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Transcribed and Annotated from:

National Archives, Microfilm Publications, Microcopy M619.

Letters Received by the Office of the Adjutant General (Main Series) Roll 799 and 800

Additional correspondence:

National Archives, Microfilm Publications, Microcopy M1495.

Special Files of Headquarters, Division of the Missouri, Aug. 1872-Feb. 1876, roll 13.

Seminole Negro Indians

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Edited by Sarah N. Johnson

## The following are excerpts from the booklet

### From Bureau of Indian Affairs Commissioner Ely Parker to Secretary of the Interior J.D Cox

Department of the Interior

Indian Office

Washington D.C. April 26, 1870-

Sir:

*I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of the letter of the Hon. Secretary of War, dated 19th instant, referred here by you on the 23rd, inviting your attention to the correspondence (which he encloses) between Bvt. Col. J. D. DeGress, Commanding at Fort Duncan, Texas, and the commanding General of the Department of Texas, relative to a party of Seminole and Kickapoo Indians residing in Mexico who are anxious to return to the United States. An invitation has been sent to them by Col. DeGress to visit his post to have a talk upon the subject, and the question is put by him as to what shall be done in case they should come.*

*The history of these Indians is briefly and in substance this; about 1849, Co-ah-coo-che, or Wild Cat, a Seminole Chief of notoriety and influence, having become very much dissatisfied with the arrangements made by the Government in regard to his people upon their removal from Florida, with a few followers left the country of the Creeks, upon which the Seminoles were to reside, and went to Texas with the intentions, as he asserted, to settle there.*

*In 1850 he returned to the Nation and sought to induce all the Seminoles to join him in Texas, but succeeded only in prevailing upon about 100 together with some slaves, to accompany him. With these he returned in that year and eventually settled in Mexico across the Rio Grande. From that time he and his followers ceased to be regarded by the Department as a part of the Seminole Nation, and they have been almost wholly lost sight of for many years past. Wild Cat it is believed is now dead.*

*These Kickapoos are those who many years ago separated from their Nation residing in the Country which afterward became Kansas Territory, and went down among the Creeks and other Indians, locating upon or about the Washita River, and who became associated with the Seminoles under Wild Cat, and crossed over the Rio Grande with them into Mexico. At one time the Chief said he had with him 1,600 Kickapoos and at another, 600. They were joined in 1864 by a party of 100 from the Kickapoo Reservation in Kansas, a part of whom subsequently returned to Kansas.*

*The number of Seminoles and Kickapoo now in Mexico cannot be stated with certainty by this office. I think it is likely that of the former there may be as many (100) as stated by the Chief John Kibbett to Col. DeGress; and of the latter there may be probably from 600 to 800. A report respecting the removal of the Kickapoos back to the United States was made to the Hon. Secretary of the Interior by this office on the 14th of July 1868, and an estimate submitted of the*

*sum that would be required for the purpose. The subject is referred to in the annual report for that year of my predecessor, pages 20 and 87, and also in my report for 1869 pages 8 and 451.*

*I there suggested that steps be taken as early as practicable to have them brought back and placed somewhere in the Indian Territory and that appropriate legislation be had by Congress in the matter. I will now further remark that this office has not at its disposal the means to effect the removal of these Indians should they cross the Rio Grande and come to the Military Post at Fort Duncan with that object in view. If the Military will arrange for their subsistence and conduct them to the Indian Country, this office can then take charge of them and provide for their settlement in some suitable locality in the Indian Country; the Seminoles, perhaps, among their people from whom they separated, and the Kickapoos upon some part of the leased District, or among the Wichitas and affiliated bands in that District.*

*Should the War Department consent to such an arrangement, it will be necessary that this office be advised thereof, and before the removal commences, in order that communication may be had with the Seminole Nation to ascertain if they will receive these Seminoles and acknowledge them to be a part of the Nation, and that a home may be selected for the Kickapoos and Congress be asked for an appropriation to subsist and properly care for them.*

*I return herewith the letter of the Secretary of War and its enclosures. Very Respectfully,  
Your Obedt. Servt.*

*E. S. Parker  
Commissioner*

*Hon J. D. Cox  
Secretary of the Interior*

Commissioner Ely S. Parker, himself an Indian, is quite clear that “If the Military will arrange for their subsistence and conduct them to the Indian Country, this office can then take charge of them and provide for their settlement in some suitable locality in the Indian Country; the Seminoles, perhaps, among their people from whom they separated”. Although he asks that the Seminole Negroes and Kickapoo not be brought over to the U.S. until money has been appropriated by Congress and a place has been found for them, he urges that “steps be taken as early as practicable”, so at this time the BIA was clearly encouraging the return of the Seminole Negroes.

**Source:** Library of Congress, National Archives, Microcopy M619.  
**Collection:** Letters Received by the Office of the Adjutant General (Main Series);  
Papers Relating to the Return of the Kickapoo and the Seminole  
(Negro) Indians from Mexico to the United States, 1870 – 1914  
**Roll:** 799  
**Digital Image:** 63.jpg

From Secretary of War Belknap to Secretary of State Hamilton Fish

War Dept, May 9, 1870  
Hon Secy State

Sir:

*I have the honor to return, as requested in your letter of the 6<sup>th</sup> inst, the dispatch lately received from the US minister to Mexico relative to the proposed removal of certain bands of Seminole Indians from Mexico to the reservations of their tribes within the territory of the United States, and to inform you that until the Indian Bureau shall be prepared to bear the expense of the contemplated removal, it will not be practicable for this Dept to take any further actions in the premises. In view, however, of the importance of the subject, it is recommended that application be made to Congress for the necessary appropriations.*

*Very respy, etc  
WM Belknap  
Secy of War*

Although Belknap appears to agree that the War Dept would not take further actions regarding the Seminole Negroes until monies are available, the Seminole Negroes had already been given permission by the military to cross over and camp at Fort Duncan while waiting for approval to remove to Indian Territory. The following ongoing communications show no indication that any military official ever told the Seminole Negroes not to come to Fort Duncan. In fact, there were continued negotiations to encourage them to cross the border.

**Source:** Library of Congress, National Archives, Microcopy M619.  
**Collection:** Letters Received by the Office of the Adjutant General (Main Series); Papers Relating to the Return of the Kickapoo and the Seminole (Negro) Indians from Mexico to the United States, 1870 – 1914  
**Roll:** 799  
**Digital Image:** 119-120.jpg

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From Captain Perry, Commanding, Fort Duncan to AAG Clay Wood

*Headquarters Post of Fort Duncan Fort  
Duncan, Texas, May 15, 1870*

*Brevet Colonel H. Clay Wood  
Assistant Adjutant General, Dept of Texas Austin Texas*

*Colonel;*

*The Seminole Indians whom I am directed to receive from Mexico turn out to be negroes. From what I can learn they were held as slaves by the Seminoles during the Florida War and emancipated on condition that they would take part against the Government.*

*These Seminole Negroes have been living in Mexico for about 22 years, wishing to go to that country after the removal of the Indians from Florida, to avoid being again enslaved. I am informed that the Lipan and Kickapoos will not avail themselves of the invitation to come upon reservations upon this side of the river — and also they have in their possession a great quantity of stolen American stock.*

*As these negroes are acquainted with the points on this river where the Kickapoos cross on their depredatory raids in to Texas, they and their information might be of some use in attempting to pick up some of these thieving parties.*

*The main body of the Seminoles will arrive in about ten days, and respectfully request information in regard to the issue of rations. Will the most rations be issued to them from the horn to the hoof, that is including every portion of the beef, excepting of the hides?*

*I am, Sir,  
Very respectfully, Your  
obedient Servant. Signed  
F.W. Perry Captain 24th  
infantry  
Brevet Major US Army.                      Commanding Post.*

In this letter Perry suggests that the Seminole Negroes were “emancipated on the condition that they would take part against the Government”. This is either an error on the part of a copy clerk, leaving out the “not” take part against the Government, or else Perry was completely misled about why Jesup offered the Seminole Negroes their freedom. The condition was that they would stop fighting for their land in Florida and co-operate with the Government by moving to Indian Territory.

Perry seems to be surprised that the Seminole Indians he was waiting for are Negroes, and his tone changes toward them with that fact. This systemic racism will show up multiple times in the history of the Scouts, as various BIA and military officials change their perspectives as they are persuaded that the Scouts are more Black than Indian.

This is the first mention that the Kickapoo probably will not come over, and that the Seminole Negroes could have useful information to help prevent the Kickapoo from raiding, since they are not going to a reservation. Perry seems to have initiated the idea that the Seminole Negroes might be useful on their way to Indian Territory.

**Source:** Library of Congress  
**Collection:** Special Files Seminole Negro Indian Scouts  
**Manuscript Number(s):** M-1495  
**Roll(s):** Roll-13, Part2  
**Digital Image File(s):** 0874.jpg

*Headquarters Department of Texas  
Texas and Louisiana  
Office of the Assistant Adjutant General  
Austin, Texas May 21st 1870*

*Captain F. W. Perry  
24th U.S. Infantry  
Commanding Fort Duncan Texas*

*Sir*

*Referring to your letter of the 15th instant: You will encourage the "Seminole Negro Indians" and "Seminoles" proper, to remain at your Post until further orders with reference to them. The rations issued to them will consist of,  
18 oz Fresh Beef (Whole Beef) or 12 oz Salt Meat  
18 oz Corn Meal, Hard Bread or Flour, each  
10 lbs Sugar, 5 lbs Coffee and 3 lbs Coffee to 100 rations - (See paragraph 1203 Reg Army Reg 1863.  
1/2 this ration to children under 12 years of Age)*

*While awaiting definite instructions, ascertain all you can with reference to the localities most frequented by the "Kickapoos" and "Lepans", also whether the "Indian Negroes" will enlist in our Service, against the "Kickapoo" and "Lepans":*

*Report as early as practicable the number of "Indian Negroes" and "Seminole" proper that have already, or will probably, come into Fort Duncan, Texas.*

*By Command of  
Brevet Major General Reynolds:  
(Signed) H. Clay Wood  
Assistant Adjutant General*

This is the first approval from the War Dept of efforts to find out if the Seminole Negroes will "enlist in our service" against the Kickapoo and Lipan. At this time there were no Indian Scout detachments available for the Seminole Negroes to enlist in, so the more likely role would be as guides, who were hired briefly, for specific purposes, such as identifying crossings of raiding Indians. Each state did have an assigned military budget for a certain number of Indian Scouts, but Perry had not been given authority to hire anyone – merely to find out if they might have interest.