

# William Selby Harney: Indian Fighter

By OLIVER GRISWOLD

We are going to travel—in our imaginations—a South Florida route with a vivid personality. We are going back—in our imaginations—over a bloody trail. We are going on a dramatic military assignment.

From Cape Florida on Key Biscayne, we start on the morning of December 4, 1840. We cross the sparkling waters of Biscayne Bay to within a stone's throw of this McAllister Hotel where we are meeting.

We are going up the Miami River in the days when there was no City of Miami. All our imaginations have to do is remove all the hotels from the north bank of the Miami River just above the Brickell Avenue bridge—then in the clearing rebuild a little military post that stood there more than a hundred years ago.

At this tiny cluster of stone buildings called Ft. Dallas, our expedition pauses for farewells. We are going on up to the headwaters of the Miami River—and beyond—where no white man has ever been before.

The first rays of the sun shed a ruddy light on a party of 90 picked U.S. soldiers. They are in long dugout canoes.

The sunrise shines with particular emphasis on the fiery-red hair of a tall officer. It is as if the gleaming wand of destiny has reached down from the Florida skies this morning to put a special blessing on his perilous mission.

He commands the flotilla to shove off. But before we join him on his quest for a certain villainous redskin, let us consider who this officer is. The tall leader whose red hair shines so brightly at the head of the canoe expedition is Lt. Col. William Selby Harney—rugged, clean-cut, the man for this special job. He is wise in the ways of the Indians, with wisdom obtained first hand.

Harney had first appeared in Florida years before as a lieutenant on the staff of General Andrew Jackson. Jackson made him commander of the colorful transfer of the Territory from Old Spain to the United States in 1821. Harney came from Old Hickory's part of the country. He was born in Haysborough, Davidson County, Tenn., August 22, 1800. The Harneys were well acquainted with Old Hickory of the Hermitage.

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Young Harney was instructed at home, then in the common schools, then at Prof. Craighead's academy at Haysborough. He was the eighth of eight children born to Margaret Hudson Harney and Major Thomas Harney, who had been an officer in the American Revolution.

While young Harney was visiting an older brother, Dr. Benjamin F. Harney, an Army surgeon, at Baton Rouge, Louisiana, he attracted the attention of high Army officers. As a result, at the age of 18, he was handed a lieutenant's commission signed by President James Monroe.

After his Florida service with Jackson, the young lieutenant trekked to Council Bluffs with troops sent to impress the Indians during peace negotiations. Here he received his captaincy. Then he served at rugged frontier posts against the Indians in the Northwest Territory. At Ft. Winnebago, Wisconsin, Harney formed a warm personal friendship with a young second lieutenant whose name was Jefferson Davis.

It was a friendship for life. Fifty years later Davis described Harney as "physically the finest specimen of man I ever saw. Tall, straight, muscular, broad-chested, and gaunt-waisted, he was one of the class which Trelawney describes as 'nature's noblemen' . . . .

"Had he lived in the time of Homer he would have robbed Achilles of his sobriquet of the swift-footed, for he could run faster than a white man, farther than an Indian. . . .

"Capt. Harney was also a bold horseman, fond of the chase, a good boatman, and skillful in the use of the spear as a fisherman. Neither drinking nor gaming, he was clear of those rocks and shoals of life on a frontier garrison. . . . By long service on the Indian frontier, together with practical sense which tests all theory by actual observation, he had acquired that knowledge of Indian character which was often conspicuously exhibited in his military career."

Later, during the Black Hawk war, Harney was again in action against the Indians and he formed another important comradeship with a young captain of the militia. In off-duty hours they spent practically all their leisure together. Harney was a good story teller. But he liked best to listen to the droll jokes so skillfully told by his tall side-kick, Abraham Lincoln.

Although both were large men, they contrasted. Harney's carriage was marked by the lithe, easy grace acquired by hard frontier service. Lincoln, the country lawyer on temporary military duty, was strong, but awkward, and his face held the smiling expression of the jolly joker he then was. Because the two young captains were so constantly seen together, the soldiers

nicknamed them "the two ponies." Warmly and intimately their friendship lasted until Lincoln's death.

Harney could not only out-run the fastest Indian, but he had beaten some of them in hand-to-hand combat. More important he had studied their ways at length—and carefully. Indians then were the important foe of the country, and a man might advance his career best by knowing them well.

At the end of the Black Hawk war, Harney went on leave to Washington to call on President Jackson. Jackson appointed him a paymaster in the Army with the rank of major. The job was not to Harney's taste. Soon a new regiment called the Second Dragoons was formed under command of Col. David E. Twiggs. Wharton Rector of Arkansas was appointed its lieutenant colonel. Harney was anxious for frontier action with the dragoons. Rector would rather be a paymaster. So they went to see President Jackson at the Hermitage. He gratified their request for a swap.

As a lieutenant colonel, Harney was soon on the scene when Indian troubles broke out again in Florida. He saw his first action in the Second Seminole war at Ft. Mellon on Lake Monroe, near the present City of Sanford. His explorations of the area added another lake to the map—now called Lake Harney.

The dismal Second Seminole war dragged on and on. Then agreements with the Indians seemed to end it. Osceola and others broke them, and the war flamed up anew.

When the Indians had been repulsed and driven down to the Everglades, Harney recommended that they be offered peace and a reservation in Florida to live on. This time it was the white government that refused to ratify the proposal.

Finally, Major-General Alexander Macomb, commander of the whole United States Army, came in person to the seat of the war. Immediately he sent for Harney, who was at Cape Florida. Harney repeated his proposal for a reservation. General Macomb agreed.

Harney rounded up the Indian chiefs. They were filled with distrust for the white man's government. They wouldn't accept until Harney had given his personal word. He pledged that if the treaty were not observed by the government he would give them his ammunition and guns and three days start—and they could resume hostilities if they chose. On his personal promise, then, at Ft. King, the Indians signed. They agreed to live on a reservation lying along the lower West Coast of Florida. The government agreed to keep the white settlers out. There was peace at last.

But not for long. The Secretary of War, Joel R. Poinsett, let it be known in a letter that despite the treaty's permanent provision—and Harney's word—the War Department considered it only a temporary situation.

The Indians surmised immediately that once they were rounded up on the reservation, they would be transported out of Florida to the West. Unfortunately, the Indians heard of Poinsett's bad faith before the news reached Harney. He was encamped on the Caloosahatchie River. The angry savages descended in the night. Only seven men and the athletic, swift-footed Harney escaped. And again the war flared. Harney was filled with righteous anger—both at the savages and at the Secretary of War.

In their vicious rampages, the Indians massacred the village of Indian Key, down on the Florida Keys. It was the seat of Dade County then. They wiped it out and murdered, among others, the famous Dr. Henry Perrine.

Chief of the marauders was Chekika. He was leader of the last of the Caloosa Indians, or Spanish Indians, who had occupied Southern Florida long before the remnants of the Seminoles had come down. The Caloosas and many of the Seminoles were hiding now in the unexplored fastnesses of the Everglades. No white man had ever been beyond the rim of the coast.

So now, as we join Harney and his men on this fine December morning, we are going to a place as mysterious and unknown to civilized life as the darkest interior of Africa or the valleys of the moon.

At Harney's command, we shove off from Ft. Dallas. Up the dark waters of the Miami River we paddle between thick walls of green jungle. Gaudy parrots scream among the vines draping primeval giant trees. Ivory-billed woodpeckers chop at the ancient dead stubs. Great alligators and crocodiles lumber down the sunny banks and splash out of sight. The canoes surge silently against the current. The soldiers have been especially trained in stealthy paddling.

At the head of the river, we branch into a narrow channel. Now the saw-grass rises higher than our heads. When the canoes come to shallows, the men jump out—waist-deep in the ooze—and push. No one shoves any harder than the officers or the huge Harney.

At sunset we reach the edge of the Everglades itself. Beyond lies the unmapped and the unknown. We set up a simple camp. We light no fires. The skies are loud with the cries of thousands of herons, ibis, and agrets swarming to roost. The terrifying bellows of bull alligators add to the din as night falls. Millions of frogs croak and rasp. Then lonely owls hoot fearsomely.

We are glad when morning comes. The soldiers and officers are putting on Indian shirts and staining their faces to look like Indians.

For several days, the canoes are paddled and shoved through the saw-grass. Then, one morning, we approach a jungle-covered island rising above the marsh. We hear the sound of wood-chopping and smell the cooking fires of a Caloosa village within the trees. The Indians will be taken by surprise.

The soldiers disappear through the screen of the jungle. A fusillade of shots barks out. A huge Indian breaks through the trees and out into the open. He lunges through the saw-grass. A soldier ploughs floundering after him. The soldier levels his rifle and shoots him down. The soldier takes his scalp—the scalp of Chekika. It has been promised to high military authorities in St. Augustine.

Several warriors are taken alive—also a number of squaws and children. At sunset the captives are lined up at Harney's orders. Then two of the warriors—and Chekika's dead body—are hanged high from a tree.

The gruesome event is significant. Should the surviving prisoners escape before our expedition returns to Ft. Dallas, the witnesses will have a tale to tell other Indians.

No longer does Harney treat warriors like men of honor. He hangs them now—like criminals. They had broken their word with him.

So we go on, day after day, with Harney across the Everglades, shooting and hanging warriors, capturing squaws and children as prisoners. Finally we descend a river into the Gulf of Mexico. Harney thinks it is the Shark. But in reality it is a different one that later bears his name.

We start back to the East Coast—around Cape Sable and down to Indian Key, then up to Cape Florida, where Harney pens his official reports. Under that Cape Florida dateline, he modestly recounts one of South Florida's most important expeditions.

We go up to St. Augustine with Harney, where his intrepid triumph is hailed for its full meaning. He has broken the back of Indian resistance.

The savages have been taught they are no longer safe from Harney—even in their remotest hiding places. They now know that they no longer exclusively possess that one superior tactic—the element of surprise. Harney has taught them that the white soldier now surpasses them in that, too. Soon the clans and bands come in to give themselves up and be transported west to Arkansas. Only a few stragglers are left in the Everglades. The war is over.

Meanwhile, Harney freely answers all questions about his expedition. Freely, too, he tells that if he had the Secretary of War, Mr. Poinsett, in the Everglades, he would have hanged him also. How can an officer of the Army get away with such a statement? It is because the Secretary of War's bad faith is known to have sacrificed brave soldiers and innocent pioneer men and women on the frontier. The Secretary of War knows this, himself, and there is nothing he can say.

Ironically, it has been Harney's bitter duty—with rifle and rope—to restore the peace he had once accomplished by the Indian's trust in his personal word. Harney asks for an investigation in the Secretary of War's unjustified interpretation of the treaty. But his efforts are blocked by higher military officers. After all, even though he is obviously a man seeking justice, he is only a lieutenant colonel.

But the crowning honor of having ended the seven years of war is Harney's. Nevertheless, it is only the starting point of a great career.

Next we see him in the Mexican war. We see him assaulting the heights of Cerro Gordo, turning the battle into a great victory. He joins the final triumphant ceremonies in Mexico City. He is quartered in a palace of a prince of the Montezumas. He is rewarded with the rank of brevet brigadier general.

Soon, in recognition of his achievements, he is granted two years leave.

He scarcely arrives in Paris with his family, when he is requested to come back. When he asks President Pierce in Washington why he has not been allowed to enjoy his leave and has been ordered to return, the President replies: "General Harney, you have done so much, that I would not *order* you, but I do wish that you would assume the command and whip the Indians for us."

This time it is the hard-riding plains Indians, the Sioux. And he whips them with remarkable dispatch. Then he is assigned to Kansas to quell the bitter border troubles there, and he is equally successful.

In the Spring of 1858, the Mormons of Utah strain the patience of the U. S. Government to the breaking point by expelling the judges of the Federal courts, driving out the governors sent from Washington, and inciting the Indians to hostilities.

General Harney is ordered to deal with them. He makes a thorough plan. He determines to march to Salt Lake City, capture Brigham Young and the twelve apostles, execute them, and winter in the Temple of the Latter

Day Saints. It's not a question of religion. To Harney it is just that the authority of the United States has been defied.

Fortunately for the Mormons, he is promoted to full brigadier-general and assigned, instead, to untangle Indian troubles in Washington and Oregon. Up and down the western lands it is Harney who gets tough assignments. Then he is made commander of the Army Department of the West with headquarters in St. Louis, Mo. This is 1861. The Civil War is brewing. Missouri is a crackling hot spot.

A few days after the outbreak of the Civil War, Harney is called to Washington for conference. On the way, his train is stopped at Harpers Ferry. The 61-year-old general is greatly annoyed by the delay. His hair is snow-white now.

A young confederate lieutenant strides officiously into the car and says: "General, you are my prisoner."

"God damn your soul, get out of here," exclaims Harney to the lieutenant. With that he throws the young officer to the floor. They are grappling between the seats, with the general on top, when senior Confederate officers arrive and separate them.

But they take Harney prisoner of war—to Richmond. As a prisoner, he is accorded most unusual treatment. High officers of the Confederate army and the government, many of them old friends, meet him. They apologize and express regret for his arrest. They plead with him to join the Confederacy. Governor Letcher of Virginia and Mrs. Letcher entreat him to join their cause. General Robert E. Lee and General Joseph E. Johnston talk with him.

He tells them, in effect, what he later wrote:

"Forty-two years I have been in the military service of the United States, and have followed during all that time, but one flag—the flag of the Union. I have seen it protecting our frontier and guarding our coast from Maine to Florida. I have witnessed it in the smoke of battle stained with the blood of gallant men leading it on to victory, planted upon the strongholds and waving over the capital of a foreign foe.

"My eyes have beheld that flag affording protection to our States and Territories on the Pacific, and commanding reverence and respect from hostile fleets and squadrons and from foreign governments, never exhibited to any other banner on the globe.

"Twenty stars, each representing a State, having been added to that banner during my services, and under its folds I have advanced from the rank of lieutenant to that which I now hold.

"The government whose honors have been bestowed upon me, I shall serve the remainder of my days."

In Richmond, he is released. Then all the way back to Washington, at every railroad station, he is the hero of a strange ovation. He is riding through Confederate territory. He is obviously on his way back to join the Union.

But the people recognize only Harney, the great conqueror of the savage frontier. They swarm around his train, forgetting questions of Confederacy or Union. They won't let the train go on until he has shown himself in response to their demonstration.

Modestly he puts his head out the window. Cheer after cheer rises from the crowds as they express their admiration for Harney, the great Indian fighter, the great advancer of the American frontier, who first tasted greatness in an expedition up the Miami River.

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