An 1869 photograph of Iowa chiefs taken in Washington, D.C.
In 1864, there were seventy-eight men between the ages of twenty and forty-five listed on the rolls of the Ioway Nation. Of that number, fifty, or nearly two-thirds, had volunteered to serve in the Union army during the Civil War. Sixteen Ioway men enlisted in the Thirteenth Kansas Volunteer Infantry in 1862, and thirty-two joined the Fourteenth Kansas Volunteer Cavalry in 1863. Seven more joined various other units in Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska. During the war, Ioway soldiers saw action in Tennessee, Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, and the Indian Territory.

Although the Ioways were certainly not the only Indigenous Americans to serve in the military during the war, the circumstances of their enlistment and their experiences in the army were different from those of most other Native American soldiers in the Trans-Mississippi West. Most Native men served in segregated units, but all fifty Ioways served in integrated units. This article seeks to investigate why the Ioways had the opportunity to serve in regular companies with white men. It also explores the Ioways’ military experiences and addresses some of the obvious questions raised by their willingness to enlist in the army.

One wonders, for example, why the Ioways, who had been frustrated by six decades of contentious relations with the United States, chose to send two-thirds of their able-bodied men to fight for the federal government. At a time when settlers were demanding that Kansas tribes be removed to the Indian Territory to make their land available, the Ioways hoped that service in the military would help them leverage a bargain with the government that would allow them to retain their reservation in Kansas. Other reasons for their military service certainly came into play. Young Ioway men...
had a long history of participating in war. However, life on the reservation had largely put an end to that tradition. The Ioways may also have seen enlistment in the armed forces as a way to better themselves financially, as they were a small and impoverished tribe. The promise of a regular salary, food, and clothing may have made service enticing, as did the hope that the government would offer their families assistance while the men were away at war.

It is also possible that their Indian agent, John A. Burbank, somehow directed the Ioways' enlistment in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Kansas regiments. The Ioways' agents had a twenty-year history of exercising tight control over the activities of the tribe, and Burbank exerted his control by refusing to allow them to enlist early in the war. That the Ioways ended up enlisting when and where they did may well have been linked to Burbank's political and personal ties to the state's chief recruitment officer, Kansas senator James Henry Lane.

It also seems natural to ask whether the Ioways encountered racism or cultural difficulties unique to Native people while in the military. Throughout the war, segregated units of Native soldiers tended to receive clothing, weapons, and supplies that were inferior to those the army issued white soldiers. Because the Ioways served in integrated units, they fared better than most other Native soldiers who fought for either side during the war. Although it is difficult to determine the extent to which Ioways in the military were subjected to racism and discrimination, it does not appear that they were completely accepted by their white neighbors at home or in the military.

The Ioways, or Báxoje, as they call themselves, trace their earliest roots to MayanShuje, or Red Earth, near present-day Green Bay, Wisconsin. Over time, the Ioways broke away from their relatives the Otoes, Missourias, and Winnebagos and slowly migrated south and west. When they first encountered European missionaries in the 1670s, the Ioways were living in southeastern Minnesota and northeastern Iowa. Over the next 150 years, they gradually moved to southern Iowa and northern Missouri along the Grand and Chariton Rivers.

It was there that Ioway headmen signed their first land cession treaty with the U.S. government. In the Treaty of 1824, they sold their rights to all land in the state of Missouri north of the Missouri River for $5,000. Over the next thirteen years, more treaties pushed the Ioways toward Missouri's western border. The 1836 Platte Purchase Treaty forced them out of the state and onto a two-hundred-square-mile reservation that straddled the border separating present-day Kansas and Nebraska on the west bank of the Missouri River. By the time of the Civil War, subsequent treaties had whittled that reservation to about one-quarter of its original size. Furthermore, the government forced the Ioways to share the little land they retained with the Sac and Fox Nation of Missouri, which had been forced to relinquish all of its adjoining reservation.

During their years on the reservation, the Ioways had been pressured by government agents and Presbyterian missionaries to assimilate. By 1861, many Ioways had attended—if only sporadically—classes and church services at the Presbyterian Ioway, Sac and Fox Mission. They had also given up many of their traditions and had begun to adopt the agrarian methods and lifestyle of their white neighbors.

The chain of events that led to the Ioways' participation in the Civil War began in mid-April 1861 with the arrival of their new Indian agent John A. Burbank. Like most Indian agents who received their posts through political patronage, Burbank was a member of a well-connected family. His older brother, J. Edward Burbank, was a newspaperman who had become a member of the Nebraska territorial legislature in 1859. His sister, Lucinda, was the wife of Indiana governor and later senator Oliver P. Morton.

Natives of Indiana, Edward and John Burbank were also abolitionists and political allies of fellow Hoosier and Kansas Jayhawker James Lane. Edward Burbank met Lane while the latter was on a speaking tour in Indiana in 1856. Lane was making plans for what would eventually become known as the “Lane Trail,” a route from Chicago to the Kansas-Nebraska border. Lane hoped the trail would serve as a conduit to move abolitionists into Kansas and freed slaves out of the region, all while bypassing the slave state of Missouri.


The Ioways, or Báxoje, as they call themselves, trace their earliest roots to Mayan Shuje, or Red Earth, near present-day Green Bay, Wisconsin. Over time, the Ioways broke away from their relatives the Otoes, Missourias, and Winnebagos and slowly migrated south and west. When they first encountered European missionaries in the 1670s, the Ioways were living in southeastern Minnesota and northeastern Iowa. Over the next 150 years, they gradually moved to southern Iowa and northern Missouri along the Grand and Chariton Rivers. A series of treaties with the U.S. government in the early nineteenth century pushed the Ioways toward Missouri’s western border, and then out of the state altogether. By the Civil War, they shared a small reservation with the Sac and Fox Nation of Missouri on the west bank of the Missouri River where Kansas and Nebraska meet.

During that meeting, Lane regaled Edward Burbank with descriptions of a town site located on the Big Nemaha River near the Kansas-Nebraska border that he hoped to make the terminus of his trail. The charismatic Lane persuaded both Burbank brothers to move to the Nebraska Territory in 1857. Soon, the three men helped found the town of Falls City. Edward Burbank became the owner of the Broad Axe, the town newspaper, and John Burbank opened a mercantile store in the new village.7

Though Sol Miller, the editor of the White Cloud Kansas Chief, credited Kansas’s other senator, Samuel Clarke Pomeroy, with handing out the patronage that sent John A. Burbank to be the Ioways’ Indian agent, it seems likely that Burbank was more deeply indebted to Lane for his assignment. In the months leading up to the presidential election of 1860, Lane had cultivated a close relationship with Abraham Lincoln. With Lincoln’s inauguration in March 1861 and Lane’s election to the U.S. Senate just days later, Lane was in the position to award most of Kansas’s patronage appointments.8


7. “Special Term of County Court, May 17th, 1858,” in Edwards, History of Richardson County, Nebraska, 135–36; “The Meek-Davis Tragedy,” in Edwards, History of Richardson County, Nebraska, 168–69.

Upon his arrival at the Great Nemaha Agency, John Burbank was impressed to find the Ioways making great strides toward “civilization.” They were moving away from their communal villages and establishing their own farmsteads. Ioway families were building “comfortable houses”; in addition, they had cultivated a total of 225 acres and planned to double that acreage the following year. Burbank noted, “I find also upon this reservation that a mania for work has taken possession of a majority of the Indians. . . . The progress that this tribe of Indians are making is certainly flattering.”

However, with the coming of war and the pervasive atmosphere of uncertainty in the counties that surrounded the reservation in the spring and summer of 1861, Burbank was eager to ensure that the tribes under his charge did not fall under the influence of secessionists. Though Kansas was known as a free state, proslavery sympathizers were never far away. Residents of White Cloud, Kansas, a town just one mile east of the Ioway’s reservation, cast a wary eye across the Missouri River. They were concerned about reports that armed secessionists from Holt County, Missouri, had vowed to cross the river to cause trouble. Just four miles downriver from White Cloud, the town of Iowa Point, Kansas, was said to be the home of secessionists, and there was a report of a Confederate flag flying just west of the reservation on Roy’s Creek. “We have enemies on our border. . . . and, worse than all, traitors in our midst,” warned the editor of the White Cloud Kansas Chief.

However, with the coming of war and the pervasive atmosphere of uncertainty in the counties that surrounded the reservation in the spring and summer of 1861, Burbank was eager to ensure that the tribes under his charge did not fall under the influence of secessionists. Though Kansas was known as a free state, proslavery sympathizers were never far away. Residents of White Cloud, Kansas, a town just one mile east of the Ioway’s reservation, cast a wary eye across the Missouri River. They were concerned about reports that armed secessionists from Holt County, Missouri, had vowed to cross the river to cause trouble. Just four miles downriver from White Cloud, the town of Iowa Point, Kansas, was said to be the home of secessionists, and there was a report of a Confederate flag flying just west of the reservation on Roy’s Creek. “We have enemies on our border. . . . and, worse than all, traitors in our midst,” warned the editor of the White Cloud Kansas Chief.

Burbank believed that some of the white secessionists who lived near the Ioways were also attempting to undermine the tribe’s faith in the Union. These settlers claimed that should the federal government lose the war, it would be unable to pay the Ioways the annuities they had been promised. There were also rumors afloat that Ioway men were in danger of being seduced to fight for the Confederacy by Cherokee recruiters who were promising them “guns and many other fine presents.”

If these rumors were true, the Ioways would have been among many Natives recruited for service by the Confederates. It has been estimated that twenty thousand Indigenous people served in military units during the Civil War. Confederates mustered in the first Native troops in the Trans-Mississippi West in 1861. With the outbreak of the war, the federal government abandoned four military posts in the Indian Territory. It had established these posts to protect settlements of Cherokees, Muscogees (also known as Creeks), Seminoles, Chickasaws, and Choctaws that had been removed to the territory from the southeastern United States. After the federal government called their troops east to help fight the Confederacy, many members of these Native nations saw the abandonment of the territory as a breach of the government’s removal treaties that left them exposed and vulnerable to attack by Confederates from neighboring Texas and Arkansas.
Deserted by the Union, many Native Americans in the Indian Territory felt that they were forced to ally themselves with the South. Though some were slaveholders, their decision to side with the Confederacy had little to do with the desire to fight for the protection of that institution. Instead, many believed it was safer to join the South than to risk a Confederate invasion against which they could not defend themselves. Brigadier-General Albert Pike, an Indian agent who was known and trusted by many Native people in the Indian Territory, conducted treaty negotiations on behalf of the Confederate government. Attempting to secure the region for the South, Pike informed Native leaders that the Confederacy was willing to annex the territory, guarantee the practice of slavery inside its borders, protect the Native nations from invasion and assume the responsibility of paying the annuities the federal government had promised them. In return, the tribes would raise home guard units that would be armed and paid by the Confederate government but would be reserved only for defense inside territorial boundaries. Enough Natives signed on that by the end of 1861, Confederates had raised two regiments of Cherokee mounted rifles; one regiment of Creek, or Muscogee, soldiers; and one mixed regiment of Choctaws and Chickasaws.16

However, as events began to build toward a confrontation with federal troops near the Arkansas-Missouri border in March 1862, all pretenses of the South’s Indian regiments remaining inside the Indian Territory quickly vanished. Major General Earl Van Dorn, commander of the Confederacy’s Trans-Mississippi District, ordered Pike to move his troops into Arkansas, where Van Dorn was organizing his army to march against the federals. Pike, dressed in a Plains-style feather headdress, leggings, and beaded moccasins, led about 3,500 Native soldiers toward Pea Ridge. One bystander recorded that the soldiers rode small Indian ponies while “yelling forth their wild whoop. . . . Their faces were painted and their long strait hair, tied in a queue, hung down behind. Their dress was chiefly in the Indian costume . . . and about half carried only bows and arrows, tomahawks and war clubs.”17

Upon their arrival at Pea Ridge, Pike’s men were immediately pressed into the battle, which had already begun. The Indian units, under the command of Cherokee general Stand Watie, overwhelmed Union general Franz

16. Warde, When the Wolf Came, 52–54; Abel, The American Indian in the Civil War, 24–25.
Sigel’s German artillerymen, who fled, leaving their cannons behind. Pike had given his men permission to “fight in their own fashion,” and Union commanders later alleged that Indian troops scalped and mutilated the bodies of as many as forty-five German dead and wounded at Pea Ridge. Reports of the depredations circulated widely in northern newspapers and inflated hostility against both southerners and Natives. The federal army sought to exploit this sentiment by planning to take eleven Native prisoners who had been captured at Pea Ridge on a propaganda tour of northern cities. However, before the tour could take place, all of the prisoners were killed, allegedly for trying to escape their captors. Atrocities notwithstanding, the Confederate Indian home guards had proven that Native soldiers could be utilized advantageously in battle.

Meanwhile the federal government had also begun to consider using Native troops. Many in the War Department, including Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, initially opposed the idea. Noting the “savage” behavior of Pike’s troops, they claimed that Native troops could not be trusted or controlled. Some also feared that if the federals pressed Native American and African American troops into service, they would be tacitly admitting that whites were not able to win the war on their own. Others argued that reports concerning the effectiveness of the Native soldiers at Pea Ridge had been greatly exaggerated. Sol Miller presented this case in the *Chief*, claiming that Pike’s troops “took to their heels—or if they fought at all . . . they killed as many rebels as they did Union men!”

However, Senator Lane believed Native troops could be used to protect his state’s southern border with the Indian Territory. Thousands of pro-Union Native Americans had flooded across that border, seeking protection from the Confederates. Lane advocated recruiting regiments from among these refugees. He planned to organize an expedition that would use these new troops, armed by the federal government, to escort their fellow refugees back to their homes in the Indian Territory. This expedition would help the Union regain control of the territory and had the added advantage of freeing the federal government from the responsibility of caring for and protecting the resettled refugees.

Just days after Pea Ridge, the War Department agreed to allow Native Americans to enlist in Kansas regiments as long as they fought only other Natives and were engaged only in the defense of the state. Lane, who had been lobbying to recruit Native soldiers since the fall of 1861, received permission to recruit loyal Native American volunteers from Kansas to fill two new regiments. In a matter of months, about two thousand Muscogees, Seminoles, Delawares, Kickapoos, Osages, Senecas, Cherokees, Chickasaws, and Choctaws had enlisted in the First and Second Kansas Indian Home Guard Regiments. It is important to note that these regiments were drawn not from Native Americans who lived on reservations in northern Kansas but from those who had fled into the state for protection. This recruitment focus might explain why the Ioways were not among those who joined the Indian home guards.

However, agent Burbank reported that before Pea Ridge, as early as May 30, 1861, “some of the Citizens have been trying to get the [Ioways] to join a [Union] military company.” Captain C. W. Shreve set up a recruiting office in White Cloud during the late spring and early summer of 1861 to raise a company of eighty-three men for the new Third Regiment Kansas Volunteer Infantry. According to a report in the *Chief*, the regiment would operate along Missouri’s western border in an attempt to keep Brigadier General Benjamin McCulloch and his Confederate troops from gaining a foothold in Kansas. In the months just before the Battle of Pea Ridge, the Confederates had a strong force in northwest Arkansas that threatened both eastern Kansas and southern Missouri.

Though this was to be a unit made up of white men, some apparently believed Ioways were eligible to help fill the ranks. While this attitude may speak to the urgency of filling the much-needed company, it also raises questions about the ways local citizens perceived the Ioways. Notices about Ioways in the local press indicate that it was unlikely that White Cloud residents saw Ioways as being like them. In fact, the locals regularly noted aspects of the Ioways’ behaviors and traditions that differed significantly from their own. Throughout the late 1850s and early 1860s, Sol’s *White Cloud Kansas Chief* newspaper carried notices that portrayed Ioways as being childlike.

---

in their habits, dress, celebrations, and diet and dangerous in their use of alcohol.22

Perhaps some reasoned that Ioways, with their traditional warrior culture, would make good soldiers. By contrast, it is also possible that whites saw them as having traveled far enough down the path of assimilation to be of use to the federal government. Regardless, agent Burbank refused to allow Ioways to answer this first call for recruits, telling them instead to stay home and focus on farming. “If [your] Great Father wanted [you] to fight,” he told them, “he would send [you] guns and provisions.”23

However, Burbank’s attitude seemed to change in the aftermath of the Battle of Pea Ridge. Once the Union began recruiting Native regiments in Kansas, the aged Ioway headman Na’heNeNing’e, or No Heart, called his young men together in March 1862. No Heart found that fifty Ioways were “eager” to volunteer to fight for their Great Father in Washington. War had traditionally played an important part in the lives of young Ioway men. Participating in war parties helped men achieve status in their communities and provided a path for them to become leaders. For example, the well-known Ioway headman MaxúThka, or White Cloud, was said to have honed his leadership abilities by participating in eighteen battles, mostly against Osages, in the first decade of the nineteenth century.24 For the most part, that path had been closed to young Ioway men after they moved to the reservation in 1837. The chance to participate in battle, as their fathers and grandfathers had done, may well have appealed to Ioway men who were eager to prove themselves in a traditional manner.25

However, No Heart told agent Burbank that the Ioway men were embarrassed by their state of poverty and were ashamed to report for duty in their destitute condition. No Heart asked that each man who enlisted first be given a horse, saddle, blanket and pair of shoes. “We have heard from our red brethren,” the headman told agent Burbank. “They are going to ride on horses, [and] we do not want to go [to war] unless we [too] can ride.” The Ioways were afraid that if Natives from other tribes saw their impoverished state, they would ridicule them for not having a leader who was capable of taking

---

22. Examples of perceptions of Ioways among White Cloud residents can be seen in “Great Time among the Indians—Heap Dog!” White Cloud Kansas Chief, March 25, 1858; “Indian Shot,” White Cloud Kansas Chief, July 15, 1858; “Indian ‘Shin-Dig,’” White Cloud Kansas Chief, August 11, 1859.


25. For more about Ioway military traditions and Ioway war parties in the reservation period, see Blaine, The Ioway Indians, 105–09, 178–81, 242–43; Olson, Ioway Life, 74–76.
care of them. No Heart said his young men were so self-conscious about their poverty that they were willing to have their military wages garnished to pay for the goods they needed.  

It is possible that the prospect of receiving new clothing, tack and horses from the government was another important reason for the Ioways’ eagerness to enlist. Indeed, it appears that the young men would have refused to enlist without the goods. Burbank sent a formal request to the Bureau of Indian Affairs for just over $5,000 to cover the supplies for the Ioways. “I have held three councils with [the Ioways] and urged them to [enlist] on foot, but they refuse,” wrote Burbank. “I can raise about sixty good warriors if their request is granted.”

In the summer of 1862, Senator Lane became the state’s commissioner for recruiting and immediately began forming four new Kansas regiments. He established a recruiting office in the northeast Kansas town of Leavenworth in early August and gave a series of fiery speeches throughout the region. Miller reported in the *Chief*, “Farmers are leaving their farms, and making arrangements to have their families taken care of, in order to go into the army. After Lane’s speech at Troy, a large number of undecided persons immediately enlisted. The prairies are on fire!”

If Lane’s speeches did succeed in leading men to enlist, it was likely because he was a master of the art of hyperbole. An observer once noted that Lane had the power to charm even his enemies “out of their principles.” He warned his audiences in Kansas that they were under the imminent threat of a Confederate invasion from Missouri. He falsely told the men that they were likely to be drafted soon; thus, they should enlist now. There were even allegations that Lane’s recruiters used threats and intimidation to fill the regiments. Lane’s opponents also complained that he was using his position as commissioner of recruitment to reward

---


27. Burbank to Superintendent of Indian Affairs H. B. Branch, March 3, 1862, microfilm 234, roll 310, frame 914, Great Nemaha Agency Records.


his political cronies by making them officers in the new
regiments.30

In northeast Kansas, recruiters scoured the country for
men to fill the new Thirteenth Regiment Kansas Volunteer
Infantry. Lane politico Cyrus Leland Sr. was charged with
recruiting men from the counties of Atchison, Brown,
Doniphan, Marshall and Nemaha for the regiment. Leland
would later assume the lucrative job of quartermaster
for the Thirteenth, and another Lane ally, Thomas M.
Bowen, earned a commission as a colonel and became the
regimental commander.31

There is no known direct evidence to indicate that
the Ioways’ enlistment in the Thirteenth Kansas was the
result of threats or intimidation. Yet, as has already been
mentioned, Lane had a personal and political connection
with John Burbank, the Ioways’ agent. This relationship
was manifested early in the Civil War in one of the many
controversial episodes of Lane’s extraordinary life. At
about the same time that Lane became a U.S. senator, he
accepted a commission to be an officer in the U.S. military,
not in his home state of Kansas but rather in his native
state of Indiana. The man who issued the commission
was Indiana governor Oliver P. Morton, John Burbank’s
brother-in-law. The commission was controversial
because a sitting U.S. senator also serving in the military
was generally interpreted as a violation of the Ineligibility
Clause of the U.S. Constitution, which prohibited anyone
from serving in more than one branch of the government
at a time. In the end, Lane claimed that he had never
officially accepted the commission; thus, he was free to be
sworn in as a senator.32

Lane’s military commission indicates that his
relationship with the Burbank family included political
favors. Therefore, it is plausible that Burbank encouraged
Ioway men to enlist in the Thirteenth, and later in the
Fourteenth, as a political favor to Lane, or as part of a quid
pro quo agreement in which the senator might promote
Burbank within the Bureau of Indian Affairs. These
possibilities may explain why the Ioway men enlisted
in these particular regiments, which were based on
geographical region rather than racial or ethnic makeup.

At any rate, sixteen Ioways made the twenty-mile
journey from their reservation to Troy, Kansas, in late
August and early September to enlist in the Thirteenth.
All but one joined Company B, which was commanded
by Captain Marion N. Beeler, a white man who lived in
Troy at the time of his commission. Beeler noted that
the Ioways in his company served together in the same
squad.33 Ioway recruit John Gamble, who also enlisted
in Troy, was the lone Ioway to join Company A of the
Thirteenth. Muster rolls show that in both companies,
Ioway men served alongside white men who came from
the Kansas counties adjacent to the Ioways’ reservation. It
is difficult to determine from the regiment rolls whether
Native men served in other companies of the Thirteenth
as well. All of the soldiers, including the Ioways, are listed
in the muster rolls under their Christian names.34

The Thirteenth Regiment Kansas Volunteer Infantry
mustered in on September 2, 1862, in Atchison, Kansas,
and soon marched into northwest Arkansas to join a
brigade commanded by General James G. Blunt. Blunt
had been tasked with keeping the Confederate army
from regaining the foothold it had held in the region
prior to the Battle of Pea Ridge. During the next couple
of months, the regiment marched through the Arkansas
Ozarks, subsisting mainly “on the country,” due to
a lack of supplies, which had to be transported from
Fort Scott, Kansas, by wagon. While the troops were
able to supplement their diet by hunting, much of their
subsistence came from foraging, an activity that historian
T. J. Stiles has referred to as “a kind of economic warfare
that punished local civilians.” Soldiers helped themselves
to livestock, crops, stores from citizens’ private larders
and almost anything else that could be carried away. As
a rule, the Union army reimbursed loyal citizens for the
goods they took while simply confiscating property from
those they deemed to be disloyal. However, hungry men
sometimes took whatever they could with little thought
of repayment.35

30. “Gen. Lane at Troy” and “Recruiting,” White Cloud Kansas Chief,
August 21, 1862; “Thirteenth Regiment,” White Cloud Kansas Chief,
October 16, 1862; Castel, Civil War Kansas, 86–92.
31. Castel, Civil War Kansas, 89.
32. Abel, The American Indian in the Civil War, 43. The Ineligibility
Clause of the U.S. Constitution, Article 1, Section 6, Clause 2, is also
called the Emoluments Clause.
33. Ioway soldiers to President Abraham Lincoln, January 13, 1864,
microfilm 234, roll 311, frames 728–29, Great Nemaha Agency Records.
34. Perl Wilbur Morgan, ed., History of Wyandotte County, Kansas
and Its People, vol. 1 (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1911), 197;
“Muster Out Roll, Thirteenth Regiment, Infantry, Kansas Civil War
php?item_id=227790&f=00360861.
35. T. J. Stiles, Custer’s Trials: A Life on the Frontier of a New America
(New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), 124; Matthew M. Stith, Extreme Civil
War: Guerrilla Warfare, Environment, and Race on the Trans-Mississippi
Frontier (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016), 57, 74.
On November 27 and 28, just three months after being mustered in, the Ioways engaged in their first significant battle with the Confederates at Cane Hill, about twenty-five miles southwest of Fayetteville, Arkansas. On the heels of a Union victory at Cane Hill, the Ioways' Company B were among those sent wading across the frigid Illinois River to drive the retreating enemy over the Boston Mountains.36

Ten days later, the Ioways participated in an especially grueling battle at Prairie Grove, Arkansas. On the morning of December 7, Blunt’s brigade took positions to meet Confederate troops led by Major General Thomas Hindman, whom they expected to attack from the direction of Fort Smith, thirty-five miles to the south. Blunt had been waiting for reinforcements from Brigadier General Francis Herron, who was racing his men to the scene from Missouri. To Blunt’s complete surprise, Hindman managed to bypass him and clashed directly with Herron at Prairie Grove. Upon discovering the maneuver, Blunt ordered his men east to assist Herron. The Ioways’ Company B reported that they were forced to march eighteen miles in the December cold, the last seven miles of which they marched double time.37

Arriving on the battlefield, where fighting was already well under way, the Thirteenth was among the first of Blunt’s troops to take its place in the battle line. According to Blunt’s biographer, Robert Collins, “The Thirteenth held off all Confederate attacks, despite facing ‘hot and heavy’ fire.”38 After several hours of combat, Blunt and Herron were able to stop Hindman’s advance. Writing to the Chief, one member of the Thirteenth bragged, “At the battle of Prairie Grove, when the Tenth and Eleventh [Kansas regiments] had retreated from the field, there stood the bloody Thirteenth, like a solid phalanx, keeping the rebels at bay, until night put an end to the conflict; and not until we were ordered from the field three times, did we retire.” Eleven members of Company B were wounded at Prairie Grove, though none of the Ioways were among them. It is unclear how the Ioways escaped such heavy combat without casualties. Captain Marion Beeler, their company commander, later reported that they were “good Soldiers, and have behaved well at the battle of Prairie Grove and are ever ready to do their duty.”

After the battle, the exhausted men rested briefly before marching eight miles to Cane Hill, Arkansas.39

Three weeks later, the Thirteenth, along with other regiments, marched roughly thirty-five miles from Cane Hill to Van Buren, Arkansas. During that march, the men had to wade through the frigid, and in places waist-deep, waters of Cove Creek as many as thirty-nine times. Historian and memoirist Wiley Britton was a member of the Sixth Kansas Volunteer Cavalry, which was also part of the campaign. “[The water] was almost ice-cold, for it came mostly from melted snow that had just run down in the mountain brooks,” Britton recounted years later. “The men, however, stood this extraordinary day and night’s march without a murmur, and in fact from conversations with several infantry-men just before we bivouacked, appear to have suffered less discomfort than I supposed they would.”40

While Britton’s recollections of the event were sanguine, others claimed that the resulting cases of pneumonia and chronic rheumatism cost the regiment more than any of the battles in which it fought. One soldier claimed that the Thirteenth, which had left Atchison in September with 890 men, was reduced by the end of the year to only about 300 men fit for duty. The Chief reported, perhaps sarcastically, that the Thirteenth had quickly become a ragtag collection of “old men, cripples, persons blind of an eye, and boys.”41

The hardships endured by the Thirteenth caused a great deal of discontent within the ranks, much of it directed toward the regiment’s commander, Colonel Thomas Bowen. While many derided Bowen as nothing more than Senator Lane’s political puppet, others went so far as to brand him a tyrant. In January 1863, word reached the reservation that some of the Ioways in Company B had deserted. James Whitewater, a corporal in the company, See also M. Jane Johansson, Albert C. Ellithorpe, the First Indian Home Guards, and the Civil War on the Trans-Mississippi Frontier (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016).


39. SOR, 659–60; Collins, General James G. Blunt, 120; “From the Kansas Thirteenth (For the Chief),” White Cloud Kansas Chief, April 23, 1863; Ioway soldiers to President Abraham Lincoln.


wrote to Burbank to inform him that he and the other Ioways liked army life and had no intention of leaving the regiment. “We like to stand all together with our Company,” he declared.42

For much of the remainder of the war, the Thirteenth shuffled between Fort Scott, Kansas, Van Buren, Arkansas, and posts in the Indian Territory, where it was mainly engaged in guarding supply trains. In August 1864, near the end of the war, the members of Company B experienced what surely must have been a disheartening loss. Thirty-eight members of the company and twenty cavalry soldiers from another company were ordered to chase bushwhackers through Frog Bayou northeast of Van Buren, Arkansas. This dangerous assignment involved four skirmishes in three days. During the last of these, on August 11, the company surrounded a house that held twenty bushwhackers. Though it was dark, Captain Marion Beeler, the company’s commander, ordered his men to attack the house. Beeler was seriously wounded in the fight and died the following day.43

Meanwhile, in the summer of 1863, military recruiters were once again scouting northeast Kansas for volunteers to fill a new regiment. The War Department had appointed General Blunt, who was also an ally of Senator Lane, as a special recruiting commissioner in charge of raising one new “white” cavalry regiment and one new “colored” infantry regiment. According to the Chief, the new white regiment, the Fourteenth Regiment Kansas Volunteer Cavalry, would be engaged in “killing rebels or confiscating their property.”44

Though recruiters were in White Cloud during the months of June, July, August, and September 1863, the thirty-two Ioways who joined the Fourteenth were among the very first in the region to sign up. They enlisted in White Cloud on June 20 and mustered in six weeks later at Fort Leavenworth. Like their relatives in the Thirteenth, many of the Ioways in the Fourteenth served in a single integrated company, Company C, alongside whites from White Cloud and the surrounding area. Other companies in the regiment were also integrated and included Delawares, Shawnees, and other Natives.45

When sixteen Ioways enlisted in the Thirteenth Kansas in September 1862, all but one joined Company B, commanded by Captain Marion N. Beeler, pictured here. Following the Battle of Prairie Grove, the Thirteenth spent much of its time shuffling between Fort Scott, Kansas, Van Buren, Arkansas, and posts in the Indian Territory, where it was mainly engaged in guarding supply trains. In August 1864, the members of Company B experienced a disheartening loss. While chasing bushwhackers through Frog Bayou northeast of Van Buren, Captain Beeler was mortally wounded. Courtesy of Trans-Mississippi Photo Archive, Wilson’s Creek National Battlefield, Springfield, MO.

Members of the Fourteenth immediately became the targets of bushwhackers, especially the infamous William Clarke Quantrill. Fourteen unarmed recruits who had not yet been mustered into the regiment were among the 140 men who died when Quantrill and his men sacked the town of Lawrence, Kansas, on August 21, 1863.46 Six weeks later, eighteen members of the Fourteenth’s Company A died in Quantrill’s brutal attack on General Blunt’s entourage just outside Baxter Springs, Kansas. Quantrill and about three hundred of his men surprised the escort, sending men scattering across the prairies. Quantrill’s men chased down and killed eighty-five federal soldiers, which also included members of Blunt’s military band from the Third Wisconsin Cavalry. Miraculously, Blunt and a handful of others escaped.47

42. “From the 13th Kansas,” White Cloud Kansas Chief, February 5, 1863.
43. “Correspondence,” White Cloud Kansas Chief, September 1, 1864; SOR, 660; Stith, Extreme Civil War, 138.
44. White Cloud Kansas Chief, July 2, 1863; White Cloud Kansas Chief, July 9, 1863.
46. OR, series 1, vol. 22, part 1, 583.
In the early months of its tour, the soldiers of the Fourteenth spent much of their time escorting supply-wagon trains traveling between Fort Scott, Kansas, and Fort Smith, Arkansas. Albert Greene of the Ninth Kansas Cavalry also escorted trains from Fort Scott to the Arkansas border. He complained that such duty included “hard work and long hours of service, and the chances of being picked off in detail without warning by an unseen foe.” While supply trains with dozens or even hundreds of wagons could travel ten miles a day in the open prairie, progress was much slower in rugged country. Federal escorts had to ensure that every mile of the road was passable and secure from bushwhackers who might be hiding nearby.

In April 1864, several companies from the Fourteenth, including Company C, joined the Frontier Division under the command of General John M. Thayer to participate in the Camden Expedition. The expedition was a part of the larger Red River Campaign in which the Union hoped to unite its armies in Louisiana with Union forces from northern Arkansas. By moving toward each other, the two armies planned to attack and defeat the Confederate forces that were between them. Once that was accomplished, the united federal forces would invade Texas. Had the operation succeeded, it would have secured the entire Trans-Mississippi West for the Union.

Thayer’s Frontier Division planned to march south from Fort Smith to meet other troops from the Department of Arkansas, led by Major General Frederick Steele, which was marching southward from Little Rock. However, the Frontier Division’s march was beset with problems from the start. Many of its difficulties were caused by the federals’ long supply lines, which stretched back to Fort Smith. The spring was especially wet, making the division’s march slow and miserable and necessitating a lengthy detour. After three years of warfare, much of the land in northwest Arkansas had been stripped of its resources. Many farms had been abandoned and looted. Fields lay fallow, and forage for horses and transportation animals was scarce. Food for the soldiers was also in short supply, and the men undertook much of the campaign on half rations. Fortunately, the loss of population in the region had made it more attractive to deer and feral hogs, which the hungry soldiers hunted to supplement their meager diets. Still, the march was miserable, and on March 22, after crossing the Arkansas River at the town of Ozark and marching twenty-five miles to Boonville, sixty members of the Fourteenth Kansas deserted. It does not appear that any Ioways were among them.

When Thayer’s men finally joined Steele on April 5 at Elkins Ferry, their haggard appearance led A. F. Sperry of the Thirty-Third Iowa to describe them as a “nondescript style of reinforcement . . . numbering almost every kind of soldiers, including Indians, and accompanied of multitudinous vehicles of all descriptions, which had been picked up along the road.” The combined troops, numbering about 11,500 men, moved toward Camden, Arkansas, where Steele hoped to establish a base for the next phase of the expedition.

Between April 10 and 13, Steele’s forces defeated Major General Sterling Price’s Confederates in clashes at Prairie D’Ane and Moscow, Arkansas. After the battles, the soldiers of the Fourteenth Kansas were among those detailed to act as Steele’s rear guard as he continued to make his way toward Camden. This assignment placed the Ioways in heavy combat. On April 14, twenty-six-year-old John Whitepigeon of Company G died in a skirmish. Whitepigeon was the only Ioway soldier known to have been killed in action during the Civil War.

Desperate for food and supplies, the federal army reached the town of Camden on April 17, 1864. In hopes of relieving its dire situation, it sent a forage train of 198 wagons to a spot east of town where scouts believed they could gather five thousand bushels of corn and hay and procure beef cattle from the local population. Nearly seven hundred men, including at least seventy from the Ioways’ regiment, escorted the train. Despite the large force, Confederate forces under Major General John Marmaduke attacked the train with disastrous results for the Union. Federal forces lost nearly all of their wagons and failed to gather any food.

The so-called Battle of Poison Springs is perhaps best remembered for the Confederates’ brutal massacre of the

---

wounded and surrendering members of the First Kansas Colored Infantry. Of the 296 federal soldiers killed in the battle, 177 were black. The burial detail found bodies stripped and mutilated. Many had been scalped. Choctaws fighting for the Confederates received much of the blame for the depredations. White soldiers were also reported to have taken part in the depredations, in part because, as Mary Jane Warde has observed, many southerners found the idea of black men in uniform “appalling.” This would not be the only occasion on which Confederate troops retaliated violently against black soldiers.54

The Camden Expedition failed to attain its objectives, due largely to the lack of provisions. The supply line that stretched over 150 miles between Fort Smith and Camden proved to be too great a challenge for the Union to maintain. Arkansas’s rugged terrain made transportation difficult, and the supply trains proved to be tempting targets for Confederate bushwhackers.55 Union troops were forced to evacuate Camden by way of Little Rock soon after the battle at Poison Spring. By the summer, the members of the Fourteenth Kansas were back in Fort Scott, Kansas, with little to show for their efforts.

On June 30, the Chief reported, “The boys of the fourteenth have had a very hard time of it in Dixie. They report that their rations have been sometimes very scarce, and complain of their officers very bitterly.”56 The Ioways in the Fourteenth spent the remainder of the war in the vicinity of northwest Arkansas and northeast Indian Territory, where they were mainly detailed to escort and picket duty.

As a group, the Ioways suffered only two casualties during the war. Aside from John Whitepigeon’s death in Arkansas, one other Ioway was wounded. Twenty-four-year-old John Gamble, an Ioway who served stints in both the Kansas Thirteenth and Fourteenth Regiments, accidentally shot himself in the leg while returning home on furlough in September 1864. The ball lodged in his right knee, leaving him unfit to return to the army.57

54. OR, series 1, vol. 34, part 1, 750; Forsyth, The Camden Expedition, 116–17; “Correspondence,” White Cloud Kansas Chief, May 26, 1864; Ward, When the Wolf Came, 133, 202–03.
55. Stith, Extreme Civil War, 72.
57. Dr. Thomas Shreve memo to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, April 8, 1865, microfilm 234, roll 312, frame 65, Great Nemaha Agency Records.
Another Ioway man left the service for health reasons. In the fall of 1863, Cass Dorian of the Fourteenth fell ill soon after mustering in at Fort Leavenworth. Some claimed that he had exhibited symptoms of consumption even before leaving the reservation. After being hospitalized at Leavenworth, Dorian apparently became fearful that white military physicians could not heal him and that he would die unless he could be treated by traditional Ioway medicine men. He left the fort without permission and returned to the reservation to recover. Normally, this type of unauthorized absence would have led to charges of desertion. However, at the urging of agent Burbank, the War Department agreed that in consideration of Dorian’s “Indian characteristics,” it would grant him a medical discharge if he would submit to an examination to verify that he was unfit for service. Dorian survived the ordeal, living long enough to appear on the 1870 Ioway census as the head of a household that included a wife and four children.58

The Ioways’ service in the U.S. military raises several issues worth examining. It is difficult to understand why they agreed to defend a government that had taken so much from them. One important reason may well have been their fear that they were in danger of losing even more than they already had. The Ioways were especially concerned about their small reservation on the Kansas-Nebraska border. Amid mounting pressure from settlers who demanded that all Native people be removed from northeast Kansas to the Indian Territory, the Ioways were determined to remain.

In 1862, the Ioway leader Laggarash, or British, reminded agent Burbank that when the Ioways had moved to the reservation in 1837, the government had assured them that they would never have to move again. In a council with the agent, he stated, “We are few in number, and moved often, we want to live and die here.”59 By the outbreak of the war, only about three hundred Ioways lived on the reservation. This was a dramatic decrease from the nearly one thousand who had settled there just twenty-three years earlier. They had been decimated by disease and violence, and it is understandable that those who remained felt vulnerable.

Joseph B. Herring has argued that the Native nations that remained on their land in Kansas after the Civil War did so by becoming acculturated to European American ways. He defines acculturation as the intercultural borrowing that occurs when groups of people come into close contact. The Ioways were eager to prove to their white neighbors and to the federal government that they were willing to borrow many of the ways of the whites who lived near them. “We are well aware,” admitted Ioway leaders, “that we cannot stay here unless we can become civilized, and till the soil for our support.”60 To accomplish this goal, they adopted the settlers’ dress, lifestyle, and methods of farming.61 Seen in this light, it is likely that the Ioways saw military service as an act of acculturation that might allow them to retain their land.

Given their ethnicity, the Ioways were likely to have faced racism in the military. Although specific instances of their being poorly treated in the army have yet to be uncovered, Natives in general were often considered a separate and often inferior class of soldier. Michael Forsyth has written that when Thayer’s Frontier Division, to which the Ioways’ Fourteenth Kansas was assigned, met to reinforce Steele’s army on the way to Camden, Arkansas, the appearance of the “hodgepodge” division raised some eyebrows among Steele’s men. Of particular interest was Thayer’s cavalry brigade, many of whom, like the Ioways, were Native soldiers from Kansas who sported “unkempt hair.” Though disheveled in appearance, Forsyth maintains that these men would soon prove themselves valuable in battle.62

Wiley Britton observed that Native troops in segregated units often had to make do with inferior clothing, equipment, and weapons. He noted that the Indian home guards were issued outdated muzzle-loading rifles, while white soldiers usually received newer models. These weapons placed Natives at a decided disadvantage, especially on the skirmish line, where the ability to fire repeated rounds at a rapid rate was critical. Britton estimated, “We can perhaps load and discharge our Sharpe’s carbines a dozen times while an Indian loads and discharges his


59. “At the Great Nemaha Agency the 23rd day of October 1862 with the Chiefs of the Ioway Tribe of Indians,” microfilm 234, roll 310, frames 1044–45, Great Nemaha Agency Records


musket once.” Ioway soldiers were more fortunate than those who served in the Indian home guards. Because they served in integrated companies, they were issued the same equipment and arms as their white comrades. Muster-out rolls for Company C of the Fourteenth Kansas Cavalry show that many of the Ioways carried Spencer carbine rifles at the time of their discharge.63

Yet, while the Ioways were likely perceived as different because of their ethnicity, they were thrown together with African Americans, farmers from Iowa, men from the Missouri Ozarks, and volunteers born outside the United States in what Mathew Stith has called a “cultural middle ground.” Stith maintained that the vicious nature of the war in the Trans-Mississippi West forced both soldiers and civilians to abandon traditional cultural roles. Because all soldiers fighting in the region around the Missouri, Kansas, and Arkansas border were living outside what Stith calls their “cultural comfort zone,” everyone was in unfamiliar territory and had to adapt to the realities of military life. Therefore, the Ioways may not have been at a greater cultural disadvantage than their comrades who were also fighting far from home on strange terrain against a common enemy.64

Although it is difficult to gauge the amount of racism the Ioways faced in the military, the historical record indicates that they suffered a significant amount of it at home. When some Ioways returned to the reservation on furlough in September 1864, a rumor circulated in the town of White Cloud that some of them were carrying the scalps of gray-haired persons. “Can it be,” asked Miller in the Chief, “that the Indians, while in the army, have skulked about, murdering old men and defenseless women?” Alluding to the deprivations at Pea Ridge, Miller continued, “Rebel Indians do such things, but it is too barbarous for persons connected, with the armies of a civilized country.”65

A week later, the paper noted that the town had lately become “annoyed” by a “pack of drunken, loafing Indians,” many of them dressed in U.S. military uniforms. Some were reportedly racing through town on horseback, firing their pistols in the air and “assaulting” white citizens. The paper went on to ask if these “lazy cusses” who were home on furlough were receiving special treatment since many of the white soldiers from the same unit had returned to duty some days earlier. Clearly, in the eyes of local whites, an Ioway man in a military uniform was still subject to many of the same unflattering stereotypes Natives in Kansas had suffered for decades.66

The Ioway soldiers also experienced strained relationships with some of their relatives who had stayed behind on the reservation. Like many soldiers away at war, the Ioways worried about the well-being of their families and property. In their case, this worry was compounded by their poverty and the degree to which they relied on the government for basic necessities. Even before leaving the reservation to muster in, recruits destined for the Kansas Thirteenth had asked that their fall annuity payment be made early so they could leave knowing that their families had enough provisions for the coming winter.

The men were also concerned about their land. With most of their able-bodied men away from home, they worried about their newly cultivated fields. Although Ioway women and older children likely continued to work some of the private fields while the men were away, the government also hired a farmer to cultivate land the tribe held in common. They were also likely concerned about an ongoing problem of white settlers coming onto reservation land to steal timber. Though the government had hired a man named Michael Griffin to watch the timber, the job of policing a wide area proved difficult for one person.67

Of necessity, the Ioway soldiers were forced to trust that their agent would watch over their land and people while they were away at war. For this reason, they were disturbed to learn that Burbank was absent from the reservation much of the time and that some believed he was mismanaging the Ioways’ money. In January 1864, twenty-two Ioway soldiers from both the Thirteenth and the Fourteenth sent a letter to President Lincoln complaining that their agent was not properly taking care of or protecting the Ioways at home on the reservation. In the letter, they made a point of reminding the president that they were “true patriots” who had answered the call to put down the rebellion. They included a signed

---

64. Stith, Extreme Civil War, 5, 11–12.
65. White Cloud Kansas Chief, September 1, 1864.
67. Burbank to Commissioner of Indian Affairs William Dole, July 30, 1861, and July 31, 1861, microfilm 234, roll 310, frames 646, 650, 652–53, Great Nemaha Agency Records; Burbank to Branch, November 25, 1861, microfilm 234, roll 310, frames 560–62, Great Nemaha Agency Records.
affidavit from Captain Beeler of the Thirteenth certifying that the Ioways were indeed good soldiers. It seems obvious that they hoped their service would carry some weight with the president and that he would grant their request to launch an investigation into Burbank’s actions.68

Although the Ioways were unhappy with Burbank’s frequent long absences from the agency, their complaints were related primarily to the agent’s appropriation of tribal funds. It is not clear that Burbank was defrauding the Ioways, but the manner in which he handled their money was certainly questionable. Frustrated with the slow pace of the Indian department’s bureaucracy and the lack of cash his agency had on hand, Burbank complained in writing to Superintendent of Indian Affairs E. B. Taylor in Omaha, “If an ox or horse dies, tools lost or broken, or any kind of material runs out, and there is no funds in my hands to meet the immediate necessity, the business of this agency must come to a full stop until I can write to the Superintendent, the Superintendent to the Commissioner, which will consume at least three weeks before an answer can be received by me.” To ease this chronic problem, the agent sometimes purchased items he needed for the agency on credit or with his own money. This, in turn, frustrated the Ioways, who perceived that too much of the money they received from Washington was being diverted to reimburse Burbank or pay outstanding bills with merchants.69

Ironically, the Ioways’ military service seems to have led to a dustup with some of their leaders back home. The Ioways’ letter to Lincoln alludes to a rift that existed between the soldiers and Ioway leaders. While home on furlough, some of the soldiers had

Looking back, it is difficult to understand why the Ioways agreed to defend a government that had taken so much from them. One important reason may well have been their fear that they were in danger of losing even more than they already had. The Ioways were especially concerned about their small reservation, as increasing numbers of settlers demanded that all Native people be removed from northeast Kansas to Indian Territory. In 1862, the Ioway leader Nag-A-Rash (also Laggerash, or British), pictured here, reminded Indian agent John Burbank that when the Ioways had moved to the reservation in 1837, the government had assured them that they would never have to move again. Having borrowed many of the ways of the whites living around them in the years since, it is likely that the Ioways saw military service as an act of acculturation that might allow them to retain their land. Courtesy of the National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution [NAA INV 01000505], Washington, D.C.

68. Ioway soldiers to President Abraham Lincoln; Burbank to Commissioner of Indian Affairs Charles Mix, August 29, 1862, microfilm 234, roll 310, frame 1018, Great Nemaha Agency Records.
attempted to bring their concerns about agent Burbank’s alleged mishandling of affairs before the tribal council. However, the soldiers’ concerns apparently were flatly dismissed by their leaders. “We was sneered at by the Chiefs of our Nation,” the soldiers wrote to Lincoln, “and was made fun of by those leading Indians, and our complaint to Mr. John A. Burbank did get no hearing.”

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact nature of the rift that is exposed in this passage. One wonders whether the old headmen worried that they were in danger of losing control of their young battle-tested warriors. Even in traditional times, tension between deliberative older headmen and impatient young soldiers was not unknown. But these were not traditional times. While the old men and women could remember a time when the Ioways had lived east of the Missouri River and enjoyed more freedom, the young men had known only reservation life. Many had attended the Presbyterian mission school that operated on the reservation between 1837 and 1862. There, they had been forced to dress in “citizen clothes” and had learned how to farm in the style of the whites. Many could read and write at least some English. Perhaps the younger Ioways’ experiences in the mission school and in the army caused the elder headmen to be somewhat wary of them.

If the elders were guarded in their relationships with Ioways serving in the military, it did not keep them from trying to use the young men’s service as leverage when dealing with the government. Time and time again, when petitioning government officials for assistance, the headmen reminded them that when their Great Father had called for soldiers, the Ioways had responded generously. “We love the Government,” one such letter from the headman stated proudly. “We have sent over one half of our male population over the age of twenty years to fight the battles of our Government.”

It is uncertain whether military service alone gave the Ioways an advantage in future dealings with the government or won them the acceptance of their white neighbors. There is also no clear link between the Ioways’ military service and the fact that they succeeded in retaining their reservation in Kansas. More likely, service as U.S. volunteers was an important step in the Ioways’ overall process of acculturation that Burbank had noted when he first arrived on the reservation in April 1861. In the end, it was acculturation that allowed them to remain on their land.

The military had given Ioway men a chance to be warriors again while also allowing them to prove themselves to be patriotic Americans. In addition, it taught them important lessons about navigating the white world. The Ioways understood that if they were to remain in Kansas, they would have to adopt the ways of European Americans and become a part of the community of farmers who dominated the region. In this, they largely succeeded, and military service in the Civil War helped pave the way for their success.

70. Ioway soldiers to President Abraham Lincoln.