In 1839 the palmetto thickets and mangrove swamps bordering New River in southeast Florida were a dark and bloody ground as dangerous and significant to American military men as Vietnam in the 1960s. The military installation known as Fort Lauderdale was a log stockade garrisoned by seventy-eight officers and men, cut off from civilized society by the vast and mysterious south Florida wilderness. It was one of several forts the United States Government constructed along the lower Florida Atlantic coast in early 1839. From the fort’s walls, the men of Company K, Third Artillery, United States Army, could look westward over a seemingly interminable forest and see ominous smoke as it arose from the campfires of a large portion of the hostile Seminole Indian nation.

On February 15, 1839, a twenty-six-year-old assistant surgeon named Ellis Hughes arrived at Fort Lauderdale on the U.S.S. Santee to take up his duties as medical officer of the post. A person of literary interests, as so many officers were in the early nineteenth century American Army, Dr. Hughes kept a journal in which he recorded his daily experiences. In 1974 the two-volume journal covering his Florida service was obtained by the University of South Florida Library. Through the notes and sketches filling its near four-hundred pages, the journal provides a unique and intimate look at daily life in Fort Lauderdale in its earliest years.

Ellis Hughes had been in the Army for only five months when he arrived at Fort Lauderdale. Born in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1813, he had lived in Maryland for most of his life. After receiving his Doctorate of Medicine from the University of Maryland in 1834, he took up residence in Tallahassee and was there at the outbreak of the Second Seminole War in 1835. In February of that year he wrote a long and interesting letter to his sister, Hanna Ann Hughes, giving a lively account of life in Florida’s capital city.

**Teaching in Tallahassee**

While in Tallahassee Hughes served as “Principal of the Academy.” At least, that is how his mail was addressed in 1836. “The Academy” was probably Leon Academy, Tallahassee’s oldest public school, established in 1827. In his letter to his sister he referred several times to “the school boys.” In one passage he noted that “the boys bring their guns frequently along and as soon as school is out away they are a-gaming.” The fine hunting on the outskirts of Florida’s capital underscores that fact that Florida was still very much a frontier area in the 1830s.

Dr. Hughes seems to have left Florida sometime in 1836, as a Mr. Brook is recorded as taking over the
academy in October of that year. The next record of
young Dr. Hughes shows him serving as a Demon­
strator of Anatomy at the University of Maryland in
1837.

The academic life seems to have palled after a
while for Hughes and, early in 1838, he decided to
seek a more active role in life. In June he applied for a
commission in the medical staff of the U.S. Army. On
August 21 he received his commission as an assistant
surgeon and was off on the road that was to take him
back to Florida.

After a brief period of duty in the North, Dr.
Hughes received orders to proceed to Fort Heileman,
East Florida, by way of Fortress Monroe, Virginia. At
Fortress Monroe he met Captain William B. Davidson,
a veteran of the Seminole campaigns of 1836-8 and the
commanding officer of Fort Lauderdale, who was
returning to duty from a furlough. Traveling to Florida
together, Hughes found the captain an interesting
returning to duty from a furlough. Traveling to Florida
companion. Mercifully, neither had an inkling of the
role Davidson was destined to play in the army career
of one Dr. Ellis Hughes.

With orders to join a unit of the Second Dragoons
at Fort Hanson, Hughes parted company with
Davidson at Fort Heileman on November 25, 1838.
There, on December 1, he began the first volume of
his Florida journal with the entry "Eventful and
interesting indeed have been the incidents of the last
four months to my hitherto dull mind."

During December Hughes accompanied Major
James A. Ashby’s detachment of the Second Dragoons
on scouting expeditions in north and central Florida.
He also found time for visits to St. Augustine, New
Smyrna, and other points of interest.

**No Indians, Many Flies**

During his various jaunts with the dragoons
through the St. Johns River area, Hughes failed to
encounter a single hostile Indian. He quickly dis­
ered that Indians were the least of his worries. He
summed military life in northern Florida thus:

> On horseback and dashing ahead with a will, I rejoiced that the fleas
could not catch me — farewell Fort Hanson with thy warm cypress yellow
spring water . . . thy flied sugar and fly-ed butter — farewell thy fleas and
sand bugs — mosquito & red bugs, my skin itches to think of you — fare­
well ye Florida forest vermin — I’m now for city life again.

In spite of being "tormented by fleas," living in
field tents or "a log house admitting every puff of the
compass by night...the campfires & kettles, the horses
and the prospect of a wild brigandish life of exposure

and hardship for the winter,” Hughes found Army life
pleasant enough and seems to have gotten on well
with the young officers around him. On January 19,
however, he received orders to proceed to the garrison
at Fort Lauderdale. Leaving "Volusia" on the St.
Johns, he boarded the steamer *Santee* and set off for
New River by way of St. Augustine and New Smyrna.
During the steamer trip Hughes met a number of
officers and again encountered Captain Davidson, who
"plays us airs occasionally" on his violin to while
away the tedious voyage.

On February 5 the *Santee* reached Key Biscayne.
The channel was apparently a bit tricky, as the ship ran
aground two or three times. She was finally towed in
by the Boston wrecking ship *Globe*, which happened
to be at the Key.

Hughes landed on the southwest side of Key
Biscayne and took the opportunity to visit the
lighthouse and collect some shells on the beach. He
also visited Fort Dallas and travelled a short distance
up the Miami River sight-seeing with some other
officers.

During his stay at Key Biscayne, Captain
Andrews of the *Globe* taught Hughes the proper
method of removing conchs from their shells, a skill
which he illustrated with a diagram in his journal.
Hughes also discovered that "between here and New
River (20 m. on rt N.) there is an abundance of King
fish — the bait is pork skin — (or) white canvass bits
and in a rapid sail by dragging line along surface a
superfluity is caught."

Leaving Key Biscayne, the *Santee* headed north
towards New River. Misfortune continued to follow
her, however, and she ran aground off "widow
Lewis’s plantation" which, Hughes indicated, "is
called 6 miles from the light house." On Monday,
February 11, Hughes wrote "we spent last night
anchored off New River Inlet — 8 found us aground on
its south bar — awaiting high tide yesterday our
company stores were landed on the N. beach — we are
about to unload all now in order to get her afloat." He
had passed the morning before on the beach collecting
shells and seeing plenty of red fish, shoals of sharks,
and "Indian tracks & fires fresh as of yesterday."

**Close Encounter**

Just after sundown on the 10th Hughes learned
that the Indian signs he had seen were even fresher
than he had imagined. Going ashore in the evening, a
party from the steamer was ambushed and First
Lieutenant William W. Mackall was wounded by
buckshot in his arm and back. While treating the
wounds, Dr. Hughes couldn’t help but realize Fort
Lauderdale was going to be a bit more dangerous than
the war to which he was accustomed.
Tuesday evening [February 12] found us at the 5 points of New River, a most beautiful stream with points as regular as a line of soldiers. With so beautiful a stream — so rich in fish of every kind, so luxuriant vegetation, so numerous the game and so abundant the alimentary coontie and so delightful a clime no wonder the Indian clings to his own country.

Thus Dr. Hughes recorded his first impressions of New River. He continued his journey the following day, but not for long. The Santee ran aground again, this time at the "mouth of Middle New River... beautiful spot between New River & Sea." Finally, on February 15, 1839, Hughes was able to record "Landed at Ft Lauderdale — had my tent pitched &c hospital tents put up &c."

The Fort Lauderdale that Dr. Hughes saw on landing was located about midway between the forks and the mouth of New River. Actually, it was the second fort or encampment to bear the name. The fort which Major William Lauderdale and his Tennessee volunteers had built on March 5, 1838, had been located farther up the river on the north bank near the forks. The original fort is referred to in Dr. Hughes' journal as the "old picquet." Although it was not garrisoned after the move to the new camp, the "old picquet" was frequently visited by patrols moving up the river by boat. Due to its exposed position far up the river, however, duty at the "old picquet" was not popular with the men.

The new fort probably had been established nearer to the coast to ease supply and communications. It was still under construction when Hughes arrived, though the transfer from the old fort had taken place on February 14. From Hughes' comments and sketches a fairly good idea can be gleaned of how the new fort appeared.

**Florida Frontier Fort**

The second Fort Lauderdale was built on a slight elevation on the north side of New River, quite close to the river bank. The post was surrounded by a log stockade or picket about eight to ten feet high, pierced near the top with firing ports. A watch-tower, resembling a large box on four high posts, was located in the southwest corner of the fort. A tall, leafless tree inside the stockade was used as one of the tower's supports. The observation platform was reached by a long, slender ladder. The stockade seems to have been roughly rectangular in shape, although the side walls had some angles or jogs in them.

In the southeast corner of the fort there was a log blockhouse. This two story structure was constructed of notched treetrunks, logcabin fashion. The top story overhung the first floor, and had a square window or port in its gable end. The roof was peaked and was covered with what appears to have been a large sheet of canvas. This sheet hung down two sides of the building to about the top of the first story, giving the blockhouse a tent-like appearance.

The fort's water supply came from a well inside the stockade. Hughes watched the soldiers dig the well on February 26, observing with interest the layers of soil they encountered: "1st white sand, 2nd-black loam, 3rd coquina, 4th dark brown sand." Water from the well was purified by running it through a "percolater" [sic] located behind Captain Davidson's
The percolator was "a box filled with sand — cotton cloth above and below and a peg to drain it into jug by funnel." The well and percolator, however, could not prevent dysentery from being a permanent scourge for the garrison.

Outside the stockade were located two other necessary facilities: the camp privy and, of course, the camp graveyard. The ground outside the fort originally was covered with palmetto which was cleared by cutting and burning. Hughes, who fancied himself somewhat of a wit, characterized the process as "clearing ground with the purifier fire." Apparently, some attempt was made to establish gardens near the fort. On March 30 Hughes wrote, "I am a Florida farmer." Little success could be expected, however, from the sandy soil of the fort site.

Inside the fort there seem to have been few permanent structures aside from the watchtower and blockhouse. The garrison lived in tents; the officers in "wall tents," and the enlisted men in "common tents" which looked like overgrown pup-tents. Even the hospital was housed in a large tent. The smaller tents of the enlisted men were erected in rows, while the larger tents seem to have been spotted about the compound.

Long frameworks of poles were placed over the tents. Branches and leaves were piled on the framework in a thatch-like layer to shield the tent roofs from the hot Florida sun. Even so, temperatures in the tents were sometimes unbearable. The tents of the officers were likely well provided with camp furniture, much of it made by the soldiers to earn money in their spare time. Hughes noted that Captain Davidson had a good deal of furniture in his tent, including two or three tables, six chairs, two beds, a number of storage boxes and a writing box.

The grounds of the fort seem to have been kept in good order. On March 30, 1839, Hughes wrote "Rain heavily last night & this morn but fire still burns over the river. Pine leaves carpeting to our piquet — bower? for tent, beautifully finished & grounds policed & cleared outside."

**Move to the Beach**

Although a good deal of work was lavished on the new fort, it was still too far up the river for communication and supply purposes. Another fort, the third to bear the name of Major Lauderdale, was constructed on the north side of New River Inlet. On May 13, 1839, Hughes wrote that "tomorrow I bid farewell to Ft Lauderdale." The next day, May 14, he wrote "Came down to beach." Apparently both posts remained in use for some time. Hughes did not move his tent to the "2nd picquet" until August 18.

Unfortunately, Hughes' journal does not provide as much information about the final Fort Lauderdale as it did about the second. There is, however, one pencil sketch in the journal that probably depicts the new post. The fort seems to have been quite open; there is no stockade in Hughes' sketch. Accommodation was still in tents, although entries in the journal indicate that at least one log house was constructed. Another sketch shows a palm-thatched house or hut on the beach, not unlike the palmetto thatch shacks that were built in Florida camps during the late nineteenth century by hunters. Low and broad, the structure had two large, airy windows and an overhang on the landward side which formed a sort of pouch. The building was fairly close to the waterline; in the background the surf thundered on the beach.

Regarding the surroundings of the third fort, Hughes wrote: "No familiar trees here — but all evergreen buttonwood mangrove sea vince (?), sea grape, pine & palmetto, Spanish bayonet — cabbage palmetto &c." On several occasions he commented about the sound of the surf which he could hear from his tent in the fort.

At the time of Hughes' arrival in February 1839, the garrison of Fort Lauderdale consisted of Company K, Third Artillery, U.S. Army. The company was composed of five officers, seven sergeants and corporals, and fifty-four enlisted men. Of this small garrison six were hospitalized, two were under arrest, and two officers were on detached duty elsewhere.

The men of Company K were a mixed lot; many of the enlisted men were foreign-born. Hughes noted men from Ireland, England, Wales, Germany and Denmark. One of the men, DeJone, seems to have been well educated and taught French and German to Hughes during his stay at the post.

In addition to the garrison, Fort Lauderdale housed a number of women and children, families of the enlisted men. The soldiers' wives, four in number, were a useful addition to the fort's personnel. They sewed and washed for the garrison. In addition, the presence of women and children undoubtedly made the fort seem less cut off from civilization.

Like soldiers everywhere, the men of Company K at Fort Lauderdale acquired pets and mascots. At the time of Hughes' arrival the company had a pet crow named "Black." A pet rabbit was also acquired during his stay.

In March 1839 the fort was reinforced by Company A, Third Artillery. This brought the garrison to a total of 117 officers and men. The reinforcements broadened the garrison's social life by injecting new viewpoints and topics of conversation in the officers' mess. Company A does not seem to have remained long, however. In May 1839 Captain Davidson was
The Fort Lauderdale at which Dr. Hughes arrived on February 15, 1839, was little more than an encampment of tents covered with protective brush. By the summer, a permanent fort was erected at the beach (rendering from a sketch in the Hughes journal).
again on furlough and First Lieutenant C.Q. Tompkins was left in command of Fort Lauderdale. From July until November 1839, Hughes and Tompkins were the only officers at the fort. Understandably, they got on each other’s nerves. In November the fort was again temporarily reinforced, this time by a naval force consisting of Lieutenant J.A. Davis, one midshipman, and thirty-two sailors. This made the officers’ mess a livelier place until the naval personnel left the fort on February 11, 1840, for Tea Table Key. On January 9, 1840, however, Captain Davidson and several other officers arrived at the fort. Captain Davidson’s return marked a major turn in Dr. Hughes’ life at Fort Lauderdale.

Secluded Society

All in all, the social life at the fort was somewhat limited. On March 16, 1839, Hughes wrote:

Since the 14th Feb Thursd now one month I have been at ft Lauderdale. Can I describe the scenes the feelings the opinions expressed and the past-times of our secluded life ... secluded however from our friends from intercourse with the world from information and from that which gives variety of incident to existence. No female society to vary the usual current of sentiments appropriate to our sex. True, we have four females here — but alas they all are married — one too is gone — the remainder are here and wash for the company. There’s Mrs. Gibbs whose nocturnal groans of sickness gave me night before last no rest. There’s Mrs. Aldridge the ser­geant’s wife who washes for my hospital — there’s Mrs. Conroy gone away to increase the population at Black Creek and there’s Mrs. Mul­holland the beautiful Irish wife of her Irish husband.

In the small, closed society of the fort, Hughes came to associate a good deal with the enlisted men; more, as it later proved, than he should have. In the evenings he held “swongos,” a sort of eating and drinking party, in his tent where he talked to the men and learned their life stories. The men, judging by their nicknames, seem to have been a colorful lot. Cunningham was known as “Tusky,” Young as “Old Sneak,” Rodebuck as “Slush Bullocks,” while private Fair rejoiced in the cognomen “Piss to Windward.” It would be interesting to know where that name came from.

Private Bennett was nicknamed “Tinker.” By 1840 there seem to have been some additional ladies at the fort, amongst whom Bennett appears to have been quite popular. Hughes lists “Bennett’s girls” as “hollow eyed Sue, one eyed Betty, hollow tooth, Jinny, grey tooth Sally and high cheeked Sally.”

An important, though temporary, addition to the fort’s social life was the arrival of a steamboat or, less frequently, of a straay turtle schooner or packet. These visits provided the officers with an opportunity to meet the ships’ officers and hear what was happening in the outside world. At every opportunity Hughes wangled invitations to dine aboard visiting steamers. The Santee of Captain Poinsett, the Iris or the Gatson, were relatively frequent callers at Fort Lauderdale. The Santee offered a particular charm in the presence of Captain Poinsett’s attractive unmarried daughter. Unfortunately, Miss Poinsett was not a regular feature of the Santee, but only visiting her father for a time. On March 4, 1839, Hughes was rather carried away by the whole thing and wrote an effusion called “A Farewell to Miss Poinsett.” Among other sentiments, he wrote:

That we have strolled upon the sandy beach by moonlight and listen­ed to the accents of a femme voice and seen Arpiucka the chief of the Seminoles himself making his devo­tion were that passing incidents of our pleasure. And when she is gone, the idea that her presence once smiled upon those same will be an incitement strong in urging our farther devotion to the country’s cause. Oh her image will be a beacon to light up the dreariness of our banishment from the enjoyments of civilization and the recollection of her presence will ever endear to us the wild forests that extend around!

She must have been a decided improvement over “grey tooth Sally.”

Steamboat Sweepstakes

Not only were the arrivals of steamboats bright spots in Fort Lauderdale’s social life, but their inability to keep to an exact schedule created a sort of “steamboat sweepstakes” among the garrison. Bet­ting on steamboat arrivals was as popular among the men of Fort Lauderdale as office “baseball pools” are today. On January 24, 1840, Dr. Hughes lost a bottle of wine to Mr. Murray of the navy. Spirits such as wine, port and brandy seem to have been the currency of the steamboat pool. On January 28, 1840, Hughes wrote “at supper … Capt. said he won a bottle of wine on steamboat’s not getting here on 28th — but offered 1 box champaigne on 7th Feb — or 1 bot wine on 3d. All back out.”

(Continued page 31)
BOREDOM, BRANDY… from page 12.

In addition to steamboat pools, Fort Lauderdale offered other activities to while away time. The officers often went to "the beach" for amusement, where they swam in the ocean and collected sea shells. Quite often, they held a boat race on their way back to the fort. Many of them acquired their own canoes and Dr. Hughes apparently did a good bit of work on his. On April 4, 1839, he wrote: "said Toney (our interpreter servt. formerly of Gadsden, Chaires &c.) lor Massa you has turned di Indian canoe into a white man." The move to the third fort doubtlessly facilitated the garrison's recreation in aquatic sports and shell collecting.

The wilderness provided further opportunities for sport. Hunting expeditions were popular both as recreation and as a means of varying the oftentimes dull menus in the officers’ mess. The area around the fort abounded in deer, bear, panther, wildcat, and a variety of fowl. On October 29, 1839, Hughes noted that he "went with Sloane down to the inlet — Sloane shot 2 crows 10 plovers or sand birds." This expedition had a sequel; the following day Hughes wrote that "Sloane sick... ate crows."

Fishing, in both New River and the ocean, also provided recreation for the men of Fort Lauderdale. Hughes notes groupers, three to four foot kingfish, "Sheep head" snapper, and Spanish mackerel among the catch. Fish, too, provided a welcome addition to military rations. The men also went "alligatoring." On March 21, 1840, Hughes saw an "alligator hauled on shore by hook — has 3 hooks in mouth escaped again." When a large rattlesnake arrived at the fort after crossing the New River, Hughes put in an interesting afternoon dissecting it and making anatomical drawings in his journal. South Florida's abundant wildlife went a good way towards mitigating the boredom of garrison life.

"Shooting" Off Steam

Another form of recreation at the fort was target practice and shooting matches. Dr. Hughes was well equipped with firearms. He had in his personal armory two pistols, one of them a "navy pistol," a "double-barrel gun" and one of the new Colt revolving rifles. Introduced in 1836, Samuel Colt's revolving percussion rifles were the latest improvement in firepower when Dr. Hughes brought his to Fort Lauderdale. In March 1838 Lieutenant Colonel William S. Harney had managed to get fifty of Colt's eight-shot revolving rifles for the use of his Second Dragoons in Florida, the first official use of Colt revolvers by the U.S. Army. Though Hughes never had need to use his rifle against the Indians, he must have felt comforted by the thought that he had eight shots between him and the scalping knife rather than the standard muzzle loader's one.

Both Hughes and several other officers found a good deal of pleasure in target practice with pistol and rifle, and loaned guns to each other on numerous occasions. The lending of guns, however, was sometimes a source of irritation, especially when the borrower never offered the use of his in return. Still, shooting whiled away the time. On April 2, 1839, Hughes wrote that "Mackall & I will practice with the rifle until I acquire a reputation." On March 12, 1840, a rifle match was held between some of the enlisted men. The prize of a new cap was awarded by Captain Davidson to the winner.

An 1836 pattern Colt Paterson revolving rifle of the type used by Ellis Hughes at Fort Lauderdale represented the last word in automated death. Though successful with hand guns, the revolver principle never became popular in shoulder arms. Every so often all the chambers in the 8-shot cylinder would fire at once, an unfortunate occurrence, for the marksman's hand was used to support the barrel.
Games were also popular means of staving off boredom. Hughes and others gathered most evenings in one of the tents for whist or "Euker" or a game or two of chess. Quite often the stakes would be bottles of wine or port. Gambling among the enlisted men seems to have been discouraged; difficulties arising from card playing resulted in disciplinary action by the post commander. The men took their gambling seriously; on one occasion in March, 1840, Hughes recorded: "Bartley lost $5 to Kirby on bet about Kirby's face being N. on the wood horse. He cried & flung $3 in the river Damned baby...Bartley said oh for God sake."

_Talk Was Cheap_

When other forms of recreation palled, there was always conversation. When conversation ran out, the fort was in trouble. The officers' mess served a social function as well as being a place to eat. Topics ranged from anecdotes about service in Florida, to talk about women, to gossip about people in and out of the service, and even to such things as the proper way to break a mule. One of Dr. Hughes' more entertaining habits was the literal reproduction of table talk. His accounts of conversations in the officers' mess at Fort Lauderdale seem to wipe away the 138 years that have passed and give history a true sense of immediacy.

A typical dinner at Fort Lauderdale was that of December 9, 1839:

"Dinner. Conversation on Sour Kraut with wines & dysentery. Dr. C. D. Sour Kraut & [word omitted] as the Germans call which means I suppose pork boiled. (Dr. H) Whorin I think a very good dinner (Lt M) Oh god it is hard we are forced to eat this. Laughlin, go and bring me a butt Claret with its price (L) Here it is sir, 75cts a butt. (Dr H) Twice what it would sell for at Charleston. (M) They wouldn't sell it there at all, but it can be had always at 10ct a bottle by the quantity. (Capt. D) Let me try it. (M) I think for this climate 'twould be healthier than coffee... (D)...Last yr. Jesup introduced what he called Catalina wine a gill to a man at 11 AM as a ration - it seemed to me to be a mixture of sour whiskey vinegar and old good for nothing. However the men ½ hour after used that away (at ft Harney) like bees 8 they became sick - it bound them up & gave them diarrhea & had to quit it... (M) Port has the same effect in dysentery, cures it only for a time. I believe exercise best for it. (Dr H) Oh no. (Capt D) the best claret I ever drank was some of old Baron Maureuil... (M) the common claret I think is not good at dinner, it has too much body...nothing like Madeira (Capt D) I wish I were wealthy enough for so much each day."

Conversation over cards in the evening was equally varied. On March 6 Hughes had an interesting conversation in Tompkins' tent about the Lieutenant's service in Florida. Tompkins told Hughes that at St. Augustine he was "employed on court martial 3 mo. Capt Drane (who could smell an indn. 9 miles) being its president. Frazier's pillow was Capt D's place of hiding whiskey. Frazier betrayed him. Capt Drane was called by death away; Gust Adolphus Scipio Africanus Floridius Withlacoochius Drane."

Evening entertainments also included singing, performances by the men, and airs played by the Captain on his violin. On the evening of January 20 Hughes wrote: "Got Bennett juggling - Jackson sings 'he will march no more, he will march no more' & also 'The tired soldier' then 'Let the trumpet sound;' wanted him to sing some merry sailor song - he afterward sang the 'Behold how brightly the morning' & 'Jack's the lad.' I listened to violin & then went to bed." When all else failed, the garrison could fall back on reading to stave off ennui. The officers had a wide selection of books, ranging from Shakespeare and the Bible to popular novels and books about the war in Florida. The officers eagerly awaited the arrival of newspapers on each steamer and traded papers and books among themselves. This exchange of reading material often became a source of bickering among the officers.

_Garrison Food Good_

Thanks to hunting, fishing, and gathering of local delicacies, the food situation at Fort Lauderdale was usually good. One of the topics at dinner on March 9, 1839, was "the good things of ft Lauderdale in respect of eating." Of course, the staple of the garrison was bacon and beans, the standard army ration. For the officers this spartan menu was filled out by beef tongue, crabs, venison, sardines, and other delicacies. Fish from the surrounding waters and such exotic Florida fare as succulent alligator tail often enlivened the mess table. On April 5, 1839, Hughes had for breakfast "fresh bream - corn cakes fried - molasses - salt scotch scotch herring & coffee." On April 2 his dinner was as follows: "Dinner no butter - fish fresh bream...potatoes fried & boiled - very salt bacon fried - no eggs - chicken missed last few days & molasses & when it gives out we will boil sugar & make syrup stand by instead of butter...& brandy & rice boiled but not well." For Christmas dinner that
year Hughes had “Eggnog - pork ribs & duck - damned good.”

A popular dish at Fort Lauderdale was “devilled bacon,” which Hughes describes as being “slices cut & prepared & mustard & broiled. So ditto with tough turkey legs renders delicate & edible.” Devilled bacon was apparently eaten either alone or over rice. Other foods eaten at the fort were hard crackers fried in grease, cootive pudding, corn dishes and such trimmings as preserved guava and molasses candy. Additionally, chickens and hogs were raised at the fort for immediate consumption. This sometimes created difficulties for Hughes. On March 25, 1840, he noted that “hogs & pigs [were] born behind my tent.” Earlier, on January 29, he had “caught a pig in tent today - quarrel with sow.”

Fort Lauderdale had an amazing range and quantity of alcoholic beverages within its walls. Hughes notes wine, port, sherry, brandy, sauterne, rum, and other beverages. Alcohol was a center piece at all meals and social activities at the fort and also provided solace to many an officer or enlisted man in his tent when the Florida wilderness seemed just too much to bear. Alcohol in short, was both a boon and a menace to the garrison.

Hughes recorded several interesting recipes for drinks in his journal. One favorite was “Blue ruin - burnt whiskey, spice & butter.” Another was “Cosic,” a drink made of burnt whiskey sweetened, then mixed with ½ its volume of water and drunk hot. A favorite toast was “Above your lip & under your nose, tip her up & down she goes.”

In spite of wild foods obtained in the vicinity, supplies at Fort Lauderdale often got very tight between the arrival of supply steamers. On March 30, 1839, Hughes noted that “butter out. (also) molasses; bacon spoiling stinking like old cheese.” Another lean period came in June: “Steambt is gone for provision - we are reduced to pork & bread. Every other thing gone, even sugar.” On January 20, 1840, the fort ran short again: “Buckwheat, bacon, tobacco, cigars all gone.” The “feast-and-famine” cycle increased the fort’s feeling of isolation and created recurrent morale problems. One of Hughes' and Tompkins’ grudges against Captain Davidson that exacerbated tensions in the fort was the belief that the Captain had “held out” on them by claiming he had no sugar when he really did during a shortage.

Food shortages were not the only sources of irritation and depression at Fort Lauderdale. On arriving at the fort, Hughes encountered his old friend, the insatiable Florida flea. On one occasion the sole entry for the day in his journal was “Fleas! Fleas!” On March 21, 1840, the post sutler, Mr. Stores, remarked to Dr. Hughes that “when he catches a bushel of fleas he believes he will pickle them.”

Another irritation was the noise of crows about the camp at various times. In March 1840 Hughes noted vast numbers of crows about the camp: “Crows make a hell of a noise over my tent - one ate my two crabs yesterday - one just now let fall a bone.” In another passage he writes “Caw caw caw - damned crows.” The Florida weather also proved trying on occasion. On January 26 Hughes wrote that the officers all lie abed during this rainy morning.” And again on November 18, 1839: “Rained this morning - gloomy day - gloom gloom.”

Everything But The Plague

As in most wars, the Second Seminole War lost many more men to disease than to enemy action. Fort Lauderdale was no exception. Hughes records several deaths from disease among the enlisted men in his hospital. Captain Davidson had several illnesses, including liver trouble and recurrent bouts of dysentery. Dysentery and “fever” were the scourges of the post. Hughes himself was no exception. Early in March he came down with a fever in spite of the fact that he regularly dosed himself with “red pepper and vinegar” as a general tonic. His “maladies” included vision difficulties, headaches, and stomach trouble, varied occasionally by dysentery and bouts of fever. He attempted to treat his problems by regulating his diet and dosing himself. However, he had little will-power when it came to giving up food, wine, and tobacco: “Friday Rule - Eat nothing Drink nothing all day - take 1 dose salts & nothing else all day unless I Seidlitz Powds. These rules have been blown to hell - I must take emetic tonight & keep bowls loose all the month & no solid food - animal or oily matter.” Dr. Hughes’ health continued to have ups and downs throughout his stay at Fort Lauderdale. An obituary for him many years later read: “Stationed in the vicinity of the Everglades, and suffering the vicissitudes incident to a campaign in insalubrious country, his health was seriously impaired. From the effects of disease and climate he long suffered, and perhaps it may be said never fully recovered.”

All in all, in spite of the beautiful river, the beaches, and forests that were a naturalist’s dream, the garrison of Fort Lauderdale did not like south Florida. On March 30, 1839, Hughes recorded the remark “if God Almighty did make this country if he'd come back he wouldn’t know it. Give me the stuff and I'd make a better.”

The justification for Fort Lauderdale’s existence was, of course, the presence of hostile Indians whose stronghold was in the wilderness of forest and swamp west of the fort. Although they were seldom seen, the fort’s garrison had frequent evidence of the Indians'
presence. Smoke from Indian fires could be seen daily from the fort and occasionally one of the garrison would fall foul of an Indian bullet while on patrol. Indeed, shortly after Hughes' arrival at the New River, a party gathering wood near the fort was attacked and two men killed. Hughes visited the site of this killing, and was struck by the "bloody palmettos" marking the killing ground. Many evenings Hughes looked from the fort's palisade to see "smoke due west — dark blue smoke over the grass isles."

Indians were a common topic of conversation at the fort. On Thursday, April 4, 1839, Hughes had a conversation with Captain Davidson about the Seminole leader Sam Jones or Arpeika:

Aipiaka [sic] - he says he will never shake hands with the white man - he is an old wrinkled withered active hoary white headed Indian of small stature and has done more mischief given more trouble than Oceola ever did. Aipiaka may this moment be within 6 m. of us. No white man has seen him since the war began. He got the name Sam Jones from Capt Galt at Ft Drane or King where he used to sell fish being fond of money. Galt had written a parody on 'twas Dunois the brave.' was Sam Jones of Sandy Hook fisherman of N.Y. & Aipiaka was delighted & was proud of the name.

In another passage, Hughes repeats the story of Sam Jones's name, confirming that it was applied to him by the officers of Fort King.

**Welcome News**

On May 3, 1839, a "Boat Yawl" arrived at Fort Lauderdale with Lt. Colonel William S. Harney aboard. The next entry in Hughes' journal is "Truce truce no more fighting; 2 Inds visited us at Key Biscayne; Genl Macomb at Ft King to treat with them." On May 18 General Alexander Macomb, commanding general of the United States Army, met with a group of Seminoles at Fort King to negotiate an end to the Florida war. By the terms of the agreement, the Indians would withdraw south of Pease Creek within specified boundaries by July 15, 1839, and remain there "until further arrangement were made." Another section of the agreement provided that a trading post be established to serve the Indians on the Caloosahatchee River.

At Fort Lauderdale comfortable relations with the Indians developed quickly. By May 17, before Macomb's declaration had been made at Fort King that the war was over, Hughes recorded in his journal that Sergeant Jennings had gone up to the Indian camp and returned that day. On the 19th a group of Indians arrived at the fort and were "invited to breakfast." Hughes describes the arrival of the Indians thus:

At about 11 AM - A canoe was seen approaching down the river from the west - in 10 or 20 m. it reached the shore and 5 Indians landed. One was a muscular 32 yr. man whom Capt Poinsett recognized as having been among the chiefs at Ft Mellon (supposed to be a nephew of Sam Jones). One was a wild eyed buckish dressed youth of about 22 or 24 white [maple0] fringes for shoulders and hips - all were well formed. I gave them a bottle of brandy - We sat in tent rear of Lt Tompkins.

Indians, singly or in groups, became almost daily visitors in the days that followed. Sometimes, as on June 4th, as many as fifteen canoe loads of Indians stopped by the fort for a visit. Trade quickly developed between the garrison and the Indians. Hughes records that he "got 2 hair skins - 2 bunches of beads to squaws." Indian women also provided quantities of coontie, a welcome addition to the fort's larder.

On June 19, 1839, Dr. Hughes recorded his first visit to the Indian camp. Two days later he repeated the visit, noting that three of the Indians were sick. The good doctor was quite ready to treat Indians as well as soldiers and his journal indicates that he provided medical treatment for sick Indians on a number of occasions.

On June 19 the redoubtable Sam Jones himself arrived at Fort Lauderdale. Thereafter Sam Jones was a frequent visitor at the fort, often bringing his attractive young wife. Hughes had many opportunities to talk to Sam Jones. On August 19 Hughes writes: "Chat with Sam Jones about his pretty wife." During one of Sam Jones' visits he had an "interview with Miss Poinsett, shakes hands with his."

On August 1, 1839, another of the major Seminole leaders, Chitto Tuskeneggee, arrived at Fort Lauderdale. He had been the most prominent Seminole leader to take part in General Macomb's council at Fort King. Hughes records his arrival thus: "Aug. 1. Chitto Tuskeneggee arrives in camp from Key Bis - swam new river and scared two soldiers - his heart is sad - no sleep - no eat - a treaty is a treaty - he will let them see if he is not chief - he will at the risk of his life carry it into effect."

Chitto's reassurances were not entirely comforting. On the previous day word reached the fort that the Indians had massacred Colonel Harney's command at the trading post on the Caloosahatchee; only Harney and fourteen of his men escaped. News of the
massacre, which had taken place on July 23, reached Fort Lauderdale at four in the afternoon on July 30. Hughes noted in his journal “4 PM - skiff from Key Biscayne. Bad news 11 Dragoons surfer & 3 killed - 15 & 2 interpreters - news read to Chitto Hadoj & Sam Jones son.” On August third Hughes wrote: “Chitto Hadoj & Sam Jones’s son again in camp... Sam hopes we don’t believe any of his people did hostility.”

In spite of the Caloosahatchee massacre, Indian relations at Fort Lauderdale were cordial. Sam Jones and Chitto Tuskenuggee continued to visit the post. On September 7, 1839, Hughes had a friendly conversation with the two chiefs. “You’re an honest man,” he said to Sam Jones. “What did you go to war for?” Sam replied “It was all about the emigration. I never consented to it and there is no use to talk any more at all about it.” Later he said “You whites have been fighting us and after [word missing] what have you done?” “Raised a flag,” said Chitto. “We can see it from the pine trees when Harney comes.”

Throughout August and early September relations with the Indians remained friendly. Colonel Harney arrived and engaged in a series of councils with the Indians. Sam Jones and Chitto Tuskenuggee continued to express their determination to keep the peace. The overall situation in Florida, however, continued to deteriorate. The “break” came on September 27-28, 1839, in the form of an attempt to massacre the troops at Fort Lauderdale. On the 27th Hughes wrote: “Chitto Tuskenuggee, Chitto hadjo & Chitto’s fat brother, also ‘bowlegged Chopkamathlay’ and his little boy - Tiger & Margt &c in camp. Wrestled with Chitto Tuskenuggee - at night - George - Hopkins & Boyce go to Indian camp... at midnight Tompkins & Davis go after them & rescued Hopk.”

At breakfast on the 28th, Dr. Hughes suggested going up the river. Several others volunteered to go, but Lieutenant Tompkins vetoed the idea. “Hopkins dies 6 hours after his rescue & is buried in evening - he stated the deaths of George & Boyce.”

George, however, was more fortunate than poor Hopkins thought. On the 29th Hughes wrote: “Dead body of Boyce discovered & at same instant George recognized across in mangroves alive. He is brought back immediately. Boyce buried today - George has fever in evening.”

This ended the fort’s “Indian summer” interlude which began with the Macomb Treaty of May 1839. After a period of tense expectancy, the garrison resumed the shooting war on the same footing as before the truce. Once more, patrols probed the hostile wilderness. The fort resumed its isolation, occasionally punctuated by brushes with the Indian warriors who prowled the banks of New River. On December 20, 1839, Hughes himself had an encounter: “Going up to old piquet with Davis, Tompkins not going. Directions about letters. 2 sailors & 1 soldier wounded!”

Amid Adversity, Morale Problems

Indians, whether friendly or hostile, brought relief from the monotony of life in a fort deep in the Florida wilds. As is the case in almost any isolated military post, morale problems posed repeated difficulties. Military discipline in 1839-40 was harsh. Hughes’ journal records numerous incidents of floggings. On November 13, for instance, Hughes noted: “Davis gives the cat this morn to his men for not getting up at reveille.” The journal also includes many laconic entries such as “Bill flog,” and “talked to Laird about stripes.” Another frequently used punishment at Fort Lauderdale was the “wooden horse” or “two-legged horse,” which was constructed of two planks nailed together to form a ridge like a small peaked roof. Sometimes a square beam was used instead, with one of its angles pointed upward. Mounted on two uprights and raised five or six feet above the ground, the prisoner was made to sit astride the “horse” for the period of his punishment. Sometimes weights, often muskets, were attached to the man’s legs to increase the severity of the punishment. Several errant soldiers could be disciplined at once on this device, depending on the length of the “horse.”

In spite of such deterrents to misbehavior, the state of discipline at the fort often was not good. Hughes wrote about fights over cards, at least one stabbing incident between a sergeant and a corporal.
unauthorized firing of guns in camp, and, strange to say, one attempted desertion. On December 30, 1839, Hughes noted: "Laird punished for running away." One wonders where Laird could possibly have hoped to go from a fort surrounded by miles of almost unexplored wilderness full of hostile Indians.

Many disciplinary problems were related to liquor. The theft of whiskey and brandy from officers’ tents seems to have been Fort Lauderdale’s most popular indoor sport for the enlisted men. Drunkenness prompted fights and insubordination. On February 29, 1840, Hughes penned: “Needham wouldn’t tell Capt D who gave him whiskey, Capt D: ‘by Jesus you are a fine fellow’ - ‘Capt kiss [ass].’” The problem, it seems, was of major proportions. On October 24, 1839, Hughes wrote in his journal: “Whole camp drunk.” Unfortunately, Dr. Hughes didn’t set a very good example for the men; the journal entry for March 23, 1840, is “Drunk abed all day.”

Personal relations among the officers did nothing to raise morale. Captain Davidson and his second in command, Lieutenant C. Q. Tompkins, detested each other. In fact, Tompkins really did not seem to get along very well with anyone at the fort. Hughes observed in his entry for May 2, 1839: “The private feelings festering the last two days are coming to a head.” They did not climax, however. Captain Davidson’s furlough began on the fifth and the showdown was postponed. Hughes disliked Tompkins, but since they were the only two officers at Fort Lauderdale for several months, he perforce became quite intimate with him.

Tension and Dissension

After Captain Davidson’s return, the atmosphere at the fort became very tense. The entries in Hughes’ journal for 1840 describe a group of prima donnas obsessed with their own feelings and opinions rather than a corps of military officers running a fort. The journal has many snide passages disparaging various individuals at the camp. Hughes seems to have been midway between the Captain and Tompkins, sticking in his oar now and again in a manner that certainly did not improve matters. The atmosphere in the officers’ mess was, by early 1840, not good.

Doubtlessly, the officers’ dissension did not improve the overall morale of the post. On February 5, 1840, Hughes wrote: “Tompkins - he shuts himself up and does not face the company has nothing to do with it doesn’t even look at it.”

Dr. Hughes himself, however, was hardly in a position to criticize. His indulgence in strong drink was an increasing problem and eventually became prejudicial to the good order of the post. Given to having drinking parties with enlisted men in his tent, the whole camp was often kept awake. Finally, Captain Davidson went one evening to Hughes’ tent and found him very drunk. The good doctor had one of the privates sitting on his knee, was holding forth to him as to what an ass Davidson was, and how he could run the camp much better himself. That, for Captain Davidson, was the final straw. He confined Dr. Hughes to his tent and stationed a guard over him. The charges against Hughes, were drunkenness and “conduct unbecoming an officer.”

Hughes spent the time after his arrest on March 25, 1840, under “tent arrest.” He passed his days sending a barrage of letters to Captain Davidson, but not until he transcribed them in his journal. He complained about the manner of his arrest, and the absence of formal charges against him. Also claimed that he was being prevented from performing his duties in the hospital. Hughes repeatedly requested permission to move his tent, claiming that it was unbearably hot and that the hogs were rooting behind his tent, a state of affairs not to be borne by an officer and gentleman. He also filled page after page by listing the various wrongs Davidson had inflicted on him since he first came to Fort Lauderdale.

Dr. Hughes replacement, Dr. E. Worrell, arrived on May 12, 1840. Dr. Hughes was ordered to Black Creek on the St. Johns River. Before leaving Fort Lauderdale, he wrote and signed an acknowledgement of “errors I had committed there.” Upon giving this acknowledgement, he assumed that Captain Davidson would retract the charges against him. Shortly thereafter, on May 18, 1840, Ellis Hughes boarded a steamer bound for Black Creek, and ended his eventful stay at Fort Lauderdale.

As it turned out, Hughes’ departure from Fort Lauderdale marked the virtual end of his military career. Soon after his arrival at Black Creek, Dr. Hughes received, in his own words, “official communication announcing from General Armistead his readiness to ‘receive my resignation.’” This was Dr. Hughes’ first intimation that the charges against him had not been dropped. He demanded a hearing to clear himself. Before one could be convened, however, he became impatient with the delay and “…my health worn out by long suspense I addressed a letter of resignation to General Armistead.” Hughes’ army career came to an official end on July 31, 1840.

The unfortunate Captain Davidson did not long survive Dr. Hughes’ departure. According to the Fort Lauderdale post return for December 1840, Captain Davidson, Lieutenant Rankin, and thirty-three men of the garrison left the fort on December 2 on an expedition to the Everglades under Lieutenant Colonel Harney: “Captn Davidson was taken sick with Dysentery & died at Indian Key on the 25th Dec.”
In the End, Frustration

After his resignation from the Army, Dr. Hughes visited New Orleans and then returned to Maryland. There he engaged in journalistic work with his father, Jeremiah Hughes, publisher of Niles National Register. In the summer of 1841 he applied for a commission in the United States Navy. Although he passed the qualifying examination with ease, he was not granted a commission due to his Army record.

In 1849 Hughes moved to Georgetown, District of Columbia, and became editor of the Georgetown Advocate. An obituary in the New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal (January 1867) summarizes Dr. Hughes' later life: "His health not permitting him to engage in the practice of his profession, Dr. Hughes was engaged, prior to the late civil war, successively in some of the various bureaus of the War and Interior Departments at Washington, especially those of the census, statistics and the topographical engineers." At the outbreak of the Civil War Dr. Hughes attempted to resuscitate his military career. On November 24, 1861, he wrote to the Secretary of War and volunteered his services as a military surgeon. His offer, however, was not accepted.

Ellis Hughes died at Georgetown on October 5, 1866. His last intelligent words were "This is Life, indeed." One hundred and forty years later, we might say with equal drama after reading his journal: "So this was life on the New River." Indeed.

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