



An Excerpt from “The Guns Across the Loxahatchee”

(Originally written by the book's author, Richard Procyk, and modifications by author included in this story)

The Soldiers Return to Jupiter: With the resumption of the Seminole War which started on December 20, 1855 and the attacks on Jupiter Lighthouse construction crews, the U.S. Army returned to the Loxahatchee crossroads and established a new fort in Jupiter on February 21, 1855.

Lt. Ambrose P. Hill, in charge of opening the post, determined that Old Fort Jupiter was no longer suitable; it was "bare of timber and further away from the Jupiter bar [i.e., inlet] than the new post which is a half mile nearer, has a convenience of timber, good soil for gardening, loading and unloading boats and preferable to Old Fort Jupiter, or any other locations in its vicinity."¹⁶

Although the new site was a half mile east of Old Fort Jupiter and closer to the Jupiter Lighthouse, it was also located on the same stagnant landlocked waters of the Loxahatchee River. When the inlet was closed to the sea the blocked river loaded with organic matter and debris became a perfect breeding ground for fever-carrying mosquitoes. In this environment the troops soon began to contract the same often fatal "Jupiter fever" that had often stopped the work at the

lighthouse.

Along with bad water, the intense heat, and bugs and vermin of every description, the men of Fort Jupiter suffered from a multitude of other diseases including severe dysentery. In fact, at one time sixty of the sixty-eight men posted there were listed on sick call.

This was not unusual, for as we have seen disease ravaged the troops during all three Indian wars in Florida. During the Second Seminole War, approximately three-quarters of the U.S. Army casualties died of disease. Now again, as fever and other infirmities decimated the ranks at the fort, in August 1855 it was deemed necessary to move the command to Fort Capron near the Indian River Inlet where the nearest medical officer was located.¹⁷ During the months that lay ahead the commands changed frequently at Fort Jupiter due to the continued unhealthy conditions. Military personnel were often rotated with those at Fort Capron. Finally, in February 1858, Lieutenant Charles H. Webber of Company E, First Artillery, took command on Jupiter River where they protected the last phase of the lighthouse construction. Meanwhile, negotiations with the Seminoles were coming to a close. Some months later, May 8, 1858, Colonel Gustavus Loomis declared the war

was over and Fort Jupiter was evacuated soon afterward.¹⁸ After Chief Billy Bowlegs and his followers departed for a western reservation there were few Seminoles in Florida except for a determined Sam Jones and his small band who hid in the Big Cypress Swamp.

Sam Jones-Be-Damned: Although the story of Osceola and Coacoochee may symbolize the tribes people's struggle for freedom during the Second Seminole War, other Native American leaders impacted history at that time. Sam Jones (Arpeika), the Mikasuki medicine man and war leader, was an unusual character and less known to the public.

Already elderly at the beginning of the war, he was the most unyielding of all the Indian leaders in his refusal to leave Florida. In the early years he sold fish to the soldiers but remained aloof and independent. Not knowing his name the regimental sutler named him after a person in a burlesque ballad:

It was Sam Jones, the fisherman,
Was bound to Sandy-hook
But first upon his Almanac
A solemn oath he took...¹⁹

Later, as tensions increased, the army officers had few kind words for Sam Jones, whom they considered a hardheaded and obstructive Mikasuki. Indeed, his dauntless fortitude helped to keep up the Seminoles' fighting spirit and determination never to surrender. Unlike other Indian leaders, Sam Jones always refused to meet with the white men to discuss peace. His plan was simple: if the white man would go away and leave the Indians alone, there would be no war. Enraged when he heard that Lt. Col. William S. Harney had hung five Indians and strung up the dead body of his friend Chekika, the Calusa chief, Sam Jones ordered white captives burned alive by igniting resinous pine splinters stuck into their bodies. Although harsh, this form of execution did stop such army hangings.

The old Indian shaman became known to the U.S. Army as Sam Jones-Be-Damned, the "great rascal" of the Seminole War. The troops were ordered to bring in Sam Jones by "fair means or foul." However, he was never captured. In the end, when he was in his nineties, his small band of less than two hundred Mikasuki followers disappeared into the Big Cypress Swamp, where they remained hidden and elusive.

During the Indian removal, almost 3800 Seminoles were

transported to Arkansas and Oklahoma and hundreds died on the way. But Sam Jones, the fighting spirit of the war, died peacefully in the Big Cypress Swamp. When he was dying, word went out far and wide, and "every Indian in Florida" was present at his death, according to Josie Billie, a Mikasuki descendant. None dared to ignore the call, for he was respected - and feared - to the last. "Sam Jones, he man of four souls," said Josie Billie. "He fighting man. He man to be feared."²⁰

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From descendants of that small band who went into the swamps to elude the white man, plus a few families who returned from the West after the Civil War, Florida now has a population of some 3500 Seminoles. This tribal survival was made possible by the steadfastness of one man who refused to quit: Sam Jones-Be-Damned Indeed! (Note by Author - At one time the impoverished Seminoles were forced to live in the swampy backwaters of the Everglades, now have 3500 members of the Seminole Tribe of Florida and are believed to be the richest population group in the state. After purchasing the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino chain for \$965 million, Max Osceola was heard to say-"we will buy back Manhattan one hamburger at a time.")

Sam Jones-Be-Damned Indeed!

Guns Across the Loxahatchee by Richard J. Procyk

An Archeologist Investigation of the Seminole Wars in Florida with a special focus on the Battle of the Loxahatchee, February 24, 1838, which was fought in Jupiter. Richard J. Procyk is a local Historian and Archeologist who has worked with local teams to unearthed the site of the Battle of the Loxahatchee River in Northern Palm Beach County, as well as the locations of the subsequent encampment of the Tennessee Volunteers commanded by Major William Lauderdale, near Old Fort Jupiter.

The book may be purchased at the Jupiter Lighthouse gift shop or at Canoe Outfitters at Riverbend Park