

1927

Letters of Samuel Forry, Surgeon U.S. Army, 1837-1838, Part I

Sanuel Forry



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Recommended Citation

Forry, Sanuel (1927) "Letters of Samuel Forry, Surgeon U.S. Army, 1837-1838, Part I," *Florida Historical Quarterly*: Vol. 6 : No. 3 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol6/iss3/4>

LETTERS OF SAMUEL FORRY, SURGEON U. S.
ARMY, 1837-1838

P a r t I

[These letters, written during Dr. Forry's service in Florida, and relating to the Seminole War, are in the possession of John Wolcott Phelps, of Northfield, Massachusetts, a son of Gen. J. W. Phelps to whom they were written.

Samuel Forry, born June 23, 1811, at Berlin, Pennsylvania, received his degree in medicine at the University of Pennsylvania and was appointed assistant surgeon, U. S. Army, in 1836, serving until 1840. He wrote: The Climate of the United States and its Endemic Influences, New York, 1842; Meteorology. . . . New York, 1843; Statistical Report of the Sickness and Mortality in the Army of the United States 1819-1839, Washington, 1840; etc. He died November 8, 1844.]

(Written to Lieut. John W. Phelps, 4th Artillery, Black Creek.)

Fort King, July 3d, 1837.

Dear Phelps,

Your epistle of the 29th ult. came duly to hand.

I have read Gov. Cass' appeal to the people of the United States. He uses up Gen. Clinch *in toto*. He not only proves that he gave Clinch all the forces he required, but more than were demanded. Capt. Galt is obliged to confess that in its composition it is classical, and that its arguments are very plausible; but he insists that all his extracts are garbled, and that Clinch will yet triumph. With the people of the Union, who view Cass without any of that just detestation, exhibited in the Army, his vindication will be regarded conclusive and triumphant.

You have had the honour, I presume, of looking upon our valiant chieftain [Gen. Jesup]. During his stay at this post, the Gen. condescended to converse with his humble servant-myself, Under Capt. Galt's deserted bower he was so kind as to enlighten my obfuscated intellect upon various topics connected with the *iste chates*.

There are two causes to which he attributes the bad faith of the Seminoles, both arising from the conduct of unprincipled white men. A company, ramifying into Georgia, was formed to speculate in the negro property of the Indians. Individuals came into the Territory, (Cooly was one of these) with their pockets full of powers of attorney. The negroes became aware of this, grew alarmed, and fled from Gen. Jesup's camp.

The other cause was the bad faith of the Creeks, as shown in the escape of Miconope. The conduct of our Creek allies, however, is excusable. Having come to Florida to fight the battles of the white man, their natural enemy, kind treatment towards the women and children, left in Alabama, was at least to have been expected. On the contrary, they became the prey of those infernal vampyres that congregate on our frontier, who, in violation of all that is honourable in man and all that is sacred in female character, have taken advantage of their unprotected condition. A young squaw, flying from one of these demoniac ravishers, was shot down dead. These facts having reached the ears of our Creeks, can we be surprised at their want of good faith? Were their women and children not in our power, the consequences might be more serious. Although the flame is suppressed, the fires of Aetna rage concealed.

He said that Tom Carr proved treacherous. I then remarked that Paddy Carr at least was faithful. "No," said the Gen., "*he is false!*"

Another cause operated in inducing the Seminoles to leave the immigrating camp. It grew sickly ; a few cases of measles appeared, and as the Indians draw no distinction between this disease and small pox, many fled terrified. Indians hostile to immigration were also constantly engaged in giving currency to rumors

that as soon as the tribes were securely in Gen. Jesup's power at sea, they would all become food for fishes.

The issue of matters soon became apparent; but Gen. J. resolved that he would not be the first to violate the treaty, although he might secure Miconope with a few of his people. Tom Carr and several other Creeks were placed as spies over the emigrating camp, with orders to report to the General as soon as the Seminoles should take to flight. Several mounted companies were lying ready for the pursuit. The Creeks, however, winked at the matter; for they allowed the oily ex-Governor 15 hours start. Judgment had already been pronounced; had they been caught, every soul of them would have been suspended upon the *loftiest* pines! On the night of their departure, the General did not retire to rest, as he was in hourly expectation of learning the event.

"The Indians," says the General, "are a persecuted race, and we are engaged in an unholy cause." He never sought the glory of driving a people from their native soil—he made application to be relieved from this unpleasant duty, but it was denied until the Indians should be removed from the Territory.

So anxious are the Indians to remain here, that they proposed to Gen. Jesup to form another treaty, in which he might prescribe their boundaries. "Put us even down upon the capes, below Charlotte's Harbour," said they. Jumper said that they were born here under the genial rays of the sun, and that removal to a colder country would kill them. He had visited the new country, and saw that it had nothing but green oaks. Here if we get wet, we can kindle a fire with pine sticks, and dry ourselves; there we would get sick. If the crop fails here, we can plant another the same year—the ground is full of Koontee root—the wood alive with game—the lakes and ponds so

abound with fish that our little boys can shoot them with bow and arrow.

Arrangements are on foot for a new campaign on a magnificent scale. Capt. Crossman has been despatched to Missouri with authority to tender to some celebrated Indian agent, (I forget his name,) the rank of a Brigadier on condition that he bring to Florida 10 or 15 hundred Shawnees and Delawares. The noble Tecumseh, you know, was of the tribe of the Shawnees ; and the Delawares possessed Pennsylvania on the arrival of William Penn ; their dominions extended from the Hudson to the Potomac. What a singular spectacle will then be presented. The remnants of the Atlantic tribes, beaten back year after year by the march of civilization, shall again be brought to the Atlantic coast to drive westward the last of their own noble but infatuated race. A 1000 Cherokees have already volunteered their services. If such an Indian body and a considerable regular and militia force are brought into the field, it is hoped that the Seminoles will be awed into submission without further bloodshed.

Paddy Carr arrived at this post this morning escorting a wagon train. I have yet had no opportunity to cultivate his acquaintance. Capt. Boyd lies sick at Santa Fee.

Yours truly,
Samuel Forry.

Lieut. Phelps, 4th Artillery
July 4th.

By Jove, we are going to have a little sub-treaty. One of Paddy Carr's men, this morning, met two hostiles who said that about a dozen of them had been hovering about the fort for some days. Their object was to ascertain whether we had any Indians with us, who could *lingoter* for them, as they wished to sell us water-melons, a patch of which they have about

one day's journey from here. When they last saw the General, they said they had a straight talk, and they hoped that now all was peace. They agreed to meet Paddy Carr tomorrow morning at the same spot.

* *

(Written to Lieut. J. W. Phelps, 4th Artillery, Black Creek.)

Tohopka Micho, July 7th, 1837.

Dear Phelps,

To keep you apprized of current events, I will just say that the soi-disant hostiles have been in every day since the date of my last. Our traffic consists in venison and watermelons. The friendlies supply us in peaches.

Believe me yours truly,
Forry.

P. S. Yesterday there were five Indians here, and today two men and one lady. They are *bona fide* Seminoles, of old King Payne's tribe. Cudjo says that he knew them *before* they were born.

I spend much of my time in the Indian camps. Yesterday a Creek with a high fever became delirious. He jumped up and seized his gun, cried out to Paddy Carr that 5000 were coming down upon them, "but," said he, "let us not run; let us meet them like warriors."

General Jesup has just written our Commandant to treat the hostiles kindly.

* * *

(Written to Lieut. J. W. Phelps, 4th Artillery, Black Creek.)

Fort King, August 1st, 1837

Dear Sir,

I have read Gen. Clinch's reply to Gov. Cass. I now perceive the honour and frankness of a soldier contrasted with the subtle arts of the diplomatist. I have changed my ground, in toto. Cass, in making his ag-

gregate of the troops ordered to Florida, estimates the companies as full, whereas it is well known that they were mere skeletons ; the three nominal companies, for example, that arrived with tardy pace at Fort Brooke, did not number more than *100 efficient* men. Again: Clinch, by a certain order, is invested with the command of all the troops of Florida ; and yet Cass, in estimating the additional companies ordered on, takes into the account the forces of Dade at Key West. Etc. There are some men, indeed, gifted with the faculty of weaving an argumentative tissue, which, like frost-work upon the casement, presents shapes so symmetrical and *beautiful* as to command our admiration, and which, not unlike it, vanishes with the first breath of reason, nor leaves a trace behind.

On the evening of the 25th July, I received a request to visit Miconopy to consult in a case of gunshot wound. Accompanied by a negro boy as a guide, I set out about 10 o'clock in the evening, and arrived there about 4 o'clock in the morning. Just as I reached the grand hammocks, the moon arose above the horizon. Oh! but it was a wild and picturesque moonlight excursion! Just imagine me, attended by my sable page, viewing, by the beams of Diana, at midnight, the ruins of McIntosh's plantation amid the majesty of nature's works! Now casting my eye along the surface of Lake Orange, and now emerging from the gloomy thickets into the pretty prairie near Fort Defiance. Waving beneath the lunar beams, this prairie was to me a perfect *deceptio oculi*. Until I entered it, it was impossible to divest my mind of the idea that *it was the heaving ocean*.

But I must tell you something about our patient. Being convalescent from a severe attack of fever, he was lying on his bed asleep, when he received the wound by the accidental discharge of a musket. At the

moment, both of his hands embraced one of his knees, which accounts for the singularity of the wound. The thumb and middle finger of the right hand were carried off, the limb just above the knee was completely traversed, as well as the wrist of the left arm. The charge consisted of the usual cartridge, an ounce-ball and 3 buck-shot. The ball was found in his sleeve. As Dr. Maffit desired me to operate, I amputated the finger and thumb at the metacarpal joint, and then the thigh. It was determined to amputate the thigh, because the femoral artery was ruptured and the extremity was cold, and more especially as the constitution of the patient, debilitated by the diseases of a Southern climate, would inevitably sink under the efforts made by nature to repair the injuries. The hope that was held out to him proved fallacious. About three hours after the operation, the poor soldier groaned and suddenly expired. This result, however, confirms the propriety of the amputation: as his system did not rally from the shock of the operation, much less could it have sustained itself under the demands made by nature for the reparation of these lesions.

Had I not made the respectability of our Seminoles a party question, I should now pronounce them a set of rascals. No chiefs have yet appeared ; the hunters tell us daily that the Chiefs are so scattered that it is not easy to find them.

It is probable that a Seminole deputation will visit Washington.

Yours truly,

Phelps

Forry

(Written to Lieut. J. W. Phelps, U. S. Army, Black Creek)

Fort King, Florida, August 3d, 1837.

My Dear Friend,

Today John Hicks of the Miccasukees made his appearance in our camp. He said that he expected to find here the other chiefs, but supposed that their delay was owing to the circumstance of Holatuchoe's residence being below Charlotte's harbour, and that part of his family was very sick. Hicks is one of the party captured by Capt. Bell last February. He states that, having heard of the treaty, he had collected his people on the Suwannee, and that he was on the main trail leading to Tampa when he encountered Capt. Bell. Suspecting no danger, they allowed themselves to be captured. He, however, escaped.

Powell, he says, has taken possession of Fort Mellon, and that Coe-hadjo is fishing on the lake. Much suffering is now endured by the Indians on account of sickness and want of provisions.

We are now daily visited by small parties of Miccasukees. There is one encampment at the Old Agency ; another about two miles East; and third on the Ocklawaha.

Yours etc.,

Lieut. J. W. Phelps

Samuel Forry

August 4th. P.S. The above was written yesterday morning in the disappointed hope of transmitting it by the extra-express. Nothing has since transpired worthy of mention. We live in an atmosphere of Miccasukees. John Hicks has an encampment among the ruins of Rodger's sutter-houses. Hicks yesterday deposited \$30 with Paddy Carr, which, by the way, is one of the strongest manifestations of a pacific disposition. Paddy has gone out several miles to bring in a sick Seminole, one of his *hostile friends*.

The Major is on the alert incessantly, night and day. Our position is, indeed, so singular that an attack would not, at any moment, come unexpectedly.

F.

P.S. No. 2 Hicks is a very fine looking Indian. He says that, had his father lived, this war would never have occurred.

F.

* * *

(Written to Lieut. J. W. Phelps, 4th Artillery, Black Creek, probably from Fort King.)

Sunday, August 6th [1837]

Dear Phelps,

Your letter reached here this morning. You tell me all things, save one. Where is Gen. Jesup? or when does he propose visiting us?

This morning we had a long pow-wow. In addition to John Hicks, there have come two stalwart fellows, under the character of aids-de-camp, the one to Powell and the other to Coe-hadjo. Vague rumors, they say, had reached them of Indian depredations made upon cattle, and that they have been authorized to seize these unruly fellows who disregard the orders of their chiefs. In the next place, they put themselves in the position of the injured party, on account of the three Indians carried to St. Augustine. It had disorganized all our mutual arrangements,-they had great difficulty in restraining the relatives from sallying forth to take avengement,-it had caused much distrust on the part of the Indians, etc., etc. In fact, they argued their question well, and proved *satisfactorily* that we are a treacherous people, and devoid of that honourable feeling which should characterize international intercourse.

Powell's aid intends to accompany Major Childs to Miconoy on Tuesday, with a view to arrange all

difficulties. The Major has permission to go to Old Point.

Ross crossed the Ocklawaha yesterday. He represents it as a very formidable "fortitude." Our hostile friends encompass us closer every day. Perhaps we are slumbering on the crust of a volcano.

The head of the War Department has granted Gen. Jesup the following Indian force: four hundred Shawnees, 200 Delawares, 200 Choctaws, 100 Kickapoos, and 100 Sacs and Foxes. We shall then have war to the knife, Every warrior shall be killed, and all the women and children become slaves to the captor! How magnanimous is a civilized and enlightened Republic of the 19th century! In the Catalogue of earth's nations, the name of Seminole shall be erased! They have been weighed in the balance, and found wanting! The edict has gone forth!

The Seminole, however, is not to be frightened by such a raw-head-and-bloody-bone story. He knows full well that when Indians operate with U. States forces, their savage customs, be they what they may, are held in check. In the conference today, not a word was said about immigration.

Your wiseacres are determined to make you a historiographer ; well, so mote it be! Write it in a book! "Ay, that will he," say they. It must be written in a book! "Oh" exclaims one, "it ought to be written in a book! it will be a glorious book! write it, Lieutenant, I beseech you!" "He will write it," says the Bhow Begum ; and after her nasal protuberance was titillated in its schneiderian membrane by means of a pinch of snuff, she added, "and he will dedicate the book to me!" Your noddies, it appears, "look as knowing as divinities." Pooh! my man Mills looked as wise as an owl, when he droned out- "I guess we will *have some more Injin books soon!*"

I am not disposed to boast about our storms. But

by the lungs of old Aeolus, I wish we had a tornado-meter. Our winds think no more of twisting off a score of mighty pines, than Baron Von Tufts does of cracking off the stem of a single tobacco pipe.

Well, it appears there is some prospect of your retrograding to Fort King. As a requisition has been made for more troops to defend us against the *friendly hostiles*, it is thought that you will be ordered.

The Indians, sir, do know how to melt silver. A Seminole in Paddy's Camp, reduced three dollars to a fluid state, and manufactured a very neat head-band. He used an earthen crucible, and blew the fire incessantly.

Tuesday the 8th-

Lieut. Warner arrived here yesterday from Miconopy with the dried skeleton of a company, by way of reinforcement.

I have a Seminole and his wife in the Hospital. Paddy brought him from a neighboring camp, suffering excessively from diarrhea and *shingles*. Ask the Doctor the meaning of the latter term. Aye, the poor son of nature's wild, felt-

"The icy worm around him steal
Without the power to scare away
The cold consumers of his day."

Is it quoted right? If so, it is not applicable ; for, the red-skinned warrior is getting well.

Well, by Jove, the Major is gone, accompanied by Major Carr, Powell's aid, and the Paymaster. Don't you think the command of this post belongs to Major Carr in preference to Capt. Galt?

Three Creeks committed suicide at Tampa, the cause assigned is *nostalgia*.

Yours of the 6th has just come to hand. Well, to proceed in order :- 1st. Damn your criticism. 2d. In

regard to the dead soldier, I would advise you to re-peruse my letter. I did not, I think, say that his dying "Proved" the propriety of the operation. Acting upon the opinion that the man would die without an amputation, we stated to him our conviction that the removal of the limb afforded *a chance of saving his life* ; and thus his death confirmed the propriety of our views for the reason stated in the former letter. Had we believed death inevitable in either condition, we should at once have turned him over to the sexton. 3d. In regard to extra-expresses, I can only say that they were *confidential*. In regard to occurrences here, you have had them all. I wrote by last mail.

Ling's resignation has been accepted.

Yours,

Forry

Six Miccasukees, who have been in before, have just arrived as *avant-courier*. They state that the delegation expected was broken up by reason of a failure in meeting at the appointed time, but that another delegation is now on the way. It consists of Coa-hadjo, Yoha-hadjo (not the one killed by Shelton) and Ho-anees Tustenuggee. Should high waters not delay their progress, they will be here tomorrow.

F.

* * *

(Written to Lieut. J. W. Phelps, U. S. Army, Black Creek.)

Fort King, August 15th, 1837.

Dear Lieutenant,

The Baron is under arrest. It were a long story to tell: suffice it to say that Paddy Carr being at Miconope, and Tufts being about to issue to the Indians some blankets, the Capt. requested him to delay it until the return of Paddy. The Baron, however, issued until ordered to stop, when in a fit of vexation,

he put them into a waggon and sent them on the way to Miconope. Learning this, the Capt. came to Tuft's tent, when the following conversation ensued:- "Is there a waggon gone?" "Yes, to Miconopy." "What is in it?" "The remainder of the blankets." "Anything else?" "No." "Order out a saddled horse." "I can't without a written order." As the Capt. was walking towards the stables, Tufts cried out-"Phagan, saddle a horse and bring him out, but he cannot go without a written order." As the Capt. was returning, Tufts again cried out-"Phagan, if you saddle a horse without my order, I will discharge you." Just at this moment the Capt. and Tufts met, when the former said-"Go to your tent, sir, and consider yourself arrested."

A general gloom hangs over the Indian Camp. Moss, second in command, is dead. I never believed Indians susceptible of so much sympathy. A relative fanned him without intermission for seven days and nights in succession. When he died, Paddy, Abraham, and others yelled and blubbered like women.

In my last, which I presume you had not received when you wrote, I spoke of Powell's aid. After his departure, our Commandant asked Cudjo whether he knew him, "I know him! Yes, and he know me too! He use for steal my pigs afore de war!"

At Clinch's treaty at this post, Miconope sent word that he could not come and sign the treaty-that he had the belly-ache.

Some of our Miccasukees have several times visited the Everglades. They say it is six days' journey from Lake Tohopkolika. Cocoa-nuts, full of milk, grow there in abundance.

You have, I presume, received my last in which I spoke of our auxiliary Indian force from the Northwest. Under the impression that you may not be aware of the force soon expected, I will merely add that Gen. Jesup writes to our Capt. that he will soon

be in command of 4100 Regulars, and that two mounted regiments are ready for the field. A Brigade of mounted Kentucky boys has tendered its services, and also several spy companies.

Coa-hadjo and Tuskeneho are now at this post. Coa-hadjo, you know, was one of the western delegation. He belonged to the emigrating party ; but after the murder of Charley Emathla, he was told that if ever he should mention the word "Arkansaw" they would cut his throat. He is a Chehaw of John Ho-Pawnee's tribe. - Yoha-hadjo, another of the present delegation, has not yet arrived. (It is not the Yoha-hadjo killed by Gen. Shelton.) Coa-hadjo says that after much delay at Fort Mellon, he resolved to go to Tampa, thinking that the other Indians would the sooner follow. He received rations from Col. Harney ; but he had got no farther than Lake Tohopkohko when Sam Jones came on in the rear like a roaring lion. Sam asked Coa how he dared to leave before he himself was ready. "Remember Charley Emathla," said he. "Back, this moment, or I will cut your throat." As Abiaka had a strong force with him, Coa-hadjo was obliged to comply.

Coa-hadjo says that the only obstacle in the way of emigration is the obstinacy of Sam Jones, and that he has now become so sulky that he cannot be induced to express any opinion ; that that part of the Miccasukee tribe that originally constituted the Tallahasseees, has gone over to Miconope, and that even Powell has joined the standard of the old Governor, although he still remains with the Miccasukees to the end of controlling their movements. So says Coa-hadjo.

There are now at least 200 friendly hostiles in our immediate vicinity.

Another member of the delegation has arrived-Yo-ho-la-chu-hun-ne, one of Abiaka's subs. John Hick's and Powell's aid are also in Paddy's camp. I

have had Hicks under medical treatment several days. They say that all the Chiefs, save Sam Jones, promised to be at Tampa in October for immigration.

As the Chiefs will remain here until an answer comes from Gen. Jesup, Coa-hadjo will go to his old town to hunt and fish. He asked for a little corn to make *sofska*, but the Capt. said he was not authorized to grant his request. "Ah!" said he, "you may hear one of these days that Coa-hadjo attempted to live on water, and that he perished." I thought our treatment very inhospitable. The Indians are excessively anxious to have a sutter store. The clouds of war, they say, are now dispersed, and the sun of peace shines over all; and that we ought to live in friendship for the few days they are destined to sojourn in the land of their fathers.

Mast sublimely yours, with ennobled sentiments of
thrice exalted friendship. Forry.

Lieut. J. W. Phelps.

Don't be surprised to hear of a fight.

* * *

(Written to Lieut. J. W. Phelps, Black Creek.)

Fort King, August 20th, 1837.

Dear Sir:

I have just had the pleasure of receiving from you two letters and a pamphlet; so God bless you. I have now merely time to say a word.

I wrote a letter to you the same day that the Capt. wrote the one which brought here Gen. Jesup. I broke open the letter to add a postscript about midnight, but the Capt. said that no letters could go with a special express. Seeing which way the hint was directed, I spoke out, which led to a desire on his part that matters of that kind should be kept private as much as possible. I tore it off immediately, sealed it up, and

then could not resist the temptation of scratching in a word about a fight. No express, however, arrived from Tampa until yesterday.-The cause of the excitement was this:- After the talk, feast, smoke, and ball play, every Indian disappeared, as if a magic. Women and children who had been here a fortnight were all gone. Even my sick Indian and his wife were sucus cha. We, of course, expected an attack - a letter was despatched to the Gen. and every soldier lay outside of his quarters upon his arms-and at daylight or soon after, their sleepless eyes discovered several Seminoles advancing, weighed down with venison.

Yours in haste,
Samuel Forry.

Tufts is re-instated, and Ross has assumed the command on account of the illness of the Capt. I have no time to say anything about the treaty, it is all nothing.

F.

(This series of letters will be continued in the following issues of the QUARTERLY.)