

GONE WITH THE WIND AND THE PERFECT STORM

Margaret Mitchell's iconic novel, *Gone With The Wind*, depicts the ravages that affected the civilian population in rural Georgia during the Civil War. It traces the circumstances of the O'Hara family, the destruction of their plantation, Tara, and the resiliency of daughter Scarlett during and after the conflict. Mitchell reminds readers of the inevitable futility of the southern cause when the social outcast, Rhett Butler, predicts its downfall by stating that "the South has no chance against the superior numbers and industrial might of the North." Never-the-less southern patriots in the storyline enlist and some fall victim to the war. Throughout the whole narrative, it is clear that there are two opposing foes, easily identified by the dark blue of Union soldiers and the butternut grey of Confederates. In addition, with a few exceptions, the whole military conflict is played out within rules of combat, a "gentleman's war," among soldiers, but followed by the depredation of civilian "carpetbaggers." However, the heroine perseveres and in the finale the reader is reminded that "After all, tomorrow is another day!"

Mitchell's portrayal of the events during the Civil War and its aftermath probably describes the situation in the East, but would not apply to Indian Territory, particularly in Cherokee country. First, because of past events, the conflict in what would become Northeastern Oklahoma might more aptly be described as a "war within a war." This war, within the national war relating to slavery, involved full blood Cherokees who still harbored hatred for the actions of "Treaty Signers." These Cherokee citizens, primarily mixed bloods, had signed away lands in 1835 that eventually resulted in the tribes' removal to Indian Territory. Second, eastern battles involved thousands of troops, but this western war was frequently fought guerilla style instead of through open combat. Finally, its troops were not easily identified because the Confederacy never filled its commitment for weapons or supplies, so rebel soldiers were frequently garbed in stolen Union uniforms or civilian clothing. Then there also were the bushwackers, self serving bands of criminals who preyed on civilians. Unlike Mitchell's novel, citizens in the west frequently couldn't tell friend from foe.

After the commitment of the Five Civilized Tribes to align with the Confederacy, spirits were high following the Southern victory at Wilson's Creek southwest of Springfield, but tempered by the Union victory at Pea Ridge, Arkansas. Another defeat at Locust Grove in 1862, followed by the defection of Chief John Ross to the Union, resulted in many Confederate soldiers also changing sides. So, from this point forward, the old prejudices reappeared, and mixed bloods fought full bloods because of a treaty signed 25 years earlier...the war within a war. Chaos resulted as civilians on either side were threatened. Southern sympathizers fled to the Choctaw or Chickasaw Nations and Texas where they were accepted. Northern sympathizers fled to Kansas, but Kansans already were trying to rid themselves of tribes, and Union government aid was insufficient, so those refugees suffered immensely from starvation due to a lack of supplies. U.S. Army surgeon A. B. Campbell reported, "The only protection they have from the snow upon which they lie, is prairie grass. Scraps of clothing hide their nakedness. I saw seven children without a thread on their back...many have had their toes frozen off."

Meanwhile, back in Indian Territory conditions were also deteriorating according to the journal of Reverend Stephen Foreman, one half Cherokee and a southern sympathizer who chose to remain at Park Hill. Park Hill was a target for both Cherokee factions, Pin Indians who were Union sympathizers and Confederates led by Colonel Stand Watie, himself a former Treaty Signer. Foreman notes on July 11, 1862...that “women were afraid to venture out on account of the Negroes and men were afraid of each other, not knowing who was a friend or an enemy.” On July 15, 1862...”Two Pins and one of Chief Ross’ Negroes entered my stable and took two horses and a mule. I was told later that if I had refused, it would have given them pretext to kill me.” Then on July 16, 1862 ...”This morning I awakened up in my cornfield, if I slept at all...about dark one of my blacks came from camps and reported that one of the white soldiers told him they were bound to kill me last night.” After numerous other encounters, Foreman gave up attempting to survive at Park Hill and during the summer of 1863 fled to Texas with his family. But the carnage continued, and most of the residences were burned or plundered by opposing forces, as was Tahlequah, the Cherokee capitol. Throughout the nation, families with ties to the Union were burned out and murdered by secessionists and Union sympathizers retaliated in a similar matter.

Even after the surrender of the Confederacy, life particularly in Cherokee territory remained hazardous as evidenced by the crime wave that followed during Judge Isaac Parker’s jurisdiction. *Gone With the Wind* may well have been descriptive of circumstances in the east during and after the conflict, but in the west a novel about the scourge of war and the lawless whirlwind that followed could have been entitled “The Perfect Storm.”

