

“This Act of Brutal Savageism”: Coverage of Native Americans at the 1862 Battle of Pea Ridge, Arkansas

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Abstract

The clash between Confederates and Yankees at Pea Ridge, Arkansas, in 1862 is famous as the battle that saved Missouri for the Union, preventing a Southern army from a planned invasion to drive through the state and capture St. Louis. But a less well-known fact is that Pea Ridge was the only major battle of the Civil War in which Native American troops participated in significant numbers.

About 1,000 Indians from the Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek and Cherokee tribes fought for the South at Pea Ridge, and some might have scalped dead and wounded Union troops.

This article examines stories about the battle from a sample of both Northern and Southern newspapers with the intent to shed light on the coverage of Native Americans during the Civil War. The article concludes that the type and quantity of coverage of Indians at Pea Ridge depended upon whether the journalists were Southern or Northern. The article thus adds further support to the notion that the Civil War press served as an arm of the government, and the stories of war correspondents of both sides have to be evaluated with the knowledge that facts were often secondary to supporting the war effort.

Keywords: Native Americans, Civil War, war reporting, Pea Ridge, Arkansas

One of the most famous representations of the 1862 battle of Pea Ridge,¹ Arkansas, is an 1889 Kurz and Allison print that shows Indians riding in a wild cavalry charge against masses of Union troops and artillery. The Indians, who are dressed like Plains warriors wearing feathered bonnets and carrying lances and tomahawks, appear to make up about half of the Rebel army. Like most such prints made after the war, it was highly stylized with little factual connection to what the battle really looked like. The Union and Confederate troops were also dressed in pristine uniforms of blue and gray when the reality was much different. Some Missouri Rebels, for example, were recently issued white uniforms that had not yet been dyed in time for the

¹ The battle is also sometimes called Elkhorn Tavern, after the hotel located at the crossroads on the battlefield. It is also sometimes called Sugar Creek after a nearby stream.

battle—making them easy targets—and some units from both sides wore blue, adding to the confusion.

The Indians participating in the charge were in fact Cherokee, part of the Five Civilized Tribes. Many owned slaves, which is one reason they were fighting for the South. Their dress was not that much different from some of the white plainsmen from Texas and Arkansas who were also in the Rebel army, and they were typically armed with rifles and shotguns, as were other Confederate troops. Only about 1,000 out of the 16,000 Rebels were Indians, yet like the Kurz and Allison print, their image in the public conception of the battle outweighs the reality (Hughes, 1988, p. 35).

William L. Shea and Earl J. Hess (1992, pp. 102, 320), who wrote the most definitive account of the battle, claim that the most controversial aspect of Pea Ridge for those who lived through it and the most “exotic” for current students is the role of the Cherokees, especially the scalping and murdering of wounded Union soldiers. The incident, which occurred after the Indian unit helped capture a Union artillery battery, horrified Northerners and generated all sorts of wild rumors such as that the Indians had been dosed with whiskey before the battle and killed and scalped both Confederate and Union soldiers. One Union officer vowed to show no mercy toward them in future battles. The Joint Congressional Committee on the Conduct of the War investigated the incident, and Albert Pike, who was the white commander of the Indian unit, was indicted in federal court after the war for encouraging the atrocities.

The scalping incident occurred on one small part of the battlefield after the Indian troopers became excited when they defeated the 3rd Iowa Cavalry in a sharp fight at the beginning of the battle. At least eight Iowa soldiers were scalped and an untold number were murdered by the Cherokees. They then joined in the celebration of other Confederate units that had captured some federal artillery. Shea and Hess (1992, p. 102) wrote the Indians were “in a frenzy” and quoted a Confederate officer who said “the Indians swarmed around the guns like bees, in great confusion, jabbering and yelling at a furious rate.” Union burial parties were shocked when they found the scalped bodies and those of others who were apparently killed and mutilated as they lay wounded. Curtis complained to Confederate Major General Earl Van Dorn about this lapse of civilized behavior; Van Dorn accused German-American troops in the Union army of killing Confederate prisoners (Shea and Hess, p. 274). When Pike learned of the scalping he ordered his troops to stop, but he received the most blame in the press, and his reputation was ruined. The Cherokee were generally undisciplined soldiers and fired on anyone wearing a blue coat, which was a problem in a Rebel army in which a lot of troopers, including Van Dorn, wore blue coats. Pike had to harangue his troops for an hour before they would help move the three captured canons to safety (Shea and Hess, pp. 143, 274-5).

Probably about eight Union soldiers were scalped or mutilated, although historical accounts vary on the exact number and even on who did the scalping. A few historians have argued that soldiers from a Texas unit used to fighting Comanches did the scalping. The Cherokee National Council issued a resolution after the battle stating that it opposed such actions and that the war “should be conducted on the most humane principles which govern the usages of war among civilized nations, and that it be and is earnestly recommended to the troops of this nation in the service of the Confederate States to avoid any acts toward captured or fallen foes

that would be incompatible with such usages.” (Abel, 1919, pp. 32-33). Nevertheless, the incident was mentioned in newspaper coverage at the time and has come to overshadow the role Native American troops played in the Civil War, particularly in Indian Territory (now Oklahoma), and the strategic significance of the battle (Hughes, 1988, p. 35).

Indians from the Five Civilized Tribes² fought on both sides in battles throughout Indian Territory. Wiley Britton (1922, p. 9), who served in the Union army and witnessed Indian troops in action, wrote “that they abstained more scrupulously from depredations upon private property than the white soldiers with whom they were associated.”

Britton (1922, p. 10) pointed out that the Indian Territory was the “extreme right flank” of Union operations, and the actions of the Union Indian Brigade were an important part of holding that flank and thus winning the war. “These Indian allies of the Government were as humane to prisoners taken in action as the white troops with whom they were associated, and they were as gallant in action and as patient in enduring perils and hardships as their white comrades.”

Yet the Indians’ minor role at Pea Ridge has sometimes overshadowed the battle’s contribution to the Union victory in the war. Shea and Hess (1992, pp. 197, 308) argue convincingly that Pea Ridge was extremely important, calling the failed Rebel charge on the first day of the battle “the high-water mark of the Confederate war effort in the Trans-Mississippi,” thus comparing it to Pickett’s Charge at Gettysburg. The Confederate army at Pea Ridge was the largest Rebel force ever assembled in the Trans-Mississippi theater and could have threatened St. Louis had it not been defeated at Pea Ridge. Even if Van Dorn had not reached St. Louis, such a large army invading Missouri after a Pea Ridge victory would have diverted thousands of troops and supplies from the Union river offenses that eventually led to the capture of Vicksburg and the total control of the Mississippi River.

At the time of the battle, a Union army of about 10,500 men under Brigadier General Samuel R. Curtis had driven Rebel troops out of southwestern Missouri across the border into Arkansas. The Missouri Rebels joined forces with another small Confederate army, and the combined force was put under the command of Van Dorn, who immediately planned an attack on Curtis. Van Dorn divided his command and attacked Curtis from two points, gaining some success of the battle’s first day, March 7. But Curtis held on and counterattacked the next day, breaking the Rebel lines. Van Dorn, whose troops were exhausted and running out of ammunition, abandoned the field.

After the battle, Curtis marched across Arkansas to Helena. His army lived off the land, devastating the countryside and essentially presaging the “strategic economic warfare” that Union Major General William T. Sherman would inflict upon Georgia in 1864. The Pea Ridge campaign thus not only effectively won Missouri for the North, it also marked the beginnings of the Hard War strategy that would be used to bring the South to its knees. Nevertheless, Shea and Hess (1992, pp. 301, 307-9, 317) concluded that the Pea Ridge campaign was eclipsed by more highly publicized events in the East, “a state of affairs that still hampers our understanding of the Civil War.”

² The Five Civilized Tribes are the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek and Seminole.

Press coverage of Pea Ridge was hampered because only two newspaper reporters were on the scene, both with the Union army: William L. Fayel of the St. Louis *Daily Missouri Democrat* and Thomas W. Knox of the *New York Herald*. Early in the campaign, Curtis thought the reporters had provided too much detail on the movements of his army through Missouri and scolded Fayel. But Curtis then invited them to cover his campaign and the relationship became mutually beneficial. The reporters gained access, making their stories more reliable, and Curtis was assured of getting a fair hearing and controlling the release of sensitive information. After the battle “newspapers across the North trumpeted the news of the glorious triumph in faraway Arkansas” (Shea and Hess, 1992, pp. 15, 270).

The stories of Knox and Fayel were picked up by other papers around the country. In addition to the reports of the correspondents on the scene, newspapers supplemented their coverage with letters from soldiers, military reports, and the work of their own correspondents who were in the region although not directly on the battlefield. One correspondent who was not at Pea Ridge, Junius Browne of the *New York Tribune*, wrote a story from Rolla, Missouri—about 200 miles from battlefield—based on bits of information from military reports and other sources with a healthy dose of imagination that made it seem as if he was there. The story was picked up by a number of papers, including one from England that praised it as a model piece of war reporting (Perry, 2000, pp. 82-84; Starr, 1954, pp. 247-248). No photographer or artist was present, so the illustrated newspapers used generic battlefield scenes, and “publishers relied on poetic license, not journalistic veracity, to convey the image.” *Harper’s Weekly* sketches of the battle were inaccurate. One Union officer complained: “The pictures in Harper’s Weekly are mere fancy sketches. The brush was so thick we couldn’t half the time see who we were fighting, and those pictures show a clear field” (Shea and Hess, 1992, pp. 125, 323).

But accuracy sometimes took a second place to getting the story first, even if that story might be more fiction than fact. Wilbur Storey, publisher of the *Chicago Times*, told one of his reporters, “Telegraph fully all the news, and when there is no news, send rumors.” (Walsh, 1968, p. 176). Philip Knightley (1975, pp. 21-22, 39) wrote in *The First Casualty* that Civil War correspondents, even given the fact that they were reporting in an era before objectivity, were disappointingly inaccurate and sensational. “(T)he Civil War, despite the sweeping changes it brought in journalistic techniques, was one of the poorer periods in the progress of war correspondents.”

Noted Civil War historian James M. McPherson (2004, xi-xii) wrote that initial battle stories were usually exaggerated or even fabricated and biased, yet he argued they are worth studying “Precisely because these dispatches shaped the first impressions of Northern readers and thereby swayed public opinion and morale. These were the stories that caused ‘the excitement of the war’ to ‘absorb everything else,’ in the words of the Virginia secessionist Edmund Ruffin—the news that made the morning paper more important to that generation than anything else except bread itself.”

Journalists on both sides believed they were part of the war effort. A *New York World* editorial early in the war argued that by increasing the unity and patriotism of the country, the press was “the most effective auxiliary” to the government in Washington. Similarly, an Alabama editor wrote that the conflict was “a war of opinion as well as of arms” and that it was

the duty of the press to marshal the public spirit (Coopersmith, 2004, xviii). Given the propaganda role that journalists assumed, one would expect the Southern and Northern newspapers to put their respective armies in the best light when writing about Pea Ridge. The actions of the Indians troops, too, would be seen with a jaundiced eye.

This article examined stories about the battle from a sample of both Northern and Southern newspapers with the intent to shed light on the coverage of Native Americans during the Civil War. Were Native American troops portrayed as legitimate combatants? Were they portrayed as heroes or villains? Was there any difference between Southern and Northern press coverage? Lastly, how did the Pea Ridge coverage of Indian troops compare to coverage of the battle as a whole? In other words, did the coverage contribute to the tendency to overlook the strategic significance of the battle? The article is thus intended to contribute to the understanding of the influence of press coverage on our understanding of the Civil War.

Every issue from March 1, 1862, to March 31, 1862, of the *Chicago Tribune*, the *New York Herald*, the *Missouri (St. Louis) Democrat*, and the *Richmond Enquirer* were examined for this study. The *Herald* and the *Democrat* were chosen because they were the only newspapers that had reporters on the battlefield. The *Tribune* and the *Enquirer* were chosen to add major Northern and Southern newspapers to the sample. The time frame was chosen to capture coverage of the preliminary skirmishes before Pea Ridge, the battle, and the aftermath.

In addition, two word searches—“scalping” and “Pea Ridge”—of the Library of Congress database of American newspapers (which included 2,090 newspapers at the time of the study) were conducted for the previously mentioned dates. The search term “scalping” turned up all variations of the word “scalp” and resulted in 157 stories from around the country. A search of the battle name “Pea Ridge” turned up 21 stories.

As would be expected given the battle was a Union victory, Northern newspapers carried more stories about Pea Ridge, longer stories, and focused on the scalping incident in much more detail than did the Southern papers.

For example, the *Chicago Tribune*, which first reported the battle on March 12, carried stories about some aspect of Pea Ridge about every other day for the rest of the month, including detailed lists of Union casualties, official reports, and even Union Brigadier General Franz Sigel’s address to his troops. Calling the battle a “great victory,” the *Tribune* editorialized that Pea Ridge “will, when its details come to be known, rank among the most brilliant achievements of the war, and adds new lustre to the laurels of our brave Western troops” (“The Victory,” 1862, March 12). The *Tribune* had a columnist at Springfield, but he lost communication with Curtis for a while and his reports were delayed. But the *Tribune* printed the late news, stating “anything from that quarter will be read with interest” (Letters, 1862, March 18).

Details about the scalping did not appear until about a week after the initial report, when it was published on the front page with a list of casualties and the report from Union Col. Cyrus Bussey, of the 3rd Iowa Cavalry, who wrote that several of his men were scalped. “(O)n personal examination of the bodies I found that it was a fact beyond dispute, that eight of the killed of my command had been scalped—and the bodies of many of them showed unmistakable evidence that the men had been murdered after they were wounded; that the first having fallen in the

charge from bullet wounds, they were afterwards pierced through the heart and neck by a savage and relentless foe” (“From Pea Ridge,” 1862, March 20).³ The *Tribune* did not sensationalize the scalping by mentioning it in the headline, and it also downplayed with a small headline on page 2 a story reprinted from the *Indianapolis Journal* that included an account of the incident.

“Lieutenant Smith, of the 8th Indiana, was wounded, not severely, but enough to disable him, and was left by his comrades, in the press of the fight, for an hour or two, to take care of himself. He was found after the battle, with his *throat cut in two places, dead*. A Lieutenant of the 3d (sic) Iowa Cavalry was struck in the leg by a ball, and so far disabled as to be compelled to dismount. His comrades told him to make himself as comfortable as possible till they could get a chance to take him off the field, and left him. He was found after the battle with *over twenty bayonet stabs in his breast*” (“The Horrors,” 1862, March 20).⁴

On March 25, the *Tribune* published a story with no attribution and a subhead that promised merely “more particulars and incidents” of Pea Ridge—it was an edited version of Browne’s hoax story for the *New York Tribune*. The story included sensational details that seemed apocryphal, like the tale of Missouri soldier who collected the scalps of nine Indians after finding his brother’s mutilated body. “When he had shot an Indian, he would shout with delirious joy: ‘There goes another red skin to h—I. Hurrah for the Stars and Stripes, and d—n all Indians!’” The writer claimed that the Indians scalped about 100 Union soldiers and also fought unfairly, hiding in ambush or behind trees instead of standing in formation like white soldiers, or pretending to be dead and then rising up to kill Union soldiers. The Confederates supposedly gave the Indians alcohol before the battle, which made them fight with a “demonic rage” that was horrible to witness. “The secessionists overcharged their dusky machines, and when they were fired, the truly guilty suffered from the recoil. The Indians in the midst of the excitement and under the stimulus of their burning potatoes, became frenzied, lost to every sense but that of slaughter.” The story ended with the fanciful description of a fight between the Confederates and their Indian allies in which about 500 were killed (“The Battle,” 1862, March 25; “The Great Battle, 1862, March 20). In reality, the Indian units didn’t partake in the main part of the battle after the clash with the 3rd Iowa Cavalry, so it seems unlikely that a soldier from a Missouri unit would have been avenging the death of his brother who had served by his side. Some Indians might have fired by accident on Rebel troops dressed in blue, but such friendly fire actions were commonplace throughout the war, and there is no report of a fight among Confederate soldiers. In fact, some Indian units helped cover the retreat of the defeated Rebels after the battle was over.

But by the end of the month the *Tribune* dismissed the Indians as poor soldiers, writing that most had returned to the Indian Territory. “They were not formidable in battle, being panic stricken at the effect of our artillery” (“From the Arkansas Rebels,” 1862, March 31).

The *Tribune*, like many Northern papers, considered the scalping just one of a number of Confederate atrocities that had been committed since the beginning of the war. For example, on

³ This was reprinted from the *Democrat*.

⁴ Italics in original.

March 3, the *Tribune* had printed a story—with the all-caps subhead “Rebel Atrocities”—about what it called Confederate Major General Sterling Price’s “reign of terror” when he had occupied Springfield, Missouri. Many public buildings were turned into Confederate military facilities, and the population could not get food and other necessities (“From Southwest Missouri,” 1862, March 3). In another instance, the *Tribune* reported that Rebels in Virginia had used a graveyard to bury military supplies in order to hide them when they were forced to retreat. The graveyard had signs asking the Union army not to disturb “the repose of the dead,” another example of the sneakiness of the Confederates (“The Mortal Remains,” 1862, March 28).

The *Missouri Democrat*, like the *Tribune*, had stories about every other day on Pea Ridge from March 10 until the end of the month. The first mention of scalping appeared on page 2 of the *Democrat* in an exchange of letters between Curtis and Van Dorn in which Curtis told the Rebel leader that a number of his men had been scalped by Van Dorn’s Indians (“Interesting correspondence,” 1862, March 14). Fayel’s first main battle story, which covered almost half of the front page on March 18, focused on the heroism of the Union troops, which the headline declared had won a “glorious victory.” The nine decks of headlines did not mention the Indians, and Fayel dismissed their actions, not even mentioning their fight with the 3rd Iowa Cavalry. “They (the Indians) proved of little account, except to plunder and rifle the dead and scalp the wounded.... In the field these cowardly allies could not be brought within range of our cannons. They would say, ‘Ugh, big gun!’ and skedaddle for the brush.” Fayel quoted a captured Rebel doctor, who claimed the Indians painted their faces black instead of the tradition red war paint because they had not had anything to eat for two days, and black signified hunger (Fayel, 1862, March 18).

The *Democrat* praised Fayel’s reporting in an editorial, but didn’t mention the scalping. “His narrative is clear, and many incidents are related of thrilling interest. This is one of the great, memorable battles of the war. A description so full, by an intelligent, reliable eye-witness possesses historic value for preservation” (*Missouri Democrat*, 1862, March 18).

Fayel’s follow-up stories continued to mock the Indians. On March 22 he wrote in more detail about the 3rd Iowa, but not that it had fought the Cherokee. He only mentioned a “funny incident” about an old soldier who was sent to the rear with an Indian prisoner. The soldier came back to the front, and his officer asked him about the prisoner. The soldier said he hit the Indian on the head to stun him and left him in the rear. When they went back to check, “The prisoner was gone, red skin, like a cat, having recovered at the right time and absquatulated” (Fayel, 1862, March 22). Three days later the *Democrat* printed a follow-up story from Fayel that did not mention the Indians, but it also published part of the same article that had been in the *Chicago Tribune* about the revengeful Missouri soldier. The *Democrat* attributed the story to the *New York Tribune* (Fayel, 1862, March 25; “Further incidents,” 1862, March 25).

But the *Democrat* was not against all Indians. On March 27 it reported that loyal Indians on the Kansas border would likely be armed by the federal government (“Loyal Indians, 1862, March 27). The *Democrat* also mentioned every so often news of Rebel guerrillas like William Quantrill, who the paper called a “bandit” and was terrorizing the people on the border. These stories showed that race was not the determining factor in fighting outside the rules of war; Confederates soldiers of all races committed atrocities (“From the Border, 1862, March 28).

The *New York Herald* carried about the same number of stories on Pea Ridge as did the *Tribune* and the *Democrat*, but it placed more emphasis on the scalping and linked it to the overall moral depravity of the South. Albert Pike, the *Herald* asserted in an editorial, had “dishonored” the title of soldier. “The special duty of Mr. Albert Pike in this contest appears to be to hover over the field of battle with his band of untamed Indians, tomahawking the dying and scalping the dead. The instinct and training of the Indian may afford some excuse for such a method of warfare. Nature brought him forth a savage, and, where the influences of civilization do not reach him, he is a savage still. But what can be said for the white man who turns the tomahawk and the scalping knife upon his own kindred! (“Albert Pike,” 1862, March 24). A day later the *Herald* added the Pea Ridge scalping to a list of Rebel atrocities, including the mutilation of the bodies of two Union officers killed at Bull Run in Virginia. “Coupled with the scalping of Union prisoners at Pea Ridge, the fashioning of drinking cups and spoons out of the skulls and tibia of our dead, the general poisoning of wells in their retreats and the laying of mines for the wholesale destruction of our troops previous to the evacuation of their strongholds, these facts demonstrate on the part of the rebels a savage and demoniac spirit, such as is usually only to be found amongst the most barbarous tribes.” Such behavior surely would keep France and Great Britain from supporting the Confederacy, the *Herald* intoned (“Rebel Barbarities,” 1862, March 25).

However, the *Herald* provided little detail in its news columns about the scalping other than Curtis’s letter to Van Dorn. The battle story on March 23 reported that Union soldiers were angry about the scalping. “Seven of the Indians are now prisoners in our camp, and it was at first difficult to restrain our men from visiting summary judgement upon them. But most of the story derided ordinary Rebel soldiers as cowards and thieves. Wounded Rebel officers, now prisoners of the Union, “speak of their own men as cowards of the worst description, and say that the loss of so many officers is owing the cowardice of the men, necessitating the former constantly to expose themselves.” One wounded Yankee whose position was temporarily overrun by the Rebels, took \$50 out of his wallet and stuffed the bills in his mouth, leaving a few coins and stamps. The Rebels stole his wallet, but he was able to save most of his money (“The Pea Ridge Battle,” 1862, March 23).

The most detailed of the *Herald*’s stories, which took up almost a full page on March 19, only mentioned the Indians in a few sentences, and scalping not at all. Instead, the reporter noted the Rebel soldiers routinely robbed the dead. “The rebels, in nearly every instance, removed the shoes from the dead and mortally wounded both of their own army and ours. Of all the corpses I saw I do not think one-twentieth had been left with their shoes untouched. In some cases pantaloons were taken and occasionally an over coat or a blouse was missing.” The writer also faulted the Rebel soldiers for hiding behind trees instead of standing in ranks like Union soldiers, which in other stories had been a criticism of the Indians (“The Great Battle,” 1862, March 19).

The search of the Library of Congress database revealed that newspapers through the North, from Vermont to Illinois, carried some story about the scalping at Pea Ridge. The most frequently published story was one datelined on March 13, 1862, from Springfield, Missouri, as a special report to the *Missouri (St. Louis) Republican*. The story, which was generally accurate in terms of the outline of the action and the numbers of troops involved and casualties, had one

sentence reporting 18 Union soldiers were scalped, although a few newspapers listed 180 either as a typo or an exaggeration.⁵

Less common were stories that went into great detail about the scalping incident. The most common story, which appeared in the database about five times, was one filed by the Arkansas correspondent of the *Cincinnati Times*. It was similar in detail to the Browne hoax story, with tales of drunken Indians turning on their Rebel allies. It included the story of a Rebel major who told the Indians they were shooting at their friends. “(B)ut the Indians did not heed what he said, and again discharged their pieces. ‘The d—d rascals have turned traitors,’ cried the Major. ‘Upon them, Arkansans, and give them no quarter’” (“The Great Battle,” 1862, March 27).

The story of the scalping, whether embellished or not, could be expected to create outrage in the North, and a number of papers carried editorials denouncing the Southerners. The *National Republican* in Washington, for example, used Pea Ridge as among a list of atrocities committed by Southerners that made it unreasonable to allow the fugitive slave act to stay in effect (“The Pursuit,” 1862, March 13). The *Pomeroy (Ohio) Telegraph* editorialized that Pea Ridge was a great victory. “But what will thrill the nation with horror, and place the rebels in their true light before the world, is the disgraceful fact that *one hundred and eighty of the Union men were found SCALPED on the field after the battle!* This act of brutal savageism was, perhaps, necessary to place the traitors in their true light before the world. It will be remembered in future conflicts” (“The Great Victory,” 1862, March 21).

As Pea Ridge was a Northern victory, Southern journalists apparently wanted to forget it. Southern newspapers carried far fewer stories than Northern papers about Pea Ridge, probably because they had no correspondents with Van Dorn’s army. In addition, communication from the battlefield was more difficult in the South. For example, the *Richmond Enquirer* only carried five stories during the time period analyzed. The first story, which appeared on March 14, was from the Southern Associated Press sent from Memphis via New Orleans. About the only details the story got right were that Confederate brigadier generals Ben McCulloch and James McIntosh were killed and losses were heavy. But the story placed the battle in Missouri with about 80,000 troops on each side, and that the Rebels won. “Our forces are in the rear and driving them Southward. We are whipping them. Beyond a doubt, a great victory has been achieved.” The *Enquirer* also printed a summary of news from Northern papers that reported the Union had won, but it was clear more emphasis was placed on Southern reporting. In addition, the paper editorialized that although it was not sure what happened in the battle, “We feel a strong confidence that Price and Van Dorn will make an important advantage out of the enemy before he gets back from his present advanced position” (Loomis, 1862, March 14; “Late Northern Intelligence, 1862, March 14; “The Battle,” 1862, March 14).

Later in the month, the *Enquirer* published the official reports of the Union and Confederate armies, but no mention of scalping was made (“Battle,” 1862, March 21).

⁵ See “The Battle of Pea Ridge, Ark.,” *Bedford (Pa.) Enquirer*, March 21, 1862, as an example of this story, and “More About the Great Battle in Arkansas,” *Weekly Lancaster (Pa.) Gazette*, March 20, 1862 for example with 180 scalped.

The search of the Library of Congress database only turned up three Southern stories referencing Pea Ridge scalping, and all were in the *New Orleans Crescent*. Only eight stories were found about the battle in newspapers in the database from Virginia and the three Southern states in the region—Louisiana, Arkansas, Tennessee. Clearly, the battle was not deemed very newsworthy by Southern newspapers.

All of the three scalping stories were only one or two paragraphs long. One story pulled a paragraph out of the widely circulated *Missouri Republican* story that reported 18 Union soldiers were scalped. A New Orleans paper published it under the headline “Indians Scalping Yankees” (“Indians,” 1862, March 28).

One New Orleans scalping story found in the database search was an edited *New York Herald* story in which the U.S. Indian Commissioner, William Dole, said Kansas and Nebraska chiefs offered their services to “scalp and tomahawk Secessionists to any extent desired by the Government” (*New Orleans Crescent*, 1862, March 22). The story as it actually appeared in the *Herald* noted the Indian tribes were destitute, having lost most of their belongings as they were chased out of Indian Territory by Confederate Indians. “While in Kansas and Nebraska the Indian chiefs called upon (Dole), and tendered the services of their warriors for military services; but these cannot now be accepted” (“News,” 1862, March 9).

The two versions of the Dole story represent the main lesson from the coverage of the Indians at Pea Ridge—coverage depended upon whose Indian allies were scalping who. Because the Cherokee at Pea Ridge were allies of the Confederates, Northern newspapers wrote about the Indians’ role in the battle in much more detail than was warranted, often exaggerating the scalping that was committed. The Northern press also tried to have it both ways. Some stories emphasized the brutal efficiency of the Indian warriors, while others mocked them as cowards and drunkards.

The information from the Indian Commissioner indicated that Indians would be welcomed to fight on the Northern side, which the Indians did in great numbers in the Indian Territory as the war progressed.

On the other hand, the Southern newspapers virtually ignored the Indians at Pea Ridge. The battle itself generally received scant coverage, but the general ineffectiveness and embarrassing actions of the Confederates’ Indian troops were mentioned in only a few sentences.

In summary, the coverage of Indians at Pea Ridge adds further support to the notion that the Civil War press served as an arm of the government, and the stories of war correspondents of both sides have to be evaluated with the knowledge that facts were often secondary to supporting the war effort. In the case of the Indians at Pea Ridge, the Northern press exaggerated their actions, no doubt increasing public distrust of the tribes and decreasing sympathy for them as the nation moved westward.

Is it possible that this distrust and lack of sympathy contributed to an attitude that permitted massacres such as the 1864 battle at Sand Creek in Colorado, where volunteer cavalry

attacked a Cheyenne village, killing and mutilating women and children? The topic is worth exploring based on the findings of this article.

More research is also needed on press coverage of Native Americans in the Civil War. This study of Pea Ridge could be improved by expanding the time frame of the study and also the search terms used in the Library of Congress database. In addition, more individual newspapers could be studied issue by issue, for although the database search can provide a broad sample of articles, it can miss the context provided by looking at the entirety of a newspaper's coverage of a period of the war. Finally, press coverage of Native Americans in other battles, particularly those in the Indian Territory, where Indian troops played a dominant role, should be explored.

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