

The Kanza in the Civil War

By Doug and Pauline Sharp

With the coming of the American Civil War in 1861, the Kanza Indians, trained as warriors and superior horsemen, suddenly became an asset as the state recruited them as Union soldiers and scouts to stave off invasions by slave-holding tribes and Confederate supporters in Indian Territory. Company L, 9th Kansas Cavalry, was comprised mostly, if not entirely, of Kanza Indians. The 87 Kaw Indian braves who enlisted in the US Army served in this company from the spring of 1863 until July, 1865. The Kaw tribe was living on the Diminished Reserve south of Council Grove in a destitute condition. Each brave was required to take on the names of white men for Army records. As a result, many braves took the names of well-known Council Grove citizens, Indian agents, traders and national figures, such as Conn, Farnsworth, Chouteau and George Washington. 21 of them never came home – a large loss to the already diminished numbers of the tribe.

As early as May of 1861, several Kaws offered to join a local militia unit, but apparently were rejected. They had made a strong impression upon the US Cavalry when assisting it with making war upon the Kiowas on the Arkansas River. Perhaps emboldened by their success, their offer was nonetheless rejected. Shortly thereafter, however, the government reconsidered. A series of letters were exchanged by government officials later in 1861 indicating awareness of large bands of southern Indians enrolled to serve for the pro-slavery rebel forces. J.N. Lane, Commanding Officer of the Kansas Brigade, wrote the following letter to Indian Agents of the Sac & Fox, Shawnee, Delaware, Kickapoos, Potawatomie, and Kaw tribes:

“For the defense of Kansas I have determined to use the loyal Indians of tribes above named. To this end, I have appointed Augustus Wattles to confer with you and adopt such measures as will secure the early assembling of the Indians at this point.

If you have the means within your control I would like to have you supply them when they march with a sufficient quantity of powder, lead, & subsistence for their march to this place (Ft. Lincoln), where they will be fed by the government.

You can assure them for the Govt. that they will not be marched out of Kansas without their consent—that they will only be used for the defense of Kansas.”

Proving once again that the wheels of government move slowly, recruitment did not begin until March, 1863. Company L was first reported at Fort Leavenworth May 23,

1863 under the leadership of Captain John I. DeLashmutt. Among the names of Kansas recruits were the following; William Hardheart, Joseph Germengo, Add Doris, Conasalla, Little Bear, Eli Elkhorn, James Otter, Eagle Ocia, Peter Shoto, Shunga Nuga, Joseph Wolf, Arson Aqua, Edward Gahoga, Joseph Kickapoo, Eli Kasa, and Little Thunder. The Leavenworth Daily Conservative reported "Captain Delashmutt's company of Indians camped near the Fort, have received their horses and will soon join their regiment – the Ninth." The following report of the farmer for Kansas Indians, T.S. Huffaker, is worthy of notice, among other items stating that over 80 braves had enlisted in the United States army during that year:

"Sir – I submit this as my report for the past year as farmer for the Kansas Indians. The Indians are still laboring under the same disadvantages mentioned in my last annual report, the same insufficient number of oxen, plows and other agricultural implements; but they have, notwithstanding these difficulties, been able to plant more than 300 acres of ground, from which they will gather some eight or nine thousand bushels of corn. They have devoted most of their time to the raising of corn, being better acquainted with the culture of corn than of other products. Many families have been unable to cultivate their farms as they should, owing to the fact that many of their able-bodied men have gone into the army, of whom more than eighty have enlisted in the United States service during the last year. The Indians are well pleased with their new mode of life, and say they do not desire to exchange their present mode for the former. They, to commence another year favorable, should be furnished with an additional number of oxen, plows, etc., say twice the number they now have."

After leaving Fort Leavenworth on June 19, 1863, they reported to Westport, Mo. July 31, 1863. They were also stationed at Trading Post, Ks in Linn County; Fort Scott, Ks; Osage Mission, Ks. (St. Paul); Lawrence, Ks.; Fort Smith, Arkansas; Springfield Mo; Little Rock, Arkansas; and Duvall's Bluff, Ark. As to whether or not the Kaw soldiers consented to serving in neighboring states, as was assured by Commanding Officer Lane, it is doubtful.

The Museum of the Kansas National Guard has many records pertaining to the service of the 9th Kansas Volunteer Cavalry of which Company L was a part. However, detailed information pertaining to the activities of Company L is hard to pinpoint. The following information is taken verbatim from their records: "The Quantrill raid on Lawrence took place in the month of August 1863, and nearly every squadron of the 9th participated in his pursuit. Captain Coleman with D Company, and Captain Pike with K Company, were the first on his trail. They struck his rear guard, as he was retreating southward from Lawrence, near Brooklyn, and hung on his rear and flank, fighting him until his band had scattered among the forest and their haunts in Missouri. Lieut. Col. Clarke, with E, G & F companies, encountered them as they passed the state line into Missouri,

and did such execution as the nature of the retreat would admit. Maj. Thacher, with A & L companies of the 9th and one squadron of the 11th Kansas, marched from Westport and joined in the pursuit near Grand River in Missouri. His command killed several of the raiders and recaptured some of the property captured from Lawrence.

This service, from the spring of 1863 to the close of the war, in this part of Missouri, was of the most inhumane and barbarous character ever known to a civilized people. The soldiers constituting the large armies were indeed fortunate in comparison with the 9th and other troops detailed on this fearful duty of fighting bushwhackers." If the Union soldiers on the border were killed by guerrilla bushwhackers, their inanimate bodies were outraged and disfigured; if wounded, they were tortured; if made prisoner they were shot, mutilated and scalped.

John Madden, in his book Along the Trail, reminisces about the Kaw Trail and seeing among the Kaw hunters an occasional blue coat, indicating that the wearer had served as a soldier in the War of the Rebellions, "for it is a fact that the Kaw tribe furnished many sharpshooters to the government, and these men performed their duty well in dealing with the bushwhackers of Missouri and Arkansas, I remember with some degree of tenderness, that these blue-coated braves were always kindly received and treated well by the settlers along the trail."

Abram Munroe, Nim-ja-no-gah, mustered into the 9th Cavalry on May 2, 1863 and was soon promoted to sergeant. In a letter to the Kaw Agent Hiram W. Farnsworth dated July 31, 1864 from Little Rock, Ark., he wrote: "I take the present opportunity to inform you that my brother "Hard Wind" is sick also my nephew Edna. Please let the tribe know that you have received a letter from me. Tell my Sister and Aunt that I am down here fighting every day. I just returned a few days ago from a scout & brought in four prisoners. When the Rebels see the Federals coming they always run and don't stop to show fight. Tell Dohunmony that the boys are all well except those I mentioned. I have heard that the Chiefs have gone to Washington to make a treaty of their land and if it is true let me know immediately. The boys are all anxious about it do not want them while they are down here fighting for their country to sell their land and we ask you to see that they do not do so. I want you to see that they do not treat my land off for I want to live on it myself when I get out of the service.

I and my boys are down here exposed to danger both of being killed and dying from sickness while they are lying at home doing nothing and now while we are away they want to sell our land. It is not right and the boys down here will never give their consent and if they sell their own, I don't want mine disturbed. Tell Frank James if he is there to come back as we have no information and want him for that purpose tell him to come to Ft. Scott then to Ft. Smith then he can come here in a boat. If any of the Chiefs are

there tell them to go ahead and sell their own land if they want but not to interfere with ours for we don't care where they go.

Tell my brothers and sisters that this is a good country and that we get plenty to eat and plenty of forage for our horses. I am down here hunting Rebels and don't think I will get home for some time. I have written 3 letters before this and have never heard a word from any of them. I wish you would write for the boys are getting very impatient answer this as soon as possible. Tell the Chiefs that we have just as hard boys here as they have and that they can't get ahead of us in that line. When I started I was Sergeant and am still. "

Sergeant Munroe was so respected by his men that 56 of them signed the following letter to agent Farnsworth on Dec. 3, 1864: "We the undersigned Kaw Indians and noncommissioned officers of Co. L 9th Kansas Cavalry being a majority of the Tribe above names, would respectfully recommend that Sgt. Abram Munroe (Nim-ja-no-jah) a chief and brave be appointed "Head Chief" of the Kaw Nation as we consider him as the most competent man now in the Tribe to fill the function and would respectfully solicit our Great Father Abraham Lincoln, president of the United States to appoint him such as he is a wise and sagacious chief of old & high Blood and has the good of his country and people always in view." Even though Abram Munro did not become head chief, after the war his name appears on the bottom of documents as one of the Kanza chiefs and headmen signing letters to the agent and commissioners, annuity rolls, and proposed treaties.

The following newspaper report from Duvall's Bluff, Arkansas, by a certain Benjamin Woodward, was dated Oct. 31, 1864:

"The 9th Kansas Cavalry is here, and have many sick, but they have just arrived, and have not been within reach of sanitary supplies. Company L of this regiment is composed exclusively of Kaw Indians. A finer body of men was never seen, and the officers of the regiment say they are the best and most reliable scouts, and most splendid horsemen."

The Topeka Journal, Oct. 23, 1916 documented the following story relating to the Kaws recruitment into the 9th:

"If some of the Kaw Indians who lived in Kansas in the early days could be brought back to life, the state could produce some very likely marathon racers. As the crow flies and as the Indian traveled, the distance from Topeka to Council Grove is 60 miles. According to William K. Beach, an old settler living 5 miles west of Dover in 1916, the Kaw Indians considered traveling on foot from Council Grove to Topeka a day's journey.

It is interesting to speculate on what they might have done had they been given the benefit of modern training methods.

Mr. Beach told an interesting story in connection with the recruiting of the 9th Cavalry:

The men were first mustered in as infantry and after serving the required length of time were provided with mounts and converted to Cavalry said Mr. Beach. I think there was difficulty in securing the desired quota of men. The road from Council Grove to Topeka ran just north of my house. I remember that one day I saw a large number of Kaw Indians pass on their way to Topeka. They were accompanied by a recruiting officer.

The next day about noon I looked over toward the road and saw a big Kaw Indian streaking it back toward Council Grove. He was moving right along at a good gait and every bit of clothing he wore was a new Army hat with the spread eagle brass design of the Army on the front of it. He had a bundle strapped to his shoulders, but the hat was the only clothes he was wearing. Later I saw other Indians passing in the same manner.

A few days later I met the recruiting officer, and he told me that as soon as the Indians arrived in Topeka and were mustered in and given new army uniforms, everyone hit the trail back to Council Grove to show their Indian friends their new clothes. They took their clothes off and tied them in bundles while traveling, so they would be clean and unsoiled when shown to other members of the tribe. When they got near Council Grove they stopped and dressed up in their new uniforms. After they had been given an opportunity to display their new clothes, they all returned to service in the regiment.”

To be clear, some Kaw mixed bloods also served in regiments other than the 9th. Joe Bellmard and his second cousins Big Louis and Big Henry Pappan, who lived north of Topeka when the war broke out, also served. They enlisted in Company F, 15th Kansas Volunteer Cavalry Regiment in September, 1863. Their enlistment date was two weeks after Quantrill’s raid. Louis was 21 years old, however Joe and Henry were only 16, and 2 years shy of the legal enlistment age of 18. That fact was conveniently overlooked by Company F commander, Captain Orren Curtis who happened to be the brother-in-law of the Pappan brothers by virtue to his marriage to their sister, Ellen. Orren and Ellen Curtis were the parents of Charles Curtis, future Vice-President of the United States under Herbert Hoover, who was only 3 years old at the time. The 15th spent much of the war defending the eastern Kansas border from attacks by confederate guerrillas, which included confederate Indian troops from Indian Territory. They also participated in the Battle of Lexington (Missouri). After the War’s end, the 15th was also stationed for 6 months at Fort Larned and Fort Zarah, near Great Bend, to protect the wagon trains on the Santa Fe Trail from Cheyenne and Comanche attacks.

21 Kanza braves serving in the 9th lost their lives in service to their country. The majority died of diseases including pneumonia, dysentery, measles, bronchitis, fever. These soldiers were buried at cemeteries near where they succumbed, including Fort Scott, Trading Post, Fort Smith, Osage Mission, Little Rock and Devalls Bluff.

On Jan. 19th, 1867, Abram Munroe, Soldier chief Kaw Indians wrote the following letter:

“My Great Father, Washington City

My great father has called my chiefs to Washington to see him, and I hope you will do us all good.

I would like to have gone and seen you myself, but I think you do not know that when, the war broke out, a good many of our people, went to help drive back the Secesh from our country, and served as good soldiers all through the war. You sent us word that if the Secesh got all of our lands we would probably not get much to eat, so we went to the war—and the most of our men came home again, some of them died in the service, many after they came home. There is a number of Widows and orphans of our soldiers that our Great Father forgets. We think that our widows and orphans should not be forgotten by you. I was in a good many battles, one that lasted 4 days, and I was always ready to march even if the order came in the night. I am called the Soldier Chief and I want my great father to write a few lines to show me that he does not forget the soldiers and I would like to secure a medal from you.” It is not clear whether President Andrew Johnson ever responded to Abram Munroe’s letter.

The *Official Military History of Kansas Regiments* says:

“Owing to the fact that the companies composing the regiment were, soon after the regimental organization, so widely scattered, and on account of the nature and the character of the duty they were called upon to perform, it is impossible to give in detail an account of each battle and skirmish in which each part was engaged.... Had the regiment been from its organization, kept together and assigned a place where distinction was awarded for valiant and faithful service, it would undoubtedly have carved out for itself a record which would have given still additional luster to the already enviable fame which justly belongs to it as well as to the other heroic regiments sent forth by the state of Kansas.”

And so, a beaten down people who had suffered from forced migration brought on by the westward white movement termed Manifest Destiny, which in turn brought about near starvation conditions within their tribe, stepped up to serve their Great White Father during the most difficult time in our country’s history. Whether their service was forced or voluntary, they served honorably for the Union and helped to bring to conclusion the Civil War. In spite of the treatment imposed upon them by white settlers

which began even two centuries previous, and the policies of the federal government towards them and other native peoples, their resilience as a people shone through, as well as their loyalty to a government they did not create, nor sanction.