

On the drill field or in the attack, the Missouri Brigade operated as a tightly knit band of brothers. Their *esprit de corps* and devotion to each other was obvious even to the casual observer and feared by their foe. After the debacle at Franklin and Nashville, the once grand Army of Tennessee, shattered by the excesses of General Hood, went into full retreat southward. An observer wrote to R. S. Bevier concerning the southward exodus of the army crossing the bridge at Bainbridge, Tennessee.

The men marched like a mob—half of them were unarmed, while regiments passed by with not ten muskets to an hundred men. One shining exception I noticed, The Missouri Brigade was the only organization I saw, except some of the artillery, which was perfectly intact. There may have been others; if so, they did not come under my observation.

The Missourians I did see, moving erect, soldierly, shoulder to shoulder, with apparently not a single article of equipment lost, with a style and bearing as if they had never known defeat.⁷

And of whom else should we speak? Of Gen. Joe Shelby and his knights of the Iron Brigade, that gallant band of Missouri cavaliers whose 1863 raid into occupied Missouri covered fifteen hundred miles, destroyed \$1,000,000 worth of Federal supplies and \$800,000 worth of railroad property, and returned with six thousand horses and mules and eight hundred recruits from northern Missouri.⁸ We remember Capt. William Quantrill, “dashing and daring,” the only Southern military leader who achieved any victories won by the Confederacy in the west during 1863.⁹

Since the Civil War the memory of the accomplishments of Missouri’s sons has been overstruck by a cruel reconstruction and a callous rewriting of history. The remembrance of Missouri’s valiant efforts to shake off the shackles of tyranny has been distorted by those mainstream histories that label Missouri a “Border State,” or even worse, “undecided.” Three revisionist lies, that Missouri was not a Confederate state, that Missouri did not secede, and that Missouri furnished too few troops for the Southern cause to make a difference, seem to have a life of their own and are not only perpetuated by Missouri’s former enemies, from

whom one would expect obfuscation and derision, but by those of Southern sympathy who should know better. In Reconstruction-generated ignorance, they deny Missouri its rightful seat at the round table of Southern knighthood.

These flags bear silent testimony to the sacred service of the sons of Missouri in defense of their homeland.

1. Thomas L. Snead, *The Fight for Missouri* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1886).
2. John C. Moore, *Confederate Military History: Missouri* (Atlanta: Confederate Publishing Co., 1899), 83.
3. R. S. Bevier, *History of the First and Second Missouri Confederate Brigades: 1861-1865* (St. Louis: Bryan, Brand & Company, 1879), 124. A footnote identifies the source as Covell's Diary, p. 127.
4. *Ibid.*, 164-65.
5. *Ibid.*, 227.
6. Joseph L. Boyce, "Missouri Confederates," *St. Louis, Missouri Republican*, May 11, 1885. All of the regiments participating were doing so with an equal number of men, that being five companies. Captain Boyce was one of the company commanders participating. In his narrative he also included regiments from Arkansas and Louisiana as being present.
7. Bevier, 258.
8. "Maj. Gen. Joseph Orville Shelby," Missouri Division, Sons of Confederate Veterans Web page, available from www.missouridivision-scv.org/camp191.htm.
9. Paul R. Peterson, *Quantrill of Missouri: the Making of a Guerrilla Warrior* (Nashville: Cumberland House, 2003), 340.