



Andrew Jackson known to The Creek Indians as Sharp Knife

Historian Alan Taylor has observed that the American Revolution and The War of 1812 can be best understood if they are viewed as a protracted civil war that took place among the British settlers of North America. The British allied themselves with the Creek and Seminole Indians in an effort to demoralize the people living in the southern United States. Major Edward Nicolls was ordered to build a fort on the Apalachicola River in Northern Florida. Captain George Woodbridge worked to recruit slaves from Spanish Florida who escaped to the British Lines. Alexander George Arbuthnot, was a Scottish trader who worked out of The Bahamas. He had lived among the Seminoles in Florida since 1803 and became a translator and diplomat for them. Robert Chrystie Armbrister had been a midshipman before being signed on to fight for the British in Florida by Major Nicholls who had arrived in Nassau in 1815 in command the HMS Hermes to recruit men to join him in Florida. Armbrister was the son of James Armbrister, a loyalist slave owning planter from South Carolina who had relocated to The Bahamas after the American Revolution.

The British campaign in the south had not been as successful as its Central Atlantic campaign which had resulted in the looting and destruction of many coastal towns and farms in the Chesapeake Bay Region as well as the burning of Washington, D.C. In the south, The British had successfully enticed hundreds of slaves to flee their American masters but they had not conquered any American territory and ended up abandoning the fort they had built in 1814 on Prospect Bluff along the Spanish side of the Apalachicola River in Northern Florida. The fort had become a haven for escaped slaves and had become known as The Negro Fort. Many of the Seminoles in Northern Florida were blacks who had escaped slavery. Alexander George Arbuthnot remained with the Seminoles after the British peace treaty with the United States. Robert C. Armbrister had gone home to Nassau but returned in 1817. Armbrister and Arbuthnot were concerned that the Seminoles were being driven out of their lands contrary to the provisions of the treaty that had ended Great Britain's War with the United States.

Major General Andrew Jackson had been given command of The United States southwestern district after his surprising victory over the British at New Orleans. Jackson firmly believed

that all Indian Tribes had to be relocated West of the Mississippi River. He believed that North America had to be rid of European influence, specifically The British and the Spanish. He had done all he could to get rid of the British whom he hated with sound personal reason. As a teenager during the American Revolution he had been slashed with a sword by a British Officer who had found him and his brother in an abandoned loyalist house in North Carolina. Jackson had been scarred on the head and hand by the blow. He and his older brother had been thrown into a germ infested prison where they both contracted small pox. Andrew Jackson had survived, emaciated and scarred while his brother had not. Jackson's mother had then gone to serve American prisoners of war on a British prison ship in. She contracted an illness on the germ infested ship and died soon after.

Andrew Jackson's hatred of Indians and the Spanish had been nurtured during his adulthood on the frontier in Western Tennessee. Like most frontier settlers throughout American History, Jackson believed that the United States government should do all it could to remove Indians from lands that white people wanted to settle. Jackson had seen the state militia as his best chance for political advancement. He worked hard throughout his adult life to move up through the ranks of The Tennessee Militia until he was finally placed in command of it during The War of 1812. Andrew Jackson had always had a bad temper. Since childhood he had been prone to temper tantrums and rages that defied the logic of those who witnessed them. Historian Robert Remini argues that Jackson learned to harness his temper and turn it to his advantage. This was certainly the case with regard to his participation in The Tennessee Militia. Jackson's men loved him, despite the fact their government often did not supply them with enough food. Jackson promised to suffer with them. He marched them relentlessly. He Insisted that they remain at their posts even though their enlistment times had expired and they had run out of food. The men named him "Old Hickory".

Jackson was a supporter of The Republican Party as were most southerners. He supported the War of 1812 and hoped that it would result in the removal of all foreign influences from North America east of The Mississippi River. Jackson had been a supporter of Aaron Burr's failed attempt to lead a military takeover of the southern frontier during the early 19th century. Now he saw an opportunity to exploit a civil war that had erupted among the Creek Nation. The Creek Nation lived on land that would become known as the deep south of The United States. White Stick Creeks lived near the settled regions of Tennessee and Georgia. The White Sticks sought accomodation with white settlers which included their adopting aspects of European culture. Red Stick Creeks lived further away from white settlements. They feared white encroachment and sought to prevent Americans from settling further west. Jackson informed The White Stick Creeks that he would ally his Tennessee Militia with them in order to defeat the Red Sticks. Jackson's combined force of militia and White Stick Creeks won a decisive battle at Horseshoe Bend during which they annihilated the Red Stick Creek Warrior force. Some of Jackson's men went so far as to make horse's reigns out of the flesh of dead Red Stick Creek Warriors.

Jackson then held a war council with the White Stick Creeks and the survivors of the defeated Red Stick Creeks. The indians were starving because their civil war had prevented them from obtaining food for the winter. Jackson boldly informed the starving warriors and their leaders that they would all have to relocate west of the Mississippi River. The Creeks had no choice but to give in to the white warrior they called "Sharp Knife". Most of the land that is now Alabama and Mississippi was gained in this manner. Certain chiefs among Indians were given several thousand dollars in compensation. Those warriors who chose to fight with Jackson in his upcoming battle with The British Forces at New Orleans would be given the opportunity to remain east of the Mississippi.

The British had been successful in getting Seminole and Creek Indians who had sought refuge in Florida to attack white settlements in Georgia. They had been successful in luring slaves away from American plantations and arming the men who had escaped. These new black regiments were called Colonial Marines. The performance of the Colonial Marines had caused men such as Rear Admiral George Cockburn, Major Edward Nichols, Captain George Woodbridge and Lieutenant Robert C. Armbrister to develop a positive view of black men and their abilities as fighters. These British Officers did all they could for their black fighters, including ignoring mandates from the British Government to comply with American slaveholders requests for return of their "property" after the Treaty of Ghent was signed in Switzerland in December 1815. The British kept fighting until April 1816 when both the British and the United States government had certified the treaty.

The Battle of New Orleans has been discounted as a great battle because it occurred after the Treaty of Ghent had been signed. However, if the British had captured New Orleans it is unlikely they would have been willing to abandon it. According to British Admiral Cochrane, commander of The British Fleet in North America, Napoleon Bonaparte had violated a treaty with Spain when he sold The vast Louisiana Territory to The United States. The British brought an overwhelming force to The Gulf of Mexico in anticipation of capturing the city at the mouth of The Mississippi River. Which ever nation controlled New Orleans, ultimately controlled the Mississippi River and all of the lucrative trade that occurred upon it from the Minnesota Territory through Andrew Jackson's home state of Tennessee.

Major General Andrew Jackson brought his motley but effective force of Tennessee volunteers and Creek Indians to New Orleans where he enlisted the services of a New Orleans Militia known as the Free Men of Color. These men were originally from the French Colony of St. Dominique. They had fled because they had been driven out by the forces of freed slaves who had ultimately won the bloody civil war there that had resulted in the colony being renamed Haiti. The citizens of New Orleans had complained to Jackson about using armed Negroes in his battle with the British. Jackson told the citizens of New Orleans to stay out of military affairs. Jackson was a pragmatic white supremacist. He even recruited slaves at the last minute, promising them their freedom if the Americans won the battle. Probably the most helpful group for Jackson was the group he relented to enlisting at the very last minute, the Bactrian Pirates. The Pirates had a vast supply of gun powder and knew the Bayous surrounding New Orleans better than anybody.

Everything went wrong for The British when they attacked New Orleans. The January weather was cold and wet. The British encountered the same problems they had during the American Revolution. Their forces relied on heavy artillery which got bogged down in the swampy terrain surrounding the crescent city. The Tennessee Volunteers were able to blend in with the terrain and their superior marksmanship helped to make up for the fact that they were vastly outnumbered. The British lost hundreds of men during their 3 day attack. They had to sue for peace and depart. Major General Andrew Jackson became the unquestioned military hero of The War of 1812. He ordered that the slaves who had fought be disarmed and returned to their masters, explaining to the heartbroken slaves that he had no authority to grant them their freedom. He kept New Orleans under martial law for another month, earning the enmity of many of New Orleans most influential citizens, including one judge whom he denied the right of habeas corpus. But to most of the citizens of the United States he was a hero, a man who could be thought of as they sang Francis Scott Key's popular poem The Star Spangled Banner, which had been written during the British siege of Baltimore.

Americans had suffered mightily during the War of 1812. But there had been gains. Jackson's victory over the Creeks had resulted in hundreds of thousands of square miles of territory being made available for settlement. The United States had come out of the war as the dominant force in North America. During the summer of 1816 newly promoted General Andrew Jackson demanded that the Governor of Spanish Florida do something about the Negro Fort that had been built by the British on the Apalachicola River at Pine Bluff. Jackson claimed that he needed to put down the border raids that were being carried out by the Negroes and Indians who resided there. A combined force of U.S. Navy, U.S. Army and Creek Indians attacked Fort Negro on June 24, 1816. The impenetrable fort blew up when a shot from the Americans hit the fort's artillery magazine causing all of the gunpowder stored there to explode. Most of the men defending Fort Negro were killed in the blast. Two leaders of the Negro Fort were put to death by the Creek Indians. American runaways who were captured were returned to their masters. The destruction of The Negro Fort was the first step towards creating the cotton kingdom in the Southern United States. King Cotton would dominate the United States economy for two generations before the outbreak of the civil war. The Seminoles of Northern Florida were greatly weakened by the destruction of Fort Negro. On November 30th a boatload of American Soldiers was attacked and 34 of the 40 soldiers were killed by Indians from Fowl Town, the closest Seminole town to Fort Scott. The Indians kidnapped six soldiers wives who had been on the boat. The Indians also bashed in the heads of four children who were on the boat.

One year later, the American soldiers from Fort Scott burned Fowl Town to the ground. With the blessing of President James Monroe and Secretary of State John C. Calhoun, General Andrew Jackson wrote a letter to the Spanish Governor of Florida in Pensacola stating that he planned to bring his army into Florida to subdue the Seminole Indians. The Governor replied that he did not have the power to subdue the Indians but he would not try to stop Jackson's army from doing so. In fact the citizens of Pensacola had been sympathetic to the Americans because they resented the British encouragement of Indian attacks and fugitive slaves during the War of 1812.

General Andrew Jackson arrived in Florida during the month of April, 1818. His combined force of U.S. Army Soldiers, Tennessee Militia and White Stick Creek Indians attacked the Seminole Town of Miccosukee and burned most of it to the ground. Jackson then occupied the Spanish Fort St. Marks where he took the Scottish Trader from the Bahamas and Seminole ally Alexander George Arbuthnot prisoner. Jackson habitually blamed half breeds for inciting Indians to violence against Americans. Arbuthnot wore Indian clothing, spoke the Seminoles Language and had been serving the tribe diplomatically for years. To Jackson, Arbuthnot was the worst kind of traitor. He raised no objection when the 70 year old Arbuthnot was beaten while awaiting his trial and execution.

Jackson marched his forces 100 miles east to the town of Bowlegs where a mixed group of blacks and Indians resided. His force destroyed the town, captured escaped slaves and killed Indian men, women and children. The former British Lieutenant James C. Armbrister was taken prisoner. According to his father, Armbrister had only been in Florida for two weeks. Along with Alexander George Arbuthnot, James C. Armbrister was charged with aiding and encouraging hostile Indian attacks on American citizens. Both Arbuthnot and Armbrister were executed after a hasty trial.

On March 24th, 1818 General Andrew Jackson marched his forces into Pensacola and claimed the city for The United States. As had happened to him during his campaign in New Orleans, Jackson suffered terrible illness from his old dueling wounds. He was emaciated and coughing up blood. He returned with his Tennessee Militia to his plantation The Hermitage outside of Nashville. The U.S. Government considered putting Jackson on trial for exceeding his orders but his

actions were very popular with the majority of the American people. Ironically, his biggest supporter among those in the government was his future enemy John Quincy Adams, who argued that Jackson had accomplished what Americans had long desired, the acquisition of Florida. The U.S. Government returned Florida to the Spanish but this turned out to be a formality. On February 22nd, 1819 Florida was ceded to the United States. Andrew Jackson was appointed governor of the new Florida Territory. His most notable accomplishment during his six month tenure was his fight to secure a land title for a mixed race woman who was being denied her rightful inheritance.

Jackson's forces apprehended two British agents who had been helping the Seminoles: 70 year old Alexander George Arbuthnot, a merchant based in the Bahamas who had been living among the Seminoles for 15 years and Robert Chyristie Armbrister son of a loyalist planter from the Bahamas. Armbrister had been given the rank of Auxillary Lieutenant by Admiral Cochrane. He served with Major Nichols at The Negro Fort and among The Creek Indians. training the Indians to fight while Arbuthnot had been trying to help the Indians in other ways. A military tribunal found both men guilty of inciting the Indians to attack white settlers. Jackson ordered both men to be executed as enemy combatants. In 1819 the United States purchased Florida from Spain for a cash indemnity. Although Armbrister's father asked the British government to intervene on his son's behalf, the British Government was about to embark on a new era of good feelings with their American counterparts.

The United States Government held hearings on Jackson's behavior in Florida. He had violated the constitution but he had also gotten the Spanish out of Florida and gained even more territory for The United States. He was a National hero. Congress ruled that Arbuthnot and Armbrister had been enemy combatants which made it all right for Jackson to have them executed. This ruling has been used since 9/11 to kill enemy combatants in other countries.