

THE PLACE OF INDIAN TERRITORY IN THE COMMAND STRUCTURE OF THE CIVIL WAR

By George H. Shirk

Students and history buffs alike are familiar with the nomenclature of military organization when it pertains to familiar terms, such as company, battalion or regiment. These words, defining organized units of personnel of varying sizes, convey a familiar meaning. Yet, the Army's organization of higher headquarters, especially as they are usually designed to exercise territorial jurisdiction as well as the command of troop units, is often overlooked or treated with uncertainty.

It is essential for an army, especially in the zone of combat operations, to exercise territorial control as well as command of military units. Many problems of area-wide responsibility, such as military police, maintenance of law and order, and the like, although quasi-civilian in nature, are the responsibility of military commanders. Thus it is traditional for the higher echelons of command to exercise two responsibilities (wearing two hats so to speak), that is, territorial control of geographical area defined by boundaries prescribed by the War Department as well as the strategic, tactical and administrative control of the military personnel within such command.

Throughout the period of the War both the North and the South included the area of Indian Territory within the nomenclature of its area or regional organizational structure. It is the chronology of this type of organization, as it evolved throughout the period of the War, in which we are here interested.

At that time four categories of regional or territorial organization were in vogue, in descending order: division, department, district and sub-district. Creation, reorganization and dissolution of these commands were usually the responsibility of the next superior commander. They were dependent upon the local tactical situation as well as the personalities and the peculiarities of the individual commanders for the time being. Thus, if it were expedient for the War Department to see that two contiguous departments worked closer together, a military division would be created into which division the two departments were placed as subordinate headquarters. In like fashion, if a department commander believed the work load so required, he would subdivide his department into two or more districts with district commanders exercising territorial jurisdiction of the assigned or designated areas comprising each district.

At the outbreak of hostilities in May, 1861, there were three active military posts within what is now Oklahoma, Forts Washita, Arbuckle and Cobb. All were located within the military Department of the West with headquarters at St. Louis, with Maj. Gen. William S. Harney commanding. There was of course no parallel Confederate organization.

On 17 April 1861, the War Department ordered Col. William H. Emory, the senior officer present, to evacuate all Federal troops from the region west of Fort Smith.¹ This was accomplished in early May, and thereafter and for the duration of the War, Indian Territory was the locale for continual reorganization, change in command, and realignment of the structure of both Federal and Confederate forces.

UNION ARMY

1861

May 31. Brig. Gen. Nathaniel Lyon assumed command of the Department of the West. G. O. 5, Hq. Dept. of the West.²

July 3. Maj. Gen. John C. Fremont assigned by the War Department as commander of the Department of the West, and name of command changed to Western Department. W. D., A.G.O., G.O. 40³

October 24. Maj. Gen. David Hunter assigned to relieve Maj. Gen. Fremont as commander of the Western Department. W. D., A.G.O., G.O. 18.⁴ Hunter assumed active command November 2nd.⁵

November 9. The Department of Kansas, which included all of Indian Territory, created as a department separate from the former Western Department, with headquarters at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Maj. Gen. David Hunter assigned as Department Commander. W. D., A.G.O., G.O. 97.⁶

1862

March 11. The Department of Kansas consolidated with the Department of the Missouri to create the Department of the

¹ *War of the Rebellion, Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series I* (Hereafter cited as O. R.) Vol. I, p. 007. For a thrilling account of those hectic days see "Lieut. Averell's Ride" by Muriel H. Wright, *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* (Spring, 1901), p. 2.

² O. R., Vol. III, p. 381.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 533.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 532.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 537.

Mississippi with headquarters at St. Louis. Maj. Gen. Henry W. Halleck assigned as Department Commander, by Executive Order of the President.⁷

March 19. The District of Kansas, including Indian Territory, created within the Department of the Mississippi, with headquarters at Fort Leavenworth. Brig. Gen. James W. Denver assigned as District Commander. G.O. 7, Hq. Dept. of the Mississippi.⁸ Denver assumed command April 2.⁹

April 6. Brig. Gen. Samuel D. Sturgis directed to relieve Denver as commander of the District of Kansas. G.O. 77, Hq. Dept. of the Mississippi. Sturgis assumed command April 10.¹⁰

May 2. The Department of Kansas reestablished as a separate military department with area to include all of Indian Territory, with headquarters at Fort Leavenworth. W.D., A.G.O., G.O. 50.¹¹ Brig. Gen. James G. Blunt assumed command May 5.¹²

September 19. The Department of Kansas, including the area of Indian Territory, consolidated into the Department of the Missouri, with headquarters at St. Louis and Maj. Gen. Samuel R. Curtis commanding. W.D., A.G.O., G.O. 135.¹³ Curtis assumed active command September 24.¹⁴

November 2. "For convenience of police regulations" the Department of the Missouri divided into twelve military districts. The area of Indian Territory designated the 9th Military District. Hq. Dept. of the Missouri, G.O. 11.¹⁵

December 3. The 8th, 9th and 10th Military Districts of the Department of the Missouri (western Arkansas, Indian Territory and Kansas) combined into one command under Brig. Gen. James G. Blunt. Hq. Dept. of the Missouri, G.O. 24.¹⁶

1863

January 13. The 8th and 9th Military Districts (Western Arkansas and Indian Territory) removed from the command of

⁷ O. R. Vol. VIII, p. 806.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 832.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 853.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 858.

¹¹ O. R. Vol. XIII, p. 368.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 376.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 673.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 696.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 777.

¹⁶ O. R. Vol. XXII, Part 1, p. 809.

Blunt and made a separate command under Col. W. A. Phillips. Hq. Dept. of the Missouri, G.O. 6.¹⁷

March 10. Maj. Gen. Edwin V. Sumner assigned as Commanding General of the Department of the Missouri. W.D., A.G.O., G.O. 114.¹⁸ Sumner died March 21 and did not assume active command; and Curtis continued in temporary command.

March 30. Indian Territory separated from Western Arkansas and made a part of the District of Kansas. Hq. Dept. of the Missouri, G.O. 24.¹⁹

May 13. Maj. Gen. J. M. Schofield appointed by President Lincoln as commander of the Department of the Missouri.²⁰ Schofield assumed active command May 25.²¹

June 9. Indian Territory and part of Kansas created into the District of the Frontier, with headquarters at Fort Scott and Maj. Gen. James G. Blunt commanding. Hq. Dept. of the Missouri, G.O. 48.²²

October 19. Gen. Blunt relieved as commander of the District of the Frontier by Brig. Gen. John McNeil. Hq. Dept. of the Missouri, G.O. 118.²³ McNeil assumed active command November 2nd.²⁴

1864

January 1. The Department of Kansas, as a territorial command separate from the Department of the Missouri, is again established. Fort Smith and all of Indian Territory included within the Department. Maj. Gen. Samuel R. Curtis designated Department Commander. W.D., A.G.O., G.O. 1.²⁵ Curtis assumed active command on January 16.²⁶

January 6. The Department of Arkansas established to include all of the area of Arkansas except Fort Smith. Maj. Gen. Frederick Steele assigned as Department Commander. W.D.,

¹⁷ O. R. Vol. XXII, Part II, p. 40.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 293.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 315.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 608.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²⁵ O. R. Vol. XXXIV, Part II, p. 7.

²⁶ O. R. Vol. XXXIV, Part I, p. 1.

A.G.O., G.O. 14.²⁷ Steele assumed active command on January 30.²⁸

January 30. Maj. Gen. W. S. Rosecrans directed to relieve Maj. Gen. J. M. Schofield as commander of the Department of the Missouri. W. D., A.G.O., G.O. 28.²⁹

February 22. Brig. Gen. John M. Thayer relieves Brig. Gen. John McNeil as commander of the District of the Frontier (part of the Department of Arkansas).³⁰

April 17. All of Indian Territory and Fort Smith transferred to the jurisdiction of the Department of Arkansas.³¹

May 7. A higher headquarters, known as Military Division of West Mississippi established, to include the Departments of Arkansas (of which Indian Territory a part) and the Department of the Gulf. Headquarters were designated at Natchez, Mississippi, with Maj. Gen. E. R. S. Canby commanding. W.D., A.G.O., G.O. 192.³²

November 29. Maj. Gen. Joseph J. Reynolds assigned to command of the Department of Arkansas, relieving Maj. Gen. Frederick Steele. W.D., A.G.O., G.O. 290.³³ Reynolds assumed active command December 22.³⁴

December 2. Maj. Gen. G. M. Dodge assigned as commander of the Department of the Missouri to relieve Maj. Gen. W. S. Rosecrans. W.D., A.G.O., G.O. 294.³⁵

1865

January 30. The Department of Kansas merged into the Department of the Missouri with headquarters at Fort Leavenworth, and Dodge to continue as Department Commander of the enlarged department. W.D., A.G.O., G.O. 11.³⁶

January 30. A higher headquarters known as the Military Division of the Missouri created, under which placed the Departments of the Missouri and the Northwest, with headquarters at St. Louis and Maj. Gen. John Pope commanding.³⁷

²⁷ O. R. Vol. XXXIV, part II, p. 34.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 304.

³¹ O. R. Vol. XXXIV, Part III, p. 192.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 490.

³³ O. R. Vol. XLII, Part IV, p. 711.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 913.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

³⁶ O. R. Vol. XLVIII, Part I, p. 886.

³⁷ *Loc. cit.*

April 22. Military District of South Kansas enlarged to include all of Indian Territory with headquarters at Fort Gibson and Maj. Gen. J. G. Blunt commanding. At the same time the District was detached from the Department of the Missouri and made a part of the Department of Arkansas. Hq., Mil. Div. of the Missouri, G.O. 40.³⁸

May 17. Military Division of West Mississippi abolished and all of the area west of the Mississippi River and south of the Arkansas River organized into the Military Division of the Southwest with temporary headquarters at New Orleans and Maj. Gen. P. A. Sheridan commanding. W. D., A.G.O., G.O. 95.³⁹ Sheridan assumed active command May 29.⁴⁰

CONFEDERATE ARMY

1861

May 13. District of Indian Territory created, with Brig. Gen. Ben McCulloch commanding.⁴¹

November 22. Department of Indian Territory created with Brig. Gen. Albert Pike commanding.⁴²

1862

January 10. Arkansas, Missouri and Indian Territory organize into the Trans-Mississippi District with headquarters at Little Rock. Maj. Gen. Earl Van Dorn commanding.⁴³ The same area constituted the Trans-Mississippi Department May 26, 1862.⁴⁴

May 26. Maj. Gen. T. C. Hindman assigned as commander of the Trans-Mississippi District.⁴⁵

July 16. Maj. Gen. Theophilus Holmes assigned to com-

³⁸ O. R. Vol. XLVIII, Part II, p. 108.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 475.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 648.

⁴¹ O. R. Vol. III, p. 575.

⁴² O. R. Vol. VIII, p. 696. This order by the Confederate War Department was to be the source of much mischief. Pike used it as the basis for his position that he reported direct to Richmond, and that his command was not a part of the Trans-Mississippi. Pike consistently referred to his command as a "department" while Hq., Trans-Mississippi looked upon it as a district.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 734.

⁴⁴ O. R. Vol. XIII, p. 820.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 829. This order of Maj. Gen. VanDorn is not in complete harmony with that of the same day (I, n. 44) of the Confederate War Department.

mand the Trans-Mississippi Department. Holmes assumed active command July 30, with headquarters at Vicksburg.⁴⁵

July 28. Brig. Gen. Albert Pike relieved of command of Indian Territory by orders of Maj. Gen. T. C. Hindman.⁴⁷ Pike refused to recognize the order and in November, 1862, he was escorted out of Indian Territory under arrest.⁴⁶

August 20. The District of Arkansas, including Indian Territory, created as a part of the Trans-Mississippi Department, with Maj. Gen. T. C. Hindman commanding.⁴⁷

1863

January 8. Brig. Gen. William Steele assumed command of Indian Territory with headquarters at Fort Smith.⁴⁹ Indian Territory is detached from the District of Arkansas, and placed directly under the Trans-Mississippi Department.

February 9. Gen. E. Kirby Smith relieved Lieut. Gen. Theophilus Holmes as commander of the Trans-Mississippi Department.⁵¹ Smith assumed active command March 7.⁵²

March 2. Brig. Gen. D. M. Frost relieved Maj. Gen. T. C. Hindman as commander of the District of Arkansas.⁵¹

March 18. The District of Arkansas enlarged to include again Indian Territory, with headquarters at Little Rock and Lieut. Gen. Theophilus Holmes commanding.⁵⁴

April 24. Headquarters of the Trans-Mississippi Department moved to Shreveport, La.⁵³

July 24. Maj. Gen. Sterling Price relieved Holmes as Commanding General of the District of Arkansas.⁵⁶

September 25. Lieut. Gen. Holmes resumed command of the District of Arkansas, with headquarters established at Arkadelphia.⁵⁷

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 600. Theophilus Holmes had a long history of duty in the Indian Territory, and his name lives on in Fort Holmes, established in 1834 at the mouth of Little River and named for him.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 973.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 980, *et seq.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 877.

⁵⁰ O. H. Vol. XXII, Part II, p. 770.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 780, 787.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 798.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 794.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 803.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 830.

⁵⁶ O. R. Vol. XXII, Part I, p. 5.

⁵⁷ O. R. Vol. XXII, Part II, p. 1027.

October 14. Indian Territory removed from the District of Arkansas and organized as a separate district directly under the Trans-Mississippi Department with Brig. Gen. William Steele continuing in command.⁵⁸

December 11. Brig. Gen. Samuel B. Maxey relieved Brig. Gen. William Steele as District of Indian Territory commander.⁵⁹ On May 20, 1864 Maxey was promoted to Major General to rank from April 14, 1864.

1864

March 14. Maj. Gen. Sterling Price relieved Holmes as Commanding General of the District of Arkansas.⁶⁰

July 21. Indian Territory created by the War Department as a separate district directly under Gen. E. Kirby Smith, with Brig. Gen. Douglas H. Cooper commanding.⁶¹

August 4. Maj. Gen. J. B. Magruder relieved Price as Commanding General of the District of Arkansas.⁶²

1865

February 14. Brig. Gen. Stand Watie designated by Gen. E. Kirby Smith as commander of all Indian troops in Indian Territory. Brig. Gen. D. H. Cooper given the additional duty as Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Indian Territory.⁶³

February 21. Gen. E. Kirby Smith relieved Maj. Gen. S. B. Maxey as commander of the District of Indian Territory and placed Cooper in active command.⁶⁴

March 31. Maj. Gen. J. B. Magruder relieved as commander of the District of Arkansas by Maj. Gen. J. F. Fagin.⁶⁵

April 19. The Districts of Arkansas and West Louisiana consolidated into one district under Maj. Gen. S. B. Buckner.⁶⁶

May 18. Gen. E. Kirby Smith moved the headquarters of the Trans-Mississippi Department to Houston, Texas.⁶⁷

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1045.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1094.

⁶⁰ O. R. Vol. XXXIV, Part II, p. 1041.

⁶¹ O. R. Vol. XLI, Part II, p. 1010. This aster caused local uncertainty and was not recognized by C. G., Trans-Mississippi, until Feb. 21, 1865.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 1089.

⁶³ O. R. Vol. XLVIII, Part I, p. 1387.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1260.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1455.

⁶⁶ O. R. Vol. XLVIII, Part II, p. 1288.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1212.