

The Hornet's Nest: A Novel of the Revolutionary War

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A debut novel by the Nobel laureate and best-selling author of *An Hour Before Daylight* offers a richly textured study of the American South during the Revolutionary War, chronicling the story of Ethan Pratt, his wife Epsey, and their neighbors, Kindred and Mavis Morris, as they become caught up in the conflict and the growing problems confronting local Indian tribes. 300,000 first printing.

Jimmy Carter was born in Plains, Georgia, and served as thirty-ninth President of the United States. He and his wife, Rosalynn, founded The Carter Center, a nonprofit organization that prevents and resolves conflicts, enhances freedom and democracy, and improves health around the world. He is the author of numerous books, including *Palestine Peace Not Apartheid*, *An Hour Before Daylight* and *Our Endangered Values*. He received a "Best Spoken Word" Grammy Award for his recording of *Our Endangered Values*. All of President Carter's proceeds from this series will go to the Maranatha Baptist Church of Plains, Georgia.

Chapter 16: Massacre of the Indians
Having experienced troubles with doubtful land titles in the Carolinas, Elijah Clarke and his neighboring families were careful to get the proper documents when they obtained rights to settle near the Savannah River along the northern border of the 1773 land grant. Elijah encouraged the other men to locate their homesteads so that the entire group could remain in close contact with one another. All of the cabins were soon connected with a spiderweb of trails. Elijah and Hannah decided to build a new cabin and barn that almost joined each other, and to accept the constant animal sounds and odors in lieu of risking another fire being set by undetected intruders. This proximate location made possible an additional safety precaution, as they spent weeks of hard work putting up a stockade of upright poles, just large enough to encompass the two buildings and a small yard. Except for slits left as rifle ports and the large swinging entrance gate, the barricade cut off their view of the surrounding woods, but they did not trust the Indians who lived only a few miles away, and felt that the increased safety was worth the trouble.

Aaron Hart and his wife had settled within a mile of the Clarkes, and within sight of where two major trails crossed. Maintaining his far-reaching trade route and not intending to farm for a living, Aaron decided to take a minimum amount of land, only fifty acres, which was to be used mostly for pasture. An extra shed was built on the side of the Harts' cabin as a storeroom for his goods, and he now cut off some of his former trading territory in North Carolina and added an equivalent area in south Georgia. When Aaron was away, his wife frequently spent nights with the Clarkes.

Their decisions concerning safety seemed justified toward the end of January 1774, when Aaron came home to report that a group of Creeks had burned a homestead fifteen miles to the southwest, and murdered and scalped a man named William White, his wife, and their four children.

Elijah said, "Damn the bastards! We've got to go teach 'em a lesson."

By the time Elijah and Aaron arrived at White's place, a dozen men were there, looking at the smoldering ruins and already having dug six graves for the scalped and mutilated bodies. Since no one else seemed to be in charge, Aaron asked Elijah what he thought they should do, and the others seemed willing to listen to his opinion. Naturally assuming

the role of leader, he decided that they should follow the war party, which they assumed had crossed the Ogeechee River.

Clarke insisted that they examine the surrounding area carefully and report to him on all tracks left by unshod horses, which they followed carefully. After a day and night of tracking and examining the trail and campsites, they learned that there were about a dozen Indians, that they had two or three guns, and that they were moving fast and staying together as a unit. It was also clear that the Indians were skirting the towns of their own people, indicating a renegade group. When the trail turned north and then east, the settlers decided that another attack was planned, somewhere north of Augusta. One by one, the men announced that they were returning to protect their own homes, and Elijah was not able to dissuade them. Finally, he and Aaron were forced to abandon the chase.

Two weeks later, at about nine o'clock in the morning, what seemed to be the same band of Indians attacked a place known as Sherall's Fort, where there was a small commissary store. They had apparently watched David Sherall and the youngest of his three sons leave the area and then began firing on the fort. Mrs. Sherall, two adult sons, and a Negro slave killed three of the attackers as they attempted to scale the palisade wall. The others set fire to a corner of it and then backed off and continued the assault with their weapons.

Sherall had stopped to talk to his closest neighbor down the trail, and they saw the smoke from his homestead. The boy was sent to get help from Elijah Clarke, who lived just three miles away, while the two men rushed back toward the fort. As they drew near, they glimpsed flames through the trees and drew up their horses to assess the situation. The fire seemed to be confined for the time being to one corner of the stockade, and the men rushed forward to extinguish the flames. At that moment, an Indian on each side of the trail fired muskets at the settlers, and others followed this attack with arrows. From a distance of not more than ten yards, almost every bullet and arrow struck its target. The Indians moved in with their scalping knives, then dragged the two bodies off into the bushes and resumed their positions to guard the trail.

As Elijah Clarke approached the fort, followed by five other men and Sherall's son, he held up his hand to stop the procession.

"When savages are attackin' a place for a long time, they are careful not to be surprised and always leave an ambush party alongside the trails. Let's split up, stay a hundred yards back from the path, and move forward. We need to move fast and don't have to be quiet. If they hear us, they'll back up toward the stockade."

As they broke into the clearing, the entire party of Indians looked at them for a few seconds, sized up their adversaries, and disappeared into the woods. One of the men said, "That's Big Elk giving the orders. He has been to my place a couple of times to do some trading. He's devious, knows these woods and trails like the palm of his hand, and he's mean as hell."

After burying the dead, the men decided they would take the Sherall family to the Clarke stockade and then spread the word to as many settlers as possible to assemble there the following day to decide what they should do. There was little argument when the meeting was held.

Elijah Clarke explained, "If the nearby tribes see these bandits succeed and go to war, we wouldn't have a chance even if all of us quit farmin' and spent all our time huntin' the bastards. Our lives depend on most of the damned Indians stayin' peaceful, and only sure punishment will prevent a general uprisin'."

Aaron Hart said, "We need some help from British troops. Governor Wright is under pressure from London to keep up trade and bring settlers to the ceded land, and he's expected to maintain order in the colony."

"Yeah, but maybe Georgia is not as important to England as we think it is," someone said.

Aaron replied, "We don't amount to much as far as trade is concerned, but the British need this colony. We lie between the Spaniards in Florida and the Carolinas, and to some degree we also tend to hold off the French west of here. I agree that the best approach is to stamp out any renegade uprisings when they are just getting started, but there ain't three thousand white fighting men in Georgia. We've been lucky so far, but there's been a lot of trouble with the Cherokee in the frontier areas of Carolina, and it's finally got here."

Clarke and two or three of the settlers wanted to go right after the Indians, but a strong majority finally decided that there might be more than one group of marauders and they needed to get more help before abandoning their own homes to possible attack. Also, Aaron was convinced that British officials should assume responsibility for overall peace with the natives. Aaron and two other men would go to Savannah to inform Governor Wright that they must have protection from some of the British troops, only a handful of whom were in the ceded area. They would remind him in respectful but forceful terms that they had settled in this frontier area with the clear assurance of protection, and a lot of families would have to abandon their claims and move to a more civilized area if military help was not forthcoming.

The governor responded as they had wished, and within a week a Captain James Grierson arrived in Augusta with fifty men, obviously green troops and all wearing newly issued militia uniforms, except for two British sergeants. With great fanfare, they established a military camp at Sherall's Fort, and after a few days Grierson dispatched twenty of his men, on foot, to visit some of the nearby Indian villages to gather evidence so he could make an official report to the governor. When they had been gone less than two days, a small party of the renegade Indians ambushed the group, and three of the militiamen were killed by arrows and bullets fired from the underbrush. Not knowing the strength of their attackers, the troop returned to camp and refused to remain any longer in the "Indian-infested" land. Without any further discussions with the settlers, the entire detachment returned to Savannah.

Governor Wright was deeply embarrassed and used the occasion to dispatch an urgent message to London, describing the incident in the most compelling terms, emphasizing the seriousness of the threat, and requesting more British troops. What was more effective while the message was making its slow way to London was that the governor had Indian Superintendent John Stuart condemn the tribal leaders in the area for violating peace agreements and cut off all trade with them.

Finally realizing that they could expect no help from Savannah in the near future, some of the settlers met again at the Clarke homestead. They decided unanimously to assemble their families in safe places and to abandon their farms and homesteads long enough to punish the renegades. It was assumed that Elijah would be their military leader. One of the Indian traders reported to Aaron that he knew where Big Elk and his group of mostly young Creeks had been camping, deep within Cherokee territory, and offered to lead them there.

Elijah said he would need at least one hundred men who were willing to go on what was certain to be a difficult and time-consuming mission, and Aaron suggested that they send riders to the different areas in the ceded lands to call for volunteers.

Clarke replied, "No need to go to Wrightsborough. The damned Quakers won't help with anything that might involve violence, and we sure as he..."

Other Books

The Messenger. The Messenger is a fictional, spiritual story about a little boy who appears around the world after what is believed to be the 'End of Days', resulting from the greatest apocalyptic-like event since the biblical great flood. The boy, named Noah, shares his message of hope, unity and love, while insightfully revealing our purpose here on earth, what happens when we die, and the evolution of humanity both spiritually and physically as those left behind move forward from this disaster that eliminated over half the world's population.

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