

BRIGADIER GENERAL STAND WATIE, CONFEDERATE GUERRILLA

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BRIGADIER GENERAL STAND WATIE, CONFEDERATE GUERRILLA

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## PREFACE

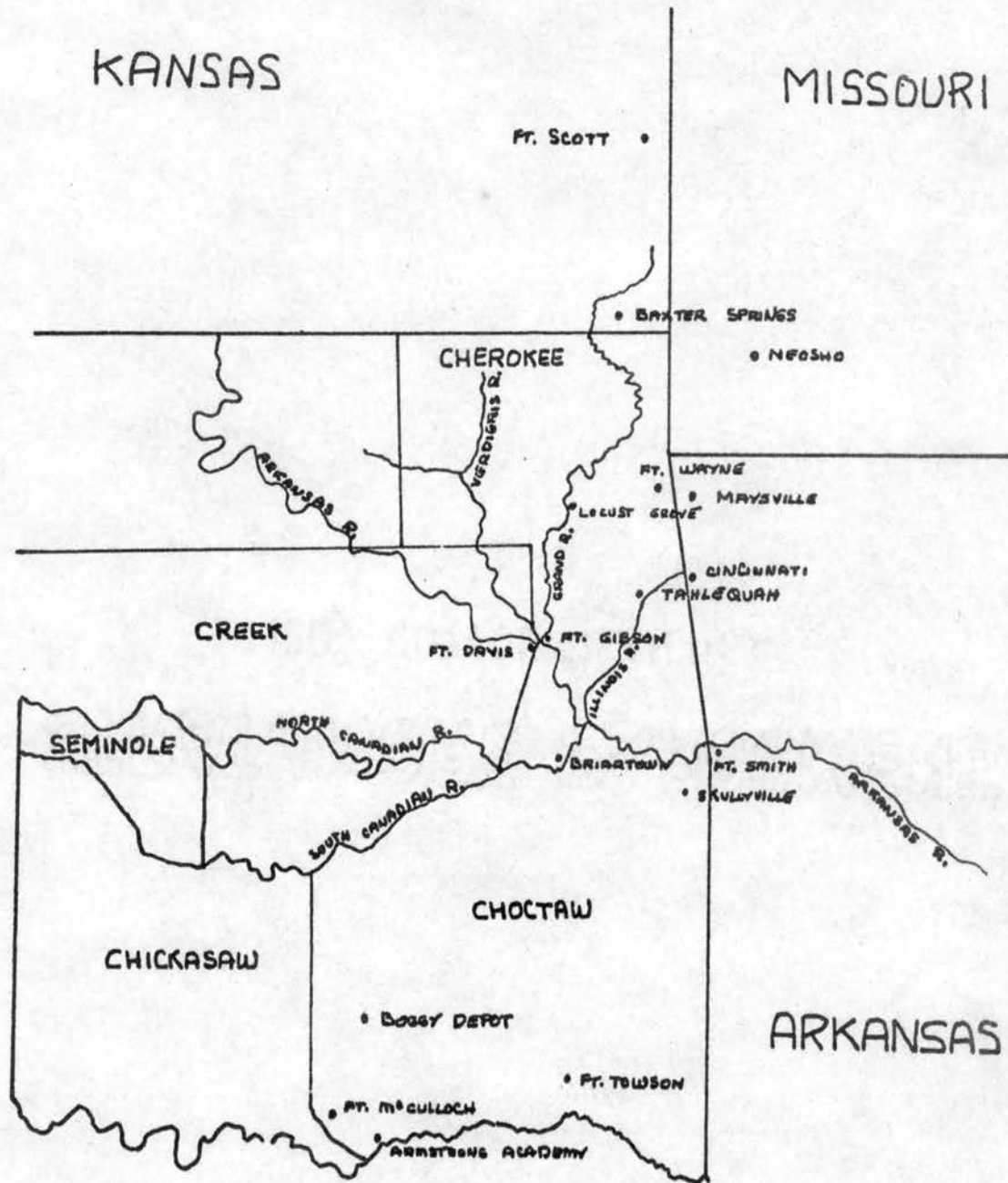
Brigadier General Stand Watie is remembered by many as the last General of the Confederacy to surrender, but that is only a small part of his story. He began his Civil War career as the popularly elected leader of a small band of Cherokee warriors and evolved from the position of a relatively unknown subordinate cavalry commander into one of the war's most feared and respected guerrillas.

Most accounts of General Watie's Civil War activities are either superficial or biased. This thesis attempts to rectify this situation by evaluating Watie as a guerrilla leader with particular emphasis on the cumulative effects of his actions.

The author extends appreciation to the Library staff of Oklahoma State University for their willing assistance in locating many of the materials used in preparing this thesis. He also thanks the staff of the Oklahoma Historical Society and in particular Mrs. Rella Looney of the Indian Archives Division for her helpfulness in locating manuscript documents.

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BRIGADIER GENERAL STAND WATIE'S  
AREA OF OPERATIONS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. THE PRE-WAR YEARS, 1806-1860 . . . . .	1
II. CONFEDERATE DOMINATION IN INDIAN TERRITORY, 1861 . . . . .	12
III. THE FEDERAL DRIVE TO THE ARKANSAS RIVER, 1862. . . . .	25
IV. EXTENSION OF FEDERAL CONTROL IN INDIAN TERRITORY, 1863 . .	49
V. THE MATURATION OF A GUERRILLA, 1864. . . . .	68
VI. THE LAST YEARS, 1865-1871. . . . .	83
VII. CONCLUSIONS. . . . .	91
BIBLIOGRAPHY. . . . .	97

## CHAPTER I

### THE PRE-WAR YEARS, 1806-1860

On June 23, 1865, a tired but unbent figure rode proudly into Fort Towson, deep in Indian Territory. Brigadier General Stand Watie, the last of the Confederate generals, had come to surrender. Four years of fighting were over, and the Cherokees could proudly boast that the most feared and respected Indian guerrilla of the war was coming home in the wake of a brilliant career that had witnessed victory and defeat, joy and sadness, success and failure, but never shame or disgrace. Watie was clearly the Cherokee Nation's finest soldier.

Watie was born on December 12, 1806, near the present site of Rome, Georgia, the second child in a family of nine children.<sup>1</sup> His parents were David Oowatie, a full-blooded Cherokee, and Susannah Reese Oowatie, a half-blood Welsh-Cherokee. The elder Oowatie, for the purpose of clarity, dropped the first two letters of his surname in 1811 when he became a member of the Moravian Church.<sup>2</sup> The children, with but one exception, retained the Christianized version of the Cherokee surname.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Mabel Washbourne Anderson, The Life of General Stand Watie (Pryor, Oklahoma, 1931), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>Muriel H. Wright, "Notes and Documents," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXXIV (Autumn, 1956), p. 353.

<sup>3</sup>Other children were sons Buck, John, Thomas, and Charles, and daughters Nancy, Mary, Elizabeth, and Susan. Edward Everett Dale and Gaston Litton, eds., Cherokee Cavaliers (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939), p. 302. Buck Watie attended school at Cornwall, Connecticut, and while there asked for and received permission to take the name

The source of Stand Watie's unusual first name has never been clearly established. One version is that his Cherokee name was "Dagataga," meaning "standing together."<sup>4</sup> A more popular version is that his Cherokee name was "Takatokah," which means "to stand firm."<sup>5</sup> In either case, the derivation of Stand is readily apparent.

Watie was poorly educated by modern standards but did receive a rudimentary education when in 1818, at the age of twelve, he was sent to the Moravian Mission School at Brainerd, Tennessee. He was not as well educated as others in his family, but this never seemed to impede him.<sup>6</sup> His main forte was his ability to think clearly under stress and apply sound judgment to the problems that confronted him; this was a gift that served him well in his military career.

Young Stand grew to maturity during a most vexing era in Cherokee history. Georgia officials insisted on the need for additional land for white settlers in the state, and this could only be obtained from the large land holdings of the Cherokees. The Cherokees, on the other hand, were unwilling to sell their lands because they had no desire to relocate to new lands in the West. White officials became impatient with the Cherokee position and laws were then enacted to force the removal.<sup>7</sup>

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of his benefactor, Elias Boudinot. The descendants of Buck Watie have continued to use the surname Boudinot. Wright, "Notes and Documents," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXXIV, p. 353.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>John F. Wheeler to "Dear Sparks," undated, Miscellaneous Letters, Cherokee Documents File, Northeastern State College, Tahlequah, Oklahoma; Anderson, The Life of General Stand Watie, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup>Dale and Litton, eds., Cherokee Cavaliers, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup>Grant Foreman, Indian Removal (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1932), p. 229.



The white man's laws regarding the possession of Georgian lands by Indians became so odious that some Cherokees felt that removal was inevitable, and that steps should be taken to consummate the move in a manner least detrimental to the Indians.<sup>8</sup> This view was not shared by the Cherokee majority, who bitterly opposed all attempts at removal and continued to insist that the land was rightfully theirs.<sup>9</sup>

Watie had neither the disposition nor the desire to become a political leader, but events were soon to make him a focal point in the politics of the Cherokee Nation. In 1829 he began a quiet but short-lived career as Clerk of the National Supreme Court.<sup>10</sup> The calm was soon ended, for three years later he replaced his brother, Elias Boudinot, as editor of the Cherokee Phoenix, and then became embroiled with Chief John Ross over possession of the paper.<sup>11</sup> Chief Ross was diametrically opposed to removal, while Watie held that it was inevitable, and each sought the newspaper as a vehicle to press for his beliefs. They began a personal feud that rocked the Cherokee Nation for over thirty years.

The vital issue of removal which had threatened to split the Cherokee Nation did so in 1835. During that year the Ridge-Watie-Boudinot faction signed a removal treaty with United States Commissioner J. F. Schermerhorn, and thus agreed to cede all eastern territory and move west in return for \$3,250,000.<sup>12</sup> The treaty was signed with the

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<sup>8</sup>Dale and Litton, eds., Cherokee Cavaliers, p. xvii.

<sup>9</sup>Morris Wardell, A Political History of the Cherokee Nation (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1938), p. 10.

<sup>10</sup>Anderson, The Life of General Stand Watie, p. 13.

<sup>11</sup>Robert G. Martin, Jr., "The Cherokee Phoenix: Pioneer of Indian Journalism," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXV (Summer, 1947), p. 116.

<sup>12</sup>Foreman, Indian Removal, p. 266.

understanding that it would become effective when ratified by the tribal council.

The full council of the Cherokee Nation met in October, 1835, and under the leadership of Chief Ross flatly rejected the treaty. Paradoxically, Ridge and Boudinot, who had already signed the proposed treaty, joined the majority in opposing it. The United States, impatient with the delay, served notice that a treaty would be negotiated at New Echota in December, and that anyone failing to appear would be considered in favor of any treaty negotiated at the meeting.<sup>13</sup>

The vast majority of Cherokees failed to attend the negotiations, but those who did signed the treaty that committed the Cherokees to removal.<sup>14</sup> The Treaty of New Echota provided that all lands held by the Cherokees in the states east of the Mississippi would be ceded to the United States for \$5,000,000 and that all Cherokees would move west.<sup>15</sup> Chief Ross objected strongly to the provisions and legality of the treaty, but his exhortations were ignored by President Andrew Jackson, who had long been an advocate of removal.<sup>16</sup> The treaty became law on May 23, 1836, and the Cherokee Nation was officially disenfranchised.<sup>17</sup>

The signatories of the Treaty of New Echota became known as the Treaty Party, and those who opposed the treaty became the Ross or Anti-Treaty Party.<sup>18</sup> These two factions became so embittered that they

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 268.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 269.

<sup>15</sup>Charles J. Kappler, ed., Indian Affairs, Laws and Treaties (6 vols., Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), II, pp. 439-449.

<sup>16</sup>Robert A. Rutland, "Political Background of the Cherokee Treaty of New Echota," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXVII (Winter, 1949), p. 405.

<sup>17</sup>Kappler, ed., Indian Affairs, Laws and Treaties, II, p. 439.

<sup>18</sup>Wardell, A Political History of the Cherokee Nation, pp. 8-9.

opposed each other in every manner for the next half century, and the remaining history of the Cherokee Nation was for the most part written by the undying enmity of the two groups.

Removal became a nightmare for government officials and Cherokees alike. The minority treaty party moved peacefully west soon after signing the treaty, and settled in what is now the State of Oklahoma, but nearly two-thirds of the Cherokee Nation refused to leave Georgia.<sup>19</sup> The army, led by General Winfield Scott, and acting under the orders of President Jackson, finally forced the remaining Cherokees to move.<sup>20</sup>

Watie and the other leaders of the Treaty Party were early migrants to the new lands, and when they arrived they immediately formed a coalition with older settlers, who had migrated a decade before.<sup>21</sup> They then awaited the confrontation they knew would come when Chief Ross and the bulk of the Cherokees eventually completed the westward migration.

The "Trail of Tears," as the trek was called, was a dark and bitter chapter in the history of the Cherokees. The march that began in the autumn of 1838, under threat of rifle and bayonet, ended in 1839 after more than 4,000 Cherokees had perished along the way.<sup>22</sup> The survivors never forgot that nightmare forced on them by the United States, nor the actions of the Cherokees who made it possible.

In June, 1839, an attempt was made to reunite the Nation. A meeting attended by all party factions was held at Double Springs, near present-

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<sup>19</sup>Muriel H. Wright, "Seal of the Cherokee Nation," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXXIV (Summer, 1956), p. 137.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Wardell, A Political History of the Cherokee Nation, p. 8.

<sup>22</sup>Grant Foreman, "The Murder of Elias Boudinot," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XII (March, 1934), p. 20.

day Tahlequah.<sup>23</sup> The Treaty Party, although outnumbered two to one, refused to unite unless the late arrivals accepted the government and officials already constituted in the West. The majority, fully cognizant of their own strength, refused to accept the dictates of the minority and the meeting broke up in failure.<sup>24</sup> The rift caused by the Treaty of New Echota seemed to have produced a trauma from which the Cherokee Nation would find it difficult to recover.

The day following the meeting, on June 22, 1839, three leaders of the Treaty Party, Major Ridge, his son John, and Elias Boudinot were brutally murdered.<sup>25</sup> John Ridge was dragged from his bed and stabbed to death in full view of his wife and children. Major Ridge was shot from ambush while on his way to Evansville, Arkansas. Boudinot was stabbed and tomahawked by three men while getting them medicine they had requested.<sup>26</sup> Stand Watie, James Starr, John A. Bell, and George W. Adair, all signers of the Treaty of New Echota, were also marked for death but escaped.<sup>27</sup> The assassinations were well executed and bore all the earmarks of detailed planning.

Chief Ross was pointed to as the mastermind of the plot, but the accusation was never proven.<sup>28</sup> The murders were carried out by followers

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Wardell, A Political History of the Cherokee Nation, pp. 16-17.

<sup>27</sup>House Executive Document Number 185, 29th Cong., 1st Sess., p. 55.

<sup>28</sup>Foreman, "The Murder of Elias Boudinot," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XII, p. 21. Ironically, Major Ridge in 1829 sponsored a measure in the Cherokee Council that decreed "death to any member who should sign a treaty or any other paper agreeing to give up their country in the East." Grant Foreman, "The Trial of Stand Watie," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XII (September, 1934), p. 305.



of Ross as retribution for those who signed away the Cherokee lands at New Echota, but the Chief himself had no knowledge of the plans. Ross' son, Allen, admitted later that a secret meeting was held and all present drew lots to determine who would fill the executioners' roles. His only part in the conspiracy was to keep the secret from his father until the assassinations were accomplished.<sup>29</sup>

A reign of terror followed closely on the heels of the murders as both factions formed armed bands for protection. Many families of the Treaty Party fled into Arkansas while others grouped in the vicinity of old Fort Wayne, an abandoned United States Army post, close to the Arkansas border. Watie, now recognized as the leader of the Treaty Party, established a protective military force at Fort Wayne.<sup>30</sup> The Ross Party organized a group of "light-horsemen" as its military force, and the Cherokee Nation moved into a period of revenge and reprisal.<sup>31</sup>

In 1842 Watie killed James Foreman, a man reputed to be one of the assassins of Major Ridge.<sup>32</sup> The incident occurred while both men were drinking. Foreman, a large man, boasted that he had helped to kill Major Ridge, and then the much smaller Watie turned on him and a fight ensued.<sup>33</sup> Foreman struck at Watie with a whip but was in turn stabbed and finally shot.<sup>34</sup> Watie stood trial in May, 1843, in Benton County,

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., pp. 22-24.

<sup>30</sup>Watie and others to Colonel James McKiscek, August 2, 1847, Stand Watie Letters, Cherokee Documents File, Northeastern State College.

<sup>31</sup>Wardell, A Political History of the Cherokee Nation, p. 52.

<sup>32</sup>Foreman, "The Trial of Stand Watie," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XII, p. 313.

<sup>33</sup>Wheeler to Sparks, undated, Stand Watie Letters, Cherokee Documents File, Northeastern State College.

<sup>34</sup>Foreman, "The Trial of Stand Watie," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XII, p. 319.

Arkansas, among friendly surroundings, and as expected was acquitted.<sup>35</sup> Incidents of this nature were commonplace and murders within the Cherokee Nation continued at an alarming rate. One observer commented in 1846 that "people care as little about hearing these things as they would [to] hear of the death of a common dog."<sup>36</sup>

In March, 1846, Watie left his armed band in the command of his brother John and led a delegation to Washington to seek a solution to the Cherokee problem.<sup>37</sup> The atmosphere existing in Washington in 1846 was decidedly friendly to the Treaty Party, and it appeared that their hoped-for division of the Cherokee Nation would become a reality. President James K. Polk carefully evaluated the problem and submitted a message to Congress in which he said: "I am satisfied that there is no probability that the different bands or parties into which it is divided can ever again live together in peace and harmony, and that the well-being of the whole requires that they should be separated and live under separate governments, as distinct tribes."<sup>38</sup>

Chief Ross, angered by the pronouncement, intensified his efforts for unity and succeeded in convincing President Polk to appoint a three-man commission to deal with the problem.<sup>39</sup> Attorneys for both sides argued throughout the month of July, but in the end the treaty produced by the commission and eventually ratified by the Senate was a triumph

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 316.

<sup>36</sup>John Candy to Watie, April 10, 1846, Dale and Litton, eds., Cherokee Cavaliers, p. 32.

<sup>37</sup>Wardell, A Political History of the Cherokee Nation, p. 66.

<sup>38</sup>House Executive Document Number 185, 29th Cong., 1st Sess., p. 2.

<sup>39</sup>Wardell, A Political History of the Cherokee Nation, p. 71.

for Chief Ross. The provisions of the treaty succeeded, at least superficially, in creating tribal harmony. It stated in part that

all difficulties and differences heretofore existing between the several parties of the Cherokee Nation are hereby settled and adjusted, and shall, as far as possible, be forgotten and forever buried in oblivion. All party distinctions shall cease, except so far as they may be necessary to carry out this convention or treaty. A general amnesty is hereby declared. All offenses and crimes committed by a citizen or citizens of the Cherokee Nation against the nation, or against an individual or individuals, are hereby pardoned.<sup>40</sup>

On August 14, 1846, the delegates of both factions met with President Polk and officially approved the treaty. Watie, who had much to forgive, put tribal interests above his own. He shook the hand of Chief Ross and assured the President that he would abide by the treaty.<sup>41</sup>

The decade following the Treaty of 1846 was relatively peaceful in the Cherokee Nation. Watie returned to his farm and family on Honey Creek and within a few years succeeded in accumulating a large amount of property.<sup>42</sup> He not only increased his material wealth but also continued to participate actively in the political affairs of the Cherokee Nation, serving as a member of the National Council.<sup>43</sup> Watie succeeded in subjugating his old animosities, but internal dissension continued to bubble just below the surface of tribal unity. Young firebrands like John Rollin Ridge never forgave Chief Ross and continually reminded Watie of the need for revenge.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Kappler, ed., Indian Affairs, Laws and Treaties, II, p. 561.

<sup>41</sup>Wardell, A Political History of the Cherokee Nation, p. 73.

<sup>42</sup>Watie had married Sarah Caroline Bell in 1842 and their five children, Saladin, Solon, Cumiskey, Winnie, and Charlotte, were all born during the period from 1847 to 1857. Dale and Litton, eds., Cherokee Cavaliers, p. 303; Anderson, The Life of General Stand Watie, p. 23.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Dale and Litton, eds., Cherokee Cavaliers, pp. 64, 77, 83.

The wounds of the Cherokee Nation might conceivably have healed in time but for the vexing issue of slavery. The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, the disturbances that followed in its wake, and the growing rift between North and South led to increased strife within the Cherokee Nation.<sup>45</sup> The tribal division created by the Treaty of 1835, widened by the murders of 1839, and ostensibly healed by the Treaty of 1846, once again became a gaping wound, as members of the tribe disagreed vehemently over slavery.

The Treaty Party and the Anti-Treaty Party were both revived in earnest because they formed natural alignments on the issue of slavery. The full-blooded Cherokees constituted two-thirds of the population, and were essentially poorly educated farmers who were loyal to the old traditions.<sup>46</sup> Chief Ross was their leader when they opposed the Treaty of New Echota and he led them in their opposition to slavery. The mixed bloods were the educated, generally well-to-do slaveholders, who were closely tied to the heritage of the South. They had supported the Treaty of New Echota and they turned instinctively to Watie to lead them in support of slavery.<sup>47</sup>

In 1859 the full-bloods, under the leadership of two Baptist missionaries, Evan and John Jones, formed the "Keetowahs," a secret society dedicated to the preservation of Indian customs and the abolition of slavery. The members of the society became known as "Pin Indians" because of their insignia, two crossed pins on the left lapel of their

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>46</sup>Joseph B. Thoburn, A Standard History of Oklahoma (4 vols., Chicago: The American Historical Society, 1916), I, p. 260.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., pp. 252, 264-265.



coats.<sup>48</sup> Many members of the Keetowahs also joined the Loyal League, which sought to remain friendly with the United States. More than two thousand Cherokees, all followers of Chief Ross, were members of the League.<sup>49</sup>

The mixed bloods, led by Watie and strongly pro-southern, formed the Knights of the Golden Circle as their answer to the Loyal League. This too was a secret society, and prospective candidates were required to affirm their belief in slavery before they would be accepted into membership. The basic function of the Knights was to provide protection against abolitionists.<sup>50</sup>

As the year 1860 drew to a close, the Cherokee Nation was once again the scene of violence and strife.<sup>51</sup> The short-lived era of peaceful coexistence was over and the Treaty and Anti-Treaty parties once again renewed their longtime antagonisms on the new theme of slavery.

On the eve of conflict Watie appeared ready for a leadership role. He had proven that he was a man others instinctively turned to in time of crisis. He was humble, never shirked responsibility, was steadfast to his ideals, and above all, fearless. He did not have the military education or training of a West Point graduate, but he had sound judgment and a quick mind. He would soon prove that he was indeed the equal of any professional soldier he faced.

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<sup>48</sup>Wardell, A Political History of the Cherokee Nation, pp. 120-121; Cherrie Adair Moore, "William Penn Adair," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXIX (Spring, 1951), p. 38; Dale and Litton, eds., Cherokee Cavaliers, p. 57.

<sup>49</sup>Wardell, A Political History of the Cherokee Nation, p. 122.

<sup>50</sup>Constitution of the Knights of the Golden Circle. Miscellaneous Letters, Cherokee Documents File, Northeastern State College.

<sup>51</sup>Senate Executive Document Number 1, 36th Cong., 2nd Sess., pp. 339-340.

## CHAPTER II

### CONFEDERATE DOMINATION IN INDIAN TERRITORY, 1861

During the early months of 1861 the bitter issues that engulfed the people of the United States moved rapidly toward war. Chief Ross was personally opposed to secession, but foremost in his mind was the well-being of the Cherokee Nation.<sup>1</sup> This he reasoned was a white man's quarrel and the Indian would do well to stay out of it.<sup>2</sup> He failed to realize that by its location alone, Indian Territory could not avoid war.<sup>3</sup>

The Confederacy understood the importance of Indian Territory, and wasted little time in seeking its allegiance. During January, 1861, Governor Henry M. Rector of Arkansas urged Chief Ross to join the South or prepare to suffer the consequences of abolitionist incursions.<sup>4</sup> In reply Ross stated that the Cherokees were bound by treaty to the United States and that he had no fears of the abolitionists.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Dean Trickett, "The Civil War in Indian Territory," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XVII (September, 1939), p. 322.

<sup>2</sup>Ohland Morton, "The Confederate States Government and the Five Civilized Tribes," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXXI (Autumn, 1953), p. 299.

<sup>3</sup>Annie H. Abel, "The Indians in the Civil War," American Historical Review, XV (January, 1910), p. 283.

<sup>4</sup>Rector to Ross, January 29, 1861, United States Department of War, War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (70 vols., 128 books in the United States Serial Set, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), i, I, pp. 683-684. Hereinafter cited as Official Records; series cited in small case Roman numeral; volume cited in large case Roman numeral; part of each volume cited as "Pt."

<sup>5</sup>Ross to Rector, February 22, 1861, *ibid.*, pp. 491-492.

Ross, as Principal Chief, probably spoke for the majority of the Cherokee Nation, but there was a vocal minority, the Treaty Party, for whom he would never be the spokesman. The old animosities within the Cherokee Nation were rekindled by the natural alignment of Watie and his followers with the Confederacy. The mixed bloods were the educated, slaveholding element, adamant in their belief in slavery, and opposed to Chief Ross on all questions. If war came there would be little doubt about the side they would favor.

President Jefferson Davis was anxious to win Indian Territory for the Confederacy, so early in March he appointed Albert Pike of Arkansas as commissioner to "all the Indian tribes west of Arkansas and south of Kansas."<sup>6</sup> He was given the title Commissioner of Indian Affairs, and instructed to negotiate treaties and facilitate the raising of Indian battalions and regiments.<sup>7</sup>

Events moved rapidly in the spring of 1861, and Indian Territory moved ever closer to the Confederate camp. Federal Indian agents invariably were Southerners, and at the outbreak of the war resigned to join their native states.<sup>8</sup> The Union was without Indian agents at a most crucial time, and therefore unable to cope with the astute diplomacy of Pike.

On April 17, 1861, the Federal government literally handed the territory to the Confederacy when it ordered the withdrawal of all troops.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Davis to Congress of the Confederate States, *ibid.*, pp. 785-786.

<sup>7</sup>Robert Lipscomb Duncan, Reluctant General: The Life and Times of Albert Pike (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1961), p. 168.

<sup>8</sup>Charles Richard Francis, "Confederate Ascendancy in Indian Territory 1860-1861" (Unpublished Master of Arts Thesis, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, 1963), p. 14.

<sup>9</sup>Townsend to Emory, April 17, 1861, Official Records, i, I, p. 667.

The consequence of the move must have been apparent then as it is now. A potentially valuable border area and its population was defaulted without issue to an enemy who was delighted to have it.

Chief Ross doggedly continued to resist the Confederate tide. On May 17, 1861, he made his position clear by issuing a proclamation of neutrality.<sup>10</sup> The Confederacy realized fully the value of the Cherokee Nation and applied further pressure. Brigadier General Ben McCulloch of Texas was assigned command of Indian Territory and Colonel Douglas H. Cooper was empowered to raise a mounted regiment among the Choctaws and Chickasaws.<sup>11</sup> Additional regiments were to be raised among the Creeks, Seminoles, and Cherokees. The combined force under McCulloch came to six regiments, three Texan and three Indian. The Confederacy deemed this force adequate to secure Indian Territory.<sup>12</sup>

Prominent citizens of Arkansas appealed to Watie to lead the Cherokees in support of the South. They cautioned him to make his preparations as quickly as possible and promised that he would receive guns and ammunition from the State of Arkansas whenever he applied for them.<sup>13</sup> At approximately the same time, followers of Watie approached Pike and asked if they would be protected if they declared for the South; he assured them that they would.<sup>14</sup> Pike now knew that one segment of the Cherokee Nation was with the Confederacy. He was determined to convince

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<sup>10</sup>Elunt to Weer, July 19, 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 489-490.

<sup>11</sup>Cooper to McCulloch, May 13, 1861, *ibid.*, pp. 575-576; Walker to Cooper, May 13, 1861, *ibid.*, pp. 574-575.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup>A. M. Wilson and J. W. Washbourne to Watie, May 18, 1861, Dale and Litton, eds., Cherokee Cavaliers, pp. 106-107.

<sup>14</sup>Duncan, Reluctant General: The Life and Times of Albert Pike, p. 171.

Chief Ross to make it unanimous.

Early in June, Pike and McCulloch traveled to Park Hill to negotiate with Ross. Pike seemed to believe that neutrality was a dodge that Ross would renounce as soon as he had official guarantees from an authorized spokesman of the Confederacy.<sup>15</sup> The meeting proved him wrong, for Chief Ross, although cordial, remained unyielding.<sup>16</sup> In later years Pike admitted that he really did not expect Ross to change his position of neutrality, and that the main purpose of the trip was to deal with Watie.<sup>17</sup> General McCulloch assured Ross that Confederate troops would not enter the Cherokee Nation except to repel a Federal invasion. He insisted, however, that Cherokees sympathetic to the Confederacy be allowed to form military companies of Home Guards for defensive purposes.<sup>18</sup> This was an obvious attempt to gain approval for the forces already in being under Watie. Chief Ross answered McCulloch's demands by flatly denying authority for the organization of the Indian Home Guard.<sup>19</sup> He knew full well that the fiercely independent Watie would welcome the opportunity to divide the Cherokee Nation, if he had not already done so.

Early in the spring of 1861 Watie organized an independent military force to protect the dissident elements of the Cherokee Nation from raids along the northern border. Watie was pro-Southern from the outset and organized his band of irregulars for protection and to await the

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<sup>15</sup>Pike to Toombs, May 29, 1861, Official Records, iv, I, pp. 359-361.

<sup>16</sup>Joseph B. Thoburn, "The Cherokee Question," Chronicles of Oklahoma, II (June, 1924), pp. 173-174.

<sup>17</sup>Wardell, A Political History of the Cherokee Nation, p. 128.

<sup>18</sup>McCulloch to Ross, June 12, 1861, Official Records, i, II, pp. 591-592.

<sup>19</sup>Ross to McCulloch, June 17, 1861, ibid., i, III, pp. 596-597.

opportunity to bring them into active Confederate service. During the interim there is evidence that the unit engaged in minor skirmishes.<sup>20</sup>

Watie's active military career began on July 12, 1861, when he was commissioned a Colonel in the Confederate Army.<sup>21</sup> The Confederacy was aware of the military and political value of raising a unit to break the stand of Chief Ross on neutrality, and authorized Watie to raise a regiment to "protect" the northern border of the Cherokee Nation.<sup>22</sup> The official designation of this, the initial Cherokee unit to serve in the Civil War, was the First Regiment Cherokee Mounted Volunteers.<sup>23</sup>

Chief Ross was in an untenable position and he knew it. The move that put Colonel Watie at the head of a Confederate Army unit and stationed it on the northern border of the Cherokee Nation placed Ross in the midst of a Confederate sea. If he dared to remain neutral he would run the risk of a military coup d'etat led by Watie.

In early August three Confederate forces concentrated in southwestern Missouri for a move on St. Louis.<sup>24</sup> General Nathaniel Lyon received word of the maneuver and led a Union force to defeat it. He attempted a double envelopment but was killed and his army defeated at the Battle of Wilson's Creek on August 10, 1861.<sup>25</sup> Southwestern Missouri fell to the

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<sup>20</sup>Anderson, The Life of General Stand Watie, p. 26; Charlotte Jean Jarrett, "The Influence of General Stand Watie on the History of Oklahoma" (Unpublished Master of Arts Thesis, University of Oklahoma, Norman, 1929), p. 36.

<sup>21</sup>Stand Watie Service Record, The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>22</sup>McCulloch to Drew, September 1, 1861, Official Records, i, III, p. 691.

<sup>23</sup>Grant Foreman, ed., "History of the Five Civilized Tribes in the Confederate Army" (Typescript, 2 vols., Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, 1928), I, p. 71.

<sup>24</sup>Mark Mayo Boatner, III, The Civil War Dictionary (New York: David McKay Company, 1959), pp. 932-933.

<sup>25</sup>Official Records, i, III, pp. 53-130.

Confederacy and its hold on Indian Territory was solidified.

Chief Ross was now convinced of the futility of neutrality and moved quickly to come to terms with the Confederacy. He sent word to Pike that he was ready to negotiate a treaty.<sup>26</sup> Pike was delighted with the news. He had already completed negotiations with the Creek, Seminole, Choctaw, and Chickasaw nations, and a treaty with the Cherokees would complete his mission.<sup>27</sup>

The Cherokee Nation held a general meeting at Tahlequah on August 21, 1861. Chief Ross, as principal speaker, reviewed the position of neutrality and concluded that the Cherokees should not stand alone in the face of overwhelming odds. He proposed an alliance with the Confederacy. The Executive Council endorsed the new policy and advised General McCulloch that a mounted regiment would be raised under the command of Colonel John Drew and offered for service in the Confederate Army.<sup>28</sup>

General McCulloch seemed pleased to have an additional Cherokee regiment, and so advised Colonel Drew. McCulloch at the same time reminded Drew that Watie was already officially protecting the northern border of the Cherokee Nation.<sup>29</sup> McCulloch apparently had some reservations about the relative value of the two Cherokee regiments. He advised Secretary of War L. P. Walker that Watie and his men had been

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<sup>26</sup>Thoburn, "The Cherokee Question," Chronicles of Oklahoma, II, p. 175.

<sup>27</sup>Annie H. Abel, The American Indian as Slaveholder and Secessionist (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1915), p. 175.

<sup>28</sup>Ross and others to McCulloch, August 24, 1861, Official Records, I, III, pp. 673-677.

<sup>29</sup>McCulloch to Drew, September 1, 1861, *ibid.*, p. 691.

highly effective in their role as border guardians and should be retained as a battalion separate from Colonel Drew's full-bloods.<sup>30</sup> Watie, he was certain, would make an outstanding officer; of Drew he was not so sure.

McCulloch's advice was heeded by Secretary Walker and immediate steps taken to insure that Watie would command a force comparable in size to Drew's. Watie was authorized to expand his force to form a regiment to consist of ten companies with 100 men in each company. He was also advised to continue operating in the neutral lands in Kansas, but cautioned to accept only armed men into his unit.<sup>31</sup>

The Cherokee Nation formally aligned itself with the Confederacy on October 7, 1861.<sup>32</sup> The wily Ross had convinced the Cherokees to join what appeared to be the winning team. He himself had no patriotic feeling for the Confederacy, but was an opportunist determined to achieve the best solution for his people. He called on all Cherokees to bury past differences and join in fighting a common enemy.<sup>33</sup>

The Cherokees by the fall of 1861 had two regiments in the field. Colonel Drew commanded one and Colonel Watie the other. There is some confusion regarding the names of these units. This is due in part to the fact that Drew's regiment was the first authorized by the Cherokee Nation, although Watie's force preceded him in the field. It is also caused by the fact that Drew's unit twice defected and eventually disbanded when its members changed sides.

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<sup>30</sup>McCulloch to Walker, September 2, 1861, *ibid.*, pp. 691-692.

<sup>31</sup>Bradgate to Watie, September 20, 1861, Letters to Stand Watie and Family, 1832-1878, Cherokee Nation Papers, Manuscripts Division, University of Oklahoma, Norman.

<sup>32</sup>Confederate Treaty with the Cherokee Nation, Official Records, iv, I, pp. 669-687.

<sup>33</sup>Ross to the National Committee, October 9, 1861, *ibid.*, i, XIII, pp. 501-502.



The unit organized by Watie and officially accepted by the Confederacy on July 12, 1861, was named the First Regiment Cherokee Mounted Volunteers.<sup>34</sup> It was, however, often referred to as the Second Cherokee Regiment by the Confederate War Department until the final dissolution of Drew's regiment in July, 1862.<sup>35</sup> Watie in his official reports early in the war often uses different command lines, but never the word second. His was the first Cherokee unit to form and apparently he saw no reason to allow someone else to usurp the honor.

The regiment raised by Colonel Drew on November 5, 1861, was named the First Regiment Cherokee Mounted Rifleman and continued with this designation until its disbandment in July, 1862.<sup>36</sup> The confusion in unit designations was further compounded by the fact that on at least one occasion Colonel Drew's regiment was also officially referred to as the Second Cherokee Regiment.<sup>37</sup>

From the disbanding of Drew's regiment until February, 1863, Watie led the only Cherokee regiment serving with the Confederacy. An additional regiment was formed on February 3, 1863, and designated the Second Regiment Cherokee Mounted Rifles, under the command of Colonel William Penn Adair.<sup>38</sup> From February, 1863, until the end of the war

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<sup>34</sup>Stand Watie Service Record, The National Archives; Foreman, ed., "History of the Five Civilized Tribes in the Confederacy, I, pp. 71-179; Dale and Litton, eds., Cherokee Cavaliers, p. 114.

<sup>35</sup>Watie to Cooper, June 1, 1862, Official Records, i, XIII, p. 94; Trickett, "The Civil War in Indian Territory," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XVIII, p. 145.

<sup>36</sup>Foreman, ed., "History of the Five Civilized Tribes in the Confederacy," I, pp. 4-69.

<sup>37</sup>Abstract from return of the Department of Indian Territory, May, 1862, Official Records, i, XIII, p. 831.

<sup>38</sup>Foreman, ed., "History of the Five Civilized Tribes in the Confederacy," I, pp. 181-247.

there were two Cherokee regiments serving the Confederacy.

By the fall of 1861 a force in excess of four thousand Indians was poised and ready to fight for the Confederacy.<sup>39</sup> They were not properly armed, but on the surface appeared to be formidable.<sup>40</sup> The Confederacy was soon to find that the combat readiness of this force was questionable even when facing a quasi-military organization.

One element of the Creek Nation refused to swear allegiance to the Confederacy, and under the leadership of their elder statesman, Opothleyahola, they set out for friendly Cherokee country in early November, 1861, to escape the vengeance of the secessionists. The withdrawal was closely followed by Colonel Cooper, determined to block the escape.<sup>41</sup> After futilely following the trail for several days, Cooper on November 19, 1861, stumbled onto the enemy and was defeated in the engagement at Round Mountain, the first significant action of the Civil War in Indian Territory.<sup>42</sup>

Colonel Cooper was temporarily forced to discontinue the pursuit of Opothleyahola when he received orders from General McCulloch to prepare for an invasion from Missouri. The invasion threat proved unfounded and Cooper once again set out after Opothleyahola. En route he was joined

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<sup>39</sup>Pike to Benjamin, November 27, 1861, Official Records, i, VIII, pp. 697-698.

<sup>40</sup>The supply of arms and equipment to Indian Territory was a problem the Confederacy never solved. From the beginning it was apparent the Confederate Indians would be poorly armed. Official Records, i, III, pp. 588, 620. Union forces invariably were better armed and equipped than their Confederate foes.

<sup>41</sup>Abel, The Indian as Slaveholder and Secessionist, p. 254.

<sup>42</sup>Cooper to Benjamin, January 20, 1862, Official Records, i, VIII, p. 5.

by Colonel Drew and his First Cherokee Mounted Rifles.<sup>43</sup>

On December 8 Major Pegg of the Confederate Cherokee regiment was sent on a peace mission to Opothleyahola's camp. He returned without having met Opothleyahola and circulated such exaggerated rumors of the enemy's equipment and numbers that Drew's force deserted en masse before its first combat action. The original force of over 450 Cherokees was reduced to Drew and twenty-eight others who remained loyal to the Confederacy.<sup>44</sup>

The following day Cooper attacked Opothleyahola and once again failed to achieve his objective. This engagement of Chusto-Talash was at best a draw, although Cooper claimed a victory. His estimation of enemy killed and wounded indicates that he not only was a weak combat commander but prone to exaggerate. It would be folly to assume that a poorly equipped aggressor, outnumbered two to one, could assault and rout a well dug in enemy, and inflict casualties at the rate of ten to one, as Cooper reported doing.<sup>45</sup>

Low on ammunition and concerned with continued desertions among the Cherokees, Cooper sent Colonel Drew and the remnants of his command back to Fort Gibson while he led the remaining elements down the Arkansas River. He reported his "victory" to Colonel James McIntosh in Van Buren, Arkansas, and asked for an additional white force in the territory to help stop the widespread disaffection among the Cherokees and to act in support of Watie.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., pp. 10-11.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

Colonel McIntosh hastened to Fort Gibson, conferred with Cooper, and formulated a plan to envelop Opothleyahola's forces. One pincer led by Cooper would assault from the rear while the other pincer under McIntosh would make a frontal attack. The first force to sight the enemy would attack.<sup>47</sup> The plan was sound except for the timing of the final assault, and in the end this was the cause for partial failure.

Colonel McIntosh left Fort Gibson with a force of 1,380 and moved rapidly in pursuit of Opothleyahola.<sup>48</sup> Cooper found it impossible to keep up and ordered Watie to rendezvous with the impetuous Texan prior to the final attack.<sup>49</sup> McIntosh sighted elements of the fleeing enemy on Christmas, and decided to press on without waiting for Watie. He hit Opothleyahola's tired and bedraggled force on the banks of Shoal Creek, a tributary of the Verdigris River, and completely routed it. The Creeks outnumbered McIntosh and held good defensive positions, but the effect of the long campaign had taken its toll.<sup>50</sup> The engagement of Chustenahlah was a clear-cut Confederate victory, but failure to adhere to the original plan allowed the enemy to escape complete annihilation. Watie and his 300 Cherokees rode hard to join McIntosh before battle but arrived on the scene just as the hostilities were ending. The fault was not Watie's, for the over-anxious McIntosh had refused to wait for him.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> McIntosh to S. Cooper, January 1, 1862, *ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Cooper to Benjamin, January 20, 1862, *ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>50</sup> McIntosh to S. Cooper, January 1, 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 22-25.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

At dawn the following day the reinforced Confederates again resumed the pursuit. Watie's scouts overtook elements of Opothleyahola's force and reported them in strength in the hills on the left flank of the route of march. Without waiting to consult Colonel McIntosh, Watie divided his command and undertook a double envelopment. One force led by Major Elias C. Boudinot assaulted the enemy from the left while the other under Watie himself moved in from the right. The enemy had the advantage of defending rocky terrain that in places was inaccessible to horses, but did not make a determined stand. The fighting was sporadic as Watie's forces drove the enemy from point to point and finally succeeded in completely routing them. Watie suffered no casualties but inflicted heavy damage on the enemy.<sup>52</sup> Confederate forces continued to pursue Opothleyahola but succeeded only in capturing a few stragglers. The wily Creek in the face of great adversity escaped to sanctuary in Kansas.

The year of 1861 ended in a flurry of successes that placed the Confederacy in firm control of Indian Territory. The dissident elements were gone, all tribes were in accord with the South, and threat of Federal invasions seemed remote. The high tide of the Confederacy in Indian Territory had been reached.

In the joy of victory Southern leaders overlooked some weaknesses that would prove costly as the war progressed. Confederate commanders failed to recognize the need for planning and coordination in joint military operations and succeeded only because the opposition was something less than a test. Colonel Cooper demonstrated that he had little imagination or military drive and General McIntosh that he had too much

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<sup>52</sup>Watie to McIntosh, December 28, 1862, *ibid.*, p. 32.

of both. These commanders seemed to lack valuable leadership qualities that would be needed when they faced more competent opposition.

The only Southern leader to pass the initial tests of command in Indian Territory was Watie. He used scouts properly, planned his actions well, and carried them out with alacrity and speed. During his first engagement he pursued an enemy on the run from a previous defeat, and might easily have thrown caution to the wind in his haste to deliver a coup de gr<sup>^</sup>ace. He displayed the mark of a military leader by respecting the potential of his enemy, avoiding over-confidence, and above all, by planning carefully and executing vigorously. Watie's combat actions during 1861 were limited in scope, but his performance of duty clearly indicated a high potential as a commanding officer.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE FEDERAL DRIVE TO THE ARKANSAS RIVER, 1862

During the early months of 1862 the Confederacy settled back to enjoy the fruits of its recent victories over Opothleyahola. The sweetness of success was soon to disappear, for this was a year of stinging defeats for the Southern cause in Indian Territory.

Commissioner Pike, an unqualified success as a diplomat, was rewarded by being appointed a Brigadier General and placed in command of all Indian troops in the Territory. His field commander was Colonel Cooper.<sup>1</sup> Pike, perhaps more than any other white man, had the respect of the Indian and was in turn fully cognizant of the value of Indian troops properly equipped and employed. His effective force in early 1862 was only 5,500 men, but Pike felt certain that it would swell to at least 7,000. If used within the confines of Indian Territory, he believed they would prove a valuable supplement to the Confederate Army.<sup>2</sup>

General Pike was dissatisfied with Fort Gibson and determined to display his own initiative and importance by building a new military post. He chose a site on the south side of the Arkansas River a mile or two south of the Verdigris River and within rifle sound of Fort Gibson. The installation, named Cantonment Davis in honor of President Jefferson Davis, was to be the military and civil headquarters of the

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<sup>1</sup>General Order, Adjutant and Inspector General Department, November 22, 1861, Official Records, i, VIII, p. 690.

<sup>2</sup>Pike to Benjamin, November 27, 1861, *ibid.*, p. 697.

Confederacy in Indian Territory.<sup>3</sup>

Watie spent the winter of 1861-1862 in watchful waiting in the Flint District of the Cherokee Nation.<sup>4</sup> During a lull in military operations he reported on two incidents that in themselves were minor, but the nature of the communications was significant. Watie wrote a detailed report to Colonel Cooper in answer to a complaint from Colonel Drew that Watie's nephew Charles Webber had killed and scalped one of Drew's men. Watie readily admitted the killing as a regrettable incident over which he had no control. He felt that Colonel Drew's complaint laid undue stress on the fact that Webber was a member of Watie's command and that the victim, Chunestootie, was a member of Drew's command. Watie made a stinging denunciation of what he felt was an attempt to rekindle the animosity between the factions within the Cherokee Nation. He also left no doubt that he neither trusted nor respected Colonel Drew and his full-bloods.<sup>5</sup>

Watie's second significant report during this time was written to General Pike. The General, upon hearing rumors of Opothleyahola's return to Indian Territory, had ordered Watie's regiment to Fort Davis. Watie at the time was with General McCulloch, but when he returned and found his unit gone he ordered it to return. He curtly advised General Pike that the rumor was in error, and by his manner of writing indicated concern that General Pike had panicked so easily.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Angie Debo, The Road to Disappearance (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1941), p. 153; Grant Foreman, "Fort Davis," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XVII (June, 1939), p. 148.

<sup>4</sup>Watie to Pike, February 27, 1862, Dale and Litton, eds., Cherokee Cavaliers, p. 114.

<sup>5</sup>Watie to Cooper, February 19, 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 111-114.

<sup>6</sup>Watie to Pike, February 27, 1862, *ibid.*, p. 114.



President Davis received word that General Sterling Price and General Ben McCulloch were clashing over who should command Confederate forces in the West. He acted promptly to solve the problem and on January 10, 1862, created the Trans-Mississippi District, and placed Major General Earl Van Dorn in command.<sup>7</sup> General Van Dorn had a commendable record that indicated that he was courageous and willing and could be relied on to take prompt and aggressive action.<sup>8</sup>

General Van Dorn, upon assuming command, took immediate steps to make a major assault upon the Union stronghold in Missouri.<sup>9</sup> On March 3, 1862, General Pike received orders to move rapidly with his Indian troops along the Cane Hill road into Arkansas, and to fall in behind the combined forces of General Price and General McCulloch. Pike prepared for immediate action. The need for haste was so great that on March 3 Van Dorn sent direct orders to Watie, McIntosh, and Drew to move along the road from Evansville to Fayetteville, Arkansas, so as to be within five or six miles of Fayetteville by evening the following day. They were directed to travel light and be prepared for immediate action.<sup>10</sup>

General Van Dorn sought to lead his combined force against the Union forces of Brigadier General Samuel Curtis in the vicinity of Pea Ridge, Arkansas. He planned to outflank the enemy by sending General Price against the Union left rear while General McCulloch and General

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<sup>7</sup>Special Order No. 8, Adjutant and Inspector General's Office, January 10, 1862, Official Records, i, VIII, p. 830.

<sup>8</sup>Boatner, Civil War Dictionary, p. 867.

<sup>9</sup>Abel, "The Indian in the Civil War," American Historical Review, XV, p. 289.

<sup>10</sup>Maury to Pike, March 3, 1862, Official Records, i, VIII, pp. 763-764; Maury to Drew, McIntosh, Watie, March 3, 1862, ibid., p. 764.

Pike led a secondary attack from the northwest toward Leestown.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately for the Confederacy, the Battle of Pea Ridge did not take place as planned. On the first day, March 7, 1862, the assault was contained by the Union forces and General McIntosh and General McCulloch were killed. Thus Confederate forces became leaderless and confused at a critical time. The following day the Union Army launched a counter-attack and the Confederate forces withdrew from the field in a confused and hasty retrograde movement. General Curtis did not attempt to pursue the fleeing enemy because his own force was exhausted.<sup>12</sup>

The Indian forces played a major role in the Confederate defeat at Pea Ridge. They were heavily engaged from the beginning, and their conduct caused them to become the center of a controversy regarding the use of Indian troops in formal warfare. General Pike received his initial orders from General Van Dorn in ample time but was delayed because the Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Creeks refused to move without being paid. Pike paid the Choctaws and Chickasaws, left them in camp, and moved out with the Creeks whom he promised to pay on the way. He overtook Watie's regiment at Cincinnati on the Cherokee border, then caught up with Colonel Drew, and finally fell in behind McCulloch's division on the afternoon of March 6.<sup>13</sup> The Indian forces on the eve of battle was composed of Watie's and Drew's regiments and a squadron of Texas cavalry, consisting of not more than 1,200 men in all.<sup>14</sup> The bulk of General Pike's command either remained at Fort Gibson or moved too

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<sup>11</sup>Van Dorn to Bragg, May 27, 1862, Official Records, i, VIII, pp. 283-284.

<sup>12</sup>Curtis to McLean, April 1, 1862, Official Records, i, VIII, p. 202.

<sup>13</sup>Pike to Maury, March 14, 1862, *ibid.*, p. 287.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 287-288.

slowly to arrive in time for the battle.

During the initial phase of hostilities at Pea Ridge, General Pike placed his command on line behind General McIntosh's brigade and moved toward the enemy. Captain O. G. Welch's Texas Squadron was on the right, Colonel Drew in the center, and Colonel Watie on the left.<sup>15</sup> After marching about a mile, a Federal battery of three guns protected by five companies of cavalry was discovered barring the route of advance. General McIntosh had moved his unit to the left so the Indian elements became the lead force facing the enemy battery. Pike reformed his line behind a fence, and when the enemy opened fire less than three hundred yards away, the Indians charged. The assault was led by Watie's regiment on foot followed by Colonel Drew's mounted forces. The yelling Indians passed through a wooded area into an open field and made a frontal assault on the enemy. The battery was overrun and the Federal cavalry dispersed. Pike ordered the captured guns towed back to the concealment of the woods and at this point lost effective control of his forces. Colonel Drew's jubilant Indians milled around the booty and refused to obey orders to regroup.<sup>16</sup> Watie discovered another enemy force to the direct front, and advised General Pike, who then sought to train the captured guns on the newly found enemy. Captain Rowell Lee, a staff officer, was directed to move the guns into battery, but Drew's excited Indians ignored his commands.<sup>17</sup> The confusion was compounded when the enemy fired a few shells among the Indians. Pike realized his force would never stand in the face of an artillery barrage, so he ordered them to seek shelter

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 287.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 288.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

behind trees. The entire command then covered behind trees and awaited a Federal infantry assault that never came.<sup>18</sup>

Pike left his Indians and reconnoitered his left flank, where he discovered two Confederate cavalry regiments formed on line. Colonel Drew, apparently impatient with inactivity, led his 500 man regiment in search of General Pike, and upon finding him was directed to form behind the Confederate cavalry, dismount and fight any way he desired.<sup>19</sup> Pike then directed Sergeant-Major George West of Watie's regiment to drag the captured artillery into the woods and place a guard over it.<sup>20</sup>

As the day progressed, Pike was perturbed by a lack of communications from higher headquarters. He made a personal reconnaissance and learned that General McCulloch and General McIntosh were dead and that a strong body of Federal infantry was attempting to outflank the Confederate left. He assumed command and took steps to counter the enemy move. All available troops, including Watie's regiment, were moved to the left flank toward a wooded ridge that Pike felt was a suitable defensive position. The troops were halted at the foot of the ridge and Major Boudinot was sent to inform General Van Dorn of Pike's plans. The sight of retreating Confederates up ahead convinced Pike that the battle had been lost and that a wholesale retreat was in order. Colonel Watie was directed to protect both flanks with his cavalry, and the entire force made an orderly retreat without having made an attempt to engage the enemy. Pike attempted to re-establish contact with Colonel Drew to order him to join the retreat, but the order was not received. Drew eventually withdrew

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 289.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

to Camp Stephens, where it appears he sat out the remainder of the Battle of Pea Ridge.<sup>21</sup>

On the second day of the battle Colonel Watie was directed to split his unit and man observation posts on both flanks of the main Confederate force. His mission was to observe the enemy and report if any attempt was made to turn the Confederate left.<sup>22</sup> Pike, whose command now consisted solely of Watie's regiment, once again proceeded to roam over the battlefield on a personal reconnaissance, leaving Watie on his own.<sup>23</sup> Pike learned that under the pressure of a major Federal assault the Confederate forces were making a hasty retreat; unfortunately, General Van Dorn had neglected once again to keep him abreast of developments. Pike attempted to get word to Colonel Watie to withdraw from his position, but Watie, who had already prodded Pike for orders, never received the order to retreat.<sup>24</sup> Watie held his position until it became untenable and then continued a rearguard action covering the Confederate retreat as best he could while withdrawing to Camp Stephens.<sup>25</sup> The retreat continued confused and unabated until the Indian forces reached Cincinnati, Arkansas. It was here that Pike first learned the whereabouts of General Van Dorn and the main Confederate force.<sup>26</sup>

The disaster of Pea Ridge resulted in part from a series of blunders

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 290, 292.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 290.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Duncan, Reluctant General: The Life and Times of Albert Pike, p. 221.

<sup>25</sup>Frank Cunningham, General Stand Watie's Confederate Indians (San Antonio: The Naylor Company, 1959), p. 64.

<sup>26</sup>Pike to Maury, March 14, 1862, Official Records, i, VIII, p. 292.

in command. General Van Dorn utterly failed to understand the potential value of Indian forces properly employed. He ignored them and their commander and suffered the consequences when Pike, unprepared and uninformed, was thrust into a responsible position. The actions taken by Pike under the stress of battle indicate that he was not suited to the task. No reasonable commander covers a battlefield in search of information while his command fends for itself, and no reasonable commander retreats until assured that he cannot withstand an enemy assault.

— The overall reputation of Confederate Indian forces suffered badly and, in some cases, unjustly at Pea Ridge. Colonel Cooper and his Choctaws and Chickasaws arrived too late to do anything other than join the retreat. Colonel Drew appears to have retreated long before the need arose, and many Indians never crossed the border into Arkansas.<sup>27</sup> Pike's only effective force on the second day of fighting was Watie's regiment. General Curtis alleged that the Confederate Indians engaged in scalping. Although this is probably true, it was not extensive.<sup>28</sup> It seems strange that he expected Indians to adhere to the white man's code of conduct in spite of their heritage to the contrary. A most significant feature of the Indian failures at Pea Ridge was their misuse by white commanders. The fighter trained from birth in hit and run guerrilla tactics and individual bravery was ill-suited to stand fast in the face of artillery and massed formations, and should not have been used in this manner.

Watie's forces conducted themselves admirably throughout the engagement. They responded well to every mission given them, fought as a team, and continued to resist even while withdrawing. They remained a

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 287, 288, 292.

<sup>28</sup>Curtis to Wade, May 21, 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 206-208.

reasonably well disciplined and effective force throughout the action. If the finger of guilt for Indian shortcomings must be pointed, it points best at Colonel Drew's regiment.

Following the Confederate disaster at Pea Ridge, General Pike made a move that confirms the belief that he was a far better diplomat than a soldier. He continued his retreat into Indian Territory, stopped briefly at Fort Davis, and then moved deep into the southeastern portion of the Territory, halting only after reaching the Red River. Here in friendly surroundings he announced his plans to construct a bastion to be named after his fallen comrade General McCulloch.<sup>29</sup> Colonel Watie and Colonel Drew were instructed to hold Indian Territory, harass the enemy, and when all else failed, flee south and join Pike and his white troops in the safety of Fort McCulloch.<sup>30</sup> Pike's utter lack of military understanding was appalling, for he not only abandoned the country he was commissioned to defend, but detailed the reasons to his sacrificial lambs, Watie and Drew. He did fail to mention, however, that when formulating his own plans he ignored a direct order from General Van Dorn to defend the Territory.<sup>31</sup>

During April Watie established his headquarters on Cowskin Prairie, Arkansas, and acted as Pike's advanced guard. His force was greatly reduced by furloughs and probably numbered less than 300, some of whom

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<sup>29</sup>Grant Foreman, A History of Oklahoma (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1945), p. 110.

<sup>30</sup>Pike to Watie, April 1, 1862, Dale and Litton, eds., Cherokee Cavaliers, pp. 115-117; Pike to Drew, April 1, 1862, Grant Foreman, Civil War Cherokee Collection, Indian Archives Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City.

<sup>31</sup>Van Dorn to Secretary of War Walker, March 18, 1862, Official Records, i, VIII, p. 282; Duncan, Reluctant General: The Life and Times of Albert Pike, p. 232.

were scattered throughout the area as scouts.<sup>32</sup> It was during this period of anticipating a Federal invasion that Watie engaged in his first independent action. On April 25 his scouts reported the advance of 200 Federal troops upon Elk Mills, located a mile north of Watie's camp on Cowskin Prairie.<sup>33</sup> Watie led a forty-man reconnaissance party to check the validity of the report and found it was true. He sent for reinforcements and later that day 100 troops from his regiment and sixty soldiers from the Missouri State Guard arrived under the command of Colonel J. T. Coffee. The enemy moved on to Neosho, Missouri, and Watie, with a force that now numbered 200, followed closely on its heels.

Early on the morning of April 26 Watie attempted a double envelopment of the enemy. He led a force of 125 men on a surprise assault on the rear of the enemy camp, while Colonel Coffee was expected to make a simultaneous assault at another point. Watie dismounted his troops two miles from the camp and proceeded on foot. He surprised the enemy pickets, drove them into camp, and fired upon the main body. Colonel Coffee unaccountably failed to arrive on time to offer support, and Watie was forced to withdraw with unloaded muskets.<sup>34</sup> The initiative swung to the Federal force, consisting of the First Battalion First Missouri Cavalry, with Major J. T. Hubbard commanding. Lieutenant Amos Burrows rallied companies L and H and chased Watie's forces out of the camp site.<sup>35</sup> The opposing forces continued to skirmish until about 3:00 p.m., when Watie regrouped his forces and retreated to Cowskin Prairie.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Foreman, A History of Oklahoma, p. 110.

<sup>33</sup>Watie to Cooper, April 27, 1862, Official Records, i, XIII, p. 63.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Hubbard to Curtis, May 2, 1862, *ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>36</sup>Watie to Cooper, April 27, 1862, *ibid.*



The outcome of this skirmish at Neosho is difficult to evaluate, for both sides claimed victory. In view of the fact that Watie had the initial element of surprise, his assessment of thirty-five Federal casualties and seven Confederate is probably accurate.<sup>37</sup> By his own admission, however, Watie failed to envelop the enemy and was in turn forced to retire, so that this action in a sense was a Federal victory. The significant feature was that it established a pattern for most of Watie's future engagements. He undoubtedly considered himself a guerrilla fighter with a mission to harass the enemy. Success in this light should be measured by damage dealt the enemy rather than ability to hold the battlefield. Few successful guerrilla fighters have ever succeeded in overwhelming the opposition with sheer weight of numbers. It should be noted that most commanders during the Civil War measured success only in terms of enemy withdrawal, and this is reflected in their reports. Colonel Cooper was highly pleased with Watie's performance at Neosho, and advised both Van Dorn and Pike that Watie was a valuable link in the Confederate chain. He recommended to Van Dorn that Watie be promoted to Brigadier General and given wide authority to recruit all Indians north of the Canadian River.<sup>38</sup>

Following his engagement at Neosho, Watie returned to his task of guarding the Southern border, and within a month his unit was involved in another combat action. On May 31, 1862, Captain R. C. Parks led 200 men of Watie's regiment in a surprise raid on the Fourteenth Regiment Missouri Militia. This second engagement at Neosho was a resounding

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid.; Hubbard to Curtis, May 2, 1862, *ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>38</sup>Cooper to Pike, May 6, 1862, *ibid.*; Cooper to Van Dorn, May 6, 1862, *ibid.*, p. 824.

success for the Confederacy. Watie himself was not present during the action, but it appears that he planned the attack.<sup>39</sup> Colonel John M. Richardson and the Missouri Militia were bivouacked near Neosho when Colonel Parks and 200 Cherokees supported by Colonel Coffee and 200 Missouri Cavalry completely surprised him. In a manner typical of Watie's tactics, the Confederate force dismounted prior to the attack and made their surprise assault on foot. The Federal force was thrown into complete confusion, and within ten minutes after the first shot was fired they abandoned their camp.<sup>40</sup> Both forces were essentially equal in numbers, but the element of surprise, coupled with a deterioration in the Federal chain of command, provided Watie's regiment with a clear-cut victory. Colonel Richardson himself was wounded and his command so badly routed that an investigating officer was assigned to fix responsibility for the disaster. The investigation confirmed that the Federal force had conducted itself poorly and had suffered a stinging defeat.<sup>41</sup> Much of the credit for the victory belongs to Parks and Coffee for their aggressive actions, but the plan itself bears the stamp of Watie.

As the summer of 1862 approached, Watie had demonstrated his value as a border guerrilla. Colonel Drew's regiment on the other hand continued to be of questionable value. Drew had orders to remain in supporting distance of Watie at all times, but his unit was conspicuous by its absence.<sup>42</sup> Colonel Cooper insisted that unless white troops

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<sup>39</sup>Watie to Cooper, June 1, 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

<sup>40</sup>Mills to Brown, June 13, 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 92-94.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup>Cooper to Drew, May 6, 1862, Foreman, *Civil War Cherokee Collection*, Indian Archives Division, Oklahoma Historical Society.

were sent to assist Watie in the defense of Indian Territory, a Federal invasion force would prove too formidable for Watie and provide cause for Drew's unit to defect again.<sup>43</sup>

The long anticipated Federal invasion became a reality when in June, 1862, Colonel William Weer led a force of 6,000 from Fort Scott, Kansas, with the avowed purpose of retaking Indian Territory. The command was composed of the Second, Sixth, and Ninth Kansas Cavalry, the Tenth Kansas Infantry, the Ninth Wisconsin Infantry, the Second Ohio Cavalry, the First and Second Indiana Batteries, and two newly formed Indian regiments.<sup>44</sup> Watie was the first to feel the sting of the invasion force, when on June 6, 1862, he unaccountably allowed himself to be surprised and overrun. Colonel Charles Doubleday knew of Watie's encampment on Cowskin Prairie and led a 100 man force of the Second Ohio Cavalry, augmented by a battery of artillery, to break up the camp.<sup>45</sup> The First Battalion was sent across Grand River with orders to attack from the rear while the main body made a frontal assault. The assault took place at 9:00 p.m. under the cover of darkness, and apparently caught Watie unaware. The Confederate camp was thrown into confusion, but Doubleday failed to exploit his initial success, and thereby allowed Watie to escape. The Federal force broke off the fighting at 1:00 a.m., posted pickets, and slept on the battlefield. Watie escaped during the night and retreated southward. Casualties for both sides were light, but Doubleday captured 500 head of horses and cattle that

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<sup>43</sup>Cooper to Van Dorn, May 6, 1862, Official Records, i, XIII, pp. 823-824.

<sup>44</sup>Albert Castel, A Frontier State at War: Kansas, 1861-1865 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1958), p. 97.

<sup>45</sup>Doubleday to Weer, June 8, 1862, Official Records, i, XIII, p. 102.

the poorly equipped Watie could ill-afford to lose.<sup>46</sup>

Colonel Weer's expedition continued to lumber down the Grand River valley and the vastly inadequate Confederate forces opposing it continued to withdraw. Major General T. C. Hindman, the newly appointed commander of the Confederate Trans-Mississippi Department, ordered Pike to abandon Fort McCulloch and establish his headquarters at Fort Gibson to better cope with the invasion force.<sup>47</sup> Pike ignored the order and in turn passed the responsibility to Colonel Cooper, while he remained at a safe distance from the hazards of combat. Cooper was assigned by Pike to command all troops north of the Canadian River and advised to take the actions he deemed necessary.<sup>48</sup> The only effective forces facing the Federal juggernaut as it moved southward were Watie's regiment, Drew's regiment, and a battalion of Missourians under Colonel J. J. Clarkson.<sup>49</sup> The unpredictable Pike had apparently lost his stomach for war at the Battle of Pea Ridge and was content to let the badly outnumbered Cherokees act as his buffer.

Watie was still licking his wounds from the surprise attack of the Second Ohio Cavalry when he repeated his error and allowed himself to be surprised once again. Colonel Weer received word that Watie was encamped on Spavinaw Creek while Colonel Clarkson was located at Locust Grove.<sup>50</sup> The Sixth Kansas Cavalry was sent down the east side of the Grand River

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Hindman to Cooper, June 19, 1862, *ibid.*, p. 837.

<sup>48</sup>General Order of the Department of Indian Territory, June 23, 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 839-840.

<sup>49</sup>Hindman to Cooper, November 3, 1862, *ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>50</sup>J. C. Hopkins, "James G. Blunt and the Civil War," (Unpublished Master of Arts Thesis, University of Oklahoma, Norman, 1952), p. 18.

to engage Watie while the rest of the force continued southward in pursuit of Colonel Clarkson. At daybreak of July 3 Lieutenant Colonel Lewis R. Jewell and the Sixth Kansas Cavalry surprised Watie on Spavinaw Creek. After a brief exchange Watie hastily retreated toward Locust Grove, leaving most of his supplies behind.<sup>51</sup> In the meantime Colonel Clarkson was overrun at Locust Grove, suffered heavy casualties, and he was captured.<sup>52</sup> The badly outnumbered Watie continued his flight southward, knowing that it would be foolhardy for his force alone to attempt to check the Federal drive.

General Hindman exhorted Pike once again to move to the trouble spot and take action, but his plea fell on deaf ears.<sup>53</sup> Pike not only refused to move, but he denounced Hindman and others for the deplorable situation in the Territory, and with a flourish tendered his resignation.<sup>54</sup>

Colonel Drew's regiment had shown little inclination to fight since Pea Ridge, and now seized the opportunity to disband. In great numbers they flocked to join the Federal forces, and within a few days after Colonel Weer arrived in Tahlequah the Third Indian Regiment had been formed to accommodate them. Nearly 1,000 Cherokees joined the Union forces at this crucial time.<sup>55</sup> Chief Ross was captured on July 15 and the Cherokee Nation was once again split along the old factional

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<sup>51</sup>Anderson, The Life of General Stand Watie, pp. 30-31.

<sup>52</sup>Weer to Moonlight, July 4, 1862, Official Records, i, XIII, p. 137.

<sup>53</sup>Hindman to Pike, July 8, 1862, *ibid.*, p. 857.

<sup>54</sup>Pike to Hindman, July 15, 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 857-858.

<sup>55</sup>Wiley Britton, The Union Indian Brigade in the Civil War (Kansas City: Franklin Hudson Publishing Company, 1922), p. 73; Weer to Moonlight, July 6, 1862, Official Records, i, XIII, pp. 137-138.

lines.<sup>56</sup>

The Federal invasion had met with startling success and the future was dim for Confederate hopes in Indian Territory. Nothing seemed to bar the way for complete Federal domination, until without warning the invasion force negated all its gains with a mutiny. Colonel Weer, who had a reputation for heavy drinking, moved his army to within twelve miles of Fort Gibson and stopped. The warm weather, scarce forage, and rumors of Confederate troop movements made the command uneasy.<sup>57</sup> Colonel Frederick Salomon, second in command, placed Colonel Weer under arrest and assumed command of the expedition. He then issued orders to the command justifying his mutinous act and prepared them for an immediate withdrawal.<sup>58</sup> The gains so easily achieved were thrown away by an unsound decision based on rumors and physical discomfort.

The bewildered and disorganized Confederate forces were amazed in July, 1862, when the Federal invasion force began its movement northward, accompanied by Chief Ross and the archives of the Cherokee Nation. Perhaps the most startling development was Colonel Salomon's decision to place the defense of the newly won area in the hands of his Indian regiments. The Indians who had joined the Union forces because of grandiose promises to regain their lost lands were left behind in Indian Territory without artillery, detailed instructions, or sufficient rations by a commander preoccupied with retreat.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Wardell, A Political History of the Cherokee Nation, p. 155.

<sup>57</sup>Britton, The Union Indian Brigade in the Civil War, p. 67.

<sup>58</sup>Salomon to all commanders, July 18, 1862, Official Records, 1, XIII, pp. 475-477.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.; Abel, The American Indian as Participant in the Civil War, pp. 143-144.

Colonel R. W. Furnas, the ranking officer in the Indian units, assumed command and grouped the First, Second, and Third Indian Regiments together to form the First Indian Brigade. Initially Colonel Furnas planned to establish headquarters on the Verdigris River but numerous desertions among the discontented Indians caused him to move further north. He overtook Colonel Salomon and convinced him to augment the Indian force with a section of artillery, a detachment of infantry, and badly needed food. Now stationed at Camp Wattles on Horse Creek, Furnas prepared to defend the recently won Cherokee territory.<sup>60</sup> During the confusion of the Federal withdrawal and regrouping, opportunity beckoned to the Confederate forces to exploit the confusion by harassing the enemy. Unaccountably both Cooper and Watie failed to grasp the opportunity.

The only significant action during July, 1862, was initiated by the First Indian Home Guards under the command of Major William A. Phillips. On July 27 at Bayou Menard, seven miles northeast of Fort Gibson, elements of Watie's First Cherokee Regiment led by Lieutenant Colonel Thomas F. Taylor, blundered into Major Phillips' forces and were badly mauled in the ensuing action. Phillips, who was scouting the countryside around Tahlequah, Park Hill, and Fort Gibson, had split his 400 man force into three elements to follow three separate roads that came together at Bayou Menard. Colonel Taylor, unaware of the presence of enemy forces, stumbled on the center column and without hesitation charged headlong into it. He was then encircled by the two flank columns as they appeared on the scene. When they discovered their error, the

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<sup>60</sup>General Order, First Indian Brigade, July 19, 1862, Official Records, i, XIII, p. 481; Furnas to Blunt, July 25, 1862, ibid., pp. 511-512; Britton, The Union Indian Brigade in the Civil War, p. 81.

Confederate Indians withdrew in great confusion, but not until the field was littered with their dead, including Colonel Taylor. Union sources estimated that Taylor's force numbered close to 400 and suffered thirty-two dead, twenty-five captured, and total casualties in excess of 125.<sup>61</sup> The numbers undoubtedly are somewhat exaggerated, but there is little doubt that Taylor's force made itself an easy mark by its senseless actions. Major Phillips, who would prove to be Watie's major protagonist as the war progressed, emerged an easy winner in his first engagement with Watie's regiment.

Colonel Salomon, who had halted his retreat while still within the borders of the Cherokee Nation, received word in early August of Confederate activity in Missouri. Without further delay he moved northward until his force was once again in the friendly confines of Fort Scott, Kansas.<sup>62</sup> Colonel Furnas, now completely unsupported, did the practical thing and moved his Indian Brigade north to Baxter Springs, Kansas. The loyal Indians and their families were forced once again to abandon their homes and crops. Cooper and Watie welcomed the opportunity to recross the Arkansas River and once again moved into the vacated area.<sup>63</sup>

Military activity was negligible in Indian Territory during the late summer of 1862. Each side occupied itself with reorganizing and regrouping for future activities. General Pike ended his controversial

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<sup>61</sup>Phillips to Furnas, July 27 and August 6, 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 181-184; Britton, The Union Indian Brigade in the Civil War, p. 82.

<sup>62</sup>Salomon to Elunt, August 9, 1862, Official Records, i, XIII, pp. 551-553.

<sup>63</sup>Wiley Britton, The Civil War on the Border (2 vols., New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1890-1904), I, pp. 309-312.



military career by resigning and writing bitter denunciations of General Hindman and General Van Dorn.<sup>64</sup> Cooper in turn was promoted to Brigadier General and given the additional duty of Superintendent of Indian Affairs.<sup>65</sup> Colonel Watie was elected principal chief of the Cherokee Nation by the Southern Cherokees who claimed that Chief Ross had forfeited all right to the position when he abandoned Indian Territory.<sup>66</sup>

Federal forces regrouped and reshuffled commanders throughout the summer until finally in October the Army of the Frontier was formed with Brigadier General J. M. Schofield in command. Brigadier General James G. Blunt by virtue of date of rank was relegated to second in command.<sup>67</sup> The animosity created by this move would soon erupt into open hostility between Schofield and Blunt, for Blunt did not take kindly to being pushed from center stage.

In mid-October, 1862, General Schofield received reports that Confederate forces in northwest Arkansas were planning a two pronged attack against the Federal forces in Missouri and Kansas. The main element under Brigadier General James S. Rains was expected to remain in Arkansas while the second element under General Cooper moved to the vicinity of Maysville, Arkansas.<sup>68</sup> General Schofield countered the move by sending General Blunt to engage General Cooper while Schofield himself

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<sup>64</sup>Pike to Davis, July 31, 1862, Official Records, i, XIII, pp. 860-869.

<sup>65</sup>Special Order Number 227, September 29, 1862, *ibid.*, p. 885.

<sup>66</sup>Dale and Litton, eds., Cherokee Cavaliers, p. 121; Moore, "William Penn Adair," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXIX, p. 29.

<sup>67</sup>General Order, Department of Missouri, October 12, 1862, Official Records, i, XIII, p. 730.

<sup>68</sup>Britton, The Civil War on the Border, I, p. 375.

planned to move against General Rains.<sup>69</sup>

On October 22, 1862, General Blunt and General Cooper met at Fort Wayne, Cherokee Nation, in the most decisive battle fought in Indian Territory during that year. The indefatigable Blunt, wedded to the principle of offensive warfare, badly mauled the Confederate Indian Division under General Cooper.

Blunt was informed by scouts that General Cooper with a force of 7,000 was encamped at Fort Wayne, less than thirty miles from his own position at Bentonville, Arkansas. Without hesitation he began a forced march on the night of October 21, hoping to arrive in time to fall on the surprised Cooper the following morning.<sup>70</sup> General Blunt's command, composed of the Second and Third Brigades of the First Division, including the First and Third Cherokee Regiments, marched throughout the night over unfamiliar terrain. As dawn approached the anxious Blunt found that his units were strung out along the route of march. He resolved to attack the enemy with the forces at hand and commit the others as they arrived on the scene. The audacious Blunt launched the attack at 7:00 a.m. with but three companies of the Second Kansas volunteers augmented by two mountain howitzers.<sup>71</sup> A force of less than 400 men took on an enemy reputed to number close to 7,000.<sup>72</sup> Cooper's force consisted of the First Choctaw and Chickasaw Regiment, the First Cherokee Regiment, Major J. M. Bryan's Cherokee Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel

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<sup>69</sup>General Order, Army of the Frontier, October 20, 1862, Official Records, 1, XIII, pp. 754-755.

<sup>70</sup>Blunt to Schofield, October 28, 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 325-326.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup>Basset to Hill, October 24, 1862, *ibid.*, p. 329.

Chilly McIntosh's Creek Battalion, and Captain Sylvanus Howell's Artillery Battery, a combined force of 1,500.<sup>73</sup> This force, although much smaller than reported, was still sizeable enough to defeat Elunt's piecemeal assault, if properly led. Unfortunately, Cooper's leadership was once again found to be lacking. He had received reports of the Federal advance, and when the assault began, assumed without verification that he was hopelessly outnumbered and that his own alternatives were retreat or destruction.

The Second Kansas Cavalry in their initial assault moved across Beattie's Prairie, drove in the Confederate pickets, and assaulted Cooper's main position. The Confederate forces made a half-hearted attempt to outflank both ends of the Federal line, but were quickly dissuaded by the arrival of additional Federal troops. The assaulting element of the Second Kansas Cavalry, augmented by the arrival of additional men, captured the lone Confederate battery and the Confederate Indian Division broke and ran in a headlong flight to escape destruction. The rout was so complete that they were reported in flight until they reached Fort Gibson seventy miles away.<sup>74</sup>

Watie's role at Fort Wayne was to secure Cooper's left flank by holding the Tahlequah road. The task was not an original part of Cooper's defensive plan but rather one that Watie was thrust into by the confusion of combat. Early on the morning of the engagement Watie received orders from Cooper to report with the Cherokee Regiment to Cooper's headquarters. Watie had sent out to comply with the order when he received word from his scouts that the enemy was attempting to outflank the Confederate left. Without hesitation he assumed a defensive

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<sup>73</sup>Cooper to Hindman, December 15, 1862, *ibid.*, p. 335.

<sup>74</sup>Elunt to Schofield, October 28, 1862, *ibid.*, p. 327.

position on the Tahlequah road, dismounting and posting his horses some three hundred yards behind the road. Within a short time the enemy appeared and launched an attack. The sounds of combat were dissipating on other portions of the battlefield, so Watie made a personal reconnaissance of his immediate front. He was chagrined to learn that the main elements of the Cherokee Indian Division had lost their artillery and were in full retreat, and that his 500 man force was facing the brunt of the Federal advance. Watie knew that his unit would be no match for the 3,000 man force that he judged he was facing. The men were ordered to remount and fall back on Spavinaw Creek. The Federal cavalry followed and harassed Watie's force until it reached the sanctuary of the creek a little before sunset.<sup>75</sup>

The battle at Fort Wayne was a clear-cut victory for General Blunt and reaffirmed that aggressiveness and daring are essential components of military successes. Conversely, it proved once again that timidity and indecision can lead only to defeat. There is little doubt that General Blunt was blessed with supreme good luck when he succeeded in spite of the piecemeal nature of his assault. An aggressive opponent would have recognized the assault for what it was and dealt severely with it, but Cooper was convinced that he was outnumbered at all times and seemed determined to retreat.

General Cooper displayed an imagination equal to General Blunt's in assessing enemy strength and casualties. He was certain that he had engaged a Federal force of at least 5,000, and inflicted close to 100 casualties on them, when in fact less than 600 Federal troops were involved in the initial assault and probably no more than 2,000 arrived in

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<sup>75</sup>Watie to Cooper, October 25, 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 336-337.

time for combat. Elunt on the other hand estimated his opposition to number 7,000 men, at least three times the size of the force Cooper had available for combat.<sup>76</sup>

Watie's conduct during the fiasco at Fort Wayne was reasonable. He performed no miracles in the face of great odds, nor was he guilty of timidity or indecision. He engaged the enemy when their strength had peaked and the issue was no longer in doubt, and because of that there was little he could do other than retreat. General Cooper made elaborate apologies for the conduct of his division, attempting to place the blame on poor equipment, personal sickness, improper rations, and an overwhelming enemy.<sup>77</sup> Apologies did little to lessen the fact that Cooper had been badly outgeneraled.

Following the disaster at Fort Wayne, Cooper led his forces southward to the friendly atmosphere of Scullyville in the Choctaw Nation. Watie also withdrew beyond the Arkansas and established his headquarters in the vicinity of Scullyville.<sup>78</sup> Watie continued to scout the then desolate area north of the Arkansas River and his frequent movements caused at least one report to place him as far north as Fort Scott, Kansas.<sup>79</sup>

The year that had started so gloriously for the Confederacy was soon to close on an additional bitter note. Major Phillips, recently promoted

<sup>76</sup>Elunt to Schofield, October 22 and October 28, 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 325-328; Cooper to Newton, October 25, 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 331-332; Cooper to Hindman, December 15, 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 332-336.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 332, 336.

<sup>78</sup>Watie to Cooper, December 19, 1862, *ibid.*, i, XXII, Pt. 2, pp. 66-67; Henning to Chipman, November 13, 1862, *ibid.*, i, XIII, p. 790.

<sup>79</sup>Phillips to Elunt, December 28, 1862, *ibid.*, i, XXII, Pt. 1, p. 881; Elunt to Curtis, December 30, 1862, *ibid.*, p. 168.

to Colonel, returned to Indian Territory in December with a 1,200 man force. After driving the Confederate forces south of the Arkansas River, he crossed the river on December 28, 1862, and burned Fort Davis to the ground.

The picture of Watie as a guerrilla fighter was damaged somewhat during 1862. It is true that during the significant engagements at Pea Ridge and Fort Wayne he and his men conducted themselves admirably. They held their positions courageously when others were fleeing, and with numbers that never exceeded 500, conducted excellent rearguard actions in the face of overwhelming odds. It is also true that Watie's regiment demonstrated fully the value of guerrilla fighters by their well-planned surprise raids on Neosho, Missouri. Watie's image was tarnished not so much by what he did but by what he failed to do. On two occasions he allowed himself to be surprised by forces that had made no elaborate plans to conceal their movements. He had failed in his mission to observe and harass the enemy. Would the errors committed by Watie in 1862 relegate him to a position of mediocrity, or would he profit by them?

## CHAPTER IV

### EXTENSION OF FEDERAL CONTROL IN INDIAN TERRITORY, 1863

Watie and his Confederate Cherokees spent the winter of 1862-1863 at Briartown on the Canadian River, under conditions of extreme deprivation. Rations were meager and cavalry horses at times ate tree bark to survive.<sup>1</sup> The future that a year before had seemed so bright was now ominous and foreboding, and the cause of the Confederacy had lost its aura for all but the most adamant sympathizers. Indians in large numbers had either forsaken their allegiance to the South or were ready to do so. The Union Indian Brigade increased daily in strength as some of Watie's men defected and joined its ranks.<sup>2</sup>

The lines of separation within the Cherokee Nation caused by the wholesale defection of Drew's regiment and the seemingly willing capture of Chief Ross became permanent when the Northern Council revoked their alliance with the Confederacy.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the remainder of the War the Cherokee Nation was divided against itself in a manner that caused tribal bitterness of such magnitude that even time never completely succeeded in healing it.

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<sup>1</sup>Cooper to Hindman, January 8, 1863, Official Records, i, XXII, Pt. 2, p. 770; Cunningham, General Stand Watie's Confederate Indians, p. 87.

<sup>2</sup>Report of Confederate Indian Commissioner January 12, 1863, Official Records, iv, II, pp. 352-357; Phillips to Curtis, February 6, 1863, ibid., i, XXII, Pt. 2, p. 101; Phillips to Curtis, February 15, 1863, ibid., p. 112; Cooper to Hindman, January 8, 1863, ibid., p. 770.

<sup>3</sup>Foreman, A History of Oklahoma, p. 115.

Colonel Phillips, who had returned with his command to Northwestern Arkansas after razing Fort Davis, was given command early in January of the newly created Indian Brigade.<sup>4</sup> General Schofield placed Phillips in charge in Indian Territory with orders to hold the area above the Arkansas River, protect the Indians loyal to the Union, and draw supplies direct from Fort Scott by way of the wagon train placed at his disposal.<sup>5</sup>

Colonel Phillips thoroughly understood his mission and led his force on a series of advances that would in time carry them to Fort Gibson. His plan was to clear the countryside of guerrillas, establish headquarters at Fort Gibson, provide a supply route down the west side of Grand River, and offer protection for the many Indian families returning to their homes in the Cherokee Nation.<sup>6</sup> The move began during January and was completed in early April when the 3,000 man Union Indian Brigade moved into Fort Gibson and re-established it as a Federal military post.<sup>7</sup>

Watie followed the advance of the Federal Indians as they moved in on Fort Gibson. Initially there was little he could do to contest the move, but as spring arrived he called his scattered forces in from furlough and prepared to harass the enemy.<sup>8</sup> The pattern of warfare that

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<sup>4</sup>The Union Indian Brigade, as this unit was commonly called, was composed of the three Indian regiments, a battalion of Sixth Kansas Cavalry, and Hopkins' Battery. Britton, The Union Indian Brigade in the Civil War, p. 168.

<sup>5</sup>Schofield to Phillips, January 11, 1863, Official Records, 1, XXII, Pt. 2, p. 33.

<sup>6</sup>Phillips to Curtis, February 4, 1863, *ibid.*, p. 97; Britton, The Union Indian Brigade in the Civil War, p. 187.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 204; Grant Foreman, "The Centennial of Fort Gibson," Chronicles of Oklahoma, II (June, 1924), p. 126.

<sup>8</sup>Cunningham, General Stand Watie's Confederate Indians, p. 91.



developed between Phillips and Watie remained essentially unchanged throughout the war: guerrilla raids on the Federal supply lines, sporadic attacks on the homes and crops of loyal Indians, and on rare occasions major engagements between the two forces.

Watie's forces conducted isolated minor raids along the fringes of Phillips' route of advance towards Fort Gibson, but by mid-April all territory north of the Arkansas River was firmly in the grasp of the Union Indian Brigade.<sup>9</sup> The families of the Southern Cherokees withdrew from the vicinity of Fort Gibson and hurried south to the sanctuary of the Red River and Texas before establishing themselves in refugee camps.<sup>10</sup>

The Confederate Cherokee Council met at Webber's Falls on April 24 and elected Watie chairman by acclamation. Watie addressed the gathering by reviewing the recent defeats and also unveiling his plans to combat the newly arrived Indian Brigade. He stressed a need to interrupt Phillips' communications and above all to capture or destroy the supply trains from Fort Scott.<sup>11</sup> He did not delude the council into believing that his small force of 500 men was capable of seeking out and destroying the enemy, but rather emphasized the need for guerrilla tactics to harass him out of the territory.

Colonel Phillips received advance intelligence of the council meeting and acted promptly. He led a strong 600 man force on an all-night forced march from Fort Gibson, with the avowed purpose of surprising the Cherokees with a dawn attack on the morning of April 26.

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<sup>9</sup>Wiley Britton, Memoirs of the Rebellion on the Border, 1863 (Chicago: Thomas Cushing and Co., 1882), pp. 198, 205.

<sup>10</sup>Edward Everett Dale, "Arkansas and the Cherokees," Arkansas Historical Quarterly, VIII (Summer, 1949), p. 108.

<sup>11</sup>Britton, The Union Indian Brigade in the Civil War, pp. 220-222.

Unaccountably Watie was once again surprised as the Federal force fell upon his encampment at Webber's Falls. The engagement was brief, for the excited Cherokees scattered without a fight; some even rode away in their night clothes, apparently thankful to escape with their lives. The route was complete, even though the casualties sustained by the Confederates probably did not exceed thirty killed and wounded, while the attacking force lost only two killed and ten wounded. The Federal force destroyed the campsite and returned to Fort Gibson with a sizeable booty of food and equipage.<sup>12</sup>

The disaster must have been a galling defeat for Watie, because he had violated for the third time the principle of security so essential to a guerrilla force. The man who had so recently exhorted his fellow Cherokees on the virtues of surprise tactics had himself been surprised. It seems incredible that Watie did not post pickets in the area of the camp. Pickets are not mentioned in the reports of this engagement, and if they were there they did not carry out their mission, for the attack was a complete surprise.

Colonel Cooper now decided to take positive action to harass Phillips' supply lines. He received information that each night the garrison at Fort Gibson used the cover of darkness to graze their herds and return them to the safety of the post before daylight. Cooper sent Colonel Coffee at the head of five regiments across the Arkansas on May 20 to capture the grazing stock. The Federal force guarding the herd was nearly overwhelmed, but Colonel Phillips led the men remaining at the fort in a counter attack. The engagement was bitterly contested for

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<sup>12</sup>Phillips to Curtis, April 26, 1863, Official Records, i, XXII, Pt. 1, pp. 314-315; Phillips to Blunt, May 9, 1863, ibid., p. 316; Britton, The Union Indian Brigade in the Civil War, p. 222; Carolyn Thomas Foreman, "Early History of Webber's Falls," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXIX (Winter, 1951), pp. 470-471.

nearly two hours before the Confederate force withdrew in possession of over 300 horses and mules. The losses suffered by the Union Indian Brigade were twenty-five killed and a like number wounded. Confederate casualties were unreported but were probably similar in number. Colonel Phillips reported the engagement as a victory, although this was an unwarranted claim. The Confederate force withdrew, but only after accomplishing its mission. If there was a right to claim victory in this engagement, it rested with the Confederacy.<sup>13</sup>

The composition of the Confederate force during this action remains questionable. One source maintains that the attacking force was composed solely of Watie's regiment, while others indicate that it was a combined force five times the size of Watie's regiment and commanded by Colonel Coffee.<sup>14</sup> This last explanation seems the more reasonable, and it is probable that Watie, although present, served a subordinate role.

The tempo of Confederate attacks continued to increase, and on May 28 Watie led a night attack against a supply train when it was within five miles of its Fort Gibson destination. Colonel Phillips anticipated that this important wagon train of 200 vehicles would be ambushed, and he rode out with a strong force of 1,000 men to provide escort. Signs of Confederate activity were everywhere, but their actual location went undetected. When the heavily escorted train was within five miles of Fort Gibson, Watie at the head of a 1,200 man force fell on the advance guard and pushed them back on the main body. The Federal forces formed

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<sup>13</sup>Britton, Memoirs of the Rebellion on the Border, 1863, pp. 256-259; Britton, The Union Indian Brigade in the Civil War, pp. 230-231; Phillips to Elunt, May 22, 1863, Official Records, i, XXII, Pt. 1, pp. 337-338.

<sup>14</sup>Anderson, The Life of General Stand Watie, pp. 33-34; Foreman, "The Centennial of Fort Gibson," Chronicles of Oklahoma, II, p. 126.

defensive lines, held off the assault, and then launched a counter-attack that forced Watie's forces to withdraw after leaving twenty-five dead on the combat scene. Phillips' forces suffered eight killed and thirty wounded, but the supply train arrived safely at its destination.<sup>15</sup>

The increased Confederate activity began to have a telling effect on the Union Indian Brigade. Colonel Phillips was hard pressed to keep his supply line open and the continued harassment on his flanks and rear forced him to ask for reinforcements. General Blunt responded by ordering the First Kansas Colored Regiment, under the command of Colonel J. M. Williams, to proceed immediately to Fort Gibson. Six additional companies of the Second Colorado Regiment and a section of the Second Kansas Battery were ordered to accompany the next supply train south and join Phillips' command at Fort Gibson.<sup>16</sup>

Watie's actions during June of 1863 were indicative of his determination to keep constant pressure on his enemy. Shortly after his May 28 night raid on the supply train, he was reported on a cavalry raid through Park Hill and Tahlequah and on into Maysville, Arkansas.<sup>17</sup> Major J. A. Foreman and the Third Indian Home Guard Regiment were sent after Watie with instructions to attack when in the vicinity of Maysville. Watie upset the strategy by swinging around and attempting to cross Grand River in the vicinity of Spavinaw Creek. The river was unfordable at this point, and after an unsuccessful attempt to cross the swollen stream, Watie moved south to Grand Saline, where he again failed to

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<sup>15</sup>Britton, The Union Indian Brigade in the Civil War, pp. 238-240; Britton, Memoirs of the Rebellion on the Border, 1863, pp. 267-269; Elunt to Schofield, June 8, 1863, Official Records, 1, XXII, Pt. 1, pp. 341-342.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Phillips to Elunt, June 6, 1863, ibid., pp. 310-311.

negotiate a crossing. It was at this point that Major Foreman overtook Watie's rear elements. After a brief skirmish in which three Confederates were killed, Watie rapidly withdrew toward Tahlequah with Foreman in hot pursuit.<sup>18</sup>

Federal scouts at Tahlequah advised Colonel Phillips on June 15 that Watie had just been observed passing through the town. Phillips saw an opportunity to cut off Watie's retreat and immediately sent Colonel Stephen H. Wattles and 400 men of the First Indian Home Guard to head off Watie.<sup>19</sup> Colonel Wattles left Fort Gibson, recently renamed Fort Elunt, at 10:00 a.m. on June 15, but after proceeding only a few miles called a halt to reorganize his command because it had become strung out along the route of march. The march was resumed under cover of an advance guard and flank security and crossed Greenleaf Prairie just before daylight. Watie's location was still undetermined, so Wattles pressed on past Greenleaf Prairie after leaving two rearguards. The Federal force had just crossed Greenleaf Creek when Wattles received word of an enemy force at his rear. He sent a small reconnaissance party of twenty-five men back to determine the extent of the enemy and held up the main body pending further information. A messenger returned with word that the reconnaissance party was under heavy attack from an enemy force numbering between 200 and 300 men. The ever cautious Wattles countermarched and sent an advance force of 100 men ahead to ascertain the enemy strength and harass them until he could arrive with the main body.

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<sup>18</sup>Phillips to Elunt, June 20, 1863, *ibid.*, pp. 348-350.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 349.

When the main body reached the combat area, Colonel Watie's First Cherokee Regiment was on line in the trees bordering the prairie. Wattles sent a flanking element of seventy-five men against Watie's left and charged the center with the bulk of his force. The charge met with initial success as the Confederate forces withdrew, but they regrouped and forced Wattles back with a counterattack. Watie's Cherokees were in the process of completing a double envelopment when the Federal force fired into their center with its howitzer and checked the Confederate advance. The howitzer turned the tide of battle, and Watie withdrew his forces across Greenleaf Prairie through the wooded area and back toward the river. Watie's retreat placed him in imminent danger of being crushed between the forces of Major Foreman coming up in his rear and Colonel Wattles' force in front of him. With complete victory close at hand, Wattles called off the pursuit to allow his tired horses to rest on Greenleaf Prairie. Major Foreman had also experienced difficulty with his mounts, and without Wattles' knowledge had abandoned pursuit of Watie's forces and returned to Fort Blunt. Watie was thus allowed to escape towards Webber's Falls with his command still intact.<sup>20</sup>

The engagement on Greenleaf Prairie was indecisive, although the Federal forces claimed victory. Colonel Phillips was thoroughly disgusted with Colonel Wattles' failure to press the engagement to its logical conclusion, the destruction of Watie's command. He took the unusual step of relieving Wattles of command on the spot, but the damage was done and the wily Watie had escaped to fight again.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Britton, *Memoirs of the Rebellion on the Border, 1863*, pp. 292-295; Wattles to Phillips, June, 1863, *Official Records*, 1, XXII, Pt. 1, pp. 350-352; Phillips to Blunt, June 20, 1863, *ibid.*, pp. 348-350.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 349-350.

The sound of combat on Greenleaf Prairie had scarcely passed when Watie moved into his most significant action during 1863, the engagement at Cabin Creek. The Federal refugee families and the troops in and around Fort Gibson during late June, 1863, were on half rations, anxiously awaiting the next supply train from Fort Scott.<sup>22</sup> General Elunt, in response to requests for reinforcements from Colonel Phillips, had earlier ordered the First Kansas Battery to proceed to Fort Gibson. These units left Baxter Springs, Kansas, on June 26, 1863, and caught up with the southbound supply train that same day. Major Foreman and the Third Indian Home Guard Regiment had already joined the supply train as an escort because reconnaissance parties had reported that Confederate forces were massing to attack the train at Cabin Creek.<sup>23</sup>

Colonel Watie, prior to the arrival of the wagon train, reached the ford at Cabin Creek and posted his 1,400 man force in positions on the military road that crossed the creek. General William C. Cabell and a force of 1,400 men was scheduled to arrive at Grand Saline, cross the badly swollen Grand River, and hook up with Watie for the assault on the supply train.<sup>24</sup> The supply train escort would be outnumbered two to one by the combined Confederate force and unable to keep the badly needed supplies from falling into Confederate hands, thereby forcing Colonel Phillips to abandon Fort Gibson and return north for supplies. The stakes involved at Cabin Creek were high indeed.

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<sup>22</sup> Britton, The Union Indian Brigade in the Civil War, p. 256.

<sup>23</sup> Williams to Phillips, July, 1863, Official Records, i, XXII, Pt. 1, pp. 379-381; Foreman to Phillips, July 5, 1863, ibid., p. 382; Britton, Memoirs of the Rebellion on the Border, 1863, p. 306.

<sup>24</sup> Steele to Blair, July 3, 1863, Official Records, i, XXII, Pt. 2, p. 903.

General Cabell arrived at his destination only to find that he could not cross the badly swollen waters of Grand River. Half of the attacking force was lost before the plan could be put into effect and the responsibility to take the train was placed squarely on Watie's shoulders. The Federal force, now equal in size to its attacker, moved cautiously toward Cabin Creek fully aware of the danger ahead, but determined to meet it.

On June 30 advance elements of Major Foreman's command came upon Watie's pickets, and after a brief but spirited engagement the pickets were dispersed. The train continued southward and on July 1 arrived at Cabin Creek, where they found Watie's forces concealed in thickets on the south bank of the creek, ready to contest any attempt to cross the ford. Major Foreman deployed his command, placing his howitzers and one of Colonel Williams' in the center, and fired on the thickets for thirty minutes. The Federals then attempted to ford the stream but found that it was too deep to negotiate a crossing, and fell back to their previous line and waited.<sup>25</sup> Colonel Williams held a meeting that night and laid plans for the next day's operation. Two six pound howitzers were placed on the Federal left, one twelve pound howitzer and one mountain howitzer were placed in the center, and one twelve pound howitzer was placed on the right.

At 8:00 a.m. on July 2 Watie's position was blanketed by a forty minute artillery barrage using both shell and canister. Confederate firing had ceased, so the order was given to cross the creek, now low enough to ford, and drive the enemy from the thickets. Major Foreman at

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<sup>25</sup>Foreman to Phillips, July 5, 1863, *ibid.*, i, XXII, Pt. 1, p. 382.



the head of the charge was about to reach shore when he was wounded by renewed firing from the Confederate position. The assault was held up and the Federal artillery once more was brought into play. Three infantry companies were realigned to provide a base of fire from the Federal right, and the stream crossing was undertaken once again. Watie's forces contested the crossing but were forced to withdraw. The retreat quickly degenerated into a disorganized flight as Watie's command scattered in the face of the enemy. They were pursued for five miles before Colonel Williams called off the chase.<sup>26</sup>

The engagement at Cabin Creek was an unqualified Federal victory. Watie's forces, although equal in number to the attacking force and with the advantage of good defensive positions, failed to accomplish their mission. Cabell's failure to join forces with Watie and the absence of Confederate artillery to neutralize the Federal superiority in firepower proved the difference. Indian units, no matter how well led, invariably scattered when faced with superior artillery. Colonial Phillips reported that Watie personally fled the scene in dismay and, accompanied by two other men, swam both the Arkansas River and Grand River; he then reported to General Cooper, while others attempted to regroup his command. Phillips also stated that part of Watie's command was drowned attempting to cross the Grand River, and that the bodies were later observed as they floated past Fort Blunt.<sup>27</sup>

There is little doubt that Confederate losses at Cabin Creek exceeded 100 killed and wounded in addition to those who drowned attempting

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid.; Williams to Phillips, July, 1863, *ibid.*, pp. 379-381.

<sup>27</sup>Phillips to Blunt, July 7, 1863, *ibid.*, pp. 278-279.

to retreat, while Federal casualties were light and probably did not exceed twenty.<sup>28</sup> It is quite unlikely, however, that Watie fled as reported, leaving his men to fend for themselves. He had proven before and would prove again that his personal courage was incorruptible, and that he never abandoned his command at any time.

— Colonel Phillips reported that his position daily became more tenuous in the face of increased activity by the Confederate forces around him. General Blunt, convinced of the severity of the situation, led a relief column from Fort Scott shortly after hearing of the engagement at Cabin Creek. He arrived at Fort Blunt on July 11 and, with his accustomed vigor and daring, made plans for offensive operations.<sup>29</sup> The combined Confederate forces under General Cooper and General Cabell were reputed to number close to 7,000, while the total Federal force now available to General Blunt numbered approximately 3,000 men. General Cooper was in the vicinity of Elk Creek, and Cabell was on his way to join him. Thus Blunt moved quickly to engage Cooper before the Confederate forces united.<sup>30</sup>

Early on July 15 General Blunt led an advance party across the Arkansas River, secured the opposite bank, and then ferried the remainder of his force across. The crossing was not completed until late that evening, but Blunt pushed forward throughout the night toward Cooper's encampment. At dawn the Confederate outposts were engaged and driven

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<sup>28</sup>Williams to Phillips, July, 1863, *ibid.*, p. 381.

<sup>29</sup>Britton, Memoirs of the Rebellion on the Border, 1863, pp. 342-343; James G. Blunt, "General Blunt's Account of His Civil War Experiences," Kansas Historical Quarterly, I (May, 1932), pp. 243-245.

<sup>30</sup>Phillips to Blunt, July 1863, Official Records, i, XXII, Pt. 2, pp. 355-356; Cabell to Duval, December 7, 1863, *ibid.*, Pt. 1, p. 604; Blunt to Schofield, July 26, 1863, *ibid.*, p. 447.

back. Blunt then made a personal reconnaissance and discovered the enemy well concealed and awaiting his attack. He ordered a two hour halt so that his men could consolidate, eat, and rest, and then proceeded to assault the enemy position.<sup>31</sup> In what was to be the major engagement of the war in Indian Territory, General Cooper suffered severely at the hands of General Blunt. The engagement at Elk Creek, near Honey Springs, was a significant Federal victory, for Cooper's Confederate Indians were decimated and driven back in disorder. General Cabell arrived belatedly on the scene, but Cooper's units were so disorganized that the Confederate force then superior in numbers still continued to withdraw.<sup>32</sup>

Cooper's defeat at Elk Creek was not entirely of his own doing. His past disasters were usually linked to timidity and indecision, but at Elk Creek faulty ammunition had much to do with the Confederate inability to withstand the Federal assault. The Confederacy never succeeded in getting adequate supplies to their Indian forces, and as in this case when supplies did arrive they proved faulty.<sup>33</sup>

Some authorities have erroneously placed Watie at the head of his Cherokee units during the action at Elk Creek. The First and Second Cherokee Regiments did participate in the engagement, but Watie and Adair were both absent. Watie was on detached duty at Webber's Falls and Adair was sick, so the Cherokee regiments were commanded by Major Thompson and Lieutenant Colonel J. M. Bell.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., pp. 447-449; Cabell to Duval, December 7, 1863, *ibid.*, pp. 604-605; Cooper to Steele, August 12, 1863, *ibid.*, pp. 457-462.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 460.

<sup>34</sup>Cooper to Bell, September 24, 1863, Dale and Litton, eds., Cherokee Cavaliers, p. 141.

Confederate morale following Elk Creek was dangerously low and defeatism began to show in many of the actions taken by Confederate commanders. There seemed to be no inclination to take aggressive action to drive General Elunt from Indian Territory. Brigadier General William Steele, who had been the Confederate commander in the area for almost a year, even took steps to retreat further southward. General Steele was disgusted with the conduct of the war and also convinced that he was cursed with the burden of leading Indian troops, whom he considered to be totally ineffectual soldiers.<sup>35</sup>

The usually placid Watie, seldom given to emotional displays, joined the rising chorus of dissent. On August 8 he wrote S. S. Scott, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, that Indian troops loyal to the South had been poorly treated, badly equipped, and grossly underpaid. He felt that Federal forces had "almost unmolested" taken possession of Fort Gibson and been allowed to keep it because the Confederate forces were badly mismanaged. Calling attention to the fact that the Confederacy had pledged to their Indian allies full protection from the enemy, he concluded that the promise had not been kept because the Territory had been "hopelessly abandoned."<sup>36</sup>

On August 9 Watie wrote to the governors of the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations and to General E. Kirby Smith, the commander of the Trans-Mississippi Department. He advised his fellow Indians that they could expect no further outside help and requested that they come to his aid in holding the Cherokee country or they themselves would soon be overrun.

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<sup>35</sup>Steele to Anderson, February 15, 1864, Official Records, i, XXII, Pt. 1, pp. 33-35.

<sup>36</sup>Watie to Scott, August 8, 1863, Stand Watie Letters, Indian Archives Division, Oklahoma Historical Society.

His letter to General Smith was a ringing condemnation of Confederate actions in Indian Territory throughout the war. The Cherokee Nation, he said, had been overcome by a ruthless enemy because the Indian was forced to face superior numbers on his own, while the Confederacy allowed other troops in the vicinity to remain inactive. He called on General Smith to give assurance of aid or order him to "tell my people to rely upon themselves and go down to ruin if they must in the manly effort to defend their homes."<sup>37</sup>

Watie's pleas went unanswered and General Blunt moved ever southward, while the disorganized Confederates, hurt by desertions and defeatism, offered little resistance. Within six weeks after Elk Creek the ebullient Blunt could boast that he had quietly retaken Fort Smith, Arkansas, that Indian Territory and western Arkansas were under his control, and that many Southern Indians had fled their homes for Texas, leaving the northern reaches of Indian Territory open to resettlement by Federal Indians.<sup>38</sup>

The situation facing the Confederacy in Indian Territory was depressing. The Cherokee lands were gone and the families, destitute and forelorn, had fled south with little but hope to sustain them. The once proud Confederate Indian forces were badly disorganized and in danger of complete disintegration. The stinging defeat at Elk Creek and the failure of the Confederacy to deliver the long promised arms and equipment caused widespread desertions that left the ragtag Indians a highly

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<sup>37</sup> Watie to Governors of Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations, August 9, 1863, *ibid.*; Watie to Smith, August 9, 1863, *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Blunt to Schofield, September 11, 1863, Official Records, i, XXII, Pt. 2, pp. 525-526.

questionable fighting force.<sup>39</sup>

The image of Watie as a guerrilla fighter came into clear focus during this period of despair. General Cooper, fully aware that a major Confederate offensive was unlikely, sent Watie and his Cherokees back into the Cherokee Nation with instructions to harass the enemy rear. Watie knew that speed, cunning, and surprise were his only allies and that major engagements were to be avoided at all costs. His orders provided him with freedom of action, and he took full advantage of the offer.<sup>40</sup>

Watie recrossed the Arkansas River sometime in mid-October and took immediate action to throw fear into all Cherokees loyal to the Union. On October 29 he rode into Tahlequah, killed a few Federal Cherokees, dispersed a council meeting, and put the public buildings to the torch. He then moved to Park Hill and burned Chief Ross' house, "Rose Cottage," to the ground.<sup>41</sup> The audacity of the raid must have caused grave doubts in the minds of the Federal Indians about the firmness of their control of Cherokee lands. Their arch enemy had not only broken through their perimeter defenses, but had burned the capital city of their nation. Was it safe for families to remain in the area? Watie quickly proved that it was not, as he roamed the countryside at will, destroying crops, and taking whatever supplies he could find.<sup>42</sup> His surprise attacks, although

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<sup>39</sup>James M. Bell to Caroline Bell, September 2, 1863, Dale and Litton, eds., Cherokee Cavaliers, p. 137; Edward Everett Dale, "The Cherokees in the Confederacy," Journal of Southern History, XIII (May, 1947), p. 180.

<sup>40</sup>Cooper to McCulloch, October 9, 1863, Official Records, i, XXVI, Pt. 2, pp. 303-304.

<sup>41</sup>Watie to Sarah, November 12, 1863, Dale and Litton, eds., Cherokee Cavaliers, pp. 144-145; Foreman, A History of Oklahoma, p. 124.

<sup>42</sup>Debo, The Road to Disappearance, pp. 158-159.

never large in scope, did much to unsettle the Federal command and provide fuel for the Watie legend that was beginning to grow. His force during this time probably never exceeded 500 men and did most of its raiding in and around the Fort Blunt area, but some Federal reports estimated Watie's numbers as high as 3,000, and even indicated a fear that he was planning to invade Kansas.<sup>43</sup>

The last significant engagement in Indian Territory during the year 1863 occurred on December 18 in the vicinity of Barren Fork. Captain Alexander C. Spilman of the Third Indian Home Guard Regiment, commanding a composite force of 300 infantry from the First, Second, and Third Indian regiments, met and routed a force of Confederate Indians. The only account of the action is the report rendered by Captain Spilman. Although Spilman indicated that he engaged Watie's regiment, the sequence of events and the Confederate tactics make it highly improbable that Watie was involved.

Colonel Phillips, apparently in response to a minor Confederate raid on Fort Gibson on December 16, sent Captain Spilman in pursuit of Watie's forces.<sup>44</sup> Captain Spilman received word that Watie and a 500 to 800 man force had only recently plundered the Murrell Home, burned some Negro cabins, and then moved into camp on the Illinois River. The Federal force set out in pursuit, and after skirmishing with isolated elements of the Confederates on the morning of December 18, came upon the main body. The Confederate force had dismounted and formed a line under the cover of

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<sup>43</sup>Burnett to Ewing, November 28, 1863, Official Records, i, XXII, Pt. 2, pp. 722-723; Thompson to Blair, November 28, 1863, ibid., pp. 723-724.

<sup>44</sup>Fort Gibson was renamed Fort Blunt in 1863 by Colonel Phillips but apparently the name was not widely used, and later was changed back to Fort Gibson.

thick timber to block any advance along the Barren Fork road. Captain Spilman relates that he formed for an assault, but before the appointed time the enemy opened up with heavy small arms fire. The fire was returned and, when the Federal force discharged a round from its howitzer, the enemy line immediately broke and withdrew in confusion for nearly a mile. It then halted again and went into defensive positions. The Federal force, spearheaded by Cherokees, made a second assault and again forced the Confederates from their position. The Confederate force then took up good defensive positions on an adjoining hill and succeeded in forcing a temporary stalemate. Captain Spilman indicates that he next devised a ruse to draw the enemy from its positions by feigning a withdrawal. The bait was eagerly taken, and when the Confederates pursued on foot, Spilman turned on them, dispersed them, and gave chase for nearly a mile. Captain Spilman reported that his casualties were light but that the enemy suffered twelve killed and twenty-five wounded in addition to a large number of horses killed and disabled.<sup>45</sup>

The most plausible explanation of the Spilman report is that he met an element of Watie's or more likely Colonel Adair's regiment, but not the 500 to 800 man force he reports. The ruse Spilman purports to have used would not have drawn Watie into a dismounted pursuit. Watie believed in a dismounted defense, but when an advantage could be exploited by rapid mounted pursuit, he would never follow on foot.

As 1863 drew to a close, the unimaginative and unaggressive General Steele had lost all the confidence and respect of the Confederate Indians. Under the leadership of Watie they asked that something be done to prove

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<sup>45</sup> Spilman to Phillips, December 23, 1863, Official Records, i, XXII, Pt. 1, pp. 781-783.



that Indian Territory was not to be abandoned.<sup>46</sup> General Smith gave General Steele the opportunity to be relieved at his own request and Steele jumped at the chance. He had always been distrustful of his Indian forces and contemptuous of their fighting ability. It appears that the only Indian he held in high regard was Watie.<sup>47</sup> Steele at his own request was relieved on December 11, 1863, and replaced by Brigadier General Samuel B. Maxey.<sup>48</sup>

During the latter half of 1863 Confederate strategy in Indian Territory clearly turned toward guerrilla warfare, and Watie emerged as the leading guerrilla. Following his humiliation at Webber's Falls, Watie began a series of raids that improved his stature as a guerrilla. Although not always successful, his raids caused considerable confusion and consternation among Federal forces. Even though he won no major engagements, Watie continued to harass and elude the enemy.

Watie's most glaring flaw was his failure to observe the principle of security. The American Indian, whose chief concern was offensive warfare, seldom observed proper defensive tactics, and Watie was no exception. If he would learn the value of security to complement his understanding of offensive tactics, Watie would soon become a complete guerrilla.

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<sup>46</sup>Britton, The Union Indian Brigade in the Civil War, pp. 338-340.

<sup>47</sup>Steele to Anderson, February 15, 1864, Official Records, i, XXII, Pt. 1, pp. 28-36.

<sup>48</sup>Special Order, Headquarters Trans-Mississippi Department, December 11, 1863, ibid., Pt. 2, p. 1094.

## CHAPTER V

### THE MATURATION OF A GUERRILLA, 1864

Gloom and defeatism permeated the Confederate Indian ranks during the winter of 1863-1864. Indian Territory had not only been lost to the enemy but the mere process of survival had become a formidable task for many. Watie's men had always been slowed by inadequate supplies, even when the Territory was in their hands, but now the situation was intolerable. As evidence of their disgust they named their winter quarters Camp Starvation.<sup>1</sup>

Watie usually was inactive during the winter months of the war, but 1864 proved to be an exception. Perhaps the most cogent reason for his increased activity was the need for food. Forage was scarce, and if his horses and men were to survive, they would be required to search far and wide for the minimal quantities they needed to stay alive. Raiding and scouting parties became common occurrences, but they seldom resulted in military actions.<sup>2</sup>

General Maxey knew the seriousness of the situation facing his Confederate forces in Indian Territory, but unlike his predecessor, General Steele, he was determined to take aggressive action. When the Grand

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<sup>1</sup>Dale and Litton, eds., Cherokee Cavaliers, p. 148; Stephen B. Oates, Confederate Cavalry West of the River (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961), p. 54.

<sup>2</sup>Flumb to Sanborn, January 2, 1864, Official Records, i, XXXIV, Pt. 2, p. 11; Burch to Hubbard, February 1, 1864, ibid., Pt. 1, pp. 101-102.

Council of the Confederate faction of the Five Civilized Tribes met at Armstrong Academy, near Fort Washita, on February 1, he addressed them. He advised that with their help he would do everything in his power to drive the enemy from Indian Territory, adding that the Confederacy hoped to win the war during 1864.<sup>3</sup> Privately General Maxey had no more respect for Indian troops than General Steele. He believed that until properly trained and led by white men, Indians would prove of little value to the Confederacy.<sup>4</sup>

Colonel Phillips, although safely encamped at Fort Gibson, was anxious to capitalize on the plight of the Confederacy. In early February he led a force of over 1,000 men toward Boggy Depot on a scorched earth policy designed to bring the Choctaw Nation to its knees. He planned to cut a swath 170 miles wide within which he would leave nothing but death and desolation.<sup>5</sup> Marching day and night Phillips penetrated more than 160 miles south of Fort Gibson. He destroyed virtually everything in his path that might prove beneficial to the enemy, and distributed copies of President Lincoln's Amnesty Proclamation along the way. When he returned from his 400 mile junket Phillips was convinced that the Seminoles, Creeks, and Chickasaws were out of the fight and that General Maxey and a greatly reduced force were cowering in the safety of the Red River. Indeed, he seemed certain that all Indian Territory was securely under his control.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Britton, The Union Indian Brigade in the Civil War, pp. 342-344.

<sup>4</sup>Maxey to Anderson, January 12, 1864, Official Records, i, XXXIV, Pt. 2, pp. 856-858.

<sup>5</sup>Foreman, Civil War Cherokee Collection, Indian Archives Division, Oklahoma Historical Society; Phillips to Curtis, February 29, 1864, Official Records, i, XXXIV, Pt. 2, pp. 467-468.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.; Phillips to Curtis, February 24, 1864, ibid., i, XXIV, Pt. 1, pp. 108-109.

Confederate activity during the first few months of 1864 was negligible. Watie requested authority to take 1,000 men on a raid into Southwest Kansas but apparently General Maxey refused. He had plans to use Watie's troops as an independent force to harass the enemy's rear, but not as far north as Kansas.<sup>7</sup>

Colonel Adair and the Second Cherokee Regiment crossed the Arkansas River in mid-April and raided as far north as Maysville and Cowskin Prairie, while Watie and the First Cherokee Regiment remained in camp at Middle Boggy.<sup>8</sup> Adair's raid gained little material success but did cause a variety of erroneous Federal reports. Whenever Confederate Cherokees were sighted it was immediately assumed that Watie was their field commander; because of this Watie was often located erroneously. During April and May, Watie was reported raiding in all parts of the Cherokee Nation with a force estimated variously from 150 to 400 men.<sup>9</sup> Thus the legend and reputation of Watie often grew without any activity on his part.

Watie's long awaited promotion to Brigadier General became a reality on May 10, 1864. The appointment, retroactive to May 6, 1864, placed Watie in command of the Confederate First Indian Brigade. The promotion had little initial effect on Watie because he had for some time been the commander of the First Indian Brigade and merely continued in that

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<sup>7</sup>Adair to Maxey, February 5, 1864, *ibid.*, i, XXIV, Pt. 2, p. 946; Maxey to Smith, March 16, 1864, *ibid.*, p. 1050.

<sup>8</sup>Britton, The Union Indian Brigade in the Civil War, p. 396; Watie to Sarah Watie, April 24, 1863, Dale and Litton, eds., Cherokee Cavaliers, pp. 155-157.

<sup>9</sup>Burch to Sanborn, May 1, 1864, Official Records, i, XXXIV, Pt. 3, p. 383; Harrison to Sanborn, May 2, 1864, *ibid.*, p. 403; Burch to Sanborn, May 3, 1864, *ibid.*, pp. 420-421.

capacity after the promotion, but it did have a salutary effect on the members of the First Indian Brigade.<sup>10</sup>

Although poorly armed with a variety of ineffective weapons and desperate for supplies, Watie's men moved toward one of their most glorious moments of the war. Under Watie's leadership they surprised and captured on the Arkansas River a Federal steamboat, the J. R. Williams, destined for Fort Gibson.<sup>11</sup> This was a masterpiece of enterprise and daring. Watie had ordered Colonel Adair in early May to scout both sides of the Arkansas River and report any activity to him. Federal authorities, chagrined by the problems involved in resupplying Fort Gibson by the hazardous Fort Scott route, naively changed to the more direct Arkansas River route from Fort Smith, Arkansas. When the river rose sharply in early June, Watie moved rapidly, apparently aware of Federal plans to resupply Fort Gibson by water.

The stern-wheeler J. R. Williams paddled out of Fort Smith on the swollen Arkansas River. Heavily loaded with quartermaster supplies for the anxious garrison at Fort Gibson, the virtually unprotected vessel steamed slowly up the river and into the Confederate ambush. With elements of the First Indian Brigade and three artillery pieces, Watie had carefully prepared to waylay the ship at Pheasant Bluff, twenty miles above Fort Smith.<sup>12</sup> Watie, who normally disdained the use of artillery, realized that the J. R. Williams could not be taken without it, and he placed three light howitzer pieces on the bluff overlooking the river.

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<sup>10</sup>Dale and Litton, eds., Cherokee Cavaliers, p. 152; Dabose to Maxey, February 25, 1864, Official Records, i, XXXIV, Pt. 2, pp. 998-999.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Jay Monaghan, Civil War on the Western Border, 1854-1865 (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1955), p. 301.

On June 15 the J. R. Williams serenely steamed within range of the Confederate artillery. The three piece battery, under the command of Lieutenant Henry Forrester, opened fire and damaged the chimney and superstructure of the vessel, forcing it to beach on the opposite shore. The Federal military guard numbering only twenty men made a desultory attempt to defend the ship from a nearby sand bar and, after suffering four casualties, fled to Fort Smith.<sup>13</sup> Watie's Indians captured six of the fleeing enemy and then swarmed all over the prize enthralled by the sight of the bountiful supplies. The J. R. Williams carried over \$120,000 worth of flour, bacon, sugar, shoes, yarn, blankets, and other badly needed commissary items. At this point Watie lost complete control of his command as they engaged in an orgy of looting. The Creeks and Seminoles gathered all the supplies they could handle and hurried to bring them to their own destitute families. Watie's attempts to forstall the mass exodus were futile, and he was soon left without enough men to effectively secure the captured supplies.<sup>14</sup>

The command at Fort Smith soon received word of the disaster and immediately dispatched Colonel John Ritchie and the Second Indian Regiment to the scene. The 200 man relief force arrived the following day on the north side of the river and brought Watie's forces under heavy artillery fire. Watie had no wagons to carry the supplies and Colonel Adair and the Second Cherokee Regiment could offer him no assistance because they were on the opposite side of the unfordable Canadian River. Watie

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<sup>13</sup>Britton, The Union Indian Brigade in the Civil War, p. 405.

<sup>14</sup>Carolyn Thomas Foreman, "Joseph Absalom Scales," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXVIII (Winter, 1950), p. 421; Watie to Cooper, June 27, 1864, Official Records, i, XXXIV, Pt. 1, p. 1013; Watie to Cooper, June 17, 1864, ibid., p. 1012.

wisely set fire to the boat, cut it adrift, and withdrew from the scene. After retreating for about twelve miles, he was met by a relief force of Chickasaws sent by General Cooper to aid in unloading the boat. Watie ordered a party of 150 men to defend the bridge at San Bois Creek and halt the Federal pursuit. Colonel Ritchie, reinforced by the Second Kansas Colored Infantry, arrived at San Bois Creek and brought the Confederate force under heavy artillery fire. The badly outnumbered defenders withdrew, but the Federal force failed to continue the pursuit and returned to Fort Smith.<sup>15</sup>

The destruction of the J. R. Williams was guerrilla warfare at its best. Watie's forces did not succeed in confiscating the bulk of the loot, but they did deny its use to the enemy. The Federal forces at Fort Gibson remained in need of supplies and the seemingly brilliant idea of a water resupply route was quickly abandoned after this disastrous initial attempt. Federal claims to the control of Indian Territory now seemed to have a hollow ring. Their grasp on Fort Gibson and Fort Smith was firm, but what could be done to secure the countryside with Watie on the loose?

Watie and the First Indian Brigade returned to their camp on Limestone Prairie to reorganize and recollect their scattered forces. To reaffirm their loyalty to the Southern cause, and perhaps convince others who were wavering, the Cherokee units unanimously re-enlisted on June 27 for the duration of the war. They left no doubt that they were an integral part of the core of Southern strength. General Maxey was so pleased

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<sup>15</sup>Britton, The Union Indian Brigade in the Civil War, pp. 405-407; Cooper to Scott, June 17, 1864, Official Records, i, XXXIV, Pt. 1, pp. 1011-1012; Watie to Cooper, June 17, 1864, ibid., p. 1012; Watie to Cooper, June 27, 1864, ibid., p. 1013.

with the Cherokee re-enlistment resolution that he had it reproduced and distributed throughout Indian Territory.<sup>16</sup>

Convinced though he was of the Confederate cause, Watie as a leader of the Southern Cherokees felt obligated to do what he could to improve conditions among his people. He wrote General Smith in July, 1864, that the families in the vicinity of the Red River were destitute and that the poorly paid Cherokee soldiers were unable to provide adequate means for the survival of their families. He insisted that he was not writing in the spirit of complaint, but merely to offer suggestions to alleviate the condition.<sup>17</sup>

Following the letter to General Smith, Watie addressed the Cherokee National Council in a frank and unusually long letter. He reviewed the war and prophesized that the actions of 1864 would lead to a successful conclusion of the war. In his role as Chief he called on the Cherokees to increase their military effort and do everything in their power to insure ultimate victory for the Confederacy. There can be little doubt that although Watie freely aired his grievances, his belief in and adherence to the Southern cause never wavered throughout the war.<sup>18</sup>

During late July, 1864, two incidents occurred in Indian Territory that materially brightened Confederate hopes. The first was an engagement on Massard's Prairie when Brigadier General Richard M. Gano and a force of 1,500 Texas Cavalry surprised and overwhelmed the outpost camp of Company B of the Sixth Kansas Cavalry. The second incident, although

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<sup>16</sup>Official Records, i, XLI, Pt. 2, pp. 1012-1013.

<sup>17</sup>Watie to Smith, July 2, 1864, Stand Watie Letters, Indian Archives Division, Oklahoma Historical Society.

<sup>18</sup>Watie to the National Committee, July 11, 1864, Official Records, i, XLI, Pt. 2, pp. 1046-1048.



it involved no fighting, was more important than a battlefield decision. Colonel Phillips, a thorn in the Confederate side, was relieved from command at Fort Gibson and ordered to report at once to Fort Smith.<sup>19</sup>

General Cooper, recently promoted to field commander of Indian Territory, gave signs in late July of shaking his lethargy. While Gano was clearing out Massard's Prairie, Watie's Cherokees were active in the area between Fort Gibson and Fort Scott. Watie, whose headquarters was at Skullyville, used Colonel Bell and the First Cherokee Regiment and Colonel Adair and the Second Cherokee Regiment on sorties calculated to harass Federal communication and supply between Fort Gibson and Fort Smith.<sup>20</sup>

There were no major engagements during late July, 1864, but Confederate activity continued to increase. On July 31 Cooper's combined force demonstrated in the vicinity of Fort Smith, and the Cherokees led by Colonel Bell and Colonel Adair surprised and routed Federal pickets who were preparing to eat dinner. The Federal garrison at Fort Smith came out to meet Cooper's force and, after a brief exchange of artillery fire, the Confederates withdrew. Fort Smith was still safely in Federal hands, but the emboldened Confederates, supplemented by Gano's Texans, seemed once again to be formidable opposition.<sup>21</sup>

Watie was clearly developing the feel for guerrilla fighting and,

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<sup>19</sup>Steele to Thomas, August 15, 1864, *ibid.*, Pt. 1, p. 13; Thayer to Steele, July 30, 1864, *ibid.*, p. 23; Morehead to Judson, July 29, 1864, *ibid.*, p. 25; Britton, The Union Indian Brigade in the Civil War, p. 430.

<sup>20</sup>Special Order, July 21, 1864, Official Records, i, XLI, Pt. 2, p. 1019; Cooper to Scott, August 10, 1864, *ibid.*, Pt. 1, pp. 32-33.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 33-36; Anderson, The Life of General Stand Watie, p. 37; Britton, The Union Indian Brigade in the Civil War, pp. 427-429.

during the months of August and September, proved that he was one of the best in the West. At daylight on August 24 he led a force of 500 in a surprise raid on the Federal supply station at Gunter's Prairie. The station was well guarded by over 400 Federal troops, most of whom were infantry. Without warning Watie moved in, burned vast quantities of hay, and made off with over 150 mules and horses before the startled defenders could react. Watie lost only one man, while the Federal force suffered twenty killed and fourteen captured. This action was another brilliant display of Watie's guerrilla tactics.<sup>22</sup>

Watie now made plans for what was to be his most successful engagement of the war. He joined forces with General Gano and prepared to move on the Federal supply train that operated twice weekly between Fort Scott and Fort Gibson. This train was the vital supply link for the Federal garrison at Fort Gibson, and without it the post would be in an untenable position. Watie had tried to sever the line before and had failed.<sup>23</sup>

Early in 1864 Watie had requested permission to fulfill a plan that had long been in the back of his mind, a major raid into Kansas.<sup>24</sup> On August 25 General Maxey finally received approval of the plan, providing that it was undertaken prior to October 1 so that it would coincide with General Price's proposed offensive in Missouri.<sup>25</sup> General Gano and General Watie met at Camp Pike to lay plans for the raid that would

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<sup>22</sup>Maxey to Anderson, September 3, 1864, Official Records, i, XLI, Pt. 1, p. 279.

<sup>23</sup>Marvin J. Hancock, "The Second Battle of Cabin Creek," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXXIX (Winter, 1961), p. 414.

<sup>24</sup>Adair to Maxey, February 5, 1864, Official Records, i, XXXIV, Pt. 2, pp. 945-946.

<sup>25</sup>Boggs to Maxey, August 25, 1864, ibid., i, XLI, Pt. 2, p. 1082.

involve their combined forces. They agreed to retain individual control over their own units and Watie demonstrated his selflessness by granting overall command to Gano, his senior in date of rank, even though the expedition had been conceived by Watie alone.<sup>26</sup>

The plans for the Kansas raid were modified by orders from General Cooper that called for a major raid on targets north of the Arkansas River, and these included the supply train from Fort Scott. General Gano and General Watie were instructed to lead the expedition in a roughly circular route through Federal held territory and return south of the Arkansas River upon completion of the expedition.<sup>27</sup>

The joint command, 2,000 strong, began its northward move on September 14, 1864. Watie's command consisted of the 200 man First Cherokee Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel C. N. Vann commanding; the 150 man Second Cherokee Regiment, Major John Vann commanding; the 150 man Second Cherokee Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Chekote commanding; the 200 man Second Creek Regiment, Colonel T. Barnett commanding; and 130 Seminoles under Colonel John Jumper. General Gano's Texan command was a combined cavalry and artillery force numbering 1,200 men.<sup>28</sup>

The expedition spent the first night at Prairie Springs and the following morning Watie sent Major Vann ahead as scout while his Indian forces led the main party across the Arkansas River. The command encamped at Camp Pleasant in the Creek Nation on the night of September 15 and crossed the Verdigris River at Sand Town the following day. About noon that day an enemy force was discovered guarding a hay station on the Fort

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<sup>26</sup>Watie to Heiston, October 3, 1864, *ibid.*, Pt. 1, p. 785.

<sup>27</sup>Cooper to Scott, September 14, 1864, *ibid.*, p. 781.

<sup>28</sup>Watie to Heiston, October 3, 1864, *ibid.*, p. 785.

Scott road only fifteen miles from Fort Gibson. Lieutenant Colonel Vann of the First Cherokee Regiment and Captain S. M. Stayhorn of the Thirtieth Texas Regiment were directed to move to the right flank and gain a position in the enemy rear to cut off any attempt to escape. The Confederate main body moved forward with General Gano's forces on the right and General Watie's Indian Brigade on the left. Captain E. A. Barker, commanding detachments of the Second Kansas Cavalry and the First Kansas Colored Infantry, attempted to make a stand, but his 125 man force was no match for the Confederate force that surrounded him. Realizing the futility of his position, he mounted his cavalry and attempted to crack the Confederate cordon, while leaving his colored infantry on the field to fend for themselves. Captain Barker and fourteen cavalrymen made good their escape but only four infantrymen came out of the action alive.<sup>29</sup> This engagement was brief but deadly for the Negroes involved. The killed, wounded, and captured Federals numbered over 100, and most of those killed were Negroes. The Confederate force on the other hand suffered only three casualties, and destroyed everything of consequence in the area, including several wagons, mowing machines, and over 1,000 tons of hay.<sup>30</sup>

Prisoners taken at the hay station engagement confirmed that the supply train from Fort Scott was due, and Watie sent a scouting party ahead to determine its exact location. The party was fired on, but investigation revealed that the enemy was only a small Federal force and

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid.; Barker to the Adjutant General, September 20, 1864, *ibid.*, pp. 771-772.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.; Gano to Cooper, September 29, 1864, *ibid.*, pp. 788-789; Watie to Heiston, October 3, 1864, *ibid.*, p. 785.

had no connection with the supply train.<sup>31</sup> Major Henry Hopkins of the Second Kansas Cavalry, the supply train commander, received word from Fort Gibson that a Confederate force numbering between 1,200 and 1,500 was moving toward Cabin Creek. He was instructed to move the train to Cabin Creek and await further orders. Major Hopkins moved with haste and arrived with 300 wagons and 600 men at 9:00 a.m. on September 18.<sup>32</sup>

General Gano scouted the area just south of the Cabin Creek crossing and found no evidence that the train had passed Cabin Creek. On the morning of September 18 General Gano led a 400 man advance force toward Cabin Creek where he found the supply train. He immediately sent word to Watie to bring up the balance of the Confederate force and made plans to assault the Federal position. Major Hopkins had not been idle, however, and while on a reconnaissance south of his position he discovered General Gano's force. He returned quickly to the supply train and set up defensive positions behind the stockade at the Cabin Creek Station.<sup>33</sup>

Watie arrived about midnight and after consulting with Gano agreed to attack at once. The Confederate force formed with Gano's Texans on the right, Watie's Indian Brigade on the left, and Major Howell's artillery in the center. The attackers advanced on a line to a point within 500 yards of the Federal position. After a confusing verbal exchange between the lead elements of both forces the Confederates gave a rebel yell and charged. Many teamsters and wagon masters fled toward Fort Scott upon the first sounds of the Confederate assault, and took many of the horses and mules with them. Major Hopkins found it impossible to

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 786.

<sup>32</sup>Hopkins to Thomas, September 22, 1864, *ibid.*, pp. 766-769.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.; Gano to Cooper, September 29, 1864, *ibid.*, pp. 788-791.

lead the train to safer ground because of a scarcity of draft animals, so he rallied his men behind hastily assembled hay ricks and kept the train from being overrun.<sup>34</sup> General Gano, satisfied that his prey was trapped, called a halt to await the better visibility of day.

Dawn revealed that the Confederate Indian Brigade had encircled the Federal right flank and captured a number of wagons, although the bulk of the wagon train was still under Federal control. Howell's Battery, supported by the First and Second Creek Regiments, was moved to within 100 yards of the Federal position and opened fire. The Confederate artillery had a telling effect on the Federals, and they fled the field, leaving everything behind. Major Hopkins tried to reorganize a defensive position, but Watie had completely outflanked him, and he had no choice but to leave the wagons and flee.<sup>35</sup>

The prize was huge and, although over 100 damaged wagons, 6,000 tons of hay, and all agricultural machines were destroyed, the remaining booty was valued at over \$1,500,000. Every man in the Confederate force found clothing to replace his rags and food to fill his stomach before escorting 130 wagons and 740 mules back to Confederate lines. The casualties were remarkably light for the number of troops engaged. The Federals lost not more than fifty men killed, wounded, and captured, while the combined Confederate losses probably did not exceed fifty-four.<sup>36</sup>

This victory at Cabin Creek caused jubilation in the South and

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid.; Hopkins to Thomas, September 22, 1864, *ibid.*, pp. 766-769; Hancock, "The Second Battle of Cabin Creek," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXXIX, p. 420.

<sup>35</sup>Hopkins to Thomas, September 25, 1864, Official Records, i, XLI, Pt. 1, p. 770; Watie to Heiston, October 3, 1864, *ibid.*, pp. 786-787.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.; Gano to Cooper, September 29, 1864, *ibid.*, p. 790; Hopkins to Thomas, September 25, 1864, *ibid.*, p. 771.

consternation in the North. A joint resolution of thanks was unanimously passed by both houses of the Confederate Congress and signed by President Davis.<sup>37</sup> Watie was rapidly becoming a hero to all Confederates and a fearsome ogre to the Union as rumors spread that Watie was poised to invade Kansas and Missouri.<sup>38</sup> The capture of the J. R. Williams had brought Watie momentary fame, but his Cabin Creek action perpetuated it.

The joy attending the Gano-Watie expedition was short lived because the Confederacy was unable to capitalize on it. Conditions within Indian Territory remained lamentable. Although the Indian Brigade benefited from the loot taken at Cabin Creek, the vast majority of refugees suffered from ever-worsening deprivation. The Kansas raid was delayed because even Watie had misgivings about the chance of success without an assured means of resupply.<sup>39</sup>

During the late fall of 1864 the Confederate Indian Division moved into the Choctaw Nation and established winter quarters. Watie moved his headquarters to Boggy Depot and prepared for another hard winter, with survival a more dangerous foe than Federal troops. It was at last evident to both friend and foe that Watie had matured into an outstanding guerrilla leader. The bitter lessons of Cowskin Prairie, Spavinaw Creek, and Webber's Falls had been absorbed and had contributed to the learning process. The successful capture of the J. R. Williams, the foray at Gunter's Prairie, and the monumental victory at Cabin Creek were the

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<sup>37</sup>Senate Executive Document Number 234, 58th Cong., 2nd Sess., p. 495.

<sup>38</sup>Hancock, "The Second Battle of Cabin Creek," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXXIX, pp. 423-424.

<sup>39</sup>Scott to Seddon, December 1, 1864, Official Records, 1, XLI, Pt. 4, pp. 1086-1090; Cooper to Bell, October 6, 1864, ibid., Pt. 3, pp. 982-984.

earmarks of a brilliant new guerrilla who might yet retake Indian Territory in spite of the odds against him.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE LAST YEARS, 1865-1871

The Confederacy was doomed, and nowhere was this fact more apparent than in Indian Territory. Attempts were made in early 1865 to improve conditions, but the results were negligible. The Confederate government was losing the battle for survival in the East and could do nothing to assist its supporters in such a remote area as Indian Territory.<sup>1</sup>

Colonel Phillips was restored to the command of Fort Gibson on December 29, 1864, and took immediate steps to clear up corruption in the post's financial and supply matters. During his absence of five months, Colonel Wattles, the post commander, and other officials had neglected their military mission for the more lucrative task of profiteering.<sup>2</sup> The return of Colonel Phillips to his old command increased the problems of the Confederacy because he was one of the few Federal officers who had been uniformly successful in his military ventures in Indian Territory.

Colonel Phillips succeeded in cleaning up the administration at Fort Gibson, but other conditions at the post gave evidence of the increased effectiveness of Watie's guerrilla activities. Phillips discovered that his command of 2,000 men was completely devoid of cavalry mounts. He advised his superiors that if 1,000 horses were received by mid-April, 1865, he would march on the Confederate forces south of the Arkansas

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<sup>1</sup>Dale and Litton, eds., Cherokee Cavaliers, p. 192.

<sup>2</sup>Phillips to Herron, January 16, 1865, Official Records, i, XLVIII, Pt. 1, pp. 542-543.

River. Implicit in his statement was the warning that without mounts he would be unable to defeat the enemy.<sup>3</sup>

During February, 1865, Watie was assigned to command the Confederate Indian Division and General Cooper was made Superintendent of Indian Affairs in the District of Indian Territory.<sup>4</sup> If the move had been made when the Confederate cause still had vitality, the results of the war in Indian Territory might have been decidedly different. The imaginative Watie would have given General Blunt far better opposition than that presented under the timid, uninspiring leadership of General Cooper. Unfortunately, the move came too late to have any effect on the course of the war.

There was no major military activity in Indian Territory during the spring of 1865. Rumors continued to circulate that Watie would soon lead 2,000 Indians on a major raid through Kansas, but the raid never materialized. Watie's command was unequipped to conduct a major raid into Kansas, so it spent the spring in the vicinity of Boggy Depot preparing to repel an anticipated Federal attack.<sup>5</sup> Colonel Phillips was also in no position to attack because of his lack of mounts, so he continued to assume a defensive posture while awaiting horses that never arrived. The Civil War was destined to end in Indian Territory with both sides preparing against attacks that neither could deliver.

During the time that Watie was preparing his defenses, he also laid plans for a Grand Council of all Indians friendly to the South. The purpose of the meeting was to form a unity of effort that would provide a

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<sup>3</sup>Phillips to Reynolds, February 9, 1865, *ibid.*, pp. 789-790.

<sup>4</sup>Special Order, Trans-Mississippi Department, February 18, 1865, *ibid.*, p. 1387.

<sup>5</sup>Blunt to Reynolds, May 16, 1865, *ibid.*, Pt. 2, pp. 468-469.

more effective base for continued resistance. Watie, even at this late stage of the war, refused to believe that the Confederate cause was hopeless and took whatever steps he could to plan a new Confederate offensive.<sup>6</sup>

Watie's plans received a severe jolt in May, 1865, when his nephew Elias C. Boudinot, the Cherokee delegate to the Confederate Congress, sent word from Richmond that General Lee had surrendered. Boudinot indicated that General Smith, the commander of the Trans-Mississippi Department, would probably hold out for another month or two, but that resistance was hopeless. He advised Watie to remain inactive and await the development of events.<sup>7</sup>

Boudinot's assessment of the conditions in General Smith's Trans-Mississippi Department proved highly optimistic. On May 26, 1865, within fifteen days of Boudinot's letter to Watie, General Smith surrendered. His action left Watie the only unconquered General officer of the Confederacy.<sup>8</sup>

Watie, although courageous and dedicated, was certainly no fool. Boudinot's letter had undoubtedly convinced him that the end was close at hand. He furloughed most of his troops to give them an opportunity to rebuild their homes and awaited the inevitable with but a token military force behind him. When he received word of General Smith's capitulation, he took immediate steps to arrange for his own surrender.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Watie to Micco, March 19, 1865, Dale and Litton, eds., Cherokee Cavaliers, pp. 218-219.

<sup>7</sup>Boudinot to Watie, May 11, 1865, *ibid.*, pp. 222-223.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 223.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 227-228.

On June 9, 1865, Major General F. J. Herron, commanding the Northern Division of Louisiana, appointed a commission consisting of Lieutenant Colonel Asa C. Matthews and Adjutant William H. Vance to move to Indian Territory and make temporary treaties with the Indians. On June 19, 1865, at Doaksville the commission negotiated a treaty with the Choctaws and then agreed to meet with Watie.<sup>10</sup>

On June 23, 1865, the tired but proud Watie rode into Doaksville and signed a temporary treaty between the United States and the Cherokee Nation. The treaty stipulated that if the Cherokees returned to their homes and remained at peace with the United States they would be protected from all acts of hostility. Watie had completed his last official act for the Confederacy, and in so doing became the last Confederate General to surrender. The Civil War was over.<sup>11</sup>

During the bitter and confusing years that followed the Civil War, Watie became a rallying point for the Confederate faction of the Cherokee Nation. Chief Ross returned as titular head of the Nation, but the Cherokees were in no way a political entity. The long-existing rift between the Treaty and Anti-Treaty Parties was rekindled by the effects of the war. The tenuous unity that existed in the early phase of the war was shattered by the effects of the Federal invasion during the summer of 1862. The capture of Ross and the willing defection of Colonel Drew's regiment of full bloods pitted Cherokee against Cherokee for the remainder of the war. Watie and others who continued with the Confederacy felt that the bloodshed of the war had permanently divided the Cherokee

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<sup>10</sup>Annie H. Abel, The American Indian Under Reconstruction (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1925), pp. 147-148; Herron to Matthews, June 9, 1865, Official Records, i, XLVIII, Pt. 2, pp. 830-831.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 1100-1101.

Nation. They hoped that treaty negotiations with the United States would be conducted on the assumption that the Cherokees could never again live together harmoniously. Chief Ross, on the other hand, continued to believe in tribal unity, and that he as Chief was the only one authorized to act in the name of the Cherokee Nation.

Treaty negotiations were begun at the Fort Smith Peace Council on September 8, 1865.<sup>12</sup> As expected, the Cherokees sent two delegations, one representing Chief Ross and the majority of the Nation, the other representing the Southern minority faction. Watie served as a delegate but took no part in the verbal deliberations of the Peace Council. The spokesman for the Southern Cherokees was Watie's nephew, Elias C. Boudinot, a brilliant lawyer-politician. Boudinot attempted to discredit Chief Ross in the eyes of the United States commissioners, and by his eloquence prove that Ross was not fit to be chief of the Cherokees. He succeeded in convincing the commissioners that Ross was unworthy and that the Southern Cherokees led by Watie should be allowed to make a separate peace. The Northern Cherokees negated the clever actions of Boudinot by simply refusing to negotiate unless the Council recognized Chief Ross as titular head of the Cherokees. The Fort Smith Peace Council ended as it had begun, with the Cherokee question unanswered.<sup>13</sup>

The United States government, dissatisfied with the results of the Fort Smith Council, called the dissident elements of the Cherokee Nation to Washington. Watie led the Southern delegation, although he did not engage in the discussions, and returned to Indian Territory two months before

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<sup>12</sup> Abel, The American Indian Under Reconstruction, p. 181.

<sup>13</sup> Wardell, A Political History of the Cherokee Nation, pp. 188-193.

the deliberations were completed.<sup>14</sup> Boudinot once again presented a forceful case for the Southern Cherokees, but to no avail. The hopes for independence of the Southern Cherokees came to an end on July 17, 1866, when the United States signed a treaty that provided for tribal unity and recognized Ross as chief of the Cherokee Nation.<sup>15</sup>

Although poor, tired and discouraged, Watie accepted the treaty gracefully and turned his full attentions toward providing for his family. Prior to the war he was a prosperous slaveholding plantation owner, but all of that was gone. He removed himself from public life, settled near Webber's Falls, and with a small farm began the arduous task of rebuilding.<sup>16</sup>

Watie's life as a farmer was interrupted when the wily Boudinot approached him with a seemingly foolproof scheme to earn money. Boudinot had found what appeared to be a loophole in the recently signed treaty with the United States. Items produced in Indian Territory were exempt from a Federal excise tax.<sup>17</sup> Boudinot reasoned that an enterprising young man with financial backing could enter the tobacco business and, free of taxes, undersell all competitors. He considered himself that young man, and he hoped that Watie would be his backer. Although still in poor financial condition, Watie managed somehow to underwrite the scheme. By November, 1868, a tobacco factory was operating in the newly created town of Boudiville, Cherokee Nation. The main product of the new

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<sup>14</sup>Anderson, The Life of General Stand Watie, p. 49.

<sup>15</sup>Dale and Litton, eds., Cherokee Cavaliers, p. 232.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 234, 263.

<sup>17</sup>Robert K. Heiman, "The Cherokee Tobacco Case," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XLI (Autumn, 1964), p. 299.

firm was a sweet cut plug tobacco bearing the name "Boudinot & Watie Plug."<sup>18</sup> The tobacco venture gave Watie some financial aid but before long he sold his interest to Boudinot and concentrated on his farm and family.

Although he never regained a financial status similar to his pre-war position, Watie worked hard to improve his lot in the years following the war. Both he and Mrs. Watie were determined above all else to provide their children with good educational opportunities, and in 1868 they sent their sole surviving son Watica to Cane Hill College in Arkansas.<sup>19</sup>

The Watie family always seemed beset with personal tragedy. Their oldest son, Saladin, died in 1868 at the youthful age of twenty-one. Cumisky, their youngest son, died during the war when he was only thirteen years of age. The final tragedy for Watie came in the spring of 1869 when his last son, Watica, was stricken with pneumonia. The Waties hurried to Cane Hill, but shortly after their arrival Watica died.<sup>20</sup>

These personal tragedies, coupled with the severe hardships endured during the war and the rigors of late-in-life farming, took their toll on Watie's physical being. The reservoir of physical strength that so characterized his early life was rapidly depleted in those first few years after the war, but he continued to work hard for the welfare of his wife and daughters.

In spite of failing health and marginal finances, Watie succeeded in providing for the education of his two daughters, Ninnie and Jacqueline.

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 313.

<sup>19</sup>Dale and Litton, eds., Cherokee Cavaliers, p. 265.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 262, 282.

Ninnie attended school in Webber's Falls while the older Jacqueline was sent to the fashionable Clarke's Academy in Berryville, Arkansas. The letters between Watie and his daughters are evidence of a strong sense of family devotion and were among the few joys left to this tragic family.<sup>21</sup>

Watie died suddenly on September 9, 1871, while visiting his old home on Honey Creek, and was buried in the Ridge cemetery in Delaware County.<sup>22</sup> The tragic end to the story of this able man came nine years after his death. His daughters Ninnie and Jacqueline both died in 1873 and his wife, Sarah, followed seven years later. Thus the family of Watie suffered the ultimate indignity, for it left the world without heirs.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 290-295.

<sup>22</sup>Anderson, The Life of General Stand Watie, p. 50.

<sup>23</sup>Dale and Litton, eds., Cherokee Cavaliers, p. 266.



## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSIONS

As a tactician, Stand Watie will never be linked with Robert E. Lee or Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson, because he was not a tactical genius. He led no major armies, won no major battles, and lost more often than he won. Measured by traditional military standards, Watie was at best an average soldier, and yet he made a significant contribution to American military heritage, for he was a peerless guerrilla leader.

The role of the guerrilla in warfare has long been misrepresented and misunderstood. Some historians have depicted guerrillas as reprehensible subhumans whose actions cheapen the science of war. Others have romanticized them into legendary figures of superhuman qualities. Until recent years few attempts have been made to impartially study and evaluate the effects of guerrilla warfare on the course of military history.

The success or failure of a guerrilla unit cannot be measured by the same standards as a conventional military force. The ultimate objective of the conventional force is the destruction of the enemy army and its will to fight. Crushing defeats that inflict heavy casualties and cause the enemy to flee in confusion are a vital part of conventional warfare. Often the ability of a commander to take and hold a battle area is considered sufficient justification to claim victory, regardless of the other effects of the engagement. The commander of a conventional force is judged primarily by his ability to inflict casualties on the enemy, take and hold battle areas, and force the enemy to retreat. Lee was a

successful commander in the early years of the Civil War because he repeatedly forced the Union Army to retreat. Ulysses S. Grant, on the other hand, was a successful commander because he accomplished his ultimate goal. He lost his battles with Lee but he destroyed the will to fight of the Army of Northern Virginia and forced Lee to surrender.

The guerrilla leader is not judged by his ability to take and hold battle areas, the number of casualties he inflicts on the enemy, or his success in forcing the enemy to retreat. He is not judged by these standards because his mission is to harass the enemy, but not to defeat him. His objective may be the destruction of a supply dump, the disruption of communication media, the elimination of a bridge, or any other action calculated to cause the enemy embarrassment. The guerrilla may operate independently or in conjunction with conventional forces, but in either case, his mission is never more than harassment.

The typical guerrilla force is a small mounted band, loosely organized and poorly equipped, indifferently armed, semi-autonomous, self-sustaining, and highly mobile. They avoid decisive combat whenever possible and usually oppose enemy forces vastly superior to them in number.

The tactics of a guerrilla evolve from a lack of strength and a mission of harassment. The principles of war that he finds most suitable for the accomplishment of his mission are the principles of surprise, offensive, and maneuver. The guerrilla must hit quickly, inflict a maximum of damage, and be gone before the enemy can mass his forces to counter-attack. He must be ingenious and adaptable, prepared to suffer physical hardships, and loyal to his cause. His success is directly proportional to the hardships inflicted on his enemy and should be measured by the cumulative effects of his harassments rather than by the results of

single engagements.

Watie and his fellow Cherokees were by background ideally suited to be guerrillas. They were horsemen and they were Indians. The Indian, beginning with the experience of the infantry in the East and ending with the cavalry of the Great Plains, was traditionally a guerrilla fighter. He was singularly brave, poorly disciplined, highly mobile, wedded to the offense, fearful of artillery, and abhorred defensive warfare. He never understood the tactics of conventional warfare and considered it foolhardy to stand fast in the face of heavy enemy firepower. In short, he believed only in guerrilla warfare.

Watie's personal characteristics as well as his heritage contributed to his suitability as a guerrilla leader. He was physically fit, indefatigable, resourceful, courageous, and fiercely loyal. His plans were simple, his judgments sound, and he was a leader who others followed out of respect rather than fear. He was untrained in military tactics, but knew the value of raids and how to conduct them.

The Confederacy had the foresight to recognize the value of Indian Territory, but failed to understand the importance of Indian troops. All units recruited were organized along traditional military lines and expected to act as disciplined organizations in the pursuance of conventional military goals. Indian units were not used as guerrilla forces until repeated failures finally convinced the Confederacy of the futility attending their use as conventional units. The Confederacy not only misused its Indian troops, but misled them as well. Indian units were induced into the service with grandiose promises of arms and equipment for the warriors and food for the families. The promises were never kept, and most Indians fought the war with their own pitifully inadequate weapons or those they took from the enemy. The few supplies that were

earmarked for Indian units were invariably commandeered by white Confederate troops before arriving in Indian Territory.

Confederate Indian troops were not only poorly used and supplied; they were poorly led as well. General Pike was a brilliant politico-diplomat, but a dismal failure as a soldier. He had no understanding of military tactics or strategy and spent much of his time writing lengthy justifications for his failures. General Cooper, prior to the war, was a competent and respected Indian agent, but as a military leader he suffered from timidity and indecision, the worst of all possible afflictions. The Confederate Indians suffered through many losses that might well have been victories had they been led by bold and daring commanders.

Watie's reputation as a soldier grew as he evolved from the role of a subordinate cavalry commander to that of a semi-independent guerrilla. He performed adequately in his initial role, but neither he nor his troops were properly suited for sustained conventional campaigns. They excelled in the quick, elusive, rapier thrusts of the guerrilla, and until used in that manner their performance as soldiers was somewhat disappointing to the Confederacy.

Watie's first military action at Chustenahlah was not a test of his abilities because of the weakness of the opposition. The significance of the engagement was not the result but the methods employed by Watie to achieve it. He planned carefully, scouted well, attempted to outflank his enemy, and at times fought on foot. All of these elements were characteristic of Watie and later became integral parts of his standard operational tactics.

During 1862 Watie solidified his reputation as a brave subordinate but did little to enhance his reputation as a leader. With the exception

of Neosho, Missouri, he was badly beaten at every turn. He performed well at Pea Ridge and Fort Wayne in spite of the incompetence of General Pike and General Cooper and the misuse of his troops. He showed flashes of brilliance with his surprise raid at Neosho, but negated this by allowing his unit to be surprised and overrun at Cowskin Prairie and Spavinaw Creek. On the whole, Watie's actions in 1862 were marginal and stamped him for the time being as a mediocre commander.

The year 1863 marked the beginning of Watie's success as a guerrilla. Superficially, he continued to experience more defeats than victories, but he profited by his mistakes and built a strong reputation among his enemies. The defeats suffered during 1863 were for the most part unlike those of the preceding year. Watie for the first time in the war was given a mission of harassment and the authority to act on his own initiative. Throughout the year he devastated the countryside around Fort Gibson and caused extreme hardship among the Cherokee families who had cast their lot with the Union. He suffered defeat at Cabin Creek when he attempted to capture the supply train, but the loss had no lasting ill effects on his unit and only served to increase his guerrilla activities. By the end of 1863 Fort Gibson was short on supplies and cavalry mounts, and official reports and rumors began to build the legend of Watie's omnipresent guerrillas.

The picture of Watie as a guerrilla leader came into clear focus for the first time during 1864. During the summer and fall of that year of Confederate disasters he moved from one brilliant success to another. He dispelled all Federal ideas of resupplying Fort Gibson by water when he countered the first attempt by destroying the stern-wheeler J. R. Williams. He then took action to make forage an item of luxury at Fort Gibson when he surprised a large Federal force at Gunter's Prairie and

destroyed vast stands of hay. He climaxed these moves with the most brilliantly conceived and executed operation of his career, the second engagement at Cabin Creek. This joint effort by General Gano and General Watie was one of the most decisive actions of the war in Indian Territory, because supplies valued at \$1,500,000 fell in Confederate hands and the Federal troops protecting them were badly mauled. As the year came to an end, Indian Territory was a vast wasteland, and the garrison at Fort Gibson was totally unable to perform its mission because it could do little more than languish behind the walls of the fort and await Watie's next move.

Watie created no great stir as a conventional commander, but friend and foe alike united in singing his praises as a guerrilla. He lost most of his engagements and yet gained strength from defeat while his enemies were weakened by their victories. He accomplished his mission of harassment so well that he created a stalemate in Indian Territory military operations. If the measure of a capable guerrilla commander is the residual efforts of his actions, then Watie deserves consideration as one of history's finest. However he is viewed, Watie ranks as one of the leading guerrilla leaders of the Civil War.

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