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A Nation Divided: The Cherokee Alliance with the Confederate States of America

Adam Ruf

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The Harley-Davidson slogan is “a world built of road, sky and horizon.”<sup>1</sup> In the South, part of that unique world is along a road that is historically significant to Native-Americans—the “Trail of Tears.” Chattanooga, Tennessee marks the starting point of this 200-mile ride to Waterloo, Alabama. From its small beginnings ten years ago, this “motorcycle tribute to honor the Cherokees” has grown into an event with more than 100,000 bikers participating.<sup>2</sup> One of the participants this year was a man named Harvey Davis.

Harvey has participated in this event for the past two years. His chrome-plated bike, leather chaps, and leather jacket with a large Confederate flag declaring that “the South will rise again”—blended in well with the other bikes. He wore a large Indian-head patch on the front of his jacket in honor of the Cherokees. Harvey says that it is his way of expressing sympathies for the people who died on the trail. “The event is so big, and we just forget all about the importance of it.”<sup>3</sup>

For Harvey there is no connection between the Indian head on the front of his jacket and the flag represented on the back. However, the historical connection between the Confederacy and the Cherokee was due in a large part to the “Trail of Tears.” The event that caused the death of more than 4,000 Cherokees<sup>4</sup> also caused division in a strong Cherokee Nation and planted seeds of mistrust that would grow into an alliance with the Confederate states of America.

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<sup>1</sup>Harley-Davidson USA Slogan, *Harley-Davidson Official website*, 2003 [cited 6 October, 2003]. Available from the World Wide Web at <<http://www.harley-davidson.com>>.

<sup>2</sup>Bill Poovey, “Motorcycle Tribute to Honor the Cherokees,” *The Macon Telegraph*, 20 September 2003, Sec. A, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>Harvey Davis, Interviewed by Adam Ruf (September 19, 2003).

<sup>4</sup>William G. McLoughlin, *After the Trail of Tears* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 7.

There have been many books written about the Civil War—from biographies of famous generals to commentaries on social conditions in the North and South, even fictional books about Civil War heroes. Among the vast stacks of books about the Civil War there is one topic which is severely under-represented. The collection of literature about the involvement of Native Americans in the Civil War is surprisingly small and insufficient. The books written on the subject tend to discuss the impact Cherokee brigades had fighting for the Confederacy against the Union. Historians rush headlong into gruesome and detailed accounts of the battles and the successes of the Cherokees in the Civil War, often overlooking the incredible story that led to the alliance of the Cherokees with the Confederate States. This paper will examine the three main factors that changed the Cherokee position from neutrality to open alliance with the Confederate States of America.

While it has many titles—"the expulsion,"<sup>5</sup> "the Trail of Tears," "the removal,"<sup>6</sup> and even "the betrayal"—the forced relocation of the Cherokees from their native lands in North Georgia and Tennessee created a rift in the ruling class of the Cherokee Nation. The division played an important role in Cherokee post-removal politics and the Cherokee decision to join the Confederacy in the Civil War.

This division started as a harmless difference of opinion between Chief John Ross,<sup>7</sup> the head chief of the Cherokee Nation, and John Ridge.<sup>8</sup> In 1832, John Ridge, a

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<sup>5</sup>William G. McLoughlin, *After the Trail of Tears*, 1.

<sup>6</sup>Edward E. Dale and Gaston Litton, *Cherokee Cavaliers* (Norman, O.K.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939), 3.

<sup>7</sup>John Ross was born in 1790 near Lookout Mountain TN. His father was a Scotch farmer, and his mother a quarter blood Cherokee making him one-eighth Cherokee. He assisted in drafting the Cherokee Constitution of 1827 and the following year became the principal chief. He strongly opposed the move westward, but finding that it was inevitable he organized the migration and set up a new government out west. For a full account of John Ross' life see Gary Moulton, "John Ross," *American National Biography Online* Feb. 2000, [cited 1 September 2003] available at <<http://www.anb.org/articles/20/20-00885.html>>.

tribal leader from New Echota,<sup>9</sup> the first capital of the Cherokee Nation, joined a small group of Cherokees who began to doubt that the Cherokee Nation would continue to thrive in the East. He began to openly advocate plans for the relocation of the Cherokees to Indian reservation in the west.<sup>10</sup>

Ridge's reasons for supporting the move were clear. First, the Cherokee Nation's constitution was continually violated by acts from the state of Georgia. In one instance, a non-Indian typesetter for the Cherokee newspaper, *The Phoenix*, was arrested and sent to jail by the Georgia authorities.<sup>11</sup> He was sentenced to four years in prison for living with the Cherokees without a permit. The Cherokee Nation appealed to the Supreme Court which overturned the Georgian law, but the Court did not ensure freedom for the Cherokee Nation.<sup>12</sup> Cherokee leaders like John Ridge and Elias Boudinot were excited that they now had such powerful friends as the Supreme Court, but they were soon to be disappointed. The President refused to uphold the Supreme Court decision. When the

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<sup>9</sup>John Ridge was the son of Major Ridge. He was educated with his cousin Elias Boudinot at the mission school in Cornwall, Connecticut. He was one of the most influential leaders of the Cherokee Nation. He married a Sarah Northrup, with whom he lived in a beautiful home on a large plantation which was cultivated by his numerous slaves. He was one of the people who assigned his name to the treaty of New Echota, and was assassinated four years later. For a complete biography see James W. Parins, *John Rollin Ridge: His Life and Works* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991).

<sup>9</sup>During the fall of 1819, the Cherokee Council begins holding annual meetings in Newtown, a small community located at the junction of the Coosawattee and Conasauga rivers in present-day Gordon County. On November 12, 1825, the council adopts a resolution making Newtown the Cherokee Nation's capital. They changed the town's name to New Echota in honor of Chota, a beloved town located in present-day Tennessee. New Echota was where the publishing center for the *Phoenix*, the Cherokee Newspaper. For more info visit or call the historical park located at: 1211 Chatsworth Hwy. N.E., Calhoun, Georgia 30701.

<sup>10</sup>Larry Worthy, *The Cherokee Phoenix*, in About North Georgia [electronic journal], 2003 [cited 27 October 2003], available from <<http://ngeorgia.com>>.

<sup>11</sup>Mark Trahant, "Pictures of our Nobler Selves", [online article, cited 3 November, 2003] available from World Wide Web at <<http://cherokeehistory.com/picture.html>>.

<sup>12</sup>John Ridge, Letter to Major Ridge and Others, 10 March 1835, In *Cherokee Cavaliers*, edited by Edward E. Dale and Gaston Litton, 13. This trail was about a Georgia law which ceded Indian lands to settlers. The Cherokee Nation appealed the Law to the Supreme Court, and won the verdict, which declared the law to be unconstitutional.

Court decision was announced, President Jackson is reported to have said, "John Marshall has made his decision; let him enforce it now if he can."<sup>13</sup>

The actions of President Andrew Jackson towards the Cherokee Nation were the second reason John Ridge advocated a move. The President had persuaded congress to pass a law in 1830 that made it impossible for any eastern tribe to keep their lands and avoid moving to what was called "Indian Territory," west of the Mississippi.<sup>14</sup> This act turned the Cherokees against the President. John Ridge, in a letter to Stand Watie, responded to the President's complacency at the Supreme Court's decision which declared the law as unconstitutional by saying, "The chicken snake General Jackson . . . crawls and hides in the luxuriant grass of his nefarious hypocrisy."<sup>15</sup>

Chief John Ross was thunderstruck by Jackson's denial of Chief Justice John Marshall's decision and the treachery of the U.S. Senate in passing the nefarious bill stripping Indian lands.<sup>16</sup> Voicing firm opposition to any concession of the Cherokee Nation's sovereignty, he organized and "led the Cherokees' determined efforts to hold onto the land of their ancestors."<sup>17</sup> Chief Ross considered any Indians who supported or sold Cherokee land without the approval of the Cherokee National Council to be traitors.<sup>18</sup>

The real conflict began when Elias Boudinot, the editor for *The Phoenix*, began to print articles which were in favor of the relocation of the Cherokees. Chief John Ross said nothing about the articles at first, but when the articles continued to appear, he

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<sup>13</sup>Edward E. Dale and Gaston Litton, *Cherokee Cavaliers*, 8.

<sup>14</sup>William G. McLoughlin, *After the Trail of Tears*, 2.

<sup>15</sup>John Ridge, Letter to Stand Watie, 6 April 1832. Quoted in *Cherokee Cavaliers*, 6.

<sup>16</sup>Dale Van Every, *Disinherited* (New York: William Morrow, 1966), 52.

<sup>17</sup>William G. McLoughlin, *After the Trail of Tears*, 3.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid*, 5.

replaced Elias Boudinot<sup>19</sup> with an editor of his own choosing.<sup>20</sup> The Ridge-Boudinot faction of the Cherokees began to gain some support within the Cherokee Nation after the Georgia home guard began to persecute Cherokee Indians.

John Ridge voiced the opinion that the Cherokees would never be able to continue their way of life in Georgia. Acting on this belief he signed a treaty in New Echota, agreeing to sell all of the Cherokee land in Georgia and Tennessee to the government.<sup>21</sup> In the treaty it stated that the Cherokees were “seeking a permanent home. . .without the territorial limits of the State sovereignties.”<sup>22</sup> His decision to sign the treaty came as a result of Chief John Ross’ failure in front of the U.S. Senate to resolve the issue. In a letter to Stand Watie right after the meeting Ridge expressed deep disappointment in Chief John Ross. “At the outset they told Congress that our people had decided that they would choose to be citizens of the United States [rather] than remove. From various indications we ascertained that he was going to act falsely to his people.”<sup>23</sup> The Ridge-Boudinot-Watie faction of the Cherokee nation arranged for a passive removal to the tribal reserves.<sup>24</sup>

Chief John Ross returned from Washington to find rumors of his misconduct circulating around the Cherokee Nation. Embarrassed and angered that John Ridge would sign a treaty selling Cherokee land, Ross proclaimed that Ridge was guilty of

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<sup>19</sup>Son of David OO-Watie, who was the brother of Major Ridge. He was befriended by the Philadelphia philanthropist Elias Boudinot, and he took the name of his benefactor. He married Harriet Gold, daughter of a prominent family in Cornwall, Connecticut where he went to school. For a full biography see Ann Maloney, “Elias Boudinot,” *Oklahoma Genealogy Project* 2003, [cited 3 November 2003] available from World Wide Web <<http://www.rootsweb.com/~oknowata/elias.htm>>.

<sup>20</sup>Larry Worthy, *The Cherokee Phoenix*.

<sup>21</sup>Elias Boudinot, Letter to Stand Watie, 28 February 1835. Quoted in Edward E. Dale and Gaston Litton, *Cherokee Cavaliers*, 11.

<sup>22</sup>*Treaty of New Echota*, Dec. 29, 1835, [online resource, cited 8 December 2003] available from World Wide Web <<http://www.cherokee.org/culture/historypage.asp?ID=55>>.

<sup>23</sup>John Ridge, Letter to Major Ridge and Others, 10 March 1835, Quoted in *Cherokee Cavaliers*, 13.

<sup>24</sup>William G. McLoughlin, *After the Trail of Tears*, 50.

treachery against the Cherokee Nation and that any member of the Ridge-Watie-Boudinot faction was dead to the Cherokee. They were sentenced to death, and any Cherokee who saw them was obligated to kill them on the spot.<sup>25</sup> Ross's actions were directly contrary to the articles set forth in the Cherokee Constitution which stated that "all persons are to address their grievances to the court. . . the right of trial by Jury shall remain inviolate."<sup>26</sup>

Shortly after the relocation both John Ridge and Elias Boudinot were murdered. Their murders lead the Ridge-Watie-Boudinot group to believe that there was a plot to exterminate them all. Stand Watie was appointed to lead the group, and he appealed to President Jackson to step in and resolve the escalating situation. President Jackson, however, did little to bring Chief John Ross to justice. In a letter to John Bell and Stand Watie the President called the murders an "outrageous and tyrannical act of John Ross and his self created council."<sup>27</sup> And he encouraged that a peaceful course of action be adopted. However, in the same letter he also admonished that "when oppression comes and murder ensues, resistance becomes a duty and let the arm of freemen lay the tyrants low and give justice and freedom to your people."<sup>28</sup> If the President was aware of the powder keg he was igniting with that statement, it was one of the most malicious letters he ever wrote.

Stand Watie followed the advice of the President, and the murders and other lawless acts which followed made it seem that a civil war in the Cherokee Nation was

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<sup>25</sup>Edward E. Dale and Gaston Litton, *Cherokee Cavaliers*, 4.

<sup>26</sup>*Constitution of the Cherokee Nation*, July 24, 1827, University of Tennessee Digital Library, [online resource, cited 8 December 2003], available from World Wide Web <<http://oai.sunsite.utk.edu/sgm/tl217.html>>.

<sup>27</sup>Andrew Jackson, Letter to John Bell and Stand Watie, 5 October 1839, Quoted in Edward E. Dale and Gaston Litton, *Cherokee Cavaliers*, 17.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.



inevitable.<sup>29</sup> Stand Watie and his followers fought against Chief John Ross and his Indians. H.L. Smith, in a letter to Stand Watie,<sup>30</sup> described the situation in the new Cherokee Nation as “a whirlwind of death and murder, each side butchering each other.”<sup>31</sup> What had began as a difference of opinion was now a full fledged revolt, effectively dividing the Cherokee Nation and weakening it. While the two sides negotiated a separated truce for a time, fighting between Ross and Watie continued up through the Civil War. Douglas Cooper, a Confederate commander of Indian troops maintained, “It is apparent to everybody that we are in great danger of Civil War among the Cherokees.”<sup>32</sup> This rift between ruling powers led to other problems the Cherokee Nation would have to face, like the issue of slavery.

Slavery was also a major factor in the decision of the Cherokees to join the Confederacy. The chaos and disharmony after the “Trail of Tears” expanded and solidified the role of slaves in the Cherokee Nation.<sup>33</sup> Before the relocation to Oklahoma, slaves had predominantly worked for the Cherokees as field hands growing tobacco and cotton in North Georgia and Tennessee. After the removal, the Cherokees were outside the cotton belt; their agricultural products changed to consist mostly of grain and corn. This increased the value of slave labor to the Cherokees, since more people were needed to work the larger and dryer farms in the south-west.

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<sup>29</sup>Frank Cunningham, *General Stand Watie's Confederate Indians* (San Antonio, TX: Publishers of the Southwest, 1959) 21.

<sup>30</sup>Stand Watie was in Washington D.C. at the time seeking for the trail of Chief John Ross and other perpetrators of his kinsman's murders.

<sup>31</sup>H.L. Smith, Letter to Stand Watie, 4 April 1846, Quoted in Edward E. Dale and Gaston Litton, *Cherokee Cavaliers*, 29.

<sup>32</sup>Douglas Cooper, Letter to Brig. General Albert Pike, 10 February 1862, available from World Wide Web <<http://www.civilwaralbum.com/washita/OR.html>>.

<sup>33</sup>Theda Perdue, *Slavery and the Evolution of Cherokee Society* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1979), 96.

That slavery was an important economical institution for the Cherokees was readily understood by the Confederate states. In a letter to Chief John Ross, the governor of Arkansas, Mr. H.M. Rector wrote:

Your people, in their institutions, productions, latitude, and natural sympathies, are allied to the common brotherhood of the slave-holding States...Our people and yours are natural allies in war and friends in peace. Your country is salubrious and fertile, and possesses the highest capacity for future progress and development by the application of slave labor.<sup>34</sup>

Chief John Ross was very confident in his reply to the governor of Arkansas. He expressed his gratitude for the well wishes and then proceeded to tell the governor that slavery would never come into question in Indian Territory. "Laborers will be greatly disappointed if they shall expect in the Cherokee country 'fruitful fields ripe for the harvest of abolitionism,' you may rest assured that the Cherokee people will never tolerate the propagation of any such obnoxious fruit upon their soil."<sup>35</sup> Ross, in this letter, expresses his belief that the U.S. would not push for the abolition of slavery in Cherokee territories. However, followers of Stand Watie spread rumors and propaganda to convince Ross' followers that he secretly supported abolition. By making slavery an issue, Stand Watie hoped to push John Ross into an allegiance with the Confederacy. Ross was torn inside, he realized slavery meant a natural allegiance to the Confederacy—an allegiance that Stand Watie was already heavily advocating—but he did not feel ready to make the decision.

However, the Confederacy was not willing to drop the issue of slavery. In a letter to David Hubbard, the Superintendent of Indian affairs, the Confederate Secretary of War

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<sup>34</sup>H.M. Rector, Letter to Chief John Ross, 29 January 1861, available from World Wide Web <[http://cherokeehistory.com/Letter\\_Rector\\_to\\_Ross\\_01\\_29\\_1861.htm](http://cherokeehistory.com/Letter_Rector_to_Ross_01_29_1861.htm)>

<sup>35</sup>John Ross, Letter to Henry Rector, Governor of Arkansas, 22 February, 1861, available from World Wide Web <[http://cherokeehistory.com/Letter\\_Ross\\_to\\_Rector\\_02\\_22\\_1861.htm](http://cherokeehistory.com/Letter_Ross_to_Rector_02_22_1861.htm)>.

L.P. Walker encourages Hubbard to “impress the real design of the North, and the Government at Washington in regard to them. It has been, and still is the same entertained and sought to be enforced against ourselves, if allowed to proceed it will terminate in the emancipation of their slaves and the robbery of their lands.”<sup>36</sup>

According to Theda Perdue, a historian writing on the influence of slavery for the Cherokees, Ross did “realize that slavery was an issue, but he did not emphasize or perhaps admit to his followers that it was causing that big a division.”<sup>37</sup> He believed that the right of the Cherokees to their property had been spelled out in the treaties with the United States. And part of that property included slave property, so the institution within the Nation could not be altered by an act of the United States. Unfortunately that was not the way things looked from Washington.<sup>38</sup>

President Lincoln did not help to ease the Cherokees’ minds. Many of his Civil War policies and his close advisors seemed to promote abolition. With no direct position from the Union government, the Cherokees only had the actions of the administration to judge President Lincoln’s thoughts on Indian slavery.<sup>39</sup> The message that reached most of the Cherokees came from ardent abolitionists calling for the emancipation of all slaves.

Stand Watie used the issue of pro-slavery to gather followers to join in the fight against the Union. Through his propaganda Watie made certain that “slaves were a major reason the Cherokee’s became involved in the war.”<sup>40</sup> The Cherokees saw the Civil War as a “war of Northern cupidity and fanaticism against the institution of African

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<sup>36</sup>L.P. Walker, Letter to David Hubbard, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, 14 May 1861, available from the World Wide Web at <[http://cherokeehistory.com/letter\\_Walker\\_to\\_Hubbard\\_05\\_14\\_1861.htm](http://cherokeehistory.com/letter_Walker_to_Hubbard_05_14_1861.htm)>.

<sup>37</sup>Theda Perdue, *Slavery and the Evolution of Cherokee Society*, 129.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid, 127.

<sup>39</sup>David Nichols, *Lincoln and the Indians: Civil War Policy and Politics* (Columbia, OH: University of Missouri Press, 1978) 58.

<sup>40</sup>Theda Perdue, *Slavery and the Evolution of Cherokee Society*, 135.

servitude.”<sup>41</sup> Influential Cherokees who had derived much of their wealth from slave labor wanted to go to battle to defend the institution against the United States.<sup>42</sup> Stand Watie gained a bigger following of men, and stationed them at Fort Smith, an outpost abandoned by the Union army.

The Cherokees’ main understanding of the Northern position on slavery came from missionaries sent into their territory. Many Indians were neither impressed nor excited about having the missionaries, and neither was the Confederacy. The Confederates looked on the missionaries as people who were “preaching up abolition sentiments under the disguise of the holy religion of Christ, and denouncing slaveholders as abandoned by God and unfit associates for humanity on earth.”<sup>43</sup> Missionary societies in New England, especially Boston, fought over whether to accept Indian converts who owned slaves. The final decision was never reached; when war broke out between the North and South, the societies called their missionaries home.

However, not all missionaries preached ardent abolitionism to the Indians. James Slover, a missionary from the Boston-based American Board of Ministry who had ministered to the Indians for some time, commented to his congregation, “I’ll baptize a slaveholder or the slave...it is my business to preach Christ and Him crucified.”<sup>44</sup> Many missionaries to the Cherokees did more than just baptize slave owners—they owned or hired slaves themselves as translators. In their own defense they told their mission board

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<sup>41</sup>Cherokee National Committee, *Declaration of ratification of the treaty with the Confederate States of America by the Cherokee National Committee*, 28 October 1861, available from <[http://cherokeehistory.com/declaration\\_of\\_cherokee\\_treaty\\_with\\_csa\\_10\\_28\\_1861.html](http://cherokeehistory.com/declaration_of_cherokee_treaty_with_csa_10_28_1861.html)>.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>43</sup>L.P. Walker, Letter to Superintendent of Indian Affairs David Hubbard.

<sup>44</sup>James Anderson Slover, *Minister to the Cherokees*, Edited by Barbara Cloud (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2001) 29.

that it was either hire the slaves or abandon the posts.<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately for the Cherokees, when the call came to return home, all but a few of these slave-tolerant missionaries returned to the North. This exodus of missionaries left the Cherokees without the supplies and Northern church support which had helped to raise the quality of life for the Cherokee Nation.

It was this turbulent and unsteady Cherokee Nation that faced the decision of joining the Confederate or the Union side in the Civil War. Chief John Ross, who controlled the majority of the Cherokees, had always advocated neutrality for the Cherokee Nation. Ross forbade the Cherokees from showing support for either side. However, Stand Watie formed a secret society of Cherokees known as the Knights of the Golden Circle; later the group changed its name to The Southern Rights Party. In response, another group of full blooded Indians was organized by Evan Jones<sup>46</sup> to fight slavery. This second group was known as the "pin Indians" because of the insignia of crossed pins they wore on their hunting shirts and coats.<sup>47</sup>

The final major factor leading to the Cherokee alliance with the Confederate states was the exodus of Northern troops from Indian Territory combined with the active recruitment of the Cherokees by the Confederacy. By heritage the Cherokees were

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<sup>45</sup>Theda Perdue, *Slavery and the Revolution*, 120.

<sup>46</sup>At the encouragement of Chief John Ross, the Baptist missionaries Evan and John Jones approached the native ministers who worked for them. The ministers then met with the concerned laypersons of their missions. From these meetings in the churches and backwoods came a movement to defend the rights of the common people and to preserve the interests of the "old way" within the Cherokee Nation. These were the beginnings of the Keetoowah Society, otherwise known as the Pin Indians. Though the Keetoowah had its formal organization by the Joneses in 1858, most sources refer to the Society as having existed "from time immemorial." See T.L. Ballenger, "The Keetoowahs" in Ballenger Papers, Ayer Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago, IL.; Howard Tyner, *The Keetoowah Society in Cherokee History* (Masters thesis, University of Tulsa, 1949); Wilma Mankiller and Michael Wallis, *Mankiller: A Chief and her People* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993); Janey Hendrix, "Redbird Smith and The Nighthawk Keetoowahs," *Journal of Cherokee Studies* 8 (Fall 1983).

<sup>47</sup>Wilfred Knight, *Red Fox: Stand Watie and the Confederate Indian Nations during the Civil War Years in Indian Territory* (Glendale: Arthur Clark Company, 1988), 116.

generally Southerners, having grown up under the system of Negro slavery and on plantations and small farms. However, one historian gives a more subtle reason for the alliance between the Confederacy and the Cherokees. Craig Gaines presents that “the Cherokee nation was abandoned by the federal government. Many of their federal agents had left them for the Confederacy, and the tribes themselves were actively courted by the Southern states.”<sup>48</sup>

As a grain and livestock-producing area, the Indian Territories could provide ample food for the western troops of whichever side the Indians decided to align themselves with.<sup>49</sup> Indian Territory also offered an access route where an invasion of Kansas or Texas could be launched. The Confederate Secretary of War was ready to offer the Indians the full resources of the South for their cooperation. In a letter to the head of Indian Affairs for the Confederacy he wrote that:

The Government of the Confederate States of America, now powerfully constituted through in immense league of sovereign political societies, great forces in the field, and abundant resources, will assume all the expense and responsibility of protecting them against all adversaries, if they will manifest a disposition to co-operate with us in the general struggle occupying the people at the North and those at the South.<sup>50</sup>

Albert Pike was named the “official negotiator for the Confederate Bureau of Indian Affairs.”<sup>51</sup> His job was simple; get the Indians to sign treaties with the Confederacy no matter what the cost.

Albert Pike was a fat and scholarly Southerner with long hair and a disposition to drink; he did amazingly well at convincing the Indians to join with the Confederacy. In the course of five months he had convinced four of the five major tribes in the South to

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<sup>48</sup>Craig W. Gaines, *The Confederate Cherokees* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1989), 6.

<sup>49</sup>Theda Perdue, *Slavery and Cherokee Society*, 126.

<sup>50</sup>L.P. Walker, Letter to Superintendent of Indian Affairs David Hubbard.

<sup>51</sup>Wilfred Knight, *Red Fox: Stand Watie and the Confederate Indian Nations during the Civil War Years in Indian Territory* (Glendale: Arthur Clark Company, 1988), 62.

join the Confederacy. The Chickasaw Legislature announced its support of the Confederacy and urged its neighboring tribes to form an alliance against the "Lincoln hordes and Kansas robbers against whom a war which will surpass the French Revolution in scenes of blood. . .and atrocious horrors."<sup>52</sup>

Following the example of its Chickasaw brother, the Choctaw Nation was not far behind in swearing allegiance to the Confederacy. The *Little Rock Times and Herald* welcomed the support of the Indians with an editorial stating that "these noble sons of the west, who armed with long rifles, Tomahawks and scalping knives, swear that nothing but the scalp of the Yankee will satisfy their vengeance."<sup>53</sup> However, despite the successes with other tribes, Albert Pike had an almost impossible task in the Cherokee Nation.

The Cherokees sat neutral through the battle of Manassas, seizure of the arsenal at Little Rock, and the removal of all Union troops from the forts in Indian Territory. For the Cherokee Nation the Civil War was one Southern success after another, but John Ross continued to search for the best option for the Cherokees.<sup>54</sup> Even with allegiance of the other tribes and the fact that Cherokee neutrality was causing divisions in the Creeks, Ross waited.

Chief John Ross held out in the hopes that the right course of action would become clearer with time. Ross believed that joining the Civil War at all would be a costly move for the Cherokees, especially when the war was not even officially declared.

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<sup>52</sup>James D. Richardson (editor), *Messages and Papers of the Confederacy* (Nashville, TN: United States Publishing Company, 1906), 63.

<sup>53</sup>Frank Cunningham, *Confederate Indians*, 36.

<sup>54</sup>Craig W. Gaines, *The Confederate Cherokees*, 59.



"It is a matter of an uprising, which I hope will be resolved soon and peaceful,"<sup>55</sup> he wrote to the Cherokee Nation in his proclamation for neutrality. But Albert Pike, an astute observer of the conflict already present in the Cherokee nation, decided to use it to his advantage. Playing on the perceived weakness he struck a deal with Stand Watie for his group of Cherokee's to join with the Confederacy, despite the declared neutrality of the Cherokee nation.<sup>56</sup>

In a letter to Stand Watie from William Adair, Watie's close friend,<sup>57</sup> and James Bell, Watie's brother-in-law,<sup>58</sup> concern was expressed about Ross' proclamation of neutrality, and Stand Watie's hesitance to join to Confederacy. They urged that it was "time to strike."<sup>59</sup> Ross had sent envoys to Washington and had written to General McCulloch;<sup>60</sup> both actions suggested that he was entertaining an alliance with the North. Adair and Bell warned Watie of the disastrous effect of Ross making the first move: "the Pins already have more power in their hands than we can bear. . .if they acquire more power by being the Treaty making power, you know our destiny will be inalterably sealed."<sup>61</sup> Not long after he received this letter, Stand Watie joined the Confederate States of America under the promise to raise 10,000 men to fight against the abolitionists in Kansas.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>John Ross, *Proclamation for Neutrality to the Cherokee Nation*, 17 May, 1861, available from World Wide Web < [http://cherokeehistory.com/Ross\\_Proclamation\\_for\\_Neutrality\\_05\\_17\\_1861.htm](http://cherokeehistory.com/Ross_Proclamation_for_Neutrality_05_17_1861.htm)>.

<sup>56</sup>William G. McLoughlin, *After the Trail of Tears*, 56.

<sup>57</sup>William Penn Adair was a member of a prominent Cherokee family. He was an active leader of the Treaty Party and also a close friend to Stand Watie, Edward E. Dale and Gaston Litton, *Cherokee Cavaliers*, 108.

<sup>58</sup>The son of John A. Bell, was born in 1826 in the Old Cherokee Nation in Georgia. He was a younger brother of Stand Watie's wife, Ibid, 108.

<sup>59</sup>William Adair and James Bell, Letter to Stand Watie, 29 August 1861, Quoted in Ibid, 108.

<sup>60</sup>Brigadier General in the Confederate Army, assigned to help in the recruitment of the Cherokee Nation to the Confederacy, for full account see Frank Cunningham, *Confederate Indians*, 37.

<sup>61</sup>William Adair and James Bell, Letter to Stand Watie.

<sup>62</sup>Frank Cunningham, *Confederate Indians*, 53, also found in Craig Gaines, *Confederate Cherokees*, 4.



Even though it was clear that Watie joined the South with his band of Indians because he was seeking protection from Chief John Ross and the blood feud, the South embraced him as one of their own. Stand Watie was “a true southerner,” General Pike exclaimed. “John Ross only joined after the Confederate victory at Wilson’s Creek, Missouri, and is likely to leave us if the tides of battle turn,” General Pike stated after Ross decided to join the Confederacy.<sup>63</sup>

By the fall of 1861 Albert Pike had made treaties with all of the Five Civilized Tribes<sup>64</sup> except for the Cherokees. Ross began to waver in his position of neutrality under the pressure from Stand Watie and his followers, who threatened to tear apart the Nation.<sup>65</sup> Deciding to choose unity over personal issues John Ross finally called the Cherokee Council together to discuss a proposal to ally the Cherokee Nation with the Confederacy.

Ross showed a complete reversal of his position of neutrality. Now that the United States was dissolved and two separate nations had formed and the Confederacy had won a series of victories, he felt that there was no doubt of the outcome of the war. “The unanimity and devotion of the people of the Confederate States must sooner or later

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<sup>63</sup>William G. McLoughlin, *After the Trail of Tears*, 68; On August 10, 1861, there was a battle at this location. It was the first major Civil War engagement west of the Mississippi River, involving about 5,400 Union troops and 12,000 Confederates. Although it was a Confederate victory, the Southerners failed to capitalize on their success. The battle set the stage for the Battle of Pea Ridge in March 1862. Another important result was that the Indian tribes saw another Confederate victory, and the last Union troops stationed in Cherokee territory at forts Washita, Arbuckle, and Cobb left. For a full account see “Wilsons Creek” National Park Service, 2003 [online cited 5 November 2003], available from <<http://www.nps.gov/wicr/>>.

<sup>64</sup>The Five Civilized Tribes consisted of the Cherokees, Creeks, Seminoles, Chickasaws, and Choctaws. They were the tribes which had their own constitutions. The Plains Indians also joined with the Confederacy, but since the Cherokees had no real contact with them, they will not be mentioned. For a full account about the Five Civilized Tribes see Grant Forman, *The Five Civilized Tribes* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934).

<sup>65</sup>Frank Cunningham, *Confederate Indians*, 36.

secure their success over all opposition and result in the establishment of their independence and recognition of it by the other nations of the earth.”<sup>66</sup>

The Confederate states were offering to recognize the Cherokee constitutional authorities, which meant that John Ross would still be the leader, along with the guarantee of the Cherokee Nations boundaries as outlined in the patent from the United States. They also offered an advance to pay the debt that the United States owed the Cherokees, along with the payment of all annuities. Security of Cherokee investments would be taken care of, along with the assurance that the jurisdiction of Cherokee courts would still cover all members of the nation, whether by birth, marriage, or adoption.<sup>67</sup>

The position of the Cherokee Nation in the new Confederate States of America was that of a ward. While the Cherokee Nation could be called upon to furnish troops for the defense of the Indian country, it was never to be taxed for the support of any war in which the States may be engaged.<sup>68</sup> Ross urged the Cherokees to look past any bitter feelings that they felt in the past. “Whatever causes the Cherokee people may have had in the past to complain of some of the Southern States, they cannot but feel that their interests and their destiny are inseparably connected with those of the South.”<sup>69</sup>

While Ross gave lip service to joining the Confederacy whole-heartedly, his followers were clearly choosing unity over personal feelings. Ross was not inclined to join the Confederacy, but it was more important to him that the Cherokee Nation show a united front to the United States. A united Cherokee Nation would be able to make an

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<sup>66</sup>John Ross, *Request to Ratify Treaty with Confederate States of America*.

<sup>67</sup>The Cherokee National Council, *Declaration of ratification of the treaty with the Confederate States of America by the Cherokee National Committee with concurrence of the National Council*, 28 October 1861, [cited 6 November 2003] available from <[http://cherokeehistory.com/declaration\\_of\\_cherokee\\_treaty\\_with\\_csa\\_10\\_28\\_1861.htm](http://cherokeehistory.com/declaration_of_cherokee_treaty_with_csa_10_28_1861.htm)>.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>John Ross, *Request to Ratify Treaty with Confederate States of America*.

impact on the thinking of whichever side won the war. "Urged by these considerations, the Cherokees, long divided in opinion, became unanimous, and like their brethren, the Creeks,<sup>70</sup> Seminoles, Choctaws, and Chickasaws, determined, by the undivided voice of a General Convention of all the people."<sup>71</sup>

While General Pike's earlier words had turned out to be prophetic, his judgment of Chief John Ross was harsh. In Ross' request to the Cherokee Nation for an alliance with the Confederate States he mentions why he hesitated:

Our relations had long existed with the United States Government and bound us to observe amity and peace alike with all the States. Neutrality was proper and wise so long as there remained a reasonable probability that the difficulty between the two sections of the Union would be settled. . .but when there was no longer any reason to believe that the Union of the States would be continued there was no cause to hesitate as to the course the Cherokee Nation should pursue. Our geographical position and domestic institution allied us to the South, while the developments daily made in our vicinity and as to the purposes of the war waged against the Confederate States clearly pointed out the path of interest.<sup>72</sup>

However, later in the same document Chief John Ross was not as concerned about location as he was about the unity of all the southern Indian tribes, and the Cherokee Nation. His wish was that "only mutual friendship and harmony be cherished."<sup>73</sup> Expressing his feelings about the discord which was present in the Cherokee nation, he saw the future treaty as a way of harmonizing the different factions. Now that all five of

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<sup>70</sup>The Creeks also had serious divisions in their Nation. Opothleyoholo, the head chief of the Creeks, did not support the decision to join with the confederacy and as a result took those who agreed with him and went to Kansas. This was the first battle that Stand Watie participated in; he tracked the Creeks through their territory and all the way to Kansas. Many of the Creeks died in the trek from starvation and exposure, but the ones that made it formed a division in the Union army. Through the war many Cherokee Indians would desert and join this faction of the Creeks.

<sup>71</sup>The Cherokee National Council, *Declaration of ratification of the treaty with the Confederate States*.

<sup>72</sup>John Ross, *Request by Cherokee Principal Chief John Ross to the Cherokee National Committee and National Council to ratify the treaty signed with the Confederate States of America*, 9 October 1861, available from <[http://cherokeehistory.com/Ross\\_request\\_to\\_ratify\\_treaty\\_with\\_CSA\\_10\\_09\\_1861.htm](http://cherokeehistory.com/Ross_request_to_ratify_treaty_with_CSA_10_09_1861.htm)>.

<sup>73</sup>John Ross, *Request to Ratify Treaty with Confederate States of America*.

the neighboring tribes were part of the Confederate States, their mutual assistance would insure that Indian rights would be upheld in the new government after the war.

Despite the treaty with the Confederacy, questions would remain about Ross' true allegiance. After the treaty was signed a group of pro-southern Cherokees wanted to raise a Confederate flag over the Indian council house. Mrs. Ross violently opposed the efforts, and her husband, Chief Ross, upheld his wife's decision.<sup>74</sup> At Park Hill, Ross's home, the Federals were almost welcomed by Chief Ross, who saw the remainder of his Confederate regiment enroll in the Union army. Rations were nearly exhausted and, amid rumors that Watie's forces were closing in, the decision was made to withdraw to Kansas. Both Stand Watie and the Confederacy wondered about Ross's true motivation behind the capture.

While on the surface the warring factions of the Cherokees were united, McCulloch warned Pike in late September to separate the Indian commands under Stand Watie and Ross "for fear of a collision if they should come in contact with one another."<sup>75</sup> Stand Watie in a letter to Douglas Cooper expressed his concern over the defection of the Pin Indian leader John Drew's<sup>76</sup> regiments. "I regret exceedingly to see this, as it does not tend to reconcile the factions already too bitter for the Nations good."<sup>77</sup>

In addition to military supplies the Cherokees brought other things to the table: a buffer between Kansas and Texas, several regiments of reserve troops, and Stand Watie. Stand Watie as an Indian general was so resolved that even at the time of Lee's

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<sup>74</sup>Frank Cunningham, *Confederate Indians*, 47.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid, 47.

<sup>76</sup>John Drew was the commander chosen to lead the Pin Indians into battle. Shortly before the battle of Bird Creek four of his brigades deserted and went over to the side of Opothleyoholo, leader of the Northern Creeks.

<sup>77</sup>Stand Watie, Letter to Douglas Cooper, 19 February 1862, Quoted in Edward E. Dale and Gaston Litton, *Cherokee Cavaliers*, 112.

abandoning the struggle, he was preparing to raid Kansas.<sup>78</sup> It is amazing to think that even with the serious divisions in the Cherokee nation they had a major impact on the outcome of the war. However, Brigadier-General Stand Watie's raids were so successful that he earned the nickname of Red Fox. McCulloch<sup>79</sup>, talking to another officer about Watie, said, "Red Fox is what they call him—Stand Watie is his name."<sup>80</sup>

The Cherokees who fought for the Confederacy did so out of a deep seated belief in the Confederate cause—the ability to maintain their way of life (slavery) and secure future freedoms for their nation. The hardships and adversity they had to go through to fight was incredible. Not only was the United States split in two, but on a more personal level their tribe was split in two. Over 2,200 Cherokee's fought for the Union, only twice that many fought for the Confederacy. In the Union army 1,018 Cherokee's lost their lives, the Confederate numbers were almost equal.<sup>81</sup> However, Confederate Indian soldiers were in a bad position most of the war. They had inferior weapons and numbers compared to Union troops, yet they managed to hold their own on the battle field. Lt. Col. James Bell told his wife Caroline that the Cherokee fighters were neither "discouraged or whipped, and God forbid that we shall ever be."<sup>82</sup> The statement was made after the crushing victory by the Union troops at Honey Springs, effectively ending the Cherokee resistance in the west.

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<sup>78</sup>Craig Gaines, *Confederate Cherokees*, 4.

<sup>79</sup>Born in Tennessee, Ben McCulloch participated in the Mexican American War and the California gold rush. With the outbreak of the Civil War, McCulloch and his brother Henry were instrumental in the takeover of Federal garrisons in San Antonio. Commissioned a brigadier general in the Confederate army, he led a division in the battle of Elkhorn Tavern (Pea Ridge) in northwest Arkansas. On the second day of the battle, March 7, 1862, he was hit by a Federal marksman and killed instantly. For more information see Lyman Hardeman (editor), *Lone Star Junction*, online journal, 1997 [cited Feb, 19 2004] available from World Wide Web at <<http://www.lsjunction.com/people/mcculloch.htm>>.

<sup>80</sup>Wilfred Knight, *Red Fox*, 201.

<sup>81</sup>Craig Gaines, *Confederate Cherokees*, 124.

<sup>82</sup>Wilfred Knight, *Red Fox*, 183.

General Watie knew the Confederacy was doomed, but decided to wait on surrender until future events. Belated news drifted his way of the capitulation of General Robert E. Lee to General U. S. Grant on April 9, 1865; General E. Kirby Smith, in command of the Trans-Mississippi Department, surrendered on May 26. General Watie, however, made no effort to give up, and kept a small force together until a detachment of Federal troops sought him out at Doaksville, deep in the Choctaw Nation, on June 23. He was the last Confederate general to lay down his arms.

At the end of the war the Cherokee warriors returned to find their homes in ruin. Their government was still divided, John Ross was returning from his diplomatic imprisonment in Washington, and Stand Watie, fearing assassination by Ross's followers, was fleeing Cherokee territory for the Creek Indian reservation. Instead of uniting and strengthening the Cherokee Nation, the Civil War had decimated it. Albert Pike described the country as "lost, the reserve broken up or abandoned, and the loyal [Indians] fleeing to Texas."<sup>83</sup> The money promised to them by the United States was no longer owed; the Confederacy was no longer in existence and therefore could not fulfill its promises to the Cherokee Nation. The Cherokees found themselves friendless and poverty stricken.

For the Cherokees, it was a position that they knew well. The Trail of Tears had left them homeless and in a strange land. When the missionaries left Indian Territory at the beginning of the war, the Indians lost their supply of manufactured goods. Now, with the end of the Confederacy, the Cherokees lost what little remained of the provisions set forth in the infamous treaty of New Echota. The federal aid programs of reconstruction

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<sup>83</sup> Albert Pike, Letter to the President of the Confederate States, 19 November 1864 [online resource, 4 December 2003], available from World Wide Web <<http://www.civilwaralbum.com/washita/OR.html>>.

in the South did not apply to the Cherokees. They were on their own to rebuild their Nation and finally unify their tribe in the West.



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## SOUTHERN SCHOLARS SENIOR PROJECT

Name: Adam Ruf Date: 1-7-04 Major: History

### SENIOR PROJECT

A significant scholarly project, involving research, writing, or special performance, appropriate to the major in question, is ordinarily completed the senior year. The project is expected to be of sufficiently high quality to warrant a grade of A and to justify public presentation.

Under the guidance of a faculty advisor, the Senior Project should be an original work, should use primary sources when applicable, should have a table of contents and works cited page, should give convincing evidence to support a strong thesis, and should use the methods and writing style appropriate to the discipline.

The completed project, to be turned in in duplicate, must be approved by the Honors Committee in consultation with the student's supervising professor three weeks prior to graduation. Please include the advisor's name on the title page.  
The 2-3 hours of credit for this project is done as directed study or in a research class.

Keeping in mind the above senior project description, please describe in as much detail as you can the project you will undertake. You may attach a separate sheet if you wish:

I plan to write a research paper on the causes which influenced the Cherokee Nation in their decision to join with the confederate States of America in the Civil War. The paper will examine the influence of the "trail of tears", slavery, and Southern diplomacy in the Cherokee decision to side with the South.

Primary research such as letters, diaries, army orders, and governmental treaties will be used to prove that the Trail of Tears, the issue of slavery, and Southern diplomacy were the main reasons that the Cherokee Nation formed an Alliance with the Confederate States of America.

Signature of faculty advisor Lisa Diller Expected date of completion 12/15/03

Approval to be signed by faculty advisor when completed:

This project has been completed as planned: Yes

This is an "A" project: Yes

This project is worth 2-3 hours of credit: Yes

Advisor's Final Signature Lisa Diller

Chair, Honors Committee \_\_\_\_\_ Date Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Advisor, please write your final evaluation on the project on the reverse side of this page. Comment on the characteristics that make this "A" quality work.

**Adam Ruf**  
**December 2003**

Ruf argues that the Cherokee nation joined the Confederacy during the Civil War because of their own commitment to the use of slaves, the heavy recruiting on the part of the South, and because of the need to heal the rifts within their own ranks. He spends most of his paper setting up the background and laying out the issues in the Cherokee split. His use of anecdotes and his wide reading in the primary sources make Ruf's work interesting to read as well as a scholarly contribution to our understanding of the complex reasons that motivate humans in times of war.

Ruf's work clearly follows his stated thesis, but he would have an even stronger paper if he had explained the slavery issue in the Cherokee nation more clearly. As it stands, it isn't clear that any Cherokees wanted slavery to end, even though Ruf (p. 9) maintains that it was a contentious issue.

The clear writing and interesting stories place this paper within the best of the historical tradition.

Lisa Clark Diller  
Professor of History

Grade: A