



From Selma to Appomattox: The History of the Jeff Davis Artillery (Oxford Paperbacks)

Lawrence R. Laboda

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The history of the Jeff Davis Artillery is the story of a company of Alabamians who fought with valor and distinction for the Confederacy during more than three and a half years of active service. As part of the Army of Northern Virginia, these soldiers played an integral part in most of the major campaigns of the Eastern Theatre, participating in the crucial battles at Sharpsburg, Gettysburg, and Spotsylvania, among others. Here, Lawrence Laboda tells the story of an artillery unit relatively unknown to Civil War enthusiasts, but whose performance on the fields of battle more than justified the honor of being named after the President of the Confederacy. After their recruitment in Selma, Alabama, we learn that the men of the Jeff Davis Artillery found themselves under many different commanders. It was only when First Lieutenant Robert F. Beckham, Captain James W. Bondurant, and Captain William J. Reese took command that the unit matured as a military organization, and provided its most efficient service on the field of battle. Even though unfortunate circumstances later in the war caused the company to be divided between two commands, the Alabama Battery's skill and determination carried through in all of the engagements that followed. On more than one occasion, the Jeff Davis Artillery received praise from the Confederate high command, including General Robert E. Lee himself. Within the Confederate Army, the reputation of the unit was no doubt one of the best, but after the fighting was done, the war record of this particular company, except for a rare article or mention in an obituary, never received proper recognition. It is only fitting, therefore, that the entire story of the gallant Alabamians finally be told.

From Selma to Appomattox goes beyond the unit's combat record to explore its day to day challenges. Conditions on and off the battlefield were less than ideal at times, and from the beginning, the company as a whole fell victim to the horrors of disease. One glance down the roster list shows the extreme seriousness of the situation. Even disease was not their most immediate concern, however, as Laboda describes the unit's difficulties in finding food, horses, and even recruits while enduring the reorganizations of an army at war. With the assistance of numerous detailed maps, he follows the ever-proud Alabamians into their first fight at Seven Pines, through the major battles of the Peninsula, South Mountain, Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, Spotsylvania, and Cedar Creek, and ultimately to their surrender at Appomattox.

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