

TWILIGHT OF THE CONFEDERACY IN  
INDIAN TERRITORY

By Fred Hood\*

As the Battles of Gettysburg and Vicksburg in July, 1863, were pivotal in the eastern and western theaters of the Civil War, so the Battle of Honey Springs, also in July of 1863, marked the end of Confederate ascendancy in Indian Territory. In the earlier engagements of the war the Confederates had driven the remaining Union sympathizers completely out of the territory. For nearly a year the Secessionist occupation was secure. A first attempt by Federal troops to take the Indian country in the early summer of 1862 ended in failure. Beginning in October, 1862, however, the Northern force advanced slowly but victoriously. By April of 1863 Fort Gibson fell before the Union army, and after the Battle of Honey Springs the following summer, the Confederacy controlled less than half of Indian Territory.

The Union force, under General James G. Blunt, did not follow up their victory, but withdrew to the north bank of the Arkansas River. Led by Generals William L. Cabell and Douglas H. Cooper, the defeated troops retreated about twenty-five miles, and several days later took a position at Prairie Springs, fifteen miles south of Fort Gibson. Here General William F. Steele, commander of all Confederate forces in Indian Territory, assumed personal command on July 24.<sup>1</sup> He intended to wait for reinforcements from Texas under General Smith P. Bankhead, and then advance toward Fort Gibson.

The South had nearly 6,000 soldiers in Indian Territory, compared to less than 5,000 Northern troops, but the superiority of numbers was the only cause for optimism. The Confederates had less than half the artillery strength of the Federals and their

\* Fred Hood's paper here is another excellent contribution to Oklahoma's Centennial Commemoration of the Civil War in the Indian Territory, completed in his careful research and preparation of the manuscript as a graduate student in the Seminar on the subject of the American Civil War that involved the Indian nations and tribes in this Oklahoma region (History 510 Seminar), under Professor LeRoy H. Fischer, author and historian, at Oklahoma State University, January, 1963.—Ed.

<sup>1</sup> U. S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (hereinafter referred to as *Official Records*), Ser. I, Vol. XXXI, pt. 2, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1888), p. 948. Brig. Gen. William Steele, Commanding, Department of Indian Territory, Prairie Springs, 26 July 1863, to Maj. W. B. Blair, Actg. Asst. Adj. Gen., District of Arkansas, Little Rock.

gun powder was nearly worthless. The powder was "scarcely more than sufficient to drive the ball from the piece."<sup>2</sup> Some of the men were unarmed and others possessed faulty guns. Pay was eight months in arrears, clothing inadequate, and food often was lacking in quantity and quality.<sup>3</sup> These conditions, highlighted by the poor discipline of popularly elected officers, led to numerous desertions. Steele reported up to three hundred, including several officers, in one night. He complained that conditions were such that it was impossible for the Confederate troops to entrench themselves and prepare for the defense of the Texas Road.<sup>4</sup>

By early August, General Steele was convinced that "with such material and such ammunition" he was "doing well" to "avoid a disaster." He ordered Colonel A. S. Morgan to evacuate Fort Smith and move everything of value to Boggy Depot. Efforts were made to make an entrenchment north of there to stop any Union move south on the Texas Road. Confederate fears were well warranted, for on August 22 General Blunt crossed the Arkansas River with 4,500 men and eight pieces of artillery, boldly predicting that "forty-eight hours hence will settle the contest in the Indian Territory."<sup>5</sup> The Confederate force was considerably scattered. Cooper was at Briartown, Cabell had been ordered toward Fort Smith, and the reinforcements from Texas under Bankhead had not yet arrived. When Blunt approached the 2,000 Confederates under Steele, encamped near the Canadian River, they fell back along the Texas Road without giving battle. But at dusk the rear guard of the Southern force deployed for combat and fired upon the Federal troops. Blunt quickly dismounted his cavalry and ordered a flanking movement which soon routed the Confederates. The rear guard deserted Ferryville and hastened to catch up with the main body of Confederate troops, who were by now some distance away. Hav-

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197. S. S. Scott, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Fort Washita, 8 August 1863, to Lieut.-Gen. Theophilus H. Holmes, Commanding, District of Arkansas.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph B. Thornburn and Muriel R. Wright, *Oklahoma: A History of the State and Its People*, (hereinafter referred to as *Oklahoma*), Vol. I (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., 1929), pp. 346-347.

<sup>4</sup> *Official Records*, Ser. I, Vol. XXII, pt. 2, pp. 866-867, Steele, Commanding, Department of Indian Territory, Camp Soda Springs, 7 August 1863, to Blair, Actg. Asst. Adjt. Gen., District of Arkansas, Little Rock.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 957-958, Steele, Commanding, Department of Indian Territory, Soda Springs, 8 August 1863, to Col. A. S. Morgan, Commanding, Fort Smith, Arkansas, p. 961, Steele, Commanding, Department of Indian Territory, Camp Inochia, 9 August 1863, to Blair, Actg. Asst. Adjt. Gen., District of Arkansas, Little Rock, pp. 456-465, Maj. Gen. James O. Blunt, Commanding, Army of the Frontier, Fort Blunt, 22 August 1863, to Maj. Gen. John M. Schofield, Commanding, Department of Missouri.

ing marched all day, the Union force did not pursue. That night Blunt's force feasted from the Confederate provisions stored at Perryville while the darkness around them was brightened by the glow of the burning supply depot.

Harassment continued for several days while Confederate fear mounted. Steele was twenty miles from water and sixteen from suitable grass for grazing. Bankhead received orders to come to Steele's aid immediately, though he could provide only eight hundred of the two thousand troops deemed necessary. Steele now made provisions to secure better powder, as attack on Boggy Depot seemed imminent, but Confederate fear momentarily subsided when Blunt turned his troops from Boggy Depot.<sup>6</sup>

Blunt now aimed for a higher prize—Fort Smith. He left a portion of his troops at Fort Gibson and Webbers Falls, and proceeded to Fort Smith with the Second Kansas Cavalry of Colonel W. F. Cloud. At Steele's orders, Cabell was stationed at some distance from the fort, which fell to the advance guard of the Union without resistance. Arriving at Fort Smith, Blunt dispatched Cloud with six hundred cavalry and two sections of battery to pursue the Confederates. There was some skirmishing in the late afternoon but during the night Cabell continued to retreat towards Lanesport. The next day Cloud overtook the Southern force at Devil's Back Bone in the Poteau Mountains. After several hours of fighting, in which half of the Confederate troops "behaved disgracefully," Cabell's force was forced to retreat. Bankhead had been sent to the aid of Cabell, but did not reach him in time. When Cabell reached Waldron, desertion had diminished his force from 1,250 to 900. For several days after the skirmishing, "mountain Feds" and deserters flocked to Fort Smith in great numbers.<sup>7</sup>

Having taken Forts Gibson and Smith, the Northern army ceased their southward drive, and there was little military activity in the fall of 1863. In early September, Cabell and Bankhead were ordered to Arkansas, leaving only Cooper's Brigade in Indian Territory to secure Confederate interest. When Gen-

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 872-873. Acting Brig. Gen. Smith P. Bankhead, Commanding, Second Brigade, Camp Bankhead, 30 August 1863, to Capt. Edmund P. Turner, pp. 902-904. J. F. Crosby, Bonham, Texas, 30 August 1863, to Maj. G. M. Bryan, Asst. Adj. Gen., Trans-Mississippi Department, pp. 1012-1013. Steele, Commanding, Department of Indian Territory, Middle Boggy, 11 September 1863, to Maj. Thomas S. Broad, Asst. Adj. Gen., Little Rock, Arkansas; *ibid.*, Part 1, pp. 597-598. Blunt, Commanding, Army of the Frontier, Perryville, 27 August 1863, to Schofield, Commanding, Department of Missouri, St. Louis.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 604-609. Brig. Gen. W. L. Cabell, Commanding Brigade, 7 December 1863, to Capt. B. G. Duval, Asst. Adj. Gen., Indian Territory.

eral John B. Magruder, commanding officer in Texas, heard of the recent developments in the territory, he suggested a combination of the forces of Steele, Cooper, Bankhead, and Cabell to retake the two forts. But by this time the scattering of forces made this or any other offensive strategy impossible. Steele took advantage of the lull and journeyed to Bonham, Texas for a conference with General H. E. McCulloch, leaving Cooper in charge of affairs in Indian Territory.<sup>8</sup>

The Confederate force in Indian Territory reached a dangerously low point in early October when Martin's Regiment of Cooper's Brigade was ordered to northern Texas. This left a total force of only 999 white soldiers and 1,643 Indian troops in the area.<sup>9</sup> The Indians became very anxious over the depletion of white troops, feeling that their country was being left to its fate and that treaty obligations were being defaulted. The situation was eased to some extent when General R. M. Ganu was sent to the territory in late October with 2,000 men.<sup>10</sup>

The deplorable condition of the Confederate army in Indian Territory was revealed in the semiannual inspection report of W. C. Schaumburg.<sup>11</sup> The physical condition of Fort Washita was described as a "perfect wreck" and Boggy Depot "about the same." The troops were poorly uniformed and insufficiently protected against the approaching winter. Discipline was almost completely lacking. At one post when Schaumburg called on three captains to drill the regiment, each admitted incompetency to do so. The senior captain who finally made an attempt "failed most signally." Referring directly to Cooper's Brigade, Schaumburg reported that the Indian troops displayed a total ignorance of drill. Generally, the men were poorly armed, with their rifles and heavy artillery being ill kept. In addition, most officers failed to keep the required reports, and an audit demonstrated that every quartermaster had deficits for which he was unable to give account.

Due to a Federal buildup at Fort Smith, General Steele anticipated a movement from there to the Red River, and made an attempt to strengthen his command. Even with the Choctaw

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, part 2, pp. 1018-1019. Steele, Commanding, Department of Indian Territory, Middle Boggy, 17 September 1863, to Brig. Gen. W. R. Boggs, Chief of Staff, pp. 1023-1024. Crosby, Asst. Adj. Gen., Department of Indian Territory, Camp Wallie, 19 September 1863, to Bankhead, Commanding Texas Brigade.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1064-1065. Steele, Commanding, Department of Indian Territory, Camp Sabine, 9 November 1863, to Col. S. S. Anderson, Asst. Adj. Gen., Trans-Mississippi Department.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1065.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1045-1053. Major W. C. Schaumburg, Asst. Inspector-General, Trans-Mississippi Department, Shreveport, 26 October, 1863, to Boggs, Chief of Staff, Trans-Mississippi Department.

Indians recruiting feverishly, any offensive drive by the Confederates was impossible. Steele adopted the policy of "harrasing the enemy without risking an engagement of . . . (the) whole force."<sup>12</sup> Luckily for the Southern force, the Federal troops remained at Fort Smith.

Stand Watie was the only Confederate officer involved in military activity in the latter part of 1863. In late October and early November he made three forays in the vicinity of Fort Gibson. In the second of these he had less than forty men and passed within sight of the fort. He burned several houses and captured clothing "even from the very person of . . . (the) loyal women."<sup>13</sup> In November Watie planned a raid up the Neosho Valley into Missouri and in early December moved north with less than 1,000 men. En route he plundered houses of loyal Indians and burned the Negro cabins of Chief John Ross. Upon hearing of Watie's proximity to Fort Gibson, Colonel William A. Phillips sent Captain A. C. Spillman with 290 infantry to arrest the Confederate movements. On December 18 the forces engaged in combat near Sheldon's Place on Barren Fork. After an initial Federal advance, there were two hours of fighting in which neither side could gain an advantage. After staging a fake retreat that drew the Confederates out of their entrenchments, Spillman quickly routed Watie's Indians.

Characteristically, the Union did not pursue, and Watie continued his campaign. Several days later his troops were engaged in a skirmish below Cane Hill near Fayetteville, but Watie avoided a direct encounter. On Christmas Eve, the Confederate Indians camped on the bank of the Grand River, and on Christmas day they turned south. Crossing the Arkansas River three miles below Fort Gibson, the Confederates skirmished a Union scouting party but fell back. Watie succeeded in keeping the Union officers anxious about his movements for several days, but by January 4, 1864 he had returned to his camp on Cowskin Prairie, leaving only a few men to the north for the purpose of aiding rebel families moving south for safety.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1065. Steele, Commanding, Department of Indian Territory, Camp Hardeman, 1 November 1863, to Brig. Gen. D. C. Cooper, Commanding, Second Brigade, Department of Indian Territory.

<sup>13</sup> U. S. House of Representatives, "Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1863." *Executive Documents: First Session of the Thirty-eighth Congress, 1863-1864*, thereafter referred to as *Executive Documents, 1863-1864*, Vol. III (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864), pp. 340-341. A. G. Procter, Late Special Indian Agent, Leavenworth, Kansas, 28 November 1863, to Col. William O. Coffin, Superintendent of Indian Affairs.

<sup>14</sup> *Official Records*, Ser. I, Vol. XXII, pt. 1, pp. 750-751. Capt. A. C. Spillman, Commanding, Detachment of Third Indian Regiment, Fort Gibson, 23 December 1863, to Col. William A. Phillips, Commanding First Brigade, Army of the Frontier; *ibid.*, pt. 2, p. 752, Brig. Gen.

The Confederate defeats in the fall of 1863 seriously impaired relations with their Indian allies. The Federal force had been allowed to occupy the Cherokee Nation, and the Creek and Choctaw nations seemed highly vulnerable. Arms for the Indians had been lost at Vicksburg, and many other treaty obligations continued to be neglected. Watie, who was Principal Chief of the Confederate Cherokees as well as an officer in the Confederate army, was one of the outstanding spokesmen for the Indian cause. He complained that an inferior military force was allowed to occupy the country. Feeling that decisive action would result in victory, he called on the Indians to protect their own homes, declaring that the Confederacy could not or would not protect them. General E. Kirby Smith, Commander of the Trans-Mississippi Department, hastened to assure Watie that the Confederate position would be strengthened sufficiently to make an offensive drive very soon in Indian Territory.<sup>13</sup>

Many Confederate Indians had defected to the North when General Blunt offered protection to all who would desert the Southern alliance. General Steele was convinced that the Indians could be of little service to the Confederate army, but, fearing that they would be dangerous enemies if properly armed by the Union, took steps to reconcile them. Israel G. Vore, whom the Creeks had earlier requested for their agent, was sent to allay their dissatisfactions, while Commissioner S. S. Scott continued to work with the Choctaws. In a meeting of the General Council of the Choctaw Nation in early October, the Choctaws registered a formal complaint in a letter to the Confederate Secretary of War, James A. Seddon. In addition, they approved resolutions which called for the appointment of General Cooper "in exclusive command" of Indian Territory, reaffirmed their loyalty to the Confederate States, and offered more troops if their conditions were met.<sup>14</sup>

If the Confederate soldiers were relatively inactive in the fall of 1863, the same could not be said of their generals. Cooper, instrumental in the removal of General Albert Pike earlier, desired to replace General Steele as commander in Indian Territory. In August he complained to General Smith that it was unjust for him to serve under Steele, whom he considered to be his junior in rank. While Steele was absent for the con-

John B. Sanborn, Commanding, District of Southwestern Missouri, Springfield, 27 December 1863, to Brig. Gen. James Totten, Chief of Staff.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1104. Stand Watie, Principal Chief of the Cherokee, Cherokee Nation, 8 August 1863, to Hon. S. S. Scott, Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1123-1125. Samuel Garland, Principal Chief of the Choctaw Nation, 7 October 1863, to James A. Seddon, Secretary of War for the Confederate States of America, Richmond, Virginia.

ference at Bonham, Cooper strengthened his position with the Indians and many of the regular officers. In early October the War Department in Richmond was flooded with requests from these officers that Cooper be placed in command of Indian Territory. Almost simultaneously, the Choctaws passed a resolution to the same effect and Cooper filed another complaint.<sup>17</sup>

The antagonism was not all one sided. Steele reported to the Trans-Mississippi Department in late October that Cooper had failed to file the proper reports and that he had planned an unwise attack on Fort Smith without consultation. By November, Steele's attacks became more vicious. He accused Cooper of avoiding the "chain of command," of falsifying what few reports he made, and of handling his troops in a most unmilitary manner. The situation became intolerable to Steele when slurs were made on his Northern birth and he was accused of cowardice and treason. At his own request he was relieved of command of Indian Territory on December 11, 1863. Cooper, however, did not win the coveted prize, as General Samuel B. Maxey was assigned to the command in the same order that relieved Steele.<sup>18</sup> Steele was asked to remain in the territory for a while so that Maxey could benefit from his knowledge of the command. It could be possible that Cooper over pressed his fortunes, for on the same day that Maxey was assigned the command, General Samuel Cooper recommended that D. H. Cooper be given the position, even though General Steele's commission held priority.<sup>19</sup>

Maxey did not inherit a great military legacy when he assumed command of Indian Territory on December 21, 1863. The effective Confederate fighting force numbered less than 1,000, although the reports for January of 1864 listed the "aggregate present and absent" as 8,865, of which only 2,241 constituted the "aggregate present." In his first report Maxey revealed that over 1,000 of the Indians were unarmed and that there was no infantry in the territory. Maxey found the army "demoralized and disorganized, and drawn back to the Red River, where nature . . . presented no line of defense."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 387, Lieutenant-General E. Kirby Smith, Commanding, Trans-Mississippi Department, Shreveport, 1 September 1863, to Cooper, Commanding, Brigade, p. 1103, E. C. Boudinot, Delegate, House of Representatives, Richmond, 31 December 1863, to Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1076-1079, Steele, Commanding, Department of Indian Territory, Doakville, 27 November 1863, to Anderson, Assistant Adjutant-General, Trans-Mississippi Department, p. 1094, Special Orders No. 214, Trans-Mississippi Department, Anderson, Asst. Adjt. Gen.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1038, Samuel Cooper, Adjutant and Inspector General, 11 December 1863, to Davis, President of the Confederate States, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1127, Abstract from return of the Trans-Mississippi Department, Smith, Commanding, 31 December 1863; *ibid.*, Vol. XXXIV,

A man of drive and ability, Maxey sought to arrest the deplorable conditions of his new command by a general reorganization. Realizing that it would be nearly impossible to obtain an adequate white force for the defense of the country, Maxey hoped to make full use of the Indians by bringing about conditions that would place every able-bodied Indian into the effective fighting force. These troops should be organized into two brigades under Watie and Cooper. Maxey did hope to secure enough white officers to train the recruits and restore military procedures, including the filing of reports. He ordered the arrest and conscription of every unattached white man in the territory, and inaugurated a system of scouts and spies. This reorganization and revitalization was intended to produce conditions favorable to an offensive movement in the spring.<sup>11</sup>

Feeling slighted because he had once again been bypassed, Cooper's opposition to Maxey was vocal from the beginning. Cooper preferred the organization of three brigades, and the constitution of Indian Territory into a separate department, with himself in command. Cooper was further insulted when he was placed in command of all the Indian troops. Although this was intended as a promotion, Cooper regarded it as a demotion and immediately complained to the Trans-Mississippi Department. When he was informed that he would continue under the command of Maxey, he carried his protest to President Jefferson Davis, under whom he had served in the Mexican War.<sup>12</sup>

The military inactivity was interrupted briefly in February of 1864 when Colonel Phillips, commander of Fort Gibson, waged a campaign to the south. Phillips marched from Fort Gibson on February 1, 1864, with 450 cavalry, a company of infantry, and one howitzer. Reaching the Canadian River, the party scouted on both sides for several miles, burning or destroying anything that might be of value to the Confederates. Between February 5 and February 8, the Union troops encountered isolated bands of Confederate Indians and fired on them, killing a few and easily routing the remainder. The Federal force arrived at Middle Boggy on February 13, where a skirmish took place with a detached group of Seminoles and Choctaws under Colonel John Jumper. Taking only the cavalry, Phillips penetrated near old Fort Arbuckle, 105 miles from Fort Gibson. When Cooper began

pt. 2, pp. 256-257, Brig. Gen. Samuel B. Maxey, Commanding, Department of Indian Territory, Doakville, 12 January 1864, to Anderson, Asst. Adjt. Gen., Trans-Mississippi Department.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. XXII, pt. 2, pp. 1112-1113, Maxey, Commanding, Department of Indian Territory, Doakville, 26 December 1863, to Boggs, Chief of Staff, Trans-Mississippi Department.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1112; *ibid.*, Vol. XXXIV, pt. 2, p. 291, Maxey, Commanding, Department of Indian Territory, Doakville, 12 January 1865, to Anderson, Asst. Adjt. Gen., Trans-Mississippi Department.

to concentrate the Confederate forces at Fort Washita, Phillips returned to Fort Gibson.<sup>13</sup>

Upon his arrival at Fort Gibson, he reported that the campaign was "more eminently successful than any ever undertaken in the Indian country," and that the "Creek, Seminole, and Chickasaw Nations," had been "destroyed or driven out of the country."<sup>14</sup> In reality, since Phillips did not even engage a major Confederate force, the campaign was more successful for its moral effect on the Indians than as a military victory. En route Phillips distributed copies of President Lincoln's "Amnesty Proclamation" in the Indian languages and wrote letters to most of the Indian leaders, promising them "mercy, pardon, and peace" if they abandoned the war, and threatened them with sure destruction if they did not.<sup>15</sup>

At the same time Phillips launched his expedition, a council of the United Nations of the Indian tribes met at Armstrong Academy. One of the primary purposes of this meeting was to make peace with the "wild Indians" of the west who had been raiding the western part of Indian Territory and down into Texas. As it turned out, however, the council developed into a struggle concerning the Indian status in the war. General Maxey attended the council on February 5 and delivered a speech. His oration had such a profound influence on the Indian leaders that he was asked to present a written copy for closer scrutiny and interpretation. Cooper, also active at the meetings, was largely responsible for the Indians' continued support of the Confederacy. The tribes received a timely message from President Davis, who apologized for Confederate failures, and promised concessions to the Indian demands.<sup>16</sup>

The council at Armstrong Academy did not allay the suspicions of all the Indians, however, and the propaganda spread by Phillips invigorated those leaders who desired to submit to the Union. Another council, composed of seven delegates from each tribe, met on March 16 at Tishomingo, near Fort Washita, to discuss the issue. Cooper was once again active in securing

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pt. 1, pp. 108-109. Phillips, Commanding, First Brigade, Army of the Frontier, Fort Gibson, 24 February 1864, to Maj. Gen. S. R. Curtis, Commanding, Department of Kansas, pp. 111-112, Itinerary of the Indian Brigade.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pt. 2, p. 987. Phillips, Commanding, United States Forces, Indian Territory, Chickasaw Nation, 15 February 1864, to Col. D. N. McIntosh.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 958-961. Maxey, Commanding, District of Indian Territory, Fort Towson, 9 February 1864, Anderson, Asst. Adjt. Gen. Trans-Mississippi Department; *ibid.*, pt. 2, pp. 824-825. Davis, President of Confederate States of America, Richmond, Virginia, 22 February 1864, to Israel Pilsom, President of the Grand Council of the Six Confederate Indian Nations.

a decision favorable to the Confederacy, but discouragement at the general situation could be noticed in the decision of the council to enlist men for the defense of the Red River country, and not for the repossession of the Cherokee Nation. The opposition could not be reconciled as it had been at Armstrong Academy and a small group of Choctaws met at Scullyville and attempted to accept peace for the Choctaw Nation. This was realized by the Union officials, who regarded it only as an indication of future large scale defection from the Confederate alliance.<sup>17</sup>

Maxey gained a greater understanding of Indian problems from this series of tribal meetings and the personal contact he had with many of the Indian leaders. After his initial association at Armstrong Academy, he immediately sought to procure arms for the Indian troops and see that other treaty obligations were met. By April of 1864 he realized that the Indians could not fight effectively using the white man's strategy. He was now convinced that the Indian brigades could be more useful if they were allowed more freedom to make raids.<sup>18</sup>

In early April, Maxey received orders to rush all available troops to Washington, Arkansas, to aid in repelling a Union assault from Fort Smith on the Confederate force of General Sterling Price. Although he disapproved of this strategy, Maxey complied by personally taking the newly formed brigades of Tandy Walker and Geno. While in Arkansas, these troops were pivotal in the Battle of Poison Spring.<sup>19</sup> Cooper was once again left in temporary command of Indian Territory. An attack on Fort Gibson and Fort Smith had already been seriously considered by both Cooper and Maxey, and during Maxey's absence Cooper encouraged such action. William P. Adair crossed the Arkansas River in mid-April with 300 men, with the intention of attacking Fort Gibson. Although the Union force at Fort Gibson was considerably depleted by the absence of a great number of patrols engaged in securing provisions for the troops and refugee Indians around the fort, Adair was never able to attack. He succeeded in moving into the northern part of the Cherokee

<sup>17</sup> Theburn and Wright, *Oklahoma*, Vol. I, p. 356; Executive Documents, 1863-1864, Vol. III, pp. 328-329. Justin Harlan Leavenworth, Kansas, 8 August 1863, to Coffin, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Leavenworth, Kansas.

<sup>18</sup> *Official Records*, Ser. I, Vol. XXXIV, pt. 3, pp. 745-746, Maxey, Commanding, District of Indian Territory, Camp Garland, 7 April 1864, to Boggs, Chief of Staff, Trans-Mississippi Department, Shreveport, Louisiana; *Ibid.*, Vol. LIII, pp. 883-888, Maxey, Commanding, District of Indian Territory, Fort Towson, 7 February, 1864, to Anderson, Asst. Adj. Gen., Trans-Mississippi Department, Shreveport, Louisiana.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. XXXIV, pt. 3, pp. 728-729, Maxey, Commanding, District of Indian Territory, Fort Towson, 3 April 1864, to Smith, Commanding, Trans-Mississippi Department, Shreveport, Louisiana.

Nation, only to be attacked at Huff's Mill near Maysville. The Confederate force was quickly routed, losing six men, and forced to retire to the south side of the Arkansas River. When Maxey returned to Indian Territory on May 9, 1864, he expressed approval of Cooper's actions in his absence.<sup>10</sup>

Considerations of retaking Forts Gibson and Smith continued to receive Confederate attention throughout May. Although Maxey complained of having inadequate transportation facilities, he reported to the Trans-Mississippi Department that the two forts could be taken easily, but that they could not be held until the Confederacy occupied the Arkansas River area below Fort Smith. A concerted Confederate drive, which would result in the repossession of northern Arkansas and the Cherokee Nation, was visualized, but never effectively launched. In June, when Cooper prepared to attack Fort Gibson, he was constrained by Maxey, and Confederate hopes of recovering the fort were temporarily dimmed.<sup>11</sup>

A bright spot in Confederate activity in Indian Territory came with the capture of the *J. R. Williams*, a steam ferryboat. With a Union escort of twenty-six men, the craft started up the Arkansas River from Fort Smith on June 15, 1864, carrying a cargo of quartermaster stores destined for Fort Gibson. General Watie, whose scouts informed him of the boat's departure, prepared an ambush at Pleasant Bluff, near the juncture of the Arkansas and Canadian Rivers. When the steamer came abreast the three cannons concealed on the south bank, the Confederate Indians fired. The boat was disabled in the first volley, and ran aground on the north bank, where the escort fled through the woods. The captured vessel was brought across the river and the Confederates began to unload the supplies. During the night the river rose, carrying some of the cargo downstream. On the next day, a band of Union Indians appeared on the opposite bank and repeatedly fired across the river, hindering the Confederate attempts to carry the supplies up the steep bluff. Discouraged, Watie's men set *J. R. Williams* on fire, and cut it adrift. The Arkansas again rose in the night, sweeping the remaining provisions from the sandbar on which they were stacked.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 765-766, Maxey, Commanding, District of Indian Territory, Camden Road, Arkansas, 14 April 1864, to Boggs, Chief of Staff, Trans-Mississippi Department, Shreveport, Louisiana, p. 816, General Order No. 39, by Maxey, Commanding, District of Indian Territory, Fort Towson, 15 May 1864.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 819-820, Maxey, Commanding, District of Indian Territory, Fort Towson, 31 May 1864, to Boggs, Chief of Staff, Trans-Mississippi Department, Shreveport, Louisiana.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pt. 4, pp. 503-504, Brig. Gen. John M. Thayer, Fort Smith, Arkansas, 23 June 1864, to Maj. Gen. F. Steele, Commanding, Depart-

Many of the Confederate Indians deserted with a portion of the captured goods, leaving Watie with a force insufficient to defend the bulk of the plunder. Upon learning of the approach of Federal troops, Watie set the provisions on fire and retreated. The next morning there was a skirmish at Iron Bridge on San Bois Creek, after which each side marched toward camp.<sup>13</sup>

The success of these raids, militarily insignificant, seemed to have a profound effect on the morale of the Confederate Indians. On June 23, 1864, the first Choctaw Regiment of General Walker unanimously re-enlisted before their term expired and passed resolutions to work for legislation that would make military service in the Confederate army compulsory for all Choctaw men from eighteen to forty-five.<sup>14</sup> The Cherokee, fresh from their attack on the *J. R. Williams*, reassembled on June 27 at Watie's camp on Limestone Prairie and re-enlisted for the duration of the war. At a meeting of the Cherokee National Council in July, Watie proposed conscription, but the council only recommended an increased effort to procure voluntary enlistment.<sup>15</sup>

With the exception of occasional raids around Fort Gibson, there was little military activity in Indian Territory in July and August of 1864, and the last major engagements of the war came in September. The Union force in Indian Territory was small and widely scattered. The major objective of Colonel Phillips was to provide for the refugee Indians which surrounded Fort Gibson. These factors indicated that there was little probability of a Federal offensive movement, but the Confederate Indians, with fresh recruits and a desire for their homeland, were eager for action. General Gano and General Watie met on September 12 at Watie's camp and decided to undertake an expedition. On September 15 the combined force of 2,000 moved northward, and the next day they came upon a Union hay station about twelve miles above Fort Gibson. The Union troops there, commanded by Colonel E. A. Barker, numbered only 125, the majority of which were Negro infantry used in the haying operations. The Confederates attacked from five directions, and quickly dislodged the Federal soldiers who had formed in a ravine beyond the camp. Colonel Barker and some fifteen men who had horses were able to escape, but the rest were either

ment of Arkansas: *ibid.*, Pt. 1, p. 1013. Watie, Commanding, Troops on Arkansas River, Pleasant Bluff, 17 June 1864, to Cooper.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1013. Watie, Commanding, First Indian Brigade, Camp on Limestone Prairie, 27 June 1864, to Cooper.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pt. 4, pp. 684-685. Tandy Walker, Col. Second Indian Brigade, Camp Green, 23 June 1864.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pt. 1, p. 1013. Watie, Commanding, First Indian Brigade, Camp on Limestone Prairie, 27 June 1864, to Cooper; *ibid.*, pp. 1048-1047. Watie, Cherokee Nation, 11 July 1864, to the Honorable Members of the National Committee and Council in General Council Convened.

captured or killed. No quarter was given to the Negroes and only a few escaped slaughter by hiding in the ravine. After destroying the hay and machinery, the Southern troops camped on the battle ground. The next morning, General Gano sent a portion of the troops to a nearby hay station, but finding it reinforced with troops from Fort Gibson, they withdrew after a brief skirmish.<sup>16</sup>

Watie and Gano learned from prisoners that a wagon train from Fort Scott was expected soon. The 300 wagons in this train carried quartermaster and commissary supplies which were greatly needed by the Federal army around Fort Gibson. The capture of this train now became the major objective of the Confederate generals. General Gano with 400 Texans located the wagons at Cabin Creek in the afternoon of September 18, and immediately sent for Watie. He arrived at midnight, bringing the Confederate force to nearly 2,000, and prepared the attack, which began several hours before dawn. After an initial exchange of fire, the Confederates moved steadily closer to the Union lines. There was great confusion in the Union camp. Teamsters were fleeing in all directions on mules from the train, and teams, terrified by the noise of battle, were bolting and leaving wrecked wagons behind them. The Secessionist charged with renewed vigor at dawn, and soon overwhelmed the Union guard that was outnumbered more than two to one. The Federal force retreated, leaving what was left of the wagon train to the Confederates.<sup>17</sup>

The Confederates gathered those wagons and mules that had escaped damage, and destroyed the rest, burning the wagons and shooting the wounded mules. They then crossed the Arkansas River and started south with the 130 wagons and 740 mules that now made up the train. Late that afternoon, the Southern force met Federal troops from Fort Smith, who were on the way to protect the train, near Pryor's Creek. They skirmished until dark, when the Confederates stole away under cover of darkness, after having created the illusion of parking the train for the night by driving an empty wagon in a circle over a rocky place. Watie and Gano marched their men for three days and nights, and arrived at Watie's camp on Limestone Prairie on September 28, 1864, having destroyed over a million dollars worth of Federal

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. XLII, pt. 1, pp. 771-772, Capt. E. A. Barker, Commanding Company C. of Second Kansas Cavalry, Fort Gibson, 20 September 1864, to Adjutant-General U.S. Army, Washington, D.C., pp. 784-786, Watie, Commanding, First Indian Brigade, Camp Bragg, 3 October 1864, to Captain T. B. Helston, Asst. Adjt. Gen., District of Indian Territory.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 788-791, Brig. Gen. R. M. Gano, Commanding, Brigade, Camp Bragg, 29 September 1864, to Cooper, Commanding, Division.

supplies.<sup>38</sup> The Confederates had fought and won the last major battle in Indian Territory.

These victories greatly encouraged the Confederate troops in Indian Territory, and greatly aided the process of reorganization which General Maxey continued to pursue. By August of 1864, Maxey had solved the organizational question on the status of Indian officers. Many of his fellow officers, including Cooper, did not believe that Indian officers should take rank over white officers. Maxey ruled that there was no color line drawn in determining the elective rank of officers and that there was no difference between white and Indian officers of the same rank.<sup>39</sup> In addition, contrary to Maxey's earlier plans, the three brigade plan was being initiated. The Cherokee Brigade was fully organized, the Creek Brigade was in the process of formation, and no difficulty was anticipated in raising men to make up a Choctaw Brigade. The third brigade, however, was not realized until October, when three regiments were severed from Watie's command and formed into a separate unit under the command of Colonel D. N. McIntosh, who was to serve until he could be replaced by a brigadier general.<sup>40</sup>

When the grand council of Indians met at Armstrong Academy in November of 1864, General Maxey delivered by request a speech on conditions in Indian Territory. Following his three hour oration, the council passed resolutions approving the military and civil administration of Maxey. The main business of the council was to once again request the arming of Indian troops. This request had been made the previous November, but a full year later the Indians had received nothing more than another promise from President Davis.<sup>41</sup>

Maxey made a three day tour of inspection in early December. He reported that the troops were now cheerful and confident, as contrasted to December of 1863, when men were deserting in large numbers. The troops were better armed and well clothed because of captured supplies and some provisions

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 391; Marvin J. Hancock, "The Second Battle of Cabin Creek, 1864," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 4, (Winter, 1961-1962), pp. 414-436.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. XXXIV, pt. 4, pp. 698-699, Maxey, Commanding, District of Indian Territory, 29 June 1864, to Cooper, Commanding Division.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. XLI, pt. 2, pp. 1075-1079, Scott, Indian Commissioner, Towson, 23 August 1864, to Seddon, Secretary of War, Richmond, Virginia; *Ibid.*, Vol. LIII, p. 1023, General Orders No. 63, M. L. Bell, Asst. Adj. Gen., District of Indian Territory, Fort Towson, 12 October 1864.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. LIII, pp. 1026-1028, Maxey, Commanding, District of Indian Territory, Fort Towson, 12 November 1864, to Smith, Commanding, Trans-Mississippi Department, Shreveport, Louisiana.

received from Texas. But Maxey was over optimistic. In late December he complained that there was an insufficient amount of supplies for the winter, and most of the soldiers had not been paid since June 30, 1863. He tried to explain to the Trans-Mississippi Department the importance of holding Indian Territory, but it is evident in his correspondence that his main objective in desiring to retain the area was for the sake of his own reputation.<sup>41</sup>

Even under these undesirable circumstances, the Confederate forces were in no danger of attack. The Union troops in Indian Territory had diminished to under 1,500, few of these being whites. Fort Gibson suffered under an added burden of having around it 20,000 refugee Indians to feed. Conditions were so poor that General Edward S. Canby recommended that all of Indian Territory be abandoned by Federal troops. General U. S. Grant expressed the opinion that Fort Smith at least ought to be held. Colonel Phillips protested that if Fort Gibson were abandoned, the refugees would be mercilessly destroyed by the Confederates. Because of Phillips' sincere desire to help these Indians, the Union troops remained to occupy the territory until the end of the war.<sup>42</sup>

After Maxey had been assigned to Indian Territory, General Cooper had never ceased his efforts to be made commander-in-chief of all Confederate forces there. Orders from the Secretary of War in Richmond had been issued to this effect in July of 1864, but General Smith refused to deliver them, allowing them to remain on his desk. Cooper made a journey to Richmond to see President Davis in February of 1865, and shortly after Smith was informed that it was imperative that he issue the orders. On February 14, Cooper was made Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Indian Territory, and on February 21 he received the coveted position of commander of all Confederate forces in Indian Territory.<sup>43</sup>

Upon assuming his new duties on March 1, 1865, Cooper's

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1028-1030. Maxey, Commanding, District of Indian Territory, Camp of Genoa's Brigade, 2 December 1864, to Smith, Commanding, Trans-Mississippi Department, Shreveport, Louisiana; Maxey, Commanding, District of Indian Territory, Fort Towson, 31 December 1864, to Boggs, Chief of Staff, Trans-Mississippi Department, Shreveport, Louisiana.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. XLVIII, pt. 1, pp. 456-457, Phillips, Commanding, Fort Gibson, 8 January 1865, to Secretary of War, Washington, D.C., p. 291, Lieutenant-General U. S. Grant, Chief Point, Virginia, 1 January 1865, to Maj. Gen. Halleck, Chief of Staff, United States Army.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1403, General Orders, No. 7, Maxey, Commanding, District of Indian Territory, Fort Towson, 24 February 1865, pp. 1408-1409, Smith, Commanding, Trans-Mississippi Department, Shreveport, 2 March 1865, to S. Cooper, Adj. and Insp. Gen., C.S. Army, Richmond, Virginia.

immediate activity was more oriented toward Indian problems than the military aspects of his command. He tightened down on the removal of public property from the territory, and ordered government workshops to spend at least one day per week in repairing farm implements. He further assisted agricultural endeavors by issuing seed corn from government supplies to indigent Indian farmers. He made an effort to bring about civil order by restraining soldiers from "depredations, outrages and wrongs," on citizens of the territory.<sup>45</sup>

Cooper had been in command of Indian Territory just over a month when General Robert E. Lee surrendered his army at Appomattox Court House, Virginia. The news, spreading slowly over the continent, reached the territory in early May, but Cooper refused to believe the scattered rumors. He wrote to Captain T. M. Scott, "It is very strange the country should be flooded with alarming reports relative to our army east. . . . We shall proceed as if no bad news had reached us."<sup>46</sup> And so he did. On May 14, 1865 he concentrated his forces at Boggy Depot and planned a raid into Missouri. But the raid never matured, for on May 16 Cooper received notice of a peace conference being held at Marshall, Texas, and stayed his actions pending the outcome of the meeting.<sup>47</sup> Ten days later, General Smith surrendered the Trans-Mississippi Department to Major-General Canby, Union commander of the Military Division of West Mississippi. Orders were sent to Cooper on June 6, to "apply to the nearest officer of the United States Army and complete the surrender of your command."<sup>48</sup>

The stubborn resistance of the Confederates in Indian Territory had ended, but only because the "army east" had been defeated. It was three months after Lee's defeat that the last

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1412-1414, Special Orders, No. 61, Cooper, Commanding, District of Indian Territory, Fort Towson, 7 March 1865; p. 1427, General Order, No. 10, Cooper, Commanding, District of Indian Territory, Fort Towson, 12 March 1865; p. 1437, Special Orders, No. 74, Cooper, Commanding, District of Indian Territory, Fort Towson, 10 March 1865; pp. 1447-1448, General Orders, No. 12, Cooper, Commanding, District of Indian Territory, Fort Towson, 27 March 1865.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pt. 2, p. 1287, Cooper, Commanding, District of Indian Territory, Fort Washita, 10 May 1865, to Scott, Asst. Adjt. Gen., District of Indian Territory.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1303-1304, Cooper, Commanding, District of Indian Territory, Fort Washita, 14 May 1865, to Scott, Asst. Adjt. Gen., District of Indian Territory, p. 1268, Cooper, Commanding, District of Indian Territory, Fort Washita, 18 May 1865, to Col. W. P. Adair, Commanding, Indian Brigade.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 604-608, General Orders, No. 81, Col. C. T. Christensen, Asst. Adjt. Gen., Military Division of West Mississippi, New Orleans, Louisiana, 26 May 1865; pp. 1322-1323, Lieut. Gen. S. B. Buckner, Chief of Staff, Trans-Mississippi Department, Shreveport, Louisiana, 6 June 1865, to Cooper, Commanding, District of Indian Territory.

of the Confederate Indians surrendered. Details of peace and treaty making were to drag on throughout the latter part of 1865 into the summer of 1866, but the war was over.

The irony of war and the blessedness of peace had been echoed in Cooper's last official correspondence to Captain Scott in 1865: "The country is quiet, and no danger of traveling alone."<sup>49</sup>

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1024, Cooper, Commanding, District of Indian Territory, Fort Washita, 28 June 1865, to Scott, Adj. Gen., District of Indian Territory, McKinney, Texas.