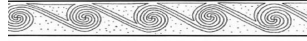


## Iti Fabussa



# Choctaw Nation and the American Civil War



**Choctaw warriors carried flags similar to this into battle. The Choctaw Nation was the first tribe to adopt a national flag (Milligan 105).**

the Choctaw Nation and the people trusted their advice.

The Choctaw Nation also had extensive trade with New Orleans. Most tribes in Indian Territory were associated with the cattle business; however the Choctaw Nation was chiefly involved in the cotton trade with Arkansas and Texas. (Cottrell 19) (Kidwell 57-58) (Milligan 102-103). With the cotton trade came one very influential Choctaw man, Robert M. Jones. Jones was a very successful cotton plantation owner and had a lot of political power within the Choctaw Nation. Jones often argued for the southern cause.

On May 7, 1861, the Choctaw Nation signed a treaty with the Confederacy officially joining the war against the United States. This was a difficult decision for the Choctaw Nation and relinquishing ties with the Federal government meant that all the past treaties would be null and void. As severe as the consequences would be, siding with the south was required for the preservation of the Choctaw Nation. With the retreat of the Federal Military from Indian Territory and the vast economic and political ties to the south the Choctaw Nation could not stay allied to the United States if it was to survive the war.

With the Choctaw Nation involved in the war it was time to defend Indian Territory. Pike recruited men from the Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Creek and Seminole Nations to defend Indian Territory. The First Choctaw and Chickasaw Mounted Rifles organized and elected Douglas Cooper and Tandy Walker as their Colonel and Lieutenant Colonel and began training in the summer and fall of 1861. Troop estimates in the middle part of the war showed as many as at 1,024 Choctaw warriors plus an additional 200 militia.

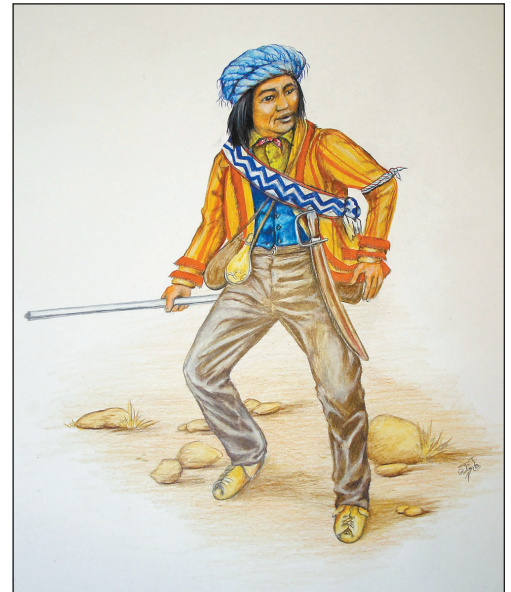
These warriors were well trained in combat, however there were concerns over their weaponry. They were poorly armed with old rifles and muskets, hunting shotguns, pistols or revolvers, and rarely bows and arrows. Some men had new rifles, but most brought what they could. There were reports that Choctaw and Chickasaw men carried up to three weapons on their person, mostly suited to close-range fighting. For dress, some of the warriors wore Euro-American garb such as hats or bandanas on their head, hunting jackets and vests, trousers and spurred boots. Others wore traditional dress consisting of turbans, feathers or skinned animal heads, leggings with breech clout, moccasins, a beaded sash, and a bandoleer bag. They did well with training, taking well to drills and kept their weapons in fine order. Despite being poorly armed and mismatched in uniform, the Choctaw warriors were recognized as fierce fighters and were commended for their efforts by their officers. (Milligan 106)(Osprey 42-58).

The Choctaws saw their first action in the 1861 campaign against the Union loyalist forces under Creek Chief Opothleyahola. With Confederate Texas troops from Fort Smith, Albert Pike's Indian Brigade, in the Battles of Round Mountain and Chusto-Talasa (Bird Creek), helped to defeat and push up into Kansas the loyalist forces in November and December of 1861 (Cottrell 23-31)(Milligan 107-109).

In 1861 the Civil War broke out in the United States between the Federal Government and 11 southern states of the Confederacy. Caught in the middle of this war was the Choctaw Nation as well as several other tribes who had just been removed to Indian Territory not 30 years earlier. With the outbreak of the war, the Choctaw Nation was forced to make a decision for its own survival. This decision would alter the history of the Choctaw people forever.

Early in the war, Confederate forces coordinated attacks on Fort Cobb, Fort Arbuckle and Fort Washita, all forts created by the federal government to protect Indian Territory through treaties made with the tribes. Once the forts were occupied, the Federal troops retreated to Kansas, allowing the Confederacy to advance and take Fort Smith. With Fort Smith taken by the Confederacy, Federal protection had been removed from Indian Territory. With Arkansas to the east, Texas to the south, and tribes loyal to the Confederacy to the north the Choctaw Nation, the Choctaw Nation was all but surrounded by the Confederacy.

Several influential Anglo neighbors urged the Choctaw Nation to join with the Confederacy, including Douglas H. Cooper, the U.S. Indian agent assigned to the Choctaw before the war, and Albert B. Pike, an attorney that represented the tribes in civil cases in Arkansas. Both men had a good history with



**A drawing by Ruby Bolding of how a Confederate Choctaw soldier may have looked.**

By 1862 several more regiments and battalions were formed by the Choctaws. These units would engage in skirmishes and battles around eastern Indian Territory as well as Missouri and Arkansas. They were included within Albert Pike's Indian Brigade in 1861, which was later commanded by Cooper in 1862.

1862 saw the Choctaws just miss the Pea Ridge Campaign in northwest Arkansas in March. Pike resigned his command of the Indian Brigade and by mid-summer Douglas Cooper was in charge. In September and October they were in the thick of things. Southern forces had invaded Missouri in September. Cooper's brigade was asked to join them and helped win the Battle of Newtonia in Missouri. The Confederate forces were later forced out of the state by Union General James Blunt and Cooper led his brigade back into Indian Territory. Cooper was organizing a force to invade Kansas when he was surprised and routed in the Battle of Old Fort Wayne in October and retreated back to Skullyville where he remained through the rest of 1862 (Cottrell 37-62)(Milligan 109-113).

In 1863, minor skirmishing with Union forces out of Kansas preceded the most important engagement of the war in Indian Territory. Union forces under Blunt occupied Fort Gibson and then advanced on Cooper's Texas and Native American troops. They met in July at the Battle of Honey Springs (also called Elk Creek), the largest battle in Indian Territory. With superior Union artillery and poor Confederate powder imported from Mexico, the Federal troops defeated Cooper and forced him back into the Choctaw Nation. Cooper commented in his after-action report that the retreating Confederate units were saved from capture by the aggressive rearguard action of the Choctaw and Chickasaw regiment. He said at the end of his report "... [The] Choctaws behaved bravely, as they always do" (Cooper). Union forces now occupied all of Indian Territory north of the Canadian River and soon captured Fort Smith. At the Battle of Perryville in August, Cooper was again defeated and with the loss of his supply depot at Perryville was forced to retreat down to the Red River. Little Rock in Arkansas was occupied in September. The northern part of the Choctaw Nation had now become a no-man's land open to raids by lawless raiders as well as organized troops from both sides (Cottrell 77-84) (Milligan 113-114).

By 1864, all the Choctaw units were banded together with the Chickasaw units into the Second Indian Brigade commanded by Tandy Walker. This brigade would serve to the end of the war. One skirmish occurred in February when 350 Union cavalry surprised and defeated a 90 man detachment of Choctaw and Texas troops at Middle Boggy Depot near Atoka (Warren). In April, Tandy Walker's Second Indian Brigade was asked help to save southern Arkansas from being over-run by Federal troops. Walker's Choctaw troops help to defeat Federal troops in the Battle of Poison Spring near Camden, Arkansas. Then in July, they were again in Arkansas raiding the area around Fort Smith. Small raids continued through the rest of 1864 and into the spring of 1865 (Cottrell 90-93) (Milligan 115-116).

The families back on the home front in the Choctaw Nation suffered during the war. By war's end, almost one in three families was considered destitute due to lack of food. Most of the men were out fighting while the fields lay dormant. Theft compounded the food shortage. During the war, up to 300,000 head of cattle were stolen, taken to Texas, and resold at inflated prices to the Confederacy. Next to Texas, Indian Territory was a big producer of beef for the Confederacy.

As the northern part of Indian Territory became a site of increasing conflict, many Creeks and Cherokees lost their homes and took refuge in the Choctaw Nation. Law enforcement broke down. Raiders from both the north and the south took advantage and preyed upon the Choctaw Nation and its refugees. Many homesteads were raided

and towns burned. Nvnih Waiya, the first capitol of the Choctaw Nation near current day Tvshka Homma, was burned to the ground and the inhabitants were forced to flee to Fort Towson for protection (Kidwell 70-71).

The Civil War ended for the Choctaw Nation on June 19, 1865, with surrender to U.S. troops. In fact, on June 23, 1865, the last Confederate general to surrender, Stand Watie (a Cherokee), did so at Fort Towson, within the Choctaw Nation. In 1866, the five tribes of Indian Territory signed a new treaty with the Federal Government in the knowledge that repercussions for joining their neighbors in the Confederacy would be severe. The Treaty of 1866, signed on April 28, stipulated that the Choctaw Nation would give one-third of its western land to the United States. This land would be used by the Federal Government to remove more tribes into Indian Territory. The Treaty also allowed for a north-south and an east-west railroad to be constructed through Choctaw country. This allowed for more white settlers to enter into Indian Territory and Choctaw lands. At these meeting, Allen Wright, a prominent Choctaw man asked that the tribes be allowed to form their own United States territory and call it Okla Humma, "okla" meaning people and "humma" meaning red. The proposal was declined; however this is where the name of today's state of Oklahoma originated.

In many ways, the American Civil War was a trying and difficult time for the Choctaw Nation, in which leaders made hard decisions that they felt were best for the survival of the Tribe. The Choctaw Nation had "... allied themselves with a foreign government to preserve what they saw as their interests in a war between competing nations." It should be noted that the Oklahoma tribes did not surrender to the United States as part of the Confederacy, but as independent nations who were fighting for their home and their identity as a native people (Debo 80) (Kidwell 80-85) (Milligan 122).

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