

Stand Watie

It was horror in the hills when Union forces tried to cope with the Confederacy's Red Fox. The hills were in Indian Territory, and the Red Fox was Stand Watie, the last general of the Confederacy to surrender his command at the close of the War Between the States.

On the western boundary of the bloody Civil War, there were not the heavy populations, the pageantry, or the drums and bugles that marked battles won or lost in the East. There was no daily newspaper account of a Gettysburg or the burning of an Atlanta. But the Battle of Big Cabin, the Battle of Springs Creek, and the burning of Perryville were fierce, bloody battles with heavy casualties. Almost no prisoners were taken by either side. Streams in the midst of the battles ran red with the blood of the dead and wounded. The men in blue and those in gray died by the hundreds. Considering the sparse population and smaller numbers of men involved in battle, the results of the Oklahoma fights showed higher casualty percentages.

Civil war was not new to Stand Watie. The Cherokee Nation had been torn by blood lines into two factions for several decades. The full-bloods were led by a mixed-blood chief, John Ross. The mixed-bloods — some of the most intelligent, best-educated, and aristocratic of the Cherokees — followed the leadership of four members of one Cherokee family. They were Major Ridge, his son John, Stand Watie, and his brother, Buck Watie. Buck used the name Elias Boudinot, a name given him by his white supporter. Boudinot was the brilliant editor of the Cherokee Phoenix, the newspaper printed in both the English language and in Cherokee, using the alphabet invented by the beloved Sequoyah.

The lines between the two Cherokee factions were drawn by blood and by the issue of the removals. Boudinot, the Ridges, and Stand Watie believed that removal was *inevitable*. Although they did not want to leave their beloved Southern homes, they wanted to get the best deal possible for the Cherokees. On the other hand, Ross and his faction simply refused removal under any condition. When members of the Watie faction signed the Treaty of Echota, John Ridge said, "I felt as though I was signing my own death warrant." And he was right! Several years



later, an assassination squad of full-bloods killed Boudinot and both of the Ridges. Stand Watie escaped only because he learned of the other killings and was warned that he, too, was marked for death.

The bitterness between the two factions intensified. Not even the common sufferings and tragedies of the Trail of Tears could abate the

anger. The two decades between the removals and the War Between the States did little to eliminate the hate between Watie and Ross. Hatred between the mixed-bloods and the full-bloods lined nearly every face in the Cherokee Nation.

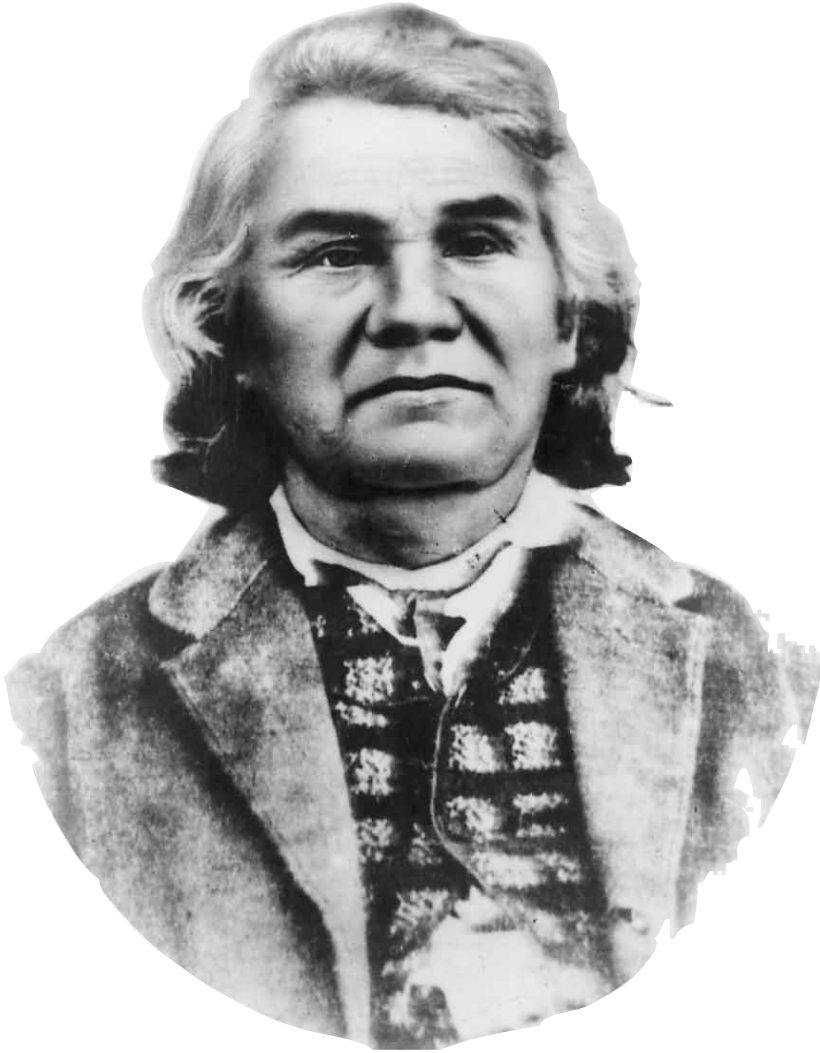
Murders of faction leaders continued in Indian Territory. In 1846, the Ross faction killed another of Stand Watie's brothers and some of Watie's supporters. Watie's brother-in-law, John Walker Candy, wrote to Watie, who was in Washington. He said that murders were so *numerous* in the Cherokee land that news of the killings carried no more interest than that of the death of a stray dog.

Watie knew that someone must pursue peace in the nation. When he returned from Washington, he went to Chief John Ross to attempt to *negotiate* some course of

action to bring about peace. He felt that the killings were bringing too much sorrow and misery to the whole nation.

Watie also knew that peace among the Cherokees was necessary because he could see the signs of the coming Civil War. Both Watie and Ross worried about the effects of the conflict upon the Indian nations west of the Mississippi River.

Ross lived in a grand style both before and after the removals. His *plantation* contained more than a thousand acres worked by more than a hundred slaves. Yet he felt no kinship with or loyalty for the Southern



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planters who had driven him from Georgia. He was a reluctant son of the Confederacy.

Stand Watie's home was not as impressive or grand as that of Ross, but he had a large new home and lands that were prosperous. He was a generous host, and his home was usually thronged by welcomed guests and by members of his own large family. Watie was an enthusiastic supporter of the Southern cause, joining in the conflict early by forming his own troop of Cherokee Rifles and assuming its command.

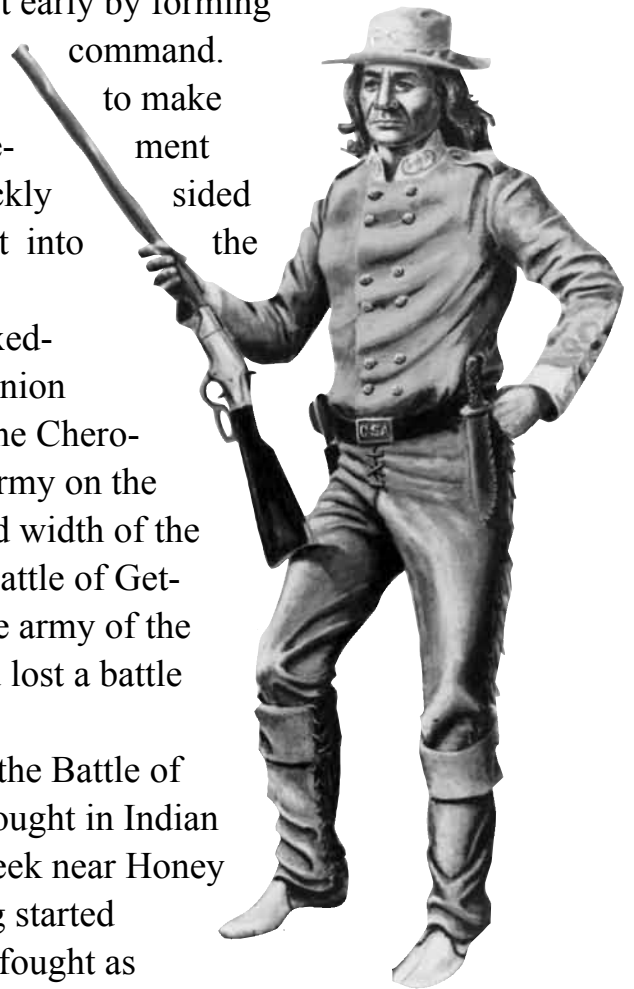
Stuck in political issues, Ross sought ways to make the Cherokee Nation secure without major involvement by the Cherokees themselves. However, Watie quickly sided with the South. With his Cherokee Rifles, he went into the battlefield.

Watie and his horse-mounted soldiers, mostly mixed-bloods, waged guerilla warfare against the superior Union forces. Although they often were greater in number, the Cherokees did not have the *artillery* to fight army-against-army on the battlefield. For four years, Watie fought the length and width of the eastern half of Oklahoma. On the same day that the Battle of Gettysburg waged in the East, Watie, then a colonel in the army of the Confederacy, and 1,500 Cherokee soldiers fought and lost a battle with Union troops headed for Fort Gibson.

Watie retreated, and then two weeks later, fought the Battle of Honey Springs, the most important Civil War battle fought in Indian Territory. The two armies met on the banks of Elk Creek near Honey Springs, about twelve miles from Muskogee. Fighting started early in the morning and lasted all day. Every soldier fought as fiercely and courageously as he could and fought with whatever weapon was at hand. More than 200 of Watie's soldiers were killed as the Union *artillery*, once again, won the day. The Union troops fell back to Fort Gibson while the Confederates retreated to Perryville, an important township in the nation.

The Union troops, reinforced with supplies and men, followed after the Watie command. At the Battle of Perryville, the Union won again and burned Perryville to the ground.

Watie did not confine his guerilla warfare to Indian Territory. He raided in Missouri, burning Union machines and stacks of hay needed for Union horses. More often losing than winning because of inferior arms, Watie and his men waged hit-and-run attacks, inflicting as much



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damage as possible upon the enemy.

Watie's most spectacular raid against the Union forces was a phantom-like strike, a victory that won the official praise of the Confederate Congress. One of the leaders of an assault on Fort Smith, then Brigadier General Watie executed his command with his usual precision, courage, and gallantry. He routed the Union troops and returned his men to the fort where his hungry Cherokee Rifles ate the plentiful dinner that had been prepared for the hated Yankees.



The raids, the burnings, and the killings continued on both sides until the end of the war, and in Watie's case, even longer. But Watie and his brave Cherokee Rifles were forced to yield. The quiet little man who looked more like a harmless Indian farmer than a soldier and a general, finally surrendered his command, disbanded his men, and went home to his farm in the hills.

His last years were filled with sorrow. His money gone, he still managed to educate his children. Even here there was sorrow, for one after another, his sons died ahead of him.

On the monument to the Confederate dead at the University of Virginia are written these words: "Fate denied them Victory, but clothed them with glorious Immortality." Forever to those who loved the Confederacy there will

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be a remembrance of General Stand Watie.