

Hugh Lawson White to Andrew Jackson, January 14, 1814, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

HUGH L. WHITE TO JACKSON.

Knoxville, January 14, 1814.

Dear General , Whilst this world is infested with so many scoundrals, I deem it improper, that honest, and honorable, men, should be suffered, to remain, on other, than good, terms, for want, of the truth being told. This sentiment must be my apology for troubling you on a subject, in which, it may be thought I have no concern.

A few days since a letter from you reached General Cocke at this place, by which he was directed to cause Ratcliff and his property to be liberated, and in which his capture is reprehended in very strong terms. it unfortunately happens that those expressions are to be applied to Captain Rufus Morgan and his company, because they were the captors. As I too well know the numerous instances in which the property of indians, and indian countrymen has been wantonly pillaged and destroyed, and believe, that when writing you were only apprised of the capture, without knowing by whom made, or from what motives, I feel myself at no loss to account for the strong language with which the order of release is accompanied. But when you are made acquainted with the circumstances attending the taking, and the motives which produced it, I have ventured to say and still believe, that I know you too well, to suppose, that the term plunderers, or any other term of reproach, will be, by you, considered applicable, either to Captain Morgan, or his company.

Without any military experience Captain Morgan, voluntarily entered the service from those motives which actuate the patriot only. without a frown, he, in every instance, not only

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discharged his own duty: but kept his company in a disposition to do theirs likewise— during my stay at camp, my tent was pitched at his fire, therefore it is, that I do not speak of him, at random.

When first at Fort Strother, Ratcliff was the subject of conversation, I then heard some person (who I do not remember) say, letters found, at Catauley Town, placed his character in a suspicious light. upon my return to Fort Armstrong I repeated what I had heard; and have no doubt, in Captain Morgan's hearing. When last at Fort Strother, the same thing was stated by some of the Gentlemen from West Tennessee. in consequence of these statements, the idea had become very general, amongst the people, from East Tennessee, that Ratcliff had corresponded with the Red Sticks, and that a fear his letters, had been taken with Catauley, had induced an abandonment of his dwelling. When I left Fort Strother, Capt Morgan had not set off, he had no expectation, at that time, as I believe, of meeting with Ratcliff. The next morning, shortly after passing Ratcliffs farm, I overtook, three or four men from East Tennessee, who told me they had found out where Ratcliff and his negroes were and that they were going to take them; and asked my opinion on the subject. My advice was, not to touch him, as they had no orders, and were not possessed of the Evidence against him. this advice they followed.

I have only named this circumstance to shew, how prevalent the idea was, that Ratcliff and his property ought to be taken. On my rout I saw the old man and some of his negroes at John Ratcliffs and the residue of his negros some miles this side. Captain Morgan and his company came the same road after me, and (as I had done) accidentally, fell in with Ratcliff and his negroes, took him and the property which they believed to be his, under a conviction, I have no doubt, that they were doing an act, which, would meet the approbation, of every officer, of the Government. I have understood and believe, that about the time of the capture, Captain Morgan met with Judge Kelly, and not willing to depend upon his own opinion, alone, took that of the Judge, who, recommended the taking. I met capt. Morgan a short distance below Knoxville on his return—his company, Ratcliff and his property were with him, and I believe they had no property along, but what

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they believed to be Ratcliffs—the Capt. told me what he had done. I advised a Report to be made to Genl. Cocke, as he said, he felt at some loss, what to do with the property and never had expected or wished any personal benefit whatever from it. I understood he did write Genl. Cocke. I said nothing to capt. Morgan, respecting my opinion, of the propriety, of taking the negros—as the 31 opinion could be, then of no use, and might make him, uneasy. Old Ratcliff told me that after he was taken, nothing belonging to the indians, was molested by, either the Capt. or his company.

I know, none, can more readily, than yourself, realise the feelings of an honorable man when he receives censure, for an act, that he thought praise worthy; and am convinced, that although, you will not fail, to inflict a wound where you believe duty compels it; Yet, you will feel a pleasure, in healing that wound whenever it can be done with propriety.¹ As Col: Williams is the bearer, I need say nothing of news. On monday I go to Clarkesville—expect to be at Nashville February throughout. Believe me, when I assure you, that I am, as I ought to be, Your friend

1 After receiving this letter Jackson wrote (Feb. 1, 1814) to Capt. Rufus Morgan as follows:

“Sir I have just received your letter of the 11th ulto., which is the first intimation I had that you were the officer that had arrested Ratcliff The information I had received both as to Ratcliffs imprisonment, the taking of his negroes, and the taking of the hooping Boys Horses was from the path Killer, and from Doctor Vandyke, that Colo. Wears Regt. had committed the act of violence on both the hooping Boy and Ratliff. When I wrote to Genl. Cocke, I wrote with the honest indignation of my heart against such acts, surrounded with daily and nightly acts of atrocity, which heightened my feelings, But believe me when I say to you however I might condemn the act of arresting an individual and his property even believing him to be a villian shielded by want of proof, or however harshly I might reprobate the act committed on the property of a friendly Indian who fought and bled with me, still I never could be brought, to attach base or impure motives or intentions to Capt. Morgan in doing the act. It was certainly true, that I had when Bob Cataula was

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taken found a letter in his possession, from Ratliff that brought suspicions on him, but it did not amount to proof of treasonable correspondence with our enemies, or I should have arrested Ratliff and had him tried before a military tribunal, but still the arrest and punishment of Ratliff would not [have] justified a confiscation of his property. He belonged and was claimed as a member of a friendly tribe of Indians waring on our behalf with the hostile creeks, consequently he is entitled to all the privileges and protection of any other member of that nation, untill convictive proof of his treason is produced.” (Jackson MSS., Letter-Book E, p. 36.)