

The Life and Career of Major George Christian Hutter

By: Timothy Elliott

Born on November 11th, 1793, in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, George Christian Hutter was the second son of Colonel Christian Jacob Hutter of Easton, Pennsylvania. George would eventually become the owner of the Sandusky Estate in Campbell County, Virginia in 1842.¹ George began his military career when he entered the Pennsylvania State Militia during the War of 1812 where he served alongside his father. George stayed in the military and received a promotion from Secretary of War John C. Calhoun to the rank of Second Lieutenant in the Corps of Artillery on January 28th, 1820, the first major stepping stone in the years that followed as George furthered his career. After receiving his promotion, George was ordered to report for duty at Fort Gadsden, Florida. George left his home in Easton on February 28th to Philadelphia for supplies, and left from there to begin his journey to Florida.

George arrived at Fort Gadsden on April 4th, 1820, and was soon met with multiple responsibilities. According to his personal diary, George was appointed as Acting Junior Master on April 23rd, a role under the fort's quartermaster. George was also appointed as Acting Commissary for the fort, as well as the Conductor of Artillery on September 1st.² George was released from his Quarter Master role on April 13th, 1821, on account of his poor health. He was granted an extended leave of absence in order to have time to petition for a furlough. On April 29th, George met with General Andrew Jackson in New Orleans, who granted the furlough to George. According to his diary, George was granted furlough until June 1st, 1821, but entries show that he was still in New York on June 2nd and intended to go home to Easton, Pennsylvania. George made no mention in his diary of an extended furlough or of any different orders, if any had been received. George returned to Fort St. Marks, Florida, where he arrived on December 31st, nearly seven months after the end of his furlough.³

George remained in Florida for the next few years, eventually earning a promotion to First Lieutenant in September, 1823.⁴ George was later transferred to the western frontier in 1824 and in 1825, George left Fort Atkinson on an expedition, serving under General Atkinson, for the

¹ The Sandusky House was originally built on land in Campbell County, but the land was eventually annexed into Lynchburg.

² Historic Sandusky Collection, George Hutter Personal Diary, April 4th and September 1st, 1820.

³ George Hutter Diary, December 31st, 1821.

⁴ Hutter, Stanley T., *George Christian Hutter: Early Life*, 2008, page 5.

purpose of making treaties between the United States and various Indian nations and tribes. The 1st and 6th Infantry Regiments departed the fort on May 16th, 1825 and returned on October 20th, successfully creating 12 treaties with 16 different tribes. George Hutter witnessed and signed four of the 12 treaties as a witness.⁵ George was moved again in 1827 to Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis, Missouri, where he would spend many years of his career.

George was promoted to the rank of Captain in May 1829, after having served at Jefferson Barracks for two years. He continued to serve at the Barracks where he met Harriet Risque of Lynchburg, Virginia in 1830, who was the daughter of Lynchburg attorney Major James B. Risque. Harriet was also the niece of Governor William Clark, who had earned his fame for co-leading the Lewis and Clark Expeditions of the Louisiana Territory. George and Harriet courted for a short time before getting married at Jefferson Barrack's on July 6th, 1830. Harriet gave birth to their first son, Ferdinand Charles Hutter, on May 16th, 1831, who was likely named after both Charles Lewis Hutter and Ferdinand Quintus Hutter, who were both brothers of George that had died in 1830 and January, 1831. George and Harriet remained at the Barracks and made it their home as George continued to serve in the military.

The following year, in 1832, the Black Hawk Indian War broke out after the Fox-Sauk tribes refused to leave their lands, claiming that a previous treaty from 1804 was not fully explained. As relations were strained, the U.S. government sent forces from Jefferson Barracks to intervene, which included George Hutter and the company of 39 men under his command.⁶ Serving under General Zachary Taylor, George participated in the Battle of Bad Axe of August 2nd, 1832, in which the U.S. Military routed the Fox-Sauk tribes. In a letter addressed to his brother, Edward Sixtus, George wrote that the Indian tribes suffered no less than 200 casualties at the Battle of Bad Axe.⁷ However, only a day prior to the appointed time to sign a peace treaty between the United States and Fox-Sauk tribes, Cholera broke out amongst the U.S. Military camps, claiming the lives of more than one out of every eight soldiers at the camps, George also wrote to Edward. George was afflicted with Cholera for a short term, but recovered to full health.

Shortly after his recovery, George gained a furlough from the military and he and his family journeyed east to visit family in Virginia and Pennsylvania. The furlough was extended after both George and his wife became ill. George recovered much sooner than Harriet, possibly due

⁵ Hutter, Stanley T., page 7.

⁶ Hutter, Stanley T., page 9.

⁷ Historic Sandusky Collection, George Hutter to Edward Sixtus Hutter, October 9th, 1832, Vol 1.

to her pregnancy of their second child, and was assigned to recruitment duty as to be able to stay home with his wife and one year old son. As time passed, more conflicts rose up between various Indian tribes and the United States. George was called to serve once again in Florida to battle the Creeks in 1838. However, after having served in the military for 18 years, George began to wish he could leave the military behind. Shortly after arriving in Florida, George wrote a letter to his brother Edward and said, “I cannot be contented separated from my family. I wish I was in a situation to quit the army. I would cheerfully labor hard, if I could make a good living at it so that I could settle myself and remain at home.”⁸ However, George remained convinced that, despite the difficulties and trials of remaining in the military, the military provided greater security than most other options.

In August, 1838, George wrote again to Edward about his efforts in the Second Florida War. George mentioned that the hard work of his military company was praised by various newspapers in the territory, as well as in letters personally addressed to George by Florida Governor, Richard K. Call. George hoped that earning the favor of the governor would be of some benefit, but as mentioned in the letter, the governor quickly became a hindrance to George. When the governor asked George to release all of his Creek prisoners, George declined, but then the governor went above George’s authority and asked Colonel Green to order George to release the Creek prisoners, which the colonel agreed to do. George wrote, “I feel truly mortified at this interference of the Governor and Col. Green. I told the Col. last evening, that he must now assume the management of all the Indians...and I am determined, not to harass myself hereafter – work night and day, to effect and object and then be interfered with as they have done.” George felt that the efforts of the colonel and governor were counterproductive and that he would be justified in no longer aiding either person unless ordered to do so.

Shortly after the incident with Governor Call, George requested in October a leave of absence from General Zachary Taylor, but the request was denied because Taylor believed that George’s service as an officer was still necessary. George remained in Florida and again wrote to his brother Edward on January 15th, 1839, and said that he planned to attack a camp of Creek Indians the next morning. George again expressed a desire to resign from the army as soon as arrangements could be made. The previous incident with Governor Call and Colonel Green left a foul taste in his mouth and George felt disgusted with the service. However, if George could not

⁸ George Hutter to Edward Hutter, June 22nd, 1838. Vol 3.

find a financially secure way to resign and support his family, he planned to petition General Zachary Taylor for a recommendation of a promotion. George also expressed to Edward an interest in returning to Easton, Pennsylvania, but he would be unable to remain with family while there. The details are left unexplained in George's letters, having only written that, "When I go to Easton, I must do as you said you would – I cannot go there and stay with any of my relations – after what has occurred there."⁹ It would not be until a year later in January, 1840, that George wrote to Edward from Florida and said, "I will not say much about your remarks in both your last (letters) about Sister – I have forgiven her".¹⁰

George received a furlough from General Taylor and left Florida in the summer of 1840. However, his expected stay in Virginia was short lived after he received orders to return to Florida in January, 1841. George was ordered by Colonel Vose to first report to New York, but George traveled separately from his company and first went to Washington to petition for a leave of absence to take care of personal business. Adjutant General Roger Jones granted the leave to George, but when George returned home, he received news that he was to be court-martialed in New York for disobeying orders, neglect of duty, and for unbecoming conduct of an officer. George fended off most of the charges, but was found guilty of neglect for not providing proper instructions to his sergeant, as well as failing to provide the travel information to Colonel Vose. On June 22nd, 1841, President Tyler released George Hutter from his position and from military service. Despite George's strong desire to not return to Florida, he petitioned the president for reinstatement. The petition was successful and President Tyler ordered George to return to Florida with his regiment.¹¹

In early 1842, George received a letter from Washington, D.C. All new military officers had to be approved by the Congressional Senate and the Senate did not approve of George's reinstatement. George argued that he had been previously appointed a position as Captain and that the president had formally rescinded the order that discharged him from the service. George was also allowed to serve for several months in the military and earn a pay, therefore, his name and position should not have gone before the Senate for approval. George considered this to be a great disservice and was forced to leave Florida and the military to return to home in Lynchburg, Virginia as a civilian. Shortly after arriving back in Lynchburg, George bought the Sandusky

⁹ George Hutter to Edward Hutter, January 15th, 1839. Vol 4.

¹⁰ George Hutter to Edward Hutter, January 26th, 1840. Vol 5.

¹¹ Hutter, Stanley T., pages 20-24.

Estate of Campbell County from John Otey on April 1st, 1842, where his family would remain for over 100 years. George struggled financially for the next several years as he adjusted to life outside of military service and he attempted to sell Sandusky along with 637 acres of land in 1845, but was unsuccessful.¹² George also applied to become Postmaster of Lynchburg, but he was declined.

George continued to struggle until he was recommissioned by President James K. Polk and promoted to the rank of Major on February 16th, 1847. George was ordered by Secretary of War William Marcy to report to Major General Winfield Scott in Mexico to participate in the Mexican-American War.¹³ Once again, George's name and rank were brought before the Senate for approval and he faced even stronger opposition than previously. Jefferson Davis, then a Senator from Mississippi who would later become the President of the Confederate States, strongly opposed George's appointment to the rank of Major. Davis agreed with George that his name should not have previously been voted on by the Senate in 1842, but because it was voted on and he was declined, it was not right for President Polk to promote George to Major. Davis argued that, because George remained away from the military for several years, he was a new appointee that must not be placed above others in order to avoid interfering with the system for regular promotions.¹⁴ However, George defeated his opposition and maintained his new position as Major and Paymaster in the U.S. Military.

George wrote to his family whenever it was possible while serving in Mexico. In a letter he wrote to his brother Edward on October 30th, 1847, George wrote that he and the men under his command had captured the town of Puebla. As a result, George and his men captured a colonel, and major, and various other minor officers, which he left unnamed. The forces that George defeated at Puebla were under the command of General Santa Anna, but according to the captured men, Santa Anna had left the city before the attack and was only ten miles away during the battle. It was believed that Santa Anna was heading for the coast and intended to leave the country. George also noted that he quartered himself in the same building that Santa Anna had stayed in before the capture of Puebla, and that he likely stayed in the same room because he was the senior officer and had the first choice for quarters.¹⁵

¹² George Hutter Newspaper Advertisement, March/April 1845, Vol. 7.

¹³ United States War Department to George Hutter, September 23, 1847. Vol. 7.5.

¹⁴ Ferdinand W. Risque to Edward Hutter, January 10th, 1848. Vol. 7.5.

¹⁵ George Hutter to Edward Hutter, October 30th, 1847. Vol. 7.5.

George's time in Mexico was relatively short in comparison to his service times in Florida and the Mid-west as the Mexican-American War ended in February, 1848. After the war, George was required to remain in New Orleans as Paymaster to deliver the extra pay ordered by Congress to the soldiers stationed there. However, while stationed in New Orleans, George was injured in an accident, which kept him in New Orleans for an extended duration.¹⁶ After recovering, George's career often kept him away from home as he traveled to make payments to other soldiers, but his service was much safer as the Mexican-American War was the last conflict George would be directly involved with. George continued to travel as Paymaster until the Civil War broke out with the attack on Fort Sumter in South Carolina in 1861. George made the final payments to the Union soldiers at Fort Sumter before the fort surrendered and he resigned from his military position on April 16th, only two days after the surrender of the fort and one day after President Lincoln's call to put down the rebellion.¹⁷

George was offered an officer's position in the Confederate Military, but he declined due to his old age and remained at home while his sons enlisted with the Confederates. In June, 1864, Union forces led by Major General David Hunter invaded Lynchburg and captured the Hutter family home, Sandusky, to use as headquarters during the battle. However, the Union forces were repelled by General Jubal Early and General Hunter quickly left Sandusky in the middle of the night. General David Hunter locked George and his family in a small room before departing and soldiers damaged several pieces of Hutter property as they left. George remained at Sandusky until his death at the age of 85 on July 31st, 1879.

¹⁶ Christian Jacob Hutter to Edward Hutter, September 29th, 1848. Vol. 7.5.

¹⁷ James Risque Hutter Personal Diary, April 16th, 1861.