

SOUTHEASTERN AMERICAN INDIANS DURING THE CIVIL WAR

American Indians participated in America's deadliest conflict. While a large number of Indians enlisted with the North, the South, by far, had the largest enrollment. After he joined his respective command, the American Indian soldier was found fighting in the Eastern, Western, or Trans-Mississippi Theaters.

After the War ended, the greater amount of historical focus was given to Trans-Mississippi Indians while those tribes found east were neglected of any significant historical attention. Authors, such as Annie H. Abel, wrote volumes concerning the struggle in the Trans-Mississippi West. However, American Indians, who were found east of the Mississippi River, have a fragmented and obscured Civil War history.

Since Southeastern Indian Confederates have been condemned to historical footnotes, it is time to take a closer look and ask some basic, but overlooked, questions. Why were these Indians in the South after removal? Why did they join the Confederacy? Who were these Southeastern Indian Confederates? Who were their white patrons? What did they accomplish? These are simple questions but profoundly revealing.

Although the majority of Southeastern Indians were sent west during the removal years, small groups elected to remain in their old homelands. Florida's Seminoles resisted removal through decades of war and earned the right to stay in the Everglades. Mississippi's Choctaws were allowed to stay because of an article provision found in the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek. North Carolina's Cherokees remained largely due to the efforts of a white man by the name of William H. Thomas. His influence was mighty among the Cherokees. And finally, South Carolina's Catawbans remained because of obscurity. The Catawbans numbers were so low that the Catawbans were barely noticed outside their reserve.

Some general reasons explain why Southeastern Indians joined the Confederacy. Tribal members may have felt compelled for an *allegiance* with Southern states. Southeastern Indians had more things in common with Southerners than Northerners. A few owned plantations like their white neighbors. With the approaching conflict, many tribes believed the United States was on the verge of *collapse*. This was not an entirely unreasonable claim. Some U.S. government officials advocated the *confiscation* of Indian lands. William Seward, the U.S. Secretary of State, openly advocated the seizing of Indian country. Many Indians were *influenced* by white Southerners. William H. Thomas was an advocate for the North Carolina Cherokee. Thomas, who studied law, supported the Confederacy and was influential among his white peers. Another reason was *neglect*. Some tribes were neglected by their representative agents or American court systems.

The Seminoles fought for decades to stay in Florida and, through warfare, earned the right to remain. As the Seminole Wars ended, from their native perspective, the Indians witnessed settlements form around their old lands, towns, and villages. Some Indians and settlers had formed “working” relations as time passed.

Andrew E. Hodges, a white farmer, apparently had a “working” relationship with the Indians. Hodges moved to Florida near Cedar Key and was a physician by 1860. By the time of the Civil War, Hodges created a home on Florida’s coast. In 1862, the same year he established a home guard, Hodges raised a company. Hodges’ Company had Seminole Indians as members, and the company’s purpose was to take advantage of the Seminole’s knowledge of Florida’s terrain. Hodges’ Company was composed mostly of Seminoles; however, the company also enrolled whites, Hispanics, blacks, and members from other tribes.

Union soldiers referred to Hodges’ Company as bushwhackers or Indian sharpshooters. Throughout the conflict, the Indian sharpshooters were credited for ambushing Union expeditions in Northern Florida. These sharpshooters would climb trees, and, from their heightened positions, they would target Union soldiers one by one. The Indian sharpshooters were credited for killing a number of Union officers.

In July of 1864, Hodges’ Company was re-organized. The former members enrolled under the leadership of Andrew McBride. From then on, Hodges’ Company was known as McBride’s Company. McBride’s Company muster roll showed the following statement, “We the undersigned, respectfully volunteer and tender our services to the Confederate States of America, begging to be immediately admitted into their armies, having chosen A. McBride for our Captain.” A list of 65 names then followed. Unique Indian names like Banana Bud, Harsh Water, and Yellow Orange made-up an eclectic muster. McBride’s Company probably continued operations until War’s end. McBride’s Seminoles quietly disbanded in 1865.

In Central Mississippi, the Choctaws formed two distinct battalions that had common members. In the early part of 1863, the 1st Choctaw Battalion was established with the endorsement of Jefferson Davis. The battalion’s first challenge came in the early morning hours of February 19th of 1863. The engine *Hercules* and its cars had crashed into the Chunky River after floodwaters undermined a bridge found along the Southern Rail Road. Nearly 100 men, mostly soldiers, were victims. The Indians, who were at a near by recruiting camp, “flew” to the scene of the accident and helped with rescue and recovery efforts.

After the train accident, the Choctaws began man-tracking. The Choctaws were known to be excellent hunters and knew the region better than any other. These skills allowed them to find wayward conscripts and army deserters hiding in Mississippi’s piney woods region and in Alabama’s northern regions.

Major John W. Pierce was the Choctaws' first commanding officer. Pierce was a white Mississippi planter and businessman. He financed the 1st Choctaw Battalion and likely procured material goods like muskets, uniforms, and haversacks. Pierce established the battalion's headquarters at Newton Station, Mississippi. At one point, the battalion numbered 101 soldiers. By March 1st of 1863, Pierce's 1st Choctaw Battalion was formed and ready for service. By the order of Lieutenant General John C. Pemberton, the 1st Choctaw Battalion was sent as reinforcement after Union forces seized a Louisiana town. Southern newspapers credited the 1st Choctaw Battalion, described as "Indian troops," for pushing back the "Yankees" during the Battle of Ponchatoula.

Major Samuel G. Spann was the Choctaws' second commanding officer. Spann was a white Alabama planter and studied law at the University of Virginia. After Pierce's Indian battalion disbanded on May 9th of 1863, Spann accepted a transfer of men from the 1st Choctaw Battalion to Spann's Battalion of Independent Scouts. Spann established an Indian recruiting camp near Newton Station, Mississippi; however, his headquarters were found in Mobile, Alabama. Later, Spann's headquarters moved to Tuscaloosa, Alabama for man-tracking operations in Northern Alabama. This particular operation was for Brigadier General Gideon J. Pillow's 1863 conscription efforts. At the insistence of Pillow, Spann's battalion was eventually re-organized as Alabama's 18th Confederate Cavalry. Spann's men eventually surrendered in May of 1865.

Jack Amos was the most famous Mississippi Choctaw soldier. He served in both the 1st Choctaw Battalion and Spann's Battalion of Independent Scouts. He mainly served as a translator. Amos' Indian name was "Eahantatubbee" which means "He who goes out and kills." Jack Amos' testimonies at the turn of the 20th century were instrumental in understanding the Mississippi Choctaws' role during the Civil War.

The Cherokees in North Carolina had discovered a "friend and benefactor" in William H. Thomas. He was a white first-generation born American and was a businessman, attorney, and state senator. Thomas grew to manhood among the Cherokees who gave him the Indian name "Wil-Usdi" or "Little Will." He was an acculturated Cherokee and sometimes referred to as a white-Indian.

On behalf of the North Carolina Cherokees, Thomas achieved a number of significant goals. As a businessman, Thomas provided the Indians much needed medical and food supplies. In his role as attorney and senator, Thomas provided the Cherokees with legal advice and political guidance.

In May of 1861, Thomas was authorized to raise a Cherokee militia. They were called Junaluska Zouaves, and their mission was to guard Western North Carolina's mountain passes. The militia was named after Cherokee Chief Junaluska—"Junaluska" translates as "One who tries but fails."

By April of 1862, Thomas was inducted into Confederate service and became captain of about “100 Cherokee warriors and 12 backwoodsmen.” Eventually Captain Thomas mustered two Indian companies with over 200 Cherokees. By September of 1862, Thomas was promoted to colonel and had several regiments of American Indian and white soldiers totaling 1,125 men. Thomas’ regiment was known by three designations—Thomas’ Legion, Regiment of Indians and Highlanders Legion of North Carolina, and the 69th North Carolina Regiment.

Thomas’ Legion was based in East Tennessee where the population was not totally committed to the Confederacy. Much work was done enforcing conscription at the displeasure of Thomas’ soldiers. Although records are not explicit, Cherokees, like the other tribes, might have performed man-tracking operations.

One particular engagement became infamous. At Baptist Gap, Tennessee in September of 1862, Thomas’ Legion, in their first major battle, skirmished with Union soldiers as they attempted to pass through Powell’s Valley. When the Indians’ lieutenant, John “Astooga Stoga,” was killed, they became enraged. Before the Indians could be restrained, they scalped a number of wounded and dead soldiers. The Union considered this an atrocity. Thomas’ Legion made an “ample apology” after the incident.

John “Astooga Stoga” was a prominent Cherokee tribal member. His last name, “Astooga Stoga,” translates to “Standing in the doorway.” He was a Christian who helped get the bible translated into the Cherokee language shortly before the War. His prominence among his people surely fueled the Indian soldiers’ retaliation on the day that he died.

After the Cherokee soldiers long struggle, Thomas’ Legion surrendered on May 10th of 1865. The legion parleyed and ended their rebellion at Waynesville, North Carolina. Thomas’ Legion was paroled, and the soldiers soon returned to their Blue Ridge Mountain homes.

South Carolina’s Catawba population was miniscule compared to other Southeastern tribes. Although population estimations are imprecise, Florida’s Seminoles had about 150 members. Mississippi’s Choctaws were estimated to have 2,068 Indians in 1855. North Carolina’s Cherokees had a count above 2,000 members. South Carolina’s Catawbas only had 55 men, women, and children at the outbreak of the Civil War.

In 1861, Cadwallader Jones, a white planter, was elected as captain in a volunteer company known as the Indian Land Guards. The company would later be designated as Company H of the 12th South Carolina Infantry Regiment. Jones’ company served in the Peninsula Campaign, the Second Battle of Bull Run, Antietam, and Petersburg. Their defining moments were at Bull Run and Antietam. The Catawbas also served in the 17th South Carolina Infantry Regiment. They, too, were at Antietam. In the 5th South Carolina Infantry Regiment, three Catawbas were known to be enrolled, but their service details are not known.

Only 19 Catawba Indians served. Their names were: Jeff Ayers, John Brown, Frank Canty, William Canty, Bob Crawford, Billy George, Gilbert George, Nelson George, Allen Harris, Epps Harris, Jim Harris, John Harris, Peter Harris, Jr., Bob Head, James Kegg, Robert Marsh, John Sanders, John Scott, and Alexander Timms. These men ultimately served in three infantry organizations—5th, 12th, and 17th South Carolina Infantry Regiments.

The Catawba were not the largest of the Southeastern tribes, yet they were the most committed, determined, and loyal of all American Indian Confederates. Several members returned to service after being wounded. Few returned home after the end of the War. Apparently, these Catawbas did not have Indian names that were known.

When the American Civil War commenced, several Indian tribes were still found in the South. They were Florida's Seminoles, Mississippi's Choctaws, North Carolina's Cherokees, and South Carolina's Catawbas. After the majority of the Indians removed in the 1830s, many remnant Indian tribes still persisted in their old homelands. They stayed behind because of *warfare*, *treaty articles*, *patron influence*, and *obscurity*. The main reasons that help explain why the Southeastern Indians sided with the Confederacy were *allegiance*, *collapse*, *confiscation*, *influence*, and *neglect*. In the South, some Indians had patrons who looked out for their welfare. The white patrons who influenced the Indians during the War were Andrew Hodges, Andrew McBride, Samuel G. Spann, John W. Pierce, William H. Thomas, and Cadwallader Jones. Some of the Indians' wartime accomplishments included *rescue and recovery*, *tracking*, *guiding*, and *skirmishing*. All four tribes mentioned still reside in their "home" state. In concluding, this article's goals revealed some insight concerning these ignored events of the Civil War. This story was a small part of the whole, yet it is a big part of America's heritage and history.

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