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CAPTAIN NATHANIEL WYCHE HUNTER AND THE FLORIDA INDIAN CAMPAIGNS, 1837-1841

by REYNOLD M. WIK

IN JANUARY, 1837, Captain Nathaniel Wyche Hunter arrived at Fort Huleman, Florida, to engage in the military campaigns against the Seminole Indians.¹ His letters and diaries during the next four years provide a vivid account of military life in the Peninsula State.² Although his observations do not alter the history of the Seminole wars, they do reflect the thoughts of a perceptive officer facing the frustrations common to this theater of frontier warfare. They also present a soldier's view of the United States government's action in removing the Florida Indians to lands beyond the Mississippi river.

Captain Hunter, born in Powelton, Hancock County, Georgia, in 1810, had been well trained for a military career. Since he indicated a preference for the army at the age of fifteen, his father Arch R. L. Hunter suggested he enter West Point.³ The father described him as tall, active, agreeable, well-proportioned for his years and possessing a strong desire for military life. Be-

1. The Hunter families of Virginia came from a long genealogical line which can be traced back to Scotland in 1661. George H. S. King of Fredericksburg, Virginia, gives the following information taken largely from *The Hunter's of Duns, Berwick County, Scotland to Fredericksburg, Virginia* by Mary Kate Hunter (Palestine, Texas, 1940).

James Hunter lived in Dunse, Scotland, (1661-1738). His son William Hunter came to Virginia sometime before 1741 where he became a successful merchant at Fredericksburg. After his marriage to Martha Taliaferro of Snow Creek, Spotsylvania County, Virginia, in 1744, three children were born, James Hunter (jr) 1746-1788; William, 1748-1788, and Martha 1750-(?). James Hunter (jr) married Marianna Russell Spence 1747-1805. Their son, Arch R. L. Hunter moved to Powelton, Georgia. His three sons were Russell, James, and Nathaniel Wyche Hunter. The unpublished diaries and letters of Nathaniel Hunter provide the basis for this article.

2. The Hitchcock-Coit Collection, Mills College Library, Oakland, California. This manuscript collection includes the unpublished records of James Hunter (jr); the Arch R. L. Hunter Papers, and the Nathaniel Wyche Hunter letters and Diaries, volume I, 160 pages, and volume II, 210 pages. Unless otherwise indicated, the correspondence and diaries cited hereafter are from the Hitchcock-Coit Collection.

3. D. Vinton, Powelton, Georgia, to Hon. James Barbou, Secretary of War, Washington, D. C., May 7, 1825.

sides, he excelled in reading, writing, grammar, arithmetic, geography and geometry.⁴ Nathaniel received notification of his appointment on May 30, 1828, and entered West Point later in the summer.⁵

The new Cadet liked the physical aspects of the Academy. He described the location as the most beautiful plain he had seen. Huge mountains surrounded the site, with the spectacular Hudson river cutting across the plain in almost a straight line. Fort Putnam of Revolutionary War days defended Fort Clinton on the verge of the point. "To the eye of the spectator the place is impregnable," he mused, and added, "the country is so rugged that few people live close to the point."⁶

Although impressed by the location of the Academy, he detested many phases of academic life complaining that the innumerable regulations could not be put down on ten quires of paper. Grades were based on daily recitation rather than annual examinations. Each word missed in class became a demerit to be totaled up at the end of the year. Sixty demerits could mean expulsion. Like many of his colleagues, Hunter worried about grades, moaned over his inability to study, and at times felt certain he would be discharged from the service of the United States.⁷ He wrote in the summer of 1831 that final examinations were over but that it would be impossible for his parents to know how miserable he had been. At times he said he hated the Academy and signed his name, "your son in prison."⁸ Frequently he criticized his instructors as biased and unreasonable men and insisted that,

4. Arch R. L. Hunter, Powelton, Georgia, to Hon. James Barbour, Secretary of War, Washington, D. C., May 8, 1825.

5. John Taliaferro, Washington, D. C., to Arch R. L. Hunter, Powelton, Georgia, May 30, 1828.

6. Nathaniel Wyche Hunter, West Point, New York, to Arch R. L. Hunter, Powelton, Georgia.

7. Nathaniel Wyche Hunter, West Point, New York, to Arch R. L. Hunter, West Point, New York, to Arch R. L. Hunter, Powelton, Georgia, June 20, 1831.

8. Nathaniel Wyche Hunter, West Point, to Arch R. L. Hunter, Powelton, Georgia, August 7, 1829. These fears could be held by the Cadets with some justification because almost half of each entering class was dismissed before graduation. In 1825, 87 students entered the Academy but only 46 graduated in 1829.

The one thing that tends more than anything else to make me dislike the place is that nearly all the instructors here are Yankees. They are so partial to the Yankees that it is almost impossible for a Southerner to stay here, but should he happen to stay, it is almost impossible for him to have any standing.⁹

In spite of these qualms, Hunter graduated from West Point on June 15, 1833, and shortly afterward received his commission as Second Lieutenant in the United States army.

Assignment to Florida probably came as no surprise to Captain Hunter because this region had been the stage for extended conflict between the white and red man. Negro slaves escaping to the Everglades swamps created added tension. Following the Adams-Onis Treaty of 1819, the United States government used diplomatic and military measures to persuade or force the Seminoles to relinquish their lands. The treaties of Camp Moultrie and Payne's Landing were dictated by the power of the United States army. Efforts to move the Seminoles west of the Mississippi River under provisions of the Removal Act of 1830 were met by stiff Indian resistance. Daniel Webster in the Senate on June 7, 1838, pointed out: "This Florida war has already cost us over twenty million dollars."¹⁰ Congressman William C. Preston of South Carolina estimated the cost as larger than all the other Indian wars put together and four times the price paid to Spain for acquisition of the whole country¹¹. By 1840, at least 1,500 American troops had been killed by the Seminoles, while the losses of the Indians in defense of their homes is impossible to calculate.¹²

9. Nathaniel Wyche Hunter, West Point, to Arch R. L. Hunter, Powelton, Georgia, October 8, 1829. This statement is a bit extreme because Robert E. Lee and Joseph E. Johnston, both of Virginia, were enrolled at the Academy in 1829 when Nathaniel Hunter made this comment. In fact, Robert E. Lee was made adjutant of the corps for 1828-1829 which was the highest honor granted to West Point students. See also, Douglas Southall Freeman, *R. E. Lee* (New York, 1935), I, 48-60.

10. *Congressional Globe*, 25th Cong., 2nd Sess., June, 1838, p. 373.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 375.

12. Grant Foreman, *Indian Removal* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1932), p. 382. See also, Edwin C. McReynolds, *Seminoles* (Norman Oklahoma, 1957), p. 95. Professor McReynolds states that an official survey in 1820 indicated that approximately 5,000 Indians lived in Florida. That these limited numbers should inflict so many casualties on the United States army reflects the courage, skill and fighting ability of the Seminoles.

Fort Huleman, where Nathaniel Hunter was first stationed, was on the banks of the St. Johns, a river which William Cullen Bryant once called, "one of the noblest streams of the country."¹³ One hundred miles from its mouth, the wide, deep waters resembled a lake, Martha Hunter, the Captain's sister, in 1839 thought the region extremely beautiful with its large orange trees bending to the ground with their golden fruit. "We can gather wagon loads of fruit," she explained, "while lemons grow wild, the coconut trees are of considerable size, and the river abounds in fine fish of which the men gather great quantities of speckled trout every day."¹⁴

However, these scenic vistas failed to impress Captain Hunter who, three months after his arrival, wrote to his parents "abusing the country at a terrible rate."¹⁵ He seemed to agree with John Randolph who said, when he opposed the building of federal roads in this area, "No man would immigrate into Florida, no, not from hell itself."¹⁶ Much of this negative attitude resulted from the young officer's fear of the Indians. He never underestimated the fighting ability of the Seminoles. Even though the tribe had been weakened by 1837, the Florida marshes were still a no-man's land in which death might lurk in every shadow.

Captain Hunter in May, 1838, relieved Captain Beall in command of Fort Swarengen which was then the southernmost military post in Florida. General Jessup had just ended his eighteen month campaign, capturing, 2,200 Indians and killing 70 more.¹⁷ All volunteers were discharged and all territory south of Fort Swarengen abandoned to the enemy.

Anticipating new Indian assaults, Hunter believed his position insecure due to the weak construction of Fort Swarengen. He envisioned disaster with his group of twenty men facing an enemy which earlier had withstood the attack of 2,000 American troops. When relief failed to arrive his anxiety reached the highest pitch of tension and his "brain reeled with delirium."¹⁸

13. Branch A. Cabell and A. J. Hanna, *The St. Johns: A Paradise of Diversities* (New York, 1943), p. 3.

14. Martha Hunter, Palatka, Florida, to Arch R. L. Hunter, Huntington, Cherokee County, North Carolina, December 5, 1839.

15. Russell Hunter, Knoxville, Tennessee, to Arch R. L. Hunter, Valley Towns, Cherokee County, North Carolina, March 1, 1837.

16. Cabell and Hanna, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

17. *Congressional Globe*. 25th Cong., 2nd Sess., June 8, 1838, p. 355.

18. Nathaniel Hunter Diary, II, 26.

Later, Hunter described his futile attempt to defend the post against an Indian night raid. He recalled that after sundown a strange noise came from the upper story of the block-house which sounded as if a dozen Indians were dancing on parcels of dried hides. All soldiers were under arms. With torch in hand, the Captain led a party to search the building. Even the roof under the shingles was searched without finding anyone. Someone suggested that the noises might be the ghosts of the unburied dead who fell in the battle of Okeechobee. Meanwhile Hunter tried to calm his men by saying the noises came from owls and bats. Yet, in spite of all precautions, the Seminoles infiltrated the fort. By ten o'clock Fort Swaengen burst into flames, forcing the army troops to retreat to Black Creek.¹⁹

Later, Hunter criticized the buildings at Fort Melon, saying those responsible for these flimsy defenses should be ashamed to call them a military post. Martha Hunter writing from Palatka in December, 1839, likewise mentioned the inadequate construction.

When I arrived here I found that there were no quarters and I was obliged to live in a tent for several days, which I confess was not very pleasant. My house is made of half-skinned pine poles held together by clap boards nailed across. The outside of it is as clean as a pig pen, and not much better. The doors open on the outside like a barn door and at night we tie them together with a twine cord, and so we live. . . . I was much alarmed the first night and did not sleep a wink for fear of Indians.²⁰

Needless to say, Captain Hunter soon learned something about the obstacles encountered in building fortifications in Florida. When ordered in February, 1840, to proceed to Rollestown with his company of High Dragoons to establish a military post, he gave instructions for cleaning out the underbrush, constructing a wharf at the St. Johns river, and erecting quarters for his men. However, delays followed since one third of the men were needed for scouting expeditions. Then too, supplies were scarce and at times virtually impossible to secure. The Quartermaster at Black Creek refused to issue a tarpaulin or to send boards for flooring

19. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

20. Martha Hunter, Palatka, Florida, to Arch R. L. Hunter, Huntington, North Carolina.

except on order of the commanding general. Bricks, mortar, and lumber failed to arrive because the purpose for which they were to be used had not been specified. In fact, Hunter learned to loathe the quartermasters, calling them hypocrites whose first official act was to make themselves comfortable, then to make everybody else as uncomfortable as the license of the service would permit. Besides, they retarded the movements of the army, disregarded the interests of the service, outraged private feelings, violated public confidence and all "to gratify the whims of some puritanical ass. To think of a Quartermaster possessing conscientious scruples, I'd as soon expect holy water in hell or sanctity in Satan." ²¹

Some of the frustrations of the military grew out of ignorance of the geography of the region. Scouts frequently got lost trying to return to camp. Hunter knew the general terrain but not the topography of specific areas. He felt the need of a good guide and reliable maps, not those available in bookstores at home which were so inaccurate that, "any Negro guide could make a better one in the sand." ²² He wanted a comprehensive delineation of Florida because,

All the maps I have seen are erroneous in many important respects. They are almost entirely compiled from the verbal representations of illiterate guides. Each officer should be compelled to make a map of the district under his command from personal observation, actual movement, and such means as would enable him to certify to its accuracy. ²³

Even though the United States army held seventy fortified positions in Florida in 1840, the complete subjugation of the remaining Seminoles proved difficult because they hid in the swamps and dense foliage. This problem enlivened a Senate debate when a critic of the Florida wars suggested that someone count the Seminoles to enable Congress to determine the size of the army required to capture them. Senator Robert Strange of North Carolina sagely replied, "Gentlemen, to count the savages, we must catch them, and if caught the necessity for counting would be over. . . ." ²⁴ Thomas Hart Benton, senator from Missouri, believed successful military exploits did not exist in

21. Hunter Diary, I, 11.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

23. *Ibid.*, I, 24-25.

24. *Congressional Globe*. 25th Cong., 2nd Sess., June 8, 1838, p. 355.

such a country and against such a foe. He pictured Florida as swamps and lagoons which made it impervious to the white man's tread.²⁵

Under conditions favorable to Indian attacks from ambush, Captain Hunter insisted that soldiers were being exposed to unnecessary dangers. When on a scouting party which came upon a deserted Indian village, Hunter thought the Major's actions wholly irresponsible. "Who knew that the hummock on either side of the path was not occupied by numbers sufficient to annihilate the whole command?" he asked. "I shudder to think what might have attended the recklessness of the major on this occasion, and hope such dangers can be avoided for the sake of our country and our friends."²⁶

Additional concern resulted from the questionable tactics employed by some of the army officers. Since the Indians usually made their villages in marshes or retreats hidden in a labyrinth of vines where they could evade pursuit, common sense suggested that they could be taken only by surprise. This necessitated silent troop movements. Yet, the army units often crashed through the underbrush in general disorder creating pandemonium. Hunter thought anyone hoping to capture Indians under these conditions must be demented. Just when profound quietude seemed most essential,

Then that damned bugle is sounding again, as if the trampling of two hundred horses and the shouts of two hundred men and the occasional firing of a gun were not sufficient to notify the enemy of our approach and impress upon them the necessity of making themselves scarce. On such a night as this, sound can be heard five miles and I would not care to capture an Indian who is such a fool as not to profit by the information it conveys. The major says he will cease to have the usual calls blown when he ascertains proximity to the enemy. Well, I hope I am wrong in anticipating unfortunate circumstances from such indiscretion, but it does strike me as a piece of damned foolishness.²⁷

Furthermore, a sense of futility gripped the men. Captain Hunter's journals reflect this attitude in notations referring to

25. *Ibid.*, p. 375.

26. Hunter Diary, 1, 78-79.

27. *Ibid.*, 1, 80.

scouts returning to camp with nothing to report aside from the killing of a rattlesnake. Again, cattle were seen, but no Indians. Swamps ten miles long were encountered which defied exploration. The Indians were too nimble and the soldiers had feet of clay.²⁸

Apparently morale fell to the point where the occasional capture of an Indian failed to arouse the spirit of the troops. Little romance sprang from charging a village to snatch a few terrified children crouched in the weeds or kidnapping old squaws begging for mercy. For instance, Colonel Kearney returned to Fort King on June 26, 1840, to report the destruction of ten acres of corn, the capture of several horses, one negro, and an old woman who could not run and a child who could not walk.²⁹ After a scouting party camped near Tampa, Hunter snorted, "What have we gained from this expedition? Seven Indians and ignominy."³⁰

The use of bloodhounds to track Seminoles brought additional criticism from army personnel as well as from many citizens at home. Hunter insisted these dogs were of no value and that the bizarre experiment had proved to be a "chimera, a humbug and a hoax."³¹ When a petition drafted by people in Indiana protested the use of bloodhounds, Senator Oliver H. Smith announced that these dogs were not as dangerous as commonly believed. The petition was tabled.³²

Since war is a dirty business, the diaries written by those involved usually reek with boredom. In the Florida campaigns inclement weather plagued the men and the summer heat made work both disagreeable and dangerous. Military action ceased in the summer months.³³ Senator Benton sympathized with the soldiers in Florida, where "suffocating heat oppresses the frame,

28. *Ibid.*, p. 27. On April 15, 1840, Hunter wrote in his diary. "Received a notification from Lt. Brown that two men near the six Mile branch, swamp or hummock had been fired upon by Indians. One of the scouts fired at the smoke of the Indians' guns. I sent a scout to search the swamps near Deep Creek. He returned without seeing any signs of tracks."

29. *Ibid.*, I, 61.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 126. Hunter wrote, "Here we are on Christmas night 26 miles from Tampa with the eternal forest around us and nothing but Indians and wolves to molest or make afraid. And what a holiday it has been. I doubt that I will ever forget it. . . ."

31. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

32. *Congressional Globe*, 26th Cong. 1st Sess., April 21, 1840, p. 321.

33. Hunter Diary, I, 52.

annoying insects sting the body, burning sands, a spongy morass, and the sharp cutting grass receive the feet and legs.³⁴

Similarly, wet weather handicapped operations and depressed all hands. Scouts slogged through mud and water while roads became quagmires making transportation virtually impossible. Captain Hunter observed,

Rain, rain, rain, will it never cease its eternal patter? What a melancholy sound that monotonous pat, pat, pat as it falls from the eaves or trickles through the crevices of the roof just where your head happens to be. If such a reminder were to happen in London, half of it would be depopulated by suicides. Men and horses are performing the most arduous service and exposed to all the inclemencies of this variable climate. I presume the General will leave this God abandoned country at an early date. I would urge it most strenuously.³⁵

In addition, the long summers fostered disease and illness among the troops. Stagnant water pools fed mosquitoes to spread malaria and yellow fever. In February, 1840, Hunter thought Dr. Hitchcock should have an assistant surgeon because four posts would be too many when the "sickly season arrives."³⁶ In March, the men were getting sick so fast that a boat crew stayed on duty to transport them to a hospital at Palatka, and in April sickness prevailed to an alarming degree.³⁷

This increased sickness, according to Captain Hunter, resulted from careless management which tolerated unsanitary conditions. At Fort Nelson on June 12, 1841, he confronted unwarranted filth. Earlier reports had praised the post for its excellent gardens which provided a refuge from starvation. However, Hunter beheld an inundated garden with withered melon vines and corn stalks floating around to create a sight worse than Bunyan's Slough of Despond.³⁸ "Do you call that sink of mire a stable," he retorted. "What mountains of manure. What stench, stinks and odours that emanate therefrom. The Augean was nothing to this."³⁹ When he inspected the hospital rooms

34. *Congressional Globe*. 25th Cong. 2nd Sess., June, 1838, p. 355.

35. Hunter Diary, I, 86.

36. *Ibid.*, p. VCR. Dr. Charles M. Hitchcock served in the Florida campaigns and in the Mexican War. In 1850 he arrived in San Francisco to serve as an army surgeon.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

39. *Ibid.*, I, 136.

above a commissary store he thought the doom of Lazarus slight compared to the victims languishing in such a place. Here the smell of putrid pork and spoiled beans hit the nostrils, a condition he sardonically observed that existed on the principle that poisons counteract each other.⁴⁰ He added,

I don't see how we can possibly live here for a month and drink such villainous water. Besides its warmth and discoloration by the infusion of noxious stuffs, it generates myriads of wiggle tails and pollywogs which are anything but palatable in a state of animation. A slight infusion of "Old Rye" removes all deliteries gurgleitits and cooks the animalculæ to perfection and renders the mixture quite agreeable.⁴¹

These fears evidently were justified because Hunter suffered a five month siege of illness, emerging as he said with his spirit broken and his hopes less sanguine and a "wreck in mind and body-a victim of the vicissitudes of Florida warfare."⁴² Nevertheless he kept his humor saying that his disease had added virulency to his bile which he would now disgorge over friend and foe alike.

Of course there is more in army life than tribulations. After long marches which exhausted the men, the subsequent rest felt unusually good. Following a twenty mile march, the Captain expressed his reactions in exquisite literary fashion.

How sweet our sleep. Slumber exercises perfect dominion over all our faculties and we can covet nothing more than to yield preemptory and implicit obedience to its overpowering influence. The hooting of owls from the umbrageous pines that moaned in doleful cadence over our heads, the cry of the wolves that howled their honor from the verge of the hills above us, the barking of the grey fox that prowled within the glare of our campfires. Wake me not from the

40. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 130. Hunter believed there were too many quacks in the medical corps of the army. In his Diary, II, 39, he said, "These quack doctors are fond of prescribing nostrums, patent medicines, roots and herbs. These men who not being able or willing to keep pace with science look upon all improvements and innovations with horror. They would rather kill a patient according to the good old sacred method of their ancestors, than cure him by new fangled practice of the day."

utter state of forgetfulness into which slumberland had wright me. . . . Blessed is he who invented sleep.⁴³

Extended travel brought memorable experiences. The diarist enjoyed his exposure to a changing panorama on a trip to Tampa in 1840.

And this is Tampa, a name familiar to all who have ever read a Florida bulletin, the landing place of DeSoto and his gallant Cavaliers in 1539; the most beautiful and chosen spot in Florida. The orange and lime trees look pretty and the stately live oaks, how grand and magnificent. The fort is built on a promontory projecting into Tampa Bay leaving the Hillsboro river on the right and the arm of the San Espirito Bay on the left. There is scarcely a vestige of the old fort left. Major Belton in 1836 caused nearly all the buildings to be pulled down and many improvements destroyed in anticipation of an attack from the Indians. How he has been cursed for it. The Alabama volunteers picketed their horses to the orange trees and cut down the live oaks for firewood. What sacrilege. Tampa is still a pretty place. What a contrast does it present to the wild woods in which I have been living. Then the fish, oysters, turtles, no wonder all the commanding officers make it their headquarters. Turtle steaks are frequently issued instead of fresh beef to the men. Trout, sheepshead, grouper, oysters and crabs go a begging. . . .⁴⁴

Then too, there was rejoicing in liquor. A concentrated pull on the bottle rejuvenated them. At times, provident soldiers slipped whiskey bottles into their holsters to enliven the march. This acute dryness of the palate drew frequent comments from Captain Hunter. On a trek through the forest in April, 1840, he explained,

But by a most unpardonable oversight my flask of liquor had gone with the packs to camp, and though our drink was a tolerably strong stimulant, the excitement soon subsided and a flask of Old Monongehela to warm our drooping spirits would have commanded any price. By the greatest good luck (the devil will take care of his own) a bottle was found and many were the cups we drained and patent were the draughts we quaffed until the bottle completely exhausted under our frequent applications uttered a gurgling sound and was empty.⁴⁵

43. *Ibid.*, I, p. 81.

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 106-107.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

At first glance, the Hunter journals seem to picture a cynical officer attempting to avoid all the unpleasantness found in military life in the Florida wilds. True, his complaints are legion. He decried slow communications which permitted presidential addresses to reach Europe before Florida.⁴⁶ Desertions were followed by painful court martials. Soldiers inflicted injuries upon themselves to escape duty; others wanted to resign if they could collect their pay. Excessive paper work piled up. Superior officers were envied, promotions came slowly, and brevet majors never died.⁴⁷

Yet, beyond these protests stands an officer with enough sensitivity to think seriously about the ethics inherent in the Indian policy carried out by the United States government. As an eye witness to the Florida events, Hunter questioned the morality of ejecting Indians from their homes by military force. For him the Red Man's "Trail of Tears" was a tragedy. While contemporary scholars find it easy to condemn the ruthlessness of the Indian removal policy, Captain Hunter came to these conclusions at the time these acts were being committed. Not all army men believed that the only good Indians were deceased. In this sense, these diaries are commendable in contrast to the black record of the Federal Government's overall relations with the Seminoles.⁴⁸

For instance, on April 14, 1840, when Hunter heard of General Zachary Taylor's order to take no more Indians alive, he failed to understand how a man with the General's sound judgment and discretion could take such a step. Hunter said he would defy the order because of his own innate repugnance to commit an act of downright murder. Indeed, no Indian prisoner under his command would suffer premeditated death.⁴⁹ Al-

46. *Ibid.*, I, 138.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 19. On May 15, 1840, Hunter revealed his dislike for superior officers when he wrote, "General Armistead assumes command of the army in Florida to the surprise of all, the mortification of many and the distrust of not a few. What does the gray bearded and imbecile dotard imagine he can do? If he accomplishes anything, it will be clear gain. None can have the presumption to anticipate any good from his efforts, a chance that may kill the devil. . . ."

48. See Mary E. Young, "Indian Removal and Land Allotment: The Civilized Tribes and Jacksonian Justice," *The American Historical Review*, LXIV (October, 1958), 31-56.

49. Hunter Diary, I, 27.

though admitting an obligation to his government, he wanted some semblance of justice on his side. His fairmindedness on the Indian question brought forth the following declaration.

I've tried every argument to still my conscience, but this restless imp will not be quiet. It bores me to death with impertinent questions relative to the propriety of conduct in which I am engaged and when I answer in the hackneyed phraseology of the day - that I have no right to discuss the propriety of my order; that it is the duty of a soldier to obey; that government is but enforcing a treaty; that our enemies are barbarous murderers of women and children; and last, that I am paid for acting not thinking-Sister to the audacious imp reply, "Fiat justitia ruat calm." Have God and justice no claims upon you prior and paramount to a government that incites you to de commission of a crime? Will no compunctions deter you from wringing your hands in innocent blood, even though it be the command of a superior officer? Enforce a treaty, a compact begot in fraud and brought ford in the blackest villainy and now in process of condemnation aided by the vilest machinations man or demon could invent? Is not every act of the Indians sanctioned by the practice of civilized nations? Are they not sanctioned by expediency and revenge? Mark me-if in this unhallowed surface one drop of Indian blood should soil your hands like Lady Macbeth you may cry to all eternity, "Out damned spot". . . . Besides I'm opposed to fighting Indians anyhow. . . .⁵⁰

These reservations merely reinforced Nathaniel Hunter's disenchantment with military affairs in Florida. Thus he became jubilant on May 2, 1841, when ordered to pull the 2nd Dragoons out of the Everglades and transport them to Fort Jessup in Louisiana.⁵¹ The men strained their eyes to catch a glimpse of the steamboat puffing up the St. Johns river to pick them up. Hunter exclaimed that the Children of Israel never gazed with more earnestness from the top of Pisgah upon the promised

50. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

51. *Ibid.*, II, 2. Captain Hunter did not reach Fort Jessup until December 14, 1842. He received a furlough in May, 1841, during which time he visited Baltimore and West Point. Then he spent some time in the recruiting service at Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Hunter was moved to Texas on July 25, 1845, where he remained until the outbreak of the Mexican War. He died on April 25, 1849.

land.⁵² As the vessel touched the wharf at Palatka, the Dragoons shouted, "By the gods she blows. Let's go aboard."⁵³

This contingent left Florida knowing the Indian problem remained unsolved. In fact, a policy of alternating coercion, threats, bribes and promises continued until 1857 when the last 165 Seminoles were removed from Florida.⁵⁴ Survivors on both sides had experienced the agonies of a struggle in which right and wrong had never been clearly defined.⁵⁵

52. *Ibid.*, I, 138.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

54. Grant Foreman, *op. cit.*, p. 385.

55. See also Mary Sudman, "The Florida Indian War," manuscript, Mills College Library; and the correspondence files of Mary Manning Cook, Reference Librarian, Mills College.