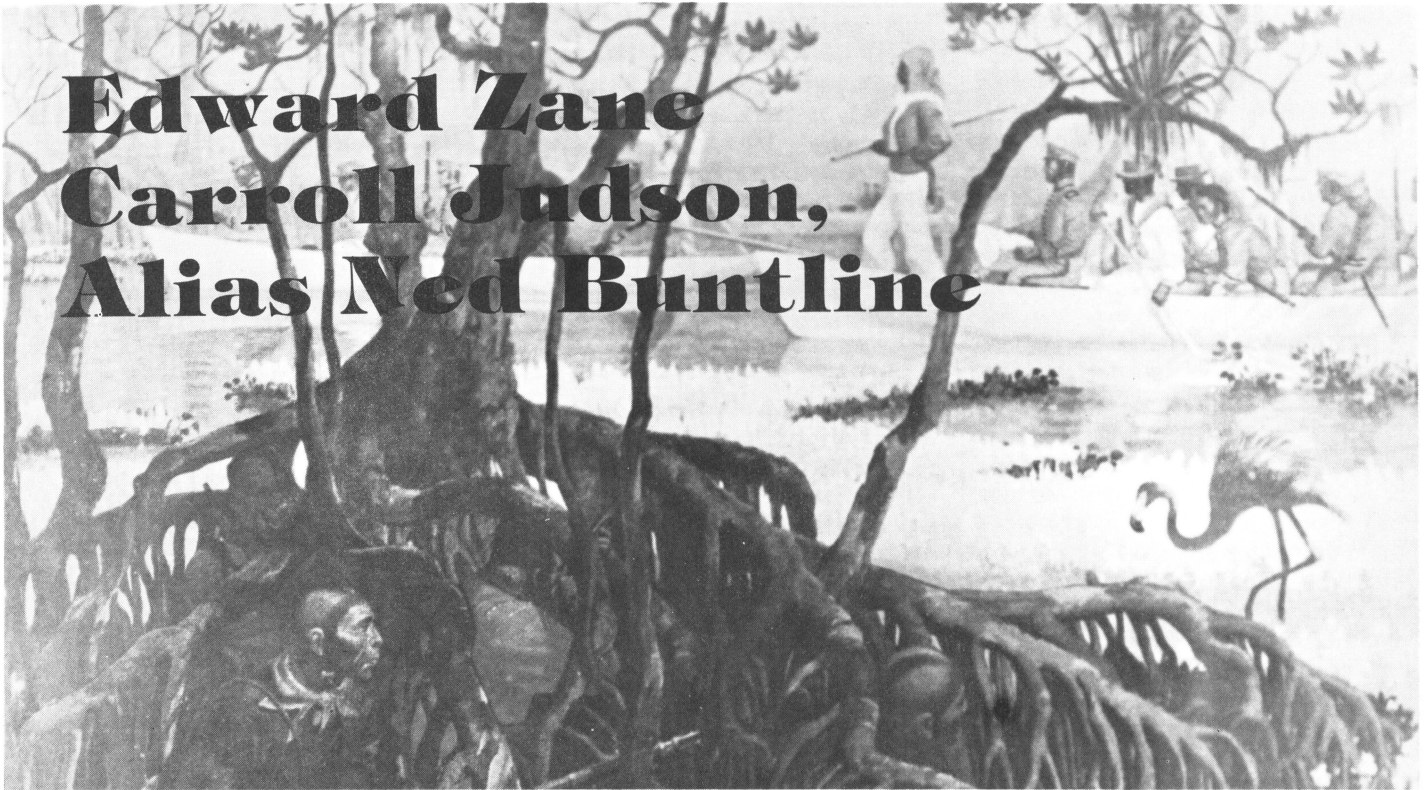


# Edward Zane Carroll Judson, Alias Ned Buntline



Marines battle Seminole Indians in the Florida War . . . 1835-1842. (National Archives)

By Cooper Kirk, County Historian

Many veterans of the 1835-1842 Second Seminole War in the southeast Florida theatre later attained national stature. Some officers came here shortly after graduation from West Point. Others had received their commissions in the field. William Tecumseh Sherman and Braxton Bragg, who fought together at Fort Pierce, Florida, were later Civil War antagonists. George Henry Thomas, the "Rock of Chickamauga," came directly to Fort Lauderdale from the military academy. Confederate General Jubal A. Early, near-captor of Washington, D.C., in 1864, joined Major General Thomas S. Jesup at Fort Jupiter in the winter of 1837-1838 soon after he had become a first lieutenant. Others, like Erasmus Darwin Keyes who had been Fort Lauderdale's last commander in 1842, attained general officer status during the Civil War even though their names have not become household words. Lieutenant-Colonel William Selby Harney, who was not a West Point alumnus, became the scourge of Seminoles in Florida and the Indians in the far northwest during his rise as the most famous pre-Civil war Indian fighter. Many years after the tragic Seminole War, the feats of these Union and Confederate generals captured the imagination of a nation enmeshed in the throes of a fratricidal conflict.

Another alumnus of this phase of the

Seminole War also gained a national reputation which contrasted with that of the foregoing warriors. Navyman Edward Zane Carroll Judson, alias Ned Buntline, established a sordid record not calculated to win the admiration of Americans with high principles. A wheeling-dealing entrepreneur who was addicted to tricky machinations in order to attain his coveted goals, Judson devoted much of his adult life to the creation of sensational novels and articles. His writing was interspersed, however, with such episodes as public brawls, law suits, political shenanigans, and confinement in prison. A recent commentator has summarized Judson's career as "a series of picaresque episodes rivalling those of the fictional characters of the day." This adventurer, who signed himself "alias, Ned Buntline" was an originator of the dime novel, an inexpensive work which featured swashbuckling heroes and violence. These were popular points of emphasis during the later decades of the nineteenth century.

Ruffian Judson, who lived from 1823 to 1886, was born either in Philadelphia or Stamford, New York. The son of attorney Levi Carroll Judson, his mother's maiden name is unknown. Much of Judson's life is obscure, sometimes due to his own fabrications and concealments. After running away to sea when a small boy, he became an apprentice in the United States Navy

and won a midshipman's commission because of his heroism in an 1838 drowning incident in the East River. Thus, at the age of fifteen, he attained an office where he could exercise his bullying tactics over unfortunate enlisted men. In keeping with his checkered career, he soon lost his commission and resumed his place in the enlisted ranks where he verbally castigated the officer caste.

Affairs along the Southeast Florida coast in late 1838 eventually brought Judson to this area of armed conflict and had a decided effect upon his career outside Florida. After mid-1838, affairs in the southeast theatre experienced a relapse for American and foreign ships and crews. Led by Arpiaka, who was known as Sam Jones, swarming Seminoles raided ships from their headquarters on the New River. These ships had been cast upon the coastal beaches by hurricanes, gales, and poor seamanship. His underlings freely roamed the coast from Jupiter Inlet south to the Keys, pilfered endangered ships, and murdered castaway crews and passengers. During a gale on the night of September 7, 1838, the French brig *Courier de Tampico*, bound from Havana to Bordeaux, drove ashore near New River Inlet, North Latitude 26 degrees. Saying that "he killed only Americans," Jones spared the survivors because they were Frenchmen. Due to the same gale, the brig *Alma*, bound from Portland, Maine, to the West In-

dies, foundered and landed near the French brig. Descending upon these unsuspecting survivors, Jones' fifty warriors massacred all but three; a Dutchman successfully had hidden aboard the ship and two Americans had escaped into the mangrove swamps near the inlet. Within days, a second gale swept ashore the schooners *Carolina* and *Caldonia* near the other beached vessels which then reeked with American blood. Further south at Caesar's Creek, the schooner *Thracian* suffered the same tragic fate. In addition to its regular cargo, this Boston-based ship carried the locomotive engine "Camden," destined for New Orleans. Among the other fourteen ships wrecked during the hurricane season were the sloops *Alabama*, *Dread*, *Caution*, and *Export*. Few of the crewmen and passengers and little of the cargoes returned to white civilization. These "Indian atrocities" by the Seminoles hardened the hearts and strengthened the determination of Americans to rid Florida of the Seminoles.

United States Army and Navy officials reacted quickly to preserve the integrity of the Southeast Florida coast. Florida army commander Brigadier General Zachary Taylor ordered the reactivation of three abandoned army forts. In February 1839, Fort Pierce in the north and Fort Dallas in the south on the Miami River were re-occupied. Simultaneously, Captain William B. Davidson and a company of the Third Artillery selected a site on the beach opposite New River Sound as the location of a new Fort Lauderdale. General Taylor believed that, from these three locations, military personnel could make the beaches safe for distressed vessels. Moreover, the soldiers could march westward into the Everglades and rid that sector of Seminoles.

The Navy also took immediate action in Washington. There, Secretary of the Navy James K. Paulding directed Navy Lieutenant John T. McLaughlin to organize the Florida Squadron. Its purpose was to protect mercantile interests along the Southeast Florida coast. The lieutenant also might assist the army if the latter chose to operate along the inland waterways. Lieutenant McLaughlin took emergency measures to assemble crews and ships in the North and then sailed for South Florida; he established headquarters first at Tea Table Key and later at Indian Key. He named his largest schooners *Wave*, *Flirt* and *Ostego*. Included among the crewmen was the erstwhile hero Judson, whom McLaughlin assigned to the *Ostego*. Thus, Judson served the duration of the war aboard the schooner commanded by Lieuten-

ant E.T. Shubrick.

When Judson arrived in South Florida the military situation looked dismal to United States' military personnel. Trained observers declared that, by mid-summer 1839, the majority of Seminole warriors in Florida had migrated to the Everglades region but still posed a danger to the military establishments along the coast and Keys. Puncturing this assessment in July 1839, a band of Indians massacred a small detachment of Colonel Harney's troops stationed on the west coast near the mouth of the Caloosahatchee River. A revengeful fire drove the colonel to proclaim that he would hang an Indian in retaliation for each of his men slain on the river.

During his three years of service against the Indians, Judson engaged in many hazardous naval enterprises along the east and west coasts. He also joined forays into the Everglades which never before had been explored by whites. No military enterprise caught the public's imagination more than Colonel Harney's second expedition into the Everglades, commencing New Year's Day 1841. Navymen and marines captained Harney's boats. Newspapers and public officials throughout the country hailed Harney's successful foray into the Everglades as ample evidence that the Seminoles had been wrong when they boasted that the whites could not successfully pursue them into their watery lair.

Judson left the navy in 1842 and, after a trip to the Yellowstone region for furs, settled in Cincinnati. Here, in 1844, he and Lucious A. Hines founded and edited the *Western Literary Journal and Monthly Magazine*. Judson then hatched the grandiose scheme to write a vast number of articles based upon his Seminole War experiences. The finances of his periodical, however, permitted him to publish only five articles about the war. He entitled these South Florida articles: "A Cruise in Lake Okeechobee," "A Chase in the Everglades," "The Capture and Trial," and "Indian Key, Its Rise, Progress, and Destruction." An untitled fifth article concerned a two days' march over summer-dried hunting grounds. Much of what Judson wrote can be substantiated from other sources, but he did add new material.

Those Seminole War experiences deeply affected the impressionable Judson. Some of his early literary examples were derived from his wartime service. A romantic, Judson's lurid stories explored the sub-conscious and teemed with cliches, awful quotations, incorrect punctuation, irritating digressions, and downright fabrications. These characteristics are particularly

evident in his five articles about the Florida war.

Yet, these articles do provide illuminating details and interpretations of events which enliven the dreary conflict. Instead of presenting stoic characters, as generally portrayed by war commentators, Judson sought to evince some pathos from his readers when he depicted the participants with realistic actions and emotions. He led along lines where imagination could soar. If not achieving justice, he at least sought to evoke empathy for the "uncivilized" Indians.

Nowhere does the contrast between his mildly lugubrious style and the factual, concise recitation of events given by army officers become more apparent than in a comparison between his account of Harney's second expedition into the Everglades and the journalized entry by one of Harney's officers. Judson's recitation is contained in the two articles entitled "A Chase in the Everglades" and "The Capture and Trial." An unsuspecting reader might easily be forgiven if he mistook these dissimilar narratives for two different events. Although Judson's atrocious digressions contribute to the apparent dissimilarity, they do allow him to include informative details which, otherwise, might have been lost to posterity. Contemporary readers then, however, were unlikely to enjoy the opportunity of comparing the two narratives. While the prestigious Niles' *National Register* published the somber journal, Judson printed his reminiscences in his renegade magazine.

Judson and Hines published the Cincinnati-based magazine from November 1844 to April 1845, when financial difficulties arose. Judson then skipped town and left Hines with the debts. Thereafter, his career assumed a more bizarre character.

Judson was next heard of in Eddyville, Kentucky, where he won a \$600 bounty for single-handedly capturing two murderers. He moved to Nashville where he founded *Ned Buntline's Own*. This enterprise ended sensationally in 1845 when he fatally dueled his mistress' husband. While Judson stood trial, the deceased's brother fired at him. Judson jumped through the window but was recaptured. That night he was taken out by a mob and actually lynched. But, he was rescued when the rope was cut before his life expired. Consequently, the jury refused to indict him. He was free.

Judson then returned to New York where he revived *Ned Buntline's Own*, an organ of a rowdy, jingoistic, nativistic patriotism. There he also became a partisan of actor Edwin Forrest and, on



In Buntline's (Judson's) drama, "Scouts of the Prairie," Ned Buntline, William F. ("Buffalo Bill") Cody, and Jack Omohundro ("Texas Jack"). (Library of Congress)

May 10, 1849, the night of the Astor Place Riot, led the mob that showered the theatre with cobblestones. He was sentenced to a year's imprisonment on Blackwell's Island and fined \$250 for exciting and fomenting the riot.

Upon release from prison, Judson was paraded and feted by various patriotic organizations. In the spring of 1854, however, a St. Louis grand jury indicted him for instigating an election riot in which several people were killed, two houses were burned, and other property was destroyed. But, he escaped by jumping bail. The Know-Nothing party owed much to his political tactics. Although personal popularity made his name a household word, Judson's prison record prevented him from running for office.

Ever since 1846 he constantly had been writing cheap, sensational fiction. By 1850 he had published such drivel as *The Mysteries and Miseries of New York* and *Ned Buntline's Life Yarn*. Amazingly enough, his tremendous

literary output still left him time to travel extensively, agitate for political causes, associate with the rich, and arouse trouble and excitement wherever he went.

Judson enlisted in the Civil War in 1862 and compiled a thoroughly discreditable record which culminated in 1864 in a dishonorable discharge. He met William Frederick Cody in 1869 at Fort McPherson, Kansas, conferred on him the name "Buffalo Bill," and initiated a series of dime novels which featured Cody as the hero. He and J.B. Omohundro persuaded Cody to go on the stage. Erelong, they parted as enemies over the division of the profits. Judson returned to Stamford, New York, where he died of a heart attack in 1886. He had married four times. Although two wives had died and one had divorced him, the last survived him with two children.

With his demise a loud blustering ceased. His life reads like one of his own serials and sensational novels. In-

deed, he was frequently his own hero in a minimum of 400 works.

Literary critics Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft pungently and caustically summarized Judson's career in this assessment.

He was the real father of the dime novel. Cheap, boisterous, rowdy, chauvinistic, an incorrigible liar and a generally bad egg, he nevertheless prided himself on his piety (he wrote hymns among other verses), and lectured indefatigably in favor of temperance. His writing was all trash and he himself a rascal of the first order, but he has his place in the history of American eccentrics and the development of American fiction.

It is noteworthy that his Seminole War experiences in Southeast Florida contributed much to shape him into the man who touched millions of lives through a multitude of antics and activities.