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

Samuel Forry



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

PART III

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

St. Augustine, October 19th, 1837

My dear Phelps,

In the first place, I thank you very much for your kind attention in sending me a letter. My order to proceed to Fort Peyton has been countermanded; and I now remain here until further orders.

I have delayed writing a day or two, in the hope of giving some definite information in regard to the Indians. Coa-cuchee returned day before yesterday; and yesterday, Gen. Hernandez went as far as Hewlitt's mills, carrying provision for about 100 of Philip's people, who are approaching from different points. The Gen. met about 50 Indians, and brought to Fort Peyton 79 negroes. My friend, Joe Hicks, was there, and Powell and Coa-hadjo, they say, will be at Fort Peyton today. The Indians have not the least idea of emigrating. Tomoka John has no doubt held out false hopes to them, declaring that a portion of this territory will be assigned to them. If these people once get into our power, they will be held as fast as the old Fort can make them. They come with the view of having a talk and a ball-play, and eating and drinking.

Gen. Jesup and staff got here yesterday, doubtless concocting some direful plans to entrap the poor savage.

I can of course give you nothing new or interesting in regard to this fishing village. Last night we had a grand party at Gen. Hernandez. Waltzes and

Spanish dances were the order of the day. After midnight we had quite a splendid supper. About sixty ladies were in attendance, and some of them were passably handsome. I have never, however, participated in such amusements; but last night I most anxiously wished that I could waltz, for no other reason than merely feel and be felt by the ladies. Coa-cuchee was the lion of the night, attracting the special attention of the ladies. His remarks were always to the point, prompted by the impulses of nature. A lady and gentleman being introduced to him, he enquired if they were married. Being answered that the pair had lately been yoked, he added that she was very pretty, and that her husband no doubt enjoyed her very much, but that after bearing several children, she would be scarce worth having.

I have found amusement in rambling about these crumbling walls. Much food for reflection is presented everywhere. The fort, the chapel, the Plaza de la Constitution, are all invested with pleasing associations.

A considerable number of negroes are now at Volusia, for whom it is intended to despatch a steamboat.

Last evening King Philip's brother got so drunk that it was necessary to carry him off. When he saw the display of liquors, he was really transported to the third elysium. He gulped down draught after draught, and finally drew from his pocket a black bottle, thumped it upon the table, and cried out to have it filled. Coa-cuchee also drank immensely; but by being led between two men, he contrived to maintain the perpendicular; and thus he continued to receive the applause of the ladies. Coa-cuchee has the countenance of a white man—a perfect Apollo in his figure—dresses very gaudily, and has more than the vanity of a woman.

You may have heard of the loss of the Steamer "Home," bound for Charleston from New York. It is said that 80 passengers out of 200 perished. No further particulars. Disasters by sea are now every day occurrences. Half a dozen vessels are now off this coast, one of which left the mouth of the St. John's 15 days ago, bound for Charleston.

More troops are concentrating. Major Ashby, Capt. Bell, and a cracker company have just arrived, destined, I suppose, for Fort Peyton. Soon, ah soon, will the rusty hinges of the old Spanish fort close upon the devoted head of the mighty chieftain, Powell! Major Ashby's force number about 200.

Yours truly,
Samuel Forry

Lieut. Phelps

* * *

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

St. Augustine, October 21st, 1837

Dear Phelps,

I have just time to say that the Indians have been seized. Among the Chiefs taken are Powell, Coa-hadjo, Micopotoka, John and Joe Hicks, John Cowaga, and old Tustenug.

In the midst of our talk, Major Ashby closed in upon us with about 300 horsemen. No resistance was made by the Indians; their rifles were seized, and they were marched off to St. Augustine. Gen. Hernandez conducted the talk, whilst Gen. Jesup remained at Fort Peyton. Powell's camp was about a mile from the Fort, and he received us standing beneath a white flag. The whole number captured are, perhaps, seventy, all warriors with the exception of half a dozen women. The Indians bore it like philosophers.

A man, supposed to be a deserter, has been killed between Tampa and Fort King.

Yours truly,
Samuel Forry

* * *

(Written Lieut. J. W. Phelps, U. S. Army, Fort Heileman,

St. Augustine, October 31st, 1837.

Dear Phelps,

Yours of the 23d reached me yesterday at Fort Peyton on my return from an expedition to the South. I was ordered to accompany Gen. Hernandez, who set out on the morning of the 25th. A mounted force of 250 accompanied him, whilst 120 men escorted forage and provisions to Bulow's.

As preliminary to the account of our march, I may mention that on the second day after the seizure of Powell, we captured 30 Indians, of whom 18 were male adults. They were met down the road by small parties of our people, who shook them by the hand very cordially-dealt out to them the contents of their haversacks, and invited them to the fort. Arriving at the fort, unsuspecting of treachery, their rifles were seized, and they were marched off to St. Augustine. Of Powell's party, two men and one woman, who were a considerable distance from the main body, escaped; but as these took the road to Spring Garden, and the former came by the route of Tomoka, they fell into the same snare. I will also correct an error in my last: -instead of 300, Ashby's force was about 200; and the number of captives then taken is 82, including not more than half a dozen women and children.

But to return. This expedition proved the most unpleasant I have yet undergone. We took the field without tents and the nights proved very cold. On the third day our route lay thro' a succession of cypress bogs,

and we were obliged to swim the three Haw creeks. This trail had never been travelled by a white man; it has been made since the war, and led through these bogs, with a view to favour escape in the event of being surprised by horsemen. The first creek, filled with haw trees, runs through the centre of a marshy prairie about two miles wide. Our passage was quite an amusing spectacle. The distance to be swum was not more than 20 ft. and it reminded one of a crowd of boys rushing to a certain point to take a dive into the water. Each one plunged thro' the haw bushes in rapid succession. Every Irishman lost his cap, and every Dutchman saved his.

We had not only excellent white and negro guides, but also Tomoka John and Blue Snake, who have now completely identified their interest with ours. Our guides were always in advance examining trails, and at night proceeded several miles looking for the fires of the enemy. I forgot to say that on the first day we met an Indian, his wife and three children, who were sent under guard to Fort Peyton. The third night we encamped at a point, six miles from Volusia, and seven from Spring Garden. The Gen. had intended going to the former place, but as recent trails led to the latter, he changed his course. Early in the morning we surprised the enemy at Spring Garden, and captured 16 negroes and 16 Indians, mostly women and children. Had the Gen. possessed a better knowledge of the locality, all might have been taken; but there were two camps, separated by an extensive and almost impenetrable oak scrub communicating with a large swamp. Some of our men were close to three Indians, but would not fire without orders. We captured the Creek who ran away from Paddy Carr, and who was not killed when Uchee Billy was taken; or rather we did not capture him, as he could have escaped, but hear-

ing the voice of Blue Snake, he surrendered. Had our Indians been better mounted, it is very probable that all would have been induced to surrender. We found about 100 lbs. of lead, cut from a sugar boiler.

Our course was now directed to the ruins of Bulowville. Early next morning, the advance guard met two Indians, who retreated to a Cypress bog. Our lines were immediately extended around it, but the soil was so marshy that it could not be entered by horsemen. At several points, horse and rider disappeared beneath the surface. Even in the trail we were following, the water came to the skirts of the saddle, sometimes for the distance of half a mile. Several men being ordered to dismount and enter the bog, overgrown with cypress trees and tall grass, the Indians, as our men approached, instinctively brought the rifle to the eye; but as Tomoka John and Blue Snake cried out lustily that they should not fire, they finally surrendered. They proved to be the first and last born of King Philip, waiting for the return of their brother Coa-cuchee. The younger one, called Capt. Sam, escaped when his father was taken.

Nothing more worthy of notice occurred. We met the train at Bulowville, and returned to St. Augustine. At Bulow's a splendid steam sugar-mill lies in utter ruins. I had no idea, before seeing these plantations, of the devastations committed by the Indians.

The negroes captured say that the two Indians, who escaped when Powell was taken, passed Spring Garden post haste, terror and dismay depicted on their countenances, bearing tidings of woe to the nation. They stated the fact of the seizure, but added that all were bound with cords. The next day, the woman brought up the rear, with of course increased exaggeration. She stated that seeing horsemen as far as the eye could reach, she fled; and that shortly after-

wards she heard the roar of big guns, and that consequently all were slaughtered.

One of the negroes, named Titus, will prove an excellent guide. He gives a favourable account of the exertions of Coa-hadjo after his return from Fort King. At a council of chiefs, he addressed old Yakky, (Abiaka) from morn to midnight, and that Yakky became so mad that he several times left the council. Powell coincided in the views of Coa-hadjo, stating that they could not maintain the war another year, and that he for one would make peace with the whites. Sam Jones replied that he would not give up as long as he had a single ball and a charge of powder-that when he could no longer shoot game, he would live on fish-when his lines are worn out, he will make others of horse hair-and when his hooks are broken, he will cut up his old tin pans and make others. He concluded by saying that he had 700 warriors, and that he would fight as long as they would stand by him; and that if every other Indian should leave Florida, he would find a retreat among the islands of the Everglades, remote from the face of white or red man. Sam Hicks, a son-in-law of old Yakky, now ventured to advise a contrary measure; but Yakky became exceedingly enraged-demanded back his daughter, and actually drove him from his camp. But Sam had another wife in three days. So saith Titus.

Titus thinks Sam Jones the only obstacle to the making of peace, and that he possesses a hundred times the power and influence that Powell did. He thinks that he has 400 men. As an evidence of the number of the Indians, Tomoka and Blue Snake advised Gen. Hernandez several times not to cross the St. John's (he had had that object in view). They declared our forces of horsemen to be but a handful

compared with the number of Indians in that region.

In regard to Powell, I cannot tell you much. If it were possible to comprehend Indian character, I would say that they do not regret their being captured, and that their only anxiety consists in getting their families. Powell is doubtless a patriot, and the evidence of his physiognomy and the testimony of all go to prove that cruelty makes no part of his character. You may hear many false rumors. It is [in (?)] correctly reported that he attempted to poison himself. This report arose from a soldier's running thro' town after Dr. Russel, saying that Osceola was dying. He now labours under intermittent fever. A few nights ago, the Indians had a dance in the fort; the whoops and yells alarmed the city-the Mayor ran to Gen. Jesup and hoped that he would send for more troops, for Oseola would take the city before daylight. The Indians are perfectly secure, and do not dream of escape. Their large knives were taken from them the morning after imprisonment, and a barricade was erected to prevent a rush upon the passage leading to the door. Gen. Jesup on leaving, gave a positive order that no man, except officers on duty, shall have any communication with the Indians.

The Indians are very anxious to send several persons into the nation to apprise them of their situation, and bring in their families. The selection was in fact made the morning after their capture ; but our Generals concluded that it were better first to make all the captures possible.

Tomoka John advised the course that has been pursued in regard to Powell. He went into the nation holding out false hopes to the Indians; but Coa-cuchee followed with a true account of matters. Powell, Coa-

hadjo, and others, however, determined to come at all hazards.

Yours truly,
F o r r y

* * *

(Written to Lieut. Phelps.)

Fort Taylor, January 24th, 1838

Dear Phelps,

I am exceedingly obliged to you for your note of the 19th inst. After every officer had eagerly devoured his letter, and I was mentally cursing you for your supposed neglect, the Express-rider approached me and drew forth a transparent document, looking for all the world as though it had lain twelve months in the chandler-shop of Dr. Franklin's father. It bore, indeed, a close resemblance to a parchment found in the pocket of a deceased dragoon—a commission signed by Oliver Cromwell in 1650. This 'soldier had also a Major's commission to his father signed by John Adams, and a Diploma from Princeton College when the famous Witherspoon was President.

Have you yet found Sam Jones in the fabulous islands of the undiscovered Ochee-chubee? Have you yet discovered Ponce de Leon's fountain of perpetual youth, and the mines and pearl fisheries of Pamphillo de Narvaes?

The gallant Navy, how has she signalized herself! What a thorn it will prove in her side! She who rides the mountain-wave, rival of the fast anchored isle, beaten and routed by whom? Old *Naked-arse!*

Our position here is, indeed, melancholy. After each rain, we resemble Noah on the top of Mount Ararat. Clouds of crows and blackbirds then hover around, waiting for the waters to subside, to resume their daily vocation of picking up corn. Turning your

eye to the earth, you then behold a score, of glandered and sore-backed mules! Now a mosquito buzzes in your ear, and next a flea bites you between the shoulders.

Major Lomax and Ross' command serves as an escort to the waggon-train. I have given Martin a certificate of inability to march. At his suggestion, I send you a bottle of molasses by Capt. Waite.

Write by every opportunity.

Yours sincerely,

Forry

* * *

(Written to Lieut. J. W. Phelps)

Fort Taylor, March 4th, 1838

Mon Cher Phelps,

As I am unable to give you anything in the way of sense, you will be obliged to accept nonsense. But first let me thank you from the bottom of my heart for your kind favour of the 28th. ult., which reached me yesterday. We live here almost isolated from the world; so much so, indeed, that your letter is viewed by all as constituting an epoch in our history. By the way, we have become the most religious community imaginable; aye, we even rival those primitive Christians, who were so minute as to prescribe how often a husband ought to stroke his wife. We have a Bible class that meets every evening to hear the word of God expounded in familiar lessons, and on Sundays we have a regular dove-tailed sermon. The gentlemen who officiate on these pious and interesting occasions the Rev. Brevet Major John L. Gardner and Capt. J. R. Vinton. The congregation consists of the other officers, the soldiers, and two negro guides, *one of which never attends*. As Sampson guided us in pursuit of the Indians, the least we can do is to guide him to heaven. To carry out the parallel might prove an in-

teresting subject, that is, to determine which guide is the better acquainted with the country to which he professes to pilot the other.

By yesterday's express we also learned that this post and Fort Lane are to be abandoned in several weeks. Col. Crane says that the Artillery are to be ordered to the Canada frontier. I am an applicant to go to the North, and spend the summer at the falls of Niagara. I wrote to Dr. Lawson about 20 days ago, but I have not yet received a reply. I also touched upon the same subject in making my monthly report to Dr. Finlay; but unfortunately I sent the letter via St. Augustine, the day before yesterday.

Dr. Byrne has been ordered to Fort Pierce. As the Dr. sent me a newspaper occasionally, we got now and then a glimpse of the busy world without; but since then we have breathed an atmosphere of Egyptian darkness; (always barring spiritual enlightenment).

The letter referred to in your last has not arrived. It contains, I presume, an account of the fight in which Jesup had his goggles shot from his nasal protuberance. Pray, my dear fellow, could you not give me a general narrative of the sayings and doings in the Everglades? I know very little about Col. Taylor's operations and nothing in regard to Smith and Lawson. Bullock and Gilpin gave us just about a tithe of what you might furnish.

As you have discovered the Carib girl's fountain of perpetual youth, it is not improbable that you may also find the pearl fisheries of Pamphillo de Narvaes. Is not the Ochee-chubee Lake Macaco?

I examined our mound several days ago. I found many human bones and pieces of old iron in the shape of harpoons and tomahawks almost destroyed by oxidation. Silver ornaments, beads, and other Indian relics were also discovered.

I also found a small iron box with trinkets, one of which looks very like a pearl. These discoveries would indicate a more recent origin for the mounds than I had been led to suppose. As these relics, however, are only found near the surface, it is possible that they may have been deposited by the present race of Indians many years after the erection of the tumulus.

I received a few days ago a letter, written in December, from a book-seller in New York. He says that the Florida war is so unpopular that any work on the subject, however interesting and well-written, would fall still-born from the press. This remark he makes in reference to purchasing the manuscript. The fellow then adds the hope that I will finish the manuscript, and favour him with the job of publication at my own expense.

I do not comprehend Gen. Jesup's present policy. He must be influenced by motives behind the veil of public view. How else can he justify himself in again halting in the midst of his operations to parley with the Indians. He has, doubtless, secret instructions from Washington to use his own discretion in closing this unfortunate contest.

We have here the greatest abundance of game. A few days ago, Brent and I sent out our cooks in the morning, and they returned with fifteen curlew and ducks, in time to cook them for dinner. We consequently had a great feast of all officers, including Bullock and Gilpin. Col. Harney's wine enlivened the feast with great effect.

As the Express returns to-morrow from Fort Lane, I will apprise you of anything new.

Yours sincerely,

Forry

March 6th. Nothing new-your letter has not arrived. The 1st, 2d, 4th Artillery, it is said, will certainly be distributed along the sea coast from Eastport to Mobile. We are preparing to abandon this post, that is, we are sending down the River our supplies, reserving several days' forage for several hundred horses, which are to be brought here from your post. Benton's Army bill, which passed the Senate, will, it is now thought, pass the lower House. I have seen Col. Taylor's official report: it is such a *jumbled-up* affair that it gives one a pretty good idea of the fight.

Later- Capt. D. Lagnel says the 1st, 2d, and 4th Artillery and six companies 2d Infantry are to go to the North. Of the 3d Artillery, one company is to be stationed at Savannah, one at St. Augustine, one at Key West, one at Tampa, two at Santa Rosa, and one at Mobile point, and the other three to remain in the Territory. The 1st, 4th and 6th Infantry, 2d Dragoons, and some Volunteers are also to remain under command of a Brigadier General, as an Army of observation. Gen. Hernandez has gone to Washington to solicit the command!

Yesterday the Express went South about 20 miles, and found the road impassible. Today they went towards Fort Christmas, and found it equally impracticable. The bridges were raised up from their foundations, and choked the streams. Gen Eustis' camp ground here is overflowed, and our position has become insular. We have not had ten hours continuous rain. The Major is about to despatch an Express-boat. Were he certain that the Dragoons could not return this way, he would take the responsibility of abandoning the post.

Forry

March 9th. The Major has now resolved to despatch the Express across the Lake in search of Fort Pierce. The Lake is still rising, and will soon reach the foot of the mound. I shall continue to thrust one of these bulletins into the package every day. You can assort them at your leisure.

Forry

* * *

(Written to Lieut. J. W. Phelps, Fort Jupiter)

St. Augustine, Mar. 25th, 1838

My dear Phelps,

The Sutler Dopson and Gen. Scott are both dead—Martin commands Picolata, and *thou art the man*, as Nathan said unto David, who wrote the very famous letter signed “An officer of the 4th Artillery.” What a melancholy sound was borne upon the gales of Tampa’s shore, as the poor dogs howled after their rod masters!! It is believed by many that Major Gardner is the author; and he has written to Gen. Jesup denying the vile imputation.

Gen. Scott’s reported death wants confirmation. It is said that he was shot by a militia man.

Old Dr. Weedon is about publishing the life of Osceola. Powell has quized (I don’t know how to spell that word) him most sublimely. The Dr. has Osceola’s head here in his possession.

We abandoned Fort Taylor on the 13th. Fort Lane is also abandoned. Major Gardner is at Fort Harlee, to which post I am also ordered.

I had intended to write a long letter, but delayed until I am just setting out for Picolata. The “Poinsett” is in view, and looks as though she were pregnant with news—a letter from yourself, etc.

My letters were sent to your post a few days ago—

I wish you would have them sent back. Write often.
Nothing new, except the report of Indian depredation
in Alachua.

Yours truly,
Sam Forry

* * *

(Written to Lieut. J. W. Phelps, Fort Jupiter)

Fort Harlee, E. Florida,
April 12th, 1838

My dear Phelps:

Although I may have nothing else than Indian murders to communicate, yet I am resolved to keep you in my debt. My two last letters were addressed from Fort Taylor and St. Augustine.

You may have heard of the manslaughter near Miconopy. A family, claiming a 100 acres in the Are-dondo grant, arrived there from New York. It consisted of three men and a woman. Building a temporary shelter on the edge of the prairie just beyond Miconopy, two of the men, (who chanced to be at work as the Indians passed by), fell victims to Indian indignation.

An express between Forts Dade and King has been killed, scalped, and deprived of his ears, nose, and genitals.

About Newnansville, Forts White and Fanning, and from this point to Fort Dade the country is literally alive with red-skins. On the 9th two men were killed about 12 miles from here, north of the Newnansville road. A woman, who is the wife and sister of these two men, has been brought in to this post. She is accompanied by six young pledges of mutual love. About twenty persons have lately been killed on this frontier. A messenger arrived here begging assistance to bury the dead, as the families had congregated in several houses for self-defense. The whole frontier is

being abandoned, there being now more than 30 families around us. The arrival of Expresses, crying out for help from Gen. Eustis, has become an hourly occurrence. The San Felasco hammock has become so full of Indians that they crowd one another out on every side. Between Fort King and Miconopy, the waggon-train saw fifty Indians and the signs of many more, and so turned back to the latter point.

Major Gardner, in the emergency of the case, has been ordered to Miconopy. Lieut. Brent commands this post. Major Dearborn with two companies has gone to Charle's Ferry. The 4th Infantry has been ordered to Fort King and Miconopy. And several companies of mounted volunteers are now being raised. Baron Von Tufts, it is said, has assumed the command of Fort King. "Diamond cut diamond."

A few days ago I made a professional visit to Newnansville, to see a Capt. Fitzpatrick. The whole country is in a state of direful consternation. I met waggons and carts flying in every direction, the inhabitants universally abandoning their fields of corn throughout the fertile region of the Alachua. One man showed me a fresh Indian sign near a much-to-be-feared hammock at Clark's place.

Capt. Galt fired his howitzer upon several Indians who persisted in letting down the bars of his cattle pen, much to the amazement of the garrison. A Tennessee Lieutenant took the trail of some Indians who had stolen horses from Fort Crane. He captured an Indian's cap of singular construction, consisting of a wild cat's skin with the ears and tail standing in bold relief. These same Tennesseans, when we reached this post, refused to give up the command. A general battle with clubs ensued - Major Gardner ordered them to Black Creek, and General Eustis ordered them back again:

A few evenings ago, our men got up a theatrical performance. Russel, from Fort King, performed the part of an *Express-rider attacked by an Indian*. Immediately afterwards Russel set out for Miconopy with the mail; and I was called upon to dress the wounds of an Alabamian, who had just been engaged in a duel with knives. Russel soon made his re-appearance covered with blood, and just breath enough to say, "Oh Doctor! I have been shot by Indians," when he tumbled over and fainted. He performed his part well in both tragedies; but the latter was rather more according to nature. At first it was thought that his histrionic temperament, excited more vividly than usual by an extra glass of wine, had summoned up the savages, and that in his gallant defense his bridal arm had received the charge of his pistol. His horse followed him in about half an hour so terribly excited that he obstinately refused to receive any consolation. Next morning the mail was found about three miles from here. I now incline to the opinion, from careful inquiry, that Russel was fired upon by two Indians.

The inhabitants of our village, although "suffering and distressed," seem to enjoy the pleasures of life with not a little zest. They are certainly not destitute of the fatness of the land; and as for dancing, it is an amusement not unknown to them. They have a building expressly dedicated to that purpose, in which they assemble six nights in a week. Their manners and modes of life are so unsophisticated that they exhibit a state of primitive simplicity, just one degree removed from the condition of their red brethren.

I have seen Jesup's order complimenting Col. Twiggs for the capture of the 500. Bunts' people have been shipped from Tampa. Pray, whence come they?

Forry

P. S. We have just heard via Tampa that Alligator with 150 warriors, besides negroes, etc., had surrendered at Fort Basinger.

* * *

(This series is concluded)