



The Edge of Mosby's Sword: The Life of Confederate Colonel William Henry Chapman

Gordon Blackwell Bonan

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The Edge of Mosby's Sword is the first scholarly volume to delve into the story of one of John Singleton Mosby's most trusted and respected officers, Colonel William Henry Chapman. Presenting both military and personal perspectives of Chapman's life, Gordon B. Bonan offers an in-depth understanding of a man transformed by the shattering of his nation. This painstakingly researched account exposes a soldier and patriot whose convictions compelled him to battle fiercely for Southern independence; whose quest for greatness soured when faced with the brutal realities of warfare; and who sought to heal his wounded nation when the guns of war were silenced.

Born into a wealthy slave-owning family, Chapman was a student of the fiery secessionist rhetoric of antebellum Virginia who eagerly sought glory and adventure on the battlefields of the Civil War. Bonan traces Chapman's evolution from an impassioned student at the University of Virginia to an experienced warrior and leader, providing new insight into the officer's numerous military accomplishments. Explored here are Chapman's previously overlooked endeavors as a student warrior, leader of the Dixie Artillery, and as second-in-command to Mosby, including his participation in the capture of Harpers Ferry, the battering of Union forces at Second Manassas, and his ferocious raids during the 1864 Shenandoah Valley campaign. Bonan reveals fresh perspectives on the intrepid maneuvers of Mosby's Rangers, the hardships of war, and Chapman's crucial role as the right hand of the "Gray Ghost." But while Mosby recognized him for his bravery and daring, the fame Chapman sought always eluded him. Instead, with his honors and successes came disillusionment and sorrow, as he watched comrades and civilians alike succumb to the terrible toll of the war.

The end of the struggle between North and South saw Chapman accept defeat with dignity, leading the Rangers to their official surrender and parole at Winchester. With the horrors of the war behind him, he quickly moved to embrace the rebuilding of his country, joining the Republican party and beginning a forty-two-year career at the IRS enforcing Federal law throughout the South. In the end, Chapman's life is a study in contradictions: nationalism and reconciliation; slavery and liberty; vengeance and chivalry.

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