

The Delaware: Warriors for the Union

The Delaware tribe provided valuable troops and expertise to the Union cause in the West, but it didn't make any difference after the war.

By Deborah Nichols and Laurence M. Hauptman (Civil War Times at Historynet.com)

It was April 16, 1861, four days after secessionists bombarded Fort Sumter in South Carolina. Colonel William H. Emory, commander of Union forces in Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma), began to fear attacks on his forts by nearby Arkansas and Texas secessionists. So he withdrew his troops from Forts Wa****a and Arbuckle on the Texas border, and Fort Smith in Arkansas, and concentrated them at Fort Cobb, far enough to the northwest to reduce the risk of an ambush. From there, without any orders to engage secessionist troops, he struck out at an approaching contingent of Texas Mounted Rifles. His swift action preempted a would-be Confederate assault.

Delaware Scouts

Emory could not take credit himself for seizing the initiative. He would not have known in advance about the approaching Rebels had it not been for Black Beaver, a Delaware Indian scout who had volunteered his services to the Union. Black Beaver, reported Emory, "gave me the information by which I was enabled to capture the enemy's advance guard, the first prisoners captured in the war."

The Delaware scout then guided Emory's troops and their Confederate prisoners to Fort Leavenworth in northeastern Kansas. They finally completed the 500-mile march across open prairie on May 31. Despite the danger of the mission, the force arrived at the fort "without the loss of a man, horse, or wagon, although two men deserted on the journey." Emory again had Black Beaver to thank.

Black Beaver and other Delaware Indians of Kansas and Indian Territory made significant contributions to the Union war effort in the Trans-Mississippi Theater. Although some bands of Delawares had fought against the United States in the past, the Delawares had a long history of allegiance to the government. Now, uncertain conditions faced by Delawares in southwestern Indian Territory and eastern Kansas led their men to enlist in the Union army. Of a total of 201 eligible Delaware males between the ages of 18 and 45, 170 volunteered for service in 1862.

Enlistment meant joining forces with local civilian and military personnel who desired and plotted the Delawares' removal from Kansas. For the Delaware recruits, the situation became tolerable only because they often went into battle under the command of their own outstanding leaders, chief among them being Black Beaver and a man known as Captain Falleaf. Both are mentioned frequently in the records of the Civil War in the Trans-Mississippi West, but their remarkable exploits are little known to students of the Civil War.

The Delaware People

The Delaware, also known as the Lenape or Lenni Lenape, were originally a Mid-Atlantic coastal people. Their homelands included what is now New Jersey, Delaware, southeastern Pennsylvania, and southeastern New York. From their first contact with Europeans in the early 1600s, their existence was threatened by disease, wars, and Colonial and U.S. policies. Delaware communities were relentlessly uprooted and forced to move west through Ohio, Indiana, Missouri, Arkansas, Texas, Indian Territory,

and Kansas. Some Delawares went to Wisconsin, and others to Ontario, Canada.

By the time of the Civil War, two distinct Delaware communities had evolved. A band of nearly 500 "Absentee Delawares," who had broken away from the main group in the late 1700s, drifted southwestward through Missouri, Arkansas, and Texas. A second, larger band that represented the main historic body of the tribe was removed from southwestern Missouri in 1829 to lands near Fort Leavenworth in Kansas.

The Absentee Delawares were moved in 1859 to land known as the "Leased District" in the Wichita Indian Agency in Indian Territory. Black Beaver was a member of the Kansas tribe, but acted as chief of the Absentee band. Falleaf was a member of the Kansas community. (Both tribes exist today in Oklahoma; one is headquartered at Anadarko, and the other at Bartlesville).

Continuing West

As the Delawares moved west, they became more acquainted with the goods, weapons, and customs of white people. They began selling furs to traders in exchange for much-desired cloth, guns and ammunition, saddles, jewelry, face paint, and household items. The Delawares' fur-trade experience made them much sought-after as trappers in the Rocky Mountains by the American Fur Company.

In the 1840s, after the decline of the Rocky Mountain fur trade, Delawares worked as guides, scouts, interpreters, and hunters for western explorers, military and surveying expeditions, and wagon trains on the overland trail west. They were often recruited to serve as liaisons and cultural mediators with other Indians who were less inclined to deal peacefully with the government.

By the early 1850s, the rampaging frontier had once more caught up to the Delaware people. In 1854, building lots were laid out on Indian lands near Fort Leavenworth, even though no treaty regarding this Delaware land had been signed and no land company had obtained legal title to the ground.

Bleeding Kansas

In many ways, the pressure on the Delaware people was the direct result of sectional conflict. From the time Kansas became a territory in 1854, pro- and anti-slavery forces battled over its political future in a contest that became known as "Bleeding Kansas." The Delaware, Shawnee, Wyandotte, and other immigrant tribes found themselves dragged into the conflict surrounding them. When free-state forces in the town of Lawrence, Kansas, were surrounded by an estimated 1,500 pro-slavery men in December 1855, the Delaware and Shawnee offered their warriors to defend the town.

As each side in the "Bleeding Kansas" struggle encouraged settlement by its supporters, Delaware lands were overrun. By 1857, more than 1,000 white people were trespassing on the Delaware Reserve. The following year, Delaware leaders complained to U.S. authorities: "Thieves have come in and are constantly stealing our horses, and in many instances have stripped some of our people of almost everything they owned."

As early as 1856, many rural Indians found it prudent to take refuge in nearby towns to avoid the roaming bands of "border ruffians" who preyed on unfortunate travelers and isolated cabins. In one incident that year, a group of pro-slavery rangers captured four free-state men on the road between Leavenworth and Lawrence, Kansas. They took their prisoners toward Kansas City, Kansas, to the house of Tonganoxie, a Delaware who had fled the dangerous area. The pro-slavery men took over the house

and held their prisoners there until almost midnight. Then they marched the men back toward Leavenworth. Only two miles from Tonganoxie's house, they began shooting, killing one man and wounding two. Tonganoxie must have been very grateful that he had not been at home.

A year earlier, the U.S. government had requested that the Delawares remain neutral in the sectional conflict. Caught between two growing fires, they were forced to choose sides by 1861.

Black Beaver

Black Beaver chose the Union. By the time of the Civil War, Black Beaver -- Suck-tum-mah-kway -- was a prominent Delaware and one of the most accomplished Indian scouts in North America. Born in Belleville, Illinois, in 1806, he was the son of a chief, Captain Patterson. In 1834, he served as a guide and interpreter for U.S. Army officers in dealings with the Comanche, Kiowa, and Wichita Indians on the upper Red River in Arkansas. For 10 years in the 1830s and 1840s, Black Beaver worked for the American Fur Company. In the era of the mountain men, wrote Southwestern explorer Randolph Marcy, Black Beaver "visited nearly every point of interest within the limits of our unsettled territory. He had set his traps and spread his blanket upon the headwaters of the Missouri and Columbia; and his wanderings had led him south of the Colorado and Gila and thence to the shores of the Pacific in Southern California."

When the Rocky Mountain fur trade declined in the 1840s, Black Beaver turned to guiding wagon trains west. During the Mexican War of the late 1840s, he raised a company of Delawares and Shawnees known officially as Black Beaver's Spy Company, Indian, Texas Mounted Volunteers. He was captain of the company. After the war he continued to serve the U.S. Army under contract as a scout.

In the 1850s, Black Beaver and other Delawares were employed as guides and interpreters at Forts Arbuckle and Cobb. In 1858, Black Beaver served as a guide for Douglas Cooper, a future Confederate colonel, while Cooper was a federal agent for the Chickasaws. The well-traveled Indian scout reportedly spoke English, French, Spanish, and about eight different Indian languages, and could also use Plains Indian sign language.

Joining The Union

At the start of the Civil War, Black Beaver was in his 50s, well-respected, and leading a comfortable life on his farm near Fort Arbuckle. According to the local Indian agent, Black Beaver had the most substantial residence on the reservation: "a pretty good double log house, with two shed rooms in the rear, a porch in front and two fireplaces, and a field of forty-one and a half acres inclosed with a good stake-and-rider fence, thirty-six and a half of which have been cultivated." The scout-turned-farmer was employed as the interpreter for the Wichitas, working for Indian agent Matthew Leeper.

When Black Beaver sided with the Union, he made a costly decision. Rebels seized his cattle, horses, and crops, and destroyed his farm. They also placed a contract on his head, making it impossible for him to return home during the war. Until his death in 1880, Black Beaver attempted without success to secure compensation for the sizable losses -- estimated at about \$5,000 -- he had suffered while in Federal service. Well into the 1880s, his daughter, Lucy Pruner, was still trying in vain to collect the monetary damages promised her father more than 25 years before.

Late in the Civil War, Union officials invoked Black Beaver's name to win support from the Wichita chief Tusaqueh and from other leaders in southern Indian Territory. Union agent E.H. Carruth invited

Tusaqueh or his delegates to come to Kansas to meet with him. "Your friend Black Beaver will meet you here and we will drive the bad men who entered your company last spring," he said. "The Texans have killed the Wichitas: we will punish the Texans." Throughout the war, both Confederate and Union dispatches indicate Black Beaver's continuing role as a valuable Union scout.

Official

The Delawares officially took sides in the war before the end of 1861. On October 1, 1861, the Leavenworth Daily Conservative printed a statement from the Delaware chiefs -- Anderson Sarcoxie, John Conner, and Neconhecon -- meant to encourage the Unionist Indians in Indian Territory: "We, the Chiefs of the Delawares, promise and obligate ourselves to lend the whole power of the Nation to aid and protect such tribes as may be invaded.... We will permit no other Nation to war against the Union with impunity."

When Major General John C. Frémont took command of the Union Western Department, he sought out the Delawares because they had served well with him on antebellum expeditions and had fought in the Mexican War. He recruited Captain Falleaf to raise a company of Delawares, and on October 4, 54 Delaware men were mustered into service, awaiting orders at Fort Leavenworth.

Captain Falleaf and his men traveled from Kansas City with the Kansas Brigade of the anti-slavery politician-turned-soldier James Henry Lane. A correspondent of Harper's Weekly visited Lane's camp at Humansville, Missouri, and the Delaware camp a few hundred yards away. There he found Falleaf -- Panipakuxwe, or "he who walks when leaves fall" -- who was stretched out comfortably before the campfire, "inhaling tobacco-smoke from the handle of his [pipe] tomahawk." He noted that the Delawares were armed with tomahawks, scalping knives, and rifles.

Falleaf

The Delawares arrived at Frémont's camp near Springfield, Missouri, on October 29, a few days before an anticipated battle between Frémont's troops and those of Confederate Brigadier General Sterling Price. But Frémont was relieved of his command for proclaiming the emancipation of slaves in Missouri without approval from President Abraham Lincoln, and Falleaf and his Delawares escorted the general back to Sedalia, Missouri. There, the Delawares held a war dance at Camp Falleaf, named in honor of their leader. With Frémont leaving, the Delaware recruits, who were deeply loyal to the general, refused to serve any longer. Frémont discharged them and they returned home to Kansas. Delaware military involvement in the war was temporarily on hold.

Among the Delawares, Falleaf held the title of "captain," a traditional honor that dated back at least to the 1700s. Warriors were under the command of captains, especially in times of war, and did nothing without their consent. (Black Beaver was a captain, too, but his name usually appears without the title.)

By 1862, Falleaf was approximately 55 years old. He had sharpened his leadership abilities as a guide, army scout, and trapper. In 1858, he was employed as a guide for seven companies of soldiers commanded by Colonel Edwin V. Sumner in a U.S. Army expedition against the Cheyenne. While pursuing the Kiowa and Comanche near Bent's Fort in 1860, Falleaf's rifle accidentally discharged, disfiguring his face. The next year, he once again served as a guide, this time for three companies of soldiers under Major John Sedgwick, a future Union general.

Deterioration

Conditions deteriorated for the Unionist Indians in Indian Territory during the fall of 1861, and pro-Union tribal groups began moving to friendlier territory. In December of that year, Creek Chief Opothleyahola led a large group of pro-Union Indians to Kansas, fighting their way northward through the Indian Territory. With him were at least 111 Delaware refugees and James McDaniel, a Cherokee political ally of pro-Union Cherokee Chief John Ross. In January 1862, the Delaware chiefs loaned McDaniel \$125 to enable him to remove his family from the pro-Confederate Cherokee Nation to the Delaware Nation until he could return home in safety.

The disruption and violence the Civil War was causing in the Indian Territory concerned William Dole, U.S. commissioner of Indian Affairs, and in January 1862 he requested that Indian agents "engage forthwith all the vigorous and able-bodied Indians in their respective agencies." Dole set out the provisions to be supplied to the Indian troops: "a blanket, a proper ration of salt, fresh beef or fresh pork, corn or corn meal, and wheat flour be provided each recruit; that one interpreter be hired for every 150 Indians mustered into the service; and that arms be furnished to all who do not prefer to use their own." Dole hoped to assemble 4,000 Indian soldiers ready for service.

By March 1862, Dole had convinced the War Department to detail two regiments of volunteers and 2,000 loyal Indians from Kansas to accompany thousands of impoverished Indian refugees back to their homes in Indian Territory. On May 2, 1862, Brigadier General James G. Blunt took command of the Department of Kansas. Blunt endorsed Dole's plan for an "Indian Expedition," sped up the organization and moved up the departure date. He chose Colonel William Weer of the 10th Kansas Infantry to command the force.

Home Guards

The expedition's first regiment -- the 1st Kansas Indian Home Guards -- filled rapidly with loyal Creeks and Seminoles. The second regiment, Colonel John Ritchie's 2d Kansas Indian Home Guards, took longer. Ritchie had gone south to recruit Osages, but internal feuding between local Indian Affairs personnel retarded recruitment efforts. Also a problem was the multi-tribal makeup of the 2d Indian Home Guards, which was composed of Delaware, Kickapoo, Osage, Shawnee, Seneca, and members of some of the Five Civilized Nations (Cherokee, Seminole, Creek, Choctaw, and Chickasaw).

Within one week, Falleaf was actively raising Company D of the 2d Kansas Indian Home Guard, some of whom had already arrived at the Union camp in Leroy, Kansas. With Falleaf's help, Ritchie recruited the Indians around Big Creek and Five Mile Creek, Kansas, in June 1862. At its height the unit fielded 86 mounted men. None of them would ever be reported killed or wounded in action, although 11 would die of disease and nine would be listed as deserters in the regimental books.

Fort Gibson

The First Federal Indian Expedition headed south at dawn on June 28. Ritchie's 2d Home Guard still had only 500 to 600 men, compared to more than 1,000 in the 1st Indian Regiment. About half marched on foot, and half were mounted.

On July 3, Colonel Benjamin Weer's 200 to 300 Union troops surprised Colonel James J. Clarkson's Confederate Missourians at Locust Grove, Indian Territory. Clarkson and 110 Confederates were captured, 100 were killed, and a large amount of ammunition and provisions were seized. Some

Confederate Indian soldiers, especially Cherokees, deserted and enlisted in Colonel Ritchie's 2d Kansas Indian Home Guards.

The expeditionary force pressed on, launching a successful two-pronged assault against Confederates on July 16 near Tahlequah, the capital of the Cherokee Nation, in eastern Indian Territory, and capturing Tahlequah itself. Next the force seized Fort Gibson, to the southeast, on July 18. There, according to the July 15 Leavenworth Daily Conservative, Ritchie, with 300 of his own 2d Indian Regiment and one company of the 6th Kansas Cavalry had a brush with Cherokee Confederate Colonel Stand Watie's men. Ritchie spoke of his Union Indian troops in glowing terms, stating that they "make good soldiers, easily controlled, and they conduct and deport themselves well generally...."

Skirmishing

Taking possession of Fort Gibson had been the prime objective of the First Expedition. After this initial success, however, the expedition's fortunes soon changed. Weakened by internal bickering and poor leadership, exhausted by the summer heat, and running low on salt and other supplies, the Federal invasion ground to a halt. Colonel Weer was removed from command, and Colonel R.W. Furnas was left in charge of the Indian Brigade.

Furnas sent out 300 to 400 troops to scout the area between Tahlequah, Fort Gibson, and Parkhill. On July 27, at nearby Bayou Manard, the troops encountered an equal force of Watie's Choctaw-Cherokee Regiment, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Thomas F. Taylor. Taylor, Captain Hicks, and two Choctaw captains were killed. Total Confederate losses were estimated at 36 dead and more than 50 wounded.

This battle was probably the one Falleaf described when he wrote to Washington, D.C., attempting to collect pay owed to him and his men for their service. He wrote, "We saw the enemy, the Chocktaw Indians, the halfbreed, we play Ball with them, 50 we laid on the ground, 60 we took prisoners, even the Chocktaw General, him I took myself alone; he was a big secesh; 100 union men he had killed. I brought him to the [Unionist] Cherokees [and] they killed him; they gave him no time to live."

Falleaf Leaves

After the Fort Gibson expedition, the 2d Indian Home Guard remained attached to the Department of Kansas and participated in Blunt's campaigns in Missouri and Arkansas. During a September 20 engagement at Shirley's Ford on Missouri's Spring River, Ritchie was, for the first time, unable to control his men. For some reason, the men of the 2d Home Guard began fighting with other Union troops. Ritchie blamed the confusion on a stampede of 1,500 women and children who had crowded into camp for protection. Nevertheless, he lost his command over the incident.

Before his dismissal, Ritchie gave Falleaf a medical furlough. When Falleaf left for Kansas, his men followed him. To these Delawares, war party leadership took precedence over any and all Union military regulations. They needed their "captain" to interpret orders and direct them in battle.

Trouble At Home

After returning home, Falleaf's Delawares left to hunt buffalo. Soon, the men of Falleaf's company were classified as deserters. For more than a year, Falleaf, aided by the Indian agent in Kansas, attempted to straighten out the mess. Eventually, General Blunt accepted Falleaf back as a scout, and the Indian

leader served in campaigns against the Cheyennes and Arapahos. Some of his men were allowed to join the 6th and 14th Kansas Cavalry, and others became scouts for the 15th Kansas.

From 1863 on, Falleaf had to contend less with the army and more with tribal matters at home in Kansas. Life for the Delawares in Kansas had deteriorated badly during the war. They were harassed by bushwhackers, who, according to oral history, "robbed them and then shoveled live coals from the fireplaces onto their mattresses, setting fire to their cabins."

Writing in September 1863, Indian agent John G. Pratt described the Delawares' plight: "The Delawares are affected by the unsettled conditions of the country. Many of them are in the army. Their families are consequently left without male assistance."

After The War

By the end of the war, Interior Department officials were, as the Indians had long expected, advocating removal of the Delawares from Kansas. In two treaties, signed in 1866 and 1867, tribal leaders agreed to sell their lands in Kansas and move to the Cherokee Nation, purchasing Cherokee citizenship rights. Kansas and Washington politicians, traders, and railroad officials profited greatly from the deal. John C. Frémont, friend of the Delawares and now a railroad magnate, was one of the profiteers.

As the outspoken leader of the traditionalists within the Delaware community, Falleaf actively protested his tribe's move to the Cherokee Nation. With his faction of nearly 300 Delawares, he resisted, holding out for nearly six months and facing starvation before agreeing to leave Kansas. Finally, he agreed to move his wife and family to Indian Territory, where he died in the late 1870s.

Black Beaver lived his remaining years at Anadarko as an Absentee Delaware surrounded by Caddos in southwestern Indian Territory. The former rugged mountain man died in 1880, shortly after he had become a Baptist minister.

Source: Civil War Times at Historynet.com (<http://www.historynet.com/warriors-for-the-union-cover-page-february-1997-civil-war-times-feature.htm>).