

CONFEDERATE INDIAN TROOP CONDITIONS IN 1864

By Allan C. Ashcraft*

By 1864 the various Indian units of the Confederate military service had been consolidated with a battery of Texas volunteer artillery to make up the Indian Division of Brigadier-General D. H. Cooper. In all, this division consisted of Brigadier-General Stand Watie's First Indian Brigade, the Second Indian Brigade of Colonel Tandy Walker, Colonel David Newman McIntosh's Creek and Seminole Brigade, a small "Reserve Squadron" of Captain George Washington, Howell's Battery of Texans under First Lieutenant H. A. Routh, and a division staff of four officers. General Cooper's assistant inspector general was Captain B. W. Marston, a young Louisianan who displayed great enthusiasm and frankness in carrying out his duties. After being cited for "gallant and meritorious conduct" at Shiloh in 1862, Captain Marston requested transfer to the Confederate trans-Mississippi west. Eventually, he was ordered to join Cooper's command at Fort Towson, Indian Territory.¹

In December, 1864, Captain Marston journeyed to the Boggy Depot assembly area of Cooper's Indian Division where he was to conduct a routine inspection of the various regiments and companies of the division.² Marston's inspection report (which is well preserved in the very excellent Archives Division of the

* Dr. Allen C. Ashcraft, Assistant Professor of History, A. & M. College of Texas, College Station, Texas, presents here in *The Chronicles* (Winter, 1963-1964) history not generally known concerning the Indian Division of the Trans-Mississippi Department, C.S.A. Material used are among the Confederate records in the Archives Division of Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.—Ed.

¹ Captain Marston's father, Henry W. Marston, had come to Feliciana Parish, Louisiana from Boston in 1822. By 1835, Henry had prospered in banking and planting, and had settled on an estate near Clinton, Louisiana. All three of his sons: James, Henry, and Bulow served in the Confederate Army. The old Marston house, which was used as a hospital during the Civil War, fell into disrepair as the post-war decades passed. Shortly before World War II this structure was used as a dilapidated backdrop for certain portions of the moving picture version of *Tobacco Road*. In 1941 the Marston heirs gave the old building to the community. It has since been restored by the East Feliciana Pilgrimage and Garden Club. From Inventory Folder to Marston (Henry W. and Family) Papers, L.S.U. Archives, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Included in the folder are newspaper strips from the *States-Times* (Baton Rouge) Oct. 6, 1949 and Nov. 3, 1941, and the *Morning Advocate* (Baton Rouge) Aug. 17, 1941.

² Capt. B. W. Marston was acting Assistant Adjutant General on the staff of Brig. General Douglas B. Cooper, Commanding Confederate States Forces of Indian Territory, in the field in October, 1864, Choctaw Agency region west of Fort Smith. General Cooper's report of October

Louisiana State University Library at Baton Rouge) offers considerable insight into conditions and problems that were confronting the Indian troop units at that time. Howell's Battery was the only unit that Marston actually inspected. He reported that (his Texas artillery force had an aggregate of 75 officers and men, 82 horses (57 of them classed as "unservicable"), and 6 guns of the six-pounder variety. All of the battery equipment was accounted for, military appearance of the soldiers and police of quarters were adjudged to be "tolerable," and a notation was made that orders from higher headquarters had not been "duly received" by the battery.

The reason why Captain Marston was unable to inspect the Indian units was explained in the "remarks" section of the inspection report form. These also present a rather detailed picture of the military status of the Indian commands in this phase of the war:¹

REMARKS WITH CAPTAIN MARSTON'S INSPECTION REPORT

None of the commands mentioned herein were formally inspected except Howells Battery of Texas Vol, the rest are Indian organizations, and from various causes, they had, at the date of this Report, dispersed and gone to their homes. — The Return of the Indian Brigades² as contained herein is taken from the Books of the A.A. Genl of Div — the last return from them respectively — Which I thought best to embody.* The Indian Troops, besides being a peculiar organization, labor under many disadvantages — more, I venture to say, than any command in the Confederacy. Their organizations to start with are

10, 1864, to Capt. C. A. Scott, Act. Adj. General, District of Indian Territory, Ft. Towson, Choctaw Nation, makes special mention of Capt. Marston's exploit out from Buck Creek Camp (site in vicinity of present Panama, LeFlore County, Oklahoma): "While resting at Buck Creek Captain Marston and Captain Gunter, (Samuel H. Gunter of First Cherokee Regt.), with four men, swam the Arkansas, made a reconnaissance of the enemy on the north side, ascertained certainly that the enemy were not evacuating (Ft. Smith), captured two Federals with arms, horses, rigging, and greenbacks, paroling one of the prisoners who was badly wounded, and then recrossed again, swimming the Arkansas in full view of the enemy, and arrived tired, but safely, at my camp near Chula Church, where the train had been directed to meet us. This feat is unsurpassed in the annals of the war."—Report Brig. Gen. Douglas H. Cooper, C.S. Army, War of the Rebellion, *Official Records, Union and Confederate Armies*, Vol. XLI, Pt. I, pp. 31-36.—Ed.

¹ Original grammar and punctuation have been retained in all documents and letters quoted in this article. (In a few places, parts of long text have been set in new paragraphing for clearness.—Ed.)

² The strength table, presented in Marston's report, gives some concept of the size of the various Indian units in 1864. As the young inspector pointed out, all of this information (except for the figures pertaining to Howell's Battery) were copied from earlier reports. See accompanying table opposite page.

* Since the return was made, four Batteries (?) of white troops have been attached to the 1st Ind. Brigade. They having recently come out of the enemies lines, no Return from them has been received therefore they are not included in the aggregate.

P R E S E N T

Comdg. Officer	Troops	FOR DUTY										On special duty	Stack	in arrest	Aggregate		
		Number of Regts	Number of Cos	Genl. Ofcs.	Genl. Staff Ofcs.	Field, Staff and Company Ofcs.	Enlisted Men	Aggregate	On special duty							Stack	
									Ofcs.	Enlisted Men	Ofcs.					Enlisted Men	Ofcs.
1 Lt. H.A. Routh	- Howell's Btry		1			3	64	67		7		1			75		
B. Gen. S. Watie	- 1st Ind Brig	2	24	1	80	623	710		108	1	38				857		
Col. T. Walker	- 2nd " "	3	33	2	63	851	916		1	40	2	24	6		989		
Col. D. McIntosh	- Creek & Seminole Brig.	3	30		112	1020	1132		37			13	1		1133		
Capt. C. Washington	- Reserve Sqdn.		2		6	145	151								151		
B. Gen. D.H.Cooper	- Gen & Staff Officers			14			5								5		
Aggregate		8H 3B	90	2	2264	2703	2987		1	1923	76	7			3260		

STRENGTH TABLE - MARSTON'S REPORT, 1864

Taken from cover sheet of "Inspection Report of Cooper's Division, Dist. Ind. Ty. Trans-Miss. Dep't. Commanded by Brig. Genl. D. H. Cooper. Inspected by Capt. B. W. Marston & Insp. Genl. Near Boggy Depot, Dec. 18th, 1864 (MS81).
 - "Marston Henry W. and Family's Papers." Louisiana State University Archives, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

as loose and irregular as their ideas of military propriety; their officers as a general rule are ignorant of their duties, and by education are incapable of informing themselves. — this nature of things would necessarily make discipline loose, and that being the case the command is unworkable. — When the Indians came down from the neighborhood of the enemy on the Arkansas River about the 1st of Nov. their first impulse, officers and men alike, was to go home. It was intended to have kept them on the Boggies, build winter quarters, and instruct them in the various Military exercises during the winter, this became impracticable from the facts that neither forage nor provisions had been accumulated during the summer to supply them, and the most of them were destitute of clothing or blankets; nor could axes be had to build huts — the 2nd Ind. Brigade having only three or four, and they were private property, the 1st and 3rd may have been a little better supplied, but there was universal complaint in both of them — In this condition Genl. Price's army passed through their midst, and the small amount of provisions accumulated was immediately consumed by them, the severity of winter setting in at the same time made it self preservation for the Indians to disperse.

Stringent orders have been issued for them to assemble in camps; but they have as little effect as 'Mexican pronunciamientos' with as little power vested in the comdr to enforce them. Such is the state of the Indian troops at the present time, and this they are apt to remain until spring, unless they are satisfied of an advance of the enemy, when every man would most probably turn out. — I consider one of the greatest evils to the service existing in the Indian Troops, is, the great number of white men not citizens of the Territory who have sought service in the Indian Regts to get out of service — There are some few exceptions to this rule — In some instances there are white companies, entire, in the Indian Regts. I would respectfully recommend the propriety if not necessity, of transferring every white man not on duty in the Staff Depts, not an officer, to some white command, or when there exist organized white companies, they be allowed to organize themselves into a Battalion or Regiment, as it stands now (and I don't think there are less than a thousand white men in the Indian Division) they think themselves entitled to the same rights and "prerogatives" of the Indians, and are in no respect more efficient, being as a general rule totally ignorant of drill and unaccustomed to discipline — The Indians rid of this demoralizing element, but at the same time be made to depend and rely upon a steady body of white troops which are disciplined and know how to enforce it, will give them consistency and make a frame work to build upon and being gradually taught the weight and necessity of discipline will become as effective as light cavalry or mounted infantry could be desired. — If the transferring of these white men would effect no other good than rendering them efficient it would result in no small benefit to the service. —**

I would respectfully recommend the propriety of competent and disinterested authority making a thorough investigation of the causes of the present disorganized condition of the Indian Troops, with a view to correct the evils which beset them, the many disadvantages they labor under, and the improvement of the general service — To

** Who is responsible for the organization of the Indian Troops; their wants of every thing necessary for their comfort and efficiency as soldiers is not for me to say, but this bad organization and these wants exist and have existed for so long a time, they are beginning to think that patience has ceased to be a virtue.
 † *Ibid.*, p. 10.

illustrate the Justice of this recommendation it is simply to state, that the Brig Genl D. H. Cooper was placed in command of the Ind Troops by the President, he has no more command of them, except the influence he wields from long association & universal kindness, than if he was not their General, and, if he has not command of them yet by now in command, who has? Further than this it is not my province as Div Inspr to go, but facts are on record to warrant an investigation — as for the data, in full, required by the Inspection Circular I would state that it cannot be had at present, but they are almost as destitute of every attribute of a soldier as if they were raw recruits. I would further state that they have not received pay since the 30th of June 1863.

B. W. Marston
Capt & Inspector General
Cooper's Div

While Marston's report indicated a lack of leadership on the part of the division commander, General Cooper continued to hold the young officer in high esteem. In a personal letter to General Edmund Kirby Smith, Commanding General of the Confederate Department of the Trans-Mississippi West, Cooper recommended approval of Marston's application for a furlough with glowing statements about the inspector's abilities. In this same communication Cooper included some general comments about basic shortcomings of the Indian Division. Perhaps General Cooper thought that this might cushion the effect of Marston's report as that document was being forwarded from Cooper's headquarters to the headquarters of Major-General S. B. Maxey, Commanding General of the District of Indian Territory:⁴

HeadQrs Indian Division
Boggy Depot CN Dec 28th 1864

Gen,

Capt Marston having applied for leave to visit Shreveport and the residence of his Father in La, I take great pleasure in bearing testimony to his having merited by his conduct, during the time he has been on my staff, the character given him by yourself — that of a soldier and a Gentleman.

It may not be inappropriate for me to say: That the great desideratum in this District, is efficient Staff Officers — without whom (with the faulty organization of the Indian Troops — or rather the want of information among by far the greater portion of their officers — and which must necessarily continue to some extent, on account of a lack of education, in the most limited sense of that word,) there is no prospect of introducing order, system, discipline or drill among them. We want young, intelligent — zealous and, above all, honest Staff Officers, in the Indian Commands. Officers who are willing to work, patiently, almost without the hope of reward, for the good of the service and the success of our Holy Cause.

I trust, Gen, you will excuse the liberty I have taken — of addressing an unofficial note, being myself personally unknown to you. The

⁴D. H. Cooper to E. Kirby Smith, Hq., Indian Division, Boggy Depot, C. N., Dec. 28, 1864. MSS. Marston (Henry W. and Family) Papers. LSU Archives, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

desire to do an act of justice to our mutual young friend Capt. Marston, has overcome my reluctance to deviate from propriety!

I am Gen

Respectfully

D. H. Cooper

Brig Gen Comdg

Gen E Kirby Smith

Shreveport

La

On the very next day, General Cooper attempted to solve one of the most crucial problems that Marston had disclosed in his report, the matter of white men serving in Indian units. In a dispatch to Brigadier-General W. R. Boggs, Chief of Staff at Kirby Smith's departmental headquarters, Cooper asked for permission to re-organize his division in such a way as to separate the white soldiers from the Indian troops. Captain Marston's name was offered as possible commander of the proposed all-white unit in the Indian Division.³

Copy

Head Quarters Indian Division

Boggy Depot — Dec 28th 1864

Gen

I have the honor to apply for an order from the Genl Comdg authorizing Capt B W Marston Inspt Genl of Division to organize the white men of the Division, into a separate Battalion or Regiment, the same to be attached to my Division.

The necessity of having white troops in an organized body attached to the Indian Division has been frequently represented by me. The white men mixed in with the Indians are an injury to them and are not doing justice to themselves or their country — By being organized into a separate Battalion or Regiment, as the numbers will warrant, with good officers they will set an example to the Indians and promote the efficiency of the service. Especially by affording me the means of enforcing orders among the Indians and lawless white men of the Indian Territory. Capt Marston sent here with high recommendations from the Genl Comdg has served on my staff for nearly a year as Inspt-Genl & AAA Genl,⁴ and has always shown by his conduct that the Comdg Genl of the Dept was not mistaken in his estimate of his character and worth.

Tho an excellent Staff Officer, whom I should regret to part with, Capt Marston is peculiarly fitted, by his temperament, for a Cavalry Officer; and having a military education can soon familiarize himself with the Cavalry drill, sufficiently for the Mounted Riflemen

Respectfully

D H Cooper

Brig Genl Comdg

Brig Genl W R Boggs

Chief of Staff T M D

Thru Maj Gen Maxey

Comdg D I T

Official Copy

T. R. Hinton

Capt & AA Gen

³ D. H. Cooper to W. R. Boggs, Hq., Indian Division, Boggy Depot, C. N., Dec. 29, 1864. MSS, Marston (Henry W. and Family) Papers, L.S.U. Archives, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

⁴ Acting Assistant Adjutant General.

As this letter from General Cooper passed through General Maxey's district headquarters on its way to General Kirby Smith's departmental headquarters, the following endorsement was added by General Maxey:*

Head Quarters
Dist Ind TY
Pt Towson C N
Dec 31st 1864

Respectfully forwarded.

The Chief white element in the Indian Division is in Watie's Brigade brought there under an authority which I am advised he has from the Sec of War to recruit within the enemy's lines

I know of no laws to prevent Genl Cooper who has been assigned by the Sec of War to the Command of the Indian Troops from making this organization without further trouble, other than the law (or laws) prohibiting the organization of new commands without special authority. My opinion has long been that whites should be kept out of Indian commands, and shortly after I took command I issued a note prohibiting the enlistment of white men into Indian Comds except upon authority of the Regtl Comdr. Some white men are necessary to the perfection of the organizations but as a general rule they join these commands to avoid strict discipline. They need a rigid disciplinarian — It's difficult under the most favorable circumstances to enforce rigid discipline in white troops in this Dist. The plan proposed for the white men in the Indian Comd is perhaps the best that could be fallen on. I regard Capt Marston as an energetic and ambitious young officer who would endeavor to make an organization of this kind valuable — It is the business of the Dist Comd to look after "the careless white men in the Indian Div" and he feels himself competent to do this duty

S B Maxey
Maj Gen
Comdg

Official

B W Marston
Capt & AA Genl

By early 1865 Captain Marston was in command of a separate battalion of white men in the Indian Division.¹⁰ He

* *Special Orders, No. 25* issued by T. M. Scott, Assistant Adjutant General, "By order of Major-General Maxey," from Headquarters of District of Indian Territory, Fort Towson, C.N., January 26, 1865, was published as a "Circular," stating that "Capt. B. W. Marston is hereby authorized to organize a battalion or regiment of white troops out of the Indian division, to be permanently attached to the Indian District." This "Circular" closes with this statement: "I may be found for the present at these headquarters. B. W. Marston, Inspector-General, Cooper's Division, District of Indian Territory." — *Official Records, op. cit.*, Vol. XLVIII, Pt. I, p. 1388.

Special orders, No. 11 issued by order of Brig. Gen. D. H. Cooper from Headquarters of District of Indian Territory, Fort Towson, C.N., March 23, 1865, states: "Capt. B. W. Marston is relieved from duty with the Indian Division, and is hereby announced as assistant inspector-general, District of Indian Territory, and will be obeyed and respected accordingly." — *Ibid.*, p. 1444.—Ed.

¹⁰ S. B. Maxey's endorsement, *Ibid.*

was acting in this capacity when the war ended and as he was taken prisoner by Union troops. After his parole at Shreveport, Marston turned to planting and steamboating and led what was apparently a full and successful life.¹¹

The December inspection report indicates that the Indian Division was seriously lacking in basic military attributes. Discipline was unknown, leadership and command were weak, supply and planning were deficient, and few members of the entire unit were capable of understanding the situation. In short, Cooper's command bore little resemblance to a military force. Yet, the individual soldiers must have had an interest in "the cause" as Marston proved by his comment that "every man would most probably turn out" if the Indian soldiers could be convinced that the enemy was advancing in the district. Unfortunately for the South, General Cooper was never adequately able to make use of this willingness on the part of his followers. Still, the fact that both Cooper and Maxey pushed for the formation of a separate battalion of white troops shows that these leaders were capable of making an effort to erase some of the most serious faults of the Indian Division.

¹¹ Inventory Folder to Marston (Henry W. and Family) Papers, LSU Archives, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The enclosed material was located by the author while conducting research made possible by an allocation of funds from the State of Texas through the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas.