Second Expedition Of Col. Harney In The Everglades

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The following letter, says the Charleston COURIER, from a gentleman in Florida, to his friends in this city, dated Tampa Bay, March 10, comprises a journal of Col. Harney's latest expedition to the Everglades, in pursuit of Sam Jones, and is furnished by an officer, who accompanied Col. Harney. It will show the great enterprise and endurance that are requisite on the part of those who exert themselves in the protracted and extraordinary contest with the savages of Florida.

ON THE 1ST OF JANUARY, 1841, Lieut. Col. W.S. Harney started a second time for the Everglades with a force of 20 dragoons, 70 of 3rd artillery, with four officers of the line, and 140 mariners and sailors under the command of Capt. McLaughlin and the officers of the Flirt, Wave and Otsego, U. States schooners. With the exception of four or five large canoes, carrying from six to ten men each, the force was distributed in small canoes made expressly for the purpose, and carrying five men each. The orders of the day directed that each man should be provided with twenty days' rations, sixty rounds of ball cartridge, and the necessary blankets, etc. The most perfect silence to be preserved by every one; orders to be communicated by signal whistles, with which the officers were supplied: the boats were armed with Colt's repeating rifle, and, being under the command of Col. H., formed a well tried band of experienced Indian fighters.

Half an hour after sunset, and during a shower of rain, the command left Fort Dallas, which is situated in the bay at the mouth of the Indian river, eight miles above Key Biscayne; Col. H. in advance, with Mico as guide, and negro John as interpreter, the army next, and the navy in the rear. After passing up the bay seven miles, we entered the mouth of Little river, a tortuous and extremely rapid outlet from the Everglades, and struggled against the current until after midnight, when we reached our first resting place, the site of an old plantation, and landed.

JANUARY 2nd. The guide says that by not starting here until towards evening, we will reach Chitto-tustenuggee's island, an hour or two before daybreak, tomorrow; we therefore remained as we were, as much as possible concealed in the grass and thickets, until four p.m. when we again started, but in reversed order, the colonel in advance, the navy next, and the army in the rear. It may be as well to mention here, that throughout the expedition the army and navy alternated in order of precedence, the colonel, however, always at the head of the column.

After passing up a few miles of very swift rapids, we entered the Everglades at sunset, and skirting along a projecting elbow of the Pine barren for two miles, lay concealed behind the point of it until it was quite dark. We then moved forward swiftly and noiselessly, at one time following the course of serpentine channels, opening out occasionally into beautiful lagoons, at another forcing our way through barriers of tall saw grass. After several hours' hard paddling, we came in sight of Chitto's island, and the signal was passed "to close up." Approaching cautiously, we took our positions around the island, and lay in anxious expectation of the signal, "move up and effect a landing." An advance guard having been sent in to reconnoitre, after some time reported that the enemy had left the island, and, in a tone of bitter disappointment, the colonel gave the word, "move up and land, the Indians have escaped."

JANUARY 3rd. Chitto — Tustenuggee's or Snake Warrior's island is a most beautiful spot, containing from 18 to 20 acres; the soil is extremely rich and about two feet deep, lying on rotten lime stone. — The centre is cleared, but the circumference is well protected by immense live oak and wild fig tree, and an almost impenetrable thicket of mangroves. There are two towns, two dancing grounds and one council lodge, on this island; with the exception of the dancing ground and small patch of fine Cuba tobacco, the whole clearing is overrun with pumpkin, squash and melon vines, with occasionally Lima beans in great luxuriance and of a most excellent quality. The Indians have been gone at least two weeks, and have left behind them all useless articles, such as war dance masks, supernumerary baskets, kettles, fishing spears, bows, etc. At 11 a.m. the Colonel dispatched a small force to reconnoitre Tuscone's island, which lies about three miles west of us; they returned at 4 p.m. and reported recent signs of a man, woman and child. — The only trophies they had obtained were some ears of green corn and a few stalks of sugar cane.

JANUARY 4TH. Started at 9 a.m. for Sam Jones' island. He is said to have 70 warriors with him and to hold a strong position; the only fear, however, entertained either by the officers or men, is that he too may have seen fit to
desert his island and betake himself to the Big Cypress. After paddling until 3 p.m. we reached a small cluster of trees, from the tops of which the guide said that Sam’s camp was visible; he was accordingly sent up aloft to make an observation, and soon pronounced the place deserted.

This information altered the Colonel’s plans, and instead of waiting until night should conceal his movements, he advanced immediately towards the island; at the same time, however, not omitting the precaution of sending off flanking parties, and an advance guard to reconnoitre. Before sunset we had all landed, and were enjoying our bacon and biscuits in the midst of an Indian village.

JANUARY 5TH. Sam Jones’ possessions consist of a group of several islands differing in size, and separated by narrow sluices. Upon the largest of these, which is about one hundred and fifty yards in width and half a mile in length, are three villages and dancing grounds; the general features the same as those of Chitto’s island, but the soil sandy. There are no villages on the other islands, but they have been cleared in the centre and planted with pumpkins, melons and corn, which were of course destroyed. Our greatest annoyance at this place, was the immense number of fleas, cockroaches and mosquitoes; everything touched, even the ground, was alive with the former, which with the mosquitoes, attacked us, while the roaches luxuriated on our provisions. The whole group of islands, called Army and Navy group, is nearly a mile and a half in length, and, upon careful examination, presented no recent Indian signs.

JANUARY 6th. At 8 a.m. passed over three miles to the Pine Keys, and secured their whole extent; returned at night, hungry and fatigued, to Sam Jones’ camp.

JANUARY 7th. Started early for the prophet’s island, which, according to Mico, is “two suns” from here. At 11 a.m. stopped at a small island and destroyed a flourishing crop of young corn. At 3 p.m. came to another island of small extent and uncleared; upon sending negro John up a tree to look out, he reported two Indians in canoes, two miles off, coming toward us. Orders were immediately given by Col H. to lie close, as they were evidently coming to the island. In a few minutes, John reported that they had seen us and were going back. The Colonel gave chase, but finding there was not water enough for his large canoe, transferred the guide to Captain McLaughlin’s boat, and directed him to move in pursuit — the light boats of the artillery to accompany the captain and his command.

The colonel, with the large canoes, returned to the island, and sent up a look-out, who reported the Indians as out of sight, but our boats still going at speed, and rapidly nearing a small island about three miles off. Col. H. becoming impatient and feeling confident that he could find a passage across without any guide, started for the other island, and reached it just as some of the advance boats flushed a party consisting of four warriors, five squaws and two children; each warrior had a separate canoe, containing his family and worldly possessions. They left the boats to the care of the women, and took to the grass water, loading and firing as they ran; three of the warriors were soon shot, three squaws and one child taken; the other child was drowned by its mother to prevent its cries leading to her detection. Night coming on, one warrior and two squaws, favored by darkness, escaped. Only one soldier was slightly wounded in this affair.

JANUARY 8th. Early this morning, Col. H. sent out a small force to follow the trail of the other warrior and endeavor, if possible, to take him alive, as he had learnt from squaws that it was Chia, one of the best guides in the whole territory. After following the trail five miles, they came up with a squaw (Chia’s wife) and took her; a few yards further ‘on, upon hearing a rustling in the grass, several of the men leaped into the water, and one of the mariners, in the act of springing from the boat, was shot by the Indian in the side, who then ran a few paces reloading his rifle, and as Sergeant Searles, of 3d artillery, rushed toward him, he turned and fired at only five paces, wounding the sergeant mortally, who, however, kept on towards him; Chia then struck at him with his rifle — poor Searles sank for an instant under the blow, but blinded and fainting as he was from the loss of blood, he quickly rallied for a last effort, and threw himself upon the Indian’s neck crying, “I have him;” Chia then drew his knife and was about to stab his captor, when a soldier arrested his murderous hand.

After securing the captive, the sergeant was lifted into a canoe and brought back to the island, where his wounds were examined and dressed by the medical officer. The ball was
found to have passed through the right arm, entered the right side, breaking a rib, opening the right lung, and passing into the liver. The marine was not much hurt, the ball having only made a flesh wound.

JANUARY 9th. We were compelled to sleep in our boats, and, in addition to this discomfort, it rained hard, with a cold south wind, all last night. Chia says, that Sam Jones, immediately on hearing of Col. Harney’s first expedition, had sent over to the Seminoles for powder and lead, and said that he would go into the Big Cypress, where, if he was pursued, he would fight to death. Chia and his party were going to join him, and he (with a gallows in perspective, should he prove false), promises to guide us faithfully to him. In consequence of this information, we returned to Sam Jones’ island, which we reached at noon.

JANUARY 10th. The description given by Chia of Sam Jones’ probable position, is such as would intimidate almost any one except Col. H. from attempting to dislodge him. At 8 a.m. we started for the head waters of New River, which we reached at sundown, and passed down the stream to Fort Lauderdale, where we arrived at midnight.

JANUARY 11th. Having disposed of our wounded men and the female prisoners, we left Lauderdale at sundown and ascended the New River, entering the Everglades by the right hand branch, an hour before sunrise.

JANUARY 12th. After allowing the men two hours’ rest, we moved on to a group of keys, lying between the expanse of the Everglades and the edge of the Big Cypress. It was here that Chia had expected to find the main body of the enemy; but upon examination of the signs, he pronounced that they had gone on to the O-kee-choo-bee. With a heart swelling with disappointment, Col. Harney found his schemes thwarted by the cowardice of the Indians, who had fled panic-stricken upon hearing of Cha-kai-kee’s fate, and deserted their hitherto inaccessible retreats.

At noon the navy left us, taking with them Mico and negro John as guides across the Everglades, in the direction taken by the first expedition. After a hasty dinner, we bore away for Lauderdale, and aided by the swift current of the New River, reached our destination at 8 p.m.

JANUARY 13th. Col. Harney, this morning, started with twenty men, to search for a reported passage from the New River, into the Hillsborough inlet, the low state of the water proving an insurmountable obstacle, he returned at sundown, and gave orders to be prepared to move homeward tomorrow.

JANUARY 14th. Passing down the New River to its mouth, we coasted along the shore, until we reached the Haul-over and encamped for the night.

JANUARY 15th. At early dawn the canoes were hauled over from the beach into the bay; and passing down to it, we reached Fort Dallas at noon.

The Pay-hai-o-kee, grasswater or Everglades, comprises a large portion of southern Florida, lying south of the twenty-seventh degree of latitude, and separated from the Atlantic and Gulph of Mexico, by a pine barren varying in width from 5 to 20 or more miles. There are a number of outlets on the eastern or Atlantic coast, while on the western or gulph coast there is only one, now named, after its first navigator, Harney river.

The appearance presented upon entering the everglades is that of an immense prairie, stretching out farther than the eye can reach, covered by a thick saw grass rising 6 feet above the surface of the water, which it conceals, the monotonyn varied by numerous snakelike channels, and verdant islands scattered few and far between; the average depth of water over the whole extent, is from 2 to 4 feet. The channels differ in width from ten to twenty feet, and in some places we had to force our boats through the waving sawgrass. The larger islands are about two feet above the usual water level, though no doubt, in very wet seasons occasionally overflowed. The water was clear and wholesome, and even where no current was perceptible, there was no appearance of stagnation.

The results of this expedition, although apparently not very brilliant, have only been surpassed in usefulness, by those of the first everglade expedition, undertaken and prosecuted with such untiring energy and eminent success by Col. Harney. The knowledge acquired of the nature of the country, the localities of the islands, and the strength of the positions, occupied by two of the most formidable chiefs, is of itself ample reward for the suffering and privations necessarily encountered during a movement in open boats, with no tents, a limited supply of blankets and provisions, exposed to the sun by day, and the dew by night, to the drenching rain and biting blast, but rarely allowed the luxury of a fire, and living upon fare which requires a strong appetite to relish.

Sketches Of The Florida War


I love a regular Florida winter. I do not mean one of your northern winter evenings, only rendered clear through the intense frigidity of the stiffened atmosphere, ornamented with glittering, rainbow-hued tricks, pendant like jewel-buds from leafless branches, and brightened by the dazzling reflection of star and moonlight upon snow; but I allude to one where the bright-faced moon and dancing stars look down on forests clothed in the rich beauty of perennial greenness, on an earth covered with flower-spangled verdure, teeming with luscious, air-perfuming fruit. On such a night, when the sky was smiling at itself below it, we hauled up our boats at Fort Dallas, in the mouth of the river Miami, en route for the Everglades.

We were about to make an extensive scout through this unknown section, in co-operation with a portion of the U.S. 3d Artillery, under command of Lieut. Col. Harney of the U.S. 2d Dragoons, assisted by Lts. Boyd, Field, Ketchum and others. Our own party consisted of some seventy seamen, under the chief command of Lt. Comdt. McLaughlin.

As it was "New Year’s Day," and we were about to start on a dangerous expedition, it was determined to make the most of the last holiday which we expected to celebrate for a long time, the return of which many of us were never destined to see, therefore both Navy and Army joined like brethren, as we were, in contributing to the general enjoyment.

Lively jokes and cheerful songs passed around with brimming cups of punch; and 'many a dear loved distant friend,' was remembered in the full bumper, with tremulous lips and glinting eyes, by lips that were too soon stiff and cold, filling to the brim the cup of bitterness for those who had been remembered in the warm-hearted toast.

But no thoughts of sadness rested