

# ENGAGEMENT AT CABIN CREEK, INDIAN TERRITORY

July 1 and 2, 1863.

By ANNIE ROSSER CUBAGE

The year 1863—the year of the first engagement at Cabin Creek, in what is now Craig County, Oklahoma—was the great year of the Civil War. In that year occurred its greatest events and its most decisive battles. What came before 1863 was merely the preparation for its decisive struggles, and what came later was only the gradual lowering of the curtain on the national drama. For both governments, the year 1863 marked the high tide of military power and effort.

Let us make a brief survey of the movements and conditions which prevailed on a large scale in that discover, if we may, how the Battle of Cabin Creek fitted into the general setting—what part it had in the general scheme of things.

On January 1st, 1863, President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. On March 3rd, he signed the draft law, a law which brought on the Draft Riots in New York and threw the city into hands of the draft resisters—so nearly balanced were the forces of defeat and victory at that time—and resulted in raising only 50,000 men, though 300,000 had been asked for. On May 2nd, Lee and Jackson were engaged in the decisive defeat of Hooker in the great battle of Chancellorsville. On that day, Jackson received his death-wound, by accident, from the hands of his own men, and Lee and Stewart carried the battle to a victorious conclusion. Following the victory of Chancellorsville, Lee determined to invade northern territory once more, and by July 1st he had reached the northernmost point ever attained by a Southern army. On that day he arrived at Gettysburg. It had become the settled purpose of the Federal military policy to drive a number of wedges as deeply as possible into southern territory. Their eastern

drive, the one of prime importance to them, was aimed at Richmond, Virginia, the capital of the Confederacy. Next in importance was the move seeking control of the Mississippi River. Next came the effort to cut across Tennessee and Georgia. Last were the movements farther west which included the invasions from Missouri into Arkansas and from Kansas into Indian Territory.

The first half of the year 1863 belonged most decidedly to the Confederates. In the eastern sector, which was the most important area, the Federal forces had been driven far into their own territory, and Lee was threatening Washington from the rear. In the center, along the Mississippi, the Federal drive had been repulsed at Helena, Arkansas, and Vicksburg, Mississippi. In Tennessee, Chattanooga was blocking the Federal path to the sea. As yet little progress had been made in the effort to take Arkansas and Indian Territory.

But on the first day of July, which was the middle day of the year, there came a great change. On that day, and the two following days, Lee was defeated at Gettysburg. On that day, and the three following days, Helena, Arkansas, fell and opened the way to the capture of Little Rock and the over-running of the state. On that same day, and the three following days, Grant completed the capture of Vicksburg and opened the Mississippi River, thus cutting the Confederacy in two. And on that same first day of July and the day following, the battle of Cabin Creek was fought.

Not that this little battle signified so much in the vast machine of war which was then in motion, further than that the date of its occurrence gave it kinship with the great events of its time. As a point of contact, it had its place in the synchronized movement along that far-flung battle front which extended from Pennsylvania to Indian Territory, and it played its humble part in that comprehensive plan which, by a multiplicity of simultaneous blows, sought to shatter the superb fighting machine of the South.

Let us turn now to a brief review of the details of the first battle of Cabin Creek. For our information we have authentic records from two highly contrasting sources.

The first of these is the official report of the Federal officer commanding during the battle. It is taken from Official Records of Union and Confederate Armies and is as nearly correct as could be expected from a biased viewpoint and from one who could necessarily know only the things happening on his own side of the conflict. It reads as follows:

“Report of John A. Foreman, Third Indian Home Guards. Fort Blunt, July 5, 1863.

“Sir: In compliance with your instructions, I joined your supply train from Fort Scott, at Baxter Springs, on the 24th of June, instant (ultimo). On the 24th began the march with the train for this place. Arrived at Hudson’s Ford, on the Neosho River, the 26th instant, where we were obliged to remain until the 29th by high water, when we succeeded in crossing the train. On the 30th we discovered a trail. I immediately detached lieutenant Luke F. Parsons, of the Third Indian Regiment, with 20 Cherokees, to ascertain what had made the trail, as it was fresh. Parsons followed the trail about 4 miles, when he found 30 of the enemy, which proved to be Stand Watie’s advanced picket. He gallantly attacked and defeated them, taking 3 prisoners and killing 4. On the 1st of July we arrived at Cabin Creek, where we found the enemy in force, concealed in a thicket on the south bank of the creek. I immediately deployed my command on the right and left of the ford. Lieutenant David A. Painter, of the Second, and Parsons, of the Third Indian Regiments, on the right; Lieutenant Fred Crafts, of the First Indian, and Lieutenant Benjamin Whitlow, of the Third, on the left, Captain Armstrong, with one section of his battery, and Lieutenant Jule C. Cayot, of the Third Indian Regiment, with a mountain howitzer, coming promptly into position in the center. We opened a brisk fire upon the enemy in the thicket on the opposite bank, which we continued for half an hour. By

this time the enemy's fire had ceased, so we moved forward into the stream, which proved too deep to ford, and we were obliged to fall back.

"On the morning of the 2d, one section of Blair's battery took position on an eminence about 900 yards to the left of the ford; one section of Armstrong's battery obtained a commanding position on the right; the main column, consisting of the Indians and five companies of the First Negro Regiment, were stationed in the center. After obtaining this position, we opened fire. The firing was continued about twenty minutes, when I received notice from the look outs that the enemy were in disorder (not being able to see their movements from the creek, I had stationed a lookout or picket in some trees near Armstrong's battery). I ordered the main firing to cease and the main column to move forward. When nearly across the creek, I was wounded, and obliged to go to the rear. The column pushed on, under Colonel Williams, of the First Colored Regiment, and drove the enemy from their position. They were hotly pursued by Captain Stewart and his company, of the Ninth Kansas Cavalry. Our loss is 3 killed and 30 wounded. The enemy's loss is 9 prisoners. The number of their killed and wounded is unknown, but must be heavy."

In a general way we believe this report to be a fairly good picture of the happenings at Cabin Creek. We must remember, however, that this officer was quite human, and was under the necessity of making the best possible showing to his superior.

Unfortunately, we do not have an official Confederate Report, but we are fortunate in the possession of a bit of evidence quite unique in its form, and so naively personal and charmingly tolerant in its spirit that it causes one to wonder that it could have been produced under the trying conditions of active warfare. By this statement we refer to a newspaper published by soldiers of Lieut. Col. J. W.

Wells Battalion, Texas Cavalry, stationed at Boggy Depot, Indian Territory.

This newspaper was put up on wrapping paper, in regular newspaper form, except that it was written out in long hand by its editors. It seems to have been passed from hand to hand for the instruction and amusement of their fellow soldiers. In mock-seriousness it was given the rather important name, *Choctaw & Chickasaw Observer*, Rosser & White, Editors.

We regret that we know nothing of the history of White, not even his given name or his place of origin. Rosser was W. E. Rosser of Carthage, Texas. He enlisted at Ft. Washita, Indian Territory, June 1, 1861, and served the entire four years of the war in Indian Territory and Arkansas. After the war he settled in Washington County, Arkansas, where he taught school many years, and where his widow, Mrs. Virginia Rosser, still lives. Five of his children now live in Oklahoma.

Someone has said that a suspender buckle dug up from the ruins of Babylon would tell us more about the civilization of those ancient people than all the labored official records that had ever been unearthed. On a somewhat similar theory, every scrap of personal correspondence, and every informal record is eagerly scanned by students of the past.

With this brief explanation we reproduce here this mock newspaper<sup>1</sup> with which these two boys in their teens regaled their friends, and which served as an outlet to youthful spirits which could not find enough to occupy them in the warfare of that period. The article selected bears on the Battle of Cabin Creek, and reads as follows:

THE CHOCTAW & CHICKASAW OBSERVER.  
Rosser & White, Editors.

Boggy Depot C. N. I. T. Nov. 30  
AD 1863. Weekly \$5 pr annum,  
invariably in advance.

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<sup>1</sup>The original of the "*Choctaw & Chickasaw Observer*" is on the wall of the Confederate Memorial Hall, State Historical Building.

The Capture and Escape of Thomas B. McDaniel, of Capt. D. M. Vawters Company (C) Lt. Col. J. W. Wells Battalion, Texas Cavalry.

On the 25th day of June, 1863, Col. Stand Watie with a part of four regiments started to Cabin Creek to capture a train of Federal wagons that was expected in. And on the 29th Capt. L. E. Gillett started to reinforce Col. Watie with 240 men. On the 2nd Thomas B. McDaniel went on picket with 20 men. In a few minutes the cannonading commenced and lasted 2 hours. During that time the enemy made a desperate charge under the command of John A. Foreman, Major of the Third Indian Regiment.<sup>2</sup> T. B. McDaniel ran up to the creek and fired once at Major Foreman, but missed him and fired again and brought the gallant officer to the ground.<sup>3</sup> Then the enemy ran off some distance and the Negro Regiment was drawn up in line of battle and kept up a regular firing for an hour or more, during which time our gallant Hero was shot, severely wounded, and was obliged to lay down his arms and find some quiet place to shelter himself from the terrible hail of the enemy's musket balls.

After firing two rounds, after being wounded, McDaniel started to get up. The boys wanted to carry him, but he refused to be carried by them. About that time the enemy made a desperate charge and the few remaining Confederates were obliged to fly. In the meantime 75 or 100 Cavalry and a Regiment of Negroes crossed the creek and made a dash on our lines in the Prairie; broke the lines of the White Troops and all fled promiscuously. Later on our brave and daring soldiers lay down and began to snooze.

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<sup>2</sup>Official Records Union and Confederate Armies, XXII, series 1, p. 882.

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

Our Hero, bleeding and suffering, lay on the ground for two hours; several parties passed him by, but saw him not. He finally concluded to give up and be taken prisoner. He saw a White Trooper and two negroes who had not noticed him. On seeing him, and being asked if he was a Federal, Thomas replied that he was a Rebbel, wounded and could not get up. A man who was a Lieut. in the Negro Regiment carried Thomas up to the Fed. camps and then medical aid was given to him.

The Fed. Brigade then moved down to Rock Creek where they broused for the night. Then they moved down to Ft. Gibson, where our Hero lay in the Hospital for three weeks, during which time he was treated very well; he was visited by the Fair Sex of the Cherokee Nation and waited upon by them. On the 25th of August he was carried to the beautiful town of Tahlequah, where he was treated very well until he made his escape. But we forgot to say that on the 29th of August he had an attack of typhoid fever and was delirious the most of the time until the 30th of September, but notwithstanding all of his hardships & misfortunes he was well treated by the Cherokee Ladies. "Oh" how a beautiful young lady of the Cherokee Nation use to love to feed him and mingle her tears with his Noble Blood. The Fed. Surgeon had right to be jealous because his wife showed so much affection for the Rebbel Prisoner.

On the dark night of the 14th of Oct. about one o'clock our Hero & John Chambers made a full escape. Thomas & Chambers had made arrangements before-hand and that night they met in the graveyard, not far from the Hospital, and then they started for the Rebbel camp. They walked about 8 miles and Mrs. Chambers & a young lady brought them a gun apiece and provision. They would have come to our camps then but Thomas McDaniel was taken very sick and

was obliged to stay there. They lived in the woods there two weeks & during which time they were fed by the Ladies, Mrs. Chambers & Mr. Chamber's single and beautiful sister. They also got themselves a horse apiece and finally started home. They arrived at Col. Watie's Son's Camp near North Fork Town on the Canadian River.

On the 29th day of October, 1863, our Hero then took a party of 20 men under command of Capt. Butler & on the 4th of November started back. He visited the old Hospital where he had bled and suffered. They came in contact with a party of men, killed four (4) of them. And the following night they captured (2) men, (8) likely negroes, twenty head of horses and mules. They gave to the poor women in the Nation their bread and risked chances of getting more from the enemy. They lived on meat and did charitable deeds. Their names will dwell in the minds of those poor old ladies as long as they live.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>"Uncle" George Mayes, of Mayes County, who was an eye-witness to the events surrounding this story, gives many interesting anecdotes concerning Thomas McDaniel, whom he knew well.

It will be noted from the article quoted that McDaniel was quite a lion among the ladies. This is easily accounted for by Mr. Mayes's description of him: "He was one of the finest looking men that I ever saw — tall, dark, a wonderful physique, and very handsome." No wonder the Fair Sex shed so many tears over this dashing scout, and went to so much trouble to feed him. After the close of the war, McDaniel remained in the Cherokee Nation, where he married Nancy Hickey, of Cherokee blood. He lived at Ft. Gibson until Muskogee was built, then moved to that place. In 1906, while driving to his farm, a few miles out from Muskogee, he passed away, and was later found dead in his buggy.