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Jerimiah Smith Camp members Jeffrey Kennedy, Jim Baxter, and Steve Clapp present the colors for the Daughters of Union Veterans Convention in Oklahoma City on June 1st. (Courtesy William Andrews)

September Camp Meeting

Our camp meeting this month will be held at the Hardesty Regional Library's Oak Room at 8315 E. 93rd Street – same as last month, except a different room. It will start at the usual time of 6:30, and we will be meeting jointly with the Col. Daniel N. McIntosh Camp No. 1378. Brother Joe Fears will present the program for us, as the Indian Nations Camp will serve as host.

The summer vacation period is behind us, so most of us have trips, family obligations, or other activities that tend to interfere with meeting times. If you're among those, we'll be expecting to hear some stories from any of those excursions relating to Civil War sites, and get a report in the newsletter. Hopefully we can all attend this meeting with the other SCV folks who are as interested in Civil War topics as we are. Since the Confederates are coming, let's show up in force!

August Camp Meeting

Meeting at the Hardesty Regional Library, to discuss the Battle of Honey Springs, we had a light turnout: only six members. Brothers Mike Gates; Charlie Walker; Carl Fallen; Eric Sachau; Clint Anderson; and Kevin White attended. New transfer member, Scott Preston, notified us prior to the meeting that he had a work conflict and would be unable to make it.

Kevin gave an excellent report on his attendance as our only delegate to the National Encampment held in the Cleveland – Independence, OH area. In an important development for us, Oklahoma Dept.'s Brian Pierson was elected Senior Vice Commander In Chief. No doubt, he will be elected Commander In Chief of the SUVCW next year. We should be proud of his advancement.

Battle of Honey Springs July 17, 1863

(Source: **Battle of Honey Springs, 1863-1988**, by LeRoy H. Fisher)

Our program for the July camp meeting was a discussion of the Battle of Honey Springs – also known as the Battle of Elk Creek. Of the 107 documented hostile engagements in Indian Territory, this was the largest and most significant Civil War Battle in Indian Territory. It was also significant in that it involved the First Kansas Colored Volunteers, which was the first African American regiment in the Union Army. Also, the Union victory established it as the dominant force in Indian Territory for the rest of the war.

A number of factors precipitated the battle. Early in the War, the Union Army abandoned Fort Gibson and reassigned the troops to the east where they were more urgently needed. After a year of unsuccessful attempts to reestablish Federal authority, in April 1863, Union Col. William A. Phillips occupied Fort Gibson, challenging Confederate authority in the region.

The Confederates at once made plans to drive the Federals from the fort. Phillips found it a struggle to keep his 175 mile supply line open from Fort Scott in Kansas. Preparing for an attack, Confederate Gen. Douglas H. Cooper assembled his troops twenty miles southwest at Honey Springs.

The military installation at Honey Springs consisted of a frame commissary building, a log hospital, several arbors, and numerous tents. Several springs supplied water for soldiers and livestock. The Texas Road ran through the camp. The Texas Road was the main pre-

war route connecting Indian Territory with Texas, Kansas, Missouri and Arkansas.

From this location, they harassed the Federals and attacked their supply trains coming from Fort Scott. On July 1 and 2, Confederate forces attempted unsuccessfully to capture a large military supply train of 200 wagons at Cabin Creek en route to Fort Gibson. Cooper was a former U.S. Choctaw-Chickasaw Indian Agent and an officer veteran of the Mexican War. He was highly respected by the Indians he faithfully served in both civil and military life.

The supply train had scarcely reached Fort Gibson when Union Major Gen. James G. Blunt arrived from Kansas with additional troops and artillery. The additional troops only brought the number of Federals available for field operations to about 3,000. Union commanders learned through deserters and spies in the Confederacy that Cooper was ready for an attack on Fort Gibson. Cooper had collected about 6,000 troops for the attack, and was awaiting 3,000 more plus additional artillery from Fort Smith on July 17th under the command of Brig. Gen. William L. Cabell, a West Point graduate.

Blunt was first a sailor. He became a physician by profession and a general through politics. Before he became commander of the District of the Frontier, his military campaigns had been successful and strongly characterized by offensive operations. Much concerned about the arrival of Cabell's reinforcements at Honey Springs on the 17th, Blunt saw the situation as critical. Thus, Blunt took immediate action to attack Cooper's forces before Cabell arrived. However, he came down with an intense fever due to encephalitis. While severely ill after spending a day in bed, he decided to begin the advance on Honey Springs anyway.

Blunt's Federals constructed a number of flatboats to ferry his forces across the Arkansas River. They were issued 6 days rations. He then took 250 cavalry and four pieces of light artillery at midnight on July 15 and rode about 13 miles up the north bank of the swollen river to a ford. At this point, he drove away the Confederate pickets, crossed the Arkansas River, and turned downstream to the mouth of the Grand River. Blunt then ordered the remainder of his men to cross the river. All except several cavalry units had crossed by 10 p.m. on July 16. The troops were equipped with late-model Springfield rifles and twelve pieces of artillery, including several efficient Napoleon guns.

Proceeding down the Texas Road, the first skirmish occurred near Chimney Mountain during a rain shower when Blunt's troops encountered a Confederate scouting party. Slowly falling back, the Confederates

found that some of their gun powder had absorbed moisture and wouldn't fire. This problem would plague them throughout the battle and become a serious factor in its outcome.

While the Federal force was collecting north of Elk Creek on the Texas Road, Blunt and his staff rode forward to examine the main Confederate position. Their line, about 1½ miles wide, was concealed in the timber immediately north of Elk Creek. At about 8 a.m., he ordered his wet and exhausted men to take a two-hour rest and eat lunch behind the little ridge about a half mile from the Confederate line. Another rain shower fell: more trouble for the Confederate gunpowder.

About 10 a.m., Blunt formed his force into columns, one on either side of the road, moving within a quarter mile of the Confederate line, and then rapidly deployed right and left. In less than five minutes, they were in a line of battle across the entire Confederate front. Blunt's force was composed of units from Wisconsin, Colorado, Kansas, and Indian Territory.

The Confederates employed 5,700 men arranged in battle formation. About a quarter of them were without serviceable firearms, and they were supported by only four pieces of light artillery. Several units of Texans were serving with the Indian forces. Colonel Stand Watie had been scheduled to be present at Honey Springs but the last minute was sent by Cooper with a small cavalry unit to conduct a diversionary movement in the direction of Webbers Falls. Therefore, Stand Watie did not participate in the battle.

The Confederates opened the battle by firing on Federal artillery, which replied with spherical canister case shot and shell, and solid shot for one and one-quarter hours. The field pieces consisted of three 12-pounder mountain howitzers and a scarce Confederate Mountain Rifle. In addition, they had an even smaller experimental bronze field piece rifled to take a 2½-inch diameter explosive shell. Only eighteen of these were made in 1862. This 4-gun battery was to support the 20th and 29th Texas Cavalry Regiment in the line of battle opposite the Federal Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry Regiment.

The Federal artillery consisted of twelve field pieces. Six of these cannons were big 12-pounder Napoleons, two were 6-pounders, and four were 12-pounder mountain howitzers mounted on prairie carriages. While the troop matchup heavily favored the Confederates, the artillery matchup was 12 to 4 in favor of the Federals, and this also would affect the battle results.

During the early minutes of the artillery duel, the Confederates concentrated their fire on one of the Napoleons and put it out of action with a direct hit. The Federals quickly located a mountain howitzer in the brush and put it out of action, killing its entire crew and horses. The Confederates began to use the accuracy and long range of their experimental mountain rifle to pick off Union officers who could be seen on the high open ground beyond the Union battle line.

Meanwhile, Blunt had dismounted his cavalry units to fight as infantry and ordered all commands to fire as rapidly as possible against the Confederate line. For over two hours, the Confederates effectively held their position while attempting a spirited flanking movement on the Federal left. The fighting in the underbrush was slow and confusing as the lines swayed under the impact of close-in and hand-to-hand combat. The Confederates appeared to be compensating satisfactorily for their inferior gun powder, firearms, and artillery.

Then, a set of unusual circumstances prevailed to turn the tide of the battle. Blunt ordered the First Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry, located near the center of the Federal line, to capture the four-gun Confederate artillery battery. The commander of the regiment, Col James M. Williams, of abolitionist beliefs, had told his men before the battle that no quarter would be given if they were captured. He then ordered them to fix bayonets and move forward in formation. Williams was wounded in the push forward and replaced by Lt. Col. John Bowles.

As the battle progressed, units of the Federal Second Indian Home Guard Regiment unintentionally moved in between the First Kansas Colored Volunteer Regiment and the Texas dismounted cavalry regiments. Bowles ordered the Indians to fall back to their position in the battle line. The Confederates heard the command and assumed that the Federals were falling back. The order was then given to pursue the Federals. Approaching within twenty-five paces of the Kansas Regiment, they were met with a volley from their deadly accurate Springfield rifles. The Confederate color bearer fell, but the colors were immediately raised, and again promptly shot down. Raised again, they were once more leveled by a volley from the Kansas Regiment. This time, the Federals took the colors.

Realizing he could no longer hold his position north of Elk Creek, Cooper ordered his forces to remove the artillery, vigorously defend the bridge across the creek, and stand firm on the south bank of the stream. They made several determined efforts to hold the bridge, but Federal firepower prevailed. Many Texans died holding the bridge long enough to move the Confederate artillery

across it. As the Federals poured across the bridge and the fords of Elk Creek and onto the prairies beyond, the Confederates were in orderly retreat for about a mile and a half down the Texas Road to Honey Springs Depot. Here, a final and effective stand was made, giving the Confederates time to evacuate virtually all of their forces, artillery and baggage train. All buildings and supplies at Honey Springs were set afire. The Federals arrived soon enough to extinguish some of the flames and save quantities of bacon, dried beef, flour, sorghum, and salt.

By 2 p.m., the battle was over – four hours after it began. Moving east from the battlefield, the Confederates met General Cabell's 3,000-man force en route with four mountain howitzers from Fort Smith. Too late to help.

Blunt, still suffering from an intense fever, decided not to pursue the enemy forces and to remain on the field for the night, treat the wounded, and bury the dead, including the Confederates. The next day he returned to Fort Gibson.

Losses reported by:

Confederates:

- 134 Confederates killed and wounded
- 200 Estimated Federals killed and wounded
- 47 Prisoners taken

Federals:

- 77 Federals killed and wounded
- 150 Confederates buried
- 77 Prisoners taken

Cooper afterwards sent a letter of appreciation to Blunt for his burial of the Confederate dead. Their unmarked graves may still be in the Honey Springs area. The bodies of the Federal dead were later reinterred in the Fort Gibson National Cemetery.

The Union victory at the Battle of Honey Springs prevented the Confederates from controlling Indian Territory north of the Arkansas River. This opened the path for Blunt and Union forces to move on Fort Smith, which was taken two months later in September.

Note from William Andrews – Department Secretary

I've received a card of thanks from P C-in-C Shaw for our Department's contributions during the recent National Encampment and during the past year. I hope that all of the camps are having a great year!

In Fraternity, Charity, and Loyalty,
--Bill

Camp Business

Due to the joint meeting with the SCV members this month, our discussion of camp business may be curtailed somewhat, but please remember that we need to be ready to elect a slate of officers for 2020 in October or December.



Brother Clint Anderson at a Honey Springs monument.



Camp Calendar

- Sept. 26 Joint Camp Meeting – SCV/SUVCW at Hardesty Regional Library
- October 24 Camp meeting – Hardesty Regional Lib.
- Nov. 1-3 Reenactment of Battle of Honey Springs
- Nov. 11 Veteran's Day Parade – Downtown Tulsa
- Dec. 5 Camp Meeting – Hardesty Regional Lib.

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