

## **Episode 145: Fighting in Unusual Places**

**<http://civilwar150.longwood.edu>**

This week saw military action in some remote theatres of the war and an interesting battle that was later made into a well known motion picture. First, the only serious fighting of the war in the Indian Territory, later to be known as Oklahoma, took place on July 17, 1863. The engagement took place at Honey Springs, a depot on the Texas Road. The Texas Road was the most important north-south route through the Indian Territory. Near Honey Springs was Fort Gibson, a fort well known as the final stopping point on the Trail of Tears for many Cherokee, Creek and Seminole families who had been displaced from their homelands. Union officers had given it the name Fort Blunt in honor of their commander, General James Blunt, when they reinforced the fort in 1862.

Opposing the Union forces were Confederates under D. H. Cooper intent on taking the fort and gaining control of the Texas Road. Many of the men in gray were actually Native American recruits who relished the chance to strike back at Washington. Cooper's men arrived near the vicinity of Honey Springs in mid-July and when Blunt learned of their presence he decided to go on the offensive. Leaving the fort and outnumbered by nearly 1,700 men, the Union troops routed their enemy. The Texas Road would remain in Union control for the rest of the war.

Meanwhile a very interesting naval battle took place across the world. In the spring of 1863, the emperor of Japan ordered that all foreigners be expelled. As spring turned to summer, a variety of ships under the flags of foreign nations were attacked, including the American merchant steamer *Pembroke* on June 25. The *Pembroke* managed to escape the attack with slight damage, but reported the attack.

In response, the warship USS *Wyoming* entered the Shimonoseki Straits on July 16 and took on the entire Japanese fleet. The *Wyoming* suffered serious damage but sunk two of the Japanese vessels during the two-hour engagement before withdrawing. This naval engagement was a prelude to a more concerted effort by the foreign powers in 1864 to force open the straits and eventually reopen Japan to the outside world.

Back in the U.S., the only battle of the war fought in Ohio occurred on July 19 as Confederate raiders under John Hunt Morgan tried to fight their way out of the state across the Ohio River into West Virginia. While 700 of his men were captured and sent to Northern prisons, Morgan managed to escape.

Finally, in a place familiar with fighting, Charleston, South Carolina, there was an interesting engagement this week at Fort Wagner on Morris Island just outside the harbor. Fort Wagner controlled the southern approaches to the harbor and was a tough nut to crack. It sat so that the only approach to the fort was a narrow strip of beach, with ocean on one side and swamp on the other. Taking the fort was an important Union objective, and the task fell to the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts, an African-American regiment. The assault began on the evening of July 18 and the Union troops bravely fought their way through wooden stakes and a moat to reach the parapet of the fort only to be thrown back. Fierce fighting continued for three hours until the Union troops withdrew with heavy casualties. Fort Wagner was never taken by direct assault but the Union army and navy besieged the fort and by September the men manning it had withdrawn to fortifications closer to Charleston. The gallant attack by the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts was later portrayed in the 1989 motion picture *Glory*.