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BILLY BOWLEGS

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"BILLY BOWLEGS"

Some time ago there was published in an Indian magazine a story concerning Billy Bowlegs, whose headstone may be seen in the United States National Cemetery near Fort Gibson, Oklahoma.

Concerning the subject it was said that he was the same Billy Bowlegs, a famous Seminole leader, who long fought against the United States soldiers in Florida. The author of the story, however, was greatly in error. The tombstone, or government headstone, stands at the grave of a man who fought for, instead of against the government.

Beside the number upon the headstone and the name, Billy Bowlegs, there is no other inscription except, "Captain, Ind. Ter." Thus it is proved that another Billy Bowlegs than the old Florida warrior lies beneath the sod in the cemetery.

Besides the Cherokees who served in the Union Indian brigade in the time of the Civil War there were some Creeks. The greater number of members of the First Indian regiment were Creeks, the remainder, Cherokees, and the Second and Third regiments were composed of Cherokees. Billy Bowlegs

- 2 -

a Creek, comparatively a young man, served as captain of a company of his countrymen in the First Regiment.

After service in various sections in Indian Territory, and on several occasions within the borders of outlying states, the Union Indian Brigade, together with some white soldiers, occupied the military post of Fort Gibson, there to remain until the close of the War, when all members of the brigade yet living were mustered out of the military service and returned to their homes.

Before the end of the conflict and while the Indian brigade occupied Fort Gibson a terrible epidemic of small-pox prevailed, and many of the Indian soldiers died. Among those who succumbed to the malady was Billy Bowlegs, Captain of a company of Creek soldiers. He was buried at no great distance from the Fort and when the United States National Cemetery was laid out and enclosed several years following the proclamation of peace, the remains of Captain Billy Bowlegs, and those of other Indian soldiers, were re-interred in the cemetery and the headstone was provided by the government of the United States.

Old Billy Bowlegs, the Seminole, eventually ceased contesting with the military authorities and agreed to remove to the Indian Territory, which he did and established

his home near Little River. After several years residence there the old man died in the year 1859, and was buried near his home. He spoke and understood the English language fairly well but would converse only through an interpreter, a very black old negro man.

Authorities: Thomas Hendricks, a Cherokee, who knew Billy Bowlegs, the Creek captain; Hendricks was a soldier and was at Fort Gibson. Also the late Reverend J. S. Murrow, who knew old Billy Bowlegs, and recalled the year he died, which was 1859.