

CATAWBA INDIANS IN THE CIVIL WAR

by Louise Pettus

When the Civil War began in April of 1861 there were 55 Catawba men, women and children living on 630 acres in York County. Nineteen Catawba men enlisted in the Confederate Army—almost every adult male.

The Catawba Confederate enlistees were: Jeff Ayres, John Brown, Frank Canty, William Canty, Bob Crawford, Billy George, Gilbert George, Nelson George, Allen Harris, Epps Harris, Jim Harris, John Harris, Peter Harris, Jr., Bob Head, James Kegg, Robert Marsh, John Sanders, John Scott, and Alexander Timms.

These men enlisted in three different units, more of them members of Co. H, 12th SC Volunteers, headed by Captain, later Colonel, Cadwallader Jones, than in any other unit. Co. H, which was attached to the First Corps of the Army of Northern Virginia, is believed to have seen more military action than any other company of the war.

Other Catawbas served with the Lacy Guards, Co. K of the 17th SC Volunteers and still others with Co. G of the Fifth S. C. Infantry. In all cases the Catawbas served with units which were largely recruited out of York County.

Laurence M. Hauptman, author of Between Two Fires, a book published in 1995 about American Indians in the Civil War, wrote a chapter on the Catawba soldiers. In his concluding paragraph, Hauptman wrote: "The Catawba were not the largest Indian group to join the Confederates, nor were they the most significant in military terms. But they were far and away the most committed to the Confederate cause. Brave and loyal to the bitter end, they were exposed to the very worst of the war, and though nearly utterly destroyed, they fought as a matter of course, with deep commitment and as a matter of pride."

Among the examples Hauptman used to make his point about Catawba bravery was that of two brothers, John and James Harris, both in Co. H, 12th Infantry. The Harris brothers had enlisted as cooks but were also foot soldiers. In the Battle of Antietam they were both wounded and both taken as prisoners of war.

John Harris had a musket ball in his leg when he was sent to Fort Monroe. He was freed in a prisoner exchange in May 1863 and immediately rejoined his company. In September 1864 Harris was discharged because his leg had not properly healed. (After the war he was elected chief of the Catawba tribe.) James Harris, John's brother, remained a prisoner of war until the war's end.

William Canty, who served in both the 17th SC and the 12th Inf, was wounded 3 times—in the Second Battle of Bull Run, Antietam and Boonesboro. Again there were medical problems. Canty suffered from jaundice, a condition believed caused by infection of his wounds.

Jefferson Ayers was wounded at Boonesboro and reenlisted only to be shot in the head at Hatcher's Run, near Petersburg. He was captured and taken to a Union hospital in Maryland where he died in July 1865.

Alexander Timms was wounded in the Second Battle of Bull Run. Robert Head died of wounds or disease (the record is not clear). Peter Harris was captured after the fall of Petersburg and imprisoned at Hart's Island in New York harbor.

In fact, Hauptman found that almost all of the Catawbas were casualties of war. He only found one, John Scott, who was later chief of the tribe, to have survived the war without being wounded, killed or captured.

There was a great deal of sentiment after the war among white neighbors that something should be done to give tribute to the brave Catawbas. The tribute finally came on August 3, 1900. A 10 and 1/2 foot statue was unveiled in Fort Mill's Confederate park that was dedicated to the Catawba soldiers. The statue was erected by Samuel Elliott White and John McKee Spratt. The

main speaker at the unveiling was Ben Harris, son of John Harris, one of the brave Catawbas who fought with the Army of Northern Virginia.