

# This Day in History... December 12, 1806

## Birth of Stand Watie

Stand Watie was born on December 12, 1806, in Oothcaloga, Cherokee Nation (present-day Calhoun, Georgia). Watie was the only Native American to achieve the rank of general during the Civil War and was the last Confederate general to surrender.

Watie was born to an influential, slave-owning Cherokee family in Georgia. After learning to read and write English at a mission school, Watie wrote articles for the Cherokee Phoenix newspaper. It was the first Native American newspaper, as well as the first to be published in both Cherokee and English.

Following the discovery of gold in Georgia, thousands of white settlers descended on Cherokee land and Congress passed the 1830 Indian Removal Act to relocate the Cherokees west of the Mississippi. Despite Federal laws protecting Native Americans from such action, the state of Georgia seized most of the Cherokee land within its borders.

The Cherokee eventually became divided amongst themselves. The nation became split between traditionalists and those who sought to integrate with whites. About 20 percent, including the Watie and Ridge families, adapted especially well, becoming affluent planters. However, tensions continued to rise and in 1836, Watie signed the Treaty of New Echota, surrendering the Cherokee homeland for land in Oklahoma. The Watie-Ridge faction relocated successfully, but most traditionalists had neither the money nor the inclination to move west.



*On June 15, 1864, Watie captured the Union steamboat J.R. Williams in what has been called the only naval battle fought in Oklahoma.*

Some of Watie's most famous exploits came in 1864. On one occasion, he slipped behind Union lines and captured a steamboat on the Arkansas River with \$150,000 in cargo. In another, Watie led his men to victory in the Second Battle of Cabin Creek and captured a huge Union wagon train carrying a million dollars' worth of goods. The supplies clothed and fed his entire regiment and their dependents for more than a month. But his men's massacre of black hay cutters – members of the 4th Kansas Colored Cavalry and 4th Kansas Infantry – was widely condemned.

These raids were so effective they forced the Union generals to commit hundreds of men in the West at a time when they were sorely needed in the East. But the tide had turned in the Union's favor by 1865. Lee surrendered in April and Jefferson Davis was captured in May. On June 23 – 75 days after Appomattox – Watie signed a cease-fire agreement. He was the last Confederate general to surrender. He then returned to his wife in Texas, joining her to mourn the loss of their 15-year-old son.

Like most of the South, the Indian Territory lay in ruin after the war. Once a rich man, Watie had lost everything. He worked to establish a Southern Cherokee Nation, which would be under his leadership. He traveled to Washington, but the federal government refused to recognize his group, instead declaring John Ross, who had led the pro-Union Cherokee faction, as principal chief of the Cherokee. Ross died a year later, leaving a successor who was mostly successful in reuniting the tribe. Watie avoided politics for the remainder of his life, passing away on September 9, 1871.



*Watie was also known as Standhope Uwatie, Tawkertawker, and Isaac S. Watie.*

When the American Civil War began, the Confederacy implied it would formally recognize the Cherokee Nation if it became independent itself. Watie was commissioned as a Confederate colonel and raised the First Regiment of Cherokee Mounted Volunteers. Watie's guerilla tactics were legend, and his men would "follow him into the very jaws of death." His rough-hewn horse soldiers blazed a reputation as fearless fighters. He led them into eighteen battles, where the Indian Rebel Yell struck terror in the hearts of their opponents.

Their accomplishments at Wilson's Creek in Missouri and Pea Ridge in Arkansas were exceptional. The Indian troopers, mounted on horses but greatly outnumbered, charged directly at the Union cannons, captured them, and turned the weapons on the fleeing Federal Army.



*Watie was the principal chief of the Cherokee Nation from 1862-66.*

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