

COLLINS, JOE

INTERVIEW

12777

370

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- 11 -  
INTERVIEW.

12777

Form D-(S-149)

37

LEGEND & STORY FORM  
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION  
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

Field worker's name Gomer Gower  
This report made on (date) January 25, 1938

This legend was  
secured from (name) Joe Collins

Address Poteau, Oklahoma

This person is (male or ~~female~~ ~~male~~ ~~female~~ Indian,

If Indian, give tribe Cherokee

2. Origin and history of legend or story \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Write out the legend or story as completely as possible. Use blank  
sheets and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets  
attached 5

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12797

Gomer Gower,  
Investigator,  
January 25, 1938.

Interview with Joe Collins,  
Poteau, Oklahoma,

My father, Miles C. Collins, an intermarried white man who lived near Wilson's Rock on the North bank of the Arkansas River, in the Cherokee Nation, enlisted as a scout in Confederate forces under Stand Watie, the famous Cherokee leader.

On one occasion, after a battle with the Federal forces in the Creek Nation, in which the Confederate forces were greatly outnumbered, the forces under Stand Watie, which were composed of both Choctaw and Cherokee troops, were routed and forced to retreat, followed closely by the Federal troops. The retreating Indian troops were all mounted and were seeking a place where they could cross the Canadian River from the Creek Nation into the Choctaw Nation but upon reaching the river they found it to be bank full and, therefore, unfordable.

A council with his scouts was quickly held by Watie and the scouts, being fully aware of the strength of the pursuing Federal Indian troops, advised that an effort be made to cross the rampant river at once, pointing out to him the possibility that the pursuers

would send a part of their forces by a circuitous route to intercept them from the front and thus capture the entire retreating force.

Stand Watie was reluctant to expose his men to the surging waters of the Canadian at high flood, preferring as the lesser of the two evils which confronted them to remain on the North side of the river and attempt to elude their pursuers through a more hasty retreat down the river, and gave the command to the troops to follow that course.

My father, one of the scouts in the command, knew full well the attitude of the pursuing Indian forces toward that part of the Indian tribes who had espoused the cause of the Confederacy and that if captured by their opponents, certain death awaited the captured. He was not in a position to countermand the orders given by Stand Watie, the commanding officer, but as a scout, he unobtrusively fell behind the fleeing command in order to be in a position to warn it of an uncomfortable approach of its pursuers.

In the meantime he formulated a plan in his own mind by which his compatriots could be spared capture, which he felt

3

certain awaited them if the commands issued by Stand Watie were not in some way thwarted. At the psychological moment he put spurs to his mount and rushed upon the main column shouting that the pursuers were upon them and that the only means of escape was to plunge into the nearby swollen stream and make for the opposite side. He took the lead in this move and was quickly followed by the remainder of the command, including the commanding officer, Stand Watie.

That Indian contingent of Indian troops landed safely on the South side of the Canadian River in the Choctaw Nation and they felt highly elated at their escape across the river.

They had not long to wait before the pursuing Federal troops appeared on the opposite bank only to give vent to their disappointment in finding their quarry well out of harm's way. The pursuers could not afford to risk the danger of swimming the raging current and thus expose themselves to a raking fire from the Confederates who calmly sat their mounts and twitted the Federals on the ease with which they had eluded capture.

COLLINS, JOE.

INTERVIEW.

12777

4

It became manifest to the Confederate command that the ruse which the scout, Miles C. Collins, had evolved and placed in execution over the head of their commanding officer, had been the means of their escape from capture and probable death. As a result of that feat Father was acclaimed as a hero and was congratulated by the commanding officer for his persistence in converting certain capture into a strategic deliverance.

On still another occasion Father was one of a party of twelve scouts who found themselves surrounded by a large Federal Indian force, intent upon their capture. All of the scouting party were Indians except Father. Although he was a white man, Father wore his hair, which was as black as any Indian's hair, tied in a knot which was concealed under his hat, as did his Indian comrades. Divining that their captors questioned the identity of the Indian scouting party, he quietly removed his hat, untied his knotted hair and let it fall upon his shoulders. This act was followed by his comrades doing the same thing and ultimately was the means of convincing their Indian captors that they were of their own people and therefore

COLLINS, JOE.

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12777

5

entitled<sup>6</sup> to consideration as such, whereupon the scouting party was permitted to go its way without molestation.