

CULTURAL

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Choctaws and the War of 1812: A high point in relations with the U.S.

Part 2 of 2 (continued from January)

Some Choctaws joined the Creek War on their own initiative. Mushulatubbe preferred not to fight alongside U.S. soldiers in battle for fear that the Euro-Americans wouldn’t recognize the Choctaws as allies. In the fall of 1813, he and Talking Warrior led Choctaw war parties against the Red Sticks on the Black Warrior River, in former Choctaw territory that had been taken by the Muscogee.

Pushmataha raised a battalion of 135 men, made up of four companies of Choctaw warriors. All of its officers were Choctaw war leaders. The battalion was commanded by Pushmataha, who received a commission of Lieutenant Colonel. Men from the Choctaw battalion engaged and defeated Red Sticks on Burnt Corn Creek in Dec 1813. A few days later, the Choctaw battalion saw minor action under General Claiborne at the Battle of Holy Ground Dec 23, 1813, where a Red Stick force, low on ammunition, was routed.

In January, Choctaw forces destroyed two Red Stick towns and a fort in the Black Warrior River Valley. In February, Pushmataha lead another successful campaign in the area. By March, Choctaw war parties had swept the Black Warrior region of Red Stick forces. In March, a force of more than 400 Choctaws accompanied General Cole to Alabama heights, saw limited action for a month, then returned home for spring planting. Like many other U.S. soldiers, they did not receive payment.

In late August, Andrew Jackson wrote a letter requesting the help of the Choctaw warriors in his upcoming campaign

against British forces in the Southeast. 795 Choctaws, including Pushmataha reported to Fort Montgomery and were mustered in as regular troops. In and around Pensacola, they fought in the last skirmishes of the Creek War, moping up Red Stick warriors concealed in the swamps.

After the Red Sticks were subdued, the US, ignoring the fact that many Muscogees had fought against the Red Sticks in the war, demanded that Muscogee communities cede to the United States more than 21 million acres of land in the Treat of Fort Jackson.

In late December 1814, more than 11,000 British troupes massed in coastal Louisiana. Their intent was to capture the town of New Orleans and force an end to the War of 1812. A group of 50 or 60 Choctaws, under Pierre Juzan, left Pensacola and joined the impending battle under Andrew Jackson. For a while, the Choctaws made patrols to prevent British incursions into the American line. As the British force pushed closer to New Orleans, the Choctaws’ position was on the extreme left of the American line, at the edge of a swamp.

On December 28th, a party of 200 Tennessee riflemen under Captain Canvell, entered the swamp and came upon a British force supported by two companies. In the skirmish, the British killed Captain Canvell and several men. Suddenly, withering riddle fire began from the British rear. It was the Choctaws. They could not be seen, but their effect was devastating. The Choctaw contingent, much smaller than the American force, inflicted more than half of the casualties on the British in that engagement.

After that, the Choctaws were constantly engaged day and night in skirmishes with the British sentries in the area. One Choctaw man named Poindexter killed 5 British pickets in three nights. Ultimately, the Americans won the Battle of New Orleans, with very few casualties. The small Choctaw force played a significant role, by constantly harassing the British. This battle essentially ended the War of 1812. The Choctaws who fought in it called the engagement “Balbaha Ittibi”, literally “Foreign-Language-Speaking Battle” (Hudson 1932) after the old Choctaw name for the Mississippi River.

In December 1815, Mississippi territorial government gave special recognition to Pushmataha and other Choctaw leaders for their efforts in protecting Anglo settlements in the Creek War. Just 14 years later, Mississippi, which had by then been admitted to the Union, passed resolutions that declared Choctaw lands “state property”, and “terminated” Choctaw sovereignty, thereby making Choctaw communities subject to the state’s laws and possible attack by the militia (Hudson 1976:455). In 1830, Andrew Jackson who had called on and received Choctaw aid when he needed it most, signed the Indian Removal Act. The same year, he sent government agents into Choctaw country, who threatened the Choctaw people with unprovoked military action by the United States, if they did not agree to relinquish their homeland.

Unless otherwise noted, the above information is summarized from “The Creek War of 1813 and 1814” (Halbert and Ball 1895).



Photo provided

Raven Baker, in 1800’s style Choctaw dress, cuts sausage in preparation for the day’s meal. Behind are visitors of the park interacting with students involved in a cooking demonstration.



Photo provided by the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve

Caleb Sullivan participates in a musket firing demonstration for park visitors. He is wearing a turban and French frock coat—both were worn by Choctaw men in the early 1800’s.

Choctaw Nation participates in Battle of New Orleans reenactment

By RYAN SPRING
Choctaw Nation

On Jan. 8, 1815, a group of Choctaw warriors helped Andrew Jackson save the United States from a massive British invasion at the end of the War of 1812. Two hundred years later to the day, Raven Baker and Caleb Sullivan, two youths from the Choctaw Nation traveled to New Orleans to participate in the celebration of the anniversary of this battle.

Mentored by Ryan Spring of the Choctaw Nation Historic Preservation Department, Raven and Caleb were part of the National Park Service’s “Recognizing our Roots: Choctaw Youth Living History Program.”

Each year, this program works with Choctaw students from the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, the Jena Band of Choctaw Indians, and the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, to learn about the history of the battle and the War of 1812. At the end, students from each of the three Choctaw tribes are able to come together on the original battle site, Chalmette Battlefield, and participate in a reenactment where they portray the lifestyle of the Choctaw people who fought at that battle in 1815.

In October 2014, these Choctaw youths traveled to Jena, Louisiana, to participate in the 2nd Annual Tribal EXPO hosted by the Jena Band of Choctaw Indians. At the EXPO the students

were fitted into period clothing, learned history on the War of 1812 and the Battle of New Orleans, and instructed in military drills from the period. They were also able to see Choctaw basketry makers, potters, leather workers, finger weavers, and other artists.

On Jan. 8, the day of the bicentennial had arrived and the students were excited to begin showing what they had learned as a battle reenactment took place. Men began to construct tents, build a Choctaw palmetto shelter, gather firewood, and carry buckets of water. Meanwhile the women began to build a fire and prepare the food that everyone would be eating that day.

Soon, after the camp was set-up, hundreds of visitors began to arrive. The students now had to put their skills to the test to teach the eager visitors about Choctaw culture and history. In between musket firing drills and tending the camp, the students demonstrated stickball, teaching visitors fundamentals of the game. During downtime the youths were able to visit other camps such as blacksmiths, powder horn makers and the British camp.

If any parents or students are interested in participating in the “Recognizing our Roots: Choctaw Youth Living History Program” next year, please contact Ryan L. Spring with the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Historic Preservation Dept. at (800) 522-6170 ext. 2137 or send an email to rspring@choctawnation.com. Students must be from the ages of 14 to 17 and must be a Tribal Member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. More details will be available this September.