

OKLAHOMA'S FRONTIER INDIAN POLICE

Part Two

Charles LeFlore

By Art T. Burton

Charles LeFlore was an outstanding but little known lawman in the history of Indian Territory. His family was one of the most prominent in the Choctaw Nation. LeFlore owned a ranch at Limestone Gap, near the Texas Road. He became a member of the Choctaw Lighthorse police in 1882. In 1883, LeFlore received a commission as a deputy U.S. marshal. In 1885 he accompanied Indian Police Captain Sam Sixkiller when the outlaw Dick Glass was apprehended. During that episode, one of the outlaws tried to escape and LeFlore caught him after a wild six mile horseback chase.

In September of 1886, LeFlore and Sam Sixkiller had a run-in with a mixed-blood Cherokee named Black Hoyt and a white man named Jess Nicholson, in the streets of Muskogee. The two men were drunk on moonshine when Sixkiller and LeFlore attempted to arrest them. Nicholson shot at Sixkiller and creased his arm, LeFlore then shot and wounded Nicholson. Even though wounded, Nicholson managed to escape. Black Hoyt was arrested and later Nicholson died from his wound.

In 1887, LeFlore became captain of the United States Indian Police for the Indian Territory. This was after the successor of Sam Sixkiller, William Fields was murdered in April, 1887, near Eufaula in the Creek Nation, trying to apprehend a felon. As captain of the United States Indian Police, Charles LeFlore held the position for eight years. Besides his position as captain and deputy U.S. marshal, LeFlore was a special agent for the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad.

One of Captain LeFlore's first major arrests was the black outlaw, Gus Bogles. The outlaw had murdered a white coal miner named J. D. Morgan at Blue Tank in the Choctaw Nation. Captain LeFlore arrested Bogles in Dennison, Texas on June 30, 1887. Later Bogles was executed for the crime at the federal jail in Fort Smith on July 6, 1888.

In April 1887, Captain LeFlore captured another murderer name Steve Bussel. The crime was committed in the Chickasaw Nation. After conviction at Fort Smith, Bussel was given life imprisonment at Little Rock, Arkansas.

There are many stories of LeFlore's battles with outlaws. One has to do with a gang led by a man named Christie who robbed trains. In the spring of 1884, LeFlore learned of a location on the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad, (Reynolds near Limestone Gap) where the train would stop for water and be robbed by the Christie gang. He instructed the Choctaw Lighthorsemen to arrive at the water tower first and hide under the structure. LeFlore had twenty-five policemen with him and the outlaw gang was about the same in number. A short time before the arrival of the passenger train, the outlaws made their appearance. The captain had instructed his men not to fire until they were very near the water tank. He gave the signal for his men to fire and a hellacious gun

battle ensued. When the train approached, the engineer saw the gun battle and stopped a safe distance away. The gun battle resulted in two of the posse being wounded, but five of the outlaws were killed with as many wounded. The rest of the outlaws hightailed it as soon as they realized they were losing the struggle. Captain LeFlore then loaded his prisoners and dead into the baggage car of the "Katy" passenger train. This battle broke up major train robbing operations in the Choctaw Nation. LeFlore later told on many occasions a story related to this battle that was both tragic and humorous. A young lighthorseman was hit in the eye by a large wood splinter sent flying from uprights supporting the water tower when struck by a rifle shot. The splinter actually knocked his eye out. He observed Captain LeFlore looking at him and remarked. "Captain, we have them whipped, they are out of ammunition and now shooting at us with bows and arrows."

On another occasion it was reported that LeFlore and his posse had killed three wanted outlaws. This action had taken place a great distance from Fort Smith during the summer months. Concerned the bodies would bloat and start to decompose in the heat before they could get them back, LeFlore decided to salt the bodies like cured beef or pork. He was able to deliver the deceased outlaws well preserved to Fort Smith for official identification.

It was not uncommon for Captain LeFlore to stop at his home in Limestone Gap with a load of prisoners bound for Fort Smith. While he and the posse would eat, rest and refresh, he would chain the prisoners to a large tree in his front yard.

In September of 1891, Captain LeFlore was on the trail of the Dalton gang after they robbed the M.K. & T. passenger train near Wagoner. The captain reported to the **Vinita Indian Chieftain:**

"...twenty miles from the scene of the robbery, about two o'clock the same night, four men were seen riding northwest and leading two horses. The next night a woman who is acquainted with the Dalton boys saw two of them and two others west of Red Fork, riding in the direction of the mouth of the stream of that name. They had two lead horses and the outfit corresponded with that seen the night of the robbery. The use of bloodhounds [brought from Atoka] the morning after holdup was rendered impossible because so many persons had been trailing around, but an organized pursuit is being conducted."

The above holdup took place at Leliaetta, Creek Nation. LeFlore would have a closer encounter with the Daltons at Adair in the Cherokee Nation. On the night of July 14, 1892, the Daltons took over the train depot at Adair and waited for the northbound No. 2 due at 9:45 p.m. On the train were eight lawmen, including J.J. Kinney, special railroad detective, Sid Johnson, deputy U.S. marshal, and Charles LeFlore, Alf McCay and Bud Kell of the United States Indian Police. In the gunfight that ensued after the train stopped at Adair, Kinney, Johnson and LeFlore all received slight wounds. The Daltons, untouched, got away with a small amount of loot. No doubt they would have had a better haul if the lawmen hadn't interfered with their criminal endeavors. During his long tenure, Captain LeFlore was wounded on several occasions.

The first execution in the Indian Territory under the laws of the United States, occurred at Muskogee, on July 1, 1898. Of the two men who were executed, one was captured by

LeFlore. Henry Whitefield, a black man, had murdered a man in Wagoner, Creek Nation, on December 2, 1897. Whitefield left after the murder, but was apprehended and arrested by LeFlore near Atoka in the Choctaw Nation.

Charles LeFlore worked out of the Ft. Smith court until courts were transferred to the Indian Territory in the 1890's. At that time he worked out of the Paris, Texas federal court until he retired around 1905. Captain Charles LeFlore died at his home at Limestone Gap on September 10, 1920 at the age of seventy-nine. His record as a lawman ranks with the best of those who served on the western frontier.

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Art T. Burton, author of BLACK, RED AND DEADLY, will continue his extensive review of the frontier Indian police in Oklahoma history. In Part 3 the discussion will focus on another outstanding Indian policeman, Jackson William Ellis.