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BRITISH STRATEGY AND SOUTHERN INDIANS: WAR OF 1812

by JOHN K. MAHON

HARDLY HAD LAND operations commenced in Canada during the War of 1812, when British officers in North America and adjacent waters began to recommend a diversion somewhere to the southward to relieve the pressure at the north. As early as November 1812, Admiral Sir John Borlase Warren, British commander on the North American station, suggested the shores of the Gulf of Mexico as the proper place, especially New Orleans. Seizure of that city, he said, would throttle the states of Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee, which were then spearheading the war against Upper Canada.¹

Admiral Warren, who had served on the American station during the Revolutionary War, had little sympathy for Americans. He thought it only sensible to use racial minority groups, disaffected toward the United States, in the fight. Especially the Indians! Britain, the admiral believed, ought to reconquer territory from the Americans and give it back to the Indians to create a buffer against future aggressions. The Negroes, too, were natural allies of any enemy of the United States, and Warren proposed using them to garrison New Orleans, once it was captured. Black troops would put the fear of slave insurrection into the southern states and would quickly bring them to terms.²

The British had, from the earliest times, used the North American Indians against their enemies, but a milder spirit was overtaking them bit by bit, and they were beginning to suffer pangs of conscience when allied with "savages." Earl Bathurst, Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, claimed that he was willing to engage the Indians only because the Americans would snap them up if England did not; he would have preferred it had they remained neutral.³

1. J. B. Warren to Viscount Melville, November 18, 1812, Warren Letters, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, England.

2. *Ibid.*; Warren to Melville, February 25, 1813, *ibid.*

3. Bathurst to Sir George Prevost, August 10, 1812, Public Record Office: Colonial Office, 43/23, 70.

British influence radiated out among the Indians principally from the Great Lakes region. There, England had powerful allies in Tecumseh, a Shawnee chief, and his brother, the Prophet. Tecumseh realized what few other Indians ever saw: only if all tribes made common cause could they hope to contain the United States as it exploded out of its borders. He first formed an association of tribes in the Old Northwest, and then sought to extend it throughout the Mississippi Valley. On August 5, 1811, he took a picked delegation and started southward to bring the southern tribes into a united front against the Americans. The British Promised war supplies and other assistance. His visit to the Chickasaws and Choctaws was fruitless because of the opposition of their important chiefs. But Tecumseh's mother was a Creek, and a warmer welcome was accorded him among her people. Tuscanea or Tusca Heneha, eldest son of Big Warrior, head chief of the Creek Confederation, sponsored his mission, and some 5,000 Creeks gathered at Tuckabatchee on the Tallapoosa River in September 1811, to hear his appeal.⁴

Impressive as this number was, the Creek Confederation was too deeply divided to make a united stand. The faction sponsoring Tecumseh's visit came in the main from the Upper Creek towns along the Coosa, Tallapoosa, and Alabama rivers. Foreseeing the ultimate downfall of their life and the triumph of the white men, most of these towns resisted the white innovations introduced by Indian Agent Benjamin Hawkins. Opposed to them were the majority of the Lower Creek towns along the Flint and Chattahoochee rivers, who had accepted Hawkins' "civilization" and who sought a closer attachment to the United States. This rift turned into civil war, which quickly affected the white settlers in the Gulf area. At Ft. Mims in Mississippi Territory, on August 30, 1813, a war party of "Red Stick" Creeks surprised an ill-prepared stockade and massacred about 500 persons, most of them white. This atrocity turned the Creek civil war into a Creek war against white men, and many Americans were determined to exterminate the Red Sticks.⁵

4. Robert S. Cotterill, *The Southern Indians: The Story of the Civilized Tribes Before Removal* (Norman, 1954), 166; Glenn Tucker, *Tecumseh: Vision of Glory* (Indianapolis, 1956), 187-208; Anna Lewis, *Pushmataha* (New York, 1959), *passim*.

5. Cotterill, *Southern Indians*, 166ff; Henry S. Halbert and T. H. Ball, *The Creek War of 1813 and 1814* (Chicago, 1895), 143-76.

In the war against the Upper Creeks, the Lower Creeks generally cooperated and provided war parties. The Choctaws also supported the United States but, no more than 200 of them ever fought the Red Sticks. The United States with Indian support, an association Tecumseh had tried to avoid, overpowered the Red Sticks, killing nearly 800 warriors at the Battle of Tohopeka or Horseshoe Bend on March 27, 1814. A party of Cherokees aided Major General Andrew Jackson of the Tennessee militia in this slaughter.⁶ Great as this defeat was, there were intransigent Creeks who still refused to bow to the United States. The inhabitants of eight Upper Creek towns, more than a thousand Indians, escaped to Spanish Florida and settled among the Seminoles, their southern cousins. Florida Indians had been at war with the United States since 1811, and the transplanted Red Sticks joined willingly in this congenial occupation.⁷

Incomplete reports of the Creek War reached the British, including Vice Admiral Sir Alexander Forrester Inglis Cochrane, who had replaced Warren as commander of the North American station on April 1, 1814. While he did not know how badly the Creeks were divided, nor that Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Cherokees were siding with the United States, he was impressed with the fact that a sizeable body of Indians in the Gulf region was fighting the same foe as England. He knew of Warren's proposals to strike the Gulf coast and shared his determination to use the disaffected southern Indians to create the diversion so badly needed by the strategists in Canada.

Captain Hugh Pigot, with an extra complement of men and arms for the Indians, anchored on May 10, 1814 near the mouth of the Apalachicola River. He quickly established contact with the chiefs in the area, who, together with interpreters came aboard on May 20. They agreed on the issuance of British arms, to begin immediately. They requested also a small British force among them. George Woodbine, with the temporary rank of lieutenant of marines and the local rank of brevet captain when ashore, became the British agent for those Indians willing to op-

6. Henry T. Malone, *Cherokees of the Old South* (Athens, 1956), 71; Lewis, *Pushmataha, passim.*; Merritt B. Pound, *Benjamin Hawkins, Indian Agent* (Athens, 1951), 218.

7. Cotterill, *Southern Indians*, 188. For Seminoles at war with Americans, 1810-1814, see Rembert W. Patrick, *Florida Fiasco* (Athens, 1954), *passim.*

pose the United States. He had orders to feed the Red Sticks who had fled south after the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, and who reportedly were starving in the swamps near Pensacola. Under his direction, a sergeant and a corporal drilled the warriors, and even trained them in the use of the bayonet.⁸

Pigot enthusiastically reported that 2,800 Creek and Seminole warriors could be organized and trained within eight to ten weeks. To the west were the Choctaws, (Pigot did not know that they had swung away from England), and he gave the impression that they would be a source of aid. Pigot felt that a small detachment of British soldiers supporting Creeks and Choctaws, could advance inland, seize Baton Rouge, and swoop down on New Orleans from the north. He estimated that no more than 2,000 United States regulars and three or four wooden forts stood in the way. Arm and train the Indians, tickle their vanity by the issue of a few hundred military packets, and let them rupture the American frontiers. This was Pigot's plan of strategy. A small armed vessel to keep in touch with and supply the troops would be the only support necessary.⁹

Pigot forwarded letters from several Creek chiefs, which in essence said: "Thank you for the weapons! We have always been Englishmen, and ask the chance to remain such. Land a few British troops and we shall help them drive the Americans out of the Gulf region."¹⁰

Captain Pigot recommended the issue of cavalry equipment for warriors. While the Gulf coast Indians did not use horses extensively, nor did they fight on horseback, the captain thought he detected a cavalry potential in them. He saw all Indian boys from ten upwards as useful to the cause and recommended that carbines be issued to them. In addition to the Indians, he reported that the smugglers at Barataria Bay, 800 strong, who were regarded as pirates by the Americans, would light against the United States.

Meanwhile, Captain Woodbine had worked his way about fifteen miles up the Apalachicola to a place called Prospect Bluff. There, he started what was to become a center of British, Indian,

8. Hugh Pigot to Alex. Cochrane, June 8, 1814, Public Record Office: Admiralty, 1/506, 394-97. Cited hereafter as PRO: Admiralty.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*, 402, 403.

and Negro opposition to the United States for the next two years. He also made an agreement with two chiefs in which they promised to turn all prisoners over to him. One chief, Thomas Perryman, marked the agreement as "King" of the Seminoles, and the other, Cappachamico, as "King" of the Mikasuki. They claimed to represent all the Indians of the region ". . . now assembled in arms against the Americans."¹¹ The term "king" was the translation by white interpreters of the Creek word "mico," but the micos were not really kings.

Pigot's report had a profound effect upon his superiors. It turned Admiral Cochrane toward a line of strategy which was to end in the fateful fight at New Orleans six months later. In a letter to The Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, Cochrane claimed that with 3,000 troops, he could land at Mobile, rally Indians and disaffected Frenchmen and Spaniards about him, and drive the United States out of both Louisiana and the Floridas. October and November, he thought, would be the best time for such a venture. In the meantime, he would issue 1,000 muskets, ammunition, and two cannon to the Gulf Indians.¹²

The more Cochrane thought of the Indians as the key to penetration of the Gulf coast, the better the idea appeared. These Indians, after all, had been subjected to relentless aggression by Americans ever since the Revolutionary War, and they could now be utilized to support England's cause. If they were restored to the condition they had enjoyed when the British were in Florida from 1763-1783 their loyalty would remain intact. Any Anglo-American treaty should include provisions for the return of Indian lands, Cochrane insisted.¹³

While waiting for his government to act, the admiral engaged in limited exploitation of the restless conditions on the borders. In a rousing proclamation, he told the Indians, "America

11. Indian Agreement, May 28, 1814, Cochrane Papers, folio 2328, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh. Cited hereafter as Cochrane Papers. Both Seminoles and Mikasukis were in the beginning formed from migrated bands of Creeks. They spoke different dialects of the Muscogee language, but are regarded as part of the Seminole "Nation." The Seminole for whom Cappachamico signed probably came from as far away as the Suwanee River, while the Mikasukis lived in the area between the Aucilla River and Lake Miccosukee.
12. Cochrane to J. W. Croker, June 20, 1814, PRO: Admiralty 1/506, 391.
13. Cochrane to Croker, June 22, 1814, *ibid.*, 343.

forges chains for you," while England is sending a detachment to aid you against this aggressor. He hoped Negroes from Georgia and the Carolinas would join the fight against the Americans.¹⁴

The date probably had no significance to the admiral, but it was July 4 when he penned his instructions to Edward Nicolls, the officer designated to take the Indian-aid party ashore. Nicolls was brevet major in the Royal Marines and would have the local rank of lieutenant colonel; if he succeeded in raising a battalion of 500 warriors, he would become a colonel. Nicolls was warned not to assume too much authority among the Indians, but to hold their good will; try to prevent them from committing barbarous acts; find out as much as possible about the vulnerability of New Orleans, and whether or not the Indians would aid in capturing it; avoid hostile acts toward England's ally Spain; and, actively aid Spain if she warred upon the United States. His detachment would be supplied from the *Hermes* and *Caron*, under command of Captain Henry Percy. With four war vessels at his disposal, Percy was also to blockade the mouth of the Mississippi River. Woodbine was under Nicolls' command, and the entire detachment was carried on the supplementary list of the Third Battalion of Royal Marines.¹⁵

Before Nicolls was ready to land, Admiral Cochrane recalculated his estimate of the force needed to secure control of the Gulf coast. In mid-July, he wrote Earl Bathurst that he could do the job with only 2,000 British soldiers, aided by Indians and anyone else opposing the United States. This was 1,000 less than he had requested three weeks earlier. Many Negroes would support Britain, and because of their deep hatred of their white masters, they would make effective soldiers, the admiral thought. He insisted that he had no desire to incite a Negro rebellion; he only wanted to enlist those erstwhile slaves who were willing to take up arms or to become British colonists.¹⁶

Admiral Cochrane felt he was offering the ministry a wonderful chance to save British soldiers. Too many of these men had already been expended in the conflict against Napoleon. Co-

14. Proclamation of July 1, 1814, Public Record Office: WO 1/143, 156-57. Cited hereafter as PRO: WO.

15. Cochrane to Ed. Nicolls, July 4, 1814, PRO: Admiralty 1/506, 480-82; Cochrane to Henry Percy, July 5, 1814, *ibid.*, 486.

16. Cochrane to Bathurst, July 14, 1814, PRO: WO 1/141, 15-24; Bathurst to Robt. Ross, August 10, 1814, PRO: WO 6/2, 6-8.

chrane's plan was accepted, and on August 10, 1814 the admiralty directed him to proceed with the invasion of the Gulf coast, relying heavily on Indians, Negroes, Spaniards, Frenchmen, and anyone else who opposed the United States. He would have 2,000 more British troops than he had asked for, 5,000 soldiers in all. Under the new conditions opened up by Cochrane's enthusiasm, it would no longer be necessary to send southward the much larger force under Lord Rowland Hill as originally planned.¹⁷

September 1814 was the happiest month the harried administration of Lord Liverpool had known. Napoleon had been erased, and a glittering Congress was meeting in Vienna to ease Europe back into a peaceful posture. Twenty thousand troops were in Canada under Lieutenant General Sir George Prevost, the governor general, which would certainly force a British peace upon the feeble United States. To aid them, a mobile detachment under Admiral Cochrane himself, Rear Admiral George Cockburn, and Major General Robert Ross, was harassing the Chesapeake Bay region. Now came Cochrane's proposal for the Gulf coast. To cap everything, news of the expedition against Washington reached London on September 27. Full of elation, Liverpool sent off praises to General Ross for his daring conduct, ordered a command of not 5,000 but 10,000 British soldiers, and gave him and Admiral Cochrane a virtual free hand in the Gulf operation.¹⁸

All the while, Woodbine was at work among the Gulf Indians, but without good results. During the previous five months, he had been seriously hampered by a lack of provisions. Mobile, he claimed, could have been captured if there had been enough supplies. When he first landed, he found the Red Sticks dying of starvation in the swamps around Pensacola, and he saved them with the small quantities of supplies he could spare. But Woodbine complained that there were no weapons for the 800 potentially effective warriors.¹⁹

While his report showed little progress, Woodbine promised more in the future. With 2,000 British soldiers who could rally the disaffected peoples, the whole area from the St. Marys River

17. Croker to Cochrane, August 10, 1814, PRO: WO 1/141, 15-24; Bathurst to Ross, August 10, 1814, PRO: WO 6/2, 6-8.

18. Croker to Cochrane, September 28, 1814, PRO: WO 6/2, 19-24.

19. Geo. Woodbine to Cochrane, July 25, 1814, Cochrane Papers, folio 2328, 35.

to the Mississippi could be seized. Already one of the forts at Pensacola was being manned, and the Indians were encamped around it. With arms, they would be an even more effective force. To the west were the Choctaws, with which Woodbine planned to attack the rear of Andrew Jackson's army. This would have to wait, however, until Mobile was taken and turned into a weapons-depot.²⁰

Captain Woodbine estimated that he would need 2,000 men, in addition to Indian support, to conquer the Gulf coast. Admiral Cochrane had already proposed this same figure to the government. With all his enthusiasm, Woodbine revealed major blind-spots. Although he was aware of the broken condition of the Creek nation, he continued to regard Creeks as potentially powerful allies. Similarly, he counted upon the Choctaws, even though they were already aligned with the United States.

The very day that Woodbine was writing most optimistically to the admiral, Andrew Jackson, meeting with certain Indian leaders at the confluence of the Coosa and Tallapoosa rivers, forced the Creeks to cede 20,000 acres of land west of the Coosa.²¹ Jacksonian "diplomacy" should have driven the Creeks into an alliance with England, since the Lower Creeks, who had supported the United States against the Red Sticks, also lost land. Woodbine's expectation of a Creek alliance was, therefore, reasonable. However, he did not adequately measure the wreck of the Red Sticks, more likely allies, nor did he comprehend the deep hatred between Lower Creeks and Red Sticks, which made reunion forever impossible. Contrary to Woodbine's assumptions, whatever Indian aid the British received would have to come from the Florida bands - Mikasukis, Alachuas, and recently migrated Red Sticks - all loosely known as Seminoles.

Captain Henry Percy's squadron, with Edward Nicolls and his command aboard, arrived off Pensacola early in August 1814. Nicolls wanted to make Pensacola the base for his inland operations, but Percy would not agree unless the Spanish requested a landing on their soil. Since the Spanish governor had virtually turned Pensacola's defense over to Woodbine, he had no hesitancy in inviting the British to come ashore. Percy then sailed to the Apalachicola to pick up men and material from Prospect Bluff and transfer them to Pensacola.

20. Woodbine to Cochrane, August 9, 1814, *ibid.*, 56.

21. Cotterill, *Southern Indians*, 188.

At Pensacola, Nicolls, three officers, a surgeon, four noncommissioned officers, and ninety-seven enlisted men, occupied Fort San Miguel. Besides their own arms, the detachment carried three field pieces, 1,000 stands of arms, and 300 British uniforms for the Indians. Every member of the party had received a month's pay in advance, and Nicolls carried with him \$1,000 in specie to meet extraordinary expenses.²²

Shortly after arriving in Florida, Nicolls issued a statement proclaiming Britain's power to punish insolent America. Citizens who wished to escape punishment should display a French, Spanish, or English flag. England, he insisted, was fighting for the freedom of the world, and Kentuckians especially should heed this fact and rally to the honorable cause. They had borne the brunt of the war in the West, he reminded them, yet received nothing for it. But as neutrals, if they would not become allies, they could grow rich trading with England for silver and gold. He also exhorted Louisianians to liberate from a "faithless, imbecile government your paternal soil!" Nicolls promised to help all persons and groups oppressed by the Americans.²³

The very day, August 29, 1814, that Nicolls published this proclamation, Captain Percy dispatched Captain Nicholas Lockyer aboard the *Sophia* to woo the Baratarian "pirates" under Jean Lafitte to the British cause. Lockyer's mission failed, and eventually the outlaws actively aided the United States. Thus, another of the disaffected splinters had disappointed Admiral Cochrane.²⁴

Meanwhile, English statesmen were considering the future of the American Indians. British emissaries were also negotiating with the United States. Lord Liverpool claimed that it was America's eagerness to expand in all directions that had caused the war; to allow ruthless expansionists to have their way with the Indians would be dishonorable. When the United States negotiators insisted that it was contrary to the law of nations to fix boundaries for the Indians, Liverpool countered that it was contrary to the

22. Nicolls to Cochrane (continuous report begun August 12, 1814), Cochrane Papers, folio 2328, 59. Percy to Cochrane, August 13, 1814, PRO: Admiralty 1/505, 152-53.

23. Proclamation by Lt. Col. Nicholls [*sic*], August 29, 1814, *Niles Register*, VII, 134-35; also printed in A. Lacarriere Latour, *Historical Memoir of the War in West Florida and Louisiana in 1814-1815* (Philadelphia, 1816), vii-viii.

24. Percy to Cochrane, September 9, 1814, PRO: Admiralty 1/505. For detail on the Baratarians, see Jane L. DeGrummond, *The Baratarians and the Battle of New Orleans* (Baton Rouge, 1961), *passim*.

laws of nature not to do so.²⁵ The foreign secretary, Viscount Castlereagh, sought to demolish America's claim that setting up an Indian buffer state between the United States and other nations would violate the Treaty of Paris after the Revolution. Establishment of a common Anglo-American boundary in 1783 did not prevent changing it in favor of a new one.²⁶

Nothing, in the meantime, had cooled Admiral Cochrane's enthusiasm. He wrote to Earl Bathurst on September 2, 1814, that the Carolinas, Georgia, and Louisiana all were vulnerable to attack. Employ 1,000 Negroes and whites against the coast of Georgia and South Carolina, he advised, and use this force to cut American intercoastal communication by seizing Cumberland Island and fortifying it. This enterprise would also provide a diversion in favor of the Gulf coast Indians. Thousands of warriors would aid in taking Mobile and New Orleans and in finally expelling of the United States from the region altogether.²⁷

Meanwhile, Earl Bathurst was issuing cautious, statesmanlike directives to General Ross to carry out the thrust in the Gulf. Ross was to court the goodwill of both the Spaniards and Indians. He was to enlist as many Negroes to military service as he could handle, discouraging, however, slave insurrection. The prime objects of his mission were to bring the back settlements under control by shutting off the Mississippi River and to occupy terrain which might be bargained away for other desirable objectives in the peace negotiations. The route to New Orleans would be left entirely to the discretion of Ross and Cochrane, and they could decide on future operations after New Orleans was in British hands.²⁸

Bit by bit the pivots upon which Admiral Cochrane had built his Gulf strategy were breaking down, although he did not realize it at the time. Captain Percy reconnoitered Fort Bowyer, commanding the entrance to Mobile Bay, and decided it was vulnerable. He put ashore an assault party under Lieutenant Colonel Nicolls on September 12, 1814, but, because of wind and tide, he

25. "Draft of note to American Emissaries in reply to theirs of 24 Aug. 1814," Liverpool Papers, folio 38259, 51-53, British Museum; undated and unsigned note concerning Indian boundaries, *ibid.*, folio 38365, 156.

26. Castlereagh to Liverpool, August 14, 1814, *ibid.*, folio 38259, 44.

27. Cochrane to Bathurst, September 2, 1814, PRO: WO 1/141, 66.

28. Bathurst to Robt. Ross, September 6, 1814, PRO: WO 6/2, 11.

discovered he could not support it from the sea. Three days later, Percy sailed into the bay with four war vessels and began to bombard the fort. Three hours later the cannonade ended. Percy had lost one ship and withdrew the others the next day. Nicolls, too ill to stay ashore, had come aboard, and while watching the cannonplay, he was wounded in the head and leg and blinded in the right eye. Although the British had failed to reduce the fort, Nicolls claimed that the attempt had drawn the American garrison out of Creek country.²⁹ But Mobile was essential to British plans. If Fort Bowyer could not be captured, there was little chance of taking the city.

Before and after the attempt on Fort Bowyer, and in between bouts with fever, Nicolls tried to raise an effective body of Indians. Woodbine, his subordinate, asked for funds to pay them: Micos would receive two dollars a day, and from that high point the scale would drop to fifty cents a week for each Negro in service.³⁰ At the same time, Nicolls sought to patch up matters among the Indian factions. In April, he informed Cochrane that Big Warrior of the Lower Creeks had made peace with the Seminoles. If true, this was a significant feat, but it had no lasting advantages. Nicolls, however, continued to believe that it would, and he looked forward to penetrating into Georgia soon with Seminole and Lower Creek support. But as the month passed, and he did not advance in any direction, he explained to the admiral that his health was wretched. He also said that the pro-British Indians had been in desperate plight and needed much succor.³¹

Nicolls also wrote to Andrew Jackson accusing him of inciting the Indians to barbarous acts and of paying a bounty for scalps, while the British were doing all in their power to prevent their allies from scalping. The English were not able to suppress barbarous practices, and, in spite of Nicolls, a party of Red Sticks cooked and ate selected parts of some Americans they had killed. Such a menu, not uncommon among northern tribes, was by this time somewhat rare among the Creeks.³²

29. Percy to Cochrane, August 29, 1814, PRO: Admiralty 1/505; Percy to Cochrane, September 16, 1814, Cochrane Papers, folio 2328, 83; Nicolls Report to Cochrane, *ibid.*, 59.

30. Woodbine to Nicolls, October 27, 1814, *ibid.*, 99, 171a.

31. Nicolls Report to Cochrane, *ibid.*, 60.

32. *Ibid.*

Cochrane's plan of strategy was weakened when on September 12, 1814, General Ross was killed as he was leading his forces toward Baltimore. Ross was a skilled military leader and his death jeopardized the success of the southern expedition. Preparations for it, however, continued.

Andrew Jackson, in recognition of his defeat of the Red Stick Creeks, was commissioned a major general in the regular service on May 28, 1814, and he became the next agent to destroy one of the props of Cochrane's strategy. Passionately interested in liberating Florida from Spain and attaching it to the United States, Jackson advanced upon Pensacola. The Spanish governor revealed only slight willingness to resist the American attack. Nicolls and Woodbine reported that Pensacola's defense had been virtually turned over to them. Without Spanish aid, however, they could not make an effective stand, and finally when Jackson was all but in view, the Spanish governor began to demand a full scale effort from the British military. By this time, however, Nicolls and Captain James A. Gordon of the Royal Navy had already begun to shift their power elsewhere.³³

Jackson appeared before Pensacola on November 7, 1814, with 3,000 men and five cannon. Nicolls and Gordon blew up Forts Barrancas and San Miguel and withdrew, and the American force occupied the town with almost no opposition. Thus, another spot from which British power might have radiated from the sea inward was denied England.³⁴

The British commanders now concentrated their forces at Prospect Bluff on the Apalachicola River. Nicolls undertook to strengthen this position which he had selected six months before, indicating however, that the construction would cost the government nothing but tools and labor. Spain complained of this violation of her sovereignty, but as she had no power to back up her protests, the Liverpool ministry let the installation proceed. From it Nicolls began to incite small forays by the Indians across the Florida boundary into the United States. While these attacks accomplished little, the attackers returned with reports that thousands of Georgia and Louisiana Negroes would rally to the cause the moment a British force invaded.

33. J. A. Gordon to Cochrane, November 18, 1814, *ibid.*, 109-10.

34. *Ibid.*

Nicolls gathered as much data as possible concerning New Orleans. He assured Admiral Cochrane that the only feasible route was via Lake Pontchartrain, and he placed a resident who knew that approach well at the admiral's disposal. Nicolls even proposed himself to lead the expedition against the city. Little did he realize how ambitious the British designs upon the place were, and how far up the scale of rank the ministry had already gone to pick the commander.³⁵

Even as the props of Admiral Cochrane's strategy fell one by one, the parts of the expedition to carry it out were assembling. A rendezvous took place at Negril Bay on the west end of Jamaica on November 24, 1814. Two days later, Admiral Cochrane sailed with the advance fleet toward the Gulf of Mexico. Major General John Keane had brought the first reinforcements from England, and for the time being was in command of the ground forces. He and the admiral issued a joint proclamation on December 5, 1814, addressed "To the Great and Illustrious Chiefs of the Creek and Other Indian Nations," asking for their active support and cooperation: "The same principle of justice which led our Father to wage a war of twenty years in favor of the oppressed Nations of Europe, animates him now in support of his Indian children. And by the efforts of his Warriors, he hopes to obtain for them the restoration of those lands of which the People of Bad Spirit have basely robbed them."³⁶

Some of the pro-British chiefs came aboard, but Captain Edward Codrington, Cochrane's "fleet captain" or executive officer, thought them poor creatures for a great power to have as allies. Chief, Cappachamico, Hopsi or Perryman, and the Prophet Francis (Hillis Hadjo), put on their clothes, one layer upon another, simply tying the trousers around their waists without bothering to get into the legs. Codrington liked their native head-dress, the skin and plumage of a handsome bird, with the beak pointing down the forehead and the wings spread over the ears. These had been taken off, however, in favor of gold-laced cocked hats. With this millinery and the sergeant's jackets supplied by

35. Nicolls Report to Cochrane and Nicolls to Cochrane, December 3, 1814, *ibid.*, 60, 61, 117; Hamilton (for Castlereagh) to Bathurst, December 14, 1814, PRO: WO 1/143, 197.

36. Proclamation of December 5, 1814, PRO: WO 1/141, 249.

the admiral they were described as "dressed up apes" by Codrington in a letter to his wife.³⁷

Whatever Admiral Cochrane thought of the Creek chiefs, it must have been apparent to him by this time that the Gulf coast Indians were not the formidable pro-British force he had reckoned them. Nicolls had failed to create the uprising along the Florida frontier which the admiral had expected. Thus, had he received only the soldiers he had originally requisitioned, he would now have had to reconsider his plans; 2,000 would not have been enough unless aided by Indians and Negroes. But with the promise of 10,000 men - of whom about 8,000 were at hand - it seemed no longer necessary to travel through Indian country and attack New Orleans from the rear. With so large an army of British regulars, the admiral concluded that he did not have to rely upon the natives. He preferred sailing his fleet into the waters somewhere close to New Orleans, and then selecting an advantageous route to the city.³⁸

The consequences of his new policy, important as they were, are not an essential part of this narrative. They included the several actions known together as the Battle of New Orleans. When these were over, the British had lost six soldiers for every American casualty, and still had to give up their attempt to capture the city. Following the disaster, Admiral Cochrane focused his attention elsewhere on the Gulf coast.

Both before and after the Battle of New Orleans, the British commanders made the flank attacks which Cochrane had recommended. They successfully landed on Cumberland and St. Simons Islands,³⁹ and in mid-January 1815, the line of the St. Marys River was secured.⁴⁰ After the failure at New Orleans, Fort Bowyer was assaulted again, this time successfully. Mobile could be taken, and it would be a better point from which to project British influence inland than the Prospect Bluff fort on the Apalachicola.

37. Ed. Codrington to wife, December 14, 1814, printed in Lady Bouchier, *A Memoir of the Lifts of Admiral Sir Edward Codrington*, 2 vols. (London, 1873), 1, 329.

38. For the most detailed and useful account of this series of actions, see Charles B. Brooks, *The Siege of New Orleans* (Seattle, 1961).

39. Lt. Col. Williams to Robt. Barrie, January 14, 1815, PRO: Admiralty 1/509, 163; R. Ramsey to Geo. Cockburn, February 16, 1815, *ibid.*

40. *Niles Register*, VII, 361ff.

Cochrane also now returned to heavy reliance upon Indian allies. He directed Major General John Lambert (the only one of four British generals who had been at New Orleans still able to exercise command) to organize two bodies of Indians and Negroes combined with British soldiers. One was to harass the interior of Georgia, and try to make contact with Admiral Cockburn, who was operating from Cumberland Island. The other was to take Fort Stoddert on the Tombigbee River, and thence work downstream toward Mobile, where General Lambert was expected to be by that time. The Prospect Bluff fortification could protect the families of the warriors who were fighting for Britain, and could also serve as a base for either of the two columns to fall back on in case of some unforeseen disaster. This activity, the British hoped, would hold a large American force immobilized for the defense of New Orleans and Mobile, and would occupy the militias of Tennessee and Kentucky, thereby keeping them out of Canada. Lying behind this strategy, too, was English assurance that it meant to recover the lands for the Indians which greedy Americans had taken from them.⁴¹ English negotiators did insist that Article IX, favoring the Indians, be inserted in the Treaty of Ghent. It stipulated that at the end of hostilities the warring nations would restore to the tribes "all possessions, rights and privileges which they may have enjoyed or been entitled to in 1811 previous to such hostilities."⁴²

By the middle of February 1815, Admiral Cochrane learned the terms of the Treaty of Ghent, and he was determined to see Article IX honored. If the Indians did not keep closely allied to England, he informed them they would lose the chance to get their lands back. The fort on the Apalachicola was to be their point of contact, and he promised that they would grow rich by trading through it with Britain. Cochrane went north to Chesapeake Bay, so as to better keep in touch with all parts of his North American command, but he carefully instructed Rear Admiral Pultney Malcolm to move cannon and stores into the fort. If peace endured, he was to pick up Nicoll's command, but

41. Cochrane to John Lambert, February 3, 1815, PRO: WO 1/143, 53-63.

42. Hunter Miller (ed.), *Treaties and Other International Acts of the U.S.A. 1776-1863*, 8 vols. (Washington, 1930-1948), II, 581.

must leave three war vessels to protect the fort until the lands were returned to the Indians.⁴³

Cochrane's orders laid the basis for the development of a formidable stronghold at Prospect Bluff. Meant for the Indians, it fell instead, complete with cannon and ammunition, into the hands of free, renegade Negroes. Thus, it came to be known to Americans as the "Negro Fort." For more than a year - until blown up by an armed expedition from the United States on July 27, 1816 - it was a source of tension on the southern border.⁴⁴

Nicolls stayed on at the fort during the first half of 1815, firing numerous letters to Benjamin Hawkins, United States agent to the Creek Indians. In one, he transmitted a complaint of "Simanole" Chief Bowlegs that mounted Americans had invaded Florida villages in April 1815, killing and looting. Creeks and Seminoles, Nicolls reported, wanted to cut off every thread of communication with the United States, since it was obvious that the American government was neither making efforts to curb its citizens, nor evacuating Indian lands pursuant to Article IX.⁴⁵

Seeing little possibility of a change in American behavior, Nicolls reminded Hawkins that the Indians had an offensive-defensive alliance with Great Britain, and he described them as being well-armed and provisioned, with a stronghold to fall back upon. Consequences to the United States if she failed to live up to the treaty would be dire indeed, Nicolls threatened. In June 1815, probably shortly before embarking for England, Nicolls protested the running of the boundary lines set by the Treaty of Fort Jackson. That document, he insisted, was not binding since Andrew Jackson had forced a few minor, unrepresentative chiefs to sign it. Moreover, it was in flagrant violation of Article IX.⁴⁶

It probably had become apparent to Nicolls and to other British commanders in the Gulf region by mid-1815 that they could not enforce Article IX. The government at home was not willing to back them; a firm stand could conceivably have reopen-

43. Cochrane to Pultney Malcolm, February 17, 1815, PRO: WO 1/143, 37-43.

44. See Mark F. Boyd, "Events at Prospect Bluff on the Apalachicola River, 1808-1818," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XVI (October 1937), 77-81; Rembert W. Patrick, *Aristocrat in Uniform: General Duncan L. Clinch* (Gainesville, 1963), 27-33.

45. Nicolls to Benj. Hawkins, April 28, 1815, PRO: WO 1/143, 161.

46. Nicolls to Hawkins, May 12 and June 12, 1815, *ibid.*, 151, 165, 166.

ed hostilities. It is also likely that most Americans, particularly those in a position to influence policy, never intended to honor that article. No group was likely to try to annul Jackson's treaty and return 20,000,000 acres to the Indians.⁴⁷

Nicolls arrived in England, accompanied by the Prophet Francis, (Hillis Hadjo) and three of his followers. He also carried an Address to George III from thirty Creek chiefs asking for help to avert famine. So many displaced Red Sticks had settled among them that all would starve unless the king intervened. Along with this plea went a denunciation of Panton, Leslie and Company, and especially John Forbes, its principal proprietor. The company, based in Pensacola and chartered by Spain, was operated by Englishmen. But they were traitors, the Creeks claimed, and their treachery was so flagrant that they were forbidden to enter Creek territory.⁴⁸ Nicolls agreed with the Address: the Red Sticks had been defeated at Horseshoe Bend only because they had run out of ammunition, and Forbes had traitorously failed to live up to his agreement to supply them.⁴⁹

Try as he might, Nicolls failed to secure an audience with any high officials for Hillis Hadjo. In the end, he presented the chief's claims in writing: Hillis' father was an Englishman, as was McQueen's and both these two chiefs were among the first to attack the Americans. With eighty warriors, they had defeated General Floyd and his 2,700 militiamen and had failed to stop Jackson only because of Forbes' treachery. So valuable was their help that the United States still offered a price of \$5,000 for the head of each. Yet, they had been forced to flee their villages, and the Red Sticks were dying of starvation.⁵⁰

Nicolls not only supported the Indians, but he also began to plead his own cause. He submitted a bill for \$1,952, less \$500 already paid, for expenses he had born personally to entertain chiefs at Pensacola and Prospect Bluff in England's interest. When questioned by auditors, he regretfully admitted that he could show no written orders authorizing him to extend this hos-

47. PRO: WO 1/144, 145 and also 174, 175.

48. Address of Muskogee Chiefs to the King, August 10, 1815, PRO: WO 1/143, 147, 148.

49. Nicolls to Bathurst, September 25, 1815, *ibid.*, 137, 138.

50. *Ibid.*

pitality. He insisted, however, that what he had done was vitally necessary, and that Admiral Cochrane had approved it.⁵¹

Next, he forwarded a "Memorial" to the admiralty, claiming that while Admiral Cochrane had allowed him the rank and pay of a lieutenant colonel, the government had never honored it. In fact, he had received no pay at all during the previous year. He also reiterated his claim for reimbursement for entertaining the chiefs and pointed out that even then he was entertaining four Indians in his own home at his own expense. Financial ruin would engulf him unless the government approved his claims. In reckoning the amount due, he asked that his twenty-three years of service as an officer and his action in one hundred engagements be taken into account. He also wanted the anguish of a broken left leg, a wounded right leg, a shot through the body and the right arm, a sabre cut on his head, a bayonet puncture in his chest, and his blind right eye to be remembered.⁵²

He itemized his recent service on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. Upon his arrival the Indians had been in deplorable plight, but he had succored them, which made them better allies. While at Pensacola, he had armed the natives and kept General Jackson distracted. He had done his best to keep Jackson out of Mobile, had retreated fighting, and had established a strong point on the Apalachicola. Using the latter as a base, he had harassed the frontier as long as the war lasted. His activities, he claimed, had pinned down an American army of 5,000 men and had brought 5,800 Creek warriors to the British side. All of this had cost only 9,000 pounds.

Nicolls did not receive all that he considered due him. He had exaggerated the importance of his own activities and had persistently overrated the potential of the Indians as allies. He was not the only officer, however, who had magnified the role of the Indians. Admiral Cochrane had done the same thing. But whereas Nicolls' overestimation had only incidental consequences, Cochrane's shaped the British strategy, and led to an amazing disaster for the British forces at New Orleans.

51. Nicolls account sheet, and Nicolls to J. Barrow, August 24, 1815, *ibid.*, 127, 131.

52. PRO: WO, 1/144, 419-21.