

## **Life in the Saddle of a Choctaw Cavalry Trooper**

By 1860, the Choctaw Nation had made great lengths in recovery since the removal 30 years prior. Choctaw businessmen and farmers had productive trade in crops, cotton, timber, cattle, horses and coal.

Students who graduated from boarding schools were sent to college and were coming back as leaders with degrees in business, law and medicine.

However, just a year later the American Civil War broke out, plunging the Choctaw Nation into turmoil once again.

Unable to stay out of the war, the Choctaw Nation sided with the Confederate States of American as allies in the summer of 1861.

Leaving their communities and their fields, Choctaw brothers, uncles, fathers, and cousins answered the call to protect the lands that they called home.

The Choctaw Nation organized four regiments of cavaliers. These regiments would be First Choctaw Mounted Rifles, Second Regiment Cavalry, Third Regiment Cavalry, and the First Choctaw and Chickasaw Mounted Rifles.

The beginning days of a Choctaw cavalry trooper would have been hard because the regiments were not well supplied. Many of the men were supplied equipment and weapons from their home or communities.

Their gear would have been a saddle, blanket, mess kit, tobacco, pipe, and a horse or mule.

They wore Euro-American clothes such as hats and bandannas on their head, hunting jackets, vests, trousers, leggings and boots.

Others wore traditional dress consisting of turbans, feathers, skinned animal heads, leggings and breach clout, beaded sashes and bandoleer bags.

Weapons included hunting knives, black powder rifles and muskets, black powder pistols, shotguns and bows. Since many of the weapons were single shot, Choctaws were known to carry multiple weapons.

Despite being poorly armed and outfitted, Choctaw troops were noted to be fierce fighters, especially in close combat.

When not on campaign, the day-to-day life of Choctaw troops was mostly dull. The men tended to their equipment and weapons, but most importantly their horse.

Being a mounted unit, a soldier would take care of his horse before himself. They would water and feed their horse before attending to their personal needs. Horses would need to be brushed and have their hooves checked daily.

Choctaws were very casual about their view on enlistment. If there was nothing to be done, they would travel to their communities to attend fields or home affairs.

Other times, they would leave the garrison to go on personal raids against Union troops. Choctaw troops would also hold stickball games for entertainment and to keep their edge as warriors.

Forts in Indian Territory were more logistic centers that issued supplies than fortified garrisons. In the summer of 1832, Choctaw and Chickasaw troops built Fort McCulloch with redoubts and bastions to protect Fort Washita and Texas.

To read more about Fort McCulloch, please look at the *Iti Fabvssa* in the March 2014 and April 2014 issues of the *Biskinik*.

As the war progressed, newer weapons were acquired from raids; Colt or Remington revolvers, Sharps rifles and various other guns. Eventually, the Confederate army issued Choctaw troops with Texas or Tyler rifles.

Rations of corn, pork, and beef were issued to the soldiers, as well as local foods. By 1864, as the war made its way deeper into Indian Territory, Choctaw communities and fields were destroyed or abandoned and soldiers and families relied on imported foods and supplies.

Other native people, such as the Muscogee and Cherokee people, made their way into the Choctaw Nation looking for safety and food, putting a larger strain on food supplies.

Choctaw cattle and horses were being stolen by Texans and resold back to the Confederate army.

In the spring of 1865, these brave men would finally get to go home. In 1866, a treaty was signed between the Choctaw Nation and the United States, ending the war between the two Nations.

Despite over one-third of the tribe destitute from the ravages of the war, the Choctaw Nation would rebuild itself once again.

Many of the warriors who fought to protect their families, communities, and their Tribe would continue to serve Choctaw people as Lighthorsemen, community leaders and chiefs.

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**Choctaw Cavalry reenactors demonstrate how a cavalry trooper would be outfitted and the gear they would have used while fighting for the South in the Civil War.**



Provided by the Oklahoma Historical Society  
Pictured are Choctaw men after the Civil War.