



CIVIL WAR IN INDIAN TERRITORY 1861 - 1865

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As war neared in 1861, the position the Five Civilized Tribes of Indian Territory would support in the secession movement remained uncertain. The Indians had not experienced a particularly pleasant relationship with either the Federal government or the southern states since each had been instrumental in removing the Indians from their homelands in the South. Experiences from the Trail of Tears were still vivid in their memories. But many Indians held slaves which created a supportive factor for the Confederacy. The feeling among the Creeks, Cherokees and Seminoles, located in the northern area of the Territory, was that their best course of action toward the impending conflict was to remain neutral. The southern area tribes, the Choctaws and Chickasaws, leaned favorably toward support of the Southern cause. Also, the men assigned to them as Federal agents were influential Southerners. These agents included such men of prominence as Elias Rector, southern superintendent; Douglas H. Cooper, Choctaw agent; William H. Garrett, Creek agent; Samuel Rutherford, Seminole agent and George Butler, Cherokee agent. All were Southerners who strongly supported the secessionist movement. Also, representatives of the neighboring states of Arkansas and Texas were applying considerable pressure on the Indians to align with them in the Southern cause.

In April, 1861, Colonel William H. Emory, Federal Commander of Union forces in Indian Territory, received orders to withdraw all Federal troops from the Territory. Colonel William C. Young's Confederate Texas Volunteers moved north across the Red River to mount an offensive to take the Federal posts. When Young was only one day's march from Fort Washita, Colonel Emory decided it was no longer possible to defend the Indian Territory forts, so Fort Washita was abandoned. Emory ordered the abandonment of Fort Cobb and Fort Arbuckle but before the latter could be abandoned it was taken by Colonel Young's forces. Joined by the garrisons from Fort Arbuckle, Fort Cobb and Fort Smith, which had been seized by Arkansas forces, Colonel Emory, with Black Beaver, a Delaware Indian acting as guide, led the Federal troops north to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The withdrawal of Federal troops from Indian Territory left the Indians completely unprotected. They considered the withdrawal an act of desertion by the Federal Government.

In May, 1861, Confederate President Jefferson Davis, recognizing the importance of Indian Territory as an ally, appointed Albert Pike of Arkansas to negotiate treaties with the tribes in Indian Territory. Pike was well known and respected by the Indians. Accompanied by General Ben McCulloch of Texas, the Confederate General in charge of the Indian Territory, Military District, Pike met with Chief John Ross of the Cherokees. Chief Ross was determined to maintain neutrality for the Cherokees and refused to sign treaties. Pike then contacted the Choctaws and Chickasaws who readily signed treaties in support of the South. He also negotiated treaties with the McIntosh faction of the Creeks, the Jumper faction of the Seminoles and with the Chiefs of the Wichitas and several other plains Indian tribes that were attached to the Wichita Agency. These treaties brought most of the Indians into allegiance with the Confederacy; only the Cherokees were holding out. The Ridge-Watie faction of the Cherokee tribe disagreed with the position taken by Chief Ross. Stand Watie, in defiance of the Confederacy, organized a regiment of Cherokees in support of the Confederacy. The regiment was accepted for the Confederacy by General McCulloch in July, 1861.

After the overwhelming defeat of Union forces by the Confederates at Wilson's Creek in southwest Missouri in August, 1861, and knowing that the other tribes had aligned with the Confederacy, Ross contacted Pike and negotiated a treaty in October, 1861. This officially allied the Cherokees with the South.

The Confederate Indian forces subject to General Pike's command included four full regiments and some miscellaneous troops. The four regiments were the First Regiment Choctaw and Chickasaw Mounted Rifles, commanded by Colonel Douglas H. Cooper; the First Creek Regiment, commanded by Colonel Daniel N. McIntosh; the First Regiment Cherokee Mounted Rifles, commanded by Colonel John Drew; and the Second Regiment Cherokee Mounted Rifles, commanded by Colonel (later General) Stand Watie. The miscellaneous troops included a battalion of Choctaws and Chickasaws and a battalion of Creeks and Seminoles.

INDIANS SUPPORTING THE UNION STAND

Not all the Indians were in sympathy with the South and some strongly opposed the treaties made with the Confederates. Bitter feuds erupted, dividing the tribes into Union and Southern factions. One of the more prominent leaders in support of the Union was Opothleyahola, revered leader and former chief of the Upper Creeks. The McIntosh faction of the tribe supported the Confederacy and controlled the Creek forces. Realizing that he could not maintain his Union-supportive position and remain in Indian Territory, Opothleyahola assembled his followers and made preparations to move them north into Kansas for safety.

Opothleyahola's expedition of Union Creeks consisted of about four thousand men, women and children, representing several tribes and peoples. Included were many Seminoles who followed the leadership of Chiefs Billy Bowlegs and John Chupouha who had refused to sign treaties with Pike. Because of the haste involved in organizing and starting the withdrawal to safety, the group was able to take but few of its possessions with them. To prevent Opothleyahola's escape, Colonel Cooper followed the group with his Confederate Indian regiment.

The first Civil War skirmish in Indian Territory occurred after nightfall on November 19, 1861, between Union Indian and Confederate Indian and Texas forces at Round Mountain, near the mouth of the Cimarron River. Opothleyahola's forces escaped under the cover of darkness after a sharp encounter with Cooper's troops. By early December, Opothleyahola had moved his people to a camp on Bird Creek, known as Chusto Talasah or Caving Banks. Colonel Cooper's regiment, reinforced by Colonel Drew's Cherokee regiment, again located the camp. During the battle that ensued, Cooper's strength was severely reduced when Colonel Drew's Cherokee regiment deserted and joined Opothleyahola's ranks. Colonel Cooper withdrew to Fort Gibson for supplies and requested help from Colonel James McIntosh, commander of regular Confederate forces at Van Buren, Arkansas. Colonel McIntosh detached one regiment of regular troops with supplies and led the attack himself. The Confederates located Opothleyahola's camp and, on December 26, 1861, the Confederate forces stormed the camp and completely routed the Union Creeks. Most of their wagons, equipment, food and livestock were captured and Opothleyahola's people scattered. Because of the cold weather and lack of supplies, the fleeing Indians suffered greatly from exposure on the final leg of the trip into Kansas and during the long cold winter spent there. In spite of the efforts of the Federal government agents, many Indians died from exposure. Opothleyahola himself died during the long hard winter spent in this camp on the Verdigris River in Montgomery County, Kansas.

CONFEDERATE INDIANS FIGHT IN ARKANSAS

In November, 1861, Albert Pike was commissioned a Brigadier General in the Confederate Army and placed in command of Indian Territory forces. At the call of General Earl Van Dorn, Confederate commander of the Mississippi District, General Pike led his Indian forces into Arkansas to provide support for the regular Arkansas and Missouri Confederate forces at the Battle of Pea Ridge. Pike was opposed to taking his Indian forces outside of Indian Territory because the Confederate treaties he had made with the Indians required their prior consent, which he did not have. Reluctantly, he led his two Cherokee regiments into the battle. Stand Watie's forces were very active in the battle. They captured a Union artillery battery that had been inflicting serious casualties on the Confederate forces. Watie's regiment was among the last to retreat. He helped to provide cover for the regular Confederate Army's withdrawal. The Indian regiments of Colonel Cooper and Colonel McIntosh did not arrive in time for the battle but did help cover the regular Confederate Army's retreat.

General Van Dorn's defeat at the Battle of Pea Ridge cost him his command. General Pike was very disappointed and disillusioned after the battle. He resented General Van Dorn's slighting the contribution made by the Indian forces during the battle. He also felt that his Indian forces were being deprived of their rightful supplies, ammunition and weapons by commanders in Arkansas. He withdrew back into Indian Territory leaving Colonel Cooper in command at Fort Davis, took the Choctaw and Chickasaw troops and established Fort McCulloch in present Bryan County. He ordered the Creek and Seminole troops to patrol their own nations and sent Watie's and Drew's Cherokees to guard the northern borders

of the Territory. Pike's continued sharp criticism of the Confederate Generals in Arkansas, eventually cost him his command. Colonel (later General) Douglas Cooper was placed in command of the Confederate Indian regiments.

FIRST FEDERAL INVASION OF INDIAN TERRITORY

Out of Kansas' sympathy toward Opothleyahola's loyal Union Indians and their determination to return to their homes in Indian Territory, an invading expedition was organized. The primary purpose of the invasion was to return the Indian refugees to their homes. The Indian Expedition, as it was known, consisted of about six thousand men. It included two brigades of Kansas, Wisconsin and Ohio troops, an artillery battery from Indiana, and two Indian regiments, mostly Creek and Seminole followers of Opothleyahola. The Expedition was commanded by Colonel William Weer of Kansas. They marched into Indian Territory from Baxter Springs, Kansas on June 1, 1862 and followed the Grand River into the center of the Cherokee Nation. Colonel Stand Watie, who General Pike had assigned to patrol the northern border of the Territory, harassed the Union column throughout its march. Watie's Cherokee regiment confronted the expedition at the Battle of Locust Grove on July 3, 1862. Watie's Confederate Indian troops held the Union forces completely in check until Weer's forces moved their artillery battery forward. After succeeding in his confrontation with Watie's forces, Colonel Weer divided the expedition into two groups. One moved on Fort Gibson taking it with little trouble, while the other moved on Tahlequah, Capital of the Cherokee Nation. Upon the approach of the Union forces, Colonel Drew's Cherokee regiment deserted and Tahlequah fell into Union control without a fight. Chief John Ross was taken into protective custody as a friend of the Union.

Because of dissension between Colonel Weer and Colonel Solomon, his second in command, the Indian Expedition returned to Kansas. Fort Gibson and Tahlequah were returned to Confederate control. Chief Ross accompanied the Indian expedition north and then traveled to Washington where he remained until the end of the War. With Ross out of the Territory and working for the Union, Stand Watie was elected Chief of the Cherokees by the Cherokee Council. Thousands of Ross' followers fled the territory and joined the Union forces. Under orders from General Blunt, Colonel William A. Phillips organized the defecting Cherokees into the

Indian Home Guard. The Guard consisted of three Indian regiments, a battalion of Kansas cavalry and an artillery battery. Violence and destruction between the pro-Union and pro-Confederate Indians followed in the Cherokee Nation.

SECOND FEDERAL INVASION

Under the protection of Union forces, Ross' Cherokees held a council at Cowskin Prairie. They elected Thomas Page as acting Chief, repudiated the Confederate alliance, denounced Colonel Watie's Cherokee government, abolished slavery in the Cherokee Nation and declared the followers of Colonel Watie outlaws. General Blunt mounted an offensive and, with his superior forces, defeated Colonel Cooper's Confederate forces at Fort Wayne in Delaware County in October, 1862. He then pushed the Confederate Indians to that part of Indian Territory located south of the Arkansas River. Tahlequah and Fort Gibson were again under Union control. Fort Gibson was renamed Fort Blunt and Colonel Phillips used it as his headquarters for the remainder of the War. Heartened by Union victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg and reinforced with additional troops from Kansas, Colorado, and Wisconsin, General Blunt determined to break Confederate resistance in the Territory. From Fort Gibson General Blunt moved on General Douglas Cooper's Confederate forces and defeated them with superior artillery at the climactic Battle of Honey Springs on July 17, 1863. In August, Blunt, with 4,000 men, moved on and took the Confederate depot in the Battle of Perryville near Savanna. The fall of Perryville opened the way, and Blunt took Fort Smith in September, 1863. The capture of Fort Smith ended the major war activities in Indian Territory.

In 1864 the Confederate War Department reorganized the Indian units, promoted Stand Watie to Brigadier General and placed him in command of the First Indian Cavalry Brigade. General Watie's command included the First and Second Cherokee regiments, the Cherokee Battalion, the First and Second Creek regiments, the Creek Squadron, the Osage Battalion and the Seminole Battalion. Watie was the only Indian to achieve the rank of general in either the Union or the

Confederate armies. Colonel Tandy Walker was placed in command of the Second Indian Cavalry Brigade which included the Choctaw and Chickasaw fighters and the Caddo Battalion.

Although General Watie was disappointed with the support now being provided by the Confederate government, he was determined that his Indian forces would not be taken by the Union. Watie was active to the very end of the war. He maintained a continual harassment of Union forces in the Territory. He drove off the cavalry remuda from Fort Gibson, forcing the cavalry units to become foot soldiers. He cut off their supply lines and caused the Fort to face starvation rations and meager supplies. He took great quantities of provisions, uniforms and medical supplies for the Confederacy. During an action at Pleasant Bluff, on the Arkansas River, he captured the steamboat "J.R. Williams". The steamer had been loaded with supplies destined to relieve the supply crisis at Fort Gibson.

In September, 1864, at Cabin Creek Crossing, Watie attacked a heavily guarded wagon train containing some 300 wagon loads of food, medical supplies, clothing and blankets. He eluded Union forces and successfully moved the wagon train into Confederate territory where he distributed the goods to Confederate Indian refugee camps.

THE CONFEDERATE SURRENDER

General Robert E. Lee surrendered to Grant on April 9, 1865. General E. Kirby Smith, in command of the Trans-Mississippi Department, held out until May 26. General Douglas H. Cooper surrendered his Texas troops, but the Indian troops, considering themselves to be independent allies of the Confederacy, maintained the right to set their own terms of surrender. Chief Peter Pitchlynn of the Choctaws surrendered on June 19. General Watie, however, kept up resistance until June 23, when he surrendered his brigade of Cherokees, Creeks and Seminoles at Doaksville in the

Choctaw Nation. He was the last Confederate general to lay down his arms. The Chickasaws surrendered on July 14. With these surrenders active warfare ceased in Indian Territory.

The Indians paid a bitter price for their involvement in the war. Their people were scattered, their country devastated, their livestock stolen or killed, and their homes burned. An estimated twenty-five percent of the Indian population were casualties of battle, disease and starvation. During the four years of the Indian Nation suffered greater hardships than did any of the Confederate States.

CIVIL WAR BATTLE SITES

1. Cowskin Prairie - June 6, 1862
2. Cabin Creek - July 1, 1863
3. Fort Wayne - October 22, 1862
4. Fryer Creek - September 19, 1864
5. Chustenahlah - December 26, 1861
6. Chusto-Talasah (Caving Banks) - December 9, 1861
7. Round Mountain (Red Fork) - November 19, 1861
8. Twin Mounds - 1865
9. Hay Camp (Flat Rock) - September 16, 1864
10. Fort Davis - December 27, 1862
11. Bayou Menard - July 27, 1862
12. Creek Agency - October 15, 1863
13. Honey Springs (Elk Creek) - July 17, 1863
14. Webbers Falls - April 25, 1863
15. Pleasant Bluff - June 15, 1864
16. Marsten's Skirmish - August, 1864
17. Iron Bridge - July 19, 1864
18. San Bois Creek - August 30, 1863
19. Skullyville - August 31, 1863
20. Backbone Mountain - August 27, 1864
21. Perryville - August 26, 1863
22. First Encounter U.S.A. vs. C.S.A. - May 5, 1861
23. Wichita Agency - October 23, 1862
24. Tonkawa Massacre - October 24, 1862
25. Middle Boggy - February 13, 1864
26. Boggy Depot - April 24, 1865
27. Stand Watie Surrender - June 23, 1865