



# Bullet'n Backstory

Joint Munitions Command

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## Texas Fights the Cherokee: The Battle of the Neches (July 1839)

A large wave of Anglo-American and European settlers arrived in Mexican Texas between 1821 and 1836, leading to hostility from both the Mexican government and Southern Plains Indians in the region. The latter resulted in the Texas-Indian Wars (1820s-1875). A significant part of this era was the Cherokee War (1838-1839), which erupted as a result of broken promises made by Sam Houston. During the Texas Revolution (1835-1836), Houston had secured peace with the Comanche, Kiowa, and Cherokee tribes by promising them land rights and independence. Upon becoming President of the Republic of Texas in 1836, Houston formalized his offer, but the Texas legislature refused to enact the proposal, leading to Cherokee outrage. In an effort to take advantage of Native concerns, the government of Mexico in 1838 offered to recognize Cherokee rights in return for assistance in a reconquest of Texas. Cherokee leaders agreed and lent their support to a budding revolt by Tejanos (Mexican Texans).

In a final effort to reach an accommodation, President Houston renewed his promises, only to have the legislature once more refuse to act. Angered by this apparent betrayal, Cherokee warriors attacked the homes of the Killough, Wood, and Williams families, settlers who had unwittingly moved onto disputed land. The subsequent Killough Massacre (October 5, 1838) resulted in the deaths of eighteen men, women, and children. This event, the deadliest Native American attack on settlers in East Texas, squelched all public sentiment for accommodation. When newly-elected President Mirabeau B. Lamar took office in December 1838, he made Indian Removal a primary focus of his administration. In one of Lamar's first official acts, he ordered all Native tribes to leave Texas, with moderate monetary compensation for the loss of their lands, or else face extermination.

On July 12, 1839, Gen. Kelsey Douglass, with 500 Texan soldiers, camped near the main Cherokee settlement and sent a peace commission to its leaders. After two days of diplomatic delays, the Texans sent an order to surrender and marched on the village. Upon arrival on July 15, they discovered that the reinforced Cherokee had established a defensive high ground near the Neches River. The Cherokee immediately attacked, leading to a full day of skirmishes, retreats, and chases. The Texans pursued the Cherokee overnight and defeated them the next day near the headwaters of the Neches. The Battle of the Neches saw the Texans suffer eight dead and twenty-seven injured, compared to more than one hundred Cherokee dead. The remaining Cherokee in Texas suffered a final military defeat in December 1839 before being removed to Indian Territory in Oklahoma.

~ ~ Dr. Paul-Thomas Ferguson, JMC Archivist ~ ~



*The Battle of the Neches (Donald M. Yena)*

### From the Archives

We are pleased to announce the installation of our new historical exhibit, "The Rock Island Prison Barracks, 1864-1865," on view in the JMC Display room through the end of August. The exhibit features several images and maps of the prison camp, facts about its creation, and details about

the many challenges faced while building and operating the camp.

Contact Historian Keri Pleasant (x20392) or Archivist Paul Ferguson (x20060) for access to the Display Room, for information about tours of either the Rock Island Arsenal or Quarters One, or to schedule historical presentations for your organization.



Confederate POWs making trinkets at Rock Island Arsenal (1864)

### This Month in Military History

July 3, 987: Hugh Capet is crowned King of the Franks, making him the founder of France and the Capetian Dynasty, which will occupy the French throne until 1328.

July 10, 1553: Lady Jane Grey seizes the British throne following the death of her cousin Edward VI and reigns for just nine days before being tried and executed for treason.

July 17, 1762: Catherine II becomes tsarina of Russia after directing the overthrow, arrest, and assassination of her husband Peter III.

July 24, 1929: Herbert Hoover announces adoption of the Kellogg-Briand Pact, in which 62 nations, including the United States, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Japan vowed never to declare war as a means of resolving disputes. To get around the treaty, many signatories waged *undeclared* wars prior to the start of World War II.

July 31, 1864: Confederate Gen. Richard M. Gano raids the area around Fort Smith, Arkansas, seizes \$130,000 worth of Union arms and supplies, and retreats safely back to Indian Territory (Oklahoma).

Do you have historical items? If so, please contact the Archivist: Room 661  
Dr. Paul-Thomas Ferguson - x20060 - paul.t.ferguson14.civ@mail.mil.