



The
**SEMINOLE
STRUGGLE**

A HISTORY OF AMERICA'S
LONGEST INDIAN WAR

JOHN AND MARY LOU MISSALL



Tukose Emathla (John Hicks).

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The Seminole Struggle

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A History of America's
Longest Indian War

John and Mary Lou Missall



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For our great-granddaughter, Raelynn:
May your own history, just beginning,
Be as happy as ours.

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Preface

*W*hen we published our initial work on the Seminole Wars in 2004, we lamented the fact that such an important series of events was widely unknown to the American public in general and to the majority of Floridians. Not that we should have been surprised: The war was fought in one small corner of the nation and therefore of little concern to Americans as a whole, and most Floridians weren't born in the state and would have had little opportunity to learn about the wars. Yet it shouldn't have been that way. The Seminole Wars were a major conflict for the nation and arguably one of the most formative events for the State of Florida. The Indian Wars of the American West are famous worldwide, yet the Seminole Wars were bigger than any western Indian war. The foundations for most of Florida's great cities are a result of the Seminole Wars, yet few of those cities' residents are aware of the fact. It was a historical oversight we felt was in need of correction.

In the intervening years the situation has begun to change. When we first gave talks about the Seminole Wars, it was largely to audiences who were totally unaware of the subject. Now a significant number of people attend in hope of learning more about a subject they are already interested in. During that period two major sites, Fort King in Ocala and the site of the Battle of Okeechobee, have become public property and are being developed as parks that will highlight their importance in Florida and American history. We certainly aren't taking personal credit for this blossoming of interest in the Seminole Wars. That rightfully goes to countless others who have worked diligently to bring this story to the attention of the general public and to convince local communities of the wars' significance. We applaud their determined and continuing efforts.

Still, we do feel our writings and talks on the Seminole Wars have done their part. We wrote our original work, *The Seminole Wars: America's Longest Indian Conflict*, because we could find no single book that gave a good overview of all three wars, their causes, and other factors we felt were important to the understanding of the conflict. We've been gratified by the book's success and its wide usage, and we feel privileged to have been able to work closely with so many other Seminole Wars scholars. We are also pleased to see a large number of other works written about certain aspects of the Seminole Wars, films on the subject, and discussions about matters relating to the wars. Through the efforts of many people, be they scholars, reenactors, or history enthusiasts in general, the word is spreading.

After twelve years in print, a simple updating of the original work was proposed, but we felt that would be inadequate. In the years since the original came out we've learned so much more about the Seminole Wars and associated subjects, and we feel we've matured as writers. Our perspectives have also changed. Although we attempted to balance the original work as much as possible to show both sides of the conflict, we always felt the book was lacking in the Seminole perspective, primarily because the primary sources from the period were overwhelmingly from white sources. Since the publication of *The Seminole Wars* we've become good friends with a number of Seminole tribal members and those who work closely with them, and we are beginning to have a better understanding of their point of view.

The other thing we felt the original work was lacking was an adequate treatment of the Third Seminole War. At the time we simply didn't have access to enough background material to gain a good understanding of the war, and we also felt that compared to the Second Seminole War, it didn't warrant much space in a book that covered such a wide expanse of time. Since then, working with our good friend Joe Knetsch, we have written a detailed history of the Third Seminole War, and a substantial portion of the text in the final three chapters in this book was taken from that work.

Besides the additional material on the Third Seminole War, we also probed deeper into the other two wars, reexamining source material we had looked at for the original work and reading new information that had come to our attention in the intervening years. Misconceptions on our part and errors were corrected, and new insights were added. Because approximately two-thirds of this book is new text and the structure has changed so much, we decided it also needed a new title so that researchers would not confuse the two.

Writing a new book also allows us to clear up some misconceptions on the part of some of our readers and to answer some of our critics. First off, this book is intended for a general audience and is not meant to break new scholarly ground or advance any sort of academic thesis. Our goal is to give the reader a clear understanding of the events of the Seminole Wars with as little social commentary as possible. We fully understand that great injustices were done, and we will address them to the extent we feel necessary in the epilogue, but our intention is to tell a story, not right past wrongs. Don't misunderstand us: The social issues involving the Seminole Wars are extremely important and need to be fully understood and addressed. We feel confident that by the time the reader finishes the book, he or she will appreciate how unjust the Seminole Wars were. We do not, however, feel that a general history is the place to address those issues. Making things better is multistep process: You find out what happened, you investigate and analyze the causes, you decide on a course of remedial action, and you attempt to implement it. This book only aims to help the reader accomplish the first step.

Whether or not readers proceed to the second step is up to them. We hope they do, but realistically know that only a small percentage will. And that's fine; not everyone will want to be a crusader. Sometimes it's enough to simply know what happened. The Seminole Wars period lasted almost fifty years and covered Florida from Pensacola to the Keys. There is plenty enough there to inspire any interested person. Ethnogenesis, culture, racial relations, politics, and underlying causes are very interesting and important subjects. Numerous scholarly books and articles on these and other subjects have been written, and we invite the reader to peruse the bibliography if they wish to delve deeper.

We must also take some time to correct the totally unfounded claim that we were somehow advocating Social Darwinism when we stated, "Native Americans were faced with the classic evolutionary imperative: adapt or die." Social Darwinism implies using evolutionary forces to achieve some sort of social goal; the Nazis were especially fond of this idea to promote their dreams of a "master race." At its best, Social Darwinism is foolish; at its worst, extremely evil. True Darwinism simply holds that when an entity is faced with change, how well it adapts to that change determines how well it survives. There are no moral implications and no predetermined outcomes. There can be no doubt that the Seminole faced tremendous pressure over the course of this extremely trying period. The fact that they did survive and adapt to these new conditions while keeping

their culture alive is a testament to their intelligence and fortitude. They did not yield, and we admire them for it. To anyone who understands true Darwinism, this is high praise indeed.

Because much of this book is derived from an earlier work, the list of people we wish to acknowledge must go back to some of those who helped us when we were working on the original project. It also must include many of those who have assisted, supported, and inspired us during those intervening years and people who have contributed to our other works that have in some way added to the value of this volume.

First of all, we'd like to thank our dear friend Annette Snapp for her years of friendship, detailed reviews of the manuscript, and numerous suggestions on how to improve it. It was she who introduced us to the Seminole Wars so many years ago, and we still turn to her for valued advice. Special thanks also go to Joe Knetsch for all his friendship, wisdom, and collaboration over the years, and especially for his contributions to those portions of this book dealing with the Third Seminole War. It was Joe who brought us into the Seminole Wars community and introduced us to so many wonderful and supportive people.

Obtaining a better understanding of the Seminole perspective was important to us, and among those who helped enlighten us were Paul Backhouse, director of the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Seminole Museum and his colleagues Mary Beth Rosebrough and Rechanda Lee, all of whom reviewed the manuscript and provided numerous insights. Our good friend Patsy West of the Seminole/Miccosukee Photo Archives reviewed our manuscript on the Third Seminole War, which added greatly to our understanding of the Seminole viewpoint. We must also thank dear friends and tribal members Brian and Pedro Zepeda (and their families), the late Billie Cypress, Carol Cypress, Willie Johns, Moses Jumper Jr., and Moses Osceola. Although we'll never truly understand the Seminole perspective, these people have given us a window through which we can observe and learn.

This book could not have been written without the friendship, inspiration, and assistance of our friends in the Seminole Wars Foundation and those within the Seminole Wars community. We realize "too numerous to name" is a lame excuse for not listing everyone, but we truly run the risk of forgetting those who should not be forgotten. This includes the many fine people we've met at the numerous Seminole War reenactments we have attended over the years, both reenactors and visitors. Foremost among them are Frank and Dale Laumer, who have welcomed us into their home more

times than we can count, and Earl and Bettie DeBary, who have always treated us like family.

Our appreciation also goes to the many helpful staff members at the following institutions, whose assistance made our work so much easier: Lee County Library, Fort Myers, Florida; Special Collections, Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, James Cusick, director; National Archives; Library of Congress; Florida State Archives and Library; the Florida Historical Society, Ben Brotemarkle, director; and Dale Cox of Old Kitchen Media.

Finally, we would like to thank all our very supportive friends and family members. We may have written this book sitting by ourselves in our lonely little offices, but the rooms are always filled with the presence of those we hold dear.

1500–1800

Florida, Land of Opportunity

In the spring of 1858, the departure of a steamship from a small island off the west coast of Florida signaled the end of nearly a half century of warfare between the United States and the Seminole people.¹ During that time Florida had gone from a Spanish colony to a U.S. Territory, then to a full-fledged member of the Union it would soon attempt to leave. The conflict had been known by a number of names over the years. At first it was simply “The Seminole War” and later “The Florida War.” The American people, their government, and finally historians defined a First, Second, and Third Seminole War. Soldiers and politicians had more colorful descriptions: disastrous, shameful, disgraceful, hopeless, and absurd. No one called it glorious.²

The Seminole saw things differently. They viewed the conflict as one continuous struggle, sometimes waged at the negotiating table, at other times fought on the battlefield. Even when soldiers weren’t actively pursuing the Indians, the army remained a presence on their borders or within their ancestral lands. If the Seminole weren’t arguing their case before a treaty commission, they were confronting land-hungry settlers determined to drive them out of Florida. For the Seminole, it was a constant battle to retain their culture and everything that was important to them.

The Seminole Wars had many causes, though most could be traced back to those that cause nearly all wars: greed, fear, pride, and intolerance. At first the fight was over the wealth derived from cattle and slaves, then finally the land itself. Although there were considerable differences between the three wars, they all shared the same goal of restricting or removing the Seminole. As the wars progressed, people from both sides feared for their safety, their homes, and their way of life, and many were prepared to carry on the fight to the last extremity.³

Although fought in Florida, the wars reverberated to a much wider arena. They started out as a clash between world empires, both old and new. Later they affected the entire nation, drawing in half of the U.S. Army, tens of thousands of volunteer fighters from as far away as Missouri, and even the U.S. Navy. Like all wars, they were expensive affairs, and the American people soon began to wonder whether it was worth the cost in dollars and lives. For the Seminole, the cost was enormous. At the end of the period, only one in ten Seminole remained in Florida. No one “won” the Seminole Wars; they only survived them.

To understand the Seminole Wars, we need to understand the origins of the Seminole people. At the time of the arrival of the first Europeans in the early 1500s, several hundred thousand Indians were living in Florida. Some tribes, like the Calusa in the southwest portion of the peninsula, had gained immense power and were dominant over their neighbors. Along the southeast coast were the Tequesta, Jeaga, Hobe, and others. The Ocale, Mayaca, Tocobaga, Ais, and other Indians resided in the center of the peninsula and along the central coasts. In northern Florida the various tribes were linguistically related and are known today as the Timucuans. In the eastern panhandle, the dominant people were the Apalachee. It was a level of population that would not be seen again for another four hundred years.⁴

Within two hundred years of the Spanish invasion, the population of indigenous Floridians had plummeted. Their decline may have started before the arrival of Juan Ponce de Leon in 1513 when unauthorized Spanish expeditions from Cuba or Hispaniola came ashore in search of trade opportunities or to capture slaves. Some ships may have inadvertently run aground or been driven ashore by violent storms. Such contact could have led to the accidental transmission of pathogens. Disease could also have been carried by Indians conducting normal commerce between Florida and islands where the Spaniards were already established. With no natural immunity to European diseases, many Indians were doomed.⁵

Eager to exploit whatever riches might be available in Florida and the unknown territory north of it, the Spanish launched several exploration/colonization efforts. The Narváez expedition landed in 1528, followed by Hernan de Soto in 1539. For nearly all of the Spaniards involved, the quest for riches proved fatal. Ponce de Leon was mortally wounded fighting the Calusa, and both Narváez and de Soto died during their expeditions, along with most of their followers. Left behind were more than rotting corpses and rusting weapons. Wherever the Spaniards traveled, the diseases they carried infected the population, often decimating entire villages. The complex social organization that had defined the Native cultures for centuries began to unravel.⁶

Temporary incursions could be survived, and not all diseases were equally fatal or struck all tribes and villages at the same time. Nor were the Indians bound by the same political boundaries we know today. Much of what we now consider Florida, Alabama, and Georgia was culturally interconnected, and the founding of St. Augustine in 1565 didn't change that. People were resilient and rebuilt their societies, maintaining the important traditions of their ancient cultures while incorporating useful ideas from the Europeans and other Indian nations. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, tribes continued to take in refugees, exchange brides to cement alliances, or integrate captured enemy women and children into their own groups, just as they had done for thousands of years. Trade flourished, especially in European goods, and new discoveries and technologies were brought into their daily lives.⁷

What did change were the patterns of interactions and the size of the populations. Forced labor and warfare greatly reduced the number of Indians in the southeast, while periodic outbreaks of disease further lowered their numbers. During the seventeenth century, in an attempt to Christianize the Indians, the Spanish established a string of missions along the Georgia/north Florida coast that extended westward to the Apalachicola River. The founding of the English Carolina Colony in the late 1600s also served to disrupt long-standing patterns of exchange between the Indians of the southeast. Some Native people accepted Christianity; others did not. Some supported the English, while others were loyal to the Spaniards. Many wanted nothing to do with any of the newcomers and were either forced from their homes by white expansion or left of their own volition.⁸

Through it all, it is important to remember that while the Native Americans were reacting to situations brought on by the presence of the Europeans, they were making decisions based on their own interests. As populations dwindled and old groupings fell apart, many Indians had to decide what was best for themselves or their people. Was there an advantage to accepting Christianity and living in a mission? Did family ties and a longing for tradition make some people flee to areas where the whites had yet to exert significant influence? Some people refused to give up control of their lives; others were willing to submit. Throughout these centuries, new alliances and coalitions formed, sometimes between Native American groups, sometimes between Indian and white.

The situation changed drastically in the first decade of the eighteenth century when English and allied Creek Indians raided and destroyed the Spanish missions of north Florida. Most of the Indians who lived at the missions located between the Apalachicola and Suwannee Rivers were known

as Apalachees, and large numbers were taken captive. Many were sold into slavery, but there is every reason to believe that some, mostly women and children, were integrated into the conquering tribes in the traditional manner. Many of those who escaped the raids fled to the safety of St. Augustine or joined Native groups that were not allied with the English. As far as Europeans were concerned, the aboriginal tribes of Florida were nearly extinct. The groups they knew as the Timucua, Apalachee, Guale, and others were no longer identifiable.⁹

Yet not all the people were gone, nor were the survivors confined to the areas where they had once lived. Much of the surrounding lands of the southeast were culturally familiar to them, and the European-imposed boundaries were meaningless. Some of the survivors formed small groups that managed to stay hidden in the more remote parts of the peninsula or moved to other areas in the southeast and joined the tribes there. Some of those refugees maintained a sense of their identity and kept a memory of the place they had once called home. When the time was right, they would return there.¹⁰

One of the things that separates today's Seminole from most other Indian nations is the fact that there is some historical evidence providing us with clues to the tribe's formation. Other Indian nations were already well established when the Europeans arrived, and we can only guess at their history by using oral histories and archaeological, linguistic, or genetic evidence. In contrast, the Seminole tribe developed in the presence of the European invasion, and we are fortunate that the tribe's formation happened at a time when outsiders could observe and record some of the events pertaining to its genesis.

Europeans certainly did not create the Seminole—the Seminole did it themselves—but Europeans did create the conditions that forced the tribe to emerge. The annihilation of the Native population and the scarcity of Spanish settlements made the underpopulated peninsula attractive to new Indian settlers from adjacent areas in the South. Some were leaving ancestral homelands after conflicts with English settlers, while others came in search of new hunting grounds to satisfy the European deerskin trade. Even the term *Seminole* may have been European in origin, and its application was primarily for white convenience. Finally, it was the long war against the United States that forced the emergence of a Seminole identity from several scattered, sometimes antagonistic, tribes. These conflicts “had the power to forge new identities, and as a consequence, create new self-defined ethnic bonds, and a shared history,” a process referred to by anthropologists as *ethnogenesis*.¹¹

The people we call Seminole today had their origins among the tribes of what is now the southeastern United States. The ancestors of these tribes had been devastated by warfare and European-introduced diseases, and, like those in Florida, their societies had been in a state of flux for much of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As older tribes in the southeast fell apart, newcomers from the west entered the area and mixed with or displaced the original groups. New groupings arose that collectively became known to the Europeans as “Creeks.” The first major group the British traded with during the late 1600s lived along Ocheese Creek in what is now Georgia. When referring to those Indians, the Englishmen would call them “The Ocheese Creek Indians.” Over time, the reference changed to “Ocheese Creeks” and was finally shortened to “Creeks.” Although these different Native groups possessed a common culture and often worked in concert when dealing with other Indian nations or the whites, they were not a true “nation.” Even whites understood that an Indian’s primary allegiance was to his or her clan or town, and thus referred to the entire group as “The Creek Confederacy.”¹²

One of the most important aspects of Creek culture was the “White/Red” duality, having to do with the balance of human nature and the forces of the natural world. For the Creeks, and later the Seminole, it was important to maintain a balance between White influences and Red. Towns were designated either White or Red and usually came in pairs. Although each town’s duties and responsibilities could be quite complex, “white” towns and their leaders tended to be dominant in times of peace, while “red” towns would come to the fore in times of war.

Another important division among the Creeks was linguistic. Although most spoke languages belonging to the Muskogean family, the differences in those dialects were often great enough to make them unintelligible from one another. In a general sense, the Creeks fell into two distinct groups that were labeled “Upper” and “Lower” by whites. Although these divisions appear very neat and orderly, in reality they were never precisely defined, and the makeup of each group shifted over time. Like all generalities they should be viewed with a degree of suspicion, but are necessary to comprehend the events of the time.¹³

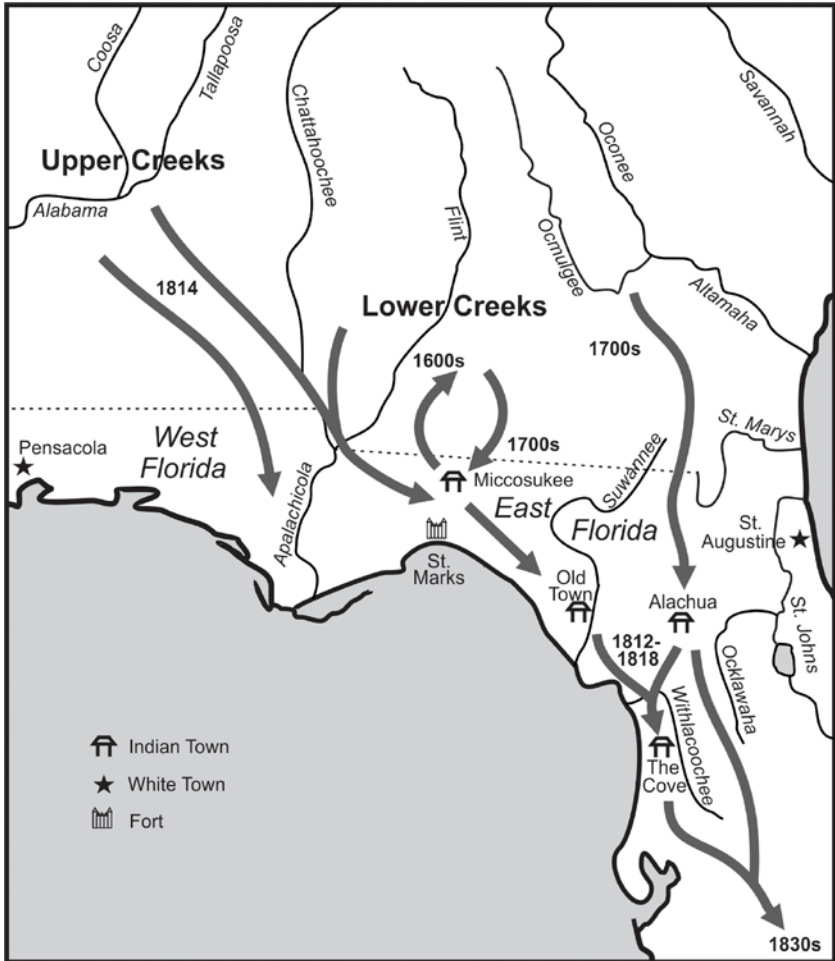
The tribes that constituted the Lower Creeks occupied what is now southern Georgia, primarily along the Flint and Chattahoochee Rivers and points east. Their principal language was Hitchiti, though regional dialects and other tongues were present. The Upper Creeks lived in what is now eastern Alabama, in the area of the Alabama River and its two main tributaries, the Coosa and Tallapoosa. The majority spoke Muskogee, a language

related to Hitchiti but not mutually comprehensible. Although both groups shared the same Muskogean culture, long-standing animosities and philosophical differences between the individual Creek tribes were not easily put aside and often led to violence and bloodshed among the different groups.¹⁴

Among the tribes of the southeast the imaginary line between the English colonies and Spanish Florida was nonexistent and of little concern, and even European powers were often in dispute as to exactly where the boundary might be. As far as the Indians north of the line were concerned, Florida was not a foreign land, but part of one continuous homeland. Situations created by the presence of the whites may have forced many of them to leave a particular locality they called home, but in many cases they would have viewed it as a temporary withdrawal, not a total abandonment of their territory.

Over the course of the eighteenth century, numerous bands intermittently migrated into Florida, taking up residence among those who were already living there. They were primarily Lower Creeks who, for various reasons, saw the opportunity for a better life in a sparsely occupied land. Some were fleeing white encroachment, while others were lured south by the Spanish, who welcomed the fierce warriors as allies against the aggressive English colonists. Most of the Indians were taking advantage of economic opportunities, be it slaving, cattle ranching, hunting, or salvaging from the numerous wrecks to be found on the Florida beaches. Others had come south because of political or personal disputes within their own tribes. Many were returning to familiar places where they had conducted seasonal hunts for generations. Because the Creeks were made up of many individual tribes, it would be a mistake to think that they all were related and always got along with each other. All these groups came to Florida for their own reasons and were sometimes in competition with other tribes that had come before them. Some bands maintained their identity, while others were absorbed by larger tribes.

Two groups, both speaking Hitchiti, stand out in particular. The first were the Mikasuki, who settled around Lake Miccosukee (northeast of present-day Tallahassee) in the first decades of the eighteenth century. Evidence suggests that some of these people may have been Apalachees who had fled north after the destruction of the Spanish missions by English and Creek raiders. For them, moving south a decade or so later wasn't a migration to a new land; it was a return to an old home. As their community grew and the tribe became prosperous, ties with other Creek towns lessened and a separate identity developed, one they fiercely protected.¹⁵



Seminole migration.

Map by John Missall.

For the present-day Seminole this tie to the Apalachee is an important distinction. During the wars of removal, one of the government's justifications for removing the Seminole from Florida was that they were somehow not "native" to the land but were breakaway Creeks. For whites, if an Indian lived north of the Georgia/Florida line, he was a Creek. Those who had originally lived south of it were Timucuan, Apalachee, or someone else. The Indians of the southeast never recognized such a line, and the culture flowed

freely across the area. Considering that most of the Seminole who remained in Florida at the end of the Seminole Wars were Mikasuki, the Seminole of today feel justified in claiming to be as native to the soil as any other tribe in the United States. This, and the belief that remnant Calusa were absorbed into the tribe, point to a centuries-old presence in the peninsula.

The other group that became a prominent part of the Seminole tribe settled in the north-central portion of the peninsula in the mid-eighteenth century. For many years, the Spanish had maintained a number of cattle ranches in northern Florida, and various native peoples had worked the ranches, learning the arts of animal husbandry and horsemanship. One of the largest ranches was La Chua, located near a large, fertile prairie south of present-day Gainesville, preserved today as Payne's Prairie State Park. The area, known then as the Alachua Prairie, was considered the best grazing land in the peninsula, and an abundance of free-ranging cattle roamed the area after the ranch was abandoned in the early 1700s. Decades later a group of Oconee Creeks moved into the area and quickly developed a thriving cattle business. Their leader was Ahaye (Ahoya), but his vast herds of cattle soon earned him the name "Cowkeeper." Like others, these people were not entering an unknown land. They were simply moving into another part of their ancestral range.¹⁶

There are several schools of thought as to the origin of the term *Seminole*. The most commonly accepted version holds that it is derived from the Spanish word *cimarron*, a term originally applied to cattle, which was generally taken to mean groups that had gone off on their own. Because there is no "r" sound in the Hitchiti or Muskogee languages, the Natives pronounced it something like "Cimallon," which eventually became "Seminole." On the other hand, there is a Muskogee term *isti semoli*, meaning "those who camp at a distance" or "free people at distant fires," and some believe this is the origin of the term.¹⁷

Because the Spaniards and the English (who occupied Florida from 1763 to 1783) dealt primarily with the Alachua band, the term originally referred only to that particular group. It was also an indication that the Florida Indians had become politically separate from the Creeks. Before the period of the Second Seminole War the Florida Indians did not usually see themselves as one tribe. As far as they were concerned, they were Seminoles (Alachuas), Mikasukis, Tallahasseees, Apalachicolas, Yuchees, or members of some other group. In an attempt to lend some clarity to this rather confusing situation, we will generally adhere to the convention of using *Seminole* to denote any Indian living in Florida. When necessary, we will call the

individual tribes by their proper names, using “Alachuas” as a designation for the descendants of Cowkeeper’s band.

We will also apply the convention of using the spelling “Mikasuki” to refer to the tribe and “Miccosukee” to refer to the lake they originally lived near and the area surrounding it. The reader should bear in mind that we are using Mikasuki in a historical sense, and it is not to be confused with modern designations. In Florida today there are the federally recognized but politically separate Seminole Tribe of Florida and Miccosukee Tribe of Florida Indians, along with several unaffiliated groups. The majority are descended from the historical Mikasuki tribe, though there are a significant number of Muskogee-speaking Creeks who are members of the Seminole Tribe. The separate “Seminole Nation” is located in Oklahoma, and these people are the descendants of those tribal members who were forced there by the Seminole Wars.

The conflicts of the Old World soon brought changes to the lives of all Floridians, no matter what their ethnic background. In 1763 the Seven Years’ War, known in America as the French and Indian War, came to an end. As part of the resulting treaty, Spain was forced to relinquish control of Florida to England. Two hundred years of Spanish occupation ended, and what would become known as the “English Period” began. The fact that Native Americans occupied much of the land and were the primary residents of Florida was of little concern to the treaty’s negotiators. As far as Europeans were concerned, the Indians were subjects of one monarch or another, their homelands and futures mere bargaining chips in the game of global politics.

For the Florida Indians, the change in colonial government had both advantages and disadvantages. The English tended to be more interfering and demanding, but were also more interested in doing business, primarily in the procuring of deerskins and other animal hides. The size of this trade was immense, often exceeding a hundred thousand skins annually. With the British now in control of all eastern North America, it was an exceptionally well regulated and organized trade, with competition limited and prices controlled. Trading company agents, known as “factors,” kept meticulous track of the number of skins each hunter brought in, crediting the Indian’s account against goods purchased.¹⁸

Some might assume that the deerskin trade was viewed by the Indian as nothing more than a way to turn his favorite leisure activity into a part-time job that provided him with the extra cash needed to purchase a few European luxuries. That would be a highly erroneous assumption. The Indians of the

Southeast were now professional hunters. Long gone were the days of hunting with bows and arrows or stone-tipped spears. Guns were a necessity, and efficient skinning required the use of steel knives. Pottery was often replaced by metal cookware, and mill-woven fabric usually took the place of buckskin clothing.¹⁹ Although most of a hunter's income would be used to buy necessities such as food and clothing, a good portion also went for non-necessities. A successful hunter would gain status and respect in his society just as a great athlete or thriving businessman does today. He could obtain a better gun, a more ornate tomahawk, beads or colorful cloth for his wife, trinkets for his children, slaves to work his fields, or bright silver ornaments and eye-catching ostrich feathers to show off his hard-earned status. He could also trade his skins for rum, tobacco, and other things that brought him pleasure.

Key to the operation of the British trading houses was the concept of credit. A hunter would obtain his ammunition and other supplies before the hunt. The factor would keep track of each individual's purchases and apply credit to the account when the skins were turned in at the end of the hunt. Sadly, it was just as easy to fall into debt in the eighteenth century as it is in the twenty-first. All too often the number of skins brought in was not enough to cover the cost of the purchases made earlier. In periods of warfare the debts grew even deeper, as more credit was extended for munitions and less time was spent on the hunt. For many a hunter it seemed as if there was always a negative balance on the books.²⁰

As might be expected, intensive hunting led to a decline in the deer population close to the Indians' homes. As their debts grew larger, hunters had to go farther afield to find enough game to meet their quotas. The time spent on hunting trips went from weeks to months. This need to find new hunting grounds was another factor in bringing more Indian settlers into Florida. With deer becoming scarce in other parts of the Southeast, many Creek, Alachua, and Mikasuki hunters began to move farther south into the peninsula, sometimes as far as the Everglades. At first they occupied temporary hunting camps, but as the trips grew longer and the distance away from home grew greater, many hunters brought their families with them and established new villages. Some who had come from Georgia or the Carolinas integrated into the existing Florida tribes, while others kept to themselves and retained their old tribal designations. Some remnants of the original tribes, such as any remaining Calusa, were absorbed by the newcomers. Other groups created new identities. It is little wonder the English simply gave up trying to keep track of it all and began to apply the term "Seminole" to any Indian living in Florida.²¹

Although the Seminole had begun to separate politically from the Creeks, they still retained the Creek culture and continue to do so today. The primary social units are the clans, and this is where a person's main allegiance lies. In historical times there were more than dozen clans, which bore such names as Panther, Bear, or Wind. Among present-day Florida Seminole, a loss of population caused primarily by the wars has reduced the number of clans to eight. Unlike European society, where people tend to take their father's surname and trace their lineage through the paternal line, Creek/Seminole clans are matrilineal. A person identifies with his mother's clan, not his father's, no matter who his father was or how powerful the father's clan. Traditionally a husband would move in with his wife's clan, but still retain the identity of his mother's clan. If the marriage dissolved, the husband returned to his own clan, but children and common property stayed with the wife.²² Under such a matrilineal system, leaders were chosen from a ruling clan, which meant succession did not pass from father to son but to a brother or a nephew within that clan. Because a father might be more attached to his own clan, the upbringing of a male child would fall to his uncles or other male members of the mother's clan. For the Seminole of the past and of today, "family" often means anyone of the same clan, no matter how many generations removed or how distant their residence.²³

In the historic period, although a Seminole's first allegiance was to the clan, much of his or her social life was centered on the town, or "talwa." The term "town" can be misleading, prompting visions of a cluster of buildings all confined within distinct boundaries. A Seminole town was much more than a geographic entity. Indeed, a significant portion of the population might live some distance away from the town center in remote villages or camps, often populated by members of the same clan. The town was the ceremonial and political center of the Seminole's world, the place where they would gather in times of celebration or danger. Towns had certain features that differentiated them from the satellite villages. Foremost was a large ceremonial square with a central fire made up of four logs arranged so that they pointed in the cardinal directions. In most cases there would also be a ball court and a council house.²⁴

While the headman of a town might be chosen for reasons of lineage, other titles were conferred by merit, most often earned in warfare. Titles often replaced names, and many of the names that non-Seminole recognize from the Seminole War period are, in truth, titles. The most common of these were Micco (head chief), Emathla (war party leader), Tustennuggee (village war leader), and Hadjo or Fixico (fearless or courageous warrior).

This results in names such as Holata Micco, Tukose Emathla, Halleck Tustennuggee, and Coa Hadjo.²⁵

As in all cultures, ceremonies, rituals, and religious beliefs play an important part in the lives of the Seminole. The most significant ritual was, and still is, the annual Green Corn Ceremony or Green Corn Dance, as it is often called. Like *town*, the term *dance* can be a bit misleading. True, members of the tribe spend a significant portion of their time chanting and moving in rhythmic patterns around the central fire, but it is much more than simple recreation. The dances have meaning, conveying tribal history, philosophy, and mores. Dancing helps bring continuity to the Indians' lives, bringing them closer to the world in which they live and the lives of their ancestors.²⁶

Foremost of all, the Green Corn Dance is a time of spiritual purification and cleansing. Although tribal courts are no longer held during the ceremony, other practices continue as they have for centuries, in the same or in modified form. Seminole warriors of the nineteenth century who practiced ritual fasting, bloodletting, and the taking of the "black drink" would no doubt notice changes, but they would still feel at home at one of today's gatherings. And although the entire ceremony is a very serious affair, it is also one of joy and celebration. Fasts are broken by feasts, and a lacrosse-like ball game helped settle disputes and release tensions, and provided an opportunity for young people of both sexes to mingle. By the end of the four-day celebration, the community was spiritually renewed and prepared to face the challenges of the coming year.²⁷

Among those who were referred to as "Seminole" were a significant number of blacks. Although these "Black Seminole" were not biologically Indian and not truly members of the tribe, many of them were brought up in the culture and fought alongside the Seminole. By the time of the Seminole Wars they had become a recognizable group, and the name, inaccurate as it may be, has stuck.

Throughout the first Spanish colonial period, the imaginary line between Florida and Georgia meant something very real to the slaves toiling on the English plantations in Georgia and South Carolina: It meant freedom. Once an escaped slave crossed the border into Spanish Florida, he or she was essentially a free person. Most escaped blacks lived near the Spanish settlements, where the governors, chronically short of soldiers and settlers, welcomed the runaways. Armed and supplied by the Spaniards, the former slaves had their own militia and a small fortification north of St. Augustine known as Fort Mosé. With the coming of British control in 1763, these "Maroons" (a word also derived from *cimarron*) faced the pros-

pect of being returned to slavery in the other English colonies, so many of them departed for Cuba with the Spaniards. For those who remained, the safest refuge was among the Seminole, and for new runaways it was virtually the only choice.²⁸

The number of freedom-seeking slaves increased during the years of the American Revolution, when the English offered freedom to any escapees who would leave their rebel masters and join the loyalist ranks. Their efforts were aided by the general disruption of life in the wartime South, which gave numerous bondsmen the opportunity to flee. Those who reached the British lines often became soldiers, and Southern plantation owners feared these men would return to unleash a slave uprising. After the end of the war, some of those blacks remained in Florida and took up residence among the Seminole.²⁹

Freedom, of course, comes in varying degrees. Since long before the arrival of the Europeans, Indians had kept Indian slaves, usually in the form of defeated enemies. In Florida, runaway blacks who found themselves among the Seminole might also be enslaved; it depended upon circumstances and personalities. A black who appeared bold and intelligent might be welcomed as a free man or woman. Others might be taken in simply for the labor they could provide. One village might welcome runaways; others might want nothing to do with them and turn them away. Blacks who had fled their white masters were dreaming of a better life. There was no guarantee they were going to get it.

Many blacks were actually purchased by the Indians. Creek/Seminole culture had existed alongside Southern culture for decades, and the institution of slavery was something the Indians were familiar and comfortable with. Because most runaways had been born and raised on plantations they were experienced agriculturalists, and Indians understood that there was money to be made in farming. Surplus crops could be sold for a profit, and if slaves were able to produce good harvests, they were valuable. The more slaves an Indian owned, the more money he could make, and the more prestige he accrued.³⁰

Slavery, like freedom, also comes in varying degrees. Most white Europeans, believing in a God-given racial superiority, looked down upon other races. From the point of view of many whites, blacks deserved to be slaves; they were created by God for the purpose of mindless labor. For the most part, the Indians did not possess such a strong prejudice. Unlike the majority of whites, they did not consider blacks to be inherently inferior. Blacks might be different, but they were still people, and were treated with the same level of respect—or disrespect—that anyone else would be

afforded. For most blacks in Florida, being the slave of a Seminole was nearly equal to being free. There were no overseers, no whips, and no mothers torn from their children on the auction block. True, the slaves were not free to leave their masters, but where would they have gone if the opportunity had arisen? There was, indeed, no safer or more promising place within walking distance. Compared to life on a Southern plantation, being a slave to a Florida Indian was perhaps the best life an English or American slave could hope for.³¹

Congressman Joshua Giddings, in his 1858 book dealing with the treatment of the Maroons, commented on the relationship, saying, "They [the Indians] held their slaves in a state between that of servitude and freedom; the slave usually living with his own family and occupying his time as he pleased, paying his master annually a small stipend in corn and other vegetables. This class of slaves regarded servitude among the whites with the greatest degree of horror." Although Giddings was painting a rosy picture to support his abolitionist agenda, he was not that far from the truth.³²

Another difference between Indian and white slavery was a legal one. In white society, property came with a bill of sale. Indians had little use for paperwork in their own society and often didn't obtain a receipt for a slave purchased from a white. This lack of documentation often caused problems between Indian slave owners and unscrupulous white slave catchers who would claim blacks that an Indian couldn't prove he owned. On the other hand, it might have been a disadvantage to be a free Black Seminole. A black who couldn't prove ownership or freedman's status could, by the white man's law, become enslaved. Being a slave to a prominent Indian offered a certain degree of protection, and many blacks may have been slaves in name only.³³

The status of blacks born into the tribe could be confusing to whites, due to the Seminole's matrilineal society. In general, a child born to an Indian woman was automatically considered a member of her clan, no matter what the background of the father. Conversely, a child born to a black woman of an Indian father was usually not considered an Indian. Even if the mother was a slave, it didn't mean the child was also a slave, though as long as that person lived with his or her mother, he or she would live like a Seminole slave. Whites, especially slave owners, saw things differently: Any amount of black ancestry made a person black, and if a person's parent was a slave, so was that person. To the Indians, it was not so simple.

Over the years, the Black Seminoles developed their own unique culture, a combination of African, Indian, and plantation influences. Many spoke the Indian language, dressed in Indian clothing, and some even rose to posi-

tions of leadership. Besides being valued for their agricultural skills and fighting ability, blacks were also appreciated as interpreters. Rarely did an Indian speak English or Spanish. Whites who spoke either of the Creek tongues were just as rare. Runaways also had the advantage of having lived among the whites. A person who understood both cultures was bound to be of value.³⁴

Estimating the Black Seminole population is an impossible task. Populations varied over time, and defining a person's race is often difficult. For decades, all three races had intermingled, and a portion of the population was mixed-blood. What may have been more of a determining factor was the group a person associated with. Did he or she live closely with the Indians or did that person reside in one of the separate black villages? Did they speak Hitchiti or Muskogee more fluently than English? Did they dress in the manner of a European or an Indian? It might also depend on who you asked. A black might consider himself an Indian, while an Indian might consider the same person a black. As scholars, we love to categorize and divide things into neat packages; it makes comprehension much easier. The real world is rarely so precise, and people living in such a fluid and tenuous situation were less worried about such matters. The best we can say is that at any one time, the number of blacks among the Seminole was probably not more than 20 percent of the Seminole population.³⁵

Many European practices were, by nature, foreign to the Indians of the time. Title to land (with its surveyed boundaries), colonial governments, and global empires were imperfect concepts to people who had no cultural experience with them. Faced with whites who understood Indian culture no better than the Indians understood white culture, the Creek and Seminole people worked to maintain their societies and culture. Survival or economic success often meant cooperating with the whites, while at other times it meant fighting them. Dealing with the various colonial governments was no doubt frustrating for the Florida Indians, as policy in the Americas was determined in some faraway Old World capital, dictated by priorities that had no real relevance to the needs of Native Americans. Furthermore, alliances in Europe could change overnight, making today's bitter enemy tomorrow's trading partner. First there had been the Spaniards, then the English. Starting in 1776, there was a new force to be reckoned with: the Americans.

The American Revolution was not the Seminole's war, but they soon became embroiled in it. Loyalists from the South fled to East Florida, one of the three English colonies (along with West Florida and Canada) that did not join the revolution, and St. Augustine soon became a center of Tory resistance. The English, quick to exploit any advantage, recruited the

Seminole and some Creeks as allies. Occasional war parties raided into rebel Georgia, laying waste to frontier settlements and stealing livestock. Runaway slaves, increasing in number due to wartime confusion, joined the Seminole ranks. Unfortunately, the Seminole picked the losing side. By the time the war was over, the victorious Americans looked upon the Seminole as mortal enemies.³⁶

The end of the Revolution also brought political change to Florida. During the war, Spain had allied itself with the United States and had re-taken West Florida from the English. In 1783 all of Florida was returned to Spanish control, thus ending the twenty-year English Period. For the diplomats who had negotiated the Treaty of Paris, the concerns of the Seminole were not a factor. Florida was strategically important, and even though Spain could not afford the colony, the idea of simply letting the Indians have it probably never came to mind.

Faced with a sometimes hostile wilderness between St. Augustine and Pensacola, the English had divided Florida into two separate colonies, East and West Florida. Upon regaining Florida the Spaniards saw the wisdom of this division and maintained it. East Florida consisted of the entire peninsula east of the Apalachicola River. West Florida extended from the Apalachicola to the Mississippi and included New Orleans, Mobile, and Baton Rouge. Although remnants of the old King's Highway still ran between the capitals of St. Augustine and Pensacola, it was virtually unused by whites. It was easier to get from one colonial capital to the other by taking a ship around the peninsula.

The Spanish government, troubled by restive populations throughout their empire, sent minimal garrisons to St. Augustine, St. Marks, and Pensacola. The nobility of Europe believed that without the strong hand of royalty to keep things under control, the United States would soon fall into anarchy. It would not take long, they thought, for the thirteen states to have a falling out among themselves. The garrisons in Florida might have to deal with lawless bands of desperados, but certainly not any large, aggressive force.

Even without the American presence, Spain soon found itself ill-equipped to administer its vast New World holdings, which also included the immense Louisiana Territory. As Europe fell into disarray because of the French Revolution, Spain found its military budget strained beyond capacity. For the Americans, inspired by their victory over the English and their ability to restrain their own potential anarchy, a grand vision of the future was emerging. Sooner or later, Spain and the United States would have to come to some sort of agreement about Florida. Whatever that agreement was, the Seminole would not be present at the negotiations.

1810–1813

The Plot to Conquer Florida

For the various Native American nations in the Southeast, opening a line of communications with the new United States could prove difficult. Much of the Seminole and Creek contact was through the trading houses, but many of them were in a state of flux due to the war. Some merchants remained loyal to the Crown but were forced out of Georgia and the Carolinas. Others embraced the new nation, but it took time to establish a viable presence among the wary Indians. Official channels were just as confusing. During the Revolution and for several years thereafter, the Natives often had to negotiate with the individual states. The adoption of the Constitution supposedly passed these matters on to the new federal government, but most frontier states were still vitally interested in Indian affairs and often pursued their own policies. Another problem was that until Indian relations reached the crisis stage, few whites cared about Native concerns; the war had left the authorities with plenty of other issues to deal with. Bloodshed and confrontation were a continual problem along the ever-expanding frontier, but the proactive diplomacy necessary to prevent conflict was almost nonexistent.

The precise legal status of the Indian tribes proved difficult for Americans to define. Were they sovereign nations (as the Indians maintained), dependent entities, or something else? In the history of international diplomacy, there was little precedent for dealing with nations that existed within another nation's borders. Throughout history, when such situations occurred, the smaller nations were either obliterated or absorbed into the larger and more powerful society. The idea of "let them be and respect their rights" was almost unheard of. Americans, believing themselves to be "enlightened" people, tried to find new ways to deal with the situation.

For the most part, nothing worked. The subsequent policies of the United States reflect the uncertainty and ambiguity. Up until the creation of the Interior Department in 1849, Indian tribes were dealt with through the War Department.¹ Normally it was the responsibility of the State Department to negotiate with other nations, since the War Department's job was exactly what its name implied. This indicates that America expected to have to fight for much of the continent.

Were the Indian nations actually hostile? Most of them welcomed the opportunity to conduct trade and hoped to maintain peaceful relations. They had developed sophisticated diplomatic practices and rituals that had served them well for centuries. Unfortunately, successful, long-lasting agreements require two parties that are willing to compromise and see things from the other's point of view. Rarely was that the case on the American frontier.

It was generally when whites began to encroach upon Indian land that problems arose, and those difficulties were multiplied by the character of many border-dwelling whites. Shifty traders fleeced unsuspecting Indians, while greedy speculators laid claim to vast tracts of Indian land, often before any treaties were signed. Unprincipled squatters and certain criminal elements also pressed upon the Indian lands. Americans knew that if the Indians went to war, white actions were often at the root of discord. Capt. John T. Sprague, a participant in and a historian of the Second Seminole War, understood the problem very well. "Upon this, as upon all Indian borders, there is a class of men destitute of property and employment, who for excitement and gain, would recklessly provoke the Indian to aggressions, and in the midst of which, escape detection and punishment, leaving the burden to fall upon the honest and industrious."² Although this lawless element made up only a small minority of the white population, enough of them existed to create continual problems for both sides.

The situation was exacerbated by the fact that there was virtually no legal protection for Native Americans at the time. Sprague wrote, "No rights were conceded to the Indians, and every act which interfered with the designs of individuals crowding within the Indian limits in all quarters, was regarded as the commencement of hostilities. Personal abuse was heaped upon them, their property and persons disregarded; no law shielded them, and no protection was given, other than that which was sought by the untiring exertions of the agent."³

Sprague was correct. Very often the only white person who would stand up for the rights of the Indians was the appointed Indian Agent. Unfortunately, there was no guarantee that he could, or even wanted to, do any

good. One problem was that the agent was a political appointee, selected by the president and approved by the senate. Because most appointments were handed out for political reasons and not according to a person's merits for the position, it was not unusual for an agent to be unqualified, incompetent, or corrupt. Depending on the administration's objectives, the agent might be instructed to protect the Indians' rights, or he might be chosen to promote the settler's agenda. Even when the agent was honest and trying to do his best (as many did), he had to remember that he could easily be replaced whenever the political winds shifted direction. Added to that was the fact that Indians were rarely allowed to testify in court, and usually only on behalf of a white person. For the Indian who had been wronged, violent retribution often seemed the only recourse.

Although frontier difficulties could often be traced to the actions of unscrupulous opportunists, there were other, less obvious causes behind the American urge to conquer what whites considered a wilderness, the same place the Indians called "home." Many of the Europeans who had colonized the country had come to North America to escape religious persecution, and in their eyes the New World was the Promised Land. As far as they were concerned, God had provided it as a place where Christian reformers could establish the perfect society that had been so often prophesied. This new land was to be cultivated, built upon, and put to its most efficient use, a philosophy that persists to this day. Despite the fact that Native Americans were accomplished farmers and were using the land in accordance with their own traditions, they were rarely Christians and therefore easily dismissed as "savage heathens."⁴

Lewis Cass, secretary of war under Andrew Jackson, held those same beliefs. "There can be no doubt . . . that the Creator intended the earth should be reclaimed from a state of nature and cultivated; that the human race should spread over it, procuring from it the means of comfortable subsistence, and of increase and improvement." Missouri senator Thomas Hart Benton, a strong proponent of Indian removal, believed that whites had a superior right to the land because they "used it according to the intentions of the Creator." In the end it was all too easy for the colonists and their successors to justify the taking of Indian land as their moral right, whether they truly believed it or not.⁵

Beyond the philosophical differences there was the legal question of who actually owned the land the Indians had occupied for countless generations. The Indians had never faced that problem. The idea that some faraway person could claim some parcel of land because they held a certain piece of paper seemed unreasonable. For them, ownership was synonymous

with occupation. Creek land was land that was occupied or used by Creeks. If the Creeks abandoned a certain parcel and the Cherokee moved in, then it was Cherokee land. As has been the case throughout the history of both the Old World and the New, ownership of valuable land was usually determined militarily. Both the Indians and the white men understood the concept of conquest.

What really separated the two cultures were the issues of who owned *unoccupied* land and the concept of *individual* ownership. The Indians generally believed that if no group exercised control over a certain parcel, it was free to be used by whoever was willing to put forth the effort to use it.⁶ Unoccupied land belonged either to the Breath Giver or to no one at all. For white society, that was not an option. Since feudal times, European society had existed with the notion that *someone* had to own every piece of land, whatever its desirability. If an individual or group did not own a particular parcel, then it belonged to the government, either in the form of a monarch or the people of a republic. No spot of land, no matter how worthless, could be allowed to remain unowned. Equally foreign to the Indians was the idea that an individual could somehow claim a portion of the earth as his personal property. A person might own a gun, a horse, or even a slave, but the earth itself was beyond ownership. True, a person might reside on a piece of property, farm it, and even call it “his,” but it was understood to be a temporary occupancy, much like a renter might call an apartment “her home,” knowing full well it belongs to the landlord.

The English and the Americans that followed them understood the Indians to have a right of occupancy simply because of their long-standing residency.⁷ They generally felt that Indian land could only be taken with the tribe’s consent and that there must be just compensation. It all sounded very honorable, but in practice there was ample opportunity to cheat the Indians out of their land. Consent could be granted by Indian leaders who were somehow coerced through intimidation or bribery or were tricked into signing while intoxicated. Headmen could be found who did not actually have the authority to speak for the tribe, but were willing to sell their people’s land for personal profit. Land could also be taken to pay off debts, even if the debts were accumulated by individuals, not the tribe as a whole. And while outright conquest wasn’t supposed to happen, land could be taken from the Indians as compensation for white losses in a war the Indians had been the cause of. Of course whites always blamed the Indians for starting a war, even if the Indians were acting against white aggression. Americans were intent on conquering the continent, and although legal

niceties were a necessity, agreements could always be ignored or interpreted as the conquerors saw fit.

Faced with an aggressive, dynamic adversary, Native Americans did what they could to protect their birthright. Although warfare comes first to mind, there were other ways to stem the tide of white expansion. Foremost was the ability to gain the aid of powerful allies. Spain controlled Florida, and much of the valuable deerskin trade passed through Pensacola and St. Augustine. France also had designs on North America, especially along the lower Mississippi. And there was always Great Britain. The major trading houses were predominantly owned by Scotsmen, and British goods were highly sought by the Indians. England may have granted the United States its independence, but an immense amount of animosity remained on both sides. Far from being pawns in the game of international politics, Native Americans were expert at playing one side off against the other.

The Seminole lived in relative peace for almost thirty years after the United States gained its independence. Thirty years may not seem very long when viewed through the distorted lens of time, but it was enough for a new generation of Seminole to be raised. For those groups that had migrated into Florida, each passing year meant connections to the Creek world lessened and their own sense of identity increased. Many of those who had been born in the Spanish colony were now in positions of leadership, and most had ancestors who were buried in Florida. For them and the groups that had been longtime residents, this was their home.

An unquiet peace prevailed between the Florida Indians and their white neighbors to the north. The Seminole, not party to the Treaty of Paris, had little respect for the imaginary line that ran between Spanish Florida and the United States. And imaginary it was: On paper, the boundary line ran from the source of the St. Marys River west to the confluence of the Flint and Chattahoochee Rivers. If a person was standing anywhere between those two points, how was he or she to know if they were north or south of the line? The white population of Georgia was almost entirely along the coast, with most of the interior being in the hands of the Indians. Several Seminole and Mikasuki villages were actually situated north of the line in what they considered to be their territory. Conversely, frontier whites had no reservations about crossing into Florida to conduct whatever business they cared to, legitimate or not.

It was a situation that could only result in conflict. White squatters were not above settling on land that might appear unoccupied but was

considered a certain tribe's precious hunting grounds. Indians, on the other hand, had no way of knowing that the parcel they occupied belonged to a faraway land speculator who had never seen the place. Such situations might not be problematic at first, but sooner or later someone was going to contest the occupation. Then there was the matter of free-ranging livestock. The Seminole were successful cattle ranchers, and frontier whites longed to increase their herds. For both Indian and white, unattended cattle were a temptation that was often too hard to ignore.

The United States had coveted Florida from the time the nation had come into being. A quick glance at a map will explain why. For a nation that were of the opinion that destined to rule the continent, this large foreign appendage on the southeast border was both an embarrassment and a liability. Many Americans felt Florida should be part of the United States simply because it was physically attached to Georgia. America had attempted to invade Canada during the Revolution with the hope of bringing it into the confederation, and would have done the same with Florida, had it been possible. The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 served to intensify the feeling that the nation would not be complete until the lands to the north, south, and west were added to the Union.⁸

One of the reasons the United States coveted Florida had to do with national security. With its long coastline and numerous harbors, Florida was vulnerable to invasion by foreign armies. What was to stop a large British or French force from landing anywhere from St. Augustine to Mobile and then working its way into the thinly settled and poorly defended southern states? If that happened, what would prevent disaffected Indians and resentful slaves from allying themselves with the invaders? For a young nation just free of European domination, it was a very real fear. The British chargé d'affaires in Washington, John P. Morier, had already suggested that if Britain once again went to war with the United States she "should take New Orleans." Then he added, "Another very vulnerable Point is in Georgia and South Carolina and the Mississippi Territory, by means of the Black population, to whom the Spaniards might send the Black Regiments from the Havannah [*sic*], to assist them in asserting their independence."⁹

There was also an economic reason for wanting Florida. Much of what is now Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia was drained by rivers that emptied into the Gulf of Mexico through Spanish West Florida. The United States was at peace with Spain, but that didn't prevent the Spanish authorities from collecting duties, limiting the types of goods that could be transported through their territory, or tying up shipments for bureaucratic reasons. The United States envisioned a thriving plantation

economy for the area, but if the produce could not flow freely to market, the expected growth would never take off.

Just dealing with the Spanish authorities often proved difficult. The Napoleonic Wars were raging throughout Europe, and the French had conquered the Iberian Peninsula, setting up their own puppet government with Napoleon's brother Joseph on the throne of Spain. The legitimate king, Ferdinand VII, was a prisoner of the French but was backed by the English, who were attempting to oust the French and return him to the throne. In the New World, Spanish officials generally supported the legitimate rulers but were more or less left to their own devices. When the inevitable bureaucratic disputes arose in Florida, officials in St. Augustine or Pensacola often found it difficult to get timely answers from their superiors in Havana or Spain.

By 1810 the administration of President James Madison was ready to obtain Florida, but exactly how to do it wasn't clear. An armed seizure would be a serious violation of international law that Spain and her ally Great Britain would consider an act of war. Somehow the administration needed a viable excuse for acquiring the territory, no matter how flimsy the reasoning might be. If, for example, the residents of Florida were to stage a revolution, set up their own government, then ask to be incorporated into the American nation, the United States could, with questionable justification, honor the request. Complicating the situation was the question of who actually owned the territory west of the Perdido River (Florida's present western boundary with Alabama, between Pensacola and Mobile Bay). The United States claimed that everything from the Perdido west to the Mississippi had been included in the Louisiana Purchase. Spain and France, who had done the selling, insisted it was still part of Spanish West Florida.¹⁰

At first the American plan to seize a portion of Florida proceeded better than expected. On September 23, 1810, residents of the parishes that now make up eastern Louisiana north of Lake Pontchartrain stormed and captured the Spanish fort at Baton Rouge. Most of the revolutionaries were American expatriates, and one of their primary leaders was Fulwar Skipwith, a former diplomat to France who had been present at the negotiations for the Louisiana Purchase. Three days later they held a convention, declared their independence as the Republic of West Florida, and elected Skipwith as their president. Upon hearing of the uprising, President Madison issued a proclamation authorizing American troops to occupy the new nation, declaring there was the possibility of it being taken over by some foreign

power. By December 10 it was all over and the area was annexed as part of the Orleans Territory (later the State of Louisiana).¹¹

Not everyone in Washington was supportive of the acquisition. Former secretary of state Robert Smith, who had been forced to resign by President Madison, publicly exposed the administration in an article that was published in the Charleston *Courier*. Raising a warning for future generations, the editor of the *Courier* asked, "It is some time since we learned that the American government intended to possess themselves of West Florida under pretenses resembling Bonaparte's. . . . What will be these States at a more advanced age if at so early a period they have already fallen into corruption and decrepitude? The want of talent . . . may be lamented, ignorance may be pitied, but no apology can be made for *treachery and corruption*."¹²

The government then cast its eye toward the remainder of West Florida. Spanish Governor Vicente Folch, unhappy at having been unable to defend Baton Rouge and miffed at the lack of support from his superiors in Havana, let it be known that he might be willing to hand the colony over to the Americans if certain terms were met. It would not be an outright cession of the colony—something Folch did not have the authority to do—but rather an arrangement whereby the United States would occupy and administer West Florida until the two governments could reach an agreement for the sale of the property.¹³

In the meantime, President Madison had appointed seventy-one-year-old former Georgia governor George Mathews as a covert agent to head up the efforts to acquire the two Floridas. Mathews was authorized to either work out some sort of deal with the Spanish governors or foment a "revolution" similar to what had taken place at Baton Rouge. Mathews first went to the St. Marys River area of Georgia to gauge the willingness of the locals, both Spanish and American, to any of his plans. He found little encouragement, and one resident warned Mathews, "As sure as you open your mouth to [St. Augustine Governor Enrique] White on the subject, you will die in chains in Moro Castle, and all the devils in hell can't save you."¹⁴ Mathews then headed for Pensacola. Unfortunately, by the time he arrived Folch had received the desired support from Havana along with orders not to surrender West Florida. The deal was off.¹⁵

Mathews returned to the East Coast, hoping he could build support for a negotiated cession from the Spaniards or find someone willing to stage a revolution. Things did not look promising. Juan José de Estrada had been appointed the new governor of East Florida after the death of Governor White, and was just as determined to uphold Spanish authority as his predecessor had been. In addition, most of the residents of the colony had little

complaint against the colonial authorities. As long as the people didn't cause trouble and paid their taxes, they were usually left to their own devices. This was especially true in the town of Fernandina on Amelia Island, just across the St. Marys River from Georgia. Engaged in the lucrative business of smuggling slaves and embargoed goods into the United States, the residents had no desire to upset the status quo.¹⁶

Mathews would not give up. If the real local residents would not stage an uprising, he would import his own revolutionaries. The first order of business was to find someone to lead the rebellion. As a covert agent, Mathews had to work in the background and let someone else be the public face of the action. The man he finally settled on was John Houston McIntosh, a Georgian who owned a plantation in Florida and had until recently resided there. Unfortunately, McIntosh still considered himself a loyal Spanish subject and had been secretly passing along information about the plot to Estrada, who sent the news on to his superiors in Havana, who in turn relayed it to European diplomats in Washington. Unaware of this, Mathews kept talking to McIntosh and eventually swayed him to his way of thinking. Previously, McIntosh had considered a revolution an impossibility; St. Augustine was too well defended. When Mathews told him the Madison administration was behind the plot and would provide military support, McIntosh turned traitor to the Spaniards. He did not, however, tell Mathews he'd already betrayed the American cause.¹⁷

Even when the plot and Mathews's part in it became public knowledge, the government did not stop its efforts. By the beginning of 1812, Mathews believed he was ready to take action. His small army of Florida revolutionaries, calling themselves "Patriots," was composed mostly of Georgians with no residence in the Spanish colony. A few of the leaders were prominent landowners in Florida but were American by birth and that is where their allegiance remained. Most of them hoped to be rewarded either with political appointments or large parcels of land in the newly acquired territory. The troops were generally poor white Georgians who were enticed by the promise of fifty acres of prime Florida real estate. When recruitment lagged, the bounty was increased to five hundred acres. As an enticement to any actual Spanish subjects who might like to join the rebellion, Mathews promised that their property and religion would be respected, any back pay due them from Spain would be paid, and some might even keep their bureaucratic positions.¹⁸

By March 1812, the Patriots had formed a government and were ready to start their revolution by launching an attack on St. Augustine. Unfortunately, on the eve of the force's departure, Mathews could not get the

cooperation from the navy and regular army that he required. Maj. Jacint Laval, temporarily in charge of the American fort at Point Peter, didn't trust Mathews and refused to proceed without specific orders from Washington. Wanting no part of Mathews's scheme and not willing to believe it was sanctioned by the government, Laval tried warning navy Commodore Hugh Campbell of the consequences. "This is a damn rascally business . . . get your neck out of the halter as soon as possible."¹⁹ Unsure of his orders, Campbell backed off and declined to send his gunboats down the St. Johns River. Without Laval's soldiers and Campbell's gunboats, Mathews knew he had no chance of taking St. Augustine.²⁰

With his ragtag army ready to move but having nowhere to go, Mathews decided to change his objective. If he couldn't take the Spanish capital, he would go for the second largest town in the colony, Fernandina. This time, Commodore Campbell was somewhat cooperative and placed five gunboats in the St. Marys River, their cannon pointed directly at the town. "Great God! view our situation," one resident said, "the cannon of five Gun Boats staring us in the face; their men at quarters, and matches lit; two more lying below in reserve; and the Commodore sailing up and down our harbour throwing out his signals." What the Spanish defenders didn't know was that Campbell had issued orders for his ships not to fire on the town. On March 17, with boatloads of Patriot soldiers rowing toward the town, the Spanish commandant had little choice but to surrender. Col. Thomas Smith, having returned and assumed command at Point Peter, relieved Major Laval and took fifty U.S. regulars to occupy the town. Things appeared to be going well for the invasion.²¹

As news of the attack spread north, newspapers, foreign diplomats, and political opponents of the administration began to make their displeasure known. No one was fooled by the fictional "revolution," and they were demanding to know if the administration had actually sanctioned the action. Maj. Gen. John Floyd, in charge of the Georgia militia, scolded the administration and Mathews for the attack on Fernandina. "All the sin of direct invasion rests on the Shoulders of the Government or its agent. And too against a weak, defenseless, unhappy Neighbor." Floyd wanted to know why the United States should have resorted to "these means of causing a war with England, and by doing so make ourselves the aggressor." In his opinion, the government should "say they will have their provinces and it will be done, merit will meet its reward and the Government will only have to answer for the deed, which she will under Existing Circumstances have to do, with all the littleness attached to such a hidden transaction." Not above a little pretense of his own, Floyd then suggested that if the Seminole were

to aid the Spanish, it would give the Georgia militia “an excuse for attacking and destroying” the Indians and wiping out the Black Seminole towns.²²

What had at first sounded like a good idea began to turn into an embarrassing distraction, especially as the nation was preparing to go to war with Great Britain. Faced with tough questions and growing criticism, on April 4 Secretary of State James Monroe insisted Mathews had exceeded his orders. In a letter relieving him of duty, Monroe said, “I am sorry to have to state that the measures which you appear to have adopted for obtaining possession of Amelia Island, and other parts of East Florida, are not authorized by the law of the United States, or the instructions founded on it, under which you have acted.”²³

In the meantime, Mathews, who would not receive notification of his removal for several weeks, turned his force south, arriving at St. Augustine on March 25. Colonel Smith, having left a squad of Marines in charge at Fernandina, joined his men with the Patriot force and settled in at the ruins of Fort Mosé north of the city. The Spaniards, secure within the stone walls of the Castillo de San Marcos, refused to surrender. Smith, without artillery, any real instructions from the War Department, or ample supplies, could do little but keep the Spaniards confined to the town. The situation soon turned into a stalemate. The only troops seeing any action were the undisciplined Patriots, who spent much of their time looting the abandoned plantations and forcibly conscripting much of the local population into their force.²⁴

Leadership on both sides of the conflict underwent a change, but it seemed to make little difference. Georgia governor David Mitchell was appointed to replace Mathews and somehow negotiate a deal with the Spaniards, but was given little direction on how to accomplish it. Meanwhile, the authorities in Havana had finally acted and dispatched a relief force to St. Augustine, commanded by Gen. Sebastian Kindelan, an experienced officer who took over from Governor Estrada. Mitchell attempted to open negotiations, offering to withdraw his forces if the rebels were given amnesty. Patriot leader John McIntosh was worried. “I think the government can never abandon them [the Patriots] to inevitable ruin, after being in some degree invited to this revolution, and formally ceding the Whole Providence to the U.S. except the Garrison and town of St. Augustine.”²⁵ Both Estrada and Kindelan refused to discuss the matter until the foreign invaders left their soil. Kindelan even went so far as to launch a pair of bold water-borne attacks, one of which forced Smith to abandon his position at Fort Mosé.²⁶

News that a detachment of black soldiers had arrived in East Florida unnerved the Americans, who were forever fearful of a slave uprising.

Colonel Smith lost no time in informing Mitchell of their arrival. Mitchell protested to Kindelan. "Your certain knowledge of the peculiar situation of the southern section of the union . . . [should] have induced you to abstain from introducing them into the province, or from organizing such as were already in it." The fact that these were Spanish troops defending Spanish territory from outside aggression didn't seem to matter. In Washington, the War Hawks in Congress were ready to go to war with the entire British Empire, but on the southern frontier a hundred black soldiers had thrown everyone into a state of panic.²⁷

Indecision in Washington wasn't helping matters. The Senate voted down a bill that would have funded the Patriot efforts, undermining what little official support Colonel Smith had. Nonetheless, Smith was ordered to maintain his position, but was not given the wherewithal to go on the offensive, nor was he sent much in the way of provisions. The administration wanted to get out of Florida, but at the same time they didn't want to leave it open for the use of Spain's ally, Great Britain. They also didn't want to appear to be abandoning the Georgians and rebel Floridians Mathews had recruited. With the administration now focused on the war with England, the situation in Florida was easily forgotten.²⁸

In the meantime, the press and Congress kept the subject alive. "We believe the opinion is becoming very prevalent," the *National Intelligencer* reported, "that the safety of the Southern frontier, as well as every motive of general policy, requires that East Florida should be added to our territorial possessions." One of those who disagreed was Senator William Hunter of Rhode Island. Warning southerners of the consequences of fighting armed black soldiers in Spanish Florida, he remarked, "Take care, that while you are pursuing foreign conquest, your own homes are not devastated."²⁹

In Hunter's opinion, the Patriot War was not a defensive action, as much as the administration tried to portray it as such. "I say this is not only war, but an offensive war; not only an offensive but an unjust war; not only unjust . . . it is a wicked war; it is robbery!" Defending the Spanish government's attacks on Smith's force, he remarked:

If you had the camp of an enemy at Georgetown, threatening the Capitol—the existence of your Government; a foreign force, combined with domestic traitors, to overwhelm you, to throw you neck and heels into the Potomac . . . would you not attack? . . . Good God! Where are we? In what age do we live? In what country, when it is made a crime to extirpate the invaders of our native soil? In what age, in what country, when it is a virtue for a nation, itself in a war for neutral rights, to invade an unoffending, helpless, friendly, neutral country?³⁰

While the nation argued, Colonel Smith and his men remained encamped outside St. Augustine, low on ammunition, low on food, and even lower on morale.

Up until this point, the Seminole had not taken part in the conflict. Both the Spaniards and Americans knew the Indians might well hold the balance of power. Spanish governors Estrada and Kindelan had made overtures to the Alachua Indians, but King Payne, Cowkeeper's successor, was wary. The Americans were already unfriendly. Why make mortal enemies of them? Desperate to break the siege, the Spaniards again approached the Indians for aid, but Payne would not commit. Maintaining their neutrality had allowed them to prosper, and Payne saw no good reason to upset the status quo. Then Mathews contacted the Alachuas and warned them to stay out of the conflict. He also told them how friendly the Americans were and how they would respect the Indians' lands and rights if the Patriots were victorious. The ploy backfired. Not only did Mathews's arrogant attitude insult the Indians; the black interpreters told the Seminole leaders that it was all a deception and that the Americans were already making plans to drive the Indians from their homes and steal their cattle. Aware of the duplicitous manner in which the Americans treated their Creek cousins in Georgia, Payne reluctantly agreed to let his warriors assist the Spaniards in driving the Americans out of Florida.³¹

The Seminole participation had an immediate effect on the war. On July 26, 1812, the Indians launched several small raids in the rear of Smith's position. A number of soldiers were killed, their bodies mutilated and scalped. Plantations belonging to Patriot sympathizers were attacked, looted, and burned. The attacks threw the Americans into disarray. Regular soldiers were disheartened, while many of the Patriots, more mercenary than military, decided the war had suddenly become too dangerous and soon deserted. Kindelan could at last feel he had the upper hand and that the Americans might well be forced to retreat. With supplies running low, he could only hope it happened soon. If relief from Havana didn't arrive shortly, he might be forced to negotiate.³²

Kindelan's confidence was soon shattered when two American privateer vessels, hired by McIntosh and the Patriots, took up position off St. Augustine to harass the Spanish vessels communicating with Havana. Effectively blockaded, the people of St. Augustine now faced starvation. It was a question of who could hold out longer: the besieged Americans outside the walls or the besieged Spaniards inside. In the end, the Spanish were able to break the stalemate. Kindelan dispatched some of his best troops, the local

black militia, to intercept a supply party that was returning to the St. Johns after dropping provisions off at Smith's camp. In a fierce battle on the night of September 11, the blacks tore into the Marines, soldiers, and Patriots, killing one and wounding eight. Captain John Williams of the Marines was hit eight times and died of his wounds more than two weeks later. Colonel Smith came to the realization that his position near Fort Mosé was now untenable and withdrew. The siege of St. Augustine was over.³³

Aiding the Spaniards did the Seminole little good. In the eyes of the Georgians, the Indians had gone from annoyance to outright enemy. In addition, Black Seminoles had fought against the Americans and had reignited an old fear. If blacks banded together, they might mount an invasion of the southern United States, destroying countless plantations and freeing thousands of slaves. There was little proof on which to base these worries, but for those who had designs on Florida, it was a fear that could be easily exploited.

In September 1812, a company of Georgia Volunteers under Col. Daniel Newnan moved against the Seminole heartland in the Alachua prairie, but was stopped before it could reach the Seminole villages. After a running gun battle that lasted several hours, the Seminole were joined by reinforcements. The Georgians, surrounded, were forced to build a defensive breastwork and send for help. Held under siege for over a week, Newnan's force finally retreated and was rescued by a relief party sent out by Colonel Smith. And while the Seminole could certainly claim victory, it came at a cost. Wounded in the fighting was their revered leader, King Payne, who would die soon after. Worse yet, the Seminole knew the Americans would return, better prepared and in greater strength. Aware that their villages were vulnerable targets, the Seminole abandoned the homes they had lived in for generations and moved farther south.³⁴ King Payne had been correct in his hesitation to enter the war, as justified as the decision may have been. Conflict with the Americans would prove to be inevitable. The struggle for Florida and the period of the Seminole Wars had begun.

Still hoping to seize East Florida, President Madison replaced Governor Mitchell as the man in charge with Maj. Gen. Thomas Pinckney, a Revolutionary War veteran and one of the men who had negotiated the 1795 treaty with Spain. Georgians, anxious to avenge the defeat of Colonel Newnan, were clamoring for action against the Seminole, and in February 1813 a force of about five hundred men under Colonel Smith again invaded Florida. This time, the invaders were able to reach the Seminole villages, but found them deserted. Before leaving, the Americans burned scores of

Seminole homes, killed or confiscated hundreds of cattle and horses, and destroyed whatever supplies they could find. Aiding the Spanish had cost the Seminole their homes and earned them a bitter enemy.³⁵

The Patriot War sputtered to a close. Congress once again refused to fund the operation, and the administration, embarrassed by losses to the English on the Canadian frontier, was forced to give up. On April 26, 1813, American forces began their withdrawal, but not before destroying several loyalist properties on the way. On May 6 the Spanish reoccupied Fernandina. Governor Kindelan, hoping to restore peace and prosperity, offered amnesty to those Floridians who had joined the rebels, but those who had spearheaded the effort refused to accept the lenient terms. Throughout the remainder of 1813 the last of the diehard Patriots attempted to resurrect their cause but had little success. By the end of the year the Spaniards had regained some measure of control over the colony, but the American hunger to acquire Florida had not gone away.³⁶

1813–1814

The Creek War

Fundamental to an understanding of the Seminole Wars is an appreciation of what was happening to the north among the Seminole's cousins, the Creeks. While many of the Seminole considered themselves politically separate from the Creek Confederacy, the two tribes were still culturally and economically intertwined, and what happened to one group usually had an effect on the other. If nothing else, American officials often spoke of the Florida Indians as being nothing more than separatist Creeks and therefore lumped them all together. Trouble among the Creeks would inevitably bring trouble to the Seminole.

The two major divisions within the Creek Nation were separated by more than linguistic differences. The Lower Creeks, residing in southern Georgia, had more contact with the whites and had begun to accept certain aspects of white culture, including large-scale agriculture and slavery. The Upper Creeks, in what is now eastern Alabama, were more removed from white society and therefore less acculturated to it. By 1811 these differences were pronounced enough to cause serious divisions within the tribal leadership. A visit by the influential Shawnee spiritual leader Tecumseh only deepened the divide. His call for a pan-Indian alliance that would stop the advance of the white man resonated with many of the Upper Creeks, but was viewed more suspiciously by the Lower Creeks. Tecumseh preached a return to Native ways and offered his followers an alliance with the British, who would supply them with armaments and other necessities in their struggle with the Americans. Those who were sympathetic to the message became known as "Red Stick" Creeks, and one of their primary leaders was Josiah Francis, commonly known as Prophet Francis. He was also known as Hillis Hadjo, a corruption of *hillis haya*, a generic term for a spiritual leader.¹

The message of Tecumseh and his brother Tenskwatawa (the Prophet) struck a chord with many Native Americans along the frontier from Florida to the Great Lakes. As leaders of a social/religious movement, the prophets quickly gained a large following. They felt that whites and the white culture were impure or unclean, and until those influences were removed, the Indian world was out of balance. The Red Sticks were also opposed to the Creek National Council, which was supported by American Indian Agent Benjamin Hawkins. He and the U.S. government favored this more centralized form of governance for the Creeks (which they could more easily manipulate or control), while traditionalists relied on the Red/White town and clan system that had served them well for centuries. As tensions grew, people took sides, and not strictly along Upper/Lower Creek lines. Not all Upper Creeks agreed with the Red Sticks, or else they realized the dangers of war with the United States. At the same time, the nativist rhetoric of the Red Sticks appealed to many young Lower Creeks, especially those who were not profiting from associations with the whites. For the most part, however, the Red Sticks were Upper Creek, and those opposing them were Lower Creek. By 1812, the Creek world was coming apart.²

American leaders were aware of what was happening and began to take action. President Madison, knowing that the Creeks were being supplied by the British, ordered Gen. James Wilkinson to capture Mobile, where a number of British agents were operating. Wilkinson and his force arrived in April 1813, and the outnumbered Spaniards surrendered without firing a shot. Insisting the area had been part of the Louisiana Purchase, the United States annexed everything from the Perdido to the Pearl River as part of the Mississippi Territory (Alabama would be created by partitioning Mississippi in 1817).³

Major violence between the Creek factions began in February 1813 when a group of Red Sticks returning from the north murdered seven white families near the Ohio River. Pressured by Hawkins, the Creek National Council sent Lower Creek leader William McIntosh with a party of “law menders” to apprehend the murderers. The killers were located, but they refused to surrender and barricaded themselves in a house. After a gunfight the house was set afire and the occupants slain. Their leader was found and killed the following day. In retaliation, the Red Sticks later killed several of the law menders, laid siege to the Lower Creek town of Tuckabatchee, and threatened to destroy Coweta, seat of the National Council. In response to the perceived danger, militia forces were called

out in Georgia, Tennessee, and Mississippi.⁴ Agent Hawkins issued a stern warning to the Red Sticks, telling them:

I hear you are preparing yourselves for war; I hear you have taken part with the prophets. The prophets have put to death nine people, because they helped the chiefs to save their country, by putting the murderers of our white friends to death. . . . Do you not know the prophets' talks will be the destruction of the Creeks, and give joy to your enemies? . . . You may frighten one another with the power of your prophets to make thunder, earthquakes, and to sink the earth. [A reference to the massive New Madrid Earthquake of December, 1811.] These things cannot frighten the American soldiers. . . . Take care how you make them your enemy. The thunder of their cannon, their rifles and their swords will be more terrible than the works of your prophets.⁵

In a letter to Secretary of War John Armstrong, Hawkins reported, "The declaration of the Prophet is, to destroy everything received from the Americans; all the chiefs and their adherents who are friendly to the customs and ways of the white people; to put to death every man who will not join them."⁶

Now that war had broken out, a force of several hundred Red Sticks under the leadership of the mixed-blood leader Peter McQueen traveled to Pensacola to procure arms and ammunition. Alarmed, local militia leaders in parts of the Mississippi Territory above Mobile began to gather their forces. On July 27, 1813, the militia surprised McQueen and his men near Burnt Corn Creek north of Pensacola. Caught off guard, the warriors fled, but then regrouped and attacked the militia, who beat a hasty retreat. Unfortunately for the Indians, the militia was able to carry off many of the supplies brought from Pensacola.⁷

Farther west, north of Mobile Bay, nervous American settlers began to gather at fortified houses in the area. One of them, Fort Mims, housed about five hundred refugees, including Territorial Militia, white and mixed-blood settlers, friendly Indians, and slaves. Feeling secure in their numbers and the strength of their fortified structure, the residents became lax in their vigilance and often left the gates to the fort open. On August 30 the Red Sticks took advantage of the situation and stormed the fort with nearly a thousand warriors. Unable to close the gates before the attackers rushed in, the settlers tried to defend themselves as best they could, but it was a hopeless cause. By the end of the day, the buildings were ablaze and nearly every occupant who wasn't taken prisoner or hadn't found a way to escape was dead.⁸

It may have been the Creek Civil War, but American blood had been shed, and the United States was now involved. In Tennessee, Governor William Blount ordered the head of the state militia to raise an army. That man was none other than Andrew Jackson. By October Jackson had gathered enough men to begin an offensive. On November 1 he established Fort Strother inside the northern boundary of the Creek Nation. The next day he ordered Col. John Coffee to take half of his one thousand mounted men and attack the nearby Red Stick town of Tallushatchee while the other half were dispatched to scour the countryside for hostile Creeks and form a cover for Coffee's force. Unprepared for such a large number of attackers, the surrounded Red Sticks desperately engaged the Americans, suffering 186 warriors dead and eighty women and children taken prisoner by the end of the day.⁹

Creeks who saw the wisdom of not taking on the Tennesseans began to gather at Fort Leslie near Talledega, about twenty-five miles south of Fort Strother. About a thousand angry Red Sticks led by William Weatherford surrounded the fort and threatened to slaughter all inside if they didn't join the Red Stick cause. Jackson, hearing of the siege, attacked the Red Sticks with about two thousand men. The majority of the Red Sticks were able to escape, but about three hundred were slain. In the aftermath of the battle, the Hillabee towns pledged to stop fighting, and Jackson promised to spare their villages. Unfortunately, another column of Tennessee Volunteers didn't get the message and attacked the defenseless towns, killing sixty-four warriors and taking 256 prisoners while suffering no casualties of their own.¹⁰

Low on supplies, Jackson and his army headed north to their depot at Fort Deposit, just south of the Tennessee River. As the Red Sticks attempted to regroup, Georgia Volunteers under Brig. Gen. John Floyd came from the east, crossed the Chattahoochee River at what is now Columbus, Georgia, and established Fort Mitchell. Floyd then marched deep into Upper Creek territory and attacked the town of Autosee on November 29. After a fierce fight that lasted several hours, the Red Sticks abandoned the towns, but not before losing about two hundred men. On December 17 another group of Georgia Volunteers attacked the Red Stick town of Nuyaka, but found it deserted. After putting the town to the torch, the troops returned to Georgia.¹¹ Things had not gone well for the Red Sticks, but with the Americans having to fall back to their supply depots, the Indians were able to gather their forces, resupply, and assess their situation. They were certainly not defeated.

The war may not have been over, but many of the enlistments of the Georgia and Tennessee Volunteers were about to run out, and the men were ready to go home. It was a continual problem that would plague



Andrew Jackson. Judge, senator, general, military governor of Florida, president of the United States, and nemesis of the Seminole.

Painted by J. Wood, engraved by J. W. Steel, 1829. State Archives of Florida, <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/18920>.

the military throughout the War of 1812 and the Seminole Wars period. Because they were expensive to maintain and had civilian lives to lead, volunteers were usually enlisted for periods of only a few months. When a volunteer's enlistment ran out he would often go home, with little consideration for the outcome of the war. Faced with dwindling forces and

a shortage of supplies, both Jackson and Floyd were forced to halt their campaigns. By the end of 1813, only the Mississippi Volunteers under Brig. Gen. Ferdinand Claiborne and allied Choctaw warriors were actively fighting the Creeks. On December 23 these forces moved north, deep into Red Stick territory, and attacked the important town of Eccanachaca, also known as the Holy Ground. Although many of the Red Sticks were able to escape, Eccanachaca was pillaged and burnt to the ground.¹²

With volunteer enlistments having run out, the U.S. forces were unable to mount any offensives during early January 1814. New volunteers were being signed up and supplies were being gathered, but for the moment only small groups of soldiers manned the forts and held their positions. During the lull the War Department placed Maj. Gen. Thomas Pinckney of the regular army in overall command of the war effort, which helped with co-ordination, communication, and supply efforts. The Red Sticks, meanwhile, regrouped and planned their next moves.¹³

By late January, both Jackson and Floyd were ready to resume their offensives. This time, however, the Red Sticks were determined to put up a fight before the soldiers reached the Indian towns. On January 22, near Emuckfau, they attacked Jackson's column, forcing him to fall back. Two days later they attacked again at Enotachopco Creek, but this time the Americans were prepared. In a sharp fight, the Red Sticks were beaten back, but Jackson, with wounded men and short of supplies, was forced to return to Fort Strother. The Creeks, having stopped one American column, then turned their attention to the Georgians, advancing from the east. On January 27 they attacked Floyd's column at Calabee Creek, inflicting serious casualties and forcing Floyd to retreat to Fort Hull. Finally able to go on the offensive, the Red Sticks had proven that they would not give up their dream of a secure and independent Indian homeland.¹⁴

Throughout February Jackson continued to gather men and supplies. Finally, on March 14, he set out with twenty-two hundred infantry (both volunteers and regulars), seven hundred cavalry, five hundred Cherokee warriors, and more than one hundred allied Lower Creeks. Their destination was the town of Tohopeka, better known as Horseshoe Bend because of its position inside a sharp meander of the Tallapoosa River. Surrounded on three sides by water, the town could only be approached through a narrow strip of land to the north. Across that opening the Red Sticks had erected a fortified wall, strong enough to withstand the rounds that would be fired from the army's cannon. With the wall between them and the Americans and with the river providing a means of escape, the Red Sticks felt confident they could stop, if not defeat, Jackson's army.¹⁵

On 24 March, as he approached Tohopeka, Jackson sent Colonel Coffee's cavalry and allied Indians around to the opposite side of the river, effectively cutting off the Red Stick's escape route. Before committing his men to a full-scale assault, Jackson began the siege by having his two small cannon open fire on the barricade. With the Red Stick warriors concentrated at the wall, Cherokee warriors were able to swim the river and take many of the canoes the Creeks had lined up along the tree-lined bank. The cannonade continued for two hours, with little damage done to either the wall or the Indians behind it. In the meantime, soldiers and warriors on the opposite side of the river used the stolen canoes to cross the river and attack the town itself, where the women and children were staying. With Tohopeka under assault, many of the Red Stick warriors were forced to leave the wall, giving Jackson an opportunity to order a bayonet charge against the Red Stick fortification. The Creeks fought ferociously, but the number of soldiers coming over the wall soon overwhelmed them. Retreating for the town, they found their way blocked by the soldiers and warriors who had crossed the river. Trapped, many of the warriors attempted to swim the river to safety but were cut down by the soldiers waiting on the other side. The slaughter went on for hours, stopped only by the setting of the sun. On the following day, when the count was made, 557 slain Indians were scattered throughout the town, about 200 had been killed trying to cross the river, and approximately 350 women and children were taken captive. Only about 200 warriors had escaped. Jackson's killed and wounded totaled around 260 men.¹⁶

For all practical purposes, the Creek War was over. Jackson marched his army southwest to an area known as the Hickory Ground and erected Fort Jackson. Upon hearing of the victory, the War Department made Jackson a Major General in the regular army and put him in charge of negotiations with the defeated Creeks. On August 1, 1814, Jackson summoned the Creek leaders to Fort Jackson to discuss the treaty that would end the war. With nearly all the surviving Red Stick leaders having fled south to Florida, negotiations were effectively in the hands of the Lower Creeks. In reality, there were no negotiations, only a dictated set of conditions. Merciless in victory as well as war, Jackson meant to make the Creeks pay for the suffering he believed they had caused. Gone were most of the Upper Creek lands, making up about a third of what is now Alabama. Yet even that was not enough for Jackson and his land-hungry associates. Also taken were most of the Lower Creek lands in Georgia, which made up nearly all of the southern quarter of the state. In total, the area came to approximately twenty-two million acres. Taking no

account of the thousands of Indians who lived there, Jackson called it “the best unsettled country in America.”¹⁷

The stunned Lower Creeks couldn’t believe what had happened to them. They had fought alongside the Americans, and in appreciation the United States had taken half their land. They tried to reason with Jackson and attempted to protest to other officials, but it was all in vain. Some of the finest agricultural land in the southeast was at stake, and Jackson was determined to have it. As justification for taking the lands in Georgia, Jackson shifted much of the blame to the British and Spanish. They had enticed the Creeks into making war upon Americans and had supplied them with the necessary weapons. For the time being, Jackson could do little to remove the Europeans from Florida, but he could certainly keep the Creeks, both Upper and Lower, away from Florida.¹⁸

Jackson’s decisive, merciless victory at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend created the image of a “hard-bitten Indian-hater,” yet the appellation may be too simplistic. It implies that all his venom was reserved for Indians and no one else, while in truth he seems to have reviled anyone who did not hold the same values he did. Whites, be they British, Spanish, or politically opposed Americans, were equally despised. Anyone, of any ethnic background, who crossed Andrew Jackson found themselves saddled with an enemy for life. An angry, impatient man who preferred to let others take care of the messy details, Jackson had little sympathy for those who stood in the way of what he considered progress.¹⁹

Like most Americans of the time, Jackson seems to have been sympathetic to the Indians only when it was convenient. As long as the Indians did what he thought they ought to, their presence was tolerated. When violence erupted, however, the best of friends could easily turn into the worst of enemies, and Jackson always dealt harshly with enemies. Yet the same Andrew Jackson raised an orphaned Indian as his own son, and a few years later he became infuriated when Georgia militiamen attacked a Creek village that had been friendly to him during the First Seminole War. Andrew Jackson was much more complex than his legend would lead us to believe.²⁰

Jackson’s triumph at Horseshoe Bend had a profound effect upon American history in general and Seminole history in particular. Most notably, the victory destroyed Creek power and, by extension, any real hope for a British invasion of the Southeast. Because of his reputation and subsequent promotion, Jackson was put in charge of the defense of New Orleans, which saved a portion of the west from falling into British hands and led to Jackson becoming the prominent political figure of the period. For the Seminole the results were not as immediate, but no less telling. Refugee Red Sticks

and displaced Lower Creeks fled to the safety of Spanish Florida, joined the Seminole and Mikasuki, and brought with them an implacable hatred of the Americans. For Jackson, the Creek War would never truly be over until all Red Sticks were destroyed—whether they resided on U.S. soil or not—and all foreign influence was removed from North America.²¹ Andrew Jackson, more than anyone else, would prove to be the Seminole's greatest enemy.

As the Creek conflict came to a close, British plans for the Gulf Coast during the War of 1812 were beginning to come into place. In May 1814, Capt. George Woodbine of the Royal Marines landed at the mouth of the Apalachicola River and began to distribute arms to the local Seminole and Mikasuki, refugee Creeks, and runaway slaves. He also began construction of an immense fort about twenty miles upriver at Prospect Bluff. In August, Maj. Edward Nicolls arrived, stepping up the effort to recruit the Indians and runaways into a force that would hopefully attack the southern United States. He also moved his base of operations to Pensacola, disregarding the complaints of Governor Gonzales Manrique, who pointed out Spain's neutrality in the war.²²

In September, the British and their Indian allies prepared to move against Mobile, which could be used as a base of operations against both New Orleans and the American south. The first order of business was to take Fort Bowyer, which guarded the entrance to Mobile Bay. The American defenders, having been warned of the attack by disgruntled British traders, were determined not to let the British warships enter the bay. In the subsequent battle, the British were beaten back and suffered the loss of their flagship. For the moment, Mobile was safe.²³

As the fall of 1814 progressed, Jackson and his army arrived at Mobile. In early November he crossed the Perdido River and advanced on Pensacola. The British, outnumbered and unable to defend the city, quickly boarded ship and departed, destroying Pensacola's defenses as they left. On November 7, Governor Manrique surrendered to Jackson, but a few days later instructions from Washington were received ordering the army not to invade Spanish territory. Having no further use of the town, Jackson gave it back to the Spaniards and headed for New Orleans and his place in history.²⁴

For the Seminole of Florida it was a time of anxiety, stress, and change. The Creek Civil War had forced hundreds of new immigrants into their midst, all of whom held a fierce animosity toward the Americans. British encouragements had also lured runaway slaves into Florida. At the same time, Andrew Jackson, the nemesis of the Seminole people, was impatiently awaiting the day when he could finish the task he had started at Horseshoe Bend and Pensacola.

1814–1816

The Fort at Prospect Bluff

The situations that had prompted American attempts to annex Florida before the War of 1812 had not changed just because the war ended in early 1815. Spanish officials still controlled the waterways that drained the South, and slaves continued to flee to the freedom Florida offered. The idea of foreign control over a territory so close to the nation's vulnerable southland still made Americans nervous, especially after the British attempts to capture Mobile and New Orleans. There were also concerns about the Florida Indians. The Seminole and Creeks had aided the British during the war and were still considered a threat by the white population.

If the Americans were concerned about the Florida Indians, the Indians had every right to be concerned about the Americans. It was they who had invaded Florida during the Patriot War, attacked the Alachua towns, and were stealing cattle and other livestock in Florida. It was they who had taken millions of acres of Indian land just north of the border and were now eyeing the lands to the south. In the Seminoles' midst were hundreds of refugee Red Sticks who had suffered in the Creek War and wanted revenge. Peace would be hard to maintain.

The War of 1812 was over, but the British presence in Florida had not completely disappeared. In the latter months of 1814 the fortification at Prospect Bluff on the Apalachicola River had been completed. It was a massive installation, more than four times as spacious as the American fort that would be built on the same ground a few years later. Royal Marine Major Nicolls, who had led the effort to recruit the Indians and runaways, directed British warships to offload cannon, muskets, and ammunition aplenty at the fort. Rather than leave Florida with the other departing British troops, Nicolls resigned his commission. He then told the Indians that Article IX

of the Treaty of Ghent had guaranteed that the United States would return all Indian lands taken during the war, including those lost as a result of the Creek War.¹ In the article, the United States and England agreed to restore to the Indians with “whom they may be at war at the time of such Ratification,” their “possessions, rights, and privileges which they may have enjoyed or been entitled to” in 1811. Because the Creek War had ended long before ratification, Americans believed it was an internal matter and had nothing to do with the Treaty of Ghent. The refugee Creeks, on the other hand, considered themselves still at war and felt the Treaty of Fort Jackson did not pertain to them.²

By the summer of 1815 Nicolls was ready to leave Florida, but only temporarily. Boarding a British vessel, he headed for London, accompanied by Josiah Francis, the Red Stick prophet. Their mission was to secure English aid and support for the Indians, both militarily and diplomatically. In that, they failed. The British Foreign Office, having less need of their former allies than of peace with the United States, turned a deaf ear. The Florida Indians and their black allies would be on their own.³ One disheartened Indian remarked, “You promised us repeatedly that this place would not be given up; and if you actually intend to abandon us to our inveterate enemy, who always sought our destruction, it would be better that you had us killed at once, rather than to expose us to a lingering death.”⁴

Whether the fort at Prospect Bluff was a good thing or not depended on one’s point of view. The Indians had little use for it, though they were certainly thankful for the weapons stored within. Runaway blacks were of a differing opinion. They saw strength in numbers and viewed the fort as a gathering place for others in the same situation. Nervous whites to the north soon began to refer to the installation as the “Negro Fort.” As news of the fort spread throughout the plantation houses of the South, word also filtered down to the fields and the slave quarters. For those slaves inclined to take flight, the all-important question of *where* to run to had been answered.⁵

Prospect Bluff was more than just a fort; it was a true community. Recruited under the fierce anti-slavery rhetoric of Major Nicolls, the hundreds of Maroons who lived there considered themselves British subjects, and most of the men had been enlisted in the Royal Colonial Marines. They chose their own leaders, built permanent log homes, tended large fields, and raised livestock. As far as they were concerned, they were free people, making their own way and living by their own rules.⁶ It was a situation southern Americans could not tolerate, and the combined fears of economic loss and slave revolt caused southerners to push for the elimination of the fort, even though it was in Spanish territory. Because Spanish slaves were also fleeing

to the fort, Juan Jose de Estrada, the governor of East Florida (the fort was on his side of the dividing line) also wanted it destroyed. Unfortunately, the best he could do was say that he had no control over the matter, and “had referred the issue of the Negro Fort to his superiors.”⁷

The problem of dealing with the fort was taken up by Andrew Jackson, who was in charge of the Southern Division of the army. Without any specific orders from Washington, he began to plot the fort’s destruction.⁸ To lead the effort, Jackson chose his loyal supporter and second in command, Brig. Gen. Edmund Pendleton Gaines.⁹ To prevent interference from friendly Creeks who had been in contact with Nicolls, Jackson warned the Indians, “He has once led part of your nation to destruction—he has promised them protection, and when ever they are attacked, he will again fly and save himself, and leave them to be destroyed.”¹⁰

It wasn’t just the fort at Prospect Bluff that had people concerned. Two years had passed since the end of the Creek War, but sporadic violence was still commonplace along the frontier. At Fort Strother on the Coosa River, where annuities and provisions were distributed to the Creeks, a soldier robbed an Indian woman of potatoes and then struck and killed her with a hoe when she resisted.¹¹ A month later, a party of Indians ambushed and killed Col. Daniel Johnson and a Mr. McGlaskey about thirty miles from Fort Claiborne in the Mississippi Territory (now Alabama).¹²

In mid-April Gaines met with a delegation of Creek leaders and read them a message from Jackson requesting assistance in apprehending the murderers of Johnson and McGlaskey. One of the most prominent leaders, Big Warrior, felt it wasn’t any of his business and told Gaines to relay his message: “General Jackson, My friend . . . as the murder has been done below the line on your side it is out of my power to do any thing in it. . . . I remember the speech you made at Fort Jackson, that you were going to have a line directly. You told me all the damage done above the line I should be answerable for. That line was to cut me off from all those below the line and from having any connection with foreign powers or others.” He also made Gaines aware of the double standard of white justice, citing “several murders committed above the line, by Soldiers and by Citizens” since the Treaty of Fort Jackson. Knowing that the soldier responsible for robbing and killing the Indian woman at Fort Strother had been allowed to go free, Big Warrior remarked, “If the Indian murderers were as completely in my power as this murderer was in yours, you should see what I would have done with them.”¹³

Concerned about the growing strength of the Maroons at Prospect Bluff, Secretary of War William Crawford wrote to Jackson, “The Negro

Fort . . . has been strengthened . . . and now occupied by between two hundred and fifty and three hundred blacks, who are well armed, clothed, and disciplined. Secret practices to inveigle negroes from the frontiers of Georgia, as well as from the Cherokee and Creek nations are still continued by the negroes and hostile Creeks. This is a state of things which cannot fail to produce much injury to the neighboring settlements, and excite irritations which may ultimately endanger the peace of the nation.” Possibly fearing Jackson’s impetuosity, Crawford then reminded the general that the fort was rightfully a Spanish responsibility, and failing that, it was up to President Madison to decide what course of action to take.¹⁴

Jackson, as was his lifelong habit, paid little or no attention to his civilian superiors. Although a staunch defender of the Constitution, Jackson would repeatedly ignore the parts that gave Congress the sole authority to declare war and the State Department the responsibility to handle foreign policy. In those early days of the Republic even the most fundamental aspects of governmental authority were open to question. Two centuries later, we still have not determined where to draw the line between “war” and “police action” or between “self-defense” and “aggression.” Ironically, having the “Father of the Constitution” sitting in the president’s chair seems to have made little difference.

Two weeks after issuing the orders to Gaines, Jackson instructed Capt. Ferdinand Amelung of the First Infantry to deliver a message to Gov. Mauricio de Zuniga of West Florida. After politely telling Zuniga that the destruction of the fort was in both nations’ interest he announced, “The conduct of this banditti is such as will not be tolerated by our Government, and, if not put down by Spanish authority, will compel us, in self-defence, to destroy them.”¹⁵ Held up in New Orleans for nearly two weeks by storms and high seas in the Gulf, Captain Amelung would take longer to get to Pensacola than expected. Not that it really mattered. The day after Amelung departed, Jackson wrote to Secretary Crawford, informing him of his orders to Gaines and of the message to Zuniga. Jackson remarked, “I have a hope that general Gaines has attended to the subject of this Negro Fort and put an end to the lawless depredations of this banditti of land-pirates. He has been left to his discretion to act on this subject, with my opinion, if certain facts can be proven against them, that their fort must be destroyed. I trust he has taken the hint.”¹⁶

Gaines’s plan to destroy the fort was innovative in the sense that it allowed the United States to claim, for political purposes, that it had been acting in self-defense. Gaines ordered Col. Duncan Clinch to erect Camp

Crawford along the Flint River, just north of the Florida border. Gaines then announced that the fort would be supplied from New Orleans, which meant bringing supplies up the Apalachicola, right past Prospect Bluff. Writing to Jackson, he remarked that “if such an intercourse could be opened down the Apalachicola, it would enable us to keep an eye upon the Seminoles, and the Negro Fort.” If the fort fired upon the supply convoy, it would provide the excuse needed to destroy it.¹⁷

On May 24 Captain Amelung finally arrived at Pensacola and presented Jackson’s message to Governor Zuniga. Two weeks later, Jackson received Zuniga’s response at his headquarters in Nashville. Zuniga wrote, “My mode of thinking exactly corresponds with yours as to dislodging the negroes from the fort, the occupying it with Spanish troops, or destroying it, and delivering the negroes who may be collected to their lawful owners.” Being a good bureaucrat, Zuniga informed Jackson that he had deferred the decision up the chain of command. “Until my captain general decides, no steps will be taken by the Government of the United States, or by your excellency.”¹⁸

Jackson didn’t wait for word from the captain general in Cuba or the War Department in Washington. On July 10, 1816, a small fleet of supply ships arrived at the mouth of the Apalachicola. The convoy consisted of two supply schooners and two navy gunboats under the command of Sailing Master Jarius Loomis.¹⁹ After receiving news of Loomis’s arrival at the mouth of the Apalachicola, Clinch took 116 men from the Fourth Infantry and descended the river with merchant William Hambly as their guide. During the evening they were joined by Lower Creek leader William McIntosh and 150 friendly Creeks, and the next day by another large body of warriors. Clinch then sent an advance guard of Indians to capture any blacks they came upon and unite with him near the fort.²⁰

Around 2:00 a.m. on July 20, Clinch arrived about a mile north of the fort and sent one of his men and two Indians to notify Loomis of his arrival. Three days later, an allied Creek entered the fort under a white flag. Former Spanish slave Garçon, a skilled carpenter and one of those in command at the fort, refused to surrender, warning that “he would sink any American vessels that should attempt to pass it, and blow up the fort if he could not defend it.” The runaways had won their freedom and were willing to die preserving it.²¹

Clinch described the fort, writing, “It stood on the east side of the river about twenty-five miles from the bay. . . . The parapet was about fifteen feet high and eighteen thick, and defended by one thirty two [pound cannon], three twenty fours, two nines, two sixes, and an elegant five and a half-inch

howitzer. It was situated on a beautiful and commanding bluff, with the river in front, a large creek just below, a swamp in the rear, and a small creek just above, which rendered it difficult to be approached by artillery.”²²

The gunboats, followed by the two supply ships, arrived below the fort and met up with Clinch on July 25. Two days later, just before dawn, the gunboats came within range of the fort. Choosing a site about a mile and a half below the fort, Loomis secured the gunboats to trees on the shore and ordered their cannon aimed at the fort. True to his promise, Garçon and his fellow Maroons opened fire. Downriver, the American sailors began to return fire, refining their aim with each shot.

By the eighth round, the naval gunners had found their mark. Inside an oven on the deck of Gunboat 154 a fire had been built, and within the coals a cannon ball had been placed. When it reached the point where it was glowing red-hot, it was carefully carried to the waiting cannon and loaded into the muzzle of the weapon.²³ The cannon’s powder was ignited, and the ball arced toward the fort. Deflected by a tree, the “hot shot” rebounded into the fort’s powder magazine. In one monumental flash, the kegs of powder exploded, instantly killing nearly three hundred of the men, women, and children who had taken refuge in the fort. The fort at Prospect Bluff had been reduced to splinters, scattered debris, and torn bodies.²⁴

The carnage was appalling, even to hardened veterans. Clinch’s staff surgeon, Marcus C. Buck, wrote to his father, telling him that “hundreds of lifeless bodies were stretched upon the plain, buried in the sand and rubbish, or suspended from the tops of the surrounding pines. Here lay an innocent babe, there a helpless mother, on the one side a sturdy warrior, on the other a bleeding squaw.” Clinch saw a higher purpose to his victory: “The war yells of the Indians, the cries and lamentations of the wounded, compelled the soldier to pause in the midst of victory, to drop a tear for the sufferings of his fellow beings, and to acknowledge that the great Ruler of the Universe must have used us as instruments in chastising the blood-thirsty and murderous wretches that defended the fort.”²⁵

There had been about 320 people within the fort. Over 250 died instantly, their dismembered bodies blown in every direction. The few surviving blacks were bound and guarded, soon to return to a life of slavery. To Clinch’s dismay, few of the survivors were the property of white Americans. Most were either escaped Spanish slaves or the property of Creeks from Georgia and Alabama. For southerners expecting an end to the black refuge in Florida, the destruction of the fort at Prospect Bluff would prove somewhat meaningless.²⁶

As the smoke cleared, soldiers, Indians, and sailors began to sift through the rubble to locate what loot they could. Although few people were left alive, there was a surprisingly large amount of military booty. Sailing Master Loomis reported to Commodore Daniel Patterson on the amount of war material salvaged from the wreckage: “2,500 stand of musketry, with accoutrements complete; 500 carbines; 500 steel scabbard swords; 4 cases, containing two hundred pairs pistols; 300 quarter casks rifle powder; 762 barrels of cannon powder, besides a large quantity of military stores and clothing.”²⁷

The shock of the fort’s destruction served to quiet the frontier for a short time. Maroons who had not been at the fort fled the area, most of them going to villages along the Suwannee River. The army, having done its duty, was ordered away from the Florida–Georgia border and into the soon-to-be-created Alabama Territory. Today, the site of the fort is preserved as Fort Gadsden Park in the Apalachicola National Forest.

1817–1818

The Invasion of Florida

The destruction of the fort at Prospect Bluff brought little peace to the Florida/Georgia borderlands. Particularly troublesome was the matter of cattle theft. Florida abounded in good range land, and the Seminole excelled at animal husbandry. Bahamian trader Alexander Arbuthnot met with several Seminole leaders and forwarded their complaints about rustling to the British Ambassador in Washington, Charles Bagot. Believing unprincipled frontiersmen were the root cause of problems along the border, Arbuthnot commented, “It is persons in the back settlements of Georgia who enter the Seminole territory in large parties to steal cattle, which they frequently drive off in gangs of 50 and 100 at a time, and if in these excursions the Indians meet them and oppose these predatory plunderers, blood sometimes has been spilt.”¹ A frustrated Seminole leader complained:

The white people have carried all the red people’s cattle off. . . . I sent to all my people to let white people alone, and stay on this side of the river; and they did so; but the white people still continue to carry off their cattle. . . . The whites first begun, and there is nothing said about that, but great complaint made about what the Indians do. This is now three years since the white people killed three Indians. Since that, they have killed three other Indians, and taken their horses, and what they had; and this summer they killed three more; and very lately they killed one more . . . but there is nothing said about that. . . . The cattle that we are accused of taking, were cattle that the white people took from us; our young men went and brought them back, with the same marks and brands.²

By February 1817 the Seminole had suffered one too many indignities. Searching for the murderers of some fellow tribal members, a group

of warriors came upon the isolated home of the Garrett family near St. Marys in southeastern Georgia. With her husband away, Mrs. Garrett could do little to defend herself. Shot, stabbed, and scalped, she was joined in death by her two children, one a toddler, the other an infant.³ In response to demands that they turn over the murderers, a group of Seminole leaders explained that in their eyes, justice had already been done. "There was some of our young men out hunting, and they were killed; others went to take satisfaction, and the kettle of one of the men that was killed was found in the house where the woman and two children were killed; and they supposed it had been her husband who had killed the Indians, and took their satisfaction there."⁴

The influx of settlers and the resulting confrontations continued to increase. Thousands of people poured into the Alabama Territory, which had been split off from the new State of Mississippi on March 3, 1817.⁵ James Graham of North Carolina jokingly compared the migration to an epidemic. "The Alabama Fever rages here with great violence and has carried off vast numbers of our citizens. . . . There is no question that this fever is contagious . . . for as soon as one neighbor visits another who has just returned from the Alabama he immediately discovers the same symptoms which are exhibited by the person who has seen the alluring Alabama."⁶ Many of those settlers were moving into territory that had been ceded at the end of the Creek War, while others were settling on Indian land that had not been ceded. The Creeks were understandably upset. What good was a treaty that set specific boundaries if one of the parties ignored those boundaries? In addition, the Creeks who had fled to Florida were still being told by the British that the ceded land was supposed to be returned to them. They knew that an increase in settlers meant a decrease in their chances of ever being able to return to their homes.

Meanwhile, General Gaines became involved in a war of words with José Masot, the new Spanish governor of West Florida. Fort Crawford (not to be confused with Camp Crawford in Georgia) had been erected in southern Alabama, just north of the Spanish capital. Gaines requested permission to bring his supply vessels up the Escambia River, which ran from Pensacola Bay up to Fort Crawford. Masot, citing the 1795 treaty that defined the relationship between the two countries, insisted that the vessels pay duty. Angry letters flew between the two commanders, but the Spaniard held his ground. Officials in Washington, not wanting to upset delicate negotiations with Spain, ordered Gaines to pay the duty. To American minds, the incident was simply another reason to remove the Spanish from Florida.⁷

Not only was Gaines bothered by difficult Spaniards (who were no doubt bothered by difficult Americans); he was also concerned about the continued British presence in Florida. These people were not authorized or supported by London, but neither Gaines nor the Seminole seemed to care. For their part, the Indians were being threatened by the Americans and needed any ally they could get, while Gaines, who had nearly died from wounds received during the defense of Fort Erie in 1814, disliked anything British. Two of the men he was most concerned about were former Royal Marine Capt. George Woodbine, who had helped lead British intrigues in Florida during the War of 1812, and Alexander Arbuthnot, the elderly Scottish merchant from the Bahamas. Woodbine appeared to be up to no good, but Arbuthnot was in Florida simply to make a profit. Dismayed by the treatment of the Seminole at the hands of their northern neighbors, Arbuthnot wrote letters to both British and American officials on the Indians' behalf.⁸

The letters brought a measure of notoriety to Arbuthnot but did nothing to help the Seminole. Either surprisingly unaware of the American attitude or simply intent on telling the Indians what they wanted to hear, Arbuthnot wrote to Creek leader Big Warrior, assuring him the United States would return their land according to the Treaty of Ghent, and that the Indians should do nothing to violate any stipulations of the treaty. Telling them that if the Americans did not begin to return the land "or if they have been making further encroachments, the chiefs have only to represent their complaints and the aggressions of the Americans to the Governor of New Providence [Bahamas] . . . to see that . . . the stipulations contained in the treaty, in *their favor*, are faithfully carried into execution." Arbuthnot assured Big Warrior that once the British ambassador in Washington made the president aware of the complaints, orders would be issued to remove the intruders from Indian lands. In his personal journal, Arbuthnot was less optimistic, writing, "I say the English ill-treat them: after making them parties in the war with America, they leave them without a pilot, to be robbed and ill-treated by their natural and sworn enemies, the Americans." Arbuthnot's intentions may have been naively honorable or shamefully opportunistic, but he was perpetuating a dream that would never come true.⁹

There was another Englishman on the scene who appeared even more sinister to American officials. Robert Ambrister had been a lieutenant in the Royal Marines and an acquaintance of George Woodbine. In the spring of 1817, Woodbine sent Ambrister to Florida to engage in some unspecified intrigue. Arriving in military attire, Ambrister was able to convince

the Seminole that he represented a new British alliance. In truth, he was nothing more than an agent for Woodbine, who had concocted dreams of a personal Florida empire protected by black and Seminole warriors. Fanciful as it was, Ambrister bought into it and became part of the plot.¹⁰

American officials, both in Washington and the western outposts, were divided on how to handle the situation in the southeast. Everyone in the administration of newly elected President James Monroe wanted to acquire Florida, but no one wanted to ruffle any European feathers. Secretary of State John Quincy Adams was involved in delicate negotiations for the colony with Spain, and with repairs still underway from the British burning of Washington in 1814, few people were willing to chance another war with England. Out on the frontier, Generals Gaines and Jackson saw things differently. As far as they were concerned, a large American force should enter Florida, punish the Seminole, and put the colony under U.S. control.¹¹ They felt that if the Florida Indians were causing trouble and the Spanish authorities couldn't control them, the United States had the right to take care of matters. Unlike Monroe and Adams, Gaines and Jackson would not have to face angry ambassadors and indignant congressmen asking annoying questions about the legality and propriety of it all.

Unfortunately, the Seminole could do little to aid their situation. They had every right to defend their lives and property, yet every confrontation supplied the Americans with an excuse to make war upon them. Cooler heads among the Seminole leadership no doubt saw the danger but could offer their people no real solution. If the Indians did not respond to attacks by marauding whites, the assaults and thefts would escalate. If they did respond, it could lead to a devastating war. They could offer peace or complain to the authorities in the United States and Europe, but none of those people really cared about the problems of the Florida Indians. If they complied with demands to turn over the killers of whites, it would be a precedent that could only encourage white aggression and undermine their own people's faith in their leaders. For the Seminole, it was a lose-lose situation.

General Gaines was charged with maintaining law and order on the frontier, but it was a difficult thing to do. Most settlers simply wanted the Indians to go away, but some of the Natives had, by law, every right to be where they were. Many friendly Lower Creeks had been allowed to remain on their land after the Creek War. The cession that had resulted from the Treaty of Fort Jackson did not take away the houses and farms of those who had sided with the Americans, and even some of the Red Sticks were al-

lowed to keep their holdings. When settlers, especially new ones who viewed every Indian as hostile, asked for protection, Gaines told them, “There exists no where any sort of authority to drive off such Indians settled upon public lands.” Concerned that innocent people might be harmed, he asked them to view the friendly Creeks “as a part of the human family, possessing the right of residing among us” and to “make allowance for their ignorance and their wants, which are calculated rather to awaken our commiseration, than to excite in us a spirit of hostility towards them.” It was a paternalistic view, but it exemplified the difficulty many had in determining friend and foe.¹²

Just as Gaines had no authority to remove Indians who held legal claim to their lands, he also lacked the ability to remove white settlers from lands they technically weren’t supposed to be occupying. Backwoods whites were often of the opinion that the territory ceded by the Creeks was now open for settlement, and many built small farmsteads without having proper title to the land. They were squatters, hoping that by the time anyone disputed their claims, they would have gained a right to the parcel by “preemption.” This was a concept whereby people believed that if someone had lived on and improved a piece of wilderness, he was entitled to own it. The federal government was generally opposed to this, as the sale of western lands was a major source of its income. The southern and western states usually supported preemption, as it helped foster population growth and settlement. Because of political pressures, the army was rarely ordered to remove squatters.

During mid-July 1817 Gaines prepared to reactivate Camp Crawford on the Flint River in Georgia (now renamed Fort Scott), hoping the military presence would overawe any hostile Indians in the vicinity. Major David E. Twiggs, in command of the Seventh Infantry at Camp Montgomery in Alabama, was ordered to march overland with his troops and reoccupy the abandoned site. Shortly after his arrival at the end of July, Twiggs sent runners to nearby Creek and Seminole villages inviting their leaders to meet with him on August 4.¹³ For the most part, the Indians who attended were friendly, but Twiggs took the opportunity to read them a letter from Gaines, knowing the message would be passed on to Seminole towns farther off. The general pointed out that the Indians had been asked to “deliver up the murderers of our citizens and the stolen property” but had “refused to deliver either” and had met in “council at Mickasuky, in which they have determined upon war.” Gaines warned, “They have been at war against helpless women and children, let them now calculate upon fighting men.” He also warned them of false promises made by the British. “The hostile party pretend to calculate upon help from the British! They may as well

look for soldiers from the moon to help them. Their warriors [British soldiers] were beaten, and driven from our country by American troops. The English are not able to help themselves; how, then, should they help the old 'Red Sticks,' whom they have ruined by pretended friendship?"¹⁴

Most of the Seminole and Creek leaders were conciliatory and respectful toward Twiggs and the message he brought, and they promised to give him an answer in ten days. The one exception was Neamathla, the bold and defiant headman of Fowltown, a village located a few miles upriver from Fort Scott on the opposite (east) bank of the Flint River. He told Twiggs that the river was the line between them and warned the soldiers "not to cut another stick on the east side of Flint River." The land was his people's, he said, and that he had been "directed by the powers above to protect and defend it." He intended to do so, he told Twiggs, and the Americans would see that "talking could not frighten him."¹⁵

At the heart of the matter was a simple question with a very complex answer: Whose land was it? To Gaines, the answer was simple: Fowltown was in Georgia and therefore on U.S. soil. To make matters even more conclusive, Fowltown was situated in the area that had been ceded to the United States by the Creeks at the end of the Creek War. Neamathla and his people were of a differing opinion. They had, after all, been living on the land long before the Europeans had arrived, not to mention the United States coming into existence. The Indians also held a different point of view concerning the Creek cession. The people of Fowltown were Lower Creek, but more closely associated with the Seminole of Lake Miccosukee, and were very sympathetic to the Red Stick cause. In their eyes, Fowltown and the surrounding areas were not Creek land to be given away. By the rules of their own societies, both Gaines and Neamathla were right. As was sure to happen sooner or later, the time had come to decide the matter.

Intent on making a show of force, Gaines began to reposition his men. On October 11, he issued orders for Maj. Peter Muhlenberg at Camp Montgomery, in Alabama, to obtain provisions from Mobile and transport part of the troops by water to the mouth of the Apalachicola River and from there to Fort Scott on the Flint River.¹⁶ On October 30, Acting Secretary of War George Graham wrote to Gaines that President Monroe had approved the movement of troops from Camp Montgomery to Fort Scott, believing it would "at least have the effect of restraining the Seminoles from committing further depredations, and perhaps of inducing them to make reparation for the murders which they have committed." If they refused, "It is the wish of the President that you should not, on that account, pass the line, and



Neamathla, defiant headman of the village of Fowltown.

State Archives of Florida, <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/25542>.

make an attack upon them within the limits of Florida, until you shall have received instructions from this department.”¹⁷

Gaines was forbidden from entering Spanish Florida, but authorization was given to “remove the Indians still remaining on the lands ceded,” with exception of those that had been granted reservations in the treaty. Graham

suggested, "It may be proper to retain some of them as hostages until reparation may have been made for the depredations which have been committed." With regards to the means and manner of removing them, Graham told Gaines, "You will exercise your discretion."¹⁸

On October 23, troops left Camp Montgomery, headed overland for Fort Scott. At the same time, Major Muhlenberg departed Mobile in three vessels "laden with ordnance stores, baggage and provisions, with eighty men under the command," underway for the Apalachicola. Gaines expected everyone to be at Fort Scott by November 10 at the latest, but when he arrived at the fort on November 19, Muhlenberg's fleet had yet to arrive.¹⁹ In order to ascertain the reason for the delay, Gaines dispatched Lt. Richard W. Scott and forty men downriver to assist in bringing the supply ships upriver to the fort.²⁰

Gaines then decided to deal with Neamathla, the proud headman of Fowltown. He sent an Indian runner to the town requesting that Neamathla come to the fort and meet with him. Later that day the runner returned with a message from the Indian leader: Neamathla had said all that he had to say and would not meet with Gaines.²¹ Unhappy with the response, Gaines ordered Major Twiggs to assemble 250 men, go to Fowltown, and bring the recalcitrant headman in.²² On November 21, 1817, Twiggs arrived at the town and was greeted by gunfire from the surrounding woods. Finding the town deserted, Twiggs returned to Fort Scott without his captive.²³

Incensed, Gaines on the following day ordered Col. Matthew Arbuckle to assemble three hundred men and reconnoiter the vicinity of Fowltown to determine the strength of the Indians. Aware of the approach of the soldiers on the twenty-third, Neamathla's people made plans to defend their homes. Hidden in a nearby swamp, about sixty warriors commenced firing on the troops as they approached the town. The fire was quickly returned and continued for about twenty minutes before the Indians fell back into the swamp with a loss of six to eight killed and a greater number wounded. Arbuckle had one man killed, Pvt. Aaron Hughes, the first military fatality of the Seminole Wars. Leaving the deserted town untouched, Arbuckle marched a short distance away and erected Fort Hughes at what is now Bainbridge, Georgia.²⁴

If Gaines's objective had been to maintain peace on the southern frontier, he had failed miserably. The Indians were neither overawed by the presence of military forces nor willing to make reparations for the murders they had committed. Instead, they chose to stand their ground against crimes and depredations that had been committed against their own people. In a bold act of defiance, Neamathla had made it perfectly clear that he would defend

his land on the east side of the Flint River and had refused to discuss the matter any further. Whether Gaines intended to or not, he had started a war.

Gaines may have commenced the hostilities, but he was in no position to expand his little war. He had been ordered not to cross into Florida, and even if he had been given the authority, the means were not at his disposal. He had hundreds of men at the ready, but he had little food, clothing, or munitions. Without the supplies that were supposed to have come up the Apalachicola, Gaines was stopped. At the moment, he had one pressing question: Where was Major Muhlenberg and the supply ships?

Gaines had sent Lieutenant Scott and forty men downriver to assist Muhlenberg, and sometime around November 21 Scott and Muhlenberg met near the mouth of the Apalachicola. The major immediately ordered clothing and other stores loaded onto Scott's boat and told the lieutenant to return to the fort. Staying behind with the fleet would be half of Scott's healthy men. Replacing them would be twenty men who were in need of medical attention, seven women (the wives of soldiers who were already at Fort Scott), and several children. Neither Muhlenberg nor Scott had any way of knowing what was happening at Fowltown.²⁵

For nearly a week, Scott's boat moved steadily against the current of the Apalachicola River. It was a slow, laborious process. A crudely fashioned boat built by soldiers, Scott's vessel was not well suited to moving against the current. Forward motion was accomplished by "warping," the process whereby a grappling hook was thrown out ahead of the boat, and after it dug into the bottom, the line was pulled in, dragging the vessel forward.

On November 28 Scott and his crew reached the Forbes and Company trading post at Spanish Bluff. From proprietor William Hambly, Scott learned the Indians were upset about something and were gathering farther upriver, near the Florida/Georgia border. Hiring an Indian runner, Scott sent a message to Gaines:

Enclosed you will receive Major Muhlenberg's communication, which he directs me to forward to you by express from this place. Mr. Hambly informs me that Indians are assembling at the junction of the river, where they intend to make a stand against those vessels coming up the river; should this be the case, I am not able to make a stand against them. My command does not exceed forty men, and one half sick, and without arms. I leave this [place] immediately.²⁶

Scott and his crew continued their journey. Two days later, a mile below the point where the river split into its two main tributaries and entered

U.S. territory, the channel curved slightly, and the current would have forced the boat toward the eastern shore. Gathered at this place were hundreds of Seminole, Mikasuki, and Creek warriors, intent on taking revenge for the attack on Fowltown. As the boat drew near, the Indians suddenly rose from their concealment and fired a deadly volley into the unprotected vessel. Sitting or standing out in the open, most of the occupants were quickly killed or wounded by fire from the shore. When the current drove the vessel aground, vengeful warriors climbed aboard and continued the slaughter. Only six of the forty-one soldiers (four of them wounded) were able to swim to safety on the opposite shore. Of the women and children, only seventeen-year-old Elizabeth Stewart survived and was taken captive.²⁷

The attack on Fowltown and the resulting “Scott Massacre” made total warfare inevitable. Earlier the War Department had advised Gaines that he was not to invade Spanish territory. The incoming secretary of war, John C. Calhoun, had amended the policy, giving Gaines permission to intrude a short distance into foreign land. When news of Scott and his doomed companions reached Washington, Calhoun immediately issued orders for Gaines to invade Florida and pursue the Indians wherever they might seek refuge. He was not, however, allowed to attack any Spanish installation.²⁸

The orders may have been issued to Gaines, but the general was no longer at Fort Scott. Prior to the Scott incident, Gaines had been ordered to the East Coast to help the navy clear out a nest of pirates who had taken up residence at Fernandina on Amelia Island, the same town that had been seized during the Patriot War. Needing an immediate and powerful presence in West Florida, Secretary Calhoun called upon Andrew Jackson, commander of the Southern Division and Gaines’s immediate superior. By late December and into January 1818, the general was busy in Nashville, gathering troops and planning his campaign. Calhoun, aware of Jackson’s ambitions toward Florida, dispatched copies of the orders that had been previously issued to Gaines, including the ones that had forbidden Gaines from attacking any Spanish installation.²⁹

Before receiving those orders, Jackson wrote a confidential letter to Monroe, informing the president that if the government so desired, Florida could be conquered within sixty days. All Monroe had to do was send approval through a confidential intermediary. Other than Jackson’s claim many years later that he received a reply and later burned it, there is no direct evidence that Monroe ever responded. Just as significantly, the president never told the general *not* to take the Spanish posts. Fully aware of Jackson’s reputation, motives, and ambitions, Monroe probably knew that, unrestrained, “Old Hickory” would do as he pleased. For the present

it was safer, politically, to say nothing. If things went wrong, Monroe could distance himself from the general's actions.³⁰

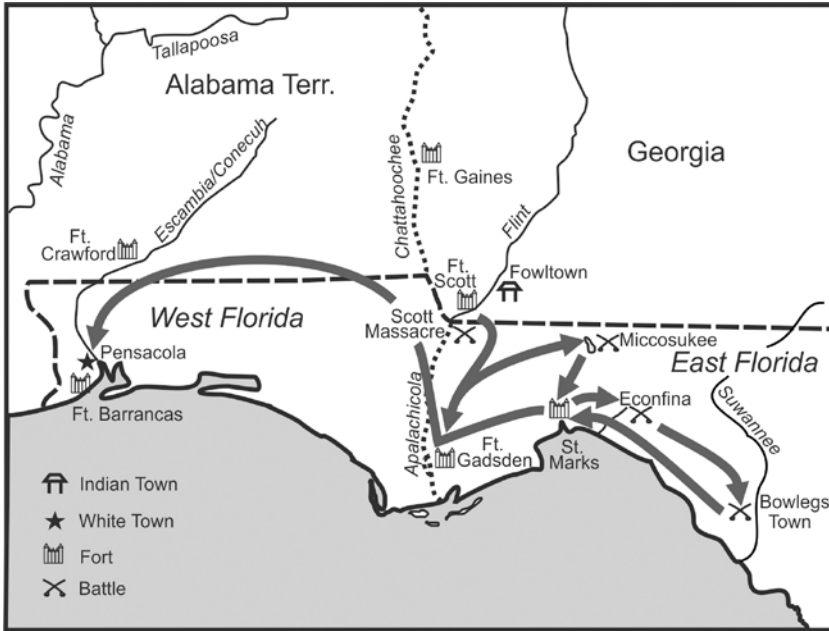
While Jackson gathered his soldiers and made his plans, the Seminole continued their hostilities. In early December they attacked Fort Scott but were rebuffed, while other warriors abducted William Hambly and Edmund Doyle from their store at Spanish Bluff.³¹ On December 15 Muhlenberg's supply vessels were attacked by a large body of Indians thirty miles below Fort Scott. Forced to stop, Muhlenberg sent a message to Gaines, reporting the assault and requesting assistance. Two of Muhlenberg's men had been killed and another thirteen wounded:

We are now compelled to remain here, as it is impossible for us to carry out a warp, as a man cannot show himself above the bulwark without being fired on. I can assure you that our present situation is not the most pleasant, not knowing how soon, or whether, we are to receive succor from above. The wounded are in but a bad situation, owing to the vessels being much crowded, and it is impossible to make them any ways comfortable on board.³²

The Seminole, confident in their own fighting ability and feeling they were the aggrieved party, had decided to take the war to the Americans. Operating in their own territory, where they had the advantage, they were attacking Gaines's force where it was most vulnerable: in its supply chain and on its fringes.

Jackson and about one thousand men arrived at Fort Scott on the evening of March 9, 1818, and found the post critically short of provisions. Muhlenberg and his ships had finally arrived, but much of the food on board had been consumed during the long delay on the Apalachicola. For each man there was only a quart of corn, to be supplemented by the meat from a few scrawny cattle and the hogs that the troops had brought with them. It was, at best, three days' rations. Fearing the supply vessels coming from New Orleans would have just as much difficulty ascending the Apalachicola as Muhlenberg's convoy had, Jackson decided to go on the march. On the eleventh the soldiers began to cross to the southern side of the Flint. By morning they were all gathered and commenced their march toward the Apalachicola.³³

Accompanying the general were about nine hundred Georgia Militia, less than four hundred regulars, and a small party of friendly Creeks. The one thousand Tennessee and Kentucky Volunteers Jackson had been expecting were a few days behind, having taken the slow overland route through



First Seminole War, 1818.

Map by John Missall.

Georgia instead of coming down the Chattahoochee River, as ordered. Moving separately were about fifteen hundred allied Creek Volunteers. On the thirteenth these warriors scored first blood in a battle with Red Stick leader Econchattimico (Red Ground King) near the Chipola River in the northern panhandle. Six days later they surprised and captured one hundred eighty women and children along with fifty-three warriors. The Creek War may have officially ended, but it was certainly not concluded.³⁴

Two days after entering Florida, the advance columns of the American army encountered the first of the supply boats. A few days later, Jackson and his men encamped at the site of the destroyed British fort at Prospect Bluff. While the men ate, rested, and filled their haversacks, the general had them erect a new fort within the ruins of the old one. Supplies for the army were slow in arriving, and a depot was needed to house and protect them. Jackson named it Fort Gadsden in honor of his aide-de-camp, Lt. James Gadsden, who was in charge of the fort's construction.³⁵

The army left Fort Gadsden on March 26, heading northeast toward the main Seminole towns at Lake Miccosukee. With a large portion of the supplies having yet to reach Fort Gadsden, the army was traveling light,

carrying only eight days' rations, fully intending to live off the plundered provisions of the defeated Seminole. On the twenty-ninth they constructed nine boats to cross the Ochlockonee River, after which Major Twiggs and three hundred men were dispatched to attack the village of Tallahassie, which stood between the army and the main towns around Lake Miccosukee. Arriving at the town on the thirty-first, Twiggs found it deserted and subsequently put it to the torch.³⁶

The Seminole clearly knew Jackson's army was coming, though the army's rapid advance gave them little time to prepare. On April 1, as the Seminole were attempting to move their cattle to safety, a group of warriors, starting from a well-chosen point of land not far from the main Lake Miccosukee town, opened fire on the advancing column of soldiers. Jackson ordered movements to encircle the warriors as they slowly fell back, and he might have succeeded had not some of the volunteers mistook the defenders for friendly Creeks and held their fire, giving the Seminole time to make their escape.³⁷

The following day, with the villages deserted, Jackson put his men to work destroying or confiscating everything they could find. As the general's adjutant reported, "About one thousand head of cattle fell into our hands. . . . Near three thousand bushels of corn were found. . . . Upwards of three hundred houses were consumed, leaving a tract of fertile country in ruins." As far as the Americans were concerned, the British were to blame. "These wretches might have lived in plenty, but for the infernal machinations of foreign traders, if not agents."³⁸

To the south, the U.S. Navy was aiding in the war effort. Lt. Isaac McKeever, in command of the U.S.S. *Thomas Shields*, arrived at the Bay of St. Marks on April 1, but instead of hoisting the American flag, he displayed the British Union Jack. Knowing the Indians were hoping for aid from the British, it seemed a good way to gather intelligence from anyone who happened to pay a visit. The next day a Spanish lieutenant from Fort St. Marks came on board, inquiring as to the nature of McKeever's business and whether he had authority from the captain general in Cuba to enter Spanish territory. Posing as a British officer, McKeever told the lieutenant that he would explain the nature of his business after Capt. Woodbine arrived, indicating that the supplies were intended to aid Prophet Francis and his warriors in their present distress. Replying that Woodbine, Prophet Francis, and Alexander Arbuthnot were friends of the Spanish commandant at St. Marks, the lieutenant told McKeever that Arbuthnot was still at St. Marks and that the ship should expect a visit from Prophet Francis shortly. The next day, Francis and the Red Stick leader Homathlemico arrived at St. Marks and

took a canoe out to McKeever's vessel. Instead of being welcomed by their English friends, the pair were taken prisoner by their American enemies and thrown in the ship's brig.³⁹

Back at Lake Miccosukee, the army continued its work of destruction and then turned south, arriving at St. Marks on April 6. Jackson sent a letter to the fort's commanding officer, Francisco Caso y Luengo, telling him he'd come in peace, but that he intended to garrison the fort with American troops to prevent the Indians from taking it. The Spanish commander congratulated the American commander on his success against the Mikasuki, but politely refused to surrender possession of the fort, saying he needed authorization from his superiors in Havana. Jackson, anxious to continue his campaign against the Indians and in no mood to be put off, replied, "The occupation of St. Marks is essential to the accomplishment of my campaign, and is peculiarly so at this period, when evidence is derived from every source of the designs of the negroes and Indians against that fortress" and that they were "now concentrating with the intention of taking possession of St. Marks the moment my army moves from its vicinity."⁴⁰

There were, of course, no such credible reports. Indeed, if Jackson knew where the Indians were gathering, why not just attack them there? Without waiting for Luengo's response, Jackson ordered Major Twiggs to take possession of Fort St. Marks on the morning of April 7. Accompanied by three companies of soldiers, Twiggs marched through the open gates, taking the Spaniards by complete surprise. The fact that Jackson's orders had specifically forbidden molesting the Spaniards was conveniently ignored. The idea that the Indians and the black allies would want to occupy the fort was absurd, but it was the only viable excuse the general could give for taking possession of a foreign installation. A war against the Seminole had now turned into a war to conquer Florida.⁴¹

Jackson's brazen violation of international law surprised everyone except those who knew him well. Commandant Luengo could do little but lodge a formal protest before being shipped off to Pensacola. Among the occupants of the fort was Alexander Arbuthnot, the Bahamian trader who had taken refuge in the fort under the mistaken assumption that the Americans would not dare violate Spanish sovereignty. It would prove a fatal mistake. Today the remnants of Fort St. Marks are preserved as a state historic site.⁴²

After taking possession of St. Marks, Jackson sent a progress report to Secretary of War Calhoun, assuring him that the capture of the fort had been an act of self-defense. Promising to forward copies of correspondence with the Spanish commandant, including evidence to support his actions

with a detailed account of the operation, the general informed Calhoun that he was preparing to march to the Suwannee River to attack the black settlements. “Success depends upon the rapidity of my movements,” he explained, which “will put a final close to this savage war.” Besides chastising the Indians and conquering the Spanish, Jackson was now hunting runaway slaves.⁴³

On the morning of the eighth Prophet Francis and Homathlemico were brought ashore and immediately hanged. Jackson forwarded the news to Calhoun the following day, commenting that Homathlemico had been in command of the party who, “so inhumanly sacrificed Scott and his companions.” He also reported that Arbuthnot was being held in confinement until evidence could be gathered confirming his guilt. It was doubtful that anyone would be looking for evidence to confirm his innocence.⁴⁴

Back in Washington, officials were beginning to receive reports from the war zone, and not all of the news was pleasing. In response to Jackson’s correspondence of March 25 informing the administration of his plans to take possession of St. Marks, Secretary Calhoun forwarded copies of the original orders that had been sent to General Gaines prohibiting the molestation of any Spanish posts. It was a feeble response to an outright act of insubordination, but there was little else Calhoun could do. Knowing the orders would arrive too late to prevent any additional outrages, Calhoun was doing little more than protecting his and the president’s own positions.⁴⁵

After leaving American troops in charge at Fort St. Marks, on April 9 Jackson marched his army north, back along the path that led to Lake Miccosukee. About halfway there they turned east, making for Walker’s Spring, where they could cross the Aucilla River. They then turned southeast, basically following the path of today’s highway US19. It certainly wasn’t the most direct route, but like many marches during the Seminole Wars period, it was one dictated by established trails and places where rivers could be crossed.⁴⁶

On the morning of April 12 Jackson ordered headman William McIntosh of the allied Creeks to investigate the sounds of nearby dogs and cattle. McIntosh’s scouts soon returned with news that they had found Red Stick leader Peter McQueen and his people on the move, near the natural bridge of the Econfinia River. McIntosh and a large force of Creeks accompanied by fifty Tennessee Volunteers quickly attacked. Following an hour-long fight, the Red Sticks warriors fled and were pursued for three miles, after which they fought for several more hours. Overwhelmed by the superior force arrayed against them, McQueen and a large number of warriors managed to escape into the nearby wetlands, leaving thirty-seven of their

comrades dead on the field. Also left behind were over a hundred people, mostly women and children, who were taken prisoner, along with about six hundred head of cattle.⁴⁷

Reporting news of the battle to Indian agent David Mitchell, McIntosh said, "There was among the Hostiles a woman that was in the boat when our friends the white people were killed on the River below Fort Scott. We gave her to her friends. Her Husband and Father are with Genl. Jackson." Elizabeth Stewart, the lone female survivor of the Scott Massacre, had been rescued.⁴⁸

Jackson and the army pressed on, the general intent on surprising Bowlegs's Town on the Suwannee River, along with the nearby Black Seminole villages. After marching for three more days, the army arrived within six miles of the Suwannee on the afternoon of April 16. It looked like a good spot to camp for the night and prepare for the next day's attack, but then several Seminole scouts were seen riding off in a hurry toward Bowlegs's Town. Knowing the element of surprise was lost, Jackson swiftly put his men in motion, determined to attack the Seminole before nightfall, depriving them of the time needed to get their supplies and possessions to safety across the river. In truth, he had little choice. The army's provisions were exhausted, and the men needed the Seminole's food to keep from starving.⁴⁹

The army reached Bowlegs's Town around sunset and immediately attacked. Jackson had hoped to surround the town to prevent the defenders' escape, but the forewarned Seminole and their black allies put up a strong resistance, enabling nearly everyone to make it safely across the river. Although he was no doubt disappointed for not having killed a large number of Indians or taken many runaway slaves prisoner, Andrew Jackson had accomplished his primary mission: The Indians had been driven far from the border with Georgia, their homes were in ashes, much of their livestock was slaughtered or taken, and a good portion of their crops were destroyed. The Seminole and Mikasuki may have been dispersed and defeated, but relatively few had been captured, and they were certainly not destroyed. They would rebuild their villages, replant their fields, and continue to grow their herds of cattle.⁵⁰

The next morning Jackson dispatched foraging parties into the surrounding countryside and ordered General Gaines to cross the river to pursue the fleeing refugees. Gaines soon realized there was no hope of overtaking his quarry, and he returned to the north side of the river empty handed. After burning nearly thirty houses, the foraging parties returned

with several thousand bushels of corn and ninety head of cattle. The following evening, unaware of the battle and hoping to obtain provisions at Bowlegs's Town, former Royal Marine officer Robert Ambrister and Peter Cook, Arbuthnot's clerk, unsuspectingly walked into the army camp and were taken prisoner. After Jackson was told that Arbuthnot's schooner was anchored in the bay, he ordered Lieutenant Gadsden to descend the river and seize the vessel.⁵¹

As the army left the Suwannee, Jackson ordered General Thomas Glascock to march the Georgia Militia to Hartford and muster them out of service. He then instructed McIntosh to proceed to Fort Scott and discharge the allied Creeks. With the sick and wounded put aboard Arbuthnot's schooner for the trip to St. Marks, the army began the overland march back to the captured Spanish post. As far as most people could tell, it appeared as if the war was over. As far as Andrew Jackson was concerned, there was plenty of unfinished business that still needed his attention.⁵²

1818–1819

Andrew Jackson, Conqueror

On April 25 Arbuthnot's schooner, the troops, and Andrew Jackson all arrived back at St. Marks.¹ If the soldiers thought the war was over and that they would soon be headed home, they were in for a surprise. Before leaving the Suwannee, the general had already decided to evict the Spanish from West Florida. In his report to Secretary Calhoun, he stated, "I shall order, or take myself, a reconnaissance west of the Apalachicola, at Pensacola point, where, I am informed, there are a few Red Sticks assembled, who are fed and supplied by the Governor of Pensacola. My health being impaired, as soon as this duty is performed, the positions taken, well garrisoned, and security given to the southern frontier . . . I shall return to Nashville to regain my health."² As much as he tried to make it sound like a war against the Indians, it no longer was. Now it would be a war against those he perceived as foreign enemies.

After reaching St. Marks, Jackson changed his story, telling Calhoun that while there still would be a reconnaissance west of the Apalachicola, he would not be leading it, but would be heading home. "My presence in this country is no longer necessary."³ Whatever his real intentions, before Jackson went anywhere, he intended to deal with his two British prisoners.

At noon on April 26 General Gaines convened a military tribunal to decide the fate of Alexander Arbuthnot and Robert Ambrister. William Hambly, Edmund Doyle, and Arbuthnot's clerk Peter Cook testified against the two British subjects. For his part, Jackson never questioned the court's legality or right of jurisdiction.⁴ The court charged Arbuthnot with inciting the Creeks to make war against the United States and her citizens; acting as a spy; aiding, abetting, and comforting the enemy; supplying the Indians with means of war; and inciting the Indians to capture Hambly and Doyle

with the intent of condemning them to death and seizing their property because of their zealous exertions to maintain peace between the United States and Indians. Ambrister was charged with aiding, abetting, and comforting the enemy; supplying them with the means of war; and leading the Creeks in war against the United States.⁵

After listening to the evidence, the court found Arbuthnot guilty of all charges with the exception of acting as a spy, and then sentenced him to be hanged. Ambrister was found guilty of all charges and was sentenced to be shot, presumably out of respect for his military background. Ambrister then begged the court's mercy, and he actually received it. Perhaps taking into account that the young man could be considered a British prisoner of war, the court changed the punishment to fifty lashes on his bare back and confinement for one year at hard labor. Jackson, always one to interpret the rules as he saw fit, overturned the court's decision, ordering Ambrister to be shot on the basis of "an established principle of the laws of nations," arguing that "any individual of a nation making war against the citizens of another nation, they being at peace, forfeits his allegiance, and becomes an outlaw and pirate." By those same standards, Jackson himself could have been considered an "outlaw and pirate" for his actions against the Spaniards. On April 29, 1818, Alexander Arbuthnot was hanged from the mast of his schooner *Chance*. Robert Ambrister, soldier of misfortune, was shot to death by firing squad.⁶

At the end of the trial, but before the executions took place, Jackson, the Tennessee Volunteers, and the remaining regulars headed for the supply depot at Fort Gadsden. Soon after their arrival on May 2, Jackson began soliciting affidavits attesting to the presence of hostile Indians at Pensacola. Two days later, he wrote to Capt. William Davenport, announcing, "A large assemblage of Indian Warriors, has collected at Pensacola (five hundred in number) who are fed and countenanced by the Governor." Once the governor was either "punished or shipped as circumstances may require," Jackson felt confident the southern frontier would be safe and peaceful.⁷

The general and his troops left Fort Gadsden on May 7. After moving up the east side of the Apalachicola (without the promised examination of the west bank), the army crossed the river at Ocheese Bluff and began the twelve-day, 173-mile march across the Florida panhandle.⁸ Aware of their movements through West Florida, Governor Masot wrote to Jackson, saying, "With respect to the Indians . . . the greater part of them were women and children . . . [and] these few unarmed and miserable men were not hostile to the United States."⁹ The governor also calmly refuted the charges Jackson had made that the soldiers at St. Marks had been supplying the Indians with ammunition. Masot pointed out that the Indians

and blacks had been well-supplied from the fort at Prospect Bluff before it was destroyed, that they considered Spanish powder and lead inferior and therefore only the poorest hunters would use it, and that the garrison had very little munitions to spare in the first place.¹⁰ Jackson had also charged that a captured Spanish vessel was carrying military clothing that had come from Lieutenant Scott's boat. Masot was happy to provide receipts showing that yes, it was American clothing, but that it had all been purchased in New Orleans months before the Scott Massacre.¹¹ As for the claim that the garrison at St. Marks had been purchasing American cattle from the Indians, Masot pointed out that it was not unusual to buy cattle from the local Indians, who had large herds, and anyway, how was Commandant Luengo to know they were American cattle?¹²

Jackson reached the outskirts of Pensacola on May 20, and Governor Masot dispatched a letter of protest, demanding that he leave the territory. "If you do not, and continue your aggressions, I shall repel force by force. The consequence in this case will, doubtless, be the effusion of blood, and also an interruption of the harmony which has hitherto reigned between our respective nations; but, as the repeller of an insult has never been deemed the aggressor, you will be responsible, both of God and man, for all the fatal consequences which may result."¹³ Masot was only doing his duty, but Jackson took it as a declaration of war and an excuse to conquer the Spanish capital. He later told Calhoun, "This was so open an indication of a hostile feeling on his part, after having been early and well advised of the object of my operations, that I hesitated no longer on the measures to be adopted." To Jackson's way of thinking, telling Masot that he was going to seize the city made it permissible.¹⁴

Hopelessly outnumbered, on May 21 Governor Masot and 175 men took up their posts at Fort Barrancas, several miles south of town, leaving Pensacola to the advancing Americans. Not satisfied until all Spanish presence was removed from West Florida, Jackson called for the surrender of Fort Barrancas. Masot refused and for good measure quoted a copy of President Monroe's message to Congress that stated Jackson's purpose in Florida was strictly to deal with Indians and not to harass Spaniards.¹⁵ Jackson was forced into a siege. Even with the great advantage in manpower, Barrancas would be hard to take. The American army arrived there on the evening of May 25. The following day was spent making plans, and that evening two cannon were placed at positions overlooking the fort. The Spaniards fired on the emplacements, but with little effect.

On May 27 the Spaniards again opened fire. Having made his point, Masot offered to resume talks. Jackson offered the same unacceptable terms,

and Masot again turned them down, recommencing his fire on the American batteries. Cannon fire continued throughout the morning and sporadically into the afternoon. By sunset Masot felt that he had done his duty and could, with a measure of honor, offer to surrender the fort on terms that were acceptable to Jackson.¹⁶ The war was now truly over, at least as far as Andrew Jackson was concerned. Leaving Col. William King as military governor and Lieutenant Gadsden as customs collector, Old Hickory headed home. He had gotten what he wanted and would let other people take care of the messy details.¹⁷

The shooting war may have been over, but the political and diplomatic battles had yet to begin. Jackson's invasion had raised three major questions. First, by what authority had he executed a pair of British subjects? Second, was the United States at war with Spain? And third, exactly who had authorized all this? A minor military excursion had somehow turned into a major international incident while at the same time igniting a serious constitutional debate.

The matter of the executions of Ambrister and Arbuthnot seemed the most immediately threatening. Andrew Jackson may have harbored no fear of the British, but he was one of the few to hold that opinion. People remembered the recent burning of Washington, and merchants all along the eastern seaboard winced at the thought of another naval blockade. The military threat was not the only one. Industrial England was the largest purchaser of agrarian America's produce, and conversely, it was America's largest supplier of manufactured goods. A disruption of trade with England could severely derail the American economy. In addition, it had to be borne in mind that British Canada shared a very long and contentious border with the United States. In short, nobody in Washington wanted trouble with England.

It was not necessarily the same on the other side of the Atlantic. As Britons traveled throughout their far-flung empire, they expected, and generally received, the protection of the Crown. The execution of Ambrister and Arbuthnot deeply insulted British pride. Englishmen began to ask questions in both London and Washington, and the answers were not proving satisfactory. They demanded to know under what authority Jackson had executed two of His Majesty's subjects who had not even set foot on American soil. Jackson argued that the pair had given up the Crown's protection when they had taken up the Indians' cause. Could Lafayette or Kosciusko have claimed the protection of France or Poland had they been captured by the British during the Revolution? That interpretation, however, raised

an embarrassing point. Jackson, in giving his reasoning, had called such a foreign agent “an outlaw and a pirate.” Many congressmen recoiled at the idea of associating the hallowed name of Lafayette with those terms.¹⁸

Looking deeper, the House Committee on Military Affairs saw other, more serious irregularities. They started out by stating that they could “find no law of the United States authorizing a trial before a military court for offenses such as are alleged.” They added, “In vain has your committee sought among the documents . . . for a shadow of *necessity* for the death of the persons arraigned before the court.” If indeed these men were prisoners of war, why were they not treated as such? The committee also questioned Jackson’s execution of Ambrister after the court had recommended leniency, then pointed out several errors in the way testimony was allowed in Arbuthnot’s trial.¹⁹

Other questions resulted in no clear-cut answers. Had Ambrister and Arbuthnot been actively engaged against American troops? Neither had been caught with a gun in his hand, but both had strongly supported the Seminole and supplied them with weapons. Had their alleged crimes been serious enough to warrant the death penalty? It is interesting to note that in American eyes, these two Britons were often seen as more responsible for the war than the Indians themselves. Although it certainly wasn’t true, the Indians were often viewed as the hapless dupes of foreign instigators, too ignorant to know what they were doing. It was much easier to blame outside troublemakers than to admit that the Indians were reacting to American aggression.²⁰

People in England began to talk of demanding reparations and of the need for some sort of military reprisal. The *Christian Observer* wrote, “Mr. [Secretary of State John Quincy] Adams not only excuses but justifies, not only justifies but eulogizes, the motives, the words, the actions of General Jackson. . . . We cannot doubt that every American will be anxious to remove from his country the stain imprinted upon it by the base and vindictive conduct of his agent. . . . Common consistency requires that the United States should disavow the proceedings of General Jackson.”²¹

The hastiness of the trial, the flimsy evidence, and the severity of the sentences were all very embarrassing to the American officials who were called upon to defend the acts. It was going to be hard for Jackson to explain why an elderly trader and a young soldier of fortune were such a mortal threat to the United States. In the end, he didn’t have to explain. By the time Parliament got around to discussing the matter, it was a cold issue. Official indignation had died for the same reason Americans had considered trouble with Britain such a bother. The economies of the two nations were

too tightly bound. English mills needed American cotton. English factories needed American customers for their finished goods. As a writer in the *Liverpool Mercury* put it:

America is, of all other nations, the one whose friendship ought to be most assiduously cultivated, and whose enmity is most to be dreaded by Great Britain. It is in her power to injure us in the most vital manner. The extreme distress into which the manufacturers of this country were thrown by the American non-intercourse acts sufficiently show how much we are interested in preserving an unrestricted intercourse with our transatlantic brethren. . . . The U. States is now become the most important market for the disposal of the staple manufacturers of this country.²²

Like Alexander Arbuthnot, the issue died a slow, agonizing death. Indeed, the executions were to dog Jackson the rest of his life, even after his retirement from office in 1837. A political cartoon from the 1844 election shows an angry Jackson with upraised cane threatening to “hang you all up . . . as I did Arbuthnot and Ambister [*sic*]!” Twenty-six years after the event, Andrew Jackson’s vindictiveness was still equated with those two names.²³

The Spaniards had suffered even greater indignities. An American army had, with no provocation, attacked Spanish forces and taken a Spanish capital. It was a clear act of war, and they demanded their property back, along with an explanation and the appropriate apologies. Secretary of State Adams had to walk a fine line, somehow mollifying the Spanish without taking official responsibility for what the general had done. He had just begun serious negotiations with Spanish minister Don Luis de Onís concerning the future of Florida and did not want them to fall apart. He also knew that to repudiate Jackson was politically unacceptable for the administration.

Wisely, Adams let the Spanish raise the required fuss. Talks were suspended but not entirely called off. Spanish sabers were rattled, but not very loudly. The empire was crumbling, and Spain was in no position to go to war with the United States. Adams then went on the offensive with a carefully worded letter (accompanied by seventy-two supporting documents) that placed blame for the war on the British, the Indians, and corrupt Spanish officials in Florida. He then apologized, said that taking Spanish territory had not been American policy, and offered to return Pensacola and St. Marks to Spain as soon as they could properly garrison their posts and control the hostile Indians.²⁴

The foreign problems were troubling but faded with time. The domestic issues proved much harder to resolve. At the heart of the debate was the American public’s attitude toward the military. Having suffered at the hands



THE LITTLE MAGICIAN INVOKED.

The Little Magician Invoked by H. Bucholzer. Anti-Jackson cartoon from the 1844 presidential election. Andrew Jackson (left) is saying, "By the Eternal! you old Hags! if I get hold of you, I'll hang you all up under the 7th section As I did Arbutnot and Ambister [sic]!"

Courtesy of Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2008661441/>.

of the supposedly tyrannical George III supported by the overwhelming power of the English military, the founding fathers established a system they felt would prevent such abuses. The Constitution provided for civilian control over the military, and Congress, in full agreement with the policy, kept the size of the army ridiculously small. More than anything else, Americans dreaded the thought of a military coup. They had seen it happen in France at the hands of Napoleon, and it was happening repeatedly in Latin America. Americans were determined that it would not happen to them.

And therein lies the irony. Andrew Jackson had openly disobeyed orders from his civilian superiors by attacking the Spanish posts. By the same action he had also violated the constitutional provision that gave Congress the sole authority to declare war. He had, quite simply, usurped the powers of the duly elected officials. Left unchecked, such actions could have easily led to a dictatorship. Even more alarming, because of his position in the army and his backing by the Tennessee Volunteers, Andrew Jackson had the power to implement his own personal agenda. Americans should have been outraged. These were a people who were deeply concerned about any

possible return to tyranny. Instead, the majority of Americans supported Jackson. Fortunately for the nation, Jackson was not a Napoleon. As self-centered and obstinate as he was, above all else he had a deep faith in the people of the United States and in the principles of democracy.

Still, there were plenty of people who saw the danger. Even a defender of Jackson, writing in *Niles' Weekly Register*, felt uneasy about the situation: "Gen. Jackson appears unaware of the necessity of strict discipline and subordination, and being utterly fearless of responsibility himself, and always taught to believe that his personal liability would be a justification of his conduct, he does not sufficiently reflect how intimately the character of the country is associated with his own, now he is an officer, and that altho' he may freely offer his personal sacrifice, yet it places the government in a most delicate situation to accept it."²⁵ It was one thing to say you would assume responsibility, and quite another to actually take it.

As it happened, while the events of 1818 were unfolding, Congress was not in session. Congress had adjourned in March and would not reconvene until December. By then one might have thought that the matter would have died. It did not. Unlike Britain and Spain, who had nothing to gain by going to extremes against Jackson, political opponents in the United States felt they had nothing to lose. Jackson was quickly becoming the most powerful political force in the nation, and as such, he had no shortage of enemies. His opponents smelled political blood and were eager to spill more of it. The ensuing arguments lasted for several months, becoming the longest debate Congress had held up until that time.²⁶

It was an odd time in the history of American politics. For the most part the nation operated under a one-party system. In the early years of the Republic there had been two loosely organized parties, the Federalists and the Democratic-Republicans. Washington and Adams had been Federalists. Fearing a strong national government, the people had elected Jefferson, a Democratic-Republican, as president in 1800. His successors, Madison and Monroe, were of the same party. Having established a popular and stable form of government, the Federalists no longer had a cause, and the party began to die out. By the time of the Seminole War, the majority of elected officials were Democratic-Republicans.

A one-party democracy cannot long endure. Either the one party eliminates all opposition, thereby eliminating the democracy, or the party splits. It may be said that for the Democrats, the growing split widened in the early months of 1819. Conservatives, mostly from the Northeast and the more "aristocratic" parts of the South, lined up against Jackson's western liberals. (Issues that define conservative and liberal have changed significantly

in the past two hundred years. Conservatives generally favored a stronger central government and traditional fiscal policies, while liberals favored more state control and easier access to money.) It was not, however, a clean split, and a true opposition party did not develop until the 1830s. Jackson's personality became more important than the issues, and the line between conservative and liberal was, for the moment, blurred.

When Congress reconvened in December 1818, several resolutions were proposed that condemned the various actions of Andrew Jackson. The administration had attempted to wash its hands of the matter by approving whatever had been done, while at the same time saying it had not been government policy. If anyone was going to punish Jackson, it would have to be Congress, and a resolution would be the means by which they would do it.

As the debates commenced, Jackson's supporters admitted that some impropriety had taken place, but all for good reason. Jackson's opponents, led by Henry Clay of Kentucky, took the high ground, using the Constitution as their chief weapon. Clay warned, "Nations are often precipitated into ruinous war from folly, from pride, from ambition, and from the desire of military fame. . . . Beware how you give a fatal sanction . . . to military insubordination. Remember that Greece had her Alexander, Rome her Caesar, England her Cromwell, France her Bonaparte, and, that if we would escape the rock on which they split, we must avoid their errors. . . . Are former services, however eminent, to protect from even inquiring into recent misconduct?"²⁷ Congressman Thomas Willis Cobb of Georgia also saw the danger. "We become so infatuated with the *man* that we lose sight of the *principle*, and we are offering him our *worship*, before we are aware that we have made him a God."²⁸

Jackson's supporters tended to dismiss the philosophical questions and instead appealed to the public's emotions or to the logic of expediency. Senator Richard Johnson of Kentucky defended Jackson, saying:

Considering the treacherous enemy he had to cope with, and the object of his measure, which was to give security to the frontier, and to save the wasteful expenditure of the blood, and even of the treasure of the nation; when I think on this . . . I do not censure Gen. Jackson; but, as before my God, I give him my thanks. . . . Do you think you will ever stand in need of the arm of such a man again!—a man, sir, little understood—violent perhaps, in his enmities, and equally ardent in his friendships—but who, as an officer, is vested with all the energies of a Caesar, or a Napoleon—who meets with equal courage and conduct the Indians.²⁹

Senator James Tallmadge Jr. of New York challenged Jackson's foes to "go, count the bleeding scalps of your murdered countrymen, of all ages and

sexes, found by Gen. Jackson—and then return, and tell to this house if this Seminole War was, on the part of our country, an offensive war.”³⁰

The arguments were good on both sides. In the end, Jackson’s popularity made him invulnerable. As Senator Alexander Smith of Virginia remarked, “His name will descend to future times in a stream of light. Such is the man whom it is proposed to dishonor. . . . Let me assure you, sir, that the American people will not be pleased to see their great defender, their great avenger, sacrificed.” The American people were creating their own Napoleon but refused to see it. For most members of Congress, it would have been political suicide to censure Jackson. The resolution of condemnation failed. The representatives of the American people could not condemn Andrew Jackson, because Andrew Jackson had done exactly what the American people had wanted him to do.³¹

It is somewhat satisfying to find that Jackson did not get off scot-free. By the time 1819 ended, the nation had slipped into a deep financial crisis. Secretary of War Calhoun and Secretary of the Treasury William Crawford, both of whom were politically ambitious and antagonistic to Jackson, considered the poor economy a good reason to downsize the army. In 1821, cutbacks called for the elimination of one of the two major generals in the army. Andrew Jackson, having less seniority than Jacob Brown, who commanded the Northern Division, was forced into retirement.³²

As we study the Seminole Wars, we are struck by how important Andrew Jackson is to the story. If General Gaines had been left in charge, history might have been considerably different. Although an able and courageous officer, Gaines did not possess the audacity and enjoy the support that Jackson did. Gaines would not have had as large and loyal a force to command and would not have been able to overwhelm the Seminole as completely or push as far south into the peninsula as Jackson had. Before the war the Seminole had been prosperous and relatively secure. The Seminole War left many of the Indians destitute, forced from their homelands, with their cattle stolen and themselves on the move. It would take a long time for them to recover.

More important, Jackson’s capture of West Florida altered the history of the peninsula. Gaines, ordered not to molest the Spanish forts, likely would have obeyed those orders.³³ Jackson openly disregarded them, unconcerned for the consequences. He felt that it was in the best interest of the nation that Florida be taken from Spain, and he did it. He felt that if he had defeated the British at New Orleans, he could defeat the Spanish anywhere. The Spaniards began to realize that he was probably right. Negotiations for the sale of Florida soon began in earnest.

1820–1823

The Acquisition of Florida and the Treaty of Moultrie Creek

The capture of Pensacola and St. Marks proved to the Spanish authorities that they could no longer hold onto the Floridas. Other than pride, there was little reason why they would want to. The colonies were a financial drain on Spain's very limited resources, were no longer of great strategic value, and would be a constant source of tension with the United States. After a cooling-off period, Secretary of State Adams and Spanish minister Onís got back to work on a treaty. The Spanish negotiator was dealing from a position of extraordinary weakness. There was very little he could ask for that the United States would be willing to give. If the price, in whatever form it took, was too high, the Americans would simply take the colony by force. In the end Onís would have to settle for a deal that was primarily concerned with maintaining his nation's honor.

On February 22, 1819, Adams and Onís signed the treaty that would turn the two Floridas over to the United States. Spain received very little in the deal, not even any cash. Instead, the United States agreed to assume payment for claims that American citizens held against Spain, up to but not exceeding \$5 million. The major concession made by Adams was an acceptance that Texas was not part of the Louisiana Purchase. The treaty also served to establish the southwestern boundary of the Louisiana Purchase, and included language that set California's northern limit at 42° N. Latitude, thereby bolstering American claims to the Oregon Territory.¹

Ratification of the treaty by the U.S. Senate was almost immediate. In contrast, the Spanish Cortes (legislature) was not so timely in their approval of the document. Having received no actual money for their colonies, the Spaniards felt they should get something else in return. What they wanted most were assurances that the United States would not officially recognize

the newly formed revolutionary governments of Latin America. Placated by vague promises from the U.S. ambassador, the Cortes finally ratified the document in late October 1820. Because of the delay, a second ratification by the Senate was called for, which took place precisely two years after the treaty was originally signed.²

Now that the United States had possession of Florida, the problem of how to administer it had to be dealt with. Andrew Jackson, appointed military governor in March 1821, seemed in no hurry to assume his post. Arriving at Pensacola in July, Jackson again found himself at odds with the Spaniards, this time over legal matters having to do with the transfer of power. Although most of the assaults were verbal, Jackson did not hesitate to arrest Spanish Governor José Callava when certain papers were not turned over in the manner he thought they should be. By September, Old Hickory had tired of Pensacola and was ready to return to Tennessee. He formally resigned the office and headed home the following month.³

Those who envisioned a prosperous future for the new Territory had little existing infrastructure with which to work. There were only two towns of any notable size and no roads of any great length. Except for the northern portion and the coastline, the territory was virtually unexplored by whites. The climate, though pleasant in winter, was devastating in summer, especially in the lower three-fourths of the peninsula. From May to September, the elevated temperatures and high humidity drained a person's energy, while mosquitoes, biting flies, and sand fleas attacked incessantly. The land itself, mostly loose sand, was considered agriculturally poor, and much of it was subject to flooding during the long rainy season. Perhaps the biggest obstacle to settlement was the presence of the Seminole people. Whites were understandably hesitant to move into an area where potentially hostile neighbors were dwelling. The Seminole may have been scattered by the war, but they had not disappeared and generally held no love for white Americans. In a territory where good farmland was scarce, the Seminole occupied some of the best available and would not willingly move from it. Trouble was inevitable.

The government saw the need to open a line of communication with the Indians from the very beginning. On March 31, 1821, Jean Penieres was appointed as sub-agent to the Seminole, though his qualifications for the position were questionable. A Frenchman, he spoke little English, and although he claimed to have spent two years living among the Indians of Arkansas, people in Florida were not impressed. Army Capt. John R. Bell, the provisional secretary of East Florida, complained to Secretary of War Calhoun that "the Sub Agent is useless, and so would any foreigner be who

is totally unacquainted with the Indian Character and the liberal policy of our Government towards them.” Jackson was also unhappy with the appointment. Not only was he finding it difficult to obtain an interpreter who understood French, English, and one of the Seminole tongues; he was miffed that Penieres had gone to Havana to see what treaties the Seminole had signed with Spain. It was certainly a double standard. Land grants made by the Spaniards to whites would be honored, but any agreements made between the Seminole and the Spanish or English were null and void.⁴

Penieres was not the only government official whose responsibility it was to deal with the Native Americans. As governor, Jackson was also Superintendent of Indian Affairs. Much of the work of dealing with the Seminole fell to Captain Bell, who seemed willing to take up the task. On September 28 Bell was officially appointed temporary agent, but there was little he could do. During the first year of American ownership of Florida, the necessary officials were slow to gather at their posts and even slower to act upon their duties. Congress, which would have to appropriate the funds and confirm any appointments, had adjourned just as the territory was acquired and would not reconvene until December. In the meantime, the departments of war and state administered the territory as best they could.⁵

For the Seminole the future was unclear. White settlers would soon be entering the peninsula in large numbers and troubles would certainly follow. It was likely that some sort of line would be drawn between where the Indians would be allowed to live and land that would be open for white settlement. There was a good chance the Seminole would be uprooted, but where would they go? Why should they plant the year’s crops if they were not going to be around to harvest them, or why improve their property if they were going to be forced to move? These were important questions, and answers were not quickly forthcoming.

Curious as to his people’s status, Micanopy, headman of the Alachua Seminole, attempted to open communications in the summer of 1821 through a pair of friendly whites, E. Wanton and Horatio Dexter. Although the two men were simply passing on a request for information and offering what assistance they could, Jackson would allow no interference in his dealings with the Indians. He told the acting governor of East Florida, “You will immediately have them arrested and sent beyond the limits of the Floridas.”⁶ As far as he was concerned, the solution to any “Indian problem” was simple: ship them out of the territory. In his opinion, most of the Indians in Florida were Creeks who had fled to the Spanish colony following the Creek War of 1814 or migrated earlier and should be repatriated with their kinsmen in Alabama or Georgia. The fact that the Seminole considered

themselves as separate from the Creeks was meaningless to him. As for any real Natives, they seemed so few in number to him that moving them to some land in the West should be a simple task.⁷

By late 1821 the necessary elements for negotiations seemed to be in place. In September Jackson met with Neamathla and two other leaders and informed Secretary of War Calhoun that the Indians were pleased to know that land would be set aside for them and that they would be under the protection of the federal government. Further talks were scheduled for November, but within a matter of weeks the white organization fell apart. Jackson resigned his governorship, Captain Bell was court-martialed, and Penieries died of yellow fever.⁸ Replacements were slow to arrive. Peter Pelham was appointed to replace the deceased Penieries in October, but as sub-agent, he lacked any real authority. Jackson left the territory in the fall of 1821, but his successor, William Pope DuVal, was not appointed until April 1822 and did not arrive in Pensacola to assume his official duties until June.⁹ In May Gad Humphreys was appointed as the new Indian agent, replacing the suspended Bell, but it would be months before he assumed his post. The Seminole wanted to talk, but there was no one to talk to.¹⁰

Few white men knew how many Seminole there were in Florida and where they were located. Captain Bell, still acting as agent in early 1822, sent a crude census to Congressman Thomas Metcalfe of Kentucky. Bell estimated there were about five thousand Indians in Florida, along with about three hundred of their slaves. Of those five thousand he believed around two-thirds of them were refugees from the Creek War and held no claim to land in Florida, while the remainder, mostly Mikasuki, could justly claim a large area in the northern portion of the territory. While his total number may have been close, he seems to have considered the Alachuas as refugee Creeks, which they certainly were not. Because of the displacements caused by the war, Seminole settlements extended from the panhandle, southeast to the Suwannee and the Alachua area, then south as far as Tampa Bay. Other villages may have existed as far south as the Everglades. Counting the Seminole, who usually didn't want to be counted, would always prove a difficult task.¹¹

For those who assume that a smaller public administration is more efficient, a perusal of letters crawling between Florida and Washington would soon dispel such a notion. It was a time when the nation was run by men who believed that the government that ruled the least, ruled the best. Unfortunately, this policy of minimal government resulted in a Florida where no one seemed to know what was going on. Much of this inefficiency could

be blamed on poor communications. An exasperated Col. Abraham Eustis, temporarily in charge at St. Augustine, wrote to the secretary of war, asking for directions concerning the most basic aspects of his administrative duties. Secretary Calhoun penned his reply almost a month later, then sent it on its weeks-long journey back to St. Augustine. Getting word to and from Pensacola, where the governor resided, could take twice as long. At a time when almost all mail traveled to and from Florida by sailing ship, the time of transit could be affected by any number of variables. Wind, weather, ports of call, and the simple availability of a suitable vessel going in the right direction all added to the delay. Shipwrecks, not at all uncommon along Florida's long, treacherous coast, also contributed to the problem.¹²

There were other factors that made getting things done difficult. Sick-ness, especially in the summer, would often bring things to a standstill.¹³ A yellow fever epidemic that struck Pensacola in 1822 was particularly brutal; the two men who had been appointed commissioners to settle land disputes were forced to write Secretary of State Adams to apologize for not having gotten anything done. "Such has been the fury and fatality with which it raged, that very few Americans who were attacked, have survived. Out of a population of about 1,500 or 2,000, between 200 or 300 have fallen victims. . . . The population was flying in every direction. . . . Such was the general alarm and distress, that business of almost every description was suspended." Even the Legislative Council had moved fifteen miles out of town to complete their work. Acting Governor George Walton reported that "Every one who could leave the city, fled from the pestilence . . . many were obliged to live in huts and tents through the woods. . . . I was one of the last Americans to make my escape."¹⁴

Officials in Florida were also hampered by an administrative difficulty common at the time: Every little problem seemed to require an "Act of Congress" to fix. Today Americans use the term as a joke. In the early days of the republic it was no laughing matter. Ever fearful of tyranny, the American people, through their elected representatives, kept the power of the federal government as limited as possible. In order to continue their work past the deadline imposed by Congress, the land commissioners would need approval from that body. Congress, of course, was not in session, nor would they be for another two months. A newly appointed judge, upon discovering that he could not be sworn in for another six months, wrote to Secretary of State Adams requesting an Act of Congress to allow some other official besides the absent governor to swear him in.¹⁵ This remoteness from Washington seems to have brought out the best in many of the people working in Florida. Very often officials would make large expenditures out

of their own pockets or from funds that had been appropriated for other purposes, frequently with no assurance of repayment. If people were suffering or if a certain commodity was needed immediately, a responsible official often found it difficult to follow directions to the letter. It is heartening to note that, generally, officials in Washington were very understanding of the situation. On the other hand, letters often contain numerous references to vouchers and receipts. An official might be confident of reimbursement, but he had better be very patient.¹⁶

Unavoidable delays and confusion were understandable, but other problems were not so easy to accept. One of the most aggravating issues concerned the absence of public officials. Appointments often had to wait on the required Act of Congress or the return of some higher official. Because the population of the territory was so small and included so many former Spanish subjects, many of the appointees came from elsewhere in the Union. Due to cutbacks in the military, a number of positions were filled by former officers with political connections, regardless of their qualifications. Although Americans had rid themselves of the monarchy and titled nobility, society still held a fascination for titles. Many of these men, though no longer in the army or state militias, were referred to by their former military rank. This tendency to recruit officials from outside the Territory led to several inconveniences. The first problem was simply notifying the individual, who might live in one of the frontier states and not receive his appointment for weeks after it was issued. Then, if the person actually accepted the position, he had to get to his station. Arranging passage from anywhere in the north to Pensacola or St. Augustine could be an ordeal unto itself, and could include several unplanned stays in ports along the way. In East Florida, for example, the acting governor did not arrive until four months after the territory had been acquired, and the first judge did not show up until sometime later.¹⁷

Once an office holder made it to Florida, keeping him there was another problem. If someone took sick, which was not uncommon during the summer "sickly" season, the cure often involved spending considerable time in a climate thought to be more healthy. Personal problems might also call a man away from his duties in Florida. At the height of the yellow fever epidemic in the fall of 1822, Governor DuVal announced that he had to return to Kentucky to attend to personal business. He did not return until after the first of the year, and then only after being ordered back to work by Secretary of State Adams.¹⁸

One of the other administrative problems that plagued Floridians was the geographical and political separation within the territory. In 1763 the

British had divided Florida into two colonies, and the Spanish had maintained the system. Although the United States called its newly acquired domain the Florida Territory, the land was still commonly referred to in the plural, as the Floridas. Because of the vast wilderness between St. Augustine and Pensacola, people living near one town felt little kinship to those living in the other. The only common officials were the governor and a few aides, who spent most of their time in Pensacola and rarely visited St. Augustine. In the governor's absence, each half of the Territory was administered by a secretary, who then became the acting governor for his half of Florida. This division did not quickly fade, even after the establishment of a central capital in Tallahassee. Until the admittance of Florida into the Union in 1845, there was still a strong faction calling for two separate Floridas.

While government inefficiency affected everyone in Florida, the Seminole seem to have been particularly neglected. They knew changes were coming but had no idea what they were. Worse still, the white officials who were supposed to know were either absent or uninformed. Almost from the day the American flag was raised over Florida, officials in St. Augustine and Pensacola wrote to Washington expressing their concerns about the Seminole situation. Some of these letters expressed fear, while others showed a remarkable level of compassion. A letter from Captain Bell in August 1821 exemplifies the fears. "If something is not soon done to satisfy in some measure the apprehension of those Indians, and to prevent the incursion of ill disposed whites and Indian bands into their country we may expect difficulty with them. At this time, almost any reasonable arrangement could be made on the part of the Government, but if delayed, wars of extermination will take place."¹⁹

Just meeting with the officials was proving to be an insurmountable obstacle for the Seminole. After the canceled meeting of November 1821, the government made little effort to meet with any large body of Indians. By the summer of 1822 Governor DuVal realized he had a serious problem on his hands. In a June letter to Secretary Calhoun, DuVal noted that the Indians were very uneasy, unaware of who their agent was, and wandering in every direction. "They are in a wretched State, many of them have lost their Crops this Season by the overflowing of the Rivers & Creeks. . . . I am confident they are in a starving condition." Expressing a certain amount of frustration at the lack of direction from Washington, he added, "As I am not advised of my powers & duties as superintendent of Indian affairs, I should be thankful to receive from you such Instructions as you deem necessary."²⁰



William Pope DuVal, governor of Florida from 1822 to 1834. Appointed by three successive presidents, he diligently attempted to maintain peace with the Seminole.
State Archives of Florida, <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/136859>.

On the other side of the territory, at St. Augustine, Colonel Eustis agreed to take over the duties of Sub-Agent Peter Pelham, who was forced to leave Florida for health reasons. Concerned about those responsibilities, Eustis wrote the War Department, stating that Pelham “informs me that

he has never received one line of instructions for his guidance either from your Department, or from Mr. Worthington, the late acting Superintendent of Indian Affairs.” Most of Eustis’s problems had to do with trade. “There is not at this time a single *licensed* trader in East Florida, & in consequence, many of the Indians are compelled to bring their skins, & other trade to this place, & here they are abundantly supplied with spirituous liquor.” He also mentioned an unlicensed trader whose “whole stock in trade consists of Tobacco & Rum.”²¹

It was the Indians who finally forced DuVal into scheduling talks. On July 25, 1822, John Blunt and Tuskihadjö, two respected leaders from the Apalachicola region, came knocking on the governor’s door in Pensacola. Through their interpreter, Stephen Richards, they expressed their frustrations. As DuVal related it to Secretary Calhoun, “The Indians were becoming restless, with the uncertainty of their Situation.” They stated that former governor Jackson had promised them that the Indian territory would be marked out in a few months, but that almost a year had passed “and yet nothing has been done.” They were well aware that things were getting dangerous. Already, two whites had been murdered near the Suwannee. The Indians simply wanted to know “when their Father the President would determine where they were to live.”²²

DuVal took time to think, finally replying to the two Indians on July 28. There was little he could do but apologize: “I am sorry your Great Father has not yet directed me where you are to live.” His excuse was simple and honest: The people in Washington were too busy. “Our chiefs at Washington are few, that do all the business of the Great American nation . . . but be patient, all that is right, will be done for you in good time.” He then lectured them on keeping the peace and demanded the surrender of the men who had murdered the two whites on the Suwannee. He set up a future meeting at St. Marks for the twentieth of November, the same date as the canceled talks of the previous year. There and then, hopefully, a treaty could be concluded, and the Seminole would know what the future held in store for them. He next brought up a matter that would continually creep into negotiations with the Seminole: If the Indians would bring in all the runaway slaves living among them, “I will see that you shall be paid for your time and trouble.”²³

Surely, DuVal thought, three months would be plenty of time for the government to decide what it wanted to do. At first it seemed as if all was going according to plan. On August 19 Calhoun approved DuVal’s plan to hold talks at St. Marks and sent a large packet of documents to aid the governor. DuVal, however, seemed to be having second thoughts. His first

concern was where to settle the Indians. Although the governor seems to have been genuinely interested in the Indians' welfare, he did not forget that the prosperity of white Floridians was his primary responsibility. After some investigation, he came to the realization that the lands presently occupied by the Seminole were also the best agricultural lands in the territory. As he told Calhoun, "It will be a serious misfortune to this Territory if the Indians are permitted to occupy this tract of Country." The United States owed more than \$4 million on the peninsula, and the only way to come up with those funds was to sell the land to settlers and speculators. For DuVal, giving the Indians the best part of Florida was out of the question.²⁴

Like Andrew Jackson, DuVal believed the Seminole rightfully belonged with the Creeks, but he knew of the opposition to such a move by both the Indians and the people of Georgia and Alabama. He then suggested that the Seminole be sent to some land west of the Mississippi. At any rate, DuVal told Calhoun, no treaty should be made until the land set aside for the Seminole had been well explored and the matter brought before Congress, which would not reconvene until December. He then added that because of the yellow fever epidemic, holding extensive talks at St. Marks in November was not a good idea. He would still order the chiefs to assemble on November 20, but only, it seems, for the purpose of putting them off once more. DuVal then closed his letter with the announcement that he was going to Kentucky to take care of some unspecified personal business.²⁵

With the absence of DuVal, authority in Florida devolved to the secretary of West Florida, George Walton, who became the acting governor. Unfortunately, in his haste to leave, DuVal had left no instructions with Walton as to how to deal with the Indians. One would think the two men, both residing in the little town of Pensacola, would have taken the time to confer. In reality, neither man was at the capital. Because of the epidemic, both had fled the city. Walton listed his address as somewhere in the woods "near Pensacola," while DuVal had moved to the home of Don Emanuel Gonzalez, fifteen miles from town.²⁶ As far as Walton knew, the talks with the Indians were still scheduled for November 20, and it seemed to be his job to conduct them. It was now that the inefficiencies of staffing in the territory became embarrassingly apparent. Not only was the governor off on extended personal leave, but the long-awaited Seminole agent, Gad Humphreys, had yet to arrive in the territory and his whereabouts were unknown. Humphreys had been appointed in early May 1822 but would not arrive in Florida until December 24, and then only after receiving a threatening letter from Secretary Calhoun. In addition, the sub-agent, Peter Pelham, was still off on his lengthy sick leave.²⁷

Walton was also unsure as to exactly what authority an acting governor had when dealing with the Indians. He would gladly meet and treat with the Seminole, but he had no idea what the government's position was and what was expected out of the treaty. With the talks only a little more than two weeks off he wrote to Calhoun, but could have had no hope of receiving a reply in time for the talks. He was also embarrassed by the fact that he had no funds with which to purchase any of the required provisions or presents that would be handed out at such a meeting. In the end, he decided the only thing he could do was dispatch a messenger to St. Marks to inform the Indians of the predicament, apologize, and let them know when new talks would be scheduled. He was aware that the Seminole would be "greatly disappointed," and feared "much dissatisfied," but what effect it would have on "exciting a spirit of hostility" or interfering with the "future effort at negotiation [*sic*]," he admitted, "I cannot certainly anticipate."²⁸

Even Walton's effort to send a messenger did not work out. The messenger, army paymaster Maj. Thomas Wright, was prepared to leave Pensacola on November 18, but a severe storm postponed his departure until the twenty-first, already a day late for the talks. The weather must certainly have been disagreeable, for his ship did not arrive at St. Marks until the twenty-seventh. Normally, a trip between Pensacola and St. Marks would take a day or two, not a week. Upon arriving, Wright learned that several important Seminole leaders had shown up on the twentieth, waited three days, then left in disappointment. Wright sent word to the closest ones, asking them to come to the fort to hear his talk. Several of them responded, among them Neamathla. The Indians listened patiently to the embarrassed Major Wright, then Neamathla assured him that "he, his chiefs and warriors, would remain peaceable and contented, until an authorized agent should arrive, for the purpose of establishing a definite and durable understanding between them and the government." Walton and Wright had done the best they could with what few resources they had. It was now up to the government to set things straight.²⁹

As 1823 began, the Seminole issue had yet to be faced, let alone solved. Finally, in April, James Gadsden and Bernardo Segui were appointed commissioners to negotiate a treaty with the Seminole.³⁰ In June, Governor DuVal was added to the commission, and after arriving in St. Augustine he appointed Horatio Dexter (the same man Jackson had ordered expelled from the Territory) as a sub-agent to obtain information about the Seminole.³¹ Because Floridians of all races had entered the summer planting season and many Indians were away on long hunting trips, it was decided to postpone

the meeting until late in the summer. The time chosen was early September 1823, at the landing on Moultrie Creek, a few miles south of St. Augustine. By the fifth of the month most of the Indians had arrived, and in the end about 425 showed up for the talks. Before meeting with the whites, the Seminole held a conference of their own. At this meeting, Neamathla was chosen as the primary Indian representative.³² The Natives were well aware of the fact that they were not bargaining from a position of strength, yet they knew they were not totally powerless. Their most important strength was whites' fear of Indian attacks. Very often the simple rumor of Indian hostilities was enough to clear the thinly settled countryside of settlers.

From the Seminole point of view, nearly the entire peninsula still belonged to them. They farmed the best land they could find and hunted where the game seemed most plentiful. Unlike their neighbors to the north, the Florida Indians had never made large land cessions to the whites. They had, while still under Spanish rule, made grants of land to some friendly whites or to pay off debts, but the only territory they had given up by treaty was north and south of St. Augustine, between the Atlantic coast and the St. Johns River. That parcel had been handed over to the British in 1765 at the Congress of Picolata, with assurances from the British that there would be no further incursions. The government negotiators were aware of this, but it was their job to convince the Seminole to surrender their claims to the rest of the peninsula.³³

On September 6 the negotiations got under way with much ritual and ceremony. Every Seminole leader needed to show off his importance to his fellows and followers. Governor DuVal was present but did not feel well. Of the two other commissioners, James Gadsden did most of the negotiating. Although he spoke kindly, the strength of the American position was not well concealed: "The hatchet is buried; the muskets, the white men's arms, are stacked in peace. Do you wish them to remain so?"³⁴ The Indians could argue the fine points, but the major thrust of the talks was not really open for discussion. The Seminole were told they must concentrate within a reservation in central Florida and surrender all claim to the remainder of the territory. They knew they were at the mercy of the United States, and were not too proud to ask for it, especially if it helped them achieve their objective of retaining as much territory as possible. Neamathla stated, "We are poor and needy; we do not come here to murmur or complain. . . . We rely upon your justice and humanity." Whether Neamathla was truly humble or simply putting on a performance is not clear. He obviously had some clout. Attached to the final treaty was a second document that allowed Neamathla and five other leaders to remain on the Apalachicola instead of having to



Col. James Gadsden. Soldier, plantation owner, businessman, and diplomat. As ambassador to Mexico, he negotiated the Gadsden Purchase, which acquired lands in southern New Mexico and Arizona.

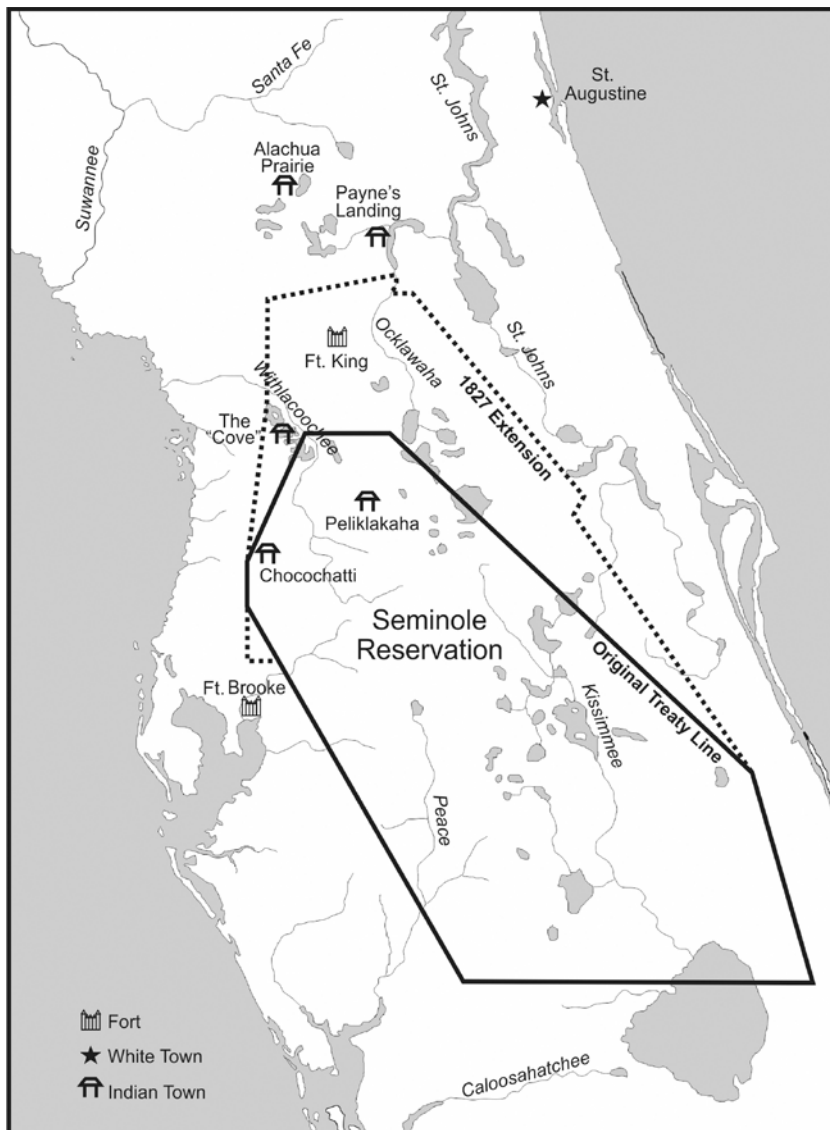
State Archives of Florida, <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/30271>.

move south. Whether he simply drove a hard bargain, elicited sympathy, or was bribed is difficult to ascertain.³⁵

In the first article of the treaty the Indians put themselves under the protection of the United States government (and no foreign power) and relinquished all claims to their lands in Florida with the exception of the reservation they were about to be forced onto, which totaled some four million acres. The northern boundary ran just south of present-day Ocala, while the southern boundary fell slightly below the lower limits of Tampa Bay. Later, the boundary would be extended to just north of Ocala. Because the government feared the Seminole would be influenced by contact with traders or agents from Cuba or the Bahamas, the eastern and western boundaries never came closer to the coast than fifteen miles in the west and twenty miles in the east.³⁶

Succeeding articles spelled out what each party's obligations were. The United States agreed to take the Indians under its protection, provided the Seminole remained peaceable and law abiding. In exchange, the government promised to distribute farm implements, provide cattle and hogs, pay the tribe an annuity of \$5,000 a year for twenty years, prevent white settlement and other intrusions into the reservation, compensate the Indians for losses and travel, and distribute rations for one year. There was also a provision for an agent who would supposedly watch out for the Indians' interests. These articles also provided for an interpreter, a school, and the services of a blacksmith, all for twenty years. Besides remaining peaceable and law abiding, there were other obligations to which the Seminole had to agree, including allowing roads to be built through their reservation. Article Seven touched on the matter that was most important to many southerners. In it, the Seminole agreed to apprehend any runaway slaves or other fugitives from justice, and provision was made to compensate the Indians for their trouble.

Was it a fair treaty? No; the difference in power between the two groups was too great. On paper, at least, the United States was about as generous as conditions and political pressures would allow. The Indians were given a large tract of land that, if needed, could be expanded. They were, to some extent, compensated for their losses, and provision was made to help them get started in their new homes. True, the Indians had given up claim to all of Florida, but what chance did they have of actually holding onto it? White settlement was unstoppable, and all parties knew it. By granting the Seminole a large, well-defined reservation and somehow keeping them separated from the whites, the negotiators hoped peace could be maintained. It was a hopeless cause, but the effort had to be made.



Seminole treaty lands, 1823.

Map by John Missall.

There were few alternatives. The most popular suggestion among whites was to ship the Seminole west. The Seminole were violently opposed to such an idea, and when the government eventually attempted a forced removal, a long, bloody war ensued. Any proposal that individual Indians be given a tract of land and made American citizens would have been rejected by both sides. Most whites of the time were not of a mind to treat the Indians as equals, while the Seminole were not willing to abandon their culture. Reuniting the Seminole with the Creeks had also been suggested but was politically unrealistic and was opposed by the Seminole. Just leaving things as they were was also out of the question. Both sides knew that the only way to avoid bloodshed was to come to some sort of understanding as to who would live where. The best we can say is that the government and the Indians tried to solve an unsolvable problem. The eventual failure to meet any of the treaty's goals shows how impossible the task was.

From a modern perspective, it is interesting to note the lack of national unity shown in the wording of the treaty. In it, the term "United States" is plural. "The United States *promise*" (not *promises*); "The United States . . . agree"; "the United States . . . stipulate." America was not one nation but twenty-four individual states acting as one. The Seminole seem even less unified, and the term is not used in the treaty. Instead they are referred to as the "Florida tribes of Indians." Of course the Seminole knew precisely who they were, even if the white commissioners didn't.

The Treaty of Moultrie Creek was necessitated by the belief that large numbers of settlers would soon be moving into the territory. There was certainly every reason to think it would happen. Governor DuVal had reported to Secretary Calhoun that the land between the Suwannee and Apalachicola Rivers was "the most desirable and valuable region in all of the Southern Country."³⁷ The driving force behind much of American policy in the nineteenth century was *expansionism*. It was a new sort of nationalism, a strange mix of religious fervor, speculative greed, and racism. Were it not for the tragedy of the Native Americans, the evils of slavery, and the aggressions against foreign neighbors, the rapid growth of the American nation would seem magical indeed. The Seminole Wars stand out because of the remarkable tenacity the Seminole displayed in resisting this unstoppable force.

Early-nineteenth-century America was primarily an agricultural society, and for much of the population the "American Dream" started with a quarter section (160 acres) of good farmland. Profits from the sale of excess produce could allow a landowner to increase his holdings, and as his acreage grew, so would his wealth. Build a large enough estate, and you went

from “farmer” to “planter,” a significant step up the social ladder. Fulfilling the dreams of the growing population required huge amounts of land, and speculators knew that people would pay good money for the best land. Those with money to invest looked to the frontier to supply that land, and for many the quest for honest profit often led to dishonest greed. It was certainly nothing new. More than twenty years before the Revolution, Peter Wraxall wrote, “This hunger after Land seems very early to have taken rise in this Province, & is become now a kind of Epidemical madness, every Body eager to accumulate vast Tracts without having any intention or taking measures to settle or improve it.”³⁸

Land speculation was seen by many as a means to get rich quick, yet others saw the dangers. Theodore Dwight remarked, “On the ocean of speculation great multitudes of sober and industrious people launched the earnings of their whole lives, and multitudes became indebted for large sums which they never possessed.” The duc de la Rochefoucauld described the effects of the “mania” in his *Travels*: “Every class of men, even watch makers, hairdressers, and mechanics of all descriptions, eagerly ran after this deception.”³⁹ In the May 9, 1835, issue of *Niles’ Register*, the headlines announced, “SPECULATION!—SPECULATION!!—SPECULATION!!! We shall offer a selection of articles as to what is going on, in the way of ‘speculation.’ Verily, the people are mad!” The speculative fever raged throughout the early 1830s, caused by the ability to buy on credit. The sale of public lands reached its highest point in 1836. That year, the receipts from public-land sales were \$25,167,833, compared with \$2,329,356 in 1830.⁴⁰

Interest in Florida land was intense. A writer in the *National Intelligencer* could easily imagine the rosy portrayals that developers would use to lure their customers. “If the land be low and wet, it will suit for the culture of rice; if dry, it will be good for cotton; if marshy, excellent for manure; if a river be near, appropriate for trade; if the river be remote, secured from freshes; if woody, full of ship-timber; if pine barren, just the spot for health; . . . if near Augustine, how secure from invasion; if near Pensacola, how accessible to commerce; if inhabited, what an inducement to settle on it; if uninhabited, what a site for a colony.”⁴¹ This is not to say that all speculators were greedy, evil men. Most were not. Although people today look upon many of their practices as illegal or immoral, such was not the case in the early nineteenth century. Making a fair though substantial profit was, and still is, seen as nothing more than the sign of a good businessman. It was only when unfair methods were employed that speculators were seen in an unfavorable light. Unfortunately, the wide-open policies of the Jacksonian era gave speculators ample opportunity to cross over the line.

What must not be forgotten when we speak of expansion and speculation is the human cost. Native Americans needed that same land to live on, but few frontier whites were sympathetic to those needs. Even those who did sympathize with the Indians often didn't see why the Natives needed so much land. If a white farmer could get by on a small parcel, why couldn't an Indian? Whites usually understood the need for hunting grounds, but rarely saw the need for large-scale hunting. They thought the Indians should farm, just like the whites, which would free up the rest of the Indian land for white settlement. They certainly didn't consider the value of the Indians' culture. In the South, there was another human cost to the growing hunger for undeveloped land. Much of the land acquired from the Indians became farms and plantations, and most of that was worked by slaves. Even a small farmer might own one or two slaves. A few people grew rich off the land, most earned a modest living, but many suffered.

For many of those who were displaced or driven from their homes, expansionism was little different from outright conquest. White Americans were intent on controlling the entire North American continent, and the inability to add Canada to the Union had done nothing to lessen the desire. The major difference was in the means and motive. Instead of a Caesar or an Alexander leading large armies that quickly subdued the indigenous people in a quest for empire, a steady wave of speculators and settlers led an uncoordinated, slow-moving attack, with no greater goal than personal profit. For Native Americans, it was less like cultural execution by beheading, and more like a death from a thousand cuts.

It is difficult to say exactly what the Seminole thought of the Treaty of Moultrie Creek. Having an oral, not a written, tradition, the spoken word obviously meant more to them than the indecipherable black marks on the formal treaty. To them, what was said at the negotiations would have carried more weight than what was written. On the other hand, white society has no higher standard than to put something in writing. It was a cultural divide that could not be easily bridged.

The negotiations had taken place, and the treaty had been signed. All parties went home, some satisfied, others not. Some people hoped for the best, others expected the worst. All probably felt they had done their best to resolve an impossible situation. Only time would tell if peace had been achieved or bloodshed would result.

1824–1830

Moving onto the Reservation

The Treaty of Moultrie Creek had been signed, but the Indians did not simply pack up and move onto the new reservation. The Seminole dwelt in established towns and had built comfortable homes and cleared extensive fields. Relocation would not be easy. Contrary to what many believed, they were not nomads who dwelt in temporary wigwams or tent-like teepees. They lived in log cabins, raised crops, and kept cattle and hogs, all in a manner very similar to their white neighbors. It was no doubt very frustrating to know that once they vacated their property, a white family would move into their cabin and plant crops on the land they had cleared. Until whites actually moved into the neighborhood, what incentive was there for an Indian to give up what he had worked so hard for and relocate to a new homestead? For most Americans of the time, migration held the hope of achieving a better life. For the Indians, it usually meant succumbing to a worse one.

Officials in Florida were doing their best to put the treaty into effect, but it would not be easy. Commissioner James Gadsden, the primary author of the document, had been ordered to remain in St. Augustine to see that it was properly carried out. In several letters to Secretary of War Calhoun, Gadsden asked for the stationing of troops at Tampa Bay and for the occasional visit of naval vessels, all for the purpose of convincing the Seminole that the United States was serious about them moving onto the reservation. In November 1823 Calhoun advised Gadsden that four companies of infantry under Col. George M. Brooke would arrive at Tampa Bay in January to establish a fort at a location chosen by Gadsden. The site Gadsden chose was at the mouth of the Hillsborough River, where the soldiers soon erected Fort Brooke. Today the site of the fort is a parking garage in downtown Tampa.¹

Both Gadsden and Brooke knew the task of dealing with the Seminole was going to require some flexibility if they wanted the Indians to settle in and be successful in their new homes. Showing an understanding of the Seminole's way of life, Gadsden requested the reservation boundary be extended several miles northward. He recognized that the Indians were herds-men, not intensive farmers, and that the lands he was recommending for inclusion were well suited to that purpose. He also pointed out that such an action would please several of the Indian leaders who were not happy with the treaty. Colonel Brooke, realizing the delicacy of his position, informed Jacob Brown, the commanding general of the army, that the Indians "will be treated with Kindness and respect but at the same time with determination and firmness."²

Despite such efforts the migration did not happen in a timely manner. In April 1824 Brooke reported, "The Indians appear to me, to be more & more displeased at the Treaty . . . and I am not unapprehensive of some difficulty. They have an idea that the nation is about to go to war with Great Britain, and was it to be the case, they would most certainly join our enemy." In June, Gadsden reported that the northern and western boundaries of the reservation had been surveyed, and as far as he was concerned it contained an abundance of land suitable to the Indians' habits. The problem, he had to admit, was that the treaty had been forced upon the Seminole with terms dictated by politics, not by the realities of the situation. Gadsden pointed out, "A restlessness of disposition (improperly publicly [*sic*] noted as hostile) has however manifested itself, and which has been principally encouraged under the hope that the arrangements made were not final, but that some more favourable change might be effected." Now that the boundary was run, he hoped the Indians would accept the situation as inevitable and settle with the limits.³

At first Governor DuVal seemed optimistic that the Seminole would follow through on their promises, but as time passed his mood changed. By April he had come to the realization that the migration would not take place before autumn, because crops had been planted and hunting parties had gone off for the summer. Still, he believed if the refugee Red Sticks would return to Creek lands (as some seemed inclined to do), and Neamathla was paid the \$500 owed him, the Seminole would begin the migration. On the other hand, some Indians were busy clearing land and building homes as if they had no intention of leaving. Weeks went by and many Seminole were still unsure of where and when they were supposed to move. It was not simply a matter of packing up the belongings, finding a favorable location within the reservation, and setting up a new cabin. Head-

men and medicine men had to locate suitable places for new towns and clan villages, boundaries between rival groups had to be delineated, and fields needed to be cleared. When white men set up new towns on the frontier, they laid out the streets, set aside parcels for churches and schools, and took time to plan for future growth. They never seemed to consider that the Indians needed to do similar things.⁴

By July 1824 it appeared as if open conflict might break out in the Apalachicola region. White squatters, knowing the Indian land was soon to be vacated, began to set up housekeeping on parcels still being used by Seminole families. According to DuVal, the Indians had become “extremely insolent and made many threats . . . [and] had in some instances killed our cattle and hogs—they also had gone . . . to several of our settlers and ordered them off.” Hoping to avert hostilities, DuVal ordered the local volunteer militia into service, and then paid a visit to the Seminole leaders in the region. The governor’s sudden movements and quick diplomacy had the desired effect, and the dissatisfied Tallahassee and Mikasuki leaders, having gotten their point across, restrained their people. DuVal then traveled to Neamathla’s village accompanied by no one but an interpreter. There he found about three hundred angry warriors. After what must have been a very tense meeting, DuVal and the Seminole headmen agreed to meet at St. Marks on July 26.⁵

When the day arrived, six hundred warriors and their leaders were gathered at St. Marks. DuVal, well known to be a great storyteller, delivered what he described as “a talk that made considerable impression on them,” though what the Seminole actually thought of it isn’t recorded.⁶ DuVal then asked that the Seminole appoint one leader to act as chief over all the bands that would be moving onto the reservation. Because Neamathla had retained his reservation on the Apalachicola, he would not be eligible. This was a problem for the Seminole: Each major town and tribe had its own leader; few of them would readily accept an overlord. More to meet the demands of the government than for their own purposes, they chose Tukose Emathla (John Hicks), leader of the Mikasuki, to fill the position. DuVal may have thought Tukose was “King” of the Seminole, but Tukose no doubt knew better. Army Lt. George McCall would later describe Tukose [frontispiece] as, “One of nature’s noblemen. He is nearly six feet two inches in height; finely formed.”⁷ DuVal then imposed a deadline of October 1 as the date when all Indians were to be on the new reservation.⁸

The October 1 deadline arrived, and the Seminole began to prepare for the migration, though few were actually headed for the reservation. As an incentive, DuVal began to pay them the compensation due for the improvements they were abandoning. He hoped the selling of their homes would

make it abundantly clear that the time to leave had arrived. Being homeless also meant the Indians were going to be temporarily dependent upon the government for their subsistence. Knowing this, DuVal ordered the promised rations to be sent to Fort Brooke at Tampa Bay. If the Indians wanted to eat, they would have to go to Tampa to obtain their provisions.⁹ In a letter to the secretary of war dated October 26, 1824, DuVal lamented that the “difficulty of reconciling the Indians to the late treaty; and to restrain them from outrage has not been inconsiderable, but to purswade [*sic*] and threaten them into a peaceable removal from this truly delightful country, required the exercise of uncommon patience, time, and prudence. I now believe confidently they will go without force, but evidently with reluctance.”¹⁰

In anticipation of the growing number of Seminole that would eventually reside within the reservation, DuVal ordered Agent Gad Humphreys to select a suitable location for his agency. The establishment of a permanent agency would help prevent unlicensed traders from selling rum and whiskey to the Natives and also serve to delineate areas open for settlement from those that were reserved for the Indians. Humphreys, however, moved no faster than his charges and did not get around to selecting a site for his agency until September 1825. Another sign that the Seminole were slowly moving onto the reservation was the dismissal of the government interpreter, who decided not to relocate from his home on the Apalachicola.¹¹

By the summer of 1825 most of the Indians had moved onto the reservation, but not all of them were happy there. Friction was inevitable, and in June, near the St. Johns River, a group of warriors threatened a plantation owner when three tribesmen came up missing. Jittery officials called out the militia, and for a moment it looked as if blood might be spilled. Fortunately, the three missing warriors appeared and the volatile situation cooled.¹² At St. Augustine, Acting Governor George Walton reported that a counter-migration of sorts was taking place. “Those who formerly resided between the Rivers Suwannee & Apalachicola are on their return hither. They state to me as a reason . . . that they have always been furnished with a scanty supply of provisions only & which has sometime since ceased altogether; that they have no means of subsistence within themselves; that there is no game in their country; that it is moreover exceedingly unhealthy.” Moving back, however, brought its own problems. As Walton pointed out, “This district . . . has been surveyed, in part sold, and is rapidly populating.”¹³

In the meantime, changes were taking place in Washington. John Quincy Adams had ascended to the presidency, replacing James Monroe, the last of the founding fathers. James Barbour was the new secretary of war, taking over from John Calhoun, who became Adams’s vice president. A

new part of Barbour's Department of War was the Office of Indian Affairs (later the Bureau of Indian Affairs). Thomas L. McKenney, head of the office, seemed unsure of what to do with the Seminole. He worried that the only way to keep them peaceable was to feed them forever, then he thought perhaps if the boundaries of the reservation were extended, that would make them happy. He also proposed shipping the Indians west, either as part of the Creek nation or separate from it.¹⁴

By late 1825 nearly all the Seminole who were supposed to be on the reservation were there, but they were not doing well. For a new dwelling place to be prosperous there needs to be sufficient planning, a way to make a living, and the residents need to possess a sense of hope, a feeling that they and their posterity will be able to prosper in their new home. For many of the Seminole, those requirements were not being met. The government, to some extent, was sympathetic. In December 1825, Colonel Brooke wrote to the War Department expressing his concerns and asking for help. "The major part of the nation are, and have been suffering for some time in extreme want. Some have died from *starvation*. . . . I can assure you they are in the most miserable situation; and unless the government assists them, many of them must starve." Brooke also pointed to a more practical reason for assistance. "Others will depredate on the property of the whites, in the Alachua and St. John's settlement."¹⁵ In his letter, Brooke gave the reasons for the Indians' plight. "1st. The continued droughts, for two months, whilst their corn was tasseling. 2d. Those who removed within the new boundary line had to cultivate new lands, which would not produce the first year of planting; and 3d. Many did not come in till it was too late to plant."¹⁶

Brooke was not the only one trying to get help for the Seminole. In January 1826 Governor DuVal wrote to Superintendent of Indian Affairs McKenney, pointing out that even the Indians who had been allowed to remain on reservations along the Apalachicola were not faring well. "Three times last year were their Corn fields and fences Swept by the uncommon rise of the river." Knowing that pleas on behalf of Indians often fell on deaf bureaucratic ears, DuVal remarked, "Until now they have never Solicited the aid of the Government for provisions. . . . These Chiefs and their warriors Served with Genl. Jackson during the Seminole war."¹⁷ Secretary of War Barbour forwarded Col. Brooke's letter to President Adams, acknowledging the truth of the statements and the government's responsibility. "Humanity demands that they should be kept from starving. They are, where they are, by our seeking." Convinced that the location where the Indians had emigrated was "not suited . . . to their preservation," he told the president that

instructions had been forwarded to Governor DuVal to “ascertain their dispositions in regard to a removal to lands West of the Mississippi.” Of course there was no reason to believe the lands out west were any better “suited to their preservation.” It was simply a way to shift the problem elsewhere.¹⁸

President Adams passed Barbour’s recommendations on to Capitol Hill, where the required Act of Congress was needed to fund the relief measures. Florida’s delegate to Congress, Joseph M. White, had written a long letter to Secretary Barbour pushing for immediate removal. The whole matter proceeded to get caught up in the Indian removal debate, and by May, five months after Brooke’s request for aid, the House and Senate were still arguing about feeding the starving Seminole.¹⁹ Exactly why the Seminole were starving was also up for debate. James Gadsden, who had negotiated the treaty, took exception to the idea that the land allotted the Indians was not sufficient for their survival. He was willing to admit that the move had put them in a bad situation but felt their continued poverty was one of their own making. Gadsden believed that the Indians had become too dependent on government rations. Whatever the cause of their distress, Gadsden pointed out that the Indians’ plight might make them more agreeable to removal west of the Mississippi.²⁰

Perhaps in hope of convincing the Seminole to emigrate, a delegation of chiefs was sent to Washington in May 1826. Among the party of seven were the tribe’s most powerful leaders: Neamathla and Tukose Emathla of the Mikasuki, Micanopy of the Alachua bands, and headmen from most of the other large bands. Unfortunately, Washington seems to have been unaware of their pending arrival. Seemingly miffed at the imposition, Indian Affairs head McKenney wrote a terse letter to DuVal, telling him the delegation should not have been sent. He then proceeded to deny all DuVal’s requests for extra funding. Still, the Indians were treated well and given an audience with the president.²¹

Also present, serving as interpreter, was Abraham, the most influential of the Black Seminole. Abraham had worked as a shipwright for Forbes and Company in Pensacola before fleeing his owners during the War of 1812. He then joined the British at Prospect Bluff and later fought alongside the Indians in the war against Andrew Jackson’s invasion. A man who spoke several languages, Abraham rose to the position of senior advisor to Micanopy and was described by army general Thomas Jesup as “a good soldier and intrepid leader,” and “the most cunning and intelligent negro” among the Indians.²²

Other than allowing both parties an opportunity to discuss their differences, the trip to Washington seems to have accomplished little. While



Negro Abraham,

Abraham. Former Spanish slave, interpreter, and chief advisor to Micanopy.

State Archives of Florida, <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/31651>.

addressing the Seminole, Secretary Barbour was polite but blunt. The president would extend the reservation boundary, but only temporarily. The “Great Father” understood their present sufferings, was sending some help, but stressed that enough time had passed for them to have gotten settled and harvested their own crops. Henceforth they were expected to take care of themselves. The Indians were also reminded that runaway slaves living

among them were to be surrendered, while the agent would do what he could to reclaim slaves who had been stolen from the Indians. There was, of course, the stern admonition to keep the peace, and a strong suggestion to join the Creeks and move west.²³

Tukose Emathla, as head of the delegation, showed no sign of being intimidated. He was not happy with what they had been told, even the part about the temporary boundary extension. "This does not please us. The land we occupy, we expect will be considered our property, to remain as such for ever." As to the matter of removal, the Seminole leader made matters perfectly clear. "We have already said we do not intend to move again." He explained, "Here our navel strings were first cut and the blood from them sunk into the earth, and made the country dear to us." As would happen again and again, the government refused to admit that the Seminole did not consider themselves part of the Creek Nation. Tukose endeavored to put the matter straight. "We will not involve ourselves in the troubles of the Muscogeese—We are a separate people and have nothing to do with them." He then pressed what he considered his rightful claim to the land. "We have heard that the Spaniards sold this Country to the Americans. This they had no right to do. The land was not theirs, but belonged to the Seminoles."²⁴

As to the matter of runaway slaves, the Indians professed to be in agreement but did not consider themselves bound to turn over slaves who had escaped before the Treaty of Moultrie Creek. They expressed happiness that Seminole slaves who were found in the possession of whites would supposedly be returned to them but doubted whether it would really happen. "We do not know if the white people will mind his [the agent's] talks when he demands our property, for they are not always willing to do right when they can avoid it—The laws of our nation are strong. . . . The laws of the whites, who have so much better sense than the red men, ought not to be less powerful and just." Finally, the delegation asked that the promised school not be built. Literacy, they believed, was a white man's tool, and they wanted no part of it.²⁵

It seems the Seminole leaders were trying to abide by the terms of the treaty, as were the white authorities. The biggest problem was with people on both sides who could not be controlled. Among the Indians, hot-headed young men who had suffered one too many insults longed for revenge. Warfare was a major part of their culture, and gaining notoriety in battle was how a young man advanced in Seminole society. As far as Governor DuVal was concerned, the entire Mikasuki tribe was nothing but trouble. "They are and have ever been the most violent and lawless Indians in all the South. They have set their own Chiefs at defiance. . . .

The orderly Indians complain as much of them as the Whites.” Evidently a love of freedom and independence of thought were acceptable for white Americans, but not for Native Americans. On the other side of the coin were lawless whites who preyed upon the Indians’ defenseless situation. Slaves, cattle, and other property stolen or falsely taken from an Indian would rarely be recovered, and crimes committed against an Indian person were almost never punished. The courts, run by white judges and filled with white jurors, rarely took the Indian’s side.²⁶

Unlike other parts of the Southeast where whites were crowding the Indians out, in the Florida Territory there was no great pressure for Indian land. In the late 1820s total residents numbered only about thirty thousand people, about half of them slaves. (The Seminole, along with most other Native Americans in the United States, weren’t counted in the census.) The majority of the whites lived in the northern tier of counties, which was considered prime agricultural land, especially for cotton and sugar plantations. The farther south one went, the less promising the land looked for agriculture, so few people wanted to homestead there. With the exception of Key West, there was little white population south of the Alachua region, mostly at individual settlements along the coast.

In an attempt to better unite East and West Florida, Tallahassee was selected as the site for the territorial capital in 1824. An abandoned Seminole town, its position midway between Pensacola and St. Augustine made it equally inconvenient for people living at either end of the territory. Governor DuVal and a handful of other people lived there, but it would remain a frontier village well into the 1830s.

In 1827 changes came to the size and makeup of the reservation. The boundaries were extended to the west to include much of the Ocklawaha River region and the Cove of the Withlacoochee, a chain of lakes and islands where many Seminole lived. To enforce the new limits, Fort King was erected near the Indian Agency at present-day Ocala, and a simple road was cut through the wilderness from it to Fort Brooke at Tampa Bay. Fort King’s position at the north end of the reservation allowed it to serve as a divider between the Indian and white inhabitants, and as a reminder to the Seminole that the army was always watching.

The Seminole seemed to be adjusting to their new homes, even if they weren’t happy there. In the last few years of the 1820s, serious white complaints about the Indians almost ceased. One major exception was the murder of the Carr family near Tallahassee in the final weeks of 1826. Mr. Carr, his four children, and a slave were killed, and the house burned

down around them. Governor DuVal called out the militia and requested the regular army at Pensacola and Fort Brooke go on the offensive. Yet even while taking those actions, DuVal had to admit that the main body of the Seminole nation was not a party to the outrage. Indeed, it was Neamathla and a group of Mikasuki warriors, working in concert with the army, who finally located the killers on an island near the coast. DuVal reported that Neamathla's men had to be prevented from executing the murderers on the spot and were instead convinced to turn them over for trial in the white courts.²⁷

In response to the cries for protection that arose from the Carr murders, the army placed Col. Duncan Clinch in charge of all forces in Florida. An able administrator, Clinch was familiar with the area and its problems, having led the attack on the fort at Prospect Bluff in 1816. He was also married to the daughter of John Houston McIntosh, leader of the Patriot War of 1812. Within two months, Clinch was able to report that his men were in position, the Indians were on the reservation, and peace was being maintained.²⁸

It was a fragile peace, but it managed to hold for about five years. The Indians planted their crops and continued their hunts, usually managing to avoid unhappy contacts with the whites. For the most part, they stayed within the northern limits of the reservation, though they frequently visited trading posts and plantations that welcomed them. They appear to have wandered freely south of the reservation, but that was no real problem; the few whites who lived south of Lake Okeechobee often made their living off the Indians. Seminole caught in white territory were usually arrested and returned to their towns unmolested. Neither side liked the presence of the other, but neither side wanted to be the spark that would ignite hostilities.²⁹

Throughout these years of relative quiet, the call for Indian removal never died off. Sometimes the talk was serious, while at other times it was mostly wishful thinking. In February 1827 Secretary of War Barbour asked Congressional Delegate White to find out if the Indians were amenable to removal. Knowing that many Americans who were close to the Seminole had a vested interest in keeping them in Florida, White sent special agents into the tribe to ascertain their true feelings. In June he reported to Barbour, "I regret to say, there is a decided repugnance to it [removal], among all classes of the tribe, and I am satisfied that those who have written to the Department of War, suggesting their willingness to go, have consulted more their own wishes, than any correct knowledge, or information of the disposition of the Indians." White then went on to list the reasons. "1st—Their entire ignorance of the Country, to which it is proposed to remove



Brig. Gen. Duncan Lamont Clinch, leader of the attack on the fort at Prospect Bluff in 1816, and in command of U.S. forces in Florida at the commencement of the Second Seminole War.

Courtesy of Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/cwp2003003780/PP/>.

them. 2nd—Their attachment to the land of their nativity, which operates more strongly on Savage than Civilized Communities. 3rd—Their fear of the Indian tribes in that quarter, and an apprehension that they would all be exterminated.”

White added that although the reservation was large enough to support a population of whites equal to that of the Seminole, with the Seminole’s

“habits of life, and ignorance of the arts of husbandry and agriculture, it is impossible that they live within the present assigned limits.” As happened with most Americans, he could not bring himself to believe that Indians could make good farmers, even though it was well known that they had once owned large herds of cattle and grown extensive crops. The delegate then hit upon a deeper problem. “It is exceedingly difficult to make them believe, that any plan, proposed by the Government is for their benefit. . . . They receive with great distrust any proposition . . . proceeding from our Government, and it will require something more than promises to convince them that the humane plan of colonization recommended . . . will be conducive to their improvement, and happiness.”³⁰

It was probably the most honest appraisal of the situation that White could give, considering his own prejudices. He seems to have sincerely felt that removing the Indians was in their best interests. More to the point, he also knew it was in his constituents’ best interests. Barely a month after penning the previous letter, White again wrote to Secretary Barbour, this time making a long and impassioned plea for removal. He no doubt knew it was a waste of time, but the letter would certainly be well received when printed in the Tallahassee and St. Augustine newspapers. In the end, it was all a moot point. Unless Congress was willing to pay for removal, it would never happen.³¹

By 1828 the major point of contention between the Seminole and their white neighbors had to do with the continual problem of runaways seeking refuge among the Seminole. Bombarded by the conflicting claims of Seminole and slave catchers as to the true ownership of several blacks, Delegate White requested the War Department provide some sort of system for settling the disputes. Knowing that Seminole slaves would always be a source of conflict between the Indians and whites, Agent Humphreys asked permission to allow the Seminole to sell their slaves through his agency. Permission was denied. Slaves were also on the mind of Governor DuVal. With each new plantation came more slaves, and between the threat of an Indian uprising and a slave insurrection, DuVal thought it a good idea that more troops be stationed in Florida.³²

Unfortunately, the opposite was about to happen. In early 1828, Maj. Gen. Winfield Scott replaced Edmund Gaines as commander of the army’s Western Department, while Gaines took over the Eastern Department. Unlike Gaines, who was a frontiersman and understood the sort of tensions that existed in such areas, Scott was an Easterner and an expert in the art of “civilized” European warfare. Finding Florida in a state of relative peace, Scott immediately decided Fort King was no longer needed and

ordered the post closed. A letter of protest quickly came from Delegate White. Apparently, Scott did not realize that the troops at Fort King were there to keep peace, not restore it.³³ Slowly, the lack of troops at Fort King began to have its effect. This small band of soldiers had been all that stood between Indian and white lands. Without the presence of the army, both sides began to cross the line. By the end of 1829 the citizens of Alachua County were calling for the reopening of the post or the construction of another at the town of Micanopy. Colonel Clinch, still in charge in Florida, also called for the reoccupation of Fort King. Washington, however, would not supply the manpower.³⁴

Another establishment that was deteriorating was the Florida Indian Agency itself. In early November 1828 the secretary of war received a list of charges brought against Agent Humphreys. These included dealing in slaves, preventing whites from obtaining runaways, and using government funds for personal business. A month later, the secretary recommended that President Adams remove the agent. A lame duck in the final months of his administration, Adams appointed Alexander Adair to go to Florida and investigate the charges.³⁵ What Adair found was puzzling. None of the people who had made charges against Humphreys were willing to talk, yet supporters of the agent were hard to find. A memorial sent in defense of the agent seemed to support him only because the writers felt he could hasten the day when the Seminole were removed. Humphrey's most damning opponent was Governor DuVal, who perhaps leveled the most dangerous charge: The agent had not supported Andrew Jackson for the presidency. Still, Humphreys managed to hang onto his job for more than a year longer.³⁶

Whatever frictions may have existed, some white officials were still intent on doing what they could for the Seminole. In early 1830, the Office of Indian Affairs noticed that the \$1,000 annually stipulated by the Treaty of Moultrie Creek for a school had never been spent. The reason was simple: The Seminole wanted no part of the white man's education and had refused the school. Still, the money had been appropriated and had to be used for the purpose designated. Director McKenney wrote to Governor DuVal, ordering him to send eight Seminole boys to a special school in Kentucky that had been established to "civilize and Christianize" young Indians. Knowing there would be resistance to the idea from those living on the reservation, DuVal found his eight candidates from among the bands living along the Apalachicola River, and he promptly sent the boys on their way.³⁷

Having done as requested, DuVal sent a bill for \$1,000 to the War Department. One can only imagine his surprise when he received a letter informing him that the bill would not be paid because the treaty stipulated

that the school must be on the reservation. We can easily understand the exasperation as DuVal politely informed his superiors that *they* had been the ones who told him to send the boys to Kentucky. Not willing to admit an error but needing a way out, the War Department informed DuVal that he must obtain permission from the Indians to send their sons to a school off the reservation. The governor promptly did so, and the bill was paid. As talk of Indian removal continued, DuVal may have wondered: If the government couldn't coordinate sending eight boys to school, how could it send thousands of Seminole to the West?³⁸

1831–1835

The Treaty of Payne's Landing and Rising Tensions

The steady pressure on the Seminole to leave Florida and take up residence in the West continued, but it was soon to become even greater. In the 1828 presidential election Andrew Jackson, the Seminole's most implacable foe, was swept into power. Along with Jackson came a number of new people for the Seminole to deal with. John Eaton, a close friend of the president, became secretary of war, Samuel Hamilton replaced Thomas McKenney as head of the Office of Indian Affairs, and Gad Humphreys was eventually removed as Indian Agent. In a matter unrelated to the election, outgoing President Adams elevated Alexander Macomb to the position of commanding general of the army after the death of Jacob Brown, bypassing both Winfield Scott and Edmund Gaines, bitter rivals who each felt the office should have been his. All three generals would eventually face the Seminole, and it would not be their finest hours.

One of the top priorities for the new administration was the passage of an Indian Removal Act. Jackson saw Native Americans as an obstacle to national expansion and potential allies of foreign powers, primarily England. As far as the president was concerned, the Natives should be removed from the white man's path, voluntarily if possible, forcibly if need be. Bringing the full weight of his political power to bear, Jackson pushed Congress to pass a bill that would fulfill his dream. Passage was certainly not guaranteed. Many Congressmen were opposed to the bill, but that didn't necessarily mean they were opposed to Indian removal. Even those who were deeply sympathetic to the Indians often believed it was in the Native Americans' best interests to be separated from white expansion. Instead, opposition was either to the cost of removal or to the methods it was feared would be employed. People in areas of the country that no longer had a significant Indian presence were reluctant

to pay for a bill that benefitted another section of the nation. Americans were also familiar with the way Jackson got things done and feared for the welfare of those who would be displaced.¹

Congressman William Ellsworth of Connecticut first argued against the cost of removal, then expressed his fears about the methods that would be used. "I have no belief that the bill will bring along with it the proposed and desirable effect; and while I am ready to go as far as any gentleman to assist in an honorable removal of the Indians, I cannot do it under circumstances which admonish me that this bill is but a part of a united effort virtually to expel the Indians from their ancient possessions. . . . I feel that power is arrayed against right; and that the voluntary, unbiased expression of the Indians, as to their removal, is not likely to be had." In agreement, Representative George Evans of Maine argued that the "uniform language of all the petitions was that the Indians might not be coerced and compelled to remove. . . . The only opposition is to a forced, constrained, compulsory removal."² On May 28, 1830 the bill was brought before the House of Representatives, having already passed the Senate. A vote was called, and the Indian Removal Act passed the House by a narrow margin of 101 to 97.³

It was an ambitious piece of legislation that had arisen from a "growing public sentiment that the Indians were obstacles in the path of progress and had to be moved." Basically, it called for all tribes east of the Mississippi to be relocated to new lands west of the great river. More specifically, the five major Indian nations of the Southeast (Seminole, Creek, Cherokee, Choctaw, and Chickasaw) were to occupy land in what is today the State of Oklahoma. At the time the land was in the western portion of the Arkansas Territory. The area would not become separate until Arkansas entered the Union in 1836, after which the western portion was officially known as Indian Territory. It was not, however, on par with other territories, such as Florida, and did not have a delegate in Congress. Although the Indians were often told this would be their home "forever," the politicians were careful not to make it official by granting the new homeland the status of a legal territory.⁴

Indian removal became national policy because when faced with the question of how to prevent violence and preserve the Native American culture, most white Americans saw no better alternative. Everyone understood that as long as whites and unacculturated Indians lived in close proximity, confrontation was unavoidable. Americans generally felt that if peace were to be maintained and the Indians were to survive, the two groups would have to be separated. Even the Indians saw the wisdom of separation; they just disagreed on where those separate lands should be. They wanted to

keep their homes in the East and would have preferred the government to enforce a boundary around existing Indian land, one that settlers would not be allowed to cross. It was an idea the government never truly considered other than as a temporary measure, such as in the Treaty of Moultrie Creek. As long as the Indians occupied prime real estate in the East, allowing them to remain was politically impossible. Because the United States possessed large amounts of land west of the Mississippi most whites believed that would be an ideal place for the Natives to live. Why? Because much of the land was considered unsuitable for the type of agriculture white farmers practiced. There, the Indians were told, they could live life according to their ancient traditions, never to be uprooted by the white man again.

The law made some provision for the loss and expenses of the emigrants, and it provided funds for transportation and the setting up of new homes. For those Americans who felt the law was the most humane solution to the problem, disappointment was in store. Many of the Indians were not peacefully guided to their new lands but marched at bayonet point. This was the time of the infamous Trail of Tears. Whatever the intent of the lawmakers, many of those whose job it was to carry out the law saw their mission as something less serious than herding cattle. Because contracts for transportation went to the lowest bidder, provisions were often insufficient and of poor quality. Travel was usually on foot with only a few people able to use horses or wagons. Shelter was rarely provided, and many an Indian succumbed to exposure when the weather turned inclement. Because supplies were limited, a leisurely pace was impossible; they had to reach their destination before the food ran out. For the elderly, the sick, and the infirm, it could easily turn into a death march.

Each affected tribe resisted in its own way, though none met with any real success. The Cherokee, being the most familiar with white customs, put up the strongest legal resistance, but it was a losing cause. In 1830 the exact legal status of the Indian nations and their relationship to the government had yet to be defined. The State of Georgia, not willing to wait on the federal government to act on removal, had enacted a series of laws in 1828 that stripped the Cherokee of their rights within the state. The Cherokee appealed through the courts, but in 1831 the Supreme Court refused to consider the particular merits of the case (*The Cherokee Nation vs. The State of Georgia*), ruling that the Indian nations were not “foreign” nations, as they had claimed, and therefore the court had no jurisdiction in the matter. Instead, the court declared the Indians were *Domestic Dependent Nations* under the protection of the United States and that the relationship between the United States and the Indians was like “that of a ward to his

guardian." A year later, in *Worcester vs. Georgia*, the court clarified the matter, ruling that the tribes were sovereign nations, not subject to state laws within their territory, and could only treat with the federal government. Unfortunately, none of the rulings stopped Andrew Jackson from enforcing the Indian Removal Act.⁵

More than eight years had passed since the signing of the Treaty of Moultrie Creek, and animosity between the Seminole and white Americans in Florida continued to grow. After the dismissal of Gad Humphreys, the position of agent passed to John Phagan, who had been sub-agent in charge of the Apalachicola bands. Like his superiors in Washington, Phagan was determined to see the Seminole moved west. To bring about the removal, the War Department appointed James Gadsden, the driving force behind the Treaty of Moultrie Creek, to negotiate a new treaty. By late spring 1832 Gadsden and the Seminole were ready to begin discussions.⁶

The meeting was held at Payne's Landing near the bend of the Ocklawaha River, about twenty-five miles northeast of Fort King. The circumstances of the new negotiations were vastly different from those held nine years earlier at Moultrie Creek. The first instance had been a very public affair, being held near the most populous settlement in the territory. Hundreds of Indians and white spectators had shown up to watch the proceedings. In contrast, the negotiations at Payne's Landing seem to have been almost secret. Although accompanied by a few soldiers and an interpreter, Gadsden worked alone. Payne's Landing, though accessible to both parties and convenient to the Indians, was a remote location, far from a large number of curious eyes. No minutes of the meetings were submitted, nor were there any detailed accounts of what had been said by either party. When the eventual disputes arose, this lack of openness only served to widen the chasm of distrust.

The Seminole, having recently been forced onto one new reservation, were in no mood to move to another. True, the whites were constantly pressuring them, but there was still plenty of uninhabited space in Florida, much of it considered unsuitable for white settlers. Conditions in Florida suited the Seminole way of life. Game was abundant, some sort of crops grew year-round, and even winter freezes were mild and short lived. How much of that would be true out in Arkansas? There were other factors that were unacceptable to the Seminole that Gadsden did not seem to understand or care about. First, there was the demand that the Seminole would once again become part of the Creek Nation. The Lower Creek, who would have most of the political power once everyone was out west, were the Seminole's

mortal enemies. Second, there was the matter of the Black Seminoles. While the Indians were afraid of losing close black friends and valuable slaves once they were in Indian Territory, the blacks were concerned they would lose their hard-won freedom. This pressure, as much as anything, would help convince the Seminole to resist emigration.

The stipulations of the treaty were simple, yet provided ample opportunity for future disagreement and conflict. Article I stated that the Seminole would give up all claim to their lands in Florida and emigrate to the territory assigned to the Creeks and become part of the Creek Nation. The amount of land assigned to the Creeks would be increased in proportion to the number of Seminole moving there, but there was no guarantee the Seminole would actually get all that land. Article II provided \$15,400 in compensation for improvements the Indians had made to their Florida homes, to be paid when they arrived at their new homes. The article also provided \$200 each for the black interpreters, Abraham and Cudjo. Article III provided “a blanket and a homespun frock, to each of the warriors, women and children” upon their arrival.

Article IV extended the provision for the blacksmith provided for in the Treaty of Moultrie Creek for an extra ten years, and promised to continue all the other benefits of the old treaty. The government also agreed to pay \$3,000 for fifteen years, but the funds would go to the Creeks to be distributed in a manner proportional to the whole Creek nation, which meant the Seminole might end up with very little of it. Article V dealt with compensating the Indians for their cattle, either in cash or replacement cattle, once they were out west. Article VI stipulated that the government would pay up to \$7,000 to liquidate claims “for slaves and other property, alleged to have been stolen and destroyed” by the Seminole. Finally, Article VII stated that the Indians would remove within three years of ratification, about a third of them every year.

On May 9, 1832, fifteen Seminole leaders put their marks on the treaty. Among them were several of the most influential men in the nation, including Tukose Emathla, Micanopy, Ote Emathla (Jumper), and Abiaki (Sam Jones). Questions have always been raised as to why they would sign a document so contrary to their interests. Abiaki, especially, was vehemently against removal. The stipulation that they join the Creeks should have been enough to make them walk away from the talks. Some have speculated that the \$200 paid to the interpreters was nothing more than a bribe, and that the Seminole didn’t know what they were signing. Yet Abraham would continue to serve as Micanopy’s trusted counselor for years. Perhaps the Indians were physically threatened, or they had gotten to the point where

they simply told Gadsden whatever he wanted to hear, knowing they never intended to keep their part of the bargain. Without some record of what transpired at the negotiations, we'll never really know.

Even though the treaty had been signed, it was not yet final. The preamble had allowed the tribe to send a delegation of seven leaders to the proposed reservation to examine it. On October 10, 1832, the delegation left Florida for Arkansas. After a long journey across the Gulf of Mexico and up the Mississippi and Arkansas Rivers, the delegation arrived at the designated area, accompanied by Agent Phagan and Abraham, their interpreter. For several months in mid-winter the group toured the territory, inspecting the land and talking with the Creeks who resided there. On March 28, 1833, at Fort Gibson, Arkansas, the delegation signed a document stating that they were satisfied with the proposed territory and agreeable to the emigration of their people. Unlike the Treaty of Payne's Landing, the Fort Gibson agreement specified an exact boundary for the Seminole reservation and promised they would have it "for their separate future residence, forever." Now, at least as far as the government was concerned, the Seminole had irrevocably signed away all rights to remain in Florida.

Washington's optimism was shattered almost immediately upon the delegation's return to Florida. Most of the delegation either denied signing the agreement at Fort Gibson or insisted they had been forced to sign. After all, the delegation was virtually alone in a strange land and very much at the mercy of Agent Phagan. Charley Emathla, one of the delegation's members, told of his experiences on the trip and voiced his concerns about the migration:

There were but few of us in the deputation. We were ill used by the Agent. We were abandoned when sick on the road. We were sometimes made to walk on foot. If the few on that expedition were exposed to such hardships and ill-usage on their journey, how much more suffering must there be, when the *whole nation* is moving in a body? If the heart [of the white man] is not big enough for tens, how can it contain hundreds?⁷

Besides claiming they had been coerced into signing, the delegation argued they did not have the authority to make such a decision for the whole Seminole nation. As far as the tribe was concerned, the delegation was to report back to a council of headmen who would then decide the matter. The initial wording in the Treaty of Payne's Landing was ambiguous on the matter, containing the pronoun "they," which could be interpreted as meaning either the delegation or the tribe. In a January 1833 report to

President Jackson, Secretary of War Eaton agreed with the Seminole, stating that the treaty was not obligatory upon the tribe until it had received the report of the delegation and made a decision whether or not to accept the treaty. By the end of March, the government had resolved the matter to its own satisfaction, replacing the troublesome “they” with “this delegation.”⁸

The Seminole contended that the treaties were fraudulent, and evidence seems to back them up. In truth, the treaties could be seen as doubly fraudulent, as it appears the Seminole had little intention of abiding by what they had signed. Whatever anyone’s true intentions or motivations, an impasse had been reached, and neither side appeared willing to compromise.

The year of 1834 brought several important personnel changes that would have an effect on the Florida Indians. Wiley Thompson, a former Georgia Congressman, was appointed the new Seminole agent, replacing John Phagan, who had been removed after it was discovered he had altered several vouchers and pocketed the difference. Farther up the administrative ladder, Governor DuVal had, after almost a dozen exasperating years, finally retired from office. His replacement, appointed by President Jackson, was Secretary of War John Eaton. Eaton’s successor in the War Department was Lewis Cass, former Territorial Governor of Michigan and a man well experienced in Indian affairs. There were also military changes affecting Florida. Duncan Clinch was still in charge of the army’s forces in Florida, but had since been promoted to the rank of brigadier general. Above Clinch, Maj. Gen. Winfield Scott had returned to the Eastern Department of the army while his rival, Edmund Gaines, had resumed his position as head of the Western Department, which included all of Florida but the east coast. Owing to growing tensions, Fort King had been reopened, but both it and Fort Brooke were chronically understaffed.⁹

On the Seminole side, Micanopy, headman of the Alachua bands, replaced the deceased Tukose Emathla as leader of all the Seminole. It was a position that meant more to the whites than to the Seminole. The government had always insisted that there be one man who spoke for the entire tribe, and Tukose had been elected to the post. As far as the Indians were concerned, no one was headman of all the Seminole. Even among the Alachuas, Micanopy was not an absolute ruler. He was from the hereditary ruling clan and had been chosen by the tribal council, but he could also be removed by them if they saw the need. If the Seminole nation needed to make a common decision, the assembled leaders and headmen of the various tribes would do it, not Micanopy. It was somewhat ironic that the

highly democratic Americans, having abandoned the idea of an autocratic ruler, couldn't understand that the Native Americans had done the same thing a long time ago.

For the most part, whites were not impressed by Micanopy. General Clinch described him as "a man of but little talent or energy of character, but, from his age and wealth, has much influence in the nation."¹⁰ Government



Micanopy, hereditary leader of the Alachua Seminole at the commencement of the Second Seminole War.

Courtesy of Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum of the Seminole Tribe of Florida (ATTK Catalog No. 206.48.1).

officers who observed him saw little leadership capability, and believed he was too easily influenced by his advisors, notably his brother-in-law Ote Emathla (Jumper) and the interpreter Abraham. Yet it was the Indians who had chosen him, and they appeared to hold him in high regard. We must keep in mind that the qualities the Seminole looked for in a leader weren't necessarily the same as the white man expected to see. Whites wanted an all-powerful chief; the Indians didn't.

The Treaty of Payne's Landing had been signed in May 1832, but the Senate did not get around to ratifying it until early 1834. The treaty had given the Indians three years after ratification in which to remove, and the Seminole, hoping to delay the process as long as possible, insisted the first group of emigrants wouldn't have to depart until January 1835. In the War Department's eyes the clock had been running since 1832, so complete removal was still expected to be finished by the end of 1835. Washington was so confident in the pending success of the removal that it planned to abolish the office of Seminole agent in December of that year. By then, it was assumed, most of the Indians would be on their way west, under control of the Creeks, and using the Creek agent.

The Seminole agent, Wiley Thompson, seems not to have realized the incompatibility of his two missions. On one hand, he appears to have been committed to seeing the Seminole treated fairly, but he was also determined to go through with their removal. Fifty-two at the time of his appointment, Thompson had made a career of public service. Born in Virginia but raised in Georgia, he served with distinction in the War of 1812 and was elected to the rank of major general in the Georgia Militia in 1817. After a few years in state politics, Thompson ran for Congress and served twelve years. After his stint in Washington, Thompson returned to state politics, serving as a delegate to the convention that was rewriting Georgia's state constitution. It was during this convention that he showed himself to be in strong support of Indian removal and states' rights concerning Indian land.¹¹

In late October 1834 Thompson called upon the Seminole to gather at Fort King for a talk. The Indians listened to the agent, quietly argued among themselves and with Thompson, then calmly stated that they had no intention of moving. They did not feel bound by the Treaties of Payne's Landing and Fort Gibson and argued that the Treaty of Moultrie Creek had guaranteed them an uncontested reservation for a period of twenty years. Concerned by the Seminole's tone, Thompson asked Washington for more troops, writing, "I feel it an imperious duty to urge the necessity of a strong reinforcement of this Post, and the location of a strong force at Tampa Bay." He had reason to be worried. "The Indians after they had

received the Annuity, purchased an unusually large quantity of Powder & Lead." The plea was largely ignored. The government didn't realize just how intransigent the Seminole were.¹²

It was during this period that the name of Osceola first began to draw the attention of whites. He was not, as is commonly believed, the head chief of the Seminole nation. Rather, he was a charismatic, angry young man who spoke his mind and gathered followers because of what he said and did. He was, in many ways, an enigma. Born a Creek in Alabama but forced into Florida as a child by the Creek War, he was determined never to be forced to move again. His father was supposedly a white trader by the name of William Powell, and his mother was of mixed background, which meant his heritage may have been more white than Indian. In attitude, however, he was fully Native. Even his name tells us little about the man. Osceola is a corruption of Asi-Yohola (black drink singer) a ceremonial title given to many young men, but he was commonly called Powell or Billy Powell after his father. Articulate and forceful, he became the "war spirit" of the Seminole, the one man who best defined their struggle.¹³

An uneasy stalemate developed that lasted for several months. Impatient to secure runaway slaves, a movement was underway in the Florida Legislative Council to put the Indians under territorial jurisdiction. In late January 1835 General Clinch warned Washington that the Seminole had no intention of removing and that if the government was intent on using force, more troops would be needed. "If a sufficient military force, to overawe them, is not sent into the Nation, they will not be removed & the whole frontier may be laid waste by a combination of the Indians, Indian negroes, and the negroes on the plantations—It is useless to mince the question." Knowing the War Department's preoccupation with economy, he also requested that the troops be fully prepared for battle, "& not with 13 rounds of cartridges pr. Man."¹⁴

Clinch was not the only one getting nervous. Agent Thompson reported that the Indians "laugh at the idea of the little handful of men at this post (Fort King) being able to compel them to remove." Governor Eaton began to question the validity of the Treaty of Payne's Landing and asked the attorney general for an opinion. He also warned that the "employing of a military force is an act of war, and the Indians will embody and fight in their defence."¹⁵ By February the administration had made up its mind. In a letter to Clinch, Secretary Cass stated that "It is impossible to yield to any wishes they may express on the subject of emigration. I fully appreciate the consequences which you predict. . . . It is the ultimate decision . . . of the

president, that they shall be removed. . . . Let them be reasoned with, and if possible convinced. Let every measure short of actual force be first used . . . then, if necessary, let actual force be employed, and their removal effected.”¹⁶

Thompson kept pushing the Indians to prepare to emigrate, while the Seminole kept ignoring him. Finally, in late March 1835, Thompson again called the Seminole leaders to a meeting. On this occasion he read to them a letter from the Great Father in Washington, their old enemy Andrew Jackson. In the letter, Jackson informed the Indians that the time for discussion was over. “Should you . . . refuse to remove, I have then directed the Commanding officer to remove you by force,” he wrote. The Seminole asked for thirty days in which to respond. A month later, they informed Thompson that despite the threats, they would not give up their homes. Angry words were exchanged between the agent and the Indians. Before violence could erupt, Clinch stepped in and restored order. In the end, eight of the leaders agreed to emigrate but asked to be allowed to remain until the first of the year. Hoping to mollify the Indians, Clinch and Thompson agreed.¹⁷

It was at this time that Thompson made the first of several major mistakes. Although eight of the Seminole leaders had agreed to emigrate, five of the most powerful, including Micanopy, adamantly refused. Infuriated, Thompson declared they no longer spoke for the tribe. Such an intrusion into the internal affairs of the Seminole people could only serve to embitter the Indians. Later, when the threat of hostilities increased, Thompson forbade the sale of arms and ammunition to the Seminole. While to us it might seem a wise precaution, the act only served to increase the anger among the Indians. Osceola was particularly incensed. Only slaves were denied the right to purchase gunpowder, he said. He warned the agent, “The white man shall not make me black. I will make the white man red with blood; and then blacken him in the sun and rain . . . and the buzzard [shall] live upon his flesh.”¹⁸

As the summer passed, tensions simmered just below the surface. The Indians came and went from the Agency at Fort King on a routine basis, conducting business and no doubt gathering intelligence. Some were friendly, others were not. Thompson complained that Osceola was particularly abusive in his language and demeanor, which led the agent to attempt to impose his authority. In early June he had Osceola handcuffed and confined to the guardhouse until he apologized. The Indian leader raged for a day or two, then began to calm down and eventually promised to honor the Treaty of Payne’s Landing and bring his followers in. Thompson was suspicious and asked that Osceola prove his sincerity by having some trustworthy headmen vouch for him. This he did, producing Charley Emathla and Coa

Hadjo, two prominent leaders in favor of emigration, to support his claim. Once released, Osceola seemed to keep his promise, signing the treaty, acting friendly and respectful, and encouraging others to emigrate. Both Thompson and Charley Emathla would later learn that it was all an act.¹⁹

Animosity soon led to bloodshed. In late June in Alachua County, near the Kanapaha prairie close to present-day Gainesville, seven whites came upon five Mikasuki who were hunting outside the boundaries of the reservation. Taking the warriors' weapons, they proceeded to flog the Indians with their cow whips. While this was happening, two other Indians arrived and opened fire. In the ensuing rounds of gunfire, three of the whites were wounded, while one Indian was killed and another seriously wounded. Later, after the parties separated, the whites who had been wounded demanded the Indians be turned over. Thompson agreed to the request, and the Seminole complied. The judge in charge of the case took no action, however, and eventually released the prisoners.²⁰ As far as the Seminole were concerned, releasing the prisoners did not amount to justice. In their eyes, Thompson had committed another grave insult by requesting the warriors be surrendered in the first place. More important, an Indian life had been taken, and satisfaction was called for. In August they took their revenge, waylaying and killing Private Kinsley Dalton, who was carrying the mail from Fort Brooke to Fort King.²¹

For those who were charged with protecting the frontier, the situation in Florida was a familiar one. Once again, the Indians were being pushed to the point of violent reaction, and once again, officials in Washington failed to understand the gravity of the situation. On October 8, 1835, General Clinch wrote to the secretary of war, stating that his present force was "entirely inadequate" to protect the frontier from "the Indians & from *another species of population* [slaves]" and that he needed permission to call out 150 mounted volunteers. Nine days later, he again wrote, apologizing that he "may have rather under estimated the means necessary to carry into effect the views and plans of the Government." With that, he asked for three additional companies of regulars. Four companies of regulars were, with no great haste, ordered to Florida, but the volunteers were not called out "because there is no appropriation authorizing it."²²

Some Seminole, wanting no part of war or sensing the futility of such an act, elected to emigrate. Foremost among them was Charley Emathla, a well-respected leader who had signed both the Treaty of Payne's Landing and the agreement at Fort Gibson. For those who had decided to stay and fight, maintaining solidarity was of extreme importance, and to go against the expressed wishes of the tribe was considered treasonous and punishable

by death. In late November Charley turned in his cattle to the government agents at Fort King and headed for Tampa Bay, where a ship would take him and his followers to their new homes in the Indian Territory. On the path to Fort Brooke, Osceola and a party of warriors met Charley and carried out the death sentence. The time for discussion and friendly differences of opinion had passed.²³

To the residents of Florida and the military men on the scene, the meaning of Charley's execution was clear. Lt. Col. Alexander Fanning, in command at Fort King, wrote an urgent letter to General Clinch at St. Augustine, requesting that he call out the volunteers and return to the interior of the territory immediately. Fanning understood the situation well. "There appears to be a general disaffection of the Indians, and, no doubt, War is determined. . . . We have fallen into the error committed at the Commencement of every Indian War: The display of too little force—The attempt to do too much with inadequate means."²⁴

December 1835–March 1836

Seminole Victories over Dade, Clinch, and Gaines

In the weeks following the death of Charley Emathla the Seminole began to attack isolated homesteads and other vulnerable targets in an effort to drive back the frontier. Leaders in Florida did their best to respond, but were hampered by a lack of men and material. Brig. Gen. Joseph Hernandez of the St. Augustine Militia, having been informed that the city would have to defend itself, was willing to carry out his duty but was without sufficient weaponry. He asked the War Department for a loan of five hundred muskets, but the nearest federal arsenal could only supply about a quarter of the guns, and ammunition was either unavailable or of poor quality.¹

Governor Eaton was out of the territory, so Acting Governor George Walker took charge and called out five hundred volunteers from Middle and East Florida and placed them under the command of Brig. Gen. Richard Keith Call. Walker also asked the commander of the Pensacola Navy Yard if he could dispatch a vessel to patrol the western coast of the peninsula, where it was reported that numerous Indian canoes were moving about. In response to such rumors, the customs collector at St. Marks first requested that a revenue cutter patrol the approaches to his post, then decided it was safer to move his family and office to Tallahassee.² Despite all the preparations, officials were not in a state of panic. Past experience had led them to believe that bellicose Indians were easily awed. Acting Governor Walker had little doubt that a show of force would bring the Seminole into submission. Indeed, the militia enlistments were for only one month. In a letter to Secretary of War Cass, Walker stated, “The enemy are determined on resistance to the last extremity. But I do not doubt that the energetic measures taken will in a few weeks cause their compliance with the treaty.”³

Officials may not have been frightened, but much of the population was. As General Clinch traveled across Florida he noted the mood of the people. "It is truly distressing to witness the panic and sufferings of the white frontier inhabitants. Men, women, and children are seen flying in every direction, and leaving everything behind them save a few articles of clothing. Many families that were comfortable . . . are now reduced to want; their houses . . . having been plundered and burned by small bands of Indians." Clinch also found it difficult to organize the settlers into defensive units. Men would not volunteer for military service until their families had been removed to a place of relative safety.⁴

Throughout early December 1835 scattered Indian war parties continued to threaten isolated homesteads or small groups of travelers, but only one major action took place. This occurred on December 18 when a large party of warriors ambushed a Florida Militia wagon train near the Kanapaha Prairie in Alachua County. In what became known as the Battle of Black Point, the escort of thirty men suffered casualties of eight dead and six wounded before fleeing the scene and leaving the wagons behind for the Indians to ransack. Two days later a force of about one hundred volunteers caught up with some of the Indians while they were burning a nearby house. The Seminole took up defensive positions in a wooded pond where they were surrounded and an unknown number killed.⁵

The Seminole were now clearly on the offensive, but there was no government force in Florida capable of containing them. Proving they understood both economic and psychological warfare, the Seminole began to attack and destroy the sugar plantations south of St. Augustine. The ruined remains of several of those sugar mills can still be seen at several parks in northeast Florida.⁶ Rightfully terrorized, most of the white inhabitants fled to the safety of St. Augustine, taking many of their slaves with them. A few plantation owners thought they could either defend their homes or reason with the Seminole, but it was to no avail. By the middle of January Florida's largest and most prosperous industry was in ruins, and many of the slaves who had worked those plantations had joined the Seminole or were Indian captives. Throughout the northern portion of the territory, whites deserted their homes and crowded into nearby fortifications. Some simply abandoned Florida altogether.⁷

Clinch's worst fears had now become a reality. At his disposal were little more than five hundred men, most of them split between Fort Brooke, Fort King, and Fort Drane, which was about twenty miles northwest of Fort King and located on one of Clinch's own plantations. Most vulnerable was Fort King, especially after Clinch ordered the majority of the troops



Sugar Mill Ruins at Bulow Plantation State Park, destroyed by the Seminole at the commencement of the war.

Photo by the authors.

stationed there to join him at Fort Drane. Several companies were on their way to Tampa by sea, and Clinch gave orders that upon their arrival they should march through the one hundred miles of hostile Indian territory to relieve Fort King. Since the killing of Charley Emathla, communications between Forts King and Brooke had been severed, and the officers and men at Tampa Bay could only imagine what was happening to their friends and comrades in the center of the territory. They feared that if aid did not reach Fort King quickly, the Indians would overwhelm it, killing all within. On December 21, Maj. Francis Belton, in command at Fort Brooke, reluctantly decided to obey Clinch's orders and send the two companies that were available in Tampa to the relief of Fort King.⁸

Command of the detachment fell to Capt. George Washington Gardiner, but his wife, who was with him at Fort Brooke, was extremely ill and in need of his care. It was no doubt a difficult decision to make, but Gardiner felt duty-bound to obey orders and began to prepare for the trip to Fort King. Then Maj. Francis Langhorne Dade gallantly volunteered to lead the expedition in his stead. Soon after Dade's command headed out on the

morning of the twenty-third, Gardiner's plans changed once again. A ship was about to depart for Key West, where medical facilities were superior and their family, including her father, were living. Feeling his wife would be better cared for in Key West, Gardiner put her aboard ship and hurried to catch up with his fellows.

Meanwhile, at Fort King, Agent Wiley Thompson didn't seem very concerned about the depleted condition of the fort's garrison. Thompson was confident that once the army arrived in strength, the Seminole would realize that resistance was futile, and emigration would reluctantly take place. The agent should have been more wary. Outside the fort, Osceola and a band of followers were watching. The Indian leader had sworn to gain revenge for the time Thompson had confined him in the guardhouse. All he needed now was an opportunity.

Less than one hundred miles to the south, other Indians were also watching and waiting. Major Dade's command of one hundred men, seven officers, one doctor, and a slave who was along as an interpreter was slowly marching north along the Fort King Road, the simple dirt path that ran between Forts Brooke and King. The first half of their journey was considered the most hazardous. It required them to cross four small rivers, places where they would have been at their most vulnerable. At the first river, the Little Hillsborough, there was a bridge, and they were able to proceed with little delay. On the second day, they came to the main branch of the Hillsborough and found the bridge had been burned only a day or two before. Each night as they camped they could hear shouts and calls from the shadowing Seminole. On the fifth day they crossed the final river, the Little Withlacoochee, and encamped that night on higher, more open ground. They had passed through the most dangerous portion of the journey, and the Seminole had offered no resistance. Although they were only halfway to Fort King, the remainder of the trek appeared safe.

Several miles north of where the army had camped, approximately 180 Seminole warriors were hidden among the tall grass, pines, and palmettos that lined the west side of the Fort King Road. On the opposite side of the road was a large pond. All in all, it was a good location for an ambush. Scouts had been following the column of soldiers while the main body of warriors waited for the return of Osceola from Fort King, but by December 28 they could wait no longer. The soldiers would soon enter more open territory, and a surprise attack might not be possible.

Early in the morning the Indians saw the line of soldiers marching toward them, wrapped in their sky-blue greatcoats, some shivering in the cold morning air. The soldiers looked relaxed, their cartridge boxes but-

toned under their coats. Flankers, who would normally examine the areas to the right and left of the column to prevent an ambush, were not deployed. The soldiers believed that the worst part of the journey was behind them and that in a few days they would be safely within the walls of Fort King. As a seasoned military man, Dade should have known better. Never underestimate your enemy.

As the advance guard of Dade's command passed in front of the hidden warriors, a single shot rang out from Micanopy's weapon. This was followed by the deadly discharge of nearly two hundred Seminole rifles. Almost half of Dade's command instantly fell dead or wounded, among them Major Dade. Terrified white hands clutched at wounds or frantically tore open greatcoats in a rush to load weapons and return fire. Disciplined soldiers, the men did not panic and run but instead took up positions behind the pine trees or palmettos that afforded the only cover available. It had been the perfect ambush, carefully planned and precisely executed. The warriors had waited for Micanopy's signal and had chosen their targets carefully. Instead of focusing their fire on the officers, as was the Seminole's habit, they spread their fire out along the entire line, inflicting the greatest number of casualties possible. Dade and his men never had a chance.

Captain Gardiner, once again in command, began to rally the men and consolidate the remaining forces. The single cannon was unlimbered and prepared for firing. The Seminole, taking cover behind the pines, continued to fire, scoring the occasional hit. As the cannon fired, the Indians fell back. Gardiner brought his command together and assessed his losses. Over half his men were dead or gravely wounded. The enemy had been chased off but had not gone away; they were sure to return sooner or later. Gardiner's choices were limited. He could go on the offensive, retreat, surrender, or stay put. Retreat wouldn't have been an option. First there was the matter of the river crossings, where the Seminole could easily cut them off. Then there was the large number of wounded. He would not leave his fallen comrades to the mercy of "savages," nor could he surrender to them. Whites believed that Indians did not take male prisoners, and if they did, it was with the intention of later torture. Likewise, the unknown number of Seminole warriors made going on the offense a questionable tactic. Whether it was intentional or not, by killing so many soldiers in the first volley, the Seminole made their numbers appear much larger than they actually were. Gardiner may well have feared there were upwards of a thousand Indians standing between him and Fort King.

From Gardiner's perspective there was but one choice: stand and fight. The soldiers no doubt knew the probable outcome of the battle,



Reconstructed breastwork at the Dade Battlefield Historic State Park, erected over the position of the original, and the site where most of the fallen soldiers were initially buried.

Photo by the authors.

but what else could they have done? If the Indians could be held off until nightfall, perhaps they would leave and the surviving soldiers could escape. Tall, straight pine trees were felled and a triangular breastwork was hastily erected, no more than three logs high. By late morning the Indians returned, cautiously advancing, killing the soldiers one by one. Troops continued to man the cannon, but this left them exposed to their enemy's fire, which only hastened their demise. By mid-afternoon, not a white man was left standing. With the exception of four wounded soldiers, Dade's entire command had been wiped out. Luis Pacheco, the black interpreter, was taken prisoner.

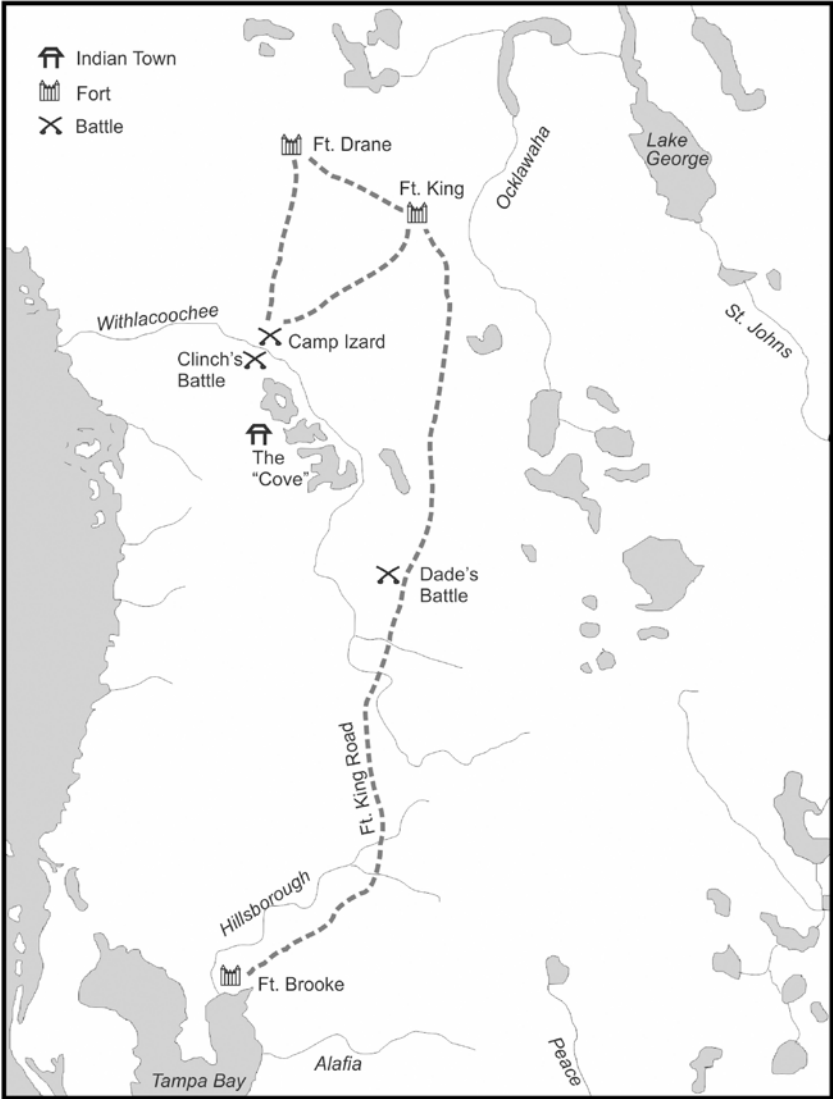
The day following the battle, two of the survivors, Ransom Clark and Edwin DeCoursey, were spotted by a lone Seminole horseman as they attempted to make their way back to Fort Brooke. Hoping to elude their pursuer, the pair split, but DeCoursey was tracked down and killed. Clark, suffering from a broken arm, broken collarbone, wounded leg, and a bullet in the lung, managed to evade the warrior and continued his struggle to return to Fort Brooke, miraculously reaching safety on New Year's Eve. The other two survivors, Joseph Sprague and John Thomas, having not been

within the breastwork and suffering only minor wounds, also made it back to Fort Brooke. To white America, Dade's defeat was decried as a "massacre." To the Seminole, it was justly hailed as a great victory.⁹

On the same day as the Dade Battle was taking place, Osceola and his band waited outside Fort King, hidden in the surrounding forest. It was mid-afternoon, close to the time when the last of Dade's soldiers were dying. The gates of the fort opened, and Agent Thompson appeared. With him was Lt. Constantine Smith, both of them out for an after-dinner stroll. As the two men walked toward the sutler's (storekeeper) cabin, the loud crack of rifle fire broke the stillness. Thompson fell, shot fourteen times. His companion was also cut down. The Indians then turned on the sutler's cabin, where they killed most of the occupants. The site of Fort King is now a city/county park with reconstructed fort, and the Dade Battlefield has been preserved as a state historic site with museum.¹⁰

The Seminole weren't the only ones going on the offensive. General Clinch had been planning a preemptive attack on the villages in the Cove of the Withlacoochee, the large, watery area to the west of the Withlacoochee River that was considered a Seminole stronghold. Clinch believed that if he could secure the Indian families in the Cove, a prolonged war might be averted. If nothing else, attacking the Seminole settlements would force the Indian warriors to concentrate on defending their own homes rather than destroying those of the whites. Unfortunately, Clinch had been unable to commence his campaign, having only a meager force of regulars at Fort Drane. Then, on December 24, General Call and about five hundred Florida Mounted Volunteers showed up, and on the twenty-seventh Colonel Fanning arrived with four companies of regulars that had been posted at Fort King. Unaware of what had happened to Major Dade on the twenty-eighth, Clinch and his army of about 750 men departed Fort Drane on the twenty-ninth. For Clinch, time was of the essence. About two-thirds of his force was made up of Florida Volunteers whose terms of service were to expire with the coming of the new year, only two days away. To make matters even more pressing, an express rider arrived from Fort King with news of the assassinations of Wiley Thompson and Lieutenant Smith. If there was any doubt in Clinch's mind that the Seminole meant war, it quickly evaporated.¹¹

Clinch's army reached the Withlacoochee early on New Year's Eve, but due to an imperfect knowledge of the area, they arrived not at the ford but at a point where the river was deep and swift flowing. The general now faced a dilemma. If the volunteers were not used that day, any chance of success would be lost. Not wishing to waste time trying to locate the



Battles of Major Dade, General Clinch, and General Gaines.

Map by John Missall.

ford, Clinch decided to ferry the troops across in an old canoe they happened upon. The canoe could only hold about seven men, which meant transporting the more than two hundred regulars would take up most of the morning. The wisdom of dividing his force with nothing more than a

leaky dugout as an attachment was no doubt questioned, but the general's orders were carried out.

In groups of five or six, the soldiers were ferried across the river. In the meantime some of the volunteers swam across with their horses, while others worked on rafts to ferry the saddles and weapons to the other side. Seeing no hostiles, the soldiers moved a few hundred yards inland to a clearing surrounded by dense shrubbery where they stacked their arms, regrouped, and relaxed. What they didn't know was that the Seminole had been aware of the army's approach but were expecting them at the ford. Alerted to the fact that Clinch's force was crossing elsewhere, the Seminole, about 250 in number, quickly repositioned themselves and began to surround the clearing where the soldiers were gathered.¹²

Unaware of the danger, the regulars continued to wait on the volunteers. Suddenly there were warning shouts and rifle shots. The surrounding hammock erupted with war whoops and gunfire. Surprised soldiers fell wounded or dying, while others lunged for their muskets. After some moments of initial confusion, the officers formed their men into ranks and began to return fire. Unfortunately, forming the men into orderly lines only made them better targets. It soon became obvious that if the well-concealed Seminole were not forced from their hiding places, a bloodbath would result. The volunteers, unable or unwilling to come to the regulars' rescue, would be of no help. Colonel Fanning, a one-armed veteran of the war with Britain, urged Clinch to order a bayonet charge. The general was at first reluctant, then agreed. The soldiers fixed bayonets and ran toward the waiting Seminole rifles. It seemed an act of desperation, but it worked. The Indians, being practical warriors, fell back, and the army was saved from annihilation. Realizing the futility of trying to pursue and engage the Seminole, Clinch called for a retreat.

While the regulars were under attack, General Call had managed to get some of his men across, while others worked frantically on the rafts. With the territorial troops forming two lines of protection, the army made its way back across the river and began the slow march back to Fort Drane. Wounded soldiers were placed in carts or on hammocks slung between horses. Those who were strong enough were given horses to ride. Clinch had lost four men in the battle and suffered another fifty-nine wounded, many of them seriously. Thanks to the skill and care of the medical staff, all but one survived. Hospital orderly John Bemrose later told how Clinch comforted the mortally wounded man. "Frequently I saw him sitting on the dirty floor so as to bring himself near the dying soldier, conversing with him and throwing in sweet consolation as he only knew how."¹³

As often happens, both sides had differing objectives so they viewed the outcome of the battle differently. From the government's point of view, Clinch and his men had fought bravely against a larger force and had, through their gallantry and courage, managed to avoid what could have been total annihilation. The fact that the strength of the enemy was vastly overrated and Clinch had been forced to retreat was conveniently ignored. The newspapers, never willing to give the Indian his due, somehow made it seem as if the army had been victorious. As far as the Seminole were concerned, the enemy had threatened their homes and had been repulsed. In the end, the Seminole had accomplished their objective—the protection of their homes—while Clinch had not.

Clinch's battle at the Withlacoochee serves to highlight several of the problems the army would face throughout the war. First there was an almost total lack of geographic knowledge concerning the interior of Florida. Maps were vague at best and often wrong. Even the southern and eastern boundaries of the reservation hadn't been surveyed because the area was considered too difficult to travel through. In Clinch's campaign, no one within the force had known exactly where to ford the river. The only guides were members of the enemy tribe or blacks who had once lived among the Indians, and neither could be completely relied upon. Generally, white men were familiar only with the northernmost portions of the territory and the coast. The rest of the peninsula belonged to alligators, panthers, bears, and the Seminole.

The army itself was part of the problem. With a total strength of little more than seven thousand men, it was simply too small for the task at hand, especially when the large number of staff officers and other personnel who were not in combat positions were subtracted. Because of low pay and harsh discipline, recruits were often from the more desperate classes of society, and almost half the American army was made up of immigrants. Hospital orderly John Bemrose, himself an English immigrant, wrote, "What a medley our little army consisted of. There were the Georgian and Floridian crackers . . . Indians . . . Yankees . . . many Germans sputtering in high and low Dutch . . . a sprinkling of Frenchmen. . . . Irish were predominant . . . Scotch there were . . . with here and there a John Bull . . . Spanish, Minorcans, Poles, Swedes, Canadians, Nova Scotians, with here and there a South American."¹⁴

Drunkenness, desertion, and disciplinary problems were commonplace and severely dealt with. Many punishments seem particularly sadistic and were often meted out for the most minor infractions. Twenty-five or fifty lashes on the bare back was common, as was having to ride "the

horse,” a thin wooden rail that the soldier would have to sit upon all day, his legs dangling, sometimes for several days in a row. Private Bartholomew Lynch of the First Dragoons (mounted cavalry) tells of one soldier who was stripped naked for the offense of cutting the hair off a horse’s tail. He then had the tail tied to his buttocks and was made to run on all fours three times around the camp, then driven into the lake to drink like a horse. Another soldier was sentenced to be shot for “having his cap drawn over his eyes.” Instead of being immediately executed, the man was kept in the guardhouse chained to his coffin. Lynch reports that three months later the man died “a maniac.”¹⁵

It was a large nation for such a small army to defend. The border with Canada was not the peaceful boundary we know today. The navy still had warships on the Great Lakes and during the period of the Florida War the army would be called upon to help settle disputes from Maine to Michigan. In the opposite corner of the nation, the War for Texas Independence was underway, threatening to draw the United States into a conflict with Mexico. The nation’s coasts were also vulnerable, and invasion from across the sea was a major concern. Many of the leaders of 1836 had gained their reputations fighting the British in their youth, and there was no reason to believe it couldn’t happen again. Even America’s old ally France was proving difficult. An argument had erupted over the payment of claims owed by France to U.S. citizens, giving Andrew Jackson more than enough opportunity to rattle the American saber. In response to such foreign pressures, the nation was constructing a series of massive brick fortifications along the coast. Although habitually understaffed, these installations were a considerable drain on the army’s resources.¹⁶

Yet dealing with foreign adversaries was not the army’s main occupation. The Indian Removal Act was forcing thousands of Native Americans to emigrate west, and the army was often called upon to hasten the removal or restore peace. Some groups chose to remain and fight, while others chose to retreat deep into the wilderness. Resistance was usually short lived but nonetheless required the presence of a considerable number of U.S. soldiers. Even after the Indians were relocated, they were not any less ill-disposed toward their white neighbors, and conflict often spilled over into the white settlements bordering Indian Territory. The pressures of resettlement also increased conflict between the incoming Indian tribes and those who already lived there. To protect the frontier, a string of forts grew up on the western border that outnumbered those on the eastern seaboard. The minuscule U.S. Army was too thinly spread to fight a major war anywhere, especially in the inhospitable swamps and hammocks of Florida.

To counter the chronic shortage of troops, the government relied on two types of citizen-soldiers. The first were the conscripted state militias, descendants of colonial militias that had been fighting the Indians for generations. In theory, these units were already organized and trained, ready at a moment's notice to come to their nation's defense. In practice, the militia tended to be lacking in both discipline and equipment. Most of the conscripts were simple farmers and few owned serviceable weapons. Their senior officers were generally appointed by the state governor, and that was where their allegiance tended to gravitate. Periodic training, if it was held at all, was often seen as a good reason to get drunk and tell stories around the campfire.

The other type of citizen-soldier was the volunteer, whose roots could be traced to the famed Minutemen of the Revolution. If discipline and cooperation were questionable in the militias, it was almost nonexistent with the volunteers. Their officers were the men who organized the companies, and their ranks were filled by people who felt little obligation to the professional soldiers they fought alongside. As volunteers, they often felt privileged to fight on their own terms or to not fight at all. Both civilian forces, whether conscripted militia or volunteer, tended to view their terms of service as an enjoyable adventure, a chance to go camping with the boys while making some fast cash off the government. The harsh and dangerous conditions of service in Florida were not what they were expecting.¹⁷

Henry Hollingsworth, a volunteer from Tennessee, was one of those who traveled to Florida with glorious expectations. What he found was something altogether different. His first disappointment came upon his arrival at Tallahassee:

We being the first Tennessee troops that arrived there, we expected a pretty warm reception and at least a *treat* from the citizens. Under this impression every man who had a clean shirt . . . put it on . . . and arranged ourselves in the march to the very best advantage. . . . In this order of procession . . . we made our entrance into Tallahassee . . . big with expectation of being met by the Governor and staff and hailed with exclamations of joy by a crowded populace and in the end receive an invitation to partake of some kind and generous hospitalities offered us on the altar of gratitude by the over-thankful and delightful inhabitants. . . . What was our disappointment on penetrating the town and finding ourselves unnoticed! . . . No Governor came out to meet us. . . . No crowded populace thronged to salute us. No beautiful females from windows, porticoes and balconies with their fairy hands waved their white handkerchiefs to bid us welcome.¹⁸

It was, as much as anything, the price tag of the civilian forces that made their use controversial. It could cost the government almost twice as much to field a temporary state force as it could to deploy a similar force of regulars. Yet whenever the government attempted to cut back on the number of state troops it used, howls of protest arose from insulted state officers and militiamen who had gotten used to living off federal funds. Despite all the shortcomings of the civilian soldiers, they did perform useful service in the war. As the conflict progressed, discipline was imposed and malcontents were weeded out. Citizen soldiers also had the advantage of local knowledge and a familiarity with living off the land, especially when compared to regulars who were fresh off the boat from Europe. They also had a more personal stake in the war. After all, it was often their own homes and families they were protecting. From the time of Clinch's battle on the Withlacoochee until long after the conclusion of the war, the army and the state forces continued to argue over who had been most responsible for failing to bring the war to a swift conclusion. It was more convenient to blame each other than to admit that they had been out-fought by the Seminole.¹⁹

Problems with the militia system became apparent in the first months of the war. In the sugar-growing regions south of St. Augustine there was virtually no protection, and the Seminole were able to attack at will. At St. Augustine General Hernandez attempted to organize a defensive force as early as December but was hampered by confusion over who was to serve and a lack of weapons. By mid-January he was able to send a force of less than one hundred men under Maj. Benjamin Putnam to the area, but the Seminole had already destroyed nearly all the plantations, so there was little for the troops to do but take up defensive positions and fight the boredom. To keep the troops busy, Hernandez ordered them to visit the burned-out plantations and retrieve what valuables they could.²⁰

On January 17, Major Putnam was leading a group of less than fifty men south by boat when word was received that Dunlawton, an abandoned plantation owned by a Mrs. Anderson, was being burned by a Seminole war party. Arriving at the plantation that night, Putnam stationed his men in the slave quarters and waited for daylight. Early the next morning two Indians were seen approaching. As they drew near they were fired upon, resulting in one being killed and the other severely wounded. Putnam's men had little time to rejoice, however, for soon the main body of the Indian force arrived, forcing the militiamen to take cover in the burned-out plantation house.²¹

The exchange of gunfire lasted about an hour, until another group of Seminole warriors arrived, bringing their total strength to nearly three or four times that of the whites. Fearing they might be surrounded and

annihilated, Putnam ordered a retreat to the boats. Seeing this, the Indians fired on the soldiers, and the panicked men ran back into the house. As the Seminole continued to close in on the house, Putnam's men realized they had no choice but to flee to the boats, no matter what the danger. This time the Indians didn't try to hit the running targets but instead waited until the whites were relatively motionless as they boarded the vessels. Amid the concentrated gunfire, several of the soldiers were hit, including Putnam. One boat was charged by the Indians, forcing its occupants to flee into the water, resulting in one of them being captured and later killed. Putnam suffered one other fatality and seventeen wounded, two of whom later died of their wounds. Realizing the precariousness of Putnam's position, Hernandez ordered him back to St. Augustine, thereby abandoning Florida's richest properties to the Indians.²²

Reports of the war spread throughout the nation as rapidly as any news could at the time. America was shocked. Major Dade would become the Custer of his day, leader of a doomed force whose annihilation captured the nation's imagination. The destruction of the Florida sugar industry and the rout of the settlers made the Seminole appear to be stronger than they actually were. Indeed, Clinch's defeat at the Withlacoochee was blamed not upon any miscalculations by the army but upon a supposedly vast superiority in the numbers of the enemy. As the reports filtered north, the facts changed slightly as they moved from city to city. Most of the newspaper reporting consisted of nothing more than the reprinting of letters, both official and unofficial, or accounts from newspapers closer to the action. Some reports were utterly fanciful. The *New York Herald* stated the Indian strength at about three thousand men, made up of "2000 Indians, 1000 negroes, and 600 vagabonds of all descriptions, commanded by young chiefs educated at the Military Academy at West Point." One editor admitted that the facts were obscure and that it appeared as if Dade's men had retreated four miles before being wiped out. Many reports were nothing more than wild rumors. The *Mobile Chronicle* of January 27 listed "various rumors," such as "Tallahassee has been surprised and sacked . . . Fort King had been stormed and taken, with 400 troops, who were all massacred . . . Apalachicola is in possession of the savage enemy."²³

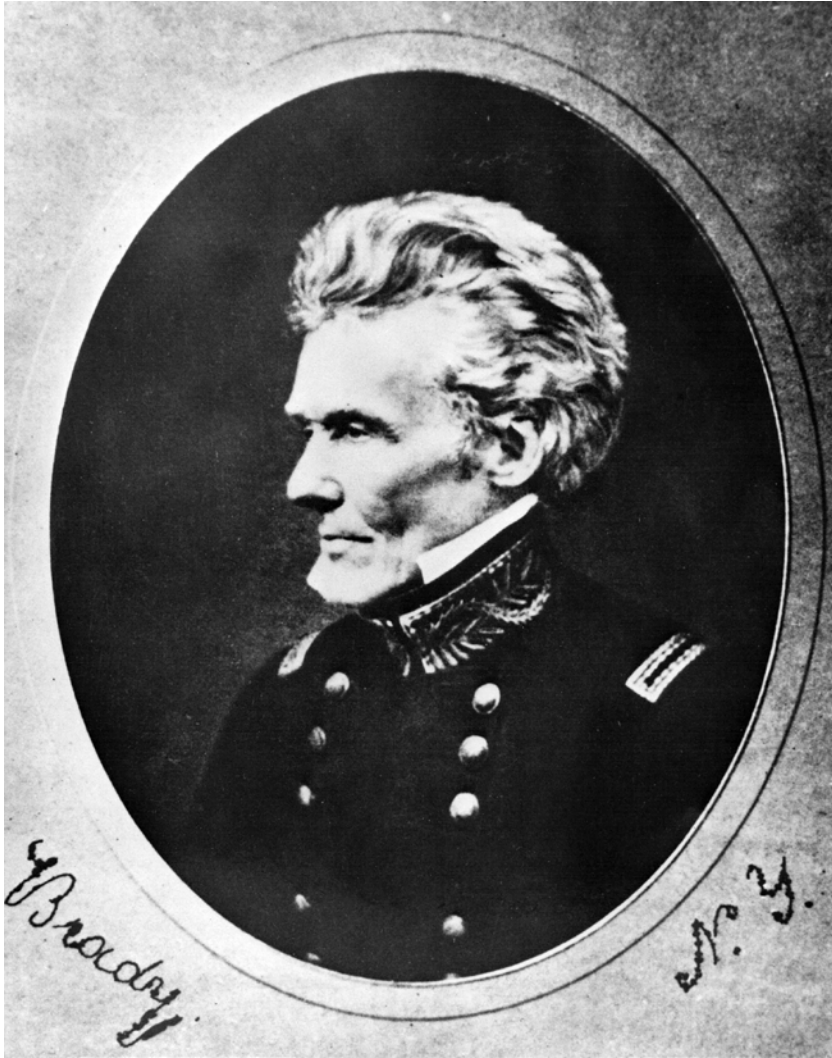
Even official casualty reports needed to be viewed with a certain amount of suspicion. Throughout history, soldiers have always overestimated the strength of their adversaries and the number of enemy slain. When the reporter has suffered a defeat, the tendency to exaggerate only increases. Often this is not intentional; during the heat of battle, the perception may

be quite different from the reality. In battlefield reports from the Seminole Wars, commanders often estimated the size of the opposing force or the number of warriors killed, yet how do you make an accurate count when your enemy is firing from hidden positions in a forest or has carried off the bodies of the dead?

As might be expected, news of war in Florida caused more concern among Southerners than among those living elsewhere in the nation. Reports that blacks had committed atrocities on the fallen soldiers and that hundreds of slaves had been freed from the plantations served to excite the emotions of the citizenry of the slaveholding states. Volunteer companies from South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama began to organize, eager to avenge the deaths of Dade's men and relieve the "suffering inhabitants" of Florida. Almost to a man, they envisioned a swift and glorious campaign that would quickly drive the Seminole into the sea.²⁴

The regular army was also beginning to mobilize. Brig. Gen. Abraham Eustis was dispatched from Charleston to St. Augustine with whatever men and supplies he could gather. Congress also took action, and a total of \$620,000 was appropriated to "suppress Indian hostilities." There was no formal declaration of war; such niceties were reserved for "civilized" opponents.²⁵ At the White House President Jackson and Secretary of War Cass placed Maj. Gen. Winfield Scott in overall command of the Florida War and gave him the authority to requisition all the men and material he deemed necessary. It would take a month or two to bring it all together, but they were confident that once the forces were in place, the might of the U.S. Army would surely bring the hostilities to a rapid close. Nothing but total victory was expected. Scott's orders also showed how closely the Seminole situation was tied to the issue of slavery. There was to be no peace with the Seminole until all fugitive slaves were returned to their masters.²⁶

Scott was not the only general heading for Florida. In New Orleans, Major General Gaines also heard the news of Dade's demise. Because the dividing line between Scott's Eastern and Gaines's Western Departments ran down the length of Florida, Gaines felt obliged to take action in what was his jurisdiction. Because communications between New Orleans and Washington could take many weeks to go back and forth, he felt no need to consult with his superiors, nor had he any way of knowing that Scott had been given command of the Florida War. Gathering as many regulars as he could muster, Gaines also called upon the governor of Louisiana for volunteers. By February 4 Gaines and a force of eleven hundred men (approximately four hundred regulars and seven hundred volunteers) were aboard ship, headed for Tampa Bay.²⁷



Maj. Gen. Edmund Pendleton Gaines. Hero of Fort Erie in the War of 1812, in command at the beginning of the First Seminole War and first to respond at the commencement of the Second Seminole War.

State Archives of Florida, <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/25572>.

At Gaines's first stop a wrench was thrown into his plans. When the ship docked at Pensacola, he was shown an unofficial letter telling him that he might be needed on the Mexican frontier and of Scott's appointment to lead the Florida campaign. Because these were not official orders, Gaines

chose to ignore the news. His men were needed in Florida, and he was not about to take them back to New Orleans. As the commander of forces on the remote frontier, Gaines knew that orders from Washington had to be taken in their proper context. Because of the time it took for communications to travel through the wilderness, officers were usually given the latitude needed to respond to any situation that presented itself. Gaines and the rest of the officers of the army were expected to make command decisions when necessity arose.²⁸

Necessity had certainly arisen in Florida. When Gaines arrived at Fort Brooke on February 9, he found it undermanned, vulnerable, and in fear of attack. He also received official notice that Scott was in charge of the war and that his own presence was needed on the border with Mexico. The War for Texan Independence was raging, and though he had no way of knowing it, troops were beginning to gather at the Alamo. Of more concern to Gaines was the situation at Fort King. No word had been received from the post since before Dade's battle. For all he knew, the installation might be under siege at that very moment. The decision to proceed to Fort King was also made for a more practical reason. Supplies at Fort Brooke were limited and were needed to support the garrison and refugees who had gathered there. According to word he had received, provisions for Scott's coming offensive were being sent to Fort King, so it seemed sensible to take his men there to meet them. After the troops were delivered, he could fulfill his orders and proceed back to Louisiana.²⁹

The force left Fort Brooke on February 13 following the Fort King Road, the same military trail Major Dade had taken. For five days the trek was peaceful, with little or no sign of conflict. On the sixth day, the column came upon the remains of Dade and his men. Woodburne Potter, Gaines's personal aide, reported, "A short distance in the rear of the little field work lay a few broke cartridge boxes, fragments of clothing, here and there a shoe or an old straw hat . . . then a cart partly burnt, with the oxen still yoked lying dead near it, a horse had fallen a little to the right, and here also a few bones of the hapless beings lay bleaching in the sun; while the scene within, and beyond the triangular enclosure, baffles all description. One would involuntarily turn aside from the horrible picture to shed a tear of sorrow."³⁰

Three burial pits were dug, two within the triangular breastwork that Dade's desperate soldiers had erected for their futile defense, and another a little farther down the path, near where Dade's body was found. Into the breastwork pits went the bodies of the enlisted men, while the officers were interred in the smaller grave. The cannon with which Dade's men had defended themselves was pulled from the nearby pond and placed, muzzle

down, over the officer's graves. With full military ceremony, the musicians played a funeral dirge and marched three times around the graves. Lt. Col. William S. Foster, in charge of the ceremony, later wrote to his wife, telling her how he felt. "With the greatest difficulty I gave the word *March!* My heart was full for the first time in my life, in battle, in the field, on the march, or at a halt. . . . A mighty effort was made and my voice rose clear and loud as usual. The next moment my eyes filled with tears and had anyone spoken to me I could not have replied but should have wept like a child."³¹

Nine days after leaving Tampa Bay the force arrived at Fort King. Gaines and his men, their rations depleted, had expected to find the fort well supplied, as sufficient time had passed for Scott's provisions to have reached their destination. Inexplicably, none had arrived. Months later, fingers in Washington were still pointing back and forth, trying to lay blame for the lapse in transport.³² Gaines now faced a serious dilemma. Under his command were a thousand men who had exhausted their provisions. Scott and his supplies were not expected for some time, too much time for Gaines to wait. In desperation he requested provisions from General Clinch, who was at Fort Drane. Clinch had little to spare. All he could send was seven days' worth, just enough for Gaines to get his men back to Tampa Bay.³³

On February 26 the force left Fort King, heading back to Fort Brooke, where Scott wanted the men to be. Hoping to shave a day off the travel time and determined to make something of the thus-far wasted trip, Gaines decided to take the trail that passed through the Cove of the Withlacoochee. As it turned out Gaines's guides were no better than Clinch's, and on the twenty-seventh the army arrived at the same spot Clinch had. Once again the Seminole were watching and waiting from the southern shore and opened fire on the soldiers when they came down to the river. For the better part of an hour the two sides exchanged fire, with the army suffering a loss of one killed and six wounded. On the following morning the ford was located a few miles downriver and a small group of soldiers entered the water. A shot rang out from the opposite shore, and Lt. James Izard fell mortally wounded, a rifle ball lodged in his brain. Sporadic firing continued for most of the day, and Gaines, unable to cross the river and unwilling to retreat, ordered the construction of a breastwork large enough to enclose the entire army. The structure, three logs high and about two hundred yards square, was designated Camp Izard in honor of the dying lieutenant.³⁴

Gaines now sensed an opportunity. He seemed to be up against a sizable portion of the total Seminole fighting force, perhaps as many as a thousand men. If he were to hold his position at Camp Izard, the Seminole

might remain concentrated around him. Then, if Clinch could bring his forces from Fort Drane and attack the Indians on their flank, the war might be ended swiftly. Gaines dug in, sent orders to Clinch, and waited.³⁵

If it was an opportunity for Gaines, it was also an opportunity for the Seminole. Trapped, just across the river, were a thousand white soldiers, concentrated in one location. Could they hope to annihilate the entire force, as they had with Dade? Probably not. They had no element of surprise, and the soldiers were in a strong defensive position. Still, it was certainly worth a try.

Under cover of night the Indians quietly crossed the river and surrounded Camp Izard. When dawn came on the twenty-ninth the army heard nothing, and some thought the Seminole had left. Soldiers began to work outside the camp, building rafts for a possible crossing of the river. Sometime around 10:00 a.m., the Seminole opened fire. As the outlying soldiers scrambled back to the camp, the soldiers within the breastwork returned fire, occasionally using the small cannon they had with them to keep the attackers at a distance. At one point the Indians set fire to the palmettos outside the camp, letting the wind drive the flames toward the camp and using the smoke as concealment to allow them to draw closer. As the flames reached the breastwork, desperate soldiers doused them with sand, preventing the fire from entering the camp. As the smoke cleared the Indians fell back, but kept up their fire for a few additional hours. When the shooting ceased, one soldier had been killed and thirty-two were wounded. Among the wounded was General Gaines, who had lost a pair of teeth when he was struck by a bullet that had ricocheted off a tree. When darkness came, another group of messengers were sent to Clinch, urging him to come quickly, while the Seminole were still concentrated.³⁶

For the next few days the Seminole continued the harassment but made no serious attempt to overrun the camp. Inside Camp Izard, the situation was deteriorating. The soldiers, short on rations when they had left Fort King, were virtually without sustenance within a few days. Horses and mules were slaughtered and fed to the troops. By the eighth day of the siege the men were too weak to have mounted an offensive if they had wanted to. Everyone wondered where Clinch was.

In truth, Duncan Clinch was a man in the middle, caught between two bitter rivals, Edmund Gaines and Winfield Scott, men of equal rank and position in the army. Both were equally superior to Clinch. Gaines was in command of the Western Department, of which Clinch was a part. Scott had been placed in charge of the Florida War, of which Clinch was also a part. Gaines had ordered Clinch to take the field. Scott had ordered Clinch to stay put at Fort Drane.

Gaines and Scott had earned their reputations during the War of 1812, showing themselves to be exceptional leaders, both having received nearly fatal wounds at the hands of the British. At that point, however, the similarity ended. Gaines was a sparse man, casual in appearance, active and decisive. His quick response to the troubles in Florida was true to character. Being in charge of the Western Department perfectly suited the old frontiersman. Winfield Scott, on the other hand, was a tall, muscular man who enjoyed the pageantry associated with high rank. Being in charge of the Eastern Department, which normally dealt with foreign adversaries, also suited him well. A thoughtful, careful planner, his response to the Florida War was much more deliberate. He would not take the field until all preparations were ready for his grand strategy.

Scott, who had arrived in Florida soon after Gaines, was near St. Augustine, making preparations for the coming campaign. News that his rival was in Florida did not please him in the least. Scott believed Gaines's actions would thoroughly upset his own carefully laid plans and therefore ordered Clinch not to cooperate with Gaines.³⁷ One can only imagine Clinch's exasperation. He was certainly inclined to go to the aid of Gaines, but that general would soon be leaving the theater of war, while Clinch would have to get along with Scott indefinitely. To be caught between two such powerful and envious men was a thankless position. He sent word to Scott, asking him to reconsider, and impatiently waited for a response.

Before the response could arrive, Clinch's patience ran out. A thousand good men were under siege and in need of relief. He could not, in good conscience, let them starve or be slaughtered. On March 5 Clinch gathered his troops and headed for the Withlacoochee. Scott's permission to take the field arrived the next day.³⁸ Gaines, in the meantime, was in a desperate situation. Living on small portions of horse meat and the occasional dog, the men were becoming emaciated and would be too weak to fight their way back to safety. The army had now been holed up at Camp Izard for eight days. If the Indians mounted a full-scale attack Gaines might not be able to hold them off. On the night of March 5, a voice called out of the darkness. The Seminole wanted a parley. Having few options, Gaines agreed to let a senior officer meet with the Seminole leaders in the morning.³⁹

On the morning of the sixth, several Seminole leaders and an equal number of army officers met outside Camp Izard. The Indians offered an olive branch: They would cease hostilities if the whites allowed them to remain unmolested south of the Withlacoochee. Gaines, through an aide, replied that he did not have the authority to make such an agreement but said that he would recommend it to his superiors. Gaines, at times opposed

to Indian Removal, probably felt such an arrangement to be fair. He should also have known that Andrew Jackson would never agree to it.⁴⁰

As the negotiations were taking place, the advance party from Clinch's column arrived on the scene. Seeing Indians, they opened fire. The Seminole, naturally cautious, fled. Gaines, more interested in the health of his men than in a futile chase, did not order a pursuit. Indeed, he still held out hope that negotiations could end the war. For whatever their reasons, the Seminole did not return to Camp Izard. Gaines waited three days and then turned command over to Clinch. For Gaines, the Florida War was over.⁴¹ The force, with many wounded and weakened men, made its way back to Fort Drane, arriving on March 11. On the thirteenth, Winfield Scott made his grand entrance into the fortification. For the remainder of that day, both major generals did their best to ignore each other. One can only imagine the awkwardness felt by Clinch and the rest of the men under his command. It must have been a great relief when Gaines departed the following day.⁴²

As far as Edmund Gaines was concerned, the campaign had been a success. In Tallahassee and in Mobile it was announced that the war was probably over, and Gaines was treated like a conquering hero. The most unfortunate aspect of Gaines's campaign was the missed opportunity to end the war. The Seminole might well have settled for some sort of reservation in the southern part of the territory, even if it meant abandoning the prize lands in the Cove of the Withlacoochee and the Ocklawaha region. The administration, however, was in no mood to talk. The army had been severely bloodied and embarrassed. No one was yet ready to question the finality of the Indian Removal policy, and there would be no negotiations with the Seminole. They would be crushed, defeated, and the survivors would be shipped west. Winfield Scott and thousands of young white men had been given their orders.⁴³

March–December 1836

The Failed Offensives of Scott and Call

The Dade Battle, the two unsuccessful attempts to cross the Withlacoochee, and the swift destruction of Florida's sugar industry were a shock to the nation. To many people it appeared the Seminole were much stronger and better organized than other Indian adversaries. Few whites were willing to give the Seminole the credit they were due. They had already proven they knew how to set up an effective ambush, lay siege to a fort, and terrorize the populace. As the war progressed, Americans would learn that the Seminole also knew how to choose and prepare defensive positions, execute hit-and-run attacks, and make strategic withdrawals.

Throughout the war, the American people and their army failed to realize how good the Seminole were at the art of war. Americans considered them "savages" who lashed out at any target that presented itself with little forethought. In fact, the opposite was true. Young Seminole men were brought up in a warrior culture. That meant more than simply knowing how to aim a rifle or wield a war club. It meant discussing long-term strategy and effective tactics, making plans, knowing your enemy's strengths and weaknesses, and gathering intelligence. Native Americans had been warring against each other for thousands of years before the white man came. Americans were foolish enough to think the Indians had learned nothing in all that time.

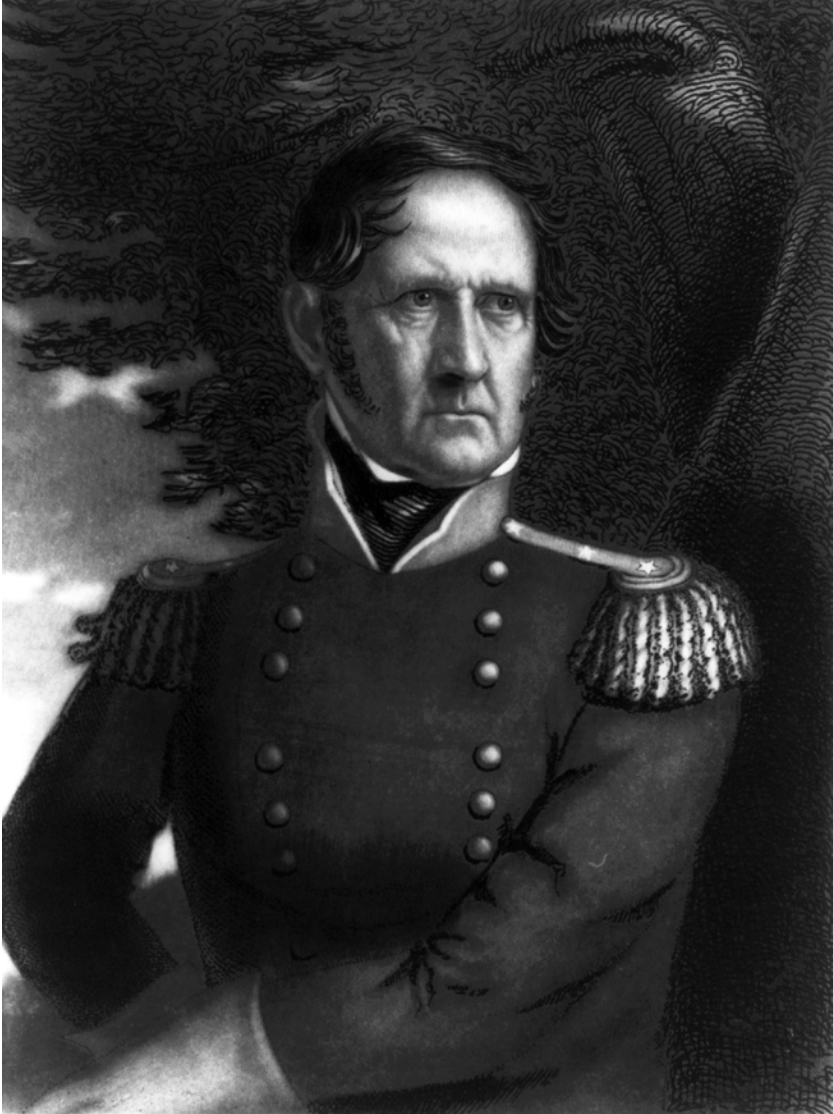
The Seminole also understood the need for cooperation. Personal or tribal differences were put aside so that a united front could be presented to the enemy. The attacks on Dade, Agent Thompson, the sugar plantations, and scattered homesteads weren't disjointed efforts. They were discussed beforehand by the entire council, planned in advance, and timed for strategic reasons. Even when reacting defensively, as against Clinch and Gaines, the

Seminole were able to show an amazing amount of coordination. If nothing else, the Seminole knew they didn't have to defeat the army; they only had to outlast the American will to make war.¹

The army, on the other hand, had to remove nearly every Indian in Florida. To accomplish the task, men and supplies were pouring into Florida. This time the army was large and well equipped enough to survive any attack the Seminole could mount against them. When General Scott had left Washington in January, word was sent to the governors of South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, and Alabama to begin the process of raising and organizing volunteer units. By the time all the volunteers were gathered, equipped, supplied, and sent on their way, the force would number approximately five thousand men.²

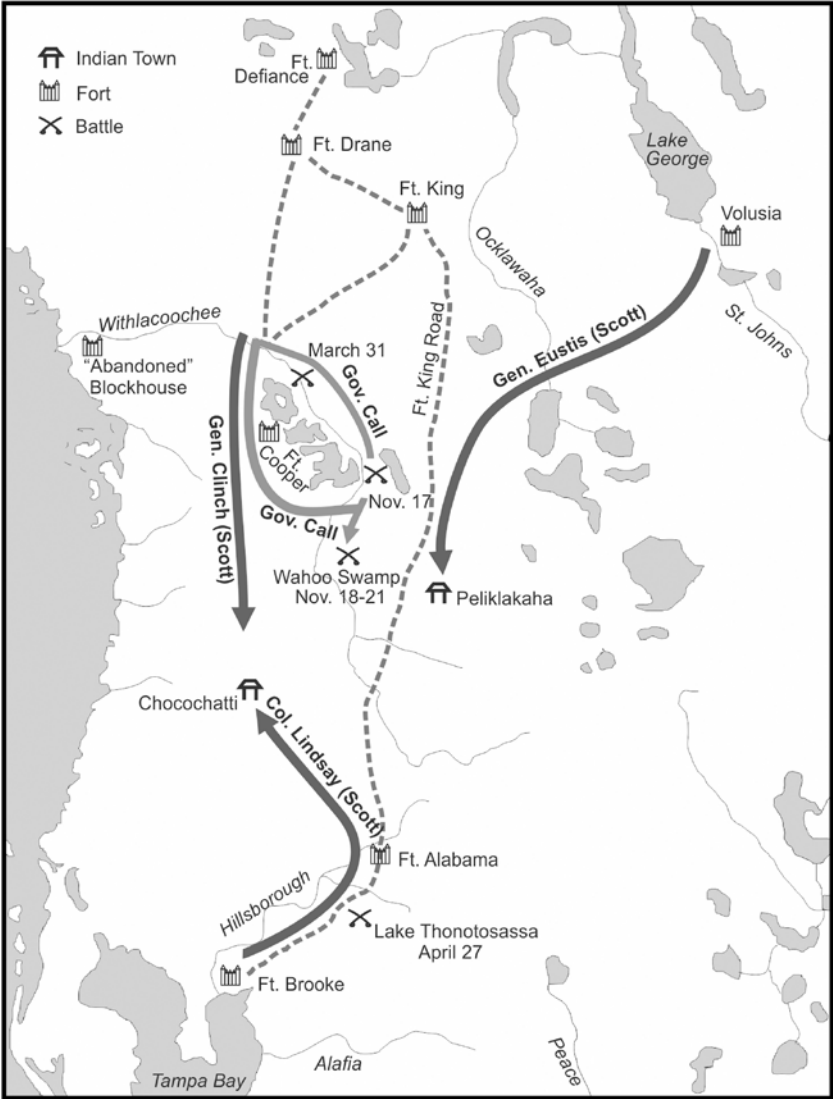
Scott had devised a grand strategy that he believed would bring the war to a swift conclusion. On paper the plan looked sound. Scott's force would be divided into three wings that would converge upon the Cove of the Withlacoochee and entrap the hapless Seminole. The Center Wing, commanded by Col. William Lindsay, would be coming north from Fort Brooke at Tampa Bay. Approximately 1,250 men strong, it was made up primarily of Alabama and Louisiana Volunteers. The Left Wing would number about 1,400 men under General Eustis and come from Volusia, far to the east on the St. Johns River. It would be comprised of South Carolina Volunteers and a few companies of regulars. Scott himself would be traveling with the Right Wing, which would be commanded by General Clinch. The force would total about 2,000 men, made up mostly of Georgia Volunteers, with smaller contingents of Louisiana and Florida Volunteers and some regulars. This group was to head south from Fort Drane, enter the Cove, and then drive the Seminole into the other two wings, which would be positioned to block the flight of the Seminole, thus forcing them to fight or surrender. It was imperative, of course, that both Eustis's and Lindsay's wings be in place when Clinch's Right Wing made its push. The deadline given the two commanders was March 25–27. On the twenty-sixth, Scott and Clinch would leave Fort Drane and head for the Cove. The timing had to be precise.³

Scott had hoped to have his campaign underway sooner, but raising the volunteers and getting all the supplies to Florida had taken longer than expected. Scott arrived at Picolata (west of St. Augustine on the St. Johns River) on February 22, the same day Gaines marched into Fort King. He had planned on having the supplies taken to Fort King via the Ocklawaha River, but the river was blocked by fallen trees. This left him with the overland route, but the roads were bad and wagons were difficult to come by. Because of this lack of transportation and the fact that Gaines's men



Maj. Gen. Winfield Scott, who would later conquer Mexico City, was the army's leading tactician and held the rank of general from the War of 1812 until the Civil War.

Engraving by Thomas B. Welch. Courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2012645266/>.



Campaigns of General Scott and Governor Call.

Map by John Missall.

had consumed supplies needed for Scott’s soldiers, the beginning of the offensive had to be delayed. To some extent, it didn’t matter when the campaign started; this was not meant to be a surprise attack. When in position, each column was to fire a signal cannon at a certain hour to let the others

know it was ready to take on the fleeing Seminole. Scott also knew that Gaines, when negotiating with the Seminole at Camp Izard, had attempted to frighten them with news that a large American force was coming after them. Along with information derived from their many spies, the Indians knew what was coming.

Colonel Lindsay and the Alabama Volunteers had arrived in Tampa on March 6. Seeing fires to the southeast on March 13, he dispatched Maj. Leigh Read and some Florida Volunteers to investigate. Read soon discovered an Indian camp and attacked it, killing three and capturing sixteen. On the twentieth Lindsay marched his men to the Hillsborough River and erected Fort Alabama as a supply depot, then returned to Tampa to await further orders from Scott. Those orders arrived the next day, and the Center Wing departed Fort Brooke on March 22, making its way north toward the Cove. After crossing the Hillsborough at Fort Alabama, the column was continually harassed by Seminole snipers for the next four days, resulting in the loss of one man. On the twenty-eighth they reached their destination, the abandoned Seminole town of Chocochatti (today's Brooksville), and erected Camp Broadnax.⁴

Lindsay was expecting a battle, but events didn't turn out as he thought they would. The Indians fired on Camp Broadnax on the twenty-eighth, but otherwise they made no appearance. The American force waited for two days, and having heard no signal cannon from the other columns and running low on food, they headed back toward Tampa. On reaching Fort Alabama they learned that it had been attacked by hundreds of Seminole on the twenty-seventh. The attack had been repulsed with the loss of one soldier, while the Indians had supposedly lost upwards of fifteen dead. Even though the main attack had been beaten back, the Seminole continued to harass the fort until the main column arrived on April 3. Leaving a strong force at the fort, Lindsay and his men continued on to Fort Brooke, arriving there on April 4.⁵

General Eustis, coming from the east, also had a difficult time. Gathering the Left Wing at Volusia, he ordered the crossing of the St. Johns to start on March 22. No sooner did the first two companies of South Carolina Volunteers get across than a group of about fifty Seminole attacked from a nearby woods. The Indians retreated as more companies crossed the river, and Eustis made an attempt to surround them by sending other units across at a point slightly downriver. Somehow, in all the various movements, the soldiers ended up firing on each other. At the end of the day, three volunteers were dead and seven wounded. The Indians had also suffered a few dead, including one who was misidentified as Yuchee Billy, leader of the small band of Yuchee Indians that were part of the Seminole nation.⁶

The rest of the force was across by the next day and began their march on the twenty-fourth. It was hard going. On a good day, a column of soldiers might make twenty miles. On the first day after leaving Volusia they made only two miles, then seven, then thirteen. They were crossing land that was dotted with innumerable lakes and bogs, and the dry areas were made up of loose sand, which wagons were ill-suited to travel through. On the twenty-ninth they reached the Ocklawaha River, where they were forced to build a bridge. It was slow work, and the entire force was not across until around midnight. On the thirtieth they were at last getting close to their destination, the Black Seminole town of Peliklakaha, also known as Abraham's Town. As the advance guard approached the town, it was fired upon, and a small battle ensued that lasted about forty minutes. Finally, on the thirty-first, Eustis's army entered the deserted town, which they promptly burned. The next day, April 1, they fired their signal cannon, but heard no response. Eustis dispatched an express rider to Fort King to secure forage for the horses and to see if there was any word as to where the other two columns were. The rider returned the next day with orders for Eustis and his men to proceed to Tampa. The column arrived there on the fifth.⁷

So where was Scott? He had intended to leave Fort Drane with Clinch's right wing on March 25, but heavy rains forced them to wait until the twenty-sixth. Due to the roads being waterlogged, going was slow and one of the wagons, lagging behind, was attacked, resulting in the loss of one soldier. The army arrived at Camp Izard on the twenty-eighth, but unlike the previous two times, no Indians attempted to prevent their crossing, though a few warning shots were fired later in the day. The river was crossed on the twenty-ninth, and the army gathered near Clinch's battleground the next day. A trail was discovered that led away from the battleground, and a part of the army followed it. A few Seminole were seen in the distance, and they acted as if they wanted to talk. The Americans, fearing they were being led into an ambush, charged the Indians, who quickly fled.⁸

On the morning of March 31, the army headed south, hopefully pushing the fleeing Seminole toward the waiting forces of Eustis and Lindsay. The Seminole families may well have fled or gone into hiding, but the warriors had gone nowhere and were determined to inflict what damage they could. Scott's army had not gone far before they were fired upon by a large party of Indians just as they were exiting a swamp. Col. William S. Foster, in charge of the regulars, knew better than to stand his men in an exposed line and fire at the attackers. After consulting with Louisiana Volunteer Gen. Persifor Smith, Foster ordered his men to fix bayonets and charge the Indians, yelling at the top of their lungs. As Lt. Henry Prince recalled, they

charged “through briar, & bush & pond & prairie & marsh” until they came to a cypress swamp. After chasing the Indians for over two miles they found a deserted camp with food still cooking, then made their way back to the main column. About an hour later more Indians were spotted in a nearby hammock, and once again Foster ordered a charge, this time chasing the Seminole for a mile and a half. At the end of the day, three Louisiana Volunteers were dead and five were wounded. Indian casualties were unknown.⁹

The army continued its march the next day, April 1, and burned two deserted villages along the way. To monitor activity in the Cove, Scott established Fort Cooper (now a state park near today’s Inverness), and then he and the rest of the army pushed on toward Tampa. They arrived at Chocochatti on April 3 and Tampa on April 5, a day after Lindsay’s column returned and the same day Eustis arrived. Scott’s elaborate plan had resulted in few Indian deaths and fewer prisoners. The only other major action had been at Fort Cooper. After stealing the Georgia Volunteers’ cattle on April 6, the Indians besieged the hungry soldiers until the returning right wing relieved them on April 18.¹⁰

Scott had been outmaneuvered, but he did not give up trying to catch his quarry. Believing most of the Seminole families had fled southeast to the Peace River area, he dispatched a force of mounted South Carolina Volunteers to scour the northern portions of the region and sent a company of Louisiana Volunteers with the navy to travel up the lower parts of the river. Other than burning some deserted villages, the patrols accomplished nothing. Scott then joined Eustis’s left wing for the trek back to Volusia and on to St. Augustine. One by one, the volunteer regiments were discharged and the campaign effectively ended.¹¹

One of the largest battles of the campaign occurred just as it was ending. The Alabama Volunteers were about to be discharged, which required the abandonment of Fort Alabama on the Hillsborough River. On April 26 a large force of volunteers and regulars left Fort Brooke to shut down the fort, escort the garrison back to Tampa, and bring back what supplies they could. Before they even reached the fort, three stragglers disappeared. The next day the supplies were loaded, and everyone left the fort. Knowing the Indians would investigate the abandoned structure, a booby trap was rigged so that a musket would fire into a barrel of gunpowder when the door to the magazine was opened. After the troops had been gone for an hour or two they heard the sound of a loud explosion. It was later discovered that at least five Indians were killed.¹²

The army marched on. About 2:30 p.m. they approached Lake Thonotosassa and came upon the mangled body of one of the volunteers who

had gone missing the previous day. As the column stopped to attend to the body, a force of between one and two hundred warriors opened fire from a nearby hammock. Pack animals ran about in confusion for a few minutes, but order was soon restored and the soldiers began a steady return fire, using their cannon to good effect. Finally, after about an hour, Colonel Foster again ordered a charge and drove the Indians from the hammock. Later that day the army reached Tampa and the Alabamians departed for home.¹³

One of the most controversial elements of the campaign had to do with a supply depot and blockhouse set up on the Withlacoochee River that was completely forgotten about for nearly two months. Many Floridians would later blame Scott for abandoning the men, but Woodburne Potter, the aide to General Gaines, pointed out that Maj. John McLemore of the Florida Volunteers had set up the blockhouse on his own initiative, after the date Scott had told him it would no longer be needed. McLemore then returned to his post on the Suwannee River, where he soon died of disease, and the remainder of his company returned to their homes, taking any knowledge of the blockhouse with them. The Seminole, however, were very aware of its presence and hundreds of warriors annoyed it constantly for about fifty days, until someone remembered it and sent a relief force.¹⁴

Scott's magnificent campaign was viewed as a total failure and another embarrassment to the army. An expert in Napoleonic tactics, Scott knew very little about wilderness guerilla fighting. He also knew nothing about Florida geography. All his planning couldn't conquer flooded roads, impassible rivers, and impossible terrain. If Scott's tactics were faulty, the Seminole's were exactly what they should have been. Having a limited number of warriors and with no hope of reinforcements, the Indians could not afford to take on the army in open battle. By necessity, they had to limit themselves to defensive actions and surprise attacks. Their only hope was to wear the white men down, and retreating into the trackless swamps was a matter of strategic survival. In battle after battle, they had proved themselves to be better tacticians than their enemy. Their attacks on the several columns slowed the army's advance, kept it concentrated, and disrupted its timing. True, they had been forced to abandon their homes in the Cove and had not defeated any of Scott's forces, but most of their villages hadn't been discovered, and the people would soon return. The war was no closer to being concluded than when Winfield Scott had arrived.¹⁵

And yet Scott's campaign could also be seen as a turning point in the war. The Seminole had scored clear-cut victories over the whites in their battles against Dade and Clinch and with their unchecked destruction of the sugar industry. They were on the offensive, and the white population

was in retreat. Gaines's battle at Camp Izard was something different. The Americans had not been defeated, only stopped. Scott, in turn, had only been slowed, not stopped. This is not to say the Seminole were defeated. Far from it. For six more years their warriors continued to wage an effective war, often on their own terms. Yet from the time of Scott's campaign up until the end of the war, the army was on the offensive and could only be slowed, not stopped. Henceforth it would be the Seminole people who were in retreat.

We must, of course, put the war into proper perspective. It was certainly not the only thing going on at the time. Yet what is surprising is how much it commanded the public's attention. A perusal of the major national newspapers quickly shows that the Florida War was *the* big news item of 1836. The statistic becomes even more impressive when we look at competing stories. If nothing else, there was a presidential election taking place. There was also heated debate over the National Bank and Treasury policy. The abolitionist movement had come alive, creating a stir throughout the nation. Above all else, there was the War for Texas Independence. The Mexican army was outside the Alamo at the same time Gaines was being held under siege at Camp Izard.

If we count the number of articles devoted to these subjects in *Niles' Register*, a leading national weekly newspaper, we find that during 1836 more space was given to the Seminole conflict (sixty-four articles) than to the election and the Texas stories combined (fifty-two). Indeed, once the news of Dade's destruction reached Washington in late January, news from Florida rarely left the front page for the next few years. The headline on most of these articles simply said, "Latest from Florida." No preface was needed. People knew what was going on.¹⁶

It was, without a doubt, a major war for the nation. Gaines and Scott, the army's top two field officers, had led two large campaigns that had accomplished nothing. Scott's army of five thousand men was a large force for the time, generally as big as anything that had been fielded for any battle of the War of 1812. The navy, which never fought against Indians, was called in to patrol the coasts and waterways and would eventually have a fleet assigned specifically to the Florida War. Part of the fleet's mission was to keep an eye out for the many wrecks that could be found along Florida's long and treacherous coast. Not only were the goods carried by those ships a major source of Seminole income and provisions; the Indians rarely showed any mercy to stranded American sailors. All told, the nation was spending millions of dollars at a time when private soldiers were paid less than ten

dollars a month. The Florida War was certainly not some minor distraction that could be easily ignored.

As many northerners were soon to learn, there were only two seasons in Florida. Winters were mild, dry, cool, and conducive to the outdoor life that a soldier was forced to live. This was the time of year known as the “healthy season.” Summer, on the other hand, was almost universally referred to as the “sickly season.” It rained almost daily, and much of the land became flooded, making overland transport almost impossible. The intense heat and humidity sapped a man’s strength while providing ideal conditions for the swarming of large numbers of biting and stinging insects, many of which carried infectious diseases. During the summer the Seminole didn’t have to wage war upon the whites; the unhealthy Florida environment killed more soldiers than Indian rifles ever could.¹⁷

Faced with disease, death, and desertion, the army was forced to spend the summer of 1836 in a protracted retreat from the ravages of the climate. The Seminole, seeming to sense the soldiers’ reluctance to fight, became emboldened. On the night of April 27, the same day as they were attacking the column returning from Fort Alabama, the Seminole destroyed the sugar works at General Clinch’s plantation. Although the works were close to Fort Drane, the commanding officer, fearing an ambush, elected not to attack the marauders. An examination of the grounds the next morning proved it to be a wise decision. A month later Fort King was abandoned due to unhealthy conditions. On June 9, Osceola and about one hundred fifty warriors attacked Fort Defiance near the town of Micanopy. Feeling up to the challenge, Maj. Julius F. Heileman brought his men out of the fort and met the Seminole, driving them off “after an hour and twenty minutes’ hard fighting under a broiling sun.” Heileman had won the battle and would gain a promotion because of it, but within a few weeks he was dead from a fever.¹⁸

The sickness, the heat, and the despair took its toll on everyone, soldier and Seminole alike. On June 15, Lt. Thompson B. Wheelock “retired to his room and shot himself.” By mid-July Fort Drane was ordered to close because of illness. Five of the seven officers were on the sick list, along with one hundred forty of their men. Although the evacuation would no doubt save many a soldier from sickness, such moves were dangerous. On July 18 a train of twenty-two wagons containing supplies and invalids from the abandoned fort was attacked by an estimated two hundred fifty Indians at Welika Pond, just a mile from Fort Defiance. The escort of about sixty soldiers was able to hold off the attackers until reinforcements arrived from the fort, but not before suffering eleven wounded, two of them mortally.¹⁹

Much farther south, the Indians attacked the lighthouse at Key Biscayne, near what would someday be the city of Miami. The keeper and a black assistant took refuge in the lighthouse, where they managed to keep the Indians at bay for the rest of the day. Thwarted, the Seminole set fire to the building, forcing the keeper and his assistant to flee to the top of the structure. As the flames began to reach the lantern room, the two men were forced into a desperate dilemma: Staying inside meant being roasted alive, but venturing out onto the platform put them within range of the Seminole rifles. As the keeper later related, “My flesh was roasting, and to put an end to my horrible suffering, I got up, threw the keg of gunpowder down the scuttle, instantly it exploded and shook the tower from the top to the bottom.” Miraculously, the structure did not collapse. Still, the fire continued to rage, forcing the men out onto the platform. From the ground, the Indians began to shoot at the two men and succeeded in killing the assistant. The keeper then climbed atop the dead man’s body, using it as a shield. The Seminole, deciding the white man was either dead or soon to die, finally left. Fortunately for the keeper, the crew of the navy ship *Motto* had heard the explosion and was able to rescue him the following day. The lighthouse was later rebuilt and remains to this day, the centerpiece of a state park.²⁰

By early August the evacuation of Fort Drane was complete, after which Osceola and hundreds of warriors took up residence in the vicinity, making use of whatever the army and plantation workers had left behind. In the meantime, Maj. Benjamin K. Pierce (brother of future president Franklin Pierce) and several companies of soldiers had been sent to shut down Fort Defiance. While in the area, Pierce seized the opportunity to attack Osceola and his men at Fort Drane. Traveling quietly through the night, Pierce attacked at dawn. Even though they were outnumbered, the Americans used their advantage of surprise and drove the Indians into the surrounding forests before retiring back to Fort Defiance with a loss of one killed and sixteen wounded. By Pierce’s best estimate, at least ten Indians had been slain. Soon Fort Defiance was also empty, leaving all central Florida in the hands of the Indians.²¹

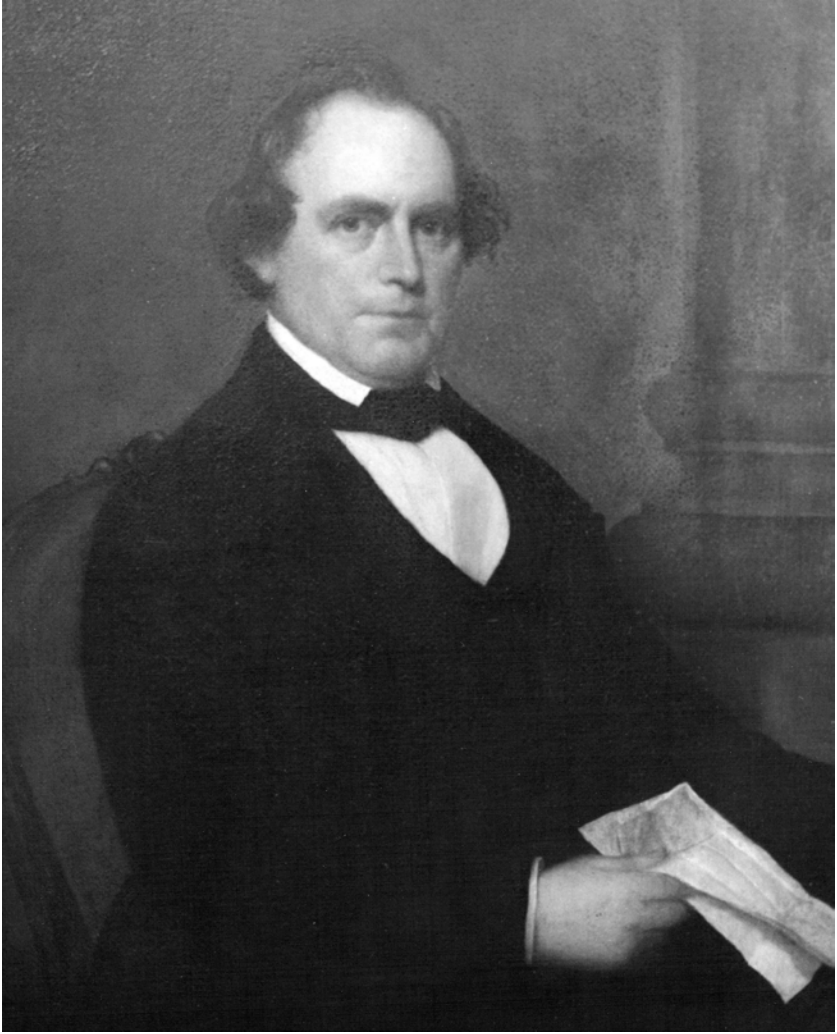
Even large bodies of troops had to be on the lookout while traveling through the Florida wilderness. On September 18 Col. John Warren and more than one hundred Florida Volunteers and two U.S. cannon crews were on a reconnaissance mission near San Felasco Hammock (northwest of present-day Gainesville) when a large body of Seminole attacked. Although the number of combatants was about the same as in Dade’s battle, the outcome was totally different. This time the soldiers were prepared, knowing that an ambush could come at any time. With the element of surprise removed,

the Seminole had to fire on the soldiers from a distance, causing few casualties. When they attempted to rush the volunteers, the warriors were repulsed by mounted counterattacks. The soldiers' cannon was also put to good use, and the Seminole were eventually forced to give up the attack.²²

After the failure of Scott's campaign, the War Department appeared unsure of who should oversee the Florida War. The command of such a large operation would have normally gone to either Gaines or Scott, but both had been on the scene and had little to show for it. An immense amount of time, money, and lives had been wasted, and the press and political opposition were asking embarrassing questions. Clinch, the officer most familiar with the territory and the Seminole, was considered the obvious choice by many, but he had retired. An offer was made giving him command in Florida if he would reconsider, but the general, who had lost his wife the previous year and had eight children to raise, politely declined. To make matters worse, another major Indian war had broken out. Just to the north of Florida, the Creeks were being forced from their last remaining ancestral lands in Alabama. Perhaps encouraged by the example of the Seminole, many Creeks took up arms and began attacking white settlements. Winfield Scott was ordered to take command of the war, and the army's focus temporarily shifted away from Florida.²³

The only person who seemed anxious to pursue the Florida War was Richard Keith Call, who had been appointed governor of Florida on March 16. Call was an old friend of the president, having served with Jackson during the Creek War, at New Orleans, and during the Seminole War of 1818. Believing the various state volunteer units could fight better than the regular army, he proposed a summer campaign. The War Department agreed to Call's plan, but with a few caveats. Foremost among them was the climate and the effect it would have on the troops. Secretary of War Cass warned Call that "opinions upon the subject of carrying on a campaign during the summer have been variant. You must exercise a sound discretion upon the whole matter."²⁴

Congress showed its resolve in the matter by appropriating \$1.5 million of the taxpayer's money for the suppression of Indian hostilities and allowing volunteers to be enlisted for up to a year at a time. It was already evident that the Florida War was going to be a long and expensive affair. Supportive as they might have been, Congressmen did not let the opportunity pass to air their views on the matter, naive as they might be. Representative Waddy Thompson of South Carolina took time to praise the fighting qualities of frontiersmen. "A thousand such men as could be raised in the West would



Gov. Richard Keith Call. A longtime friend of Andrew Jackson, the two fell out over Call's handling of the war.

State Archives of Florida, <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/45446>.

have put an end to the war in Florida in one month.” He seemed to have forgotten that the vast majority of Scott’s army had been made up of just such men. Senator John C. Calhoun of South Carolina pointed a finger at the administration, blaming it for the mismanagement of Indian affairs. “There are no people on earth so easy to deal with as our half civilized

Indians. It only required ordinary justice, a mild but firm course of conduct, with a strict adherence to truth in all transactions with them, and it was the easiest thing in the world to keep them quiet.”²⁵

Governor Call may have envisioned a summer campaign, but due to the inevitable delays, it took the whole summer for him to get ready. Florida was too sparsely populated to feed and equip the large number of troops that would be required to wage the war, so nearly everything had to come from elsewhere in the Union, usually by sailing ship or horse-drawn wagon. To move things around within Florida, ships and wagons had to be bought or hired, usually at exorbitant rates and often from adjoining states. Important messages or goods could be sent by steamboat or express rider, but even these methods could take weeks to reach a destination in another part of the country. Most of the supplies were being delivered to a depot at Garey’s Ferry on Black Creek, a tributary of the St. Johns River southwest of Jacksonville. In one instance, Call ordered supplies sent from the depot to Fort Defiance, only to learn the post had been closed and the Indians were in control of the roads.²⁶

On September 29, 1836, Call was south of the Suwannee River across from Old Town, ready to begin the campaign. The only thing lacking was provisions. More were expected daily from St. Marks and Black Creek, so he pushed on to Fort Drane, sure the supplies would reach him there. In the meantime, he sent Gen. Leigh Read with a steamer and two large barges up the Withlacoochee to set up a supply depot. The rest of the men, 1,250 Tennessee Volunteers and 125 Florida Volunteers, all on horseback, reached the abandoned Fort Drane on October 1. Finding a group of Seminole at the fort, they immediately attacked, killing four.²⁷

The lack of provisions soon became a problem. What little food the men had was of poor quality. Worse yet, there was almost nothing to eat for the many hundreds of horses. Call had assumed they could feed on the corn known to be growing on Clinch’s plantation and another nearby, but hadn’t counted on the Seminole having destroyed, consumed, or taken nearly all of it. The volunteers, proud men who expected better, began to grumble, placing the blame on Call. On October 8, relief finally arrived in the form of a wagon train escorted by a force of regulars. After receiving another round of minimal rations, the army headed for the Withlacoochee the following day.²⁸

As they approached the river on the thirteenth, a Mikasuki village was discovered nearby and attacked, resulting in the death of thirteen warriors and the capture of eleven women and children. It seemed a good start to the campaign, but upon reaching the Withlacoochee the governor discovered a major obstacle in his path. Being near the end of the rainy season, the river

was too swollen and swift to be forded. They might have cut down trees to make rafts or a bridge, but no one had thought to bring a sufficient number of axes. In addition, numerous Indians were on the south side, always quick to take aim at anyone who ventured too close to the water. The best Call could do was send a detachment of about three hundred volunteers to attack a Black Seminole village to the east. Upon arriving, the volunteers found a large, flooded creek between them and their quarry. Defenders on the other side of the creek fired on the attackers, and a small battle ensued across the water, resulting in three volunteers being killed and eight wounded. In the meantime, Call assembled a council of war to discuss their options. Unable to cross the Withlacoochee, they decided to head west to the supply depot General Read had set up at the location of the forgotten blockhouse from Scott's campaign. Once there, the soldiers would have plenty of food and the barges could be used to ferry the troops across the river. There was also a good chance they would meet up with six hundred allied Creek warriors who were working their way up from Tampa.²⁹

Unfortunately, there was no supply depot, at least not where it was supposed to be. While exploring the channel leading into the river, the expedition's steamboat, *Lt. Izard*, ran aground crosswise across the narrow channel at high tide. When the tide went out, the center of the ship was left unsupported, and the weight of the steam engine caused it to break in two. The young naval officer in command of the steamer, Raphael Semmes, would later earn fame as a captain in the Confederate Navy, but in 1836 the only thing he earned was scorn from Governor Call. Left with two barges full of supplies and no tow boat, Read was forced to establish his supply depot much closer to the Gulf than had been planned. Call, unaware of the problem, searched in vain for Read and his much-needed provisions.³⁰

Out of food, the army was forced to return to Fort Drane. It was not a happy army, especially the volunteers. Not only were the soldiers without food, but their horses hadn't been properly fed for eighteen days. Hundreds of the animals died or were simply let loose to fend for themselves. Every night there was a bonfire made up of saddles the volunteers were unwilling to carry or leave for the Seminole. As one volunteer put it, "The men are tired, hungry, and mad, and at every step vent the most bitter execrations on General Call."³¹ While certainly somewhat at fault, Call also fell prey to some extraordinary bad luck. One shipment was delayed at sea by unfavorable winds, while another large ship sprung a leak and partially sank, ruining the supplies in its hold. A waterfront warehouse at St. Marks that stored another large supply of provisions collapsed under the weight, dumping its entire contents into the river.³²

When rumors of the failed campaign reached Washington, President Jackson voiced his “disappointment and surprise” in no uncertain terms. Without waiting for Call’s explanation or any official report, Jackson relieved Call of command and replaced him with Gen. Thomas Jesup, who was fighting the Creeks in Alabama and Georgia. Due to the slowness of the mails, Call continued with plans to finish his offensive, unaware that he’d been dismissed.³³ With adequate supplies now in Florida, he had reason to be optimistic. The volunteers were sent to Black Creek to recuperate, and hundreds of horses were brought in to replace the ones that had been lost. On October 19, after a grueling march from Tampa, the regiment of Creek Volunteers arrived at Fort Drane, adding six hundred more men to the army. After reporting in to Call, the army officer in charge of the Creeks, Col. John Lane, went to his tent and drove his sword through his right eye and into his brain. Everyone was shocked, but many were not surprised. Disappointment and despair were all part of waging war in Florida, and malarial fevers could drive a man to madness.³⁴

By the second week of November, the governor was ready to try again. His army now totaled 2,100 men, made up of 950 Tennessee Volunteers, 600 Creek Volunteers, 350 regulars, and 200 Florida Volunteers. Leaving Fort Drane on November 11, they reached the Withlacoochee on the thirteenth and found it had dropped four feet in the intervening month. They also discovered that this time there were no Seminole on the opposite bank to dispute their passage. Still, the crossing was difficult, and four soldiers drowned in the attempt.³⁵

While deciding how to deploy his forces, Call sent a detachment of volunteers to attack the Black Seminole town where they had been repulsed a month earlier. Like the Withlacoochee, the creek protecting the town was now low enough to ford, but when the volunteers arrived at the town, they found it deserted, with the exception of one old man who told them all the Indians had gone south, to the Wahoo Swamp. The volunteers returned to the main army, but not before burning the town and two other villages nearby.³⁶

Call then decided to divide his force. The regulars, Creeks, and Florida Volunteers had already crossed the river, and Call placed them under the command of Benjamin Pierce, now a lieutenant colonel after the earlier action at Fort Drane. This force would pass down the west side of the Cove and meet up with the main part of the army at Dade’s battleground on the nineteenth or twentieth. Meanwhile, Call and the Tennessee Volunteers would go down the east side of the river in an attempt to locate the Seminole who had fled the Cove. Once the two forces combined, they would attack the Wahoo Swamp.³⁷

For the first few days both forces moved freely, without opposition and without seeing their enemy. On November 17, one of the Tennessee Volunteer scouts spotted an Indian encampment. Call ordered a portion of the volunteers to attack, and the Seminole hastily fled, taking their baggage and retreating to a nearby swamp. From there, 150 to 200 warriors put up a spirited defense until the volunteers dismounted and charged the swamp. Outnumbered, the Seminole fell back, leaving a number of horses and much of their baggage behind. A quick count by the volunteers showed twenty Indians had been killed, while only two soldiers had died.³⁸

On the following day, Call and about 550 men moved southwest, in the direction of the Wahoo Swamp. Finding a deserted camp, they followed a trail coming out of it, crossed a pair of streams, and then came to an open area. At the opposite side of the opening were the Seminole, prepared to fight. Call ordered his men to advance across the clearing. The Indians opened fire, and the volunteers charged. Suddenly the army realized it had been lured into a trap and was surrounded, being fired on from all sides of the clearing, even from their rear. Call ordered his men to charge in all directions. The fighting lasted nearly an hour, but finally the Seminole fell back and disappeared into the woods. Running low on ammunition, exhausted, and nearing the end of day, the army retired to the camp of the previous night.³⁹

The next day the men rested and prepared for another attack on the swamp. It would have to come soon, as rations were about to run out. On the twentieth Colonel Pierce arrived with the regulars, Creeks, and Florida Volunteers. With his army now at full strength, Call was ready to proceed. On the morning of November 21, the American force headed back to the battleground of the eighteenth and found the Seminole waiting. Call ordered a charge, and the Seminole, greatly outnumbered, fell back into the swamp. The army pursued the warriors for about a mile and a half until they found the Seminole ready to make a stand from the opposite side of a wide stream. By this time the army had become divided. The center and right columns, unfamiliar with the terrain, found the passage through the deep water and thick mud difficult, if not impossible. The Creek Volunteers of the left column had better luck and found a path through the swamp and were able to keep up with the fleeing Seminole. Anxious to engage, Maj. David Moniac, the first Native American to graduate from West Point, bravely advanced, leading his warriors into the stream. Seminole bullets cut him down, and he slipped beneath the water.⁴⁰

Seminole and Creek kept up the fire from opposite sides of the stream while the Creeks waited for the rest of the army to join them. It

was mid-afternoon by the time the entire American force was gathered, but no attempt was made to cross the stream. Colonel Pierce wanted to pursue the Seminole, but Call and the others were reluctant. It was getting late in the day, ammunition was running low, and the troops were exhausted. There was also the problem of food. Nearly everything they had brought with them from Fort Drane had been consumed. Even if they did cross the stream and take up the chase, they would soon have to give it up for lack of provisions. Having little choice, Call turned the army east, making his way toward Volusia, where the greatest amount of supplies were, and where he turned command over to General Jesup on December 9.⁴¹

So how can we assess Call's campaign? The governor certainly came closer to defeating the Seminole than any of his predecessors, but that is like saying someone who completes only ten miles of a twenty-six mile marathon came closer to winning than competitors who only finished a mile or two. Even though they had suffered heavy casualties, the Seminole were still in Florida and no less belligerent. Call's failures could be attributed almost entirely to supply problems. Some were beyond his control, while others could be blamed on the mindset of nearly everyone involved in fighting the Seminole. Gaines, Scott, Call, and their superiors in Washington all expected a swift campaign wherein the Seminole would be defeated, rounded up, and shipped west. Call had sufficient supplies in Florida, but they weren't with the army. Expecting one big battle, the army traveled light, taking no more provisions than they could conveniently carry. In a way, it was the right strategy. It allowed them to move swiftly and increased their chances of catching up with the Indians. The fact that they had surprised a number of camps and villages showed that it was an effective way to wage war on the Seminole. On the other hand, when they needed an extra day or two to complete their mission, the campaign had to be called off because the men had eaten everything they had brought with them, and the supply depots were too far away to be of immediate use.

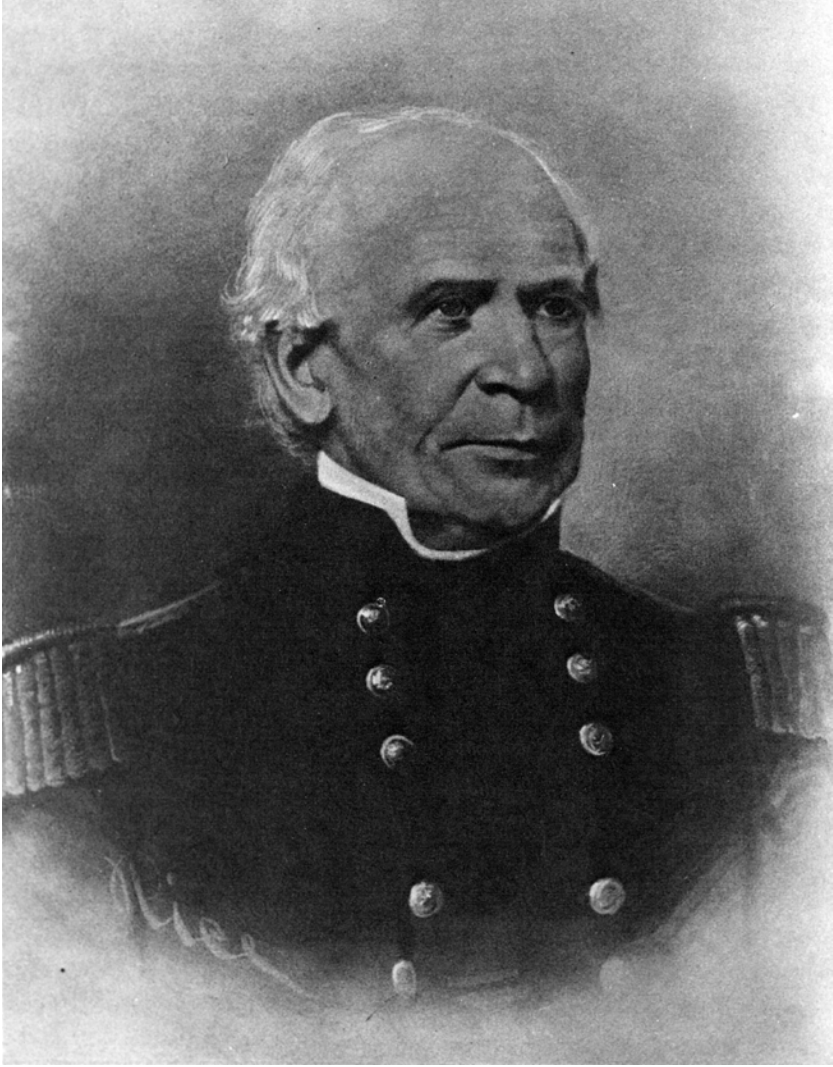
Call had given it his best shot, and even though he had been more successful than those who had made the attempt before him, he had not ended the war as Andrew Jackson had expected him to. Stung by his curt dismissal, Call returned to Tallahassee and resumed his duties as governor. He also began to distance himself from Jackson and eventually became a political opponent. Their longtime friendship was simply another casualty of the Florida War.

December 1836–June 1837

Jesup's First Campaign and the "Capitulation"

Andrew Jackson had been willing to let his old friend Governor Call have a try at the Seminole, but he really hadn't expected much. Even before Call departed Fort Drane on his first attempt at crossing the Withlacoochee, Jackson had decided someone else would be in charge for the coming winter campaign. That someone was Maj. Gen. Thomas Sidney Jesup, and in a way, Jackson hadn't had much choice. Because about half the regular army and thousands of state troops would be serving in Florida, a major general was needed to outrank all the brigadier generals who would be on the scene. There was already considerable friction between the men of the regular army and those of the state forces. The War Department needed someone who possessed sufficient rank to settle the petty squabbles that would arise among the junior officers.¹

Unfortunately, there were only four major generals in the entire army. Two of them, Gaines and Scott, had already tried their hands without success. Alexander Macomb was the commanding general, superior to all the others, but his was a desk job, not a battlefield position. That left only Jesup, who held the staff position of Quartermaster General. Appointed to the office in 1818, Jesup would occupy it until his death in 1860. Although the position of quartermaster was considered noncombatant, Jesup knew his way around a battlefield. He had fought with distinction in the War of 1812, having served under Winfield Scott at the battles of Chippewa and Lundy's Lane. In the latter contest he had led his men brilliantly, getting the better of a superior British force in extremely close fighting. Despite the fact that his position as Quartermaster General required him to reside and work in Washington, Jesup spent as much time as possible in the field, examining facilities and meeting with junior officers.²



Maj. Gen. Thomas Sidney Jesup. Battle-tested in the War of 1812, he reformed and then managed the Quartermasters Department for more than forty years.

State Archives of Florida, <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/8283>.

The duties of the Quartermasters Department might seem trivial at first. The all-important tasks of purchasing provisions and weaponry were not Jesup's responsibility but belonged to the Commissary and Ordnance Departments respectively. Yet having men, weapons, and provisions was of

little advantage if they were not where they were needed. It was the duty of Jesup and the assistant quartermasters serving under him to hire or purchase both land and water transportation for the army's needs. The other major responsibility of the department was, as the name suggests, the quartering of the troops. This involved everything from purchasing tents to constructing forts. In addition, the quartermasters were in charge of obtaining forage for the army's thousands of horses and distributing uniforms to the men. When things were not where they were supposed to be, as often happened early in the Florida War, it was the Quartermaster General who, rightly or wrongly, was blamed.³

Jesup arrived in Florida fresh from another Indian war. In the summer of 1836 trouble had broken out among the Creek Indians of eastern Alabama and western Georgia, who, like the Seminole, were resisting forced removal to the west. Jesup had been dispatched by President Jackson to take command in the area, pending the arrival of Winfield Scott from Florida. Both generals happened to arrive in Georgia at the same time, and Jesup immediately put himself under Scott's command. Scott's plan was similar to the one he had employed in Florida. Jesup was sent to lead the Alabama wing, while Scott would lead the Georgia wing. As in Florida, the plan was to crush the Indians between the converging wings. As usual, Scott moved carefully, refusing to act until everything was in proper order. Jesup, faced with open hostilities close to his position in Alabama, was forced to go on the offensive. By the time Scott was ready to move, Jesup had nearly ended the war.⁴

Jesup's initiative not only dealt the Creeks a severe blow; it also ended his close friendship with Scott. Feeling upstaged, Scott expressed his frustration in a letter. Jesup responded in a like manner. Angry letters continued to be exchanged, and one of Jesup's found its way to the president's desk and into the newspapers. In it he remarked, "We have the Florida scenes enacted over again. The war ought to have been ended a week ago." Jackson had heard enough and recalled Scott to Washington. Jesup, on the other hand, had earned Old Hickory's respect. In the aged president's eyes Jesup was just the sort of man to put an end to the embarrassing Seminole situation.⁵

Jesup arrived in Tallahassee in early October but did not take immediate command of the war. Governor Call was still officially in charge, and Jesup would not receive notice of formal orders directing him to take command until late November.⁶ If Call proved successful, the general would be happy to have the war ended. If not, he would be ready to take the field and wage his own campaign. Arriving at Tampa Bay on October 15, Jesup took command of the forces operating south of the Withlacoochee and began the

work of planning his operations while waiting for men and material to arrive.⁷ Some of the troops, about 1,250 Tennessee Volunteers, had preceded him and were already serving with Call. With the army stretched so thin, Jesup also called upon the other branches of the military service for manpower. On October 25 he was joined by several hundred U.S. Marines on loan from the navy, commanded by Col. Archibald Henderson, the Commandant of the Marine Corps. Jesup was also requesting men and boats from Commodore Alexander Dallas, commander of the Navy's West Indies Squadron.⁸

Jesup had been paying close attention to the previous campaigns and wasn't about to make the same mistakes. Unlike the other generals he had no illusions about ending the conflict in one big battle. He was also, as much as possible, not going to let his men run out of food and ammunition at a critical time. Massive amounts of supplies were ordered from the north, along with the horses, mules, wagons, and boats needed to transport them. To help keep things on schedule, a number of steamboats were hired, both for offshore use and on the rivers. Instead of large columns of soldiers marching along predetermined routes, Jesup planned on using mobile detachments that were free to attack wherever they thought the Seminole might be. To keep the troops supplied, his plans called for fortified depots to be built approximately a day's march apart. This allowed the soldiers to either return to the post to rest and resupply, or, if the situation called for it, request additional rations and ammunition that would allow them to continue their mission. Jesup was also realistic about the chances for success. He told his superiors, "The campaign will be tedious, but I hope successful in the end. I am not, however, very sanguine; the difficulty is not to fight the enemy, but to find him."⁹ He also knew how hard the campaign would be on the men serving under him, and suggested that all those below his own rank be given a grant of land just for serving in Florida.¹⁰

Indeed, serving in Florida was already taking a toll on the general's health. For the first two weeks of November he was often confined to his room, suffering from a severe lung ailment that often had him coughing up blood.¹¹ On November 29, 1836, eight days after Call's Battle of Wahoo Swamp, Jesup set out for Volusia, where the governor's army was encamped. With him was a force of 350 Alabama Volunteers and 50 Marines, all of them mounted. As they headed east, Jesup kept an eye open for Seminole villages or war parties. After crossing the Ocklawaha on December 3, the army captured an Indian, who pointed them in the direction of a village occupied by slaves that had been freed from sugar plantations earlier in the war. Jesup sent two companies of volunteers to investigate. After burning the village, they returned with forty-one prisoners and intelligence that Osceola

was in the vicinity of the Wahoo Swamp with seven hundred warriors. The prisoners also told Jesup that most of the other bands were scattered and that many were willing to surrender, but were afraid to.¹²

Jesup arrived at Volusia on December 4 and relieved Call four days later. On the twelfth he began the march back toward the west coast, where he intended to attack Micanopy or Osceola, or, if he was lucky, both. With him were almost two thousand men, which included about eight hundred Tennessee Volunteers whose enlistments were about to expire. Eager to make the most of the limited time the volunteers would be available, Jesup sent out detachments to hunt for Indians as the column moved across the territory. Few were found. In a letter to the War Department, Jesup again warned his superiors not to expect too much. "You shall not be disappointed in my efforts, though you may be in their results. The country is so extensive, and contains so many hiding places for large as well as small parties, that the enemy may escape from me."¹³

By December 17 the army had reached Dade's battleground. Signs of the battle were still present, and many of the volunteers pried bullets from the trees and the breastwork as souvenirs. Knowing the Tennesseans were anxious to go home, Jesup made them a deal: Build a fort, and as soon as it was done they could head down to Tampa and catch ship for home. In an amazingly short amount of time Fort Armstrong was complete, named after the Tennessee brigade's commanding officer, Maj. Robert Armstrong. Their work done, the volunteers took up the line of march for Tampa, but when they were about twenty-five miles from their destination, Jesup called some of them back to investigate reports of Indians in the area. None were found, and the troops continued on their way, spending Christmas at Tampa. Looking around, volunteer Henry Hollingsworth commented, "Though a beautiful situation for a city, can never be a place of great size."¹⁴

The Tennesseans weren't the only ones building forts. On November 30 Colonel Foster left Tampa with 250 men, headed for the remains of Fort Alabama on the Hillsborough River, about twenty-five miles north of Tampa. The original fort had been abandoned at the end of Scott's campaign and destroyed by the booby trap set in the powder magazine. The soldiers arrived at the site the following day and began construction on the new fort the day after. The work took over two weeks, but in the end Foster was pleased with the work his men had done. Jesup was also pleased and ordered the post bear the name Fort Foster. In the 1980s the fort was reconstructed at its original location and is part of the Hillsborough River State Park.¹⁵

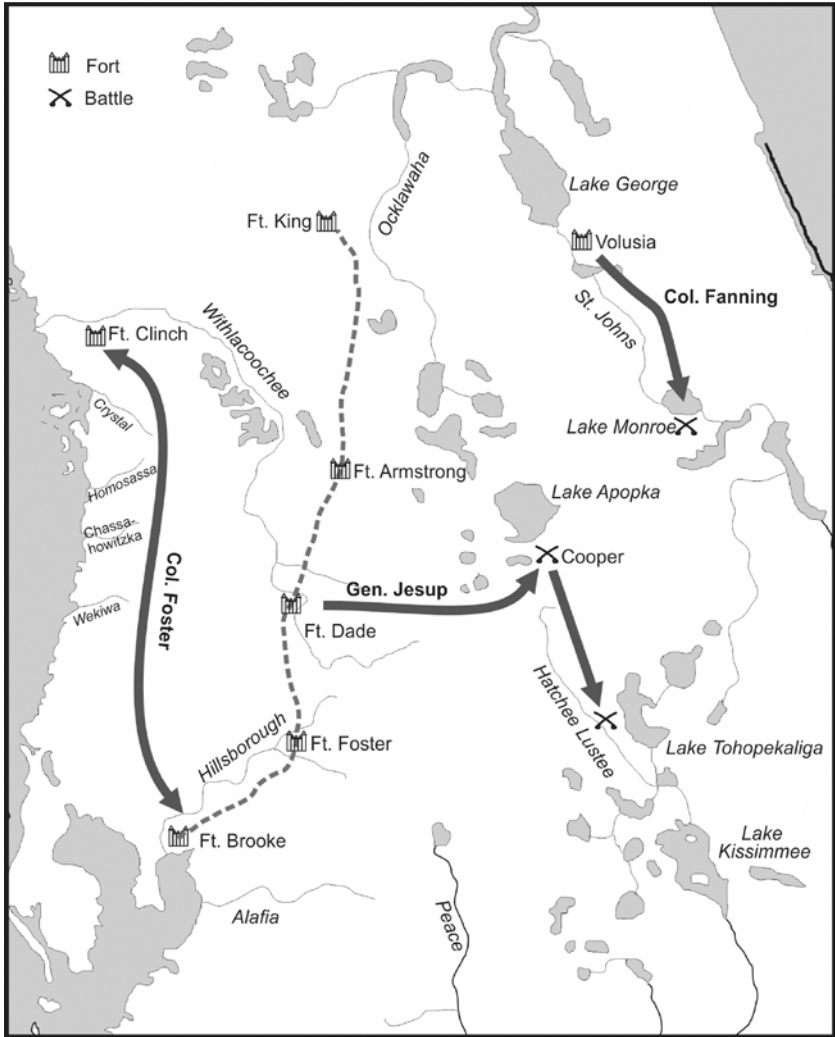
The fort had two primary purposes. One was to protect the bridge Foster's men were building across the Hillsborough, and the other was as a

supply depot for troops operating in the area. It would also serve as a way station for wagon trains heading farther north along the Fort King Road. Jesup intended the post to be well stocked. Orders called for it to hold fifty thousand rounds of musket cartridges, forty thousand rounds worth of powder and bullets, fifty thousand rations for the men, and ten thousand bushels of corn for the horses. There were also two cannon with one hundred rounds of ammunition for each and an ample supply of tools, iron, steel, nails, and cordage. Other forts were similarly supplied, a clear indication that Jesup meant to overwhelm his opponent.¹⁶

On December 22, before the bridge was complete, Foster and some of his men headed twenty-five miles north to the Withlacoochee River, where they commenced work on a bridge and an accompanying post, Fort Dade. Unlike Fort Foster, Fort Dade was of a more haphazard construction. Tall, straight pine trees were not as plentiful in the area, and until the remainder of his force arrived with additional tools and supplies, Foster and his chief engineer, Lt. Henry Prince, were limited in what they could accomplish. Finally, on the day after Christmas, twelve thousand pounds of rations arrived, along with 110 pack horses. The following day ninety-eight men showed up, followed by a group of allied Creek Indians with 101 head of captured Seminole cattle, for which they were paid \$5 a head.¹⁷

Jesup now had his string of forts. Fort Armstrong at Dade's battlefield was another fifteen miles north of Fort Dade along the Fort King Road, and with Fort Clinch near the mouth of the Withlacoochee, the entire area between the Ocklawaha and the Gulf was open to the army. To free up more men for actual fighting, Jesup requested and received sailors from the navy to man Forts Foster and Dade. The navy was also performing services much farther south. Lt. Levin Powell, with two hundred sailors, ten boats, and the Revenue Cutter *Washington* launched an extensive expedition of the coastal Everglades, examining the entire area from New River (Fort Lauderdale) on the east coast to Sanibel Island on the west. Only a few Indians were spotted, leaving Powell with the impression that reports stating that the main body of Seminole had taken refuge in the Everglades were false.¹⁸

With the completion of Fort Dade, the offensive could begin in earnest. On January 6, 1837, Jesup arrived at Fort Dade and met with Colonel Foster. He then took most of the army and moved up to Fort Armstrong. Along the way a group of volunteers captured sixteen prisoners one day and thirty-five the next. On January 11 Foster and 160 men left Fort Dade, headed for the Cove of the Withlacoochee. Soon they came across a group of allied Creeks who had captured a "half starved, half clad" Seminole warrior. The prisoner,



General Jesup's campaign of 1836–1837.

Map by John Missall.

who wore only a crude shirt fashioned from discarded army corn sacks, told them the Seminole were on the run and nearly out of food and ammunition. The army then continued north, passing the remnants of Fort Cooper and reaching the site of General Clinch's New Year's battle the next day. Using the prisoner as a guide, the army arrived at Fort Clinch on the fifteenth.¹⁹

After a meeting with Jesup, it was decided Foster would take a force of about four hundred men and search the coastal area south of the Withlacoochee. It was not going to be an easy task. It was an area about thirty-five miles long by seventeen wide where four small rivers fed into the Gulf of Mexico. The rivers first flowed through inland swampland then through a coastal marsh. Even today the area is sparsely populated, much of it being a wildlife refuge and other publicly owned land. Unfortunately, Foster and his men had only the vaguest notion of the geography, so besides hunting Seminole, their mission was to accurately map the area. Their only guide was the Seminole prisoner, who promised to lead them to his village in hopes he would be reunited with his wife and child.²⁰

Foster's army made camp near the headwaters of the Chassahowitzka River on the afternoon of the seventeenth, and on one of the coldest nights of the year the colonel led a patrol of one hundred men in search of the Indian village. As he later reported, "The troops penetrated into the hammock about three miles and a half during that night, in doing which they waded 14 streams or ponds of water from 10 inches to 3 feet depth." They returned to camp about 4:00 a.m. To make matters worse, it rained steadily from around midnight to 10:00 the next morning. The prisoner, unable to find his way in the dark, couldn't locate his village.²¹

The next day proved more successful. Mounted patrols came across a pair of Seminole warriors who fought to the death rather than be captured. One of them grabbed the bayonet of a mounted soldier in an attempt to pull him from his horse. The attempt failed, and the soldier clubbed the warrior to death with the butt of his musket. The guide, able to get his bearings in the daylight, led the soldiers to his village, where they took twenty-one captives, including the guide's family. Also taken were two hundred head of cattle, six horses, twenty-three ponies, and two mules. Exhausted and running low on supplies, the column marched south to Fort Brooke, where they arrived on January 24.²²

While recuperating at Tampa, Foster received orders from Jesup to resume his expedition and retrace his path back to Fort Clinch. Before leaving, Foster decided to try something new. He contacted Commodore Dallas, whose flagship was anchored in Tampa Bay, and asked if the navy's coastal steamer *American* might be used in a coordinated attack on the Seminole. Foster thought there might be an Indian hideout on Crystal River, and if he could attack it both from land and sea, he might be able to capture the entire village. Dallas agreed to the plan, and Foster sent one company of the Fourth Infantry aboard the *American*. To locate each other and coordinate the attack, a system of signal rockets was agreed upon.²³

On January 28 both Foster and the *American* left Tampa, taking their separate routes to the agreed-upon destination. On the way north Foster met up with a group of Georgia Volunteers and added them to his force, which now totaled over five hundred men. Continuing on, patrols located two Indian villages and burned them. Finally, on February 1, the army encamped near what they believed to be the source of Crystal River. Signal rockets were sent up, but no one saw a responding rocket from the *American*. What Foster and his men didn't realize was that they had fallen victim to inaccurate mapping, both on land and at sea. The *American* was hard aground at Tampa Bay, and Foster was at the wrong river.²⁴

Unaware of the *American's* predicament, Foster's men kept firing rockets to no avail. Still, the effort wasn't a total waste of time. One of the women prisoners showed them where a cache of saddles had been buried. Before burning the saddles the leather was stripped from them and distributed to the men so they could repair their shoes. In addition, Foster had brought with him a modern innovation that he wanted to test: an India Rubber boat. He thought it might be useful in limited situations, but the lightweight vessel proved sturdier than it looked and allowed the troops to better explore the narrow, twisted river systems they were operating in. By the time the soldiers arrived at Fort Clinch on the sixth, the Topographical Engineers had a reasonably detailed map of the four-rivers area.²⁵

As the troops rested at Fort Clinch the *American* finally arrived, having freed herself from the sandbar after five days aground. Now that everyone knew where Crystal River was, Foster dispatched the vessel to once again attempt the coordinated attack. Foster and his men spent two days searching and exploring the headwaters of the river, but found little sign of any Seminole. Capt. George Allen and the men coming ashore from the *American* fared differently. On February 10, while working their way toward Foster's position, the soldiers and sailors discovered two villages. While in the process of destroying one of them the Seminole attacked, but were driven off. When the soldiers finally arrived at Foster's position they were greeted by unexpected but certainly welcome news: A truce had been declared.²⁶

While Foster and his men had been trudging through the swamps of the Gulf Coast looking for hidden villages, Jesup had been after bigger targets. The general had received intelligence that many of the Alachua Seminole had fled east toward Lake Apopka, in the area of today's Disney complex. With them were their most powerful leaders including Micanopy, Jumper (Ote Emathla), the black leader Abraham, and Osuchee, commonly known as Cooper. On January 22 Jesup and about four hundred men went in search

of them, and on the following day a detachment made up of Alabama Volunteers, Marines, and allied Creeks attacked Osuchee's camp. Killed were Cooper and three warriors, while nine women and children and eight blacks were taken captive. The prisoners informed Jesup that the main body of the Alachuas was fleeing south, toward the Caloosahatchee River.²⁷

Jesup and his soldiers took off in hot pursuit. The first obstacle in their path was the White Mountain, "an elevated range of hills not mentioned by any geographer. . . . The ascent, in many places, was so difficult as to render drag-ropes and heavy details of men necessary to take the baggage-wagons over the heights." Three days later, on the twenty-seventh, the army came across a large herd of Seminole cattle grazing on the open prairie. Jesup knew he was getting close to his quarry and sent out patrols to locate any trails the fleeing Natives might have left and to engage them, if possible. The Seminole were soon discovered near Hatchee Lustee Creek (Reedy Creek), and a company of volunteers charged the position, capturing most of the Indians' baggage and twenty-five prisoners. One of those taken was a warrior who refused to leave his wife, as she had become too sick to travel. Colonel Henderson of the Marines led several companies in pursuit of the warriors, who crossed the creek and fled into an extensive swamp to the west of Lake Tohopekaliga. A long, running battle ensued, with the Seminole stopping to fire on the soldiers from defensible positions before continuing their retreat. The pursuit lasted until late in the afternoon, when it was called off so that the troops could regroup and set up camp for the night.²⁸

Neither Jesup nor Henderson were too worried about the Seminole escaping overnight. The warriors were in a dense swamp with their backs to Lake Tohopekaliga, and there were few escape routes available to them. Beyond that, the army had captured hundreds of head of cattle and over a hundred horses, about half of them loaded with the tribe's possessions. Nearby, another detachment of soldiers had discovered and attacked a large Indian camp, forcing the occupants to flee, their food still cooking over the camp fires. Jesup had every reason to believe that a concerted effort on the following day would result in the capture of a significant portion of the Seminole population.²⁹

On the morning of the twenty-eighth, Jesup sent one of the prisoners to make contact with the Indians, offering peace if they would abide by the treaty and give up. The next night the prisoner returned with messages from Alligator (Halpatta Tustennuggee), one of the senior Seminole leaders, and Abraham, Micanopy's foremost counselor, indicating that they were willing to talk. Two days later Abraham came in for an initial meeting, and on February 3 he returned with Alligator and Jumper. The Seminole (most of

them being Alachuas) said they were desirous of peace and that it had been the Mikasuki who had started the war, ignoring the fact that Micanopy and Jumper had been in charge at Dade's Battle. They still hoped to be allowed to remain in Florida, telling Jesup that it was too cold in the Indian Territory and that there was excessive quarrelling between the Indians who were already out there. Jumper also insisted that the Spaniards had promised that only those portions of Florida that were already under cultivation had been sold the Americans, and that the remainder had been reserved for the Seminole. Jesup may have been sympathetic, but it made little difference. The treaties had been signed, and the Seminole were obligated to move west. At the end of the day an agreement was made to hold formal negotiations at Fort Dade on February 18 and to call an immediate cease-fire.³⁰

Jesup could have boasted of his victory, but instead he made amends to those who had come before him. In a letter to the Adjutant General he wrote:

As an act of justice to all my predecessors in command, I consider it my duty to say that the difficulties attending military operations in this country can be properly appreciated only by those acquainted with them. . . . This is a service which no man would seek with any other view than the mere performance of his duty . . . and the difficulties are such that the best concerted plans may result in absolute failure, and the best established reputation be lost without a fault. If I have, at any time said aught in disparagement of the operations of others in Florida . . . knowing the country as I now know it, I consider myself bound, as a man of honor, solemnly to retract it.³¹

Jesup may have been confident, but he also knew a truce did not end a war. The Seminole were coming in to talk; there was no guarantee they would actually be getting on board the ships that would take them west.

Reports of other actions filtered out of Florida, catching the interest of people all over the nation. In the February 3 edition of the *Daily Argus* of Albany, New York, was the reprint of an article in the *Charleston Courier* of January 24, itself a reprint of a piece from the *St. Augustine Florida Herald* of January 20. In the article was the report of a failed raid on Hanson's Plantation, just outside of St. Augustine. A group of Indians and blacks had attempted to steal some horses but were driven off by a sentry. The group's trail was picked up the next day and their camp discovered and attacked. Three of the party were killed and the rest fled, leaving everything behind, including their weapons. Most alarming to the residents of St. Augustine was news that most of the raiders were black and that some of the articles

left behind had recently been purchased in town by free blacks who resided on nearby Anastasia Island. Nervous whites in St. Augustine looked at the blacks living among them with a new, more suspicious eye.³²

Besides his own force operating in the center of the peninsula and Colonel Foster's in the west, Jesup had dispatched Col. Alexander Fanning and several hundred troops up the St. Johns River in an attempt to locate King Philip's band, one of the larger and more powerful groups in the tribe. Moving by steamer up the winding river, they had pushed well past Volusia and into Lake Monroe. By the first week of February a depot had been set up on the southern shore of the lake. As a precaution against attack, the soldiers erected a breastwork around the post and slept with their weapons close at hand. It was a wise move, for the Seminole had been watching, and Philip, concerned that the army was so close to his villages, decided to act. In the predawn hours of February 8, he and Abiaki attacked with a force of nearly four hundred warriors. Unfortunately for the Seminole, they hadn't been watching closely enough. Scouts had seen the initial landing of the soldiers, but no one had noticed the arrival of extra troops or seen the breastwork go up.³³

Capt. John Rogers Vinton, an officer with twenty years' experience, wrote to his wife the next day, saying, "I have heard, for the first time in my life, the whistling of hostile bullets."³⁴ Weeks later, after an interview with several of the Indian participants of the battle, Vinton made the following notes in his letter book, telling how the Indians made their attack:

Half an hour before daybreak the signal was given, and yells of encouragement & conventional signals were constantly uttered from one party to the other. It being dark & foggy they came up at first very near to our camp,—the sentinel discovered them, hailed & fired.—The guard were roused and all retired together to the body of the camp. They [the Indians] made great efforts to kill some of our sentinels hoping at least to secure their scalps, but all their shots failed of effect. Not a man was touched. The Indians still advanced and continued to pour in a most spirited fire all round our camp till one crawling on the ground approached so near as to discover our breastworks, cried out "Tohopeka, Tohopeka" (a fort—a fort) this being the first intimation they had had of our having erected breastworks.³⁵

Realizing the soldiers were in a more defensible position than was supposed, the Seminole fell back to the surrounding woods but continued to pour fire into the post. Safe behind their breastwork, the soldiers returned fire, killing at least fifteen Indians. Also aiding the soldiers was a cannon

mounted on the steamer *Santee*, floating just offshore. Every time the cannon fired the warriors would let out a yell, but Vinton thought it was more in defiance than in pain. As for the army, only Capt. Charles Mellon was killed, felled by a ball through the heart. As Vinton told his wife, “The death of Mellon casts a gloom over the Camp. He was a great favorite with all, and leaves, besides other mourners, a wife and four children.” A fort was later erected on the spot and given the name Fort Mellon. After the war, the town of Mellonville sprang up at the site and later changed its name to Sanford. A handful of soldiers had been wounded, but only Lt. John McLaughlin of the navy, who had volunteered to serve with the army, was thought to be in any danger. The day after the battle both sides received news of the proposed peace talks and the truce.³⁶

The appointed day for the talks, February 18, came and went without the appearance of Indians at Fort Dade. Only Abraham showed up, but he insisted the chiefs were on their way. Four days later Alligator and two other leaders came in and were joined by Holatoochee the following day. Alligator informed Jesup that Jumper was sick and that Micanopy’s nephew (and emissary) had been injured while on the way, but that whatever course Micanopy decided upon, the entire tribe would follow. The general was polite, but felt he was being put off. When Alligator again mentioned being allowed to remain in Florida, Jesup stood firm. Emigration was the only option. He also told the Indians that the agreement must be made with Micanopy and no one else. He then gave the negotiators until the following day to respond. The next morning the talks resumed, with the Seminole leaders agreeing to go to Jumper and Micanopy and return in eight days. They were also forced to leave twelve hostages.³⁷

On March 5 Jumper and several other chiefs came in. Jesup was miffed that Micanopy still wasn’t with them, but Jumper insisted he had Micanopy’s full authority to negotiate a new treaty. The general, in turn, informed Jumper that they weren’t there to discuss a new treaty, just arrangements for the tribe’s emigration under the existing treaty. The back-and-forth wrangling went on all day. The Seminole tried to buy time, but Jesup wouldn’t allow it. By the end of the day little progress had been made, and the Seminole asked if they could resume talks the next day, after they had had time to confer with leaders of the Creeks who were serving with the army.³⁸

The Seminole met with the Creeks the next morning. By the end of the council Jumper and his associates were convinced they had little choice but to agree to Jesup’s demands. Later that day they signed a “Capitulation” wherein they agreed to cease hostilities and immediately gather at Fort

Brooke for emigration. The Seminole were promised all the advantages they'd been given in the Treaty of Payne's Landing, subsistence for a year after reaching their new homes, and payment for the cattle and horses they left behind. To ensure the Seminole's compliance, hostages would be held, one of which was to be Micanopy. On March 18 Micanopy came in and placed his mark on the agreement. Jesup reported that "Micconopy informed me last night that he had never before consented to emigrate; but that he now believed the Great Spirit had so ordered, that he should leave the land of his fathers, and he submitted cheerfully."³⁹

Jesup understood how difficult it would be to get the Seminole to gather for emigration. In his diary he wrote, "The emigration of the Indians will be tedious and difficult if not impracticable. The policy of moving them from the country is doubtful—there is no population pressing upon them, and until that be the case, whatsoever arrangements may be made with the chiefs, the great body of the Indians cannot be made sensible of the necessity or justice of removing them from a country so well adapted to their condition."⁴⁰

The most controversial aspect of the agreement concerned the fate of the Black Seminoles. With the exception of recent runaways, Jesup seemed content to let the blacks go west with their Indian friends. Yet no matter how definite the wording of the treaty, it soon became a matter of interpretation as to which blacks would be allowed to travel west with the Indians. The treaty read, "The Seminoles and their allies." Did this mean blacks who had resided among the Seminole for many years or did it simply refer to the Red Stick Creeks, Yuchee, and other tribes that were associated with the Seminole? The treaty also mentioned "their negroes, their *bona fide* property, shall accompany them to the west." But how did an Indian, who possessed no written bill of sale, prove that he was the *bona fide* owner of a certain slave? The exact meaning could be interpreted in whatever way was most convenient to the reader, and as far as most white southerners were concerned, nearly every black was someone's property.⁴¹

The problem with slave catchers was serious enough to cause Jesup to issue an order banning all whites from the southern half of the peninsula. There was also a problem with whites attempting to have Indians arrested for crimes or unpaid debts. Bad faith was building on both sides, and Jesup could see trouble ahead. In mid-May he received a report that some Seminole were planting crops and fixing up their houses, a sure sign that they intended to be in Florida for some time to come. In response the general ordered a detachment to destroy the crops, burn the houses, and kill any cattle and horses they found. Two weeks later he was informed that the Seminole who were still out had held a council and decided to fight rather

than emigrate. They had also deposed Micanopy and declared Abiaki to be head of the nation. Jesup sent dispatches throughout the territory, putting everyone on alert.⁴²

Reports coming out of Florida varied from week to week. Readers of the *National Intelligencer* had every right to be confused and concerned. “Nothing could be more certain” than that the war was over (March 3). “The war not ended yet!” (March 8). “It is the general opinion that the war is drawing to a close” (March 13). “The prospect of peace . . . is growing dim and indistinct” (March 19). “General Jesup believes the war to be at an end” (April 7). “Interference of unprincipled white men . . . will . . . lead to a renewal of the war (April 26). “Indians are coming in as fast as can be expected” (May 10). “Indians did not intend to emigrate (June 5). “The delay of the Indians . . . is very suspicious” (June 6). “The close of the war as yet far distant” (June 9).⁴³

The two Seminole leaders Jesup worried about most were Osceola and Abiaki. Both had expressed their deep-seated opposition to emigration over the years, and the pair had been the most vocal leaders of the resistance. Yet even Osceola seemed ready to give in, though he kept postponing his arrival, claiming he had heard rumors that he was to be executed.⁴⁴ Although the Indians were supposed to be gathering at Fort Brooke, Osceola and many others were collecting at Fort Mellon on the shores of Lake Monroe, far to the east. Captain Vinton noted:

We have been visited today by Coa Harjo, Powell [Osceola], Tuskeenhaw and Wild Cat [Coacoochee], with other chiefs and a great many Indians of both sexes. Powell treated us with a fine ball play by his young men and his Chiefs have just returned from a Council, held not many miles from this, and express themselves confident of bringing in all the Indians who are now much scattered, if they are allowed time to do so. . . . Their people were spread over an immense extent of territory and became more wildly scattered by sinister reports which no one could have anticipated or provided for. . . . In the meanwhile the success of the Chiefs in gathering their people in one grand communion here, is remarkable. Their cattle too are collected in great numbers, now appropriated by them for their daily subsistence but ready to be driven in here when they set out for Tampa. . . .

If I am deceived in the earnest anxiety of Coa Harjo to fulfill his promises to you,—in the frank, confiding abandoning spirit manifested by Powell,—the bold & unequivocal concurrence of young Coacoochy . . . and withal the unlimited confidence they place in us by suffering their women & children to come in and lie about our camp

at will,—If with all these tokens, added to that uniform expression of honesty which sits upon the countenance of every chief without exception, we still can be deceived,—then is this the most stupendous piece of dupery that the world has ever seen and I am willing to take the cast of the die. The war is finished. The Seminole Nation will emigrate, though a hundred little accidents might yet occur to hinder and delay them.⁴⁵

On the night of June 2 Vinton was proven wrong. Abiaki and Osceola, with about two hundred warriors, slipped into the detention camp near Fort Brooke and led the entire group of potential emigrants, about seven hundred people, away. Exactly how this happened remains a bit of a mystery. Most reports claim that Micanopy and other leaders who had surrendered were forced to leave the camp for fear of their lives. Jesup had been warned an escape might take place and had taken precautions. Creek spies had been sent into the camp, and sentries were posted. It was not, however, a secure camp. There were no walls or fences to contain the Natives, and it was about ten miles away from Fort Brooke. The Indians had supposedly come in voluntarily and were not considered prisoners in need of confinement. On June 21 the readers of the *National Intelligencer* received the unwelcome news: “Our hopes are all blasted. We have war again.”⁴⁶

The escape from the emigration camp was certainly a coup for the hardliners, but at what cost? Most observers agreed that Micanopy and many of his Alachuas were tired of the war and intended to emigrate, while Abiaki and the Mikasuki were determined never to leave their homes. Solidarity among those who wanted to continue the struggle was important, but solidarity enforced by death threats shows that there were deep divisions among the Seminole people. Resentments were bound to surface, which would later lead to hard feelings and defections. We shouldn’t be surprised by the number of Seminole who were willing to serve as guides for the army or who worked to convince their brethren to emigrate. True, many were threatened or physically forced to reveal the location of Seminole villages or were paid for their services, but many did it willingly for their own personal reasons.

We have to ask what might have happened had those who wished to emigrate been allowed to do as they pleased. The flight from the emigration camp was an insult to the pride of the American people and made the administration more determined than ever to push the war to its conclusion. Yet if a large enough number of Indians had gone west and the remainder had fled south and ceased hostilities, would the government have mounted the massive campaign it was now forced to? With a much smaller force

pursuing them, far more Seminole could have survived the war than eventually did. The first real opportunity to end the war with some measure of satisfaction for both sides had been missed.

People were quick to place blame for the collapse of the Capitulation, often without having any real knowledge of the situation. Most of the nation's ire was directed at the Seminole. An anonymous letter in the *Army and Navy Chronicle* was an indication of just how angry some people were. The writer, probably an army officer in Florida who was looking forward to the end of the war, claimed, "The main body never had any intention of removing." He then went on to declare the whole affair a "faithless perfidious scheme to gain time, recruit their strength and means for further bloodshed and murder. . . . Nothing short of extermination—righteous extermination, will ever rid the country of those demons. . . . They should be hunted down with bloodhounds, destroyed like venomous reptiles, and never be left until the last vestige of the savage, piratical, perfidious and murderous race is extinct from the face of the earth."⁴⁷

Blame was also pointed in Jesup's direction, and he immediately offered to relinquish command. Several weeks later, stung by criticism, he withdrew the offer. The entire incident deeply embittered Jesup, and as far as he was concerned, the word of an Indian was never to be trusted again. He also came to believe that because the Indians had been treacherous toward him, he could be just as deceitful toward them. It was a change in policy that would make martyrs of the Seminole and a villain of Thomas Jesup.⁴⁸

While the shooting war was going on in Florida, a war of words was taking place in Frederick, Maryland. Standing before a Military Court of Inquiry was Maj. Gen. Winfield Scott. Upon receipt of the letter from General Jesup complaining of Scott's foot-dragging against the Creeks, President Jackson had ordered Scott back to Washington to explain the failure of his Florida campaign. Also brought before the court was the matter of Gaines's conduct and the contents of various letters published by or on behalf of all three major generals. The three highest field officers in the United States Army were about to lock horns, and the public anxiously awaited the show.⁴⁹

They were not disappointed. First came a letter from Gaines, defending his own actions and placing blame upon Scott for the embarrassments at Camp Izard. Gaines's tone was personal and to the point. He maintained that Scott held a personal grudge against him and had sought to do more damage to a personal enemy than to the Indian enemy.⁵⁰ In another letter, Gaines went so far as to refer to Scott's actions as

the atrocious machinations of the second United States' general officer who has ever dared to aid and assist the open enemy of the republic in their operations against the United States forces employed in the protection of the frontier people. The first great offender was Major Gen. Benedict Arnold; the second, as your finding must show, is Major General Winfield Scott.⁵¹

Gaines's letters had been long but Scott's verbal response overwhelmed them. His defense—delivered by himself, not by any advocate—went on for days, and filled about thirty pages of fine print in the *Army and Navy Chronicle*. The whole piece was a masterwork of logic and rhetoric. First he recounted his movements in detail, from the moment he left Washington until he arrived in Florida, then went into all the embarrassments suffered from the lack of supplies and transportation, the blame for which he placed on Jesup's shoulders. Predictably, most of his time was spent showing how Gaines's intrusion had upset his plans and made victory impossible.⁵²

Scott then went into specifics, listing the causes for the campaign's failure to bring the war to a close. He contended that by the time word was received in Washington of the war's outbreak, it was already too late to mount a campaign with the proper amount of preparation. While praising the bravery and enthusiasm of the different volunteer units, he also complained that three-month enlistments were simply not long enough. He then reminded the court of Gaines's intrusion, the lack of transportation that was supposed to have been supplied by Jesup's Quartermasters Department, and the improper provisions sent down by the Commissary Department. Other problems were beyond anyone's control, such as the hot weather, lack of good drinking water, rampant sickness, shortage of good grazing for the horses, and inadequate roads and bridges. It was a magnificent display, and in the end no one was punished, other than both Gaines and Jesup getting their wrists slapped for comments made in the press. All in all, it seemed nothing more than a grand opportunity for proud men to air their differences in public.⁵³

Next to enter the public relations fray was retired General Clinch and the former secretary of war, Lewis Cass. In testimony given to the Court of Inquiry, Clinch had accused Cass of not providing the necessary support he'd requested prior to the outbreak of hostilities. Cass leapt to his own defense, attacking Clinch in the press. For many Americans, it seemed the army was spending more time in battle with itself than in battle with the Seminole.⁵⁴

For the most part the war in Florida had been put on hold. The rainy season was once again commencing, and the army was in no condition to take the

field. For the benefit of the service, several companies of regulars had been ordered to posts in other parts of the nation, and most of the state forces had been sent home. The Seminole, as they did for every year of the war, took advantage of the army's reluctance to fight during the summer. Crops were planted and new camps established. Wrecks were salvaged, skins were gathered, and fish were caught, with everything traded to Cubans or Bahamians who had slipped past the navy's thin blockade or to whites who were making a profit selling war material to the Indians and whiskey to both sides.

The annual summer hiatus also allowed the Seminole to hold their Green Corn Dance, an important social function that no Seminole would miss unless it was completely unpreventable. Held at a secret location far from any white presence, the ceremony helped reverse a trend toward assimilation that had begun decades earlier. Coming together in wartime gave added importance to the rituals, allowed the people to share stories of common experiences, and helped forge a new Seminole identity. Some anthropologists even consider the oral history of the wars that have been passed down through the generations as part of the Seminole's "primordial narrative," a type of creation story. By the time the war ended, a more united Seminole nation had emerged, more determined than ever to preserve the culture that made them special.⁵⁵

In the meantime there had been significant personnel changes in Washington. Andrew Jackson had left office, replaced by his chosen successor, Martin Van Buren. With a new president came a new secretary of war, Joel Roberts Poinsett. The changes were subtle, not dramatic. Because the Jacksonian Democrats were still in power, national policy had not been altered, even if the faces had. Still, the overpowering presence of Andrew Jackson was no longer a daily factor in the lives of those who had to deal with the national government or were part of it. As a national hero, Jackson had been practically unassailable. Martin Van Buren was a professional politician and vulnerable. His political opponents would make good use of an unpopular war on the southern frontier.

Politics were much different in the early nineteenth century than they are in the early twenty-first. Great orators such as Henry Clay and Daniel Webster were prominent, and their speeches could last for hours and draw huge crowds. Fistfights and the occasional duel between Congressmen were not uncommon. Like the army in Florida, Congress took the summer off, adjourning on March 4 and not reconvening until December. The Democratic-Republican Party of Jefferson had split into two distinct political parties, the Democrats and Whigs. Jacksonian Democrats tended to be rural southerners and westerners who favored agrarian interests and rapid territorial expansion,

and preferred state over federal authority. Whigs tended to be from the older, more established parts of society, such as the northeast and aristocratic south. They generally favored a stronger federal government, gradual territorial expansion, and mercantile/industrial interests. This new two-party system only lasted until the 1840s, when the Whigs fractured over slavery and other issues, leading to the rise of third parties such as the Anti-Masonic, Free Soil (anti-slavery), and American ("Know-Nothings," anti-immigrant) that were quick to oppose what they saw as evil, but did nothing to help preserve a Union that was beginning to fracture.⁵⁶

Another event had taken place that proved far more serious than any changes in Washington. The Panic of 1837 had struck, and the national economy was in trouble. For several years the sale of government-owned land had served to wipe out the national debt. Most of that land had been purchased on credit, much of it questionable. When banks began to tighten credit and President Jackson called for all payments to the government to be made in gold or silver, the speculative bubble burst. Other factors, such as a sharp decline in the price of cotton, less English investment, and the failure to recharter the Bank of the United States all added to the financial woes. When the Florida War had commenced, the federal government was, for the only time in its history, debt free and had been faced with the enviable problem of what to do with millions of dollars of surplus revenues. Because of the panic, the cost of the war soon became a matter for serious debate.

The financial woes seem to have had little effect on funding for the war. Congressmen who were opposed to the war would rail against the amounts being spent in Florida, but when it came time to vote for the necessary appropriations, Congress was quick to open the purse. Even during a special session that was called to deal with the financial crisis, out of the \$9.1 million that was proposed to help restore the economy, \$1.6 million was to fight the war. As usual, it was the little fellow who bore the weight of economic hardship: On August 3 Jesup was reminded that government rations supplied to the "suffering inhabitants" would cease as of October 1.⁵⁷

Unable to mount a summer offensive, Jesup turned to other strategies. Keeping small detachments in the field and on the move helped maintain pressure on the Seminole. It was hoped such pressure would force the Indians into surrendering or, at a minimum, avoid white settlements. The general also began to notice a significant number of escaped blacks turning themselves in. For them, returning to slavery may not have been as difficult a decision as we might assume. Some had been taken from the plantations by force—either by Seminole raiders or by peer pressure from other slaves

more intent on obtaining freedom—or were mentally and/or physically unprepared for this new type of life. What did they know about building temporary camps or finding food in the wild? Where would they obtain clothing or the simple implements necessary for everyday living? Many slaves, especially the elderly or mothers with children, no doubt longed for a life where food, shelter, and security were readily available, even if it meant returning to bondage. After all, an existence where you had to live off the land while being hunted or shot at would appeal to few, and though the war had given them their freedom, the Indians provided them with little else. Others may have wished to rejoin loved ones who had not escaped. One of the primary evils of American slavery was the matter of families being torn apart. In this instance, freedom could do the same thing.

Much has been made of Jesup's comment in a December 9, 1836, letter to Acting Secretary of War Benjamin Butler that "This, you may be assured, is a negro, not an Indian war," implying the conflict had more to do with a slave revolt than an Indian uprising.⁵⁸ At the time, Jesup may have truly believed it. Many of the escapees had joined the Seminole resistance, and the very thought of armed blacks brought up the fear of a widespread slave insurrection. Several months after concluding negotiations for the "Capitulation," Jesup told the Adjutant General, "Throughout my operations I found the negroes the most active and determined warriors; and during the conference with the Indian chiefs I ascertained that they exercised an almost controlling influence over them." Unfortunately, Jesup may have been fooled by his own prejudices. What he and other whites saw as black control over the Indians may have been nothing more than blacks being treated as equals and allowed to freely speak their minds, something white men rarely witnessed.⁵⁹

While the issue of slavery was a very important factor in bringing on the war, it was not the cause of the war, nor was there a true slave revolt. No large band of escaped slaves operated on their own to slaughter whites or free their brethren.⁶⁰ The destruction of the plantations was a Seminole endeavor, carried out for Seminole purposes. Blacks participated and no doubt had their own agenda, but it was secondary to the Indian agenda. What truly brought on the war was the government's Indian Removal policy. Even without the presence of the blacks, the policy would have been enforced, and the Seminole would have resisted. The Seminole didn't attack and annihilate Major Dade's command because they wanted to free slaves; they were protecting their own homes and their way of life. This doesn't mean the blacks who fought in the war were unimportant. They were courageous and inspiring people and played a very important part in the conduct of the war.

Jesup, along with most other whites, felt that if the blacks were removed from the equation, the Indians might be more amenable to emigration. To help accomplish this, in early 1838 Jesup began to offer Black Seminoles freedom in the west if they would surrender. By the time he left Florida most of the blacks had been removed from the conflict, but if he thought their removal would hasten the war's end, he was wrong.⁶¹ The Seminole will to fight had not lessened, and the war continued for another four years, followed by a third war in the 1850s in which few blacks participated. In the final analysis, it was always the Seminole War.

July 1837–April 1838

Jesup's Second Campaign and the White Flag

After the Seminole's flight from the embarkation camp, General Jesup's policy toward the Indians hardened. On August 20 the general met with Coa Hadjo and two other Seminole leaders. Following the four-hour discussion, Coa Hadjo told Jesup that although he personally wished to emigrate, most of his people didn't. Jesup responded that the matter was no longer open for discussion. As far as he and the administration were concerned, the issue of allowing the Indians to remain in Florida had been settled by the Treaty of Payne's Landing and reaffirmed with the Capitulation of March 6. The only subject he would discuss would be the details of their immediate surrender for emigration, and the only purpose of the white flag was to offer protection from the numerous patrols that were in the field. Jesup understood why the Indians were fighting and respected their tenacity, but he was not going to be toyed with again. Coa Hadjo said a council was soon to be held, and he would report back afterward. As it turned out, few leaders attended the council, and Coa Hadjo did not return.¹

On September 4, 1837, a series of actions began that would lead to one of the most controversial events of the war. At Fort Peyton, several miles south of St. Augustine near the place where the Treaty of Moultrie Creek had been signed in 1823, four escaped slaves came in, asking to be returned to their owners. They complained of hardships while living with the Seminole and spoke of a large Indian camp at Mosquito Lagoon. Lt. Richard Peyton, in command of the fort, decided to investigate, but General Hernandez felt Peyton's manpower wasn't enough and organized a force of 170 men. Marching twenty miles south to the ruins of the Bulow Plantation, they were greeted by five more returning runaways. One of them offered to

lead the soldiers to the Indian camp if he could be reunited with his wife, who was still at one of the plantations near St. Augustine.²

Hernandez was happy to take the man up on his offer. Marching another twenty miles farther south, the army encamped at the Dunlawton Plantation ruins and planned their attack. Moving stealthily at night, most of the soldiers dismounted and surrounded the camp. There they waited, careful not to make a sound that would wake the sleeping Indians. At dawn Hernandez ordered the rest of the troops, still mounted, to charge the camp. The surprise was complete, with only one Indian escaping. More significantly, among those captured was King Philip, one of the tribe's most powerful and respected leaders.³

Hernandez's luck continued the next night. One of the captured Indians, Tomoka John, offered to lead the white men to another camp nearby, this one populated by Yuchee Indians. Once again the whites were able to encircle the camp and capture nearly the entire band. The Indians were able to mount a short, desperate defense, and one man on each side was slain. The American loss was Lt. Winfield Scott McNeil, a twenty-year-old West Point graduate on his first combat mission, killed by the headman of the village, Yuchee Billy. Fearing other Indians in the area may have been alerted and would attempt to rescue Philip, Hernandez and his army hurried back to St. Augustine. With them were fifty-three Indian and black prisoners. The warriors were bound into pairs, but Philip, out of respect for his age and position, was allowed the use of a horse.⁴

Confined in the massive stone fortress at St. Augustine, Philip asked that a runner be sent to his son Coacoochee, one of the primary leaders of the resistance. Hernandez dispatched Tomoka John, and it was subsequently arranged for a meeting to take place at the Bulow ruins on September 24. On the appointed day eight escaped slaves came in, but no Indians. Two days later Coacoochee, Blue Snake, and two others arrived bearing a white flag and were escorted toward St. Augustine. Before reaching Fort Peyton Coacoochee took time to change into his best clothing and then rode confidently into St. Augustine. After meetings with Hernandez and Philip, Coacoochee left St. Augustine with promises to return with the remainder of his band.⁵

True to his word, Coacoochee returned on the sixteenth with Philip's brother and youngest son. He informed Hernandez that Osceola and about one hundred others would arrive in a few days and asked that food be sent to Volusia, as many starving blacks were there. On the seventeenth two runners arrived with a message from Osceola that he would come in for a talk and intended to make peace. Osceola showed up on the twentieth and sent the black leader John Cavallo to talk with Hernandez. In the meantime



King Philip (Emathla), father of Coacoochee and leader of the Seminole in the St. Johns River area. Painting by George Catlin.

State Archives of Florida, <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/12455>.

Jesup had heard from the returning blacks that the Indians were “up to no good.” He also had a strong distrust of Cavallo, which added to his belief that some sort of treachery was planned, probably an attempt to rescue Philip. That being the case, Jesup planned some treachery of his own.⁶

Orders were sent to Hernandez to meet with Osceola and the others, and included with the orders was a list of questions to ask the Indians. If the

questions weren't answered satisfactorily, Hernandez was to take the Indians prisoner, white flag or not. On the twenty-first Hernandez and about two hundred soldiers met with Osceola, Coacoochee, John Cavallo, and about eighty warriors at their camp near Ft. Peyton. As the meeting began, the soldiers commenced forming a ring around the Indians, which made the Indians point out that they had not come in to surrender, but to hear a talk. Hernandez began to ask Jesup's questions, and when he received evasive answers, he gave the prearranged signal. Before the Indians could even raise a rifle, they found themselves surrounded.⁷

For Osceola, the war was over. Taken to the fortress at St. Augustine, he was later transferred to Fort Moultrie at Charleston. Three months after his capture, he was dead. The official cause of death was quinsy (severe sore throat) and complications from malaria. Although romantics would claim he died of a broken heart, there is little reason to doubt the doctor's word. Surgeon Nathan Jarvis had reported that Osceola did not look well when captured, and rumors had been circulating for some time that the Indian leader was ill.⁸

The legend of Osceola, already commenced before his capture, only intensified with his death. His passion, and those of the Seminole who fought beside him, was something any person could understand. No matter how much exaggerated, the basic facts caught the American people's romantic imagination. A simple man had fought desperately to defend his homeland against impossible odds, had been captured by treachery, and had died a prisoner. Totally accurate or not, it was the kind of tragic tale Americans could easily embrace.

Journalist Thomas W. Storrow, writing in the *Knickerbocker* magazine, pointed out that Osceola's "life was engaged in a nobler cause than that which incites the actions of many whom the world calls great. . . . If those who have devastated the earth to gratify their selfish ambition or thirst for conquest have historians to record their deeds, and poets to sing their praises, let us not withhold a token of applause to one who committed fewer wrongs, and during life was a brave defender of his country."⁹

It is difficult for us to realize just how famous Osceola became. For almost forty years he was the most recognizable symbol of the Indian resistance to the inexorable onslaught of the white man. Almost half the states of the union have a town or some other public place named after the man. It was not until the time of Sitting Bull and Chief Joseph that another Indian was able to eclipse the fame of Osceola.¹⁰ As the writer of a *Niles' Register* article remarked, "Such was *Oceola* [*sic*], who will long be remembered as the man that with the feeblest means produced the most terrible effects."¹¹



Osceola (Billy Powell) captured under a flag of truce created a martyr and a symbol of Native American resistance. Painting by George Catlin.

State Archives of Florida, <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/26212>.

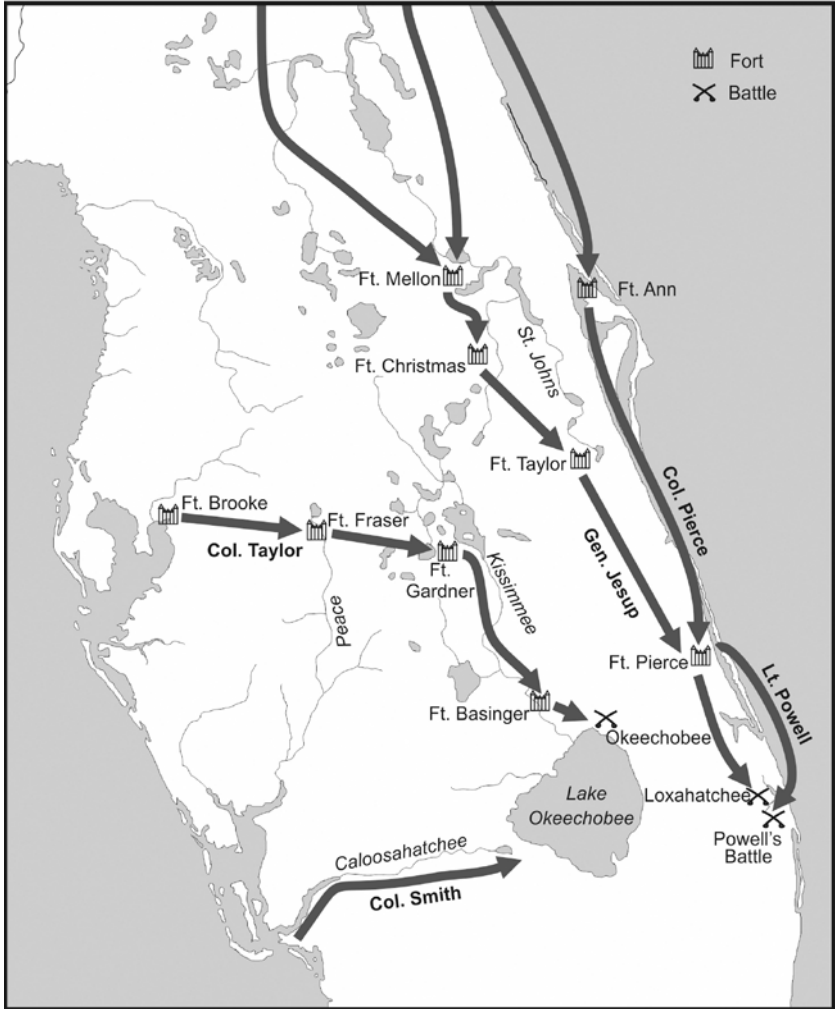
If Osceola was the hero of these newly created folk tales, General Jesup was the villain. In his own defense, Jesup pointed out that the Capitulation of March 6 was still in effect, and that the Indians had been told that the white flag would be honored only for surrender, not for new negotiations. In Jesup's eyes, the seizure was intended to prevent any Indian treachery. A rescue of Philip may well have been the Indians' intentions,

but it does little to negate the fact that Jesup was engaged in a deceit of his own. Most people understood that two wrongs do not make a right, though Jesup did receive considerable support from those who wanted the Seminole defeated, no matter what it took. If no one honored a flag of truce, how could a conflict be ended, other than by the complete annihilation of one side by the other? In the end, practical considerations meant nothing to those steeped in the romantic tradition. The cult of Osceola had begun, and there was no stopping it.¹²

By late fall 1837 the leadership and manpower of the Seminole people had been severely damaged, and Jesup hoped that a strong offensive would bring in the remainder of the hostile bands. Men and supplies had been pouring into Florida, and the call for volunteers had been so successful that Jesup found he had more men than he could use. Companies of volunteers had come from as far west as Missouri and as far north as Pennsylvania. By the time the campaign commenced, the total force was about nine thousand men, an unprecedented number for an Indian war.¹³

Jesup's plan was to divide his force into several columns, each one operating independently, but all moving in a general southerly direction. The objective was to drive the Seminole relentlessly, forcing them to surrender, stand and fight, or flee to the inhospitable Everglades. The first order of business was to clear the St. Johns and Ocklawaha River areas, where many of the Seminole were thought to be concentrated. To accomplish this, Jesup ordered several columns to advance on Fort Mellon at Lake Monroe by different routes, thereby covering the entire area. Once all the columns were at Fort Mellon, Jesup would lead the combined force south toward the eastern Everglades.¹⁴

In the meantime, Col. Zachary Taylor would go east from Tampa Bay to the Kissimmee River and then scour both sides of that river and the north and east shores of Lake Okeechobee. Taylor was also tasked with patrolling the Gulf Coast from the Withlacoochee to the Caloosahatchee to prevent the Indians from fleeing back into those areas. Lt. Col. Benjamin Pierce would begin his portion of the campaign at St. Augustine, but would then split off and go down the Indian River and set up Fort Pierce as a supply depot at Mosquito Inlet, which would then service future posts farther south. At the same time, Lt. Levin Powell of the navy would take a combined army/navy force and penetrate the southeast coast. To keep the Seminole confined to the Everglades, Col. Persifor Smith and his Louisiana Volunteers would go up the Caloosahatchee River on the southwest coast and cover the territory from there south. Just in case any Indians managed to evade the dragnet, Gen. Charles Nelson and a force of Georgia Volunteers



General Jesup's campaign of 1837–1838.

Map by John Missall.

would protect the northern portions of the peninsula. If the war could be won by sheer force of numbers, Jesup intended to do it.¹⁵

While the plan certainly had more facets than Winfield Scott's, Jesup was careful not to make the same mistakes. First off, the various columns' moves were not so perfectly timed, and no grand entrapment was planned. If the Seminole chose to stand and fight, the army would be glad to accommodate. If the Indians chose to flee, they would be happy to pursue. Second, as the columns moved they would build roads and open supply

depots, allowing the army to maintain a presence in the field while keeping a relentless pressure on the Indians. Sooner or later the Seminole would be forced to surrender or stand their ground.¹⁶

Jesup had wanted to begin his campaign in early November, but events were conspiring against him. If nothing else, troops and supplies were taking longer to arrive than anticipated, and it would be the first of December before everything was in place. In the meantime, Washington had sent a delegation of Cherokee leaders to help negotiate an end to the war. When they arrived at Fort Mellon, Jesup listened to their proposed message to the Seminole but didn't like what he heard. His orders were to remove the Seminole to Indian Territory, not negotiate a new treaty that would allow them to remain in Florida. After setting the matter straight he sent the Cherokee out to meet with the Seminole.¹⁷

Personally, Jesup was not opposed to allowing the Indians to remain in Florida. He knew the difficulty of the task before him and what it would cost in terms of lives lost and money spent. If the campaign could be avoided by letting the Seminole occupy land in the extreme southern portion of the peninsula, he would be happy to call off the offensive. To that end he dispatched Captain Vinton on a confidential mission to Washington to propose such an arrangement.¹⁸ Vinton arrived in Washington on November 20 and went immediately to the War Department. Secretary of War Joel Poinsett read Jesup's letter and listened to Vinton's arguments, but remained unconvinced. In a letter to Jesup, Vinton reported:

Much however as the Govt. desires peace with the Seminoles, I see no indication of the slightest change of policy. In the course of my argument I think I brought the Secy to a serious doubt as to the propriety of pursuing it,—for he was reduced to this sole reply, "I am not my own master in this business—we are compelled to go on." Thus, my dear Genl, there seems to be a fatality in this business, urging us forward even in spite of justice and our better reason.¹⁹

In a later letter to Jesup, Vinton, who had spent several years serving at the War Department and was familiar with many of the senior officials, elaborated on his meeting with Poinsett:

The main result of my interview with the Secy of War, was an unqualified conviction on my part that nothing but a thorough accomplishment of the great object of the war (the emigration of the Seminoles) would satisfy the Government. However pained & embarrassed the Executive

might feel in respect to this protracted controversy, still no alternative to the principle of absolute coercion was to be admitted.²⁰

At first the Cherokee mediation seemed to be working. The delegation returned with Micanopy, Coa Hadjo, and several other prominent leaders. Micanopy insisted he was coming in to stay, agreed to honor the previous treaties, and sent messengers out to his people. To help convince the others to come in, the delegation went with the messengers, but while they were out many of those who had accompanied Micanopy fled back to the woods. Micanopy and Coa Hadjo, who seem to have been willing to emigrate, remained with Jesup, and Coa Hadjo even asked that his people be secured to prevent their escape. Jesup quickly complied, and seventy-two Indians were shipped to St. Augustine. As far as Jesup was concerned, the Cherokee mission had been a failure and had delayed the beginning of the campaign by two weeks. For his part, Captain Vinton wasn't surprised at the outcome. He told Jesup, "The eagerness with which such a 'straw' was grasped at by the Depart't shows the feverish state of mind prevalent there."²¹

Of even greater consequence for the campaign was the escape of a group of captives from their confinement at Fort Marion in St. Augustine. The formidable stone structure still stands (now known by its original name of Castillo de San Marcos), and visitors can see the storerooms where Seminole prisoners were housed while awaiting deportation to the West. Most of the storerooms had tall, rounded ceilings, and high on the outer wall was a narrow opening about three feet high but only eight inches wide. Two bars ran across the opening, preventing even a child from crawling through. In November 1837 one of those rooms held about twenty-five prisoners, including Coacoochee, Osceola, King Philip, and John Cavallo. According to Coacoochee's account of the escape, the Indians fasted and took medicine, losing weight so that they could fit through the opening. Placing the blade of a knife between the rocks, the Indians were able to stand upon the handle to reach the window. From that position a warrior would slowly work at the mortar that held the bars in place. Eventually, one of the bars came free.

Leaving the frail Philip and ailing Osceola behind, Coacoochee, Cavallo, sixteen men, and two women decided to take their chances on the night of November 29, 1837. Frustrated by a guard who wanted to socialize with the captives, they ignored him until he went outside and fell asleep. They then climbed up to the small ledge just below the window and, one by one, slipped through. It could not have been easy. The coquina rock that makes up the walls of the fortress is composed of sharp fossilized shells, which would have cut and scraped their skin as they inched through. Once

outside, a rope of knotted blankets was used to lower the escapees to the ground, some twenty-five feet below. Free of captivity, the warriors and the two women made their way south. In Coacoochee the Seminole now had a new “war spirit,” and the whites knew it. Private Lynch of the Dragoons remarked, “I consider him the smartest Indian in the U.S. and every way superior to the celebrated Osceola.” There was little doubt that Coacoochee would continue the struggle that Osceola and Philip had started.²²

By the beginning of December 1837 Jesup was ready to commence his campaign. The several columns that had been scouring the Ocklawaha and St. Johns areas were gathered at Fort Mellon and ready to begin the march south. To keep the army supplied, Lt. John McLaughlin of the navy took about a dozen shallow-draft Mackinaw boats south through Mosquito Lagoon and erected Fort Ann at a narrow strip of land known as the “haulover.” From there boats could be portaged to the Indian River, which led to points farther south. Another contingent traveled down the St. Johns and established depots that would be named Fort Christmas (erected on Christmas Day, and near where a replica fort now stands, east of Orlando) and Fort Taylor at the headwaters of the St. Johns. The rest of Jesup’s column would be moving overland, an arduous trek through terrain that was often underwater and completely uncharted.²³

On the west coast, Zachary Taylor was also ready to begin offensive operations. Lt. Col. Foster had gone ahead in mid-November to create a road and erect depots running east from Tampa Bay, taking with him 790 men and 120 wagons. Also with them as a guide was Abraham, Micanopy’s slave and counselor. By the end of the month Fort Fraser was completed at the Peace River, where Taylor and the remainder of the column joined Foster’s group for the trek inland. On December 3 the army arrived at the Kissimmee and began construction of Fort Gardner. Three days later Jumper came in for a talk. The headman, one of the most powerful of the Alachua Seminole and a close relative of Micanopy, had come to the realization that he and his band could no longer outrun the Americans. The following day he agreed to surrender.²⁴

For two weeks Taylor remained at Fort Gardner, gathering supplies and preparing his men. On December 20 the army commenced its march south along the Kissimmee, on the way passing Jumper and his people as they made their way toward Tampa. Two days later they came across the abandoned camp of Alligator and his band. After erecting Fort Basinger about twenty miles north of Lake Okeechobee, they crossed the Kissimmee with three days’ provisions, leaving the sick and most of their heavy baggage

behind. On the morning of the twenty-fourth they captured four warriors drying beef, and later in the evening a young warrior was taken prisoner while skulking around the camp. He told them a large body of Seminole was only a few miles ahead, ready for a fight.²⁵

As Taylor put it, “I determined at once on indulging them as soon as practicable.”²⁶ On Christmas Day the army continued its march, and about 11:00 a.m. came upon a small prairie where about three hundred cattle were grazing. Here they captured another young warrior who pointed them toward a dense hammock where the Indians were waiting. Taylor had a considerable force, about eight hundred men, made up of Foster’s Fourth Infantry, Lt. Col. Ramsay Thompson’s Sixth Infantry, Lt. Col. William Davenport’s First Infantry, and about two hundred Missouri Volunteers under Col. Richard Gentry. Arrayed against them were about four hundred Indian and black warriors led by Abiaki, Coacoochee, Alligator, and John Cavallo.²⁷

Although the Seminole were outnumbered two to one they had the advantage of having picked an extraordinarily defensible position to make their stand. They had gathered in a dense wooded hammock on the north shore of the lake, a position that provided excellent cover. In front of the hammock was a swamp, “three-quarters of a mile in breadth, being totally impassable for horse, and nearly so for foot, covered with a thick growth of saw-grass, five feet high, and about knee-deep in mud and water.”²⁸ In order to reach the Seminole, Taylor’s men would have to wade the swamp, perfect targets for the warriors, who steadied their rifles against fallen logs or notched-out branches.²⁹

Taylor’s tactics were much more straightforward than his enemy’s: His troops would simply face down the Seminole rifles, march across the swamp, and charge into the hammock. There really seemed to be no other choice. He did send two companies of mounted infantrymen to investigate a possible route into the hammock from the west, but didn’t expect any success with it. At about 12:30 he formed his men into their lines of battle. Leading the assault would be the Missourians. Behind them were two Infantry regiments, the Sixth on the right and the Fourth on the left. In all, the force totaled about 360 men, making the odds more balanced. Taylor’s own First Infantry was held in reserve and did not enter the battle until it was almost over.³⁰

The Seminole waited and watched as the volunteers marched toward them, their progress slowed by the mud and sawgrass. As the soldiers came into close range a single Seminole shot rang out, then the entire hammock erupted into smoke and fire. Volunteers began to fall, and among the first to be hit was their leader, Colonel Gentry. Before long, most of the officers had

been wounded, and the entire regiment had suffered considerable casualties. Pinned down, the Missourians fired off several defensive volleys, until the advancing Sixth Infantry passed, allowing them to retire from the field.³¹

The majority of the Seminole seemed to be in the western portion of the hammock, and after the volunteers left the field most of their fire was directed at the Sixth Infantry. As was their habit, the Indians selectively targeted the officers, killing Colonel Thompson, Capt. Joseph Van Swearingen, and Lts. John P. Center and Francis J. Brooke. Two other officers were wounded, leaving only one untouched. Disciplined soldiers, the infantrymen held their ground and continued to fire while taking heavy casualties. Finally, with half their men killed or wounded, the Sixth fell back to reorganize.³²

An experienced Indian fighter, Colonel Foster of the Fourth Infantry did not march his men in an orderly line toward the hammock. Instead, after firing one or two volleys as they approached the hammock, he ordered the men to fix bayonets and charge the Indian stronghold at a run, shouting and swearing at the top of their lungs. Joined by Capt. Thomas Noel and the remnants of the Sixth and a few Missourians, Foster and his men gained the edge of the hammock. At first the Seminole held their ground, but when the soldiers came so close that there wasn't time to reload their rifles, the Indians began an orderly retreat. It was not a rout, and the Seminole counterattacked several times. As Foster later wrote, "These attacks were as unusual & unexpected as they were desperate & determined."³³

In spite of the counterattacks the soldiers would not be stopped, and before long their line stretched from the outer edge of the hammock to the shore of the lake. The Seminole, having put up a stout defense, escaped along the shoreline or in canoes they had previously placed on the beach. As the battle was winding down the reserve First Infantry entered the hammock but did little fighting. The fiercest battle of the Florida War had lasted approximately three hours.³⁴

When army surgeon Jacob R. Motte heard reports of the battle he called it a "disastrous victory." True, Taylor had forced the Seminole to retreat and he occupied the disputed ground at the end of the day, but the price had been staggering. Between the volunteers and the Fourth and Sixth Infantries there were twenty-seven men killed and 107 wounded, some of whom would later die of their wounds. Upon seeing the remnants of the Sixth, Lt. Joseph Rowe Smith commented, "Poor fellows!—some 60 or 70 wounded, broken arms, legs, & balls through all parts of the body." Approximately a third of the men who had initially crossed the sawgrass swamp were casualties, and most were from the volunteers and the Sixth. With so

many of their leaders slain or wounded, both units were essentially out of action. Taylor also lost use of the Fourth, as they were assigned to escort the wounded and the remnants of the other two regiments back to Tampa.³⁵

For Taylor, it was the beginning of the road that eventually led him to the White House. Before the battle, Taylor was just another colonel in the army. Okeechobee gave him the rank and fame he would need to gain further renown in the war with Mexico ten years later. The victory also gave him a reputation as a winner. That reputation made him the logical choice to be given command in the early stages of the Mexican conflict. His victories in that war were what made him president. It is one of those strange and interesting twists of fate that allowed the Seminole to make a very unintentional mark on American history.

If the Americans had won a “disastrous victory,” the Seminole had every right to feel as if they had suffered a satisfying defeat. According to later estimates by both Indians and whites, the Seminole had suffered only about a dozen fatalities and about fifteen wounded. If their primary intent had been to inflict more damage than they received, they had certainly done it. But they had an even more important reason for making the stand they did. The army was pursuing them relentlessly and closing fast. If the Americans weren’t stopped or at least slowed down, the slow-moving women, children, and elders might be captured. The Battle of Okeechobee cut Taylor’s force effectively in half and forced him to halt his offensive for a week or so while he buried the dead, tended to the wounded, and resupplied. Only the “reserve” First Infantry was left intact, and they remained at Fort Basinger, patrolling the north side of the lake and taking the occasional prisoner. The main force of the Seminole had lived to fight another day.³⁶

And fight they did. While Taylor was marching up and down the Kissimmee and doing battle at Okeechobee, Jesup’s combined army was moving south through the eastern portion of the peninsula, making its way toward the supply depot at Fort Pierce. Part of Jesup’s command was a flotilla of thirty-three small boats commanded by Lt. Levin Powell of the navy, whose mission was to penetrate and examine the many inlets and small waterways of Florida’s southeast coast. It was a motley crew of about two hundred men, being made up of both soldiers and sailors, with many of the sailors being black. With Powell was Mr. Joseph Johnston, a recently resigned army officer who was acting as topographical engineer, and who would later be one of the senior Confederate generals.³⁷

Topographers were important because not only was Jesup’s army fighting a war, it was also mapping Florida. The map of Florida supplied by the

War Department at the beginning of the campaign didn't even show Lake Okeechobee. True, everyone knew there was a large lake somewhere in south Florida, but no one in the army knew exactly where it was or the extent of it because no cartographer had ever been there. In explaining the difficulties he and his men faced in removing the Seminole, Jesup told the Secretary of War, "The greater portion of their country was an unexplored wilderness, of the interior of which we were as ignorant of as of the interior of China."³⁸

Powell and his little fleet gathered at Fort Ann north of Cape Canaveral in mid-December and began their journey south, keeping to the Indian River, which ran behind the barrier islands of Florida's east coast for about 120 miles. Entering the ocean at St. Lucie Inlet, they continued along the coast until they reached Jupiter Inlet, about twenty miles farther south, on January 15. Exploring up the Loxahatchee River they found an Indian trail, disembarked from their vessels, and followed it until they came upon a large herd of cattle and horses. They also managed to capture an Indian woman and forced her to lead them to the Indian camp. After following her for about five miles they came to a swamp and were suddenly attacked by a large force of Seminole. Little did they know they had run into the same Indians who had mauled Taylor's army three weeks earlier.³⁹

Powell ordered a charge, but soon came to the realization that he was hopelessly outnumbered. As the Seminole counterattacked, soldiers and sailors fell dead or wounded. Some of the sailors, raw recruits with no battlefield experience, broke and ran. Powell, himself wounded, ordered a hasty retreat and was forced to leave the bodies of the dead on the battlefield. Dr. Fredrick Leitner, the group's surgeon, knew he was mortally wounded and selflessly told the others to leave him behind. As the group hastened back to their boats, the troops of the army fought a rear-guard action, holding the Indians off as the sailors ran ahead of them. When Lt. Henry Fowler, the officer in charge of the soldiers, was wounded, Joe Johnston took command and made sure that everyone made it safely back to the boats. As Powell's boats put back to sea they counted their casualties. Five had died and twenty-two were wounded, with every officer having suffered an injury. Johnston had not been hit, but there were seven bullet holes in his clothing.⁴⁰

Powell's flotilla hastened back to Fort Pierce, arriving there on the sixteenth. General Jesup, there with a portion of his army, immediately made plans to pursue the Seminole and perhaps bring them to another fight. Leaving Fort Pierce on the seventeenth he marched inland to meet up with General Eustis, then turned south toward Jupiter Inlet. It was a tough

trek, especially since many of the soldier's shoes had deteriorated from the excessive marching.⁴¹

Jesup and his army of six hundred dragoons (mounted cavalry), four hundred men of the Third Artillery, and five hundred Tennessee and Alabama Volunteers reached Jupiter on the twenty-fourth, where they received word that several hundred Seminole had taken up positions in a dense hammock just ahead. Jesup immediately ordered an attack by the dragoons and volunteers. Soon joining the fray were the artillerymen, who fired a cannon and Congreve rockets at the Indians, forcing them to fall back across the nearby Loxahatchee River. The heaviest fighting was taking place where the Tennessee Volunteers were positioned, and when Jesup attempted to lead them forward, he found himself left behind and exposed. Finally, a group of dismounted dragoons swam the river. Having inflicted enough damage on the army, the Seminole and black warriors retreated, leaving Jesup to claim another dubious victory. Total loss to the army was seven killed and thirty wounded, including the general, who suffered a severe flesh wound to his left cheek from a bullet that also shattered his glasses. Though no one knew it at the time, the last major battle of the war had been fought.⁴²

By the end of January 1838, Jesup had accomplished much of what he had set out to do. The Seminole were considerably weakened, and the majority were either on their way west or already there. Of the major Indian leaders, only Abiaki and Coacoochee seemed willing to fight to the bitter end, but most of their people were in retreat, heading for safe havens in the Everglades. For other Seminole the time for fighting had passed, as it had become evident that the army would pursue them until every last Indian was either dead or in Indian Territory. Osceola, the war spirit, was dying in a white prison. Micanopy, King Philip, and Jumper had all been captured or had surrendered. Countless families had been split between the wilds of Florida and the strange land in the West, making future surrenders more likely.⁴³

Jesup would have liked to pursue the remaining Seminole, but he was stuck at Fort Jupiter until supplies came in, most notably shoes for the soldiers. On February 5 the footwear and other supplies arrived, and he was able to resume the march, moving his army twelve miles south. That night General Eustis came to his tent with a suggestion: Perhaps it was time to make peace. In all likelihood, if the remaining Seminole were allowed to live in the inhospitable Everglades, they might be willing to lay down their arms. Jesup had to admit that he'd been considering something similar. The following day Colonel Twiggs and most of the other senior officers approached and

suggested the same thing. Jesup decided to give it a try, and on the seventh he sent a messenger to the Seminole.⁴⁴

The messenger soon returned with a warrior known as Halleck Hadjo, who seemed interested in the proposal. The next day Halleck returned with Tuskegee, the leader of a group of several hundred Seminole who were encamped some miles away. The talks went well. According to Surgeon Motte, Halleck said that they were willing to do anything rather than fight anymore. They had lost all their horses and cattle, and their wives and children were dying from the hardships of living on the run. They would emigrate if they had to, but they begged to be allowed to remain, and, as Motte put it, "They would thankfully receive the smallest piece of ground that might be given to them, no matter how bad, so that it was only in Florida, and big enough for them to spread their blankets upon."⁴⁵

Jesup and all his officers knew the futility of trying to pursue the remnant Seminole into the Everglades. He also knew that it was the same proposal that had been rejected a few months earlier when he'd sent Captain Vinton to Washington. Yet the situation had changed during the intervening months. Several large battles had been fought, hundreds of prisoners had been taken, and the Seminole were scattered and exhausted. It was certainly worth an attempt. He told the Indians he would do his best to convince the administration to accept the proposal, that he would take the army back to Fort Jupiter, and that they must encamp near there within ten days.⁴⁶

On February 11 Jesup wrote a long letter to Secretary of War Poinsett, laying out his reasoning for ending the war. In it he said, "In regard to the Seminoles, we have committed the error of attempting to remove them when their lands were not required for agricultural purposes; when they were not in the way of white inhabitants; and when the greater portion of their country was an unexplored wilderness. . . . My decided opinion is, that unless *immediate* emigration be abandoned, the war will continue for years to come, and at constantly accumulating expense." Jesup was a realist. He knew that sooner or later whites would encroach upon even the most worthless corners of the peninsula, and the Seminole would once again be pressured to remove. But that might not take place for decades. Why not let them remain until then, and in the process save countless lives and millions of dollars?⁴⁷

As promised, the Seminole encamped near Fort Jupiter while everyone awaited word from Washington. While waiting, the two camps settled into a routine. The Seminole, in what finery they still held onto, attended a ceremonial council at the army camp, and officers, bringing plenty of whiskey, attended a dance at the Indian camp. It had been a hard war, especially for

the Seminole women and children. Surgeon Motte noted, “The squaws with but few exceptions presented a most squalid appearance; being destitute of even the necessary clothing to cover their nakedness; many having nothing around them but the old corn bags we had thrown away, and which they had picked up in camp, and along our trail.”⁴⁸

Jesup knew it was going to be a hard sell, and prior to receiving Poinsett’s answer, he wrote a second letter to the secretary clarifying the basis for his recommendation. Warning of the consequences of not rethinking the policy of immediate and total removal, Jesup argued, “To persevere in the course we have been pursuing for three years past would be a reckless waste of blood and treasure.”⁴⁹

The letters took two weeks to reach Washington. A few days after the first letter’s arrival Poinsett responded to Jesup, rejecting the suggestion. Referring to the Indian Removal Act, Poinsett wrote, “It is useless to recur to the principles and motives which induced the government to determine their removal to the west. The acts of the executive and the laws of congress evince a determination to carry out measures and it is to be regarded as the settled policy of the country. . . . Whether the government ought not to have waited until the Seminole were pressed upon by the white population . . . is not a question for the executive now to consider.”⁵⁰

It sounded like a complete rejection, but it wasn’t. The secretary first pointed out that the administration had hoped that with all the means at Jesup’s disposal the Seminole could have been totally defeated. Realizing it wasn’t possible due to the terrain and the Seminole’s tenacity, Poinsett allowed that a “temporary arrangement” with the Indians could be made for the summer, as long as the white settlements could be protected. Knowing the season for campaigning would soon be ending and that Jesup’s heart was no longer in it, he issued vague instructions for the disposition of the troops and orders to deal with a small group that was committing depredations in the northern part of the territory. As far as those particular Indians were concerned, “They ought to be captured, or destroyed.”⁵¹

It must be kept in mind that Jesup was not, in any way, asking Poinsett to abandon the removal policy. He was asking for nothing more than a slight modification to it. Indeed, he saw his proposal as the best way to speed the Indians’ removal. He felt that capturing the many small groups scattered over the peninsula would take years to accomplish. It did. He knew that in the meantime, the Seminole would continue their desperate attacks on homesteaders. They did. By allowing the Indians to live peacefully in remote regions, he hoped the killings would stop, and, when the time for removal arrived, the government would know where the Indians were and could

easily capture them. It was, as time would tell, a sound recommendation, and in a war full of bad decisions, Poinsett's rejection of Jesup's proposal stands out as one of the worst. The officers most knowledgeable in the subject had recommended a plan of action that could terminate an unpopular and expensive war, yet the government had ignored their advice. In the end, it was a political decision, not a military one. To leave even a few hundred Seminole in Florida was politically unacceptable.



Secretary of War Joel Poinsett. Diplomat and lifelong promoter of science. Painting by Charles Fenderich, 1838.

Courtesy of Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2003656274/>.

The decision to carry on with the war seems to have rested primarily with the secretary of war. Son of a wealthy physician, Poinsett was well educated and had traveled extensively in Europe as a youth. As did most Americans of the time, Poinsett shared in a belief of American greatness and in a republican form of government. Energetic and intensely interested in military matters, the young Poinsett became a diplomat, serving first in South America, then as his country's first ambassador to the newly independent Mexico. Whenever possible, he sang the praises of republicanism and democracy, sometimes earning the enmity of monarchists and dictators.

Interested in the sciences, he was responsible for bringing the poinsettia to the United States and helped found the National Institute for the Promotion of Science, which was soon superseded by the Smithsonian, an institution he also helped promote. Part of that interest in science extended to ethnography, especially where it applied to the Indians. He believed the Indians to be a "degraded" race, and that the degradation had been brought on by the coming of the white man. He therefore felt it the responsibility of the white man to care for the Indians and help them reach some state of civilization. When it came to Indian Removal, Poinsett was convinced that it was best for both races.⁵²

Poinsett did not reject Jesup's proposal because he felt it would not work. At no time did he argue with the general's reasoning. An intelligent and thoughtful man, Poinsett understood the political realities. For many, it seemed an affront to the nation's honor for America to acquiesce to the Seminole on any point and to any degree. Allowing even one Seminole to remain meant that America had given up, that the glorious United States had been defeated by a group of "savages." As the editor of the *St. Augustine Florida Herald* put it, "The people of Florida will not submit to it. . . . The national honor and dignity are too deeply concerned for it to listen for one moment to the proposed arrangement."⁵³

Most of the opposition to any "dishonorable" compromise with the Seminole came from two quarters. First were the residents of Florida, who understandably lived in fear of the Indians. Next were southern slaveholders. Although the flow of runaways to Florida had largely ceased and most of the blacks had been removed from the conflict, slave owners could not forget the fears they had lived with for so long. The idea of leaving the Seminole in Florida still appeared as a threat to their economic and social well-being.

Another strong influence upon Poinsett's mind was former president Andrew Jackson. Old Hickory may have retired from office, but he was still the most influential man in America, even though his tide of domination was on the ebb. Both Poinsett and Van Buren owed their positions to

Jackson, and both had helped formulate many of his policies. Contacted frequently by Poinsett regarding Indian Removal, Jackson responded with more than just advice and opinions. On August 14, 1837, Jackson informed Poinsett that Maj. William Lauderdale and five companies of Tennessee Volunteers would be put in service for one year to “put an end to this puny war or die in the attempt.”⁵⁴ Recommending a method for ending the war, Jackson told Poinsett to “find where their women are . . . and capture them—this done, they will at once surrender.” Disappointed with the war, Jackson’s letter of December 13 might have impressed upon Poinsett the need for the administration to prove itself. “I am truly surprised at the force collected in Florida—half that force was sufficient to put a speedy end to the war. . . . It has been a disgraceful war to the American character, and its army.”⁵⁵

The most pressing reason for rejecting Jesup’s proposal was the one Poinsett had alluded to: it threatened the policy of Indian Removal. Today, when Native Americans are seen (stereotypically) as spiritual icons or tourist attractions, we find it hard to understand the threat they posed, rightly or wrongly, to white society. In the early nineteenth century, America was growing at an astounding rate, and the biggest threat to that growth was the presence of Native Americans. The United States had a large frontier that was forever moving, and everywhere along that frontier, white settlers lived in mortal fear of their Indian neighbors. It was, of course, a two-sided coin. Indians also lived on that frontier and also lived in fear for their homes and families. The two groups existed side by side, engaged in a clash of cultures that seemed impossible to avoid. Even those who saw the evils of white expansionism believed that the only way to prevent Indian hostilities was to somehow separate the two groups.

Jackson and his followers had spent considerable “political capital” in getting the Indian Removal Act pushed through Congress and were not about to let the effort be weakened. Among those followers were Van Buren and Poinsett. To admit the policy to be in error, even in the smallest degree, seems to have been almost unthinkable to them. To renegotiate with the Seminole might lead to renegotiation with the Cherokee, who were claiming fraud concerning the treaty that was forcing that tribe from its homeland. News of government flexibility might give heart to other Indian nations who were fighting to retain their homelands. In the end, the government lacked the courage to modify its policy, and the war continued, as Jesup had warned, with “a reckless waste of blood and treasure.”⁵⁶

When General Jesup received word that his plan for ending the war had been rejected, he was faced with a problem: How was he to break the news to the hundreds of Indians encamped nearby? A message was sent to Tuskegee and the other headmen on March 19, instructing them to attend a conference at the general's quarters at noon the next day. The Indians politely declined but did not flee their camp. Within the Indian encampment were more than five hundred Seminole who had come in peace and were not his prisoners. Jesup could, as Poinsett had suggested, make some sort of arrangement with the Indians that would allow them to remain in Florida for the summer, but what would that accomplish? If he simply let them disappear into the wilds, the government would once again have to expend all that "blood and treasure" to hunt them down next winter.⁵⁷

For Jesup, the opportunity to remove such a large body of Seminole from the conflict was too great to be ignored. On the night of the twenty-first the Seminole held a dance where "they were supplied with a large quantity of liquor—from what quarter was not said—but they all gave themselves up to indulge to excess—at 4 o'clock the following mor'g [morning] their camp was surrounded by the Dragoons & Artillery—& on the sounding of a bugle at daylight, the line closed upon the camp."⁵⁸ One officer was not happy with the way the capture had taken place. "These people were all under the protection of the white flag. Thus has been again perpetrated a great natural crime by Gen. Jesup."⁵⁹

At this point Jesup probably didn't care. The damage to his reputation was already done, and he knew he would soon be leaving the theater of war. In his own mind he no doubt felt justified in the action. Tuskegee had asked to be allowed to remain in Florida, but had said that if that wasn't permissible his people would abide by the government's wishes. By taking them prisoner Jesup wasn't giving the Seminole a chance to change their minds. Without shedding a drop of blood he had removed 513 Indians from the conflict, which could be added to the 165 blacks he had sent to Tampa a few weeks earlier.⁶⁰

The general may have been disappointed at Poinsett's decision, but he still had a job to do. Abiaki was now the primary leader of the Seminole, and his Mikasuki band was the most determined not to leave Florida. In hopes of capturing the wily chief, Jesup had earlier dispatched Major Lauderdale and his force of Tennessee Volunteers to New River, where they established Fort Lauderdale. Hearing reports that Abiaki and his people were located on a large island in the Everglades west of Fort Lauderdale, Jesup ordered

Lt. Col. James Bankhead to attempt a capture. Joined by Lieutenant Powell of the navy and Lauderdale's volunteers, Bankhead and his men attacked the island on March 23.⁶¹

Just approaching the island was an ordeal. As one officer put it, "The men were divided among the boats—putting their muskets & cartridge boxes in them—& marching each side & dragging the boats. We followed the trail for 7 hours—the men never less than 2 feet deep in mud & water—often to the middle & sometimes taken in to the shoulders. Yet, they went on with spirit & without complaint." Concealed by the tall sawgrass, the soldiers were able to get within six hundred yards of the island before being spotted. One of the officers went forward with a white flag in case the Seminole wanted to surrender, but was immediately fired upon. Bankhead ordered a charge, and the Indians, finding themselves nearly surrounded, quickly fled. Although no Indians were killed or captured, they were forced to leave behind most of their possessions: "All their cooking utensils consisting of pots, kettles, tins—axes—a considerable quantity of lead in bars—a canister of powder—a pack of clothing—deer skins, bullet moulds—30 bolts made of cattle's hides & many other things of great value to them in their destitute condition & which they cannot replace. There were also their graters for preparing coontie."⁶²

Bankhead was soon relieved by Lt. Col. William S. Harney, who continued the hunt for Abiaki and his people. Hearing that the Mikasuki were now in the Everglades southwest of Key Biscayne, Harney went in pursuit, and once again, on April 24, Abiaki and his people were forced to flee. As Harney and his men were preparing to continue the pursuit, they received orders sending them out of Florida. The campaign was over.⁶³

For many Seminole, the point had been reached where it was of no further use to carry on the war. It would certainly have been a painful and difficult decision. How long could the women, children, and elders be expected to suffer the hardships of life on the run? Thousands of head of cattle had been taken, and for some groups, all their worldly possessions had been lost to the rapidly advancing army. Starvation and death from disease and exposure were realities that Seminole leaders could not ignore. With the army pressuring them so relentlessly, there was simply no time to rest or recuperate. As loved ones either turned themselves in or were taken prisoner, family ties and friendships became stronger than the will to fight. In early April a group of about 360 led by Alligator surrendered. Lured by a promise of freedom in the west if they would emigrate, Black Seminoles saw little reason to remain in Florida. Among those turning themselves in was John Cavallo, the last important black leader. Jesup should have felt a degree of



John Cavallo (John Horse, Gopher John) would later lead a large party of Black Seminoles to Mexico, where slavery had been abolished.

State Archives of Florida, <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/31659>.

satisfaction. It had been a distasteful campaign, and he had been subject to harsh public criticism, but he had gotten the job done. The general had, in the best American military tradition, done a soldier's duty.⁶⁴

Still, we wonder if Jesup was satisfied with his performance or angrily frustrated with the outcome of the campaign. Overall, he could claim to have accomplished the task with which he had been charged. His men had faced the Seminole several times and, with the exception of Powell's battle, had not been defeated. He had, in the course of his tenure, captured almost 2,400 Indians and blacks, and had removed most of the powerful leaders. Due to his efforts, there would soon be more Seminole in Indian Territory than in Florida. The Indians who remained were scattered, desperate, and destitute. From a tactical perspective, the Seminole had been defeated. True, there were still Indians in Florida, but had it ever been realistic to think that every last one would be captured and sent west? From a professional standpoint, the general should have been able to take pride in what he had accomplished.⁶⁵

Yet the war was not over. One can only imagine Jesup's frustrations: He felt he had won the war, but the politicians wouldn't let it end; although scattered and in hiding, many Seminole were still not subdued; many of his captives had been taken in a less-than-honorable fashion; he had turned the army into slave catchers. Jesup's orders had been to remove the Seminole from Florida, not exterminate them, and he had accomplished the task better than any of his predecessors. He had not asked for the position and seems to have taken no joy in it, yet he had done his duty. An ungrateful nation did not thank him.

The nature of the conflict had changed, and it was time for a fresh approach. With the coming of the sickly season, Jesup's peak force of around nine thousand men was reduced to about twenty-three hundred. There would be no more large-scale offensives. There was also no longer the need for a man of Jesup's high rank to be in command. On April 29, 1838, he received word that when all was in order, he could resume his duties as Quartermaster General. In a little more than two weeks he was able to turn command over to Zachary Taylor.⁶⁶

May 1838–May 1839

Taylor's Squares and Macomb's Peace

We now encounter a situation that poses a problem for anyone attempting to write a narrative of the Florida War: Most of the major action of the war took place in the first two years of the conflict, yet the war continued for another four and a half years. The problem faced by the writer is how to put it all in perspective. Only one major engagement took place during the final four years of the war, but the killing and suffering continued. It can be likened to the life of a soldier on patrol during the Seminole Wars. He might spend weeks trudging through the slashing blades of a sawgrass prairie or wading through the knee-deep water of a cypress swamp, afflicted by fevers and diarrhea, sleeping unprotected from the elements on the wet earth, plagued by innumerable hordes of biting and stinging insects, all to spend an hour or two engaged in mortal combat with an elusive foe. The whole patrol, from start to finish, could have been described as “pure hell,” but when the soldier returned to the relative comfort of his post, what aspect of the patrol did he and his compatriots spend the most time talking about? In their own memories, the only thing that “happened” was the fight.

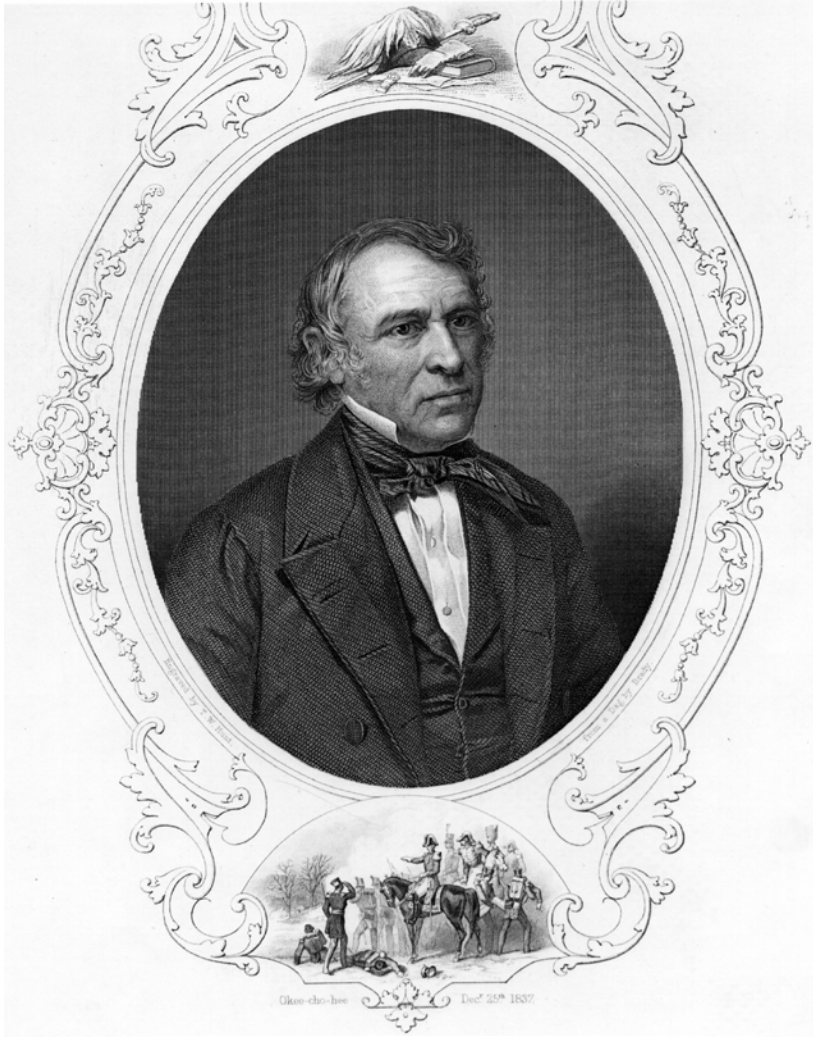
Historical records are no different. Historians devote their time almost exclusively to the mileposts, not the road. We note the battles, not the endless miles of the march. We record the changes of command, not the countless hours of administration. We report the senseless dying, not the innumerable days of productive living. The Florida War presents us with a classic example of this problem. We can devote several lengthy chapters to a span of slightly more than two years, yet have a hard time filling a single chapter on the remaining four years. It is, quite simply, a combination of the nature of the human mind and the nature of the conflict itself.

To counter this problem, we'll spend a little less time on the actual events of the war and explore some of the more intriguing aspects of the conflict. Just because the final four years of the Florida War were devoid of large battles, doesn't mean people weren't suffering and dying. Troops were still in motion, and Seminole war parties continued their attacks. No one, throughout Florida, could rest easy.

If the beginning of Jesup's command marked a turning point in the war, the end of his command brought with it a fundamental alteration in the manner in which the war was to be waged. The United States was no longer making war against the entire Seminole nation. With the exception of Abiaki and Coacoochee, most of the well-known leaders of the tribe were either dead or in the West. Officially the Seminole nation was now in Indian Territory, and those remaining in Florida were considered by whites as nothing more than outlaws. The administration should have done as Jesup recommended and declared the war over, with the acknowledgment that a sizable military presence would have to be maintained until the territory was completely pacified. No one did this, so officially, the conflict raged on.

Did it really make a difference what the official position was? How did rhetoric in Washington affect deeds on the ground in Florida? It all seemed to revolve around the term *expectations*. With the war unfinished, the army was expected to go on the offensive. They were also expected to remain on the offensive until every last Seminole was gone from Florida. Only then would the war be considered over. On the other hand, if "peace" had been declared, the army would have been expected to take up defensive positions and only react to aggressions by the Indians. The determination to continue the war also affected how the Seminole fought. Knowing the army was still intent on driving them out of Florida gave the Indians every incentive to strike back wherever and whenever they could. If the war had ended, they would have had every incentive to maintain the peace.

Going on the offensive led to its own set of expectations. The American people expected battles, and the army was expected to be victorious. The army expected to be well equipped, suppliers expected to be paid exorbitant prices for delivering goods to a remote war zone, and the volunteers, ever eager for a piece of the financial pie, expected to be called out. All of those things were expensive, but the American people expected their Congressmen to keep expenditures down. With some right, settlers expected to be safe within their homes while the army was out chasing hostile Indians. By contrast, a simple guarding of the frontier raised few such expectations, other than those of the lonely homesteader.



Zachary Taylor. From a poster commemorating the Battle of Okeechobee.

State Archives of Florida, <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/10896>.

The weight of these expectations fell most heavily upon the shoulders of Zachary Taylor. His supposed victory at the Battle of Okeechobee had marked him as a winner, won him a brevet promotion to brigadier general, and made him Jesup's successor. It was Taylor who was expected to bring the war to a conclusion. In that, he failed.

The Seminole, their numbers depleted and their former homes either occupied or under the careful watch of the army, had divided into small bands, living in remote locations the army couldn't find. For them, the reasons for fighting had not changed. They still wished to remain in their homeland, free to live life in the manner their culture called for. The fact that most of their friends and relations had been expelled from Florida was sad and infuriating but somewhat immaterial; there was nothing they could do to bring them back. For a few, the only viable way to end the despair, hunger, and loneliness was to surrender. On May 26 it was reported that twenty-four Indians had turned themselves in at Fort King.¹ About a month later a treaty was signed with the Apalachees living in the panhandle, sending them west.² As the weeks passed, the occasional Indian gave up or was captured, but it was only a trickle and certainly not enough to end the war.

Most disturbing to the whites, the Seminole refused to remain confined to the inhospitable Everglades. Near the end of May 1838 an inconclusive skirmish was fought between Florida militiamen and a group of Indians outside the Okefenokee Swamp in southeast Georgia. By June the Seminole were back in the Cove of the Withlacoochee, and fighting was reported near the San Felasco Hammock. Isolated murders and depredations were occurring throughout the territory, and everywhere in Florida nervous whites kept a wary eye out, never knowing when the wily Seminole would appear.³ To make matters worse, the War Department decided to dispense with the expensive volunteer units, though they were soon forced to reconsider and gave Taylor permission to take up to five hundred of the territorial forces into service.⁴

A good many people in the nation could not understand why it was taking so long to subdue the Florida Indians. Not willing to give the Seminole the credit due them, people were quick to blame the commanders on the ground or the officials in Washington, especially if they were of a different political persuasion. Others suggested that the Bahamians or the Cubans were supplying the Seminole with weapons and provisions. There was definitely some truth to the allegations, but the support amounted to nothing more than the continuation of a long-established trade. If the Seminole had *any* ally, it was the land of Florida itself.

Although the majority of the Seminole had not been residents of southern Florida before the war, they were intimately familiar with the land. Since the eighteenth century, bands of Creek and Seminole hunters had traveled the peninsula in search of game on their annual hunting trips. They had found the best places to camp, the best sources of wild foodstuffs, and the best routes to travel. Some, engaged in the lucrative wrecking trade,

made permanent homes along the coast or not far inland. When war broke out, the Seminole already knew the best places to hide or set up villages. White officers, on the other hand, possessed only crude maps of the interior, many of which were based solely on rumor and conjecture. As one officer put it, “Any Negro guide could make a better one in the sand.” Obviously, there had been no Lewis and Clark for the Florida Territory.⁵

For the Seminole, surviving in the Florida wilderness was possible but not easy. They did not find the wilds of Florida a well-stocked pantry, as many believed. The staple diet of the Seminole consisted of fruits and vegetables grown on small fields near their villages, supplemented by whatever meat was available, be it domesticated animal or wild game. Villages required a certain amount of high, dry land, a scarce commodity in south Florida. During wartime, such locations also required a high degree of concealment. Game was abundant, but not just standing around waiting to be shot. Indeed, shooting game presented a problem in itself. The sound of a gunshot could alert white troops to an otherwise hidden Seminole presence. The one foodstuff that was abundant was the root of the coontie plant, a form of arrowroot, but the root was toxic if not properly processed into flour. That required time and a small amount of simple equipment; it was not the sort of thing one could do on the run. A determination to remain in their homeland was often all that kept them going.⁶

For the Seminole, fighting the war was secondary to keeping the family safe. They weren’t trying to conquer new lands or make a profit off the spoils of war; they were striving to preserve their culture. If the families were separated or destroyed, if the knowledge in the minds of the elders was lost, or if the ceremonies and rituals could not be performed, the culture would die. Andrew Jackson had been correct when he told Poinsett to capture the women and children and then the men would surrender. If nothing else, the average Seminole warrior was a devoted family man. Both the army and the Indians understood that knowledge of the Seminole hiding places was key to the outcome of the conflict. What Andrew Jackson never understood was that the army had little idea where those hiding places were or how to get there.⁷

Fighting a guerrilla war was not something the U.S. Army was prepared for. West Point taught engineering, coastal defense, and the art of Napoleonic warfare. The Florida War stands out as the first time the United States was forced to fight a prolonged guerrilla war. Unlike their Indian adversaries, white soldiers could not (or would not) live off the land. They required heavy wagons or pack animals to carry their supplies. They wore light blue uniforms with white cross-belts that formed an X

right over the soldier's heart. The Indians could not have asked for a better target. It was not until late in the war that the army began to fight the Indians on their own terms.

In the months after Taylor assumed command it seemed as if the Seminole were the only ones waging an offensive war. In July, a family living along the Santa Fe River was murdered within a few miles of an army post. One of the soldiers on the scene described the condition in which he found the deceased mother: "She was not scalped, but was made the victim of a cruelty deeper and more refined. The wretches had dashed out the brains of her infant, and placed the mangled innocent in its mother's arms. There she lay, the murdered mother, fondling with the icy embrace of death the murdered child."⁸

At about the same time, another family was killed near Tallahassee. It was somehow ironic that the news was reported by James Gadsden, the very man who had played a significant role in bringing on the war by negotiating the Treaty of Payne's Landing. Far to the east, attacking from their hiding places in the Okefenokee Swamp, Seminole warriors murdered two families in Georgia. Once again, rescuers arrived too late and could only report the sad details.

Three children of the six were alive when we reached the spot, one about 3 years old had been shot through the abdomen, and lay asleep on the dead mother. But, O, horrid to tell, I found a fine young lady of 18, shot in two places and dirked in another, with about 20 hogs around her, and she yet alive and had her senses perfectly. This was the most trying time I had ever seen. I gave her cold water which she wished much, and remained with her as long as I could, till obliged to go in search of the Indians. We left a guard to protect them and administer to them all that they could, but all expired in less than twenty minutes after we left.⁹

Newspapers of the day were quick to report such sensational stories, a characteristic that continues to this day. Missing were any tales of Seminole warriors coming home to find their villages destroyed, their dwellings burned to the ground, and their family members killed or taken captive. Even if an Indian had somehow managed to submit such a story to a paper, there would have been little chance of it being printed.

There was little action by either side throughout August, September, and October, and as autumn 1838 arrived, Taylor began to plan his winter campaign. In truth, the general was more intent on simply driving the Indians from the northern half of the territory than in removing them from Florida.¹⁰ He never seemed to believe in total removal, and when the matter

came up again in 1849 when he was president, he refused to consider it.¹¹ Still, some offensive action needed to be taken, and hundreds of troops were dispatched to the area between the Ocklawaha and St. Johns, the Suwannee region, and the territory around the Withlacoochee.¹² It was an indication of how difficult the Florida War could be. All those areas had been thoroughly cleared during Jesup's campaigns, but as soon as the army departed, the Seminole returned.

Despite all the action, little was accomplished. On December 30 a large camp was discovered between the Econfinia and Fenholloway Rivers north of the Suwannee. Taylor believed it housed more than a hundred Seminole, but when it was attacked the Indians fled, leaving their possessions behind rather than be captured. In the Fort King area, patrols captured about thirty-three Seminole, but otherwise, few Indians were seen.¹³ By February Taylor felt that the northern portions of Florida were relatively clear of Indians. Hearing that they were gathering in the Everglades, he decided to concentrate his efforts in that direction. Troops were sent to reopen Forts Pierce, Lauderdale, and Dallas on the east coast, while another force was sent to Fort Deynaud on the Caloosahatchee. Yet no sooner were the orders issued than Taylor received word that several murders had been committed near Tallahassee, forcing him to cancel the offensive and send many of the troops to north Florida.¹⁴

The army was doing its best, but there were simply too few soldiers to protect the northern settlements and mount an effective offensive against the southern Seminole villages at the same time. The Indians, scattered into small bands, could attack at will, then withdraw to prearranged safe havens where supplies were cached and they could feel secure. In truth, they were applying the same strategy the army always had: Attack your enemy's homes so that his armed forces would gather close to protect the settlements. If the army was concentrated in the north, Seminole families in the Everglades and Big Cypress could grow their crops, nurse their wounded, and gather munitions in relative peace. Whether either side knew it or not, Taylor was doing precisely what the Seminole needed him to do.

Intent on protecting the settled parts of Florida, Taylor had earlier devised a plan to divide the northern portion of the territory into twenty-mile squares, each with a small fort or blockhouse at the center. The plan would take considerable time, effort, and manpower. Posts and roads would have to be built, garrisons would have to be outfitted and provisioned, and supply lines would have to be set up and maintained. All this would take a steady influx of money from a government that was becoming increasingly reluctant to appropriate funds for a war that seemed to be going nowhere.

Feeling it was the best method available to protect the inhabitants and repopulate areas that had been abandoned by whites, Taylor submitted his plan to the War Department on January 5, 1839.¹⁵

While waiting for word from Washington, Taylor did what he could to apply pressure on the Seminole in the Everglades. Patrols were sent out, but they accomplished little, other than the exhaustion of the troops as they waded through swamps and streams in search of Indians who would not show their faces. Once again, Lieutenant McLaughlin of the navy worked with the army on joint expeditions, but few Indians were seen, and none could be brought to battle. Captain Vinton, enjoying the winter weather at Fort Dallas (Miami), wrote his mother, telling her, "I might go on and enumerate many other pleasant attributes of my new station and crown the whole by saying that the Indian war is just rife enough to lend a racy excitement to our exploring adventures."¹⁶ Two days later that "racy excitement" turned deadly when his close friend Capt. Samuel Russell was killed while leading an expedition up the Miami River. Just because the Indians couldn't be found didn't mean they weren't there and ready to take their revenge.¹⁷

On January 23 Taylor's plan of squares was approved, and by mid-February many soldiers were withdrawn from actual combat duty to begin construction on the roads, posts, and bridges that needed to be built. All in all, the winter campaign of 1838–1839 seemed to entail more construction than warfare. Taylor's tally of Seminole for the period seemed dismal: only a handful of Indians had been killed and fewer than three hundred had been shipped west, most of them from the panhandle. On the other hand, only two officers and less than ten enlisted men had died at the hands of the Native warriors. The army's foremost victories had been accomplished with axes and shovels. Taylor proudly reported that "It will be observed that fifty-three new posts have been established, eight hundred and forty-eight miles of wagon-road, and three thousand six hundred and forty-three feet of causeway and bridges opened and constructed." It was, indeed, a strange way to wage war.¹⁸

The situation in Florida may not have changed much, but it certainly had in Washington. President Van Buren's Democratic Party had lost a number of seats to the Whigs during the 1838 midterm Congressional elections, bringing a change in the attitude of Congress that would soon have a very profound effect upon the conduct of the war in Florida. An amendment providing \$5,000 for an effort to negotiate a settlement with the Seminole was added to the bill that funded the war. As the amendment's sponsor put it, "Dismiss one of the Seminole prisoners with a message that, if the Semi-

noles will not cross a designated line, you will not. Both sides are equally tired of the war; and that line, I have no doubt, would be respected.” He then went on to remind his colleagues that “on those terms, you could have had peace a year ago.”¹⁹ It was an important moment that needs to be noted: For the only time in American history, a Native tribe had forced the U.S. government to sue for peace.

This was something the Whigs were forcing upon the administration, yet Van Buren may have been ready for such a move. The Florida War had become an embarrassment, and the longer it lasted the worse the president looked. Although any settlement that allowed a significant number of Seminole to remain in the territory would not be popular among Floridians, the administration may have felt it was worth the risk. There was a presidential election coming up the following year, and Van Buren was vulnerable. Besides, it was of little political consequence if Floridians were upset. Living in a territory, they couldn’t vote in national elections. Whatever its motives, it must be admitted that the War Department put forth a good effort to make peace a reality. Had they wished, they could have dispatched some junior officer to Florida with instructions to make a lot of noise but accomplish nothing. Instead, they sent someone with both the position and the authority to negotiate a real settlement: Maj. Gen. Alexander Macomb, the commanding general of the army.

Macomb was, in actuality, the only real major general in the army. The other three men who held that rank (Scott, Gaines, and Jesup) held it by brevet. Brevet rank was a troublesome tool used by Congress to reward the army’s officers without spending any additional money on them. An officer might receive a brevet promotion for some conspicuous action, such as Taylor had received after the Battle of Okeechobee, or, more commonly, brevet rank would be conferred for ten years’ faithful service in a given rank, as had been the case with General Jesup. This was necessary because the army had no forced retirement policy or generous pension system. Senior officers often held their positions until they died, creating a logjam among officers of lower rank. A brevetted officer would have the title and privileges of his new rank but would not receive the extra pay. Brevet rank also held the stigma of not being “real,” which caused considerable friction within the officer corps. Brevetted officers resented not receiving their proper due, while officers of actual rank resented junior officers receiving equal privilege.²⁰

Like his fellow generals at the time, Macomb had been a hero of the War of 1812, holding off a superior British force at Plattsburgh, New York, in the fall of 1814. The action earned Macomb a brevet promotion to major general and, like Gaines, Scott, Jesup, and Jackson, lasting fame. Drastic cut-



Maj. Gen. Alexander Macomb. Hero of Plattsburgh in the War of 1812, he served as head of the army from 1828 until his death in 1841.

Plaster bust, from life mask taken September 1825 by John Henri Isaac Browere. Fenimore Art Museum, Cooperstown, New York. Gift of Stephen C. Clark. N0245.1940, Photo by Richard Walker.

backs in the size of the army in 1821 forced Macomb to revert to the rank of colonel, but President Monroe personally promised him that the drop in rank would not affect any future promotions.²¹

In 1828 commanding general Jacob Brown died. The two men immediately below him, Gaines and Scott, both claimed the coveted position. At this point, one of the problems of brevet rank became apparent. Scott claimed seniority by his brevet rank, while Gaines claimed it by his actual rank. The two men had never liked each other, and the very public quarrel over the prestigious position only made their arguments more acrimonious. In the midst of this bitter feud, someone reminded President John Quincy Adams of the promise his predecessor had made to Macomb. Before taking the demotion to colonel, Macomb had been superior to both Gaines and Scott. Bypassing the feuding parties, Adams promoted Macomb to commanding general. Gaines and Scott were furious but could do nothing about it. Settling into his office, Macomb took up the army's top spot, answerable only to the president and the secretary of war.²²

Exactly what Macomb was instructed to do in Florida remains unclear. His written orders were so ill-defined as to be useless. He was directed to "prosecute the war with vigor" yet "treat the Indians with kindness and attention." He could "call out the militia" if he felt the need, while at the same time he could "withdraw such portions of the regular troops . . . as he thought expedient" to reduce troop strength. Finally, and most important, he was instructed to "make a treaty of peace with the Indians, based upon the treaty made at Payne's Landing." But the Treaty of Payne's Landing was what all the fighting was about. According to Lt. John T. Sprague, who was serving as one of Macomb's aides, the general more or less disregarded his orders and did as he saw fit. What we don't know is what verbal instructions Macomb may have been given by Van Buren or Poinsett.²³

On April 5, 1839, the general arrived at Fort Heileman near Garey's Ferry on Black Creek. There he met with Zachary Taylor, who informed Macomb that the only way to end the war would be to allow the Seminole to remain in Florida. To Lieutenant Sprague, who would later write the history of the war, it appeared as if the army was willing to admit defeat. "The officers appear to be completely discouraged. The Indians are in every part of the country in parties of two and three, and there is no prospect or probability of capturing them nor of ending the war. . . . From the opinions of Genl. Taylor, Col. Twiggs and other officers, the prospect of bringing matters to a termination looks very discouraging."²⁴ The *Pensacola Gazette* was in agreement. "The truth is that they [the Seminole] consider the whites to have been badly whipped, and it is nearly time

that we should take the same view of the matter.”²⁵ Though no one could know it at the time, it would be the only instance of a Native American nation forcing the U.S. government to sue for peace.

Taylor also told Macomb that it might prove difficult to arrange a meeting with the Seminole, as Abiaki had declared that anyone who came to him representing the whites would be put to death. It’s hard to know if Taylor was supportive of Macomb’s effort or not. The government was doing precisely what Taylor thought they ought to, but he may have been miffed that someone else was sent down to do the negotiations. Did they think he wasn’t good enough for the job? Taylor may also have been confused as to his exact place in the overall scheme of things. He was still in command of the Army of the South, but what sort of authority did he have when the head of the entire army was standing over his shoulder?²⁶

On the day after Macomb’s arrival, Taylor left for the Suwannee region with instructions to contact any Indians in the area and invite them to a conference to be held at Fort King on May 1. Macomb then wrote to Col. William S. Harney at Fort Mellon, asking him to attempt contact with the Indians farther south. The general also spoke to a recently captured Seminole, told him of his mission, and dispatched him to try to find his people and invite them to the meeting. Having sent out his feelers, all he could do was wait and see if anyone responded.²⁷

While waiting, Macomb decided to take a leisurely trip up the St. Johns to inspect the posts along the river. Returning to Garey’s Ferry on April 10, he began to make preparations for the trip to Fort King, arriving there on the twenty-seventh. General Taylor showed up on the thirtieth, but his presence didn’t brighten anyone’s mood. As Sprague put it, “He talks in the most discouraging manner, and should his predictions prove true the prospects of opening a communication with the hostiles is indeed gloomy.” Part of the problem was that the Indians were under the belief that the only purpose of the talks was to gather them in one place so they could be seized and shipped west. Blame for the rumor was placed upon those who were profiting from the war.²⁸

On May 1, the day scheduled for the talks, the only thing that arrived at Fort King was news that a soldier had been shot near Tampa, three citizens killed at the Alachua Prairie, and six militiamen attacked near Micanopy; one of them was killed.²⁹ Fed up with Florida and the war, on the following day Taylor put in a formal request to be relieved of duty and sent elsewhere. Sprague noted that “Genl. Taylor is very impatient and predicts no favorable results, either in effecting a treaty or accomplishing any thing else that’s desirable.” Macomb let the request sit until the fifth and then

denied it, telling Taylor “the war had been conducted with ability and that under the existing state of things . . . no one could be found so competent to conduct the affairs of Florida.” Macomb was in Florida strictly to conduct the peace talks, and whatever the outcome, Taylor would be the one left in charge when Macomb returned to Washington. Taylor left for Tampa the following day.³⁰

Macomb and his staff continued to wait at Fort King, hoping someone would turn up. The rainy season commenced on the night of the seventh with a torrential downpour, further dampening everyone’s spirits.³¹ Finally, on the ninth, the cowbell in the fort’s lookout tower rang out, announcing the approach of a party of eight warriors led by Halleck Tustennuggee, leader of the Mikasuki in the region. Macomb greeted them, and everyone sat down for a talk. The general told Halleck the purpose of his visit, and that the Great Father in Washington was “sorry there has been so much bad feeling, and would be glad to see them friends again.” Most of all Macomb wanted to see “their great chiefs Sam Jones [Abiaki], and Tiger Tail & Wild Cat [Coacoochee].” Halleck expressed pleasure at the prospect of peace and promised to try to locate the others, whom he believed were far south, in the Everglades. He would also attempt to locate the small groups that were committing the murders and tell them of the “friendly talk.” For his part, Macomb was careful not to ask any questions that might make Halleck suspicious, such as the strength of his band or where they were located. Overall the day went well, and the Indians promised to return the following day.³²

Halleck and his men returned the next day and had a long talk with the general, in which the Indians promised to cooperate in locating the three southern chiefs but warned that it could take up to three months to bring them into Fort King. Macomb stressed that the first thing that needed to be done was for all the Seminole to gather south of the Peace River, so that a truce might prevail until formal talks could be held. The meeting ended with declarations of friendship and cooperation all around, but it didn’t stop Macomb from issuing orders that military readiness should not be slackened at the post. As Sprague put it, “Indians are not to be relied on with all the professions of friendship.” The Seminole were no doubt just as wary.³³

The fort’s occupants settled back into their routines, not knowing when or if the Indians would return. Sprague was surprised by how well the soldiers and warriors had gotten along when the Indians were in camp, the enlisted men “treating them more like companions than enemies.” He reasoned, “It doubtless arises from their knowledge of the impositions practiced upon them, and the inhuman and barbarous treatment which they receive from the white settlers upon their borders.” Sprague knew “that the

first aggression is made by the white man who is divested of all restraint and regardless of every righteous law.”³⁴ As if to confirm the fact, news was received from Taylor that people in Tampa were already grumbling about any peace that would allow the Indians to remain in Florida even temporarily, and that someone was attempting to raise funds that would pay \$200 for every Indian scalp brought in. Sprague was amused by the news. “There is not a white man in nor about Florida . . . who dares venture out in any numbers in pursuit of the Indians. The Indians may rest in perfect security if two hundred dollars is all that’s afforded for their scalps.”³⁵

Finally, on May 17, 1839, there was a major break. Colonel Harney arrived from Fort Dallas with two Indians, one of whom was Chitto Tustenuggee, who was supposedly the successor to Abiaki. When Harney first received news of Macomb’s peace initiative, he immediately sent word through a trusted black interpreter that he wanted to meet with Abiaki at Fort Dallas. It took some time, but contact was made, and Chitto met with Harney. Although it was claimed that Chitto had replaced Abiaki, it was all a deception; Abiaki was too wary of the white man to allow himself to be put in a position where he could be taken prisoner. Chitto was simply his ambassador.³⁶

Formal talks began at noon on the eighteenth with all the pomp and ceremony that both sides expected. Halleck arrived with about twenty warriors and joined Chitto, after which Macomb entered the specially built council house in full uniform with an accompanying marching band and escort. After everyone was seated, the pipe was passed around. “All who were present, white, black, and yellow, smoked in perfect silence and apparent deep thought for about fifteen minutes.” Macomb then explained the terms of the proposed treaty. All Indians were to move south of the Peace River within sixty days, where they would be safe from white encroachment. The Seminole were then shown a map with the boundaries of the land assigned to them, which included most of southwest Florida below the Peace River. Macomb then asked for their reply.³⁷

Chitto was the first to speak and “expressed himself highly gratified with what he had heard and that he and his people readily accept the proffered terms.” He promised to send word to all the warriors, ordering them to remove to the country allotted, which he was sure they would do. Halleck spoke next and also declared his satisfaction with the agreement, pointing out that he did not consider the army his enemy. As far as he was concerned, the Florida “crackers” were the cause of all the trouble. The general good feeling was marred only by the reception of a letter from Fort Fanning on the Suwannee containing news that Lt. William Hulbert and Pvt. Bartholomew Driscoll had been killed on May 3 while searching

for an express rider who had gone missing. Even the Indians expressed regret for the loss.³⁸

Macomb announced an end to the war on May 19, and that evening the Indians hosted a large dance, where several of the officers attended, bringing the required whiskey and staying until after midnight. The festivities continued for another two days, until a final council was held on the twenty-second to formalize the agreement. Once again, the formal ceremonies were adhered to and the stipulations of the treaty repeated so that everyone could once again agree to them. Presents were handed out, most notably cloth for the women and children, who were dressed in rags or old corn sacks. Once again the Indians held a dance that lasted until the early hours of the morning. Sprague commented, “No person can see the Seminoles without admiring their gallantry—their patriotism in sustaining themselves, with wonderful ability, during the four years war that has been waged against them.”³⁹

Feeling his work was done, Macomb and his staff headed back to Washington the next day. Sprague was optimistic that a lasting peace had been achieved. “We may look with confidence for a continuance of peace and prosperity in a country which for four years has been ravaged by the most disgraceful war that ever can or ever will stain the pages of the history of our country.”⁴⁰

June 1839–May 1840

The Caloosahatchee Massacre, Bloodhounds, and Stalemate

As June 1839 passed into July, Macomb's agreement seemed to be working out as planned. On the whole, the Indians appeared to be moving in the direction of the reserved area. The occasional murder was attributed to undisciplined youths or warriors who had not yet received word of the truce. That didn't mean violence disappeared. In mid-July most of the Chairs family was slain near Tallahassee, and a group of soldiers was ambushed near the Ocklawaha River. In a letter to General Taylor, Secretary of War Poinsett told him to reinforce troop strength in the northern portion of the peninsula, but to exercise caution that Indians peacefully heading to the reservation not be attacked. He even suggested the peaceful Seminole might be enlisted to search for the killers.¹

Some murders could be blamed on outlaw whites who would disguise a killing to make it appear as if an Indian had done it. The death of a militiaman was deemed suspicious when a musket ball was found in his body and a bottle of whiskey nearby. To explain, Sprague pointed out that the Seminole always used rifles, and they would never leave a bottle of whiskey behind. Of course the Indians weren't the only ones who liked their liquor. Alcohol abuse was major problem for the army, and drunken soldiers seemed to be killing each other faster than the Indians could. In one issue of the *Army and Navy Chronicle* there were three reports of soldiers taking part in deadly incidents, no doubt alcohol fueled. The first was killed when he tried to break up a fight between two others, another one was shot by a fellow soldier, and a sergeant was accused of killing one of the army's best black guides.²

As expected, Floridians were incensed at the agreement. A Tallahassee newspaper printed "shame!!! Shame!!! Shame!!!" above and below Macomb's announcement that hostilities had ceased, and a public meeting

was held in which former Governor DuVal railed against the idea of any Seminole being allowed to remain in Florida. More practical Floridians were not so quick to condemn. Two distinguished Florida Militia officers, Cols. John Warren and W. J. Mills, assured Macomb that the criticisms came from city dwellers, not from the rural residents who had suffered most from the war. True, they wanted the Seminole totally expelled, but they knew the impracticality of it. More than anything, they simply wanted the war to end. A writer to the *New York Corsair* remarked, "That country now belongs to the native Floridian by a treble right. It was his by original proprietorship; he purchased it anew with his blood from the murderous Spaniard; and he has paid for it another two hundred years in advance, in the same cruel rent extracted from him by the grasping American. *Let him have it!*"³

As part of the agreement a trading post was established in mid-June on the north side of the Caloosahatchee River, near what is now downtown Cape Coral. The store was run by an ex-soldier, James Dallam, and his clerk, a Mr. Morgan. Helping in the construction of the store were three laborers, and to afford some protection, a detachment of about two dozen dragoons under Colonel Harney was encamped nearby. To Harney it seemed too small a force, but Taylor had refused to give him more men. Still, the Seminole who frequented the store seemed pleased with the arrangement and friendly toward the whites. Eventually the soldiers began to let their guard down.⁴

It was a fatal mistake for most of them. In the predawn hours of July 23 an estimated 150 Indians attacked the trading post and its guard. The surprise was complete. Some of the soldiers, rudely awakened by the war whoop and the firing of guns, were killed in their beds. Survivors ran for the river, although several of them were lured back to shore with promises they would not be harmed, only to be murdered when they stepped ashore. The remainder kept swimming until they located a boat and made their way downriver to the safety of a small ship anchored at the mouth of the river. At least two men hid out for almost two weeks before being rescued. One of those fortunate enough to escape was Colonel Harney. Having returned from a hunting expedition late at night, he had fallen asleep some distance from the rest of the men. When the shooting started he, like the others, made for the river. He was soon joined by one of his men, and the two worked their way downriver until they located a canoe and fled to the safety of the waiting ship.⁵

Gathering what few men and guns he could, Harney quickly returned to the scene of the fight in hopes of finding survivors. Instead, he found only mutilated corpses. The trading post had been ransacked and several

thousand dollars' worth of goods taken. Dallam, the other civilians, and two black interpreters were either dead or taken prisoner. Of the thirty-two men at the post, only fourteen had survived. General Macomb's longed-for peace had been violently shattered, and the war was on again.⁶

We can easily understand the Seminole's reasons for going to war in 1835. Pressed to their limits, they reacted the way many people would. Understanding the reasons for the Caloosahatchee Massacre, as it came to be known, presents us with more of a problem. The Seminole had, as much as they were likely to, gotten what they wanted in the treaty. They had worn the patience of the white men down to the point where Washington was willing to negotiate on favorable terms. Had the Indians remained peaceably within the land allotted them, the war would have ended. The brutal, unexpected attack on the trading post forced the government to reopen the war. The national pride, already wounded from having to sue for peace in the first place, was dealt a shocking blow. Americans felt as if they had extended their hands in friendship, only to be stabbed in the back at the first opportunity. For the United States, there was no choice but to continue the war until the Indian threat was completely removed. Having attained the prize they had fought so hard for, the Seminole appeared to have simply thrown it away.

So who was behind the attack? Unfortunately, Macomb had made his deal with Abiaki and his Mikasuki people, not the entire Seminole tribe. The Seminole were made up of Mikasuki, Alachuas, Creeks, and other small bands, and since each individual group had its own leader, there was no central authority. An agreement made by one group was not the least bit binding on the others. Blame for the attack was immediately placed on Chakaika, headman of the "Spanish Indians," and the Alachua Seminole led by Hospetarke and Holata Micco (Billy Bowlegs). Whether or not that is true has been debated ever since, but Harney certainly believed Chakaika was behind it, for he hunted the man with a vengeance. It was certainly the easiest explanation to believe. The Spanish Indians were an amorphous group that had lived in southwest Florida for quite some time and had enjoyed close relations with Spanish Cuba. In a way, the Spanish Indians could be viewed as "outlaws," a collection of outsiders and outcasts who, for one reason or another, were unwelcome in the more established bands. Up until this time they had stayed out of the conflict, but the presence of other groups and the army may have forced them to join the hostilities. If the Spanish Indians were indeed responsible for the attack, then the logic behind the event was simple thievery. As one contemporary writer maintained, "The temptation of plunder, alone, was too great for the virtue of savages."⁷

Another explanation for the attack was that the Indians simply did not believe the war was over. Past experience might well have led them to believe that Macomb's mission was simply a ploy to make them relax their guard and reveal their hiding places. If the Seminole were to settle at a known location near the trading post, they might be more easily surprised and taken prisoner. Indeed, that is precisely what the government had in mind, although the idea seems to have been more wishful thinking than anything else. Getting all the Seminole to gather anywhere was hard enough; rounding them up had proven impossible.

In addition to their natural skepticism, the Seminole may have been told by people they trusted that the whole affair was nothing more than a trap. Interpreters and other people making a living off the war were in no hurry for the conflict to end. The influence, both good and bad, of the interpreters was made evident in a letter published in the *St. Augustine Florida Herald* on September 26. A correspondent from Fort Lauderdale reported on Abiaki's reluctance to believe that the peace agreement with General Macomb was real: "Sam [Abiaki] remarked that interpreters were generally liars, and he feared the news brought by Sandy was too good to be true." To back that up, the reporter said that Sandy had told the Indians, "All the promises and professions of the whites were a pack of lies; they were at war with *eight* foreign and frontier nations, and had been *beaten*." For this reason, the United States had decided to sue for peace, but "next year the whites would hold another council, and take new measures to drive the Indians out." This same interpreter was captured at the Caloosahatchee and later burned to death in a process that took five or six hours to complete. It is, indeed, hard to tell what the Indians really thought.⁸

Some whites believed Abiaki was behind the attack, and the case against him was strengthened in September, about two months after the massacre. In order to appease the angry Colonel Harney, Abiaki had volunteered to bring in the men responsible for the massacre, including the Spanish Indians, and had promised to return with them in thirty-three days. In the meantime the Indians around Fort Lauderdale continued to exhibit a friendly attitude toward the white soldiers. On the twenty-seventh the officers were invited to a dance at the Seminole camp, and although they declined the invitation, they sent two soldiers and a black interpreter to the camp with a keg of whiskey. Upon arriving, the trio was fired upon by a large group of warriors. Both soldiers were killed, but the interpreter managed to dive into the river and escape. Although Abiaki wasn't present, he could not escape suspicion.⁹

While it is certainly true that the Indians broke the truce, much of the blame for the attack rests with the army, in particular Macomb. His first mistake was his immediate departure for Washington after the conclusion of the talks. Had he remained in the peninsula, contacting other groups and reassuring those he had already made agreements with, any Seminole misconception would have been greatly reduced and trust could have been rebuilt. His second mistake was leaving Zachary Taylor in charge. The junior general had no faith in Macomb's agreement and did nothing to support its implementation. Indeed, Colonel Harney was quick to point out that Taylor had denied his request for two full companies to guard the Caloosahatchee facility and implement the treaty. Had there been an adequate force in place, it's unlikely the attack would have taken place, and over time the Indians may have had more faith in the agreement. Finally, Macomb had been less than candid with the Indians. He had not even bothered to have them sign a written treaty, "such an instrument with Indians having but little binding effect," he insisted. Finding it "impolitic," he never mentioned the fact that the Seminole were still expected to remove at some later date. As far as the Seminole were concerned, they had won the right to remain in Florida forever. News that such was not the case would surely have angered them.¹⁰

Whatever the reason for the Caloosahatchee Massacre, it effectively put an end to any talk of peace or to any hopes that the Seminole might be allowed to remain in Florida. Those who carried it out may have considered the assault a great coup, or they simply may have rejoiced at the massive amount of loot they had taken. It didn't matter; they had ruined the future for everyone. From that point forward, the government had no choice but to prosecute the war to the bitter end. As one officer put it, "The Government will be *compelled to continue* the war, on the ground that the Indians *no longer have any confidence* in the white race, and, *vice versa*, the *white race* in the Indians."¹¹

Reaction to the Caloosahatchee Massacre was predictable. An officer serving in Florida wrote, "Let the white flag be hung out at points where immediate transportation can be given them to their new homes; and in the field let there be nothing less than a war of extermination. Any thing short of this, at the present stage of the game, looks to me very like positive madness. . . . A few skeletons left to hang and bleach in the wild, would teach them too surely we were in earnest, and they would shortly be found suing for peace on any terms."¹²

People may have been clamoring for the army to go on the offensive, but in truth it was the Seminole who were taking the initiative, once again bringing the war to the white man. A letter in the *Army and Navy Chronicle* related news from the last weeks of August:

On the 23rd . . . the Indians attacked Fort McClure, wounded one volunteer and killed 10 horses. On the 27th they attacked a party of volunteers on Orange Lake, killed and took prisoners the whole party, with the exception of one horse. On the 28th the steamer *R. K. Call* was . . . twice fired on by a party of Indians, about 20 in number. . . . Captain Miles adds that the Indians are very thick around Fort White. Lieut. Wood, commanding at Ft. Andrews, reports that 17 of his men had an engagement . . . with a party of Indians about 40 strong, in which two of his men were killed and five wounded.¹³

The attacks seemed to have no end. On August 28 a party of soldiers building a bridge over the Suwannee was attacked and six were killed.¹⁴ On September 3 two or three volunteers taking a bath in Orange Lake were ambushed resulting in the death of one of them, and an express rider sent to Fort Micanopy to spread the news was killed while on his way there.¹⁵ The only good news for the army was the capture of forty-six Indians at Fort Mellon. They had been encamped near the fort in a friendly manner during the truce, but were taken prisoner when the commanding officer received news of the attack at the Caloosahatchee.¹⁶ As for the army, there would be no change in leadership or tactics. Although more forces would be sent to Florida, Zachary Taylor would still be in command and would continue to concentrate his efforts in securing the settled parts of the territory.¹⁷

In response to what was perceived as a lack of initiative on the part of the regular army, Governor Call began to demand that more volunteers and militia be used and even suggested that he once again be given command of the war.¹⁸ Taylor and Col. William Davenport, who had command of the army in the Tallahassee area, were both upset by the governor's attitude and complained to Secretary of War Poinsett.¹⁹ Unhappy with Call because of his political opposition, Poinsett wrote to President Van Buren on November 29, asking him to appoint a new governor. The president was quick to comply, putting a note on Poinsett's letter that simply said, "Let Govr Call be superceded & Judge Reid appointed in his place." On December 2, 1839, Robert Raymond Reid became Florida's fifth governor.²⁰

The cry for new methods to bring the war to an end brought about one of the most politically controversial episodes of the conflict. Surprisingly, it had

nothing to do with false promises, the inefficiency of the various forces, or the millions of wasted dollars. In many ways, the whole matter seems trivial to us today. Why would anyone get upset about a pack of dogs?

Frustrated and embarrassed by the Seminole's success in thwarting the army's efforts, many Americans looked for some sort of "magic bullet" to end the war. Others looked to history for an answer. Both found what they were looking for in Jamaica. From 1655 to 1737, the British had tried in vain to capture insurgent slaves who had escaped to the heavily forested mountains of the island. Although the British repeatedly attempted to discover the blacks' hideouts, they met with nothing but frustration. The situation reminded many Americans of their own disappointments in trying to locate the hidden camps and villages of the Seminole. It was not until the British introduced bloodhounds to the conflict that the so-called Maroon Wars ended. For eighty-two years, the former slaves had managed to elude their pursuers; soon after the dogs' arrival, they gave up. Bloodhounds seemed just the sort of salvation war-weary Floridians dreamed of.²¹

The idea of using bloodhounds did not arise with the indignation over the Caloosahatchee Massacre. A year before the event, General Taylor had written to Secretary Poinsett requesting permission to do so. For whatever reasons, Taylor had never bothered to follow up on the matter. Poinsett believed that all types of dogs, not just bloodhounds, would be useful in the war effort. "I still think that every cabin, every military post, and every detachment, should be attended by dogs," he wrote. "That precaution might have saved Dade's command from massacre, and by giving timely warning, have prevented many of the cruel murders which have been committed by the Indians in Middle Florida."²²

If the federal government was not in any hurry to use the animals, the Territory of Florida was. As early as September Governor Call had asked the Territorial Legislature to fund the procurement of a group of trained bloodhounds. In due course, a delegation was dispatched to Cuba to purchase a number of the hounds and to hire the services of several handlers. On January 7, 1840, the delegation returned to Florida with thirty-three bloodhounds and five Cuban handlers. Early reports seemed to indicate the dogs would perform as advertised. As one enthusiast related, "The means are now certainly discovered of ending the war in good earnest, and almost without bloodshed." Others were not much impressed. One correspondent noted that in several trials with an Indian prisoner the hounds failed to take up the trail. Still, initial success encouraged most people to place considerable faith in the bloodhounds.²³

So what was the political problem? Even if the dogs failed to track the Indians, there was little money wasted in the effort. Simply put, it was not so much the *tracking* that bothered people, it was the *catching*. Humanitarians seem to have possessed visions of uncontrolled, bloodthirsty dogs cornering helpless Indian women and children and tearing them to pieces. Memorials began to pour into Congress in protest of the employment of the bloodhounds. Secretary of War Poinsett was forced to issue an order specifying that the dogs be muzzled and leashed when in use.²⁴ Were they really that vicious? It depended on who you asked. A reporter for the *Florida Herald* insisted, "Such a set of ferocious beasts I never before saw." Another writer had a differing opinion: "As to their ferocity, it is all humbug—a child may fondle with them. They have been more grossly misrepresented than any set of animals in the world, the army not excepted."²⁵

Like numerous issues of the time, the bloodhounds became a sectional concern. Many of those who were protesting the use of the dogs were also members of the antislavery movement. Indeed, abolitionists believed the dogs had been imported not to hunt Indians but to track down runaway slaves. Some Floridians may indeed have had such ideas as a secondary use for the animals, but there can be little doubt that the primary hope was that the dogs would prove useful in locating the hiding places of the Seminole. At any rate, the matter became a hot political issue, something for the opposition Whig party to use in convincing the American people of the moral bankruptcy of the Van Buren administration. It was, after all, an election year.²⁶

Indeed, if anyone in America was morally bankrupt, it was the people who ran the nation's election campaigns. America had entered a period of smoke-filled rooms and ruthless electioneering, a no-holds-barred arena in which the army's use of bloodhounds proved a potent weapon. It is interesting to note that in the political cartoons that have survived from the 1840 election, the Florida War does not seem to have been much of an issue. One would think the expense of the war or the embarrassing length of the conflict would have provided plenty of ammunition for the Whig forces. Perhaps because Whigs had supported the war effort almost as much as Democrats, the party shied away from the subject. Bloodhounds were another matter, and the cartoonists had a field day with the subject.

The critics' efforts were aided by the fact that the hounds were not very adept at tracking Indians. Congressman Joshua Giddings, the Ohio abolitionist, claimed, "It was well known that these animals were trained to pursue *negroes*, and *only* negroes." An officer in Florida agreed, noting that the "companies were ordered to take some of these dogs and try

bloodshed, but simply to take the Seminole's land and open it for slave-filled plantations. Some mourned the loss of the Indians' culture, while those who had done business with the Indians prior to removal mourned the loss of people they had grown close to. For whatever reason, a significant number of people put pressure upon their elected representatives to deal more fairly with the Indians.

There had always been a certain amount of public sympathy for Native Americans, but it had become more pronounced after the Jackson administration began its campaign of removing them to lands west of the Mississippi. During the infamous Trail of Tears, an estimated four thousand out of eighteen thousand Cherokee had died during capture, detention, or removal. For those who had hoped removal would benefit the Indians, the whole affair was a shocking disappointment.²⁸ Others were sympathetic for less practical reasons. It was the romantic age, and the idea of the "noble savage" was fashionable. The Industrial Revolution had begun to complicate people's lives, making them long for so-called simpler times. Even letters sent home from army officers spoke wistfully of the "children of the forest." Perhaps the highly regimented military lifestyle made soldiers long for a world where a man's primary responsibility was to go hunting. It was an unrealistic vision, but one that people still employ today.

Some of the Americans most sympathetic to the plight of the Seminole were the men charged with hunting them down. The Seminole's fierce determination to remain in Florida had earned the grudging respect of many an army officer. A sympathetic officer questioned the nation's morals in dealing with the Seminole: "After much suffering, they have been driven into the swamps and unwholesome places of the country, and they are now clinging with the last efforts of desperation to their beloved home. Can any Christian in this republic know this and still pray for the continuance of blessings, when he is about to wrest from the unhappy Seminole all that the Great Spirit ever conferred upon him?"²⁹

It was a sentiment echoed by many Americans. Had not their own Revolution been a long, sometimes hopeless war against a much more powerful antagonist? Weren't the Seminole simply defending their homes and families, one of the most basic of human instincts? It may all have been true, but the arguments often fell on deaf ears, and that deafness was often caused by the actions of the Seminole themselves. Unable to stand up to the powerful U.S. Army, they waged a guerrilla war, attacking isolated homesteads and solitary travelers. Sympathy for the Indian was often negated by tales of cruel butchery. Politicians, as well as newspaper editors, seemed to delight in retelling tales of Indian atrocities. Governor Reid addressed the

Legislative Council, reading portions of a letter relating the aftermath of an attack near the Apalachicola River.

I found Mrs. H. lying prostate on the ground . . . with her throat cut, a ball shot through her arm, one in her back, and a fatal shot in the head. . . . Her youngest son . . . lay near her side, with his skull fractured by a pine stick which lay near him. He exhibited signs of life . . . and faint hopes are now entertained of his recovery. Had you witnessed the heart-rendering sight of Mr. H. embracing his little son, and calling him by his nick-name, "Buddy!" "Buddy!" "Buddy!" with the solemn sound the parental affection, sunk of the lowest ebb of dejection; and then running to the corpse of his wife, throwing his arms around her, crying out, "My wife!" "My dear wife!" "Oh! My dear wife!" I know your feelings would have given way as mine did; I had always felt a sympathy for these merciless savages, but my heart now assumed a stern fortitude, foreign to its nature, and I felt like not leaving an Indian foot to make a track in the ashes of the desolation they have made.³⁰

Exaggerated or not, the barbarity of Indian warfare often worked against the Seminole cause. Taking a scalp was understandable; soldiers had always collected trophies, and white soldiers often scalped slain Seminole. Mutilating and abusing the dead was harder for many whites to accept. Had the Indians stuck to killing soldiers, they would have garnered much more sympathy. If they had simply burnt homesteads instead of killing the occupants, whites would have given the Seminole their grudging respect. In the end, the Seminole were simply practicing Indian warfare, unaware that they lived in a time of "civilized" rules of warfare when women and children, even those of the enemy, were not to be harmed. To have behaved any differently than they did, the Seminole would have had to give up the very culture they were fighting to preserve.

The questions will always remain as to the extent that whites committed atrocities upon Indian women and children. The admittedly degenerate attitude of many civilians and soldiers made it inevitable. Militia officers tended to have little sympathy for the Seminole and would have exercised minimal control over the rapacious tendencies of their men. In contrast, officers of the regular army often considered themselves to be the last bastions of chivalry. Still, we are not all that surprised when we hear a tale about Colonel Harney, "who had ravished Indian girls at night, and then strung them up to the limb of a live oak in the morning." During the Third Seminole War, one Florida Volunteer officer reported the scalping of a wounded Indian captive, who was later shot when he could no

longer walk. Today, most Americans consider people of other races as little more than variants of the human family. In the early nineteenth century, just the opposite was true. Science and religion taught that there were real differences, and that Caucasians were somehow superior to all others. It was the sort of mindset that made it seem acceptable to commit atrocities on “lesser” beings.³¹

Traditional Indian warfare, along with the perceived faithlessness of the Indians, forced many Americans to question their feelings for the Seminole. Perhaps, they thought, it *was* better to ship them west. Another factor that undermined sympathy for the Seminole was the war’s close association with the subject of slavery. Many of those who spoke loudest against the war were abolitionists. Their humanitarian views were easily extended to Native Americans, and they were quick to associate the evils of slavery with the evils of Indian removal. Southerners were just as quick to associate what they saw as the dangerous radicalism of the abolitionists with a dangerous sympathy for “bloodthirsty savages.” Moderate Americans, caught between the extreme, exaggerated claims of both sides, found it difficult to express a rational alternative. It’s not that different today. In the end, sympathy for the Indian could not stop the war; the cry for their removal and the quest for Indian land was simply too great.

The winter of 1839–1840 had arrived and along with it came the call for a new campaign. Taylor, limited in manpower, did not possess the number of troops necessary to mount a large-scale offensive and, in truth, saw little need for one. The army, addicted to grand strategies and large columns of tightly formed men, was beginning to rethink its methods. The *Army and Navy Chronicle* reported that the “approaching campaign then will partake more of a defensive than offensive character, as it will be confined to driving the Indians from the settled portions of Florida, where they have committed depredations almost without check. It having been found impossible to force the Indians from their fastnesses, any further attempt to effect that object would only be attended with a needless sacrifice of life and money.” Simply put, Taylor had run out of ideas.³²

Opening any sort of a campaign before December was almost impossible. The army was simply too sick.³³ One officer reported on the death of three of his fellows, saying, “We are all overwhelmed with grief and despondency. Disease and death are making fearful ravages over this devoted land. . . . Thus within a short month, the mysterious hand of death has snatched from our midst three gallant and generous spirits—three of the brightest

ornaments of our little army. . . . No season since the beginning of the war has been so productive of disease and death. . . . Gloom and sorrow prevail.”³⁴

At the Naval Hospital in Pensacola, the mortality rate was no better. In a letter published in the *New York Gazette*, the writer reported the deaths of three officers and the hospitalization of seven or eight others, along with thirty sailors. Before mailing the letter, he was forced to reopen it to add the name of another deceased officer. He closed the letter with the line “God grant that I may close this, without having the pain to record another.”³⁵

From reading the papers, one might have gotten the impression that only officers were dying. In a republic that prided itself on its democratic philosophy, there was still a strong tendency to recognize class distinctions. Enlisted men were rarely named and seldom appreciated when they died. Almost invariably, the account of a battle would list the names of the officers killed or wounded but give only the number of enlisted men who had suffered just as much. One can easily assume that in an army where enlisted men outnumbered officers by about ten to one, fatalities among them were ten times higher than for officers. Pathogens knew nothing of a man’s place in society, or, for that matter, his ethnicity. Disease could claim a Seminole as easily as a white man. True, the Natives would have had a natural resistance to strains of disease that were common to the area, but that would have been offset to a degree by new strains and illnesses brought in by the soldiers, many of them fresh from Europe. The difference is that the army kept track of its losses from sickness and disease, and reports were published in the newspapers. For the vast majority of Seminole, their passing was mourned only by those close at hand, and their last resting places were left unmarked.

Despite the sickness and everyone’s frustration, the war continued. The Caloosahatchee Massacre left no other option. In southern Florida the navy was expanding its role. Taking to canoes, sailors and Marines explored the numerous streams that fed into the Everglades, hoping to discover the hiding places of the enemy. In the northern part of the peninsula, General Taylor kept his men on the move, scouring the territory from east to west.³⁶ Indian camps were discovered and the occupants forced to flee, but few were caught or captured. A correspondent to the *New York Commercial Advertiser* put the whole effort into perspective: “Notwithstanding all these efforts, the savage, secret foe constantly carries on his work of blood and death. In the past year it is estimated that not less than eighty individuals have been killed by the Indians in Florida, while only perhaps a dozen of their number have shared a similar fate. Middle Florida, it was hoped, had been relieved of the enemy;

but this hope is proved fallacious. Within ten miles of this place [Tallahassee] houses were burnt and families murdered last summer!"³⁷

Along the east coast, things were no better. On February 13, 1840, the mail stage from St. Augustine to Jacksonville was ambushed and the driver, a youth of sixteen or seventeen, slain. While searching for the boy's murderers, soldiers discovered the body of another mail carrier. A writer related the city's grief: "Garcias was a native of this city, and a young man about twenty-two years of age, of exemplary character and integrity. He was married about four months since, and when his mangled corpse was brought home, what were the feelings of his young wife may possibly be felt, but never described."³⁸

The Florida War had degenerated into a fierce guerilla conflict that the United States appeared to be losing. Hope had been raised with the bloodhounds, but nothing had come of the effort. For two years, detachments of troops had scoured the countryside but found few Indians. Seminole war parties hid patiently in the bushes alongside the territory's roads and farmsteads, and they attacked seemingly at will. Soldiers, stationed at posts only twenty miles apart, reacted as quickly as they could to the murders but were usually too late to catch the perpetrators. For the Seminole, there was little choice but to remain on the offensive, keeping the soldiers far to the north, away from their villages in the Big Cypress and Everglades. They no doubt also wished the war to be over, but the matter was out of their hands. A feeling of helplessness and depression hung over Florida, and no one seemed able to end the suffering.

By the time the summer of 1840 began to approach, Zachary Taylor felt it was time to once again ask to be relieved. He had served as commanding officer for two years—a longer period than any of his predecessors—and had been in Florida since the beginning of Jesup's second campaign. The transfer was granted, and the man who would one day become president of the United States boarded ship for New Orleans. Upon his arrival in Pensacola, the *Gazette* reported that "Gen. T. is in very bad health." The article concluded that "There are few men, of any rank, who have devoted themselves to the great objects of the war, with an assiduity like that of the veteran Taylor, and the utter hopelessness of the war cannot be better illustrated than by reference to the fact, that even he, with all his energy and his eminent talents for command, has done nothing."³⁹

May 1840–May 1841

Armistead's Offensive and Losses on Both Sides

Upon the departure of Zachary Taylor in May 1840, command passed to sixty-seven-year-old Brig. Gen. Walker Keith Armistead, one of the army's longest-serving officers. His military career had begun in 1794 when he'd served as an orderly sergeant at the Battle of Fallen Timbers in Ohio. His conduct at the battle had earned him an appointment to the proposed U.S. Military Academy, and when West Point opened in 1801 he was one of its first students and the third to graduate. As a senior member of the Corps of Engineers he rose swiftly through the ranks, becoming a lieutenant colonel soon after the War of 1812 commenced, then colonel and Chief Engineer of the Army in 1818. Armistead's brevet promotion to brigadier general was for the usual "ten years of faithful service," although Zachary Taylor had complained that a portion of those ten years had been "passed on his farm near Upperville."¹

Armistead was already a veteran of the Florida War, having been second in command to General Jesup from 1836 to 1838. Immediately upon assuming command in May 1840, Armistead ordered major changes to the manner in which the war was to be conducted. Some of those changes were forced on him by the War Department. Congress, anxious to be rid of the war, had decided the only way to end it was to once again flood the territory with troops. The regular force was increased to almost five thousand men,² and Secretary Poinsett instructed Governor Reid to raise an additional one thousand militia. The state troops would be used to protect the settled northern portion of the territory, thereby freeing hundreds of regular soldiers to pursue the Seminole. The administration seems to have come to the realization that for all the praise that had been heaped upon the fighting



Brig. Gen. Walker Keith Armistead, by Thomas Sully. His brother George would become famous as the commander of Fort McHenry during the siege that was immortalized in “The Star-Spangled Banner.”

West Point Museum Art Collection, United States Military Academy, #9049.

abilities of Zachary Taylor, the departing general’s strategy had been one of defense. The new commander was expected to go on the offensive.³

One of Armistead’s first moves was to concentrate nine hundred men at Fort King, then dispatch them in groups of one hundred to search for the Seminole and their hideouts. It was planting time for the Indians and also time for them to gather for the annual Green Corn Dance, their most important social and cultural event. Armistead realized what most of his

predecessors had failed to understand or wished to ignore: The annual summer hiatus gave the Seminole time to rest and recuperate, time to gather supplies and put away stores of food. If the cycle could be broken, he might be able to bring the war to a close.⁴

As it was, Armistead was not the only one on the offensive. The *Savannah Georgian* ran this “Extract from the Report” of a battle that had taken place two weeks after Armistead took command:

Lieut. Martin, 2d infantry, left Micanopy on the morning of the 19th, with three men from his post, Wakahoota. After proceeding about four miles he was fired upon by Indians. He received three balls, one through the lower part of the abdomen, one through the arm, and one in his hand—one of his men and all the horses killed—the other two missing. Lieut. Sanderson, 7th infantry, with a party of seventeen men, was sent in pursuit; he fell in with the Indians, and *he* and five of his men killed. . . . Lieut. Sanderson had his fingers cut off and stuck in his mouth.⁵

Later reports showed that Lieutenant Martin survived his wounds, but the two missing men were never found.⁶

Four days later, Coacoochee and a party of warriors attacked two wagons carrying a troupe of actors traveling to St. Augustine along the Picolata Road, one of the most frequently traveled highways in the Territory. One of the wagons managed to escape to St. Augustine, but the other was taken and three of the actors slain. The Indians, no doubt hoping the wagons were loaded with gunpowder, lead, or some other valuable store of provisions, found nothing but trunks filled with theatrical costumes. Although the Seminole were disappointed in the plunder, the killings served to remind everyone that nowhere in Florida could be considered safe, and that the war was far from over.⁷

Like their white adversaries, the Seminole also suffered. Near the end of May, Lt. Col. Bennet Riley and 261 men left Fort King to scour the areas around the Withlacoochee River. A lone Indian warrior was captured near Lake Panasoffkee, who then led them to a deserted camp in the Wahoo Swamp. Riley reported, “I found thirty acres of corn, peas, pumpkins, and melons, which I caused to be thoroughly destroyed.” The following day, another fifteen to twenty acres of crops were destroyed. On June 2 Riley and his men headed for the old Seminole town of Chocochatti, where they surprised a group of Indians, killing three warriors and taking three prisoners. He reported, with “much regret,” the death of a Seminole woman, shot by one of the volunteers who mistook her for a warrior. He also told of the destruction of another fifteen to twenty acres of crops.

The captured Indian who had been forced to lead Riley's men to the camps exacted a measure of revenge when he made an escape on the night following the attack at Chocochatti. As he ran, shots were fired after him, and one of the bullets accidentally killed Capt. James B. Mason of the volunteers. Riley continued his mission the following day, discovering a village that forty to fifty Indians had abandoned only hours before. Riley's men then went about the task of "destroying their huts, ten or fifteen hogs, some packs, and thirty acres of fine corn, peas, pumpkins, and melons, just ripening." Riley then headed back to Fort King, capturing a woman and child on the way. For Riley, the expedition earned him a brevet promotion to colonel; for the Seminole, it cost them valuable foodstuffs that could not be easily replaced.⁸

Other expeditions were having similar successes. A patrol operating north of the Suwannee came upon a camp where they captured six women and four children and destroyed crops where "the corn was, in some places, fit for roasting."⁹ On one mission the army came upon approximately one hundred Seminole during preparations for the Green Corn Dance. Surprised, the Indians fled into the forest, leaving behind most all their possessions and even a sleeping infant. Another mission, led by Colonel Harney, succeeded in capturing the mother and daughter of Coacoochee.¹⁰

Armistead and his junior officers were willing to experiment with different methods to achieve their desired goals. An officer at Fort King, harassed by Seminole lurking in a hammock nearby, placed a pair of what we would today call "improvised explosive devices" along the path to the hammock. The devices worked, but his ultimate plan of capturing the Indians backfired. Alerted to the Seminole presence by the explosions, the officer took sixteen men to investigate. As the soldiers neared the hammock they were ambushed by about a hundred warriors who had rightly assumed what the whites would do. Several soldiers were killed and wounded, and the only thing that saved the rest was a retreat to the fort using a round-about path instead of the direct one, along which many of the Indians were hiding in ambush.¹¹

The Seminole continued their attacks throughout the peninsula. Near Fort White in mid-July two soldiers were reported slain on each of three separate occasions. Another pair was slain riding between Palatka and Fort King on July 16, while yet another pair was killed northwest of Micanopy on the twentieth.¹² The Indian attacks continued into August. On the twelfth one soldier was killed and another wounded, and on the following day two were killed and one wounded, both events taking place near Micanopy. A family of four was murdered near Black Creek on the thirteenth, there were

reports of portions of five or six families being killed near the Georgia line, and two soldiers were wounded within sight of Fort Lauderdale.¹³

Most notable was a daring raid on Indian Key, located in the middle of the Florida Keys. The attack, which took place on August 7, 1840, was carried out by approximately eighty-five warriors led by Chakaika, one of those believed responsible for the Caloosahatchee Massacre the previous year. Chakaika and his warriors crossed Florida Bay in seventeen canoes and completely surprised the island's residents in the middle of the night. One of the inhabitants was Dr. Henry Perrine, a noted botanist who had come to south Florida to conduct experiments with tropical plants but had been driven to the island by the war. During the attack seven of the island's residents were killed, including Perrine and four unrelated children. Perrine's wife and children were able to make their escape by hiding under the burning house until forced to flee from the collapsing structure. Taking to a small boat, they frantically rowed to a schooner anchored about a mile offshore. Another resident of the island fled to nearby Tea Table Key, where a small naval hospital was located. A number of invalids from the hospital attempted a rescue mission but were driven off when the Indians fired one of the island's cannon at the approaching sailors. From Tallahassee to the keys, no one, Indian or white, could sleep peacefully at night.¹⁴

In order to successfully attack the Seminole in their hideouts, Armistead needed the regulars to be relieved from the duty of protecting the northern settlements. The government had authorized the raising of a thousand volunteers, but it was proving difficult to find the men. Five hundred of them were to be foot soldiers, but no one would sign up for the low-paying positions. Everyone wanted to be a mounted volunteer and receive the higher rate of pay.¹⁵ For years Governor Call had insisted the state force could do a better job than the regulars, and Governor Reid was no different, asking Washington for the authority to raise three thousand mounted volunteers.¹⁶ As far as the War Department was concerned, the Floridians were more interested in being on the government payroll than in ridding the territory of the Seminole. The matter of the volunteers also caused disputes within Florida politics. Congressional Delegate Charles Downing complained that Governor Reid was using the force as a private army, appointing only officers who were of the same political persuasion.¹⁷ Gen. Leigh Read, in command of the militia forces, also complained, which forced Poinsett to write to the governor, telling him to place the entire militia force under General Read's command and not interfere with his operations.¹⁸

Armistead's job was to remove the Indians from Florida, and he believed there was more than one way to accomplish the task. First he suggested simply bribing the Seminole to go out west. The War Department concurred, but pointed out that there were no special funds allocated for such purposes and that any money promised the chiefs would come out of the war effort's general operating budget.¹⁹ Believing that some of the hostile bands could be persuaded to emigrate by friends and family who had already been sent west, the general arranged for a delegation to be brought from Indian Territory to Florida. At first the effort seemed promising. Halleck Tustennuggee and Tiger Tail, two of the more dangerous leaders still at large, seemed willing to listen. In early November 1840 a truce was called, and a large number of Seminole began to gather at Fort King, where the talks were being held. Both Halleck and Tiger Tail voiced a willingness to emigrate. As a further inducement, Armistead offered the chiefs sizable bribes if they would take their people west. In agreement with the practice, Congress later allotted \$100,000 for the effort.²⁰

Then on November 15, with no forewarning, the Indians fled their camps, returning to the wilds. Not totally surprised, Armistead called off the truce and ordered his men to once again take to the field. Parts of the order read: "The Indians having acted with their usual want of faith, the armistice is at end; the commanding officers of Districts, Regiments, and Posts will therefore be prepared to act offensively on the promulgation of this order. . . . Should the enemy hereafter appear with the white flag, they are to be made prisoners, and diligently guarded until further orders." Armistead had tried to negotiate, been rebuffed, and was left with no other course of action.²¹

After the aborted peace talks of November, hostilities resumed and both sides inflicted the occasional casualties on the other. In late December, exactly five years after Dade's command had been wiped out, another tragic loss occurred. Lt. Walter Sherwood and a squad of eleven men were escorting Elizabeth Fanny Montgomery, newlywed wife of Lt. Alexander Montgomery, from Micanopy to Wakahoota, a distance of about eight miles.²² About halfway through the journey a Seminole war party led by Halleck Tustennuggee and Cosa Tustennuggee attacked. Killed almost immediately were two privates and Mrs. Montgomery. Not willing to leave the lady's body to be mutilated by the Indians, the remaining soldiers stood their ground while one rode off to bring help. The soldiers bravely fought off the attackers hand to hand, but eventually all were killed. A rescue party, led by Lieutenant Montgomery, quickly left Micanopy but arrived too late. One can only imagine Montgomery's anguish when he came upon the bodies

of his wife, Lt. Sherwood, and the other soldiers. For the men of the army, it was an infuriating act that cried out for revenge.²³

The attack also brought a swift rebuke from Secretary Poinsett. Word had reached him that the escort had been mounted, even though they were foot soldiers. This was contrary to orders, which had been issued in the belief that during a surprise attack the soldiers would not be able to defend themselves as well as men who were already on the ground. Infantrymen were not trained horsemen, and they would either be thrown from the horse, lose their musket while trying to stay on the horse, or have to waste time dismounting. Whatever the situation, it could, and in this case did, lead to disaster.²⁴

Yet the whites were not the only ones suffering setbacks. In early December, Colonel Harney finally took revenge for the attacks on the Caloosahatchee and at Indian Key. With an escaped slave as a guide, Harney and his men silently pushed their canoes into the Everglades, looking for the camp of Chakaika and the Spanish Indians. Seeing it in the distance, the soldiers (against regulations) changed into Indian garb and approached the camp. With complete surprise, Harney captured the village, and Chakaika was slain while trying to escape. As a sign that the nature of the war had changed, several of the captured warriors were immediately hanged, strung up beside the body of their dead leader.²⁵

General Armistead's aggressive approach to the war and the accompanying successes of Harney and others signaled another turning point. No longer could the Seminole rely upon the quiet months of the summer season to rest, gather their crops, and prepare for the winter's warfare. No longer were they able to live in security in the trackless Everglades. No longer was the army willing to play by the rules of civilized warfare. The Seminole, long considered merciless hunters by many whites, found themselves being hunted by a merciless army. Though few could see it at the time, the war was beginning to end.

Taking the war to the Seminole had required a drastic change in the mindset of the army and, for the first time in an Indian war, the inclusion of the navy. From the beginning of the conflict the navy had played a role, supplying manpower when called upon in emergencies and performing valuable service in patrolling the coastline and in ferrying supplies and soldiers. Yet as early as 1837, at least one naval officer realized that the navy could play a much more important role in the fight against the Indians. Lt. Levin Powell proposed entering the Everglades in small boats to discover and attack the Seminole's hideouts. In the fall of that year, he commenced

several expeditions up the short rivers that emptied into the Atlantic coast south of Lake Okeechobee. Powell soon discovered the shortcomings of his plan. Finding his way through the monotonous Everglades was almost impossible without competent guides, which he lacked, and the standard navy boats were not suited to the shallow, tangled, twisted streams of south Florida. After being severely wounded in the battle at the Loxahatchee River in January 1838, Powell realized that expeditions into the Everglades also required specially trained men. His motley collection of sailors and volunteer soldiers were simply not up to the task.²⁶

Powell's lessons were not forgotten. The following year command of the Florida squadron was given to Lt. John T. McLaughlin, the young naval officer who had been serving with the army almost since the war's beginning and had been seriously wounded at the Battle of Lake Monroe. Like Powell, McLaughlin wanted to enter the Everglades and make life miserable for the Indians. He intended to traverse and explore the entire southern portion of the peninsula, from one coast to the other. Impressed with both his and Powell's plans, the administration gave them its support. Shallow-draft schooners, better suited to working the Florida coast, were added to the fleet. McLaughlin's flagship, *Flirt*, was built expressly for Florida duty. Flat-bottom boats and a large number of canoes were built or purchased. The whole collection of vessels became known as the "Mosquito Fleet."

What was most impressive about McLaughlin's efforts was the amount of cooperation between the army and the navy. Though obviously a naval officer, McLaughlin was serving under General Armistead. A considerable portion of the men who were part of his expeditions were soldiers. It must have been a strange-looking group. Sailors (many of them black), Marines, and soldiers, all mixed together, paddling silently into the Everglades. Throughout the final years of the war, McLaughlin and his men, during several expeditions, explored and mapped the Everglades, a portion of the territory few white men had ever visited. Hidden villages and fields were located and destroyed. By the time the war ended, the Seminole were not the only people who knew their way around the "River of Grass."

For sailors used to life on the open sea or soldiers who spent every night sleeping on terra firma, it would prove the most unusual, grueling work they could imagine. The canoes would travel in large groups, in total silence, very often at night. To escape detection by the Indians, fires were rarely allowed. Because the Everglades were covered almost entirely by water and sawgrass, the crews often had to sleep in their boats. Even in winter, the mosquitoes could be unbelievably thick. Although rations were packed, much of the food had to be captured or gathered along the

way. The discovery of a Seminole garden must have been a welcome sight to the weary, hungry men. Well removed from any military hospital, the sick managed as best they could, and those who died were consigned to a watery grave far from any ocean.

It was, overall, a new experience for the navy. Working for the army was strange enough. Sailing up narrow streams or traversing watery grasslands in canoes was altogether revolutionary. It was not the way things were normally done. Credit must be given to the officers and administrators who realized that new tactics were called for and had the courage to carry them out. They knew that if the Florida War was to be won, they would have to meet the Seminole on the Indians' own terms, in their own country.

The economics of a conflict can often have as much of an effect on its conduct as military considerations. Heated debates broke out in Congress whenever it came time to appropriate the monies needed to pursue the war. Congressman Henry Wise of Virginia complained that

Appropriations were extracted from this House, like teeth, without the proper investigation and inquiry. The officers of Government waited until appropriations were immediately wanted, and then they called upon the House to pass them, without investigation, without inquiry, and without discussion. It is in this manner that nine-tenths, if not all of the eight, nine or ten millions of dollars which had been appropriated for this fatal, disastrous, disgraceful Seminole campaign had been obtained. . . . Would any corporation or company take thirty millions of dollars to pay the expenditures of this disgraceful Indian war?²⁷

After the initial setbacks of the war, opponents of either the administration or the war had questioned if the monies were being well spent. Such had not been the case at the beginning of the war, primarily because the nation had been experiencing a booming economy. The Panic of 1837 changed all that, creating an economic contraction followed by a severe depression that lasted well into the 1840s. Faced with an economic crisis, Martin Van Buren was forced to either adhere to his predecessor's economic policies or modify them. A New York paper predicted the outcome, stating that Van Buren "feared the consequences of taking ground at so early a period of his administration in opposition to his political godfather [Jackson]."²⁸

In the midst of the depression, Congress became more concerned about the cost of the Florida War. Questioning the demands for appropriations, William K. Bond of Ohio reported, "The first appropriation . . . [was] made at a time when there was an immense surplus in the treasury, without

attracting any notice. In a short time there was another appropriation called for of \$1 million; and the ghost of this same Florida war was continually being brought to view . . . in the shape of a bill appropriating some millions of dollars for the suppression of Indian hostilities.”²⁹

Several factors contributed to the war’s escalating cost. First was the issue of inflated prices. Noting wasteful expenditures, Congressman Rice Garland of Louisiana reported that “50 cords of wood cost the government \$7,000.” Garland also remarked about the personal gain of a steamboat operator, pointing out that the owner made enough on a single trip up a Florida river to pay for the boat.³⁰ Another problem was the expense of volunteers and militia. The paymaster general informed the secretary of war that by the end of Armistead’s command, \$2,525,399.29 had been paid to regulars as compared with \$3,461,622.15 to citizen-soldiers, who were fewer in number and often served for short periods of time. To put these numbers in perspective, annual expenditures by the entire federal government averaged approximately \$34 million for each year of the war. Six million dollars just to pay the soldiers was a significant portion of the federal budget.³¹

A third problem involved those who were profiting from the war. Secretary of War Poinsett, reporting frauds committed by citizens against the government, wrote, “Many persons in Florida who are able to provide for themselves . . . are now drawing rations for themselves, families and negroes.” Captain Sprague was more to the point: “It is the opinion of all, that the war will never end until the Government is done expending money.” Congress nevertheless continued to appropriate funds to bring the contest to a close, and on March 3, 1841, Van Buren’s last day in office, it appropriated over \$1 million to fight the war. Although many Congressmen complained about the cost of the war, few actually voted against the necessary appropriation bills. At that particular point in American history it was not politically safe for most elected officials to be seen as “soft” on hostile Indians unless they represented areas that were already free of Native Americans. The best the Whigs could do was accuse Van Buren and Poinsett of gross mismanagement of the conflict. As far as most Americans were concerned, there was certainly a large amount of truth to the allegations.³²

The new year of 1841 had arrived, but the war seemed no closer to ending than it had five years earlier. True, there were now far fewer Seminole in Florida and major battles were a thing of the past, but the killing hadn’t ceased, and no one could truly relax. Yet despite its initial success, Armistead’s offensive began to slow just at the time when it should have been growing stronger. During the early months of 1841, when the weather was

conducive to campaigning, very little action took place. Maj. Ethan Allen Hitchcock complained that Armistead seemed to have lost his direction. Hitchcock also blamed the collapse of the talks in November on the general's inept handling of negotiations and on the fact that while Armistead was attempting to talk the chiefs into emigrating, troops were out harassing the Seminole. In late January, Capt. John Page, the officer in charge of the delegation of Seminole that had been brought from the west to negotiate with the Florida Indians, complained of the same problem.³³

Yet it was hard to say whether negotiations or offensive operations would have been more effective in removing the Seminole. In late January Armistead was able to report that he had 222 Indians ready to ship west. Considering how few Seminole remained in Florida, that was a significant number. Secretary Poinsett seemed to think the tactics to use depended on the location. In the northern portions of the peninsula, where the patrols had experienced the most success, the harried Indians might be more amenable to emigration and willing to accept the payments. In the Everglades, where the more intractable bands lived in relative security, it appeared more useful to go after them. These bands, primarily consisting of Abiaki's Mikasuki and Holata Micco's Alachuas, often preyed upon the numerous shipwreck victims who came to grief on the long Florida coastline, and Poinsett wanted the threat eliminated.³⁴

In March 1841 some notable personnel changes took place in Washington. First of all, a new president took office. William Henry Harrison was a Whig, and his election signaled a temporary end to the reign of the Jacksonian Democrats. To some extent the unpopularity of the Seminole War helped Harrison defeat Martin Van Buren. Although the war was not the burning issue of the campaign, it certainly helped lend credence to the Whig argument that Van Buren was an incompetent leader. With the new president came a new Cabinet, including a new secretary of war, John Bell. No sooner was the Cabinet in place, however, than the unexpected happened: After only a month in office, President Harrison died. Vice President John Tyler, a Democrat turned Whig, assumed the presidency but not with the wholehearted support of the nation or his party. Once in office, the Whig acted more like a Democrat, but not nearly enough for the Democrats. Before long, Tyler was a president without a party. Unhappy with the direction in which things were going, most of the Cabinet resigned later in the year, unwilling to serve under "his accidentcy."

The party change also affected politics in Florida. Governor Reid, appointed by Van Buren, was replaced by Richard Keith Call, the man Reid had earlier replaced. Call, who had left the Democrats to join the Whigs, was no doubt receiving his just rewards. During the election campaign Call had

traveled widely throughout the nation, speaking out against the administration's handling of the war. It was, after all, the Florida War that had brought about the estrangement of Call and his longtime friend, Andrew Jackson. Throughout the nation and the Territory, the Whigs were getting their revenge for having long suffered under Jackson's "spoils" system.

Later, in June, a change would also take place in the command structure of the army when commanding general Alexander Macomb died and was replaced by Winfield Scott. Though more of a "hands-on" leader than Macomb, Scott does not seem to have taken an active role in directing the Florida War. He had been badly burned the first time; perhaps he wished to avoid the heat a second time.

Hundreds of Seminole may have been shipped west, but there were still several large bands of warriors operating throughout the territory and willing to continue the war effort. Halleck Tustennuggee and Tiger Tail were known to be in the northern part of the peninsula, along with smaller bands led by lesser leaders. To the south, Holata Micco and the unstoppable Abiaki were determined never to leave their homeland. Most respected and feared was Coacoochee. After the death of Osceola and his own amazing escape from St. Augustine, Coacoochee had become the symbol of the Indian resistance. More than any other Seminole leader, Coacoochee was the man Armistead wanted.

Coacoochee was well aware of the army's hope to win his favor; every commanding general since Jesup had let it be known they were willing to negotiate with him. Coacoochee had pushed these invitations to the limit. Several times he had come in to parley, made encouraging promises, and then fled back into the hammocks after securing valuable supplies. The army was well aware of the trick but was in a quandary as to what to do about it. They wanted Coacoochee to be cooperative and to bring his people in. Killing him or taking him prisoner might accomplish little or nothing. Such tactics had already made a martyr of Osceola, and neither the army nor the government needed another larger-than-life legend. Indeed, dealing with Indians who came in for a "talk" was proving a major embarrassment for the army. Although Armistead had ordered that every Indian carrying a white flag be taken prisoner, it was not that simple. The army wanted the entire band to come in, not just the headman or a solitary warrior. Locking someone in irons and quickly placing him aboard ship could eliminate a valuable messenger or a possible ally. It also tended to scare off other potential emigrants. The best an officer could do was hope that *this time* the Indians were being sincere.

The Seminole had learned to play the game with great skill. A leader would come in to one of the forts, promise to emigrate, but lament the fact that because of army actions, his band was scattered over a wide area. Collecting them, he'd tell the officer in charge, would require time and provisions. The officer knew that a failure to supply those provisions would be seen as bad faith on the part of the army, causing a distrustful Indian to reconsider his decision. Some Indians would keep coming back, giving plausible excuses for why their bands had not yet arrived. Officers, often sympathetic to the Indians or under orders to cooperate, would hand out supplies, knowing full well it was a wasted effort. Suffering from a defeatist attitude, they may have reasoned that any chance of getting a large band to emigrate was worth the risk.

The pitfalls and rewards of such a game become evident when we look at the actions of Coacoochee. On March 5, 1841, he arrived at Fort Cummings (east of today's Lakeland) arrayed in costumes taken from the theatrical troop that had been waylaid near St. Augustine. Coacoochee met with Col. William Jenkins Worth, Armistead's second in command, and promised to bring his people in. In a gesture of good faith, Worth released the Indian's twelve-year-old daughter, who had been captured the year before. In true Seminole fashion, the girl presented her father with powder and lead she had managed to gather while in the camp. The reunion brought tears to the eyes of Coacoochee and to many of the white onlookers.

Coacoochee spent four days at Fort Cummings, discussing matters with Colonel Worth. He told Worth, "The white man comes; he grows pale and sick, why cannot we live in peace? I have said I am the enemy of the white man. I could live in peace with him but first they steal our cattle and horses, cheat us, and take our lands. The white men are as thick as the leaves in the hammock; they come upon us thicker every year. They may shoot us, drive our women and children night and day; they may chain our hands and feet, but the red man's heart will always be free." The "talk" finished, Coacoochee departed, promising to return in ten days' time. True to his word, he came back at the end of the ten days and asked for an audience with General Armistead. Three days later, March 22, he was at Fort Brooke. The meeting with Armistead went well, and it was agreed that the band would gather at Fort Pierce on the East Coast.³⁵

Optimism on the part of the whites slowly turned to pessimism. The old pattern seemed to reemerge. For all of April and most of May Coacoochee would come to Fort Pierce and demand provisions, declaring they were needed for the far-flung members of his band. Maj. Thomas Childs, in command at the fort, had seen it all before. Warriors would show

up, never women and children. The excuses were becoming less credible with each telling. Not wishing to be made the fool, Childs requested permission to seize Coacoochee and the warriors in his company the next time they came to Fort Pierce. Childs could only hope that the wily Seminole leader would return one more time.

The War Department was ready for another change in leadership for the Florida War. Captain Page reported that the western delegation had done about all it could and were ready to return to their homes.³⁶ Tired of paying for Territorial Militia forces that seemed ineffective, the War Department discharged the entire force on April 20.³⁷ Like all those before him, Armistead had failed to defeat the Seminole, and in mid-May orders were issued relieving him of command. No reasons were given, but it seems likely the War Department wanted a commander who was younger and more energetic. To most observers, it seemed a wise move. Without a change in direction, it appeared as if the Florida War might go on forever.

June 1841–August 1842

Colonel Worth and the End of the Florida War

Command of the Florida War was handed over to Col. William Jenkins Worth on May 31, 1841. The forty-seven-year-old Worth was one of the army's rising stars, having joined the service during the War of 1812. Ambitious and energetic, he was determined to bring the Florida War to a close. The fact that he was not a general posed no real problem. With the volunteers sent home, there was no longer the need for an officer who would outrank the state generals. It was also an indication that the war was slowly moving toward an inevitable conclusion.

Four days after Worth assumed command, Coacoochee and about twenty warriors came into Fort Pierce to demand more supplies so that the supposedly scattered bands could come in. The Indians were welcomed, cordially entertained by Major Childs and the other officers (including a young William Tecumseh Sherman), and then unceremoniously taken prisoner. Unwilling to risk the Indians escaping or being rescued, Childs quickly placed the captives aboard ship and on their way to New Orleans.¹ When Worth received word of the capture and removal on June 15, he was not happy and immediately dispatched an agent to New Orleans. The colonel may have wanted Coacoochee taken out of action, but he did not want him out of the territory. The agent caught up with the emigrants on June 28 and immediately set sail back to Tampa. Bringing Coacoochee back to Florida was a bold and risky move. Worth's career would suffer if the famous war leader were to escape, but the colonel believed the potential rewards greatly outweighed the risks. To prevent any chance of the cunning warrior breaking free, Worth ordered the prisoners' ship anchored far from shore and the Indians shackled.



Maj. Gen. William Jenkins Worth. His ability to conclude the Florida War earned him a promotion to brigadier general.

National Archives, File No: 528455.jpg.

On July 4 Worth sailed out into Tampa Bay and boarded the ship. The colonel was respectful but firm: “Coacoochee, I take you by the hand as a warrior, a brave man; you have fought long and with a true and strong heart for your country. . . . You love your country as we do, it is sacred to you. . . . Like the oak, you may bear up for many years against strong winds; the time must come when it will fall; this time has arrived.” Worth then informed Coacoochee that he would have to call his followers in. If the entire band did not give up, Coacoochee and those warriors with him would be hanged from the ship’s yardarm. Whether he actually intended to do such a thing or not, Worth left the impression that it was not an empty threat: “I say what I mean, and I will do it. . . . This war must end, and you must end it.”²

The captive leader, his voice subdued, spoke of his lifelong struggle against the white man. “I asked but for a small piece of these lands, enough to plant and to live upon, far south, a spot where I could lay my wife and child. This was not granted me. I was put in prison; I escaped. I have been again taken; you have brought me back; I am here; I feel the irons in my heart.”³ The irony of the moment was not lost on Lieutenant Sprague, a witness to the proceedings. “Here was a chief, a man whose only offence was defending his home, his fireside, the graves of his kindred, stipulating on the *Fourth of July*, for his freedom and his life.”⁴

The leadership of Coacoochee could not be denied, even when it came from a man in chains aboard a ship anchored far out in Tampa Bay. By the end of July all but twenty of his followers had given themselves up. Worth then showed his true respect for Coacoochee by letting the man freely travel the countryside in an effort to convince other, more militant leaders to end the war. By October several hundred more Seminole had gathered, ready for the trip west. Fearful that his people would become restless, Coacoochee asked that the ships be allowed to sail. The request was granted, and winter found Coacoochee and his followers in a new home, far from the swamps and hammocks they had fought so long to remain in.⁵

While Coacoochee had been talking, Worth’s men had been in the field, keeping continual pressure on the more intransigent Seminole still at large. Worth concurred with Armistead in the belief that the troops should be kept in motion during the summer. The colonel firmly believed that the high rate of sickness that occurred during the summer was due to the boredom, unhealthy diet, and easy availability of alcohol that was part of life when soldiers were confined to their posts. It was better, he thought, to keep the men in the field, where the exercise of the march and the excitement of battle would do their constitutions good. The men serving under him no doubt had a different opinion on the matter.

Despite the pressure, most Seminole were still unwilling to emigrate. At the end of June a number of Seminole leaders gathered to discuss common strategy, and they all agreed to execute anyone bringing messages of peace from the whites.⁶ Beginning in September, they also went on the offensive. On the third, three civilians were killed near Micanopy, and during the final week of the month a total of five civilians were slain in three different attacks, two near Black Creek and one at Fort Crane.⁷ The raids, presumed to be committed by Halleck Tustennuggee's band, continued into October. On October 1, several murders were reported near St. Augustine, and on the sixth there was a raid on the cattle at Fort Russell in Alachua County.⁸

The army, frustrated and without hope, suffered from sickness, extreme heat, and the toll of war. Three hundred officers had resigned since the beginning of the war, in an army that started the conflict with little more than six hundred officers.⁹ Commenting on the low morale, Sprague said, "Fatal paralysis, neither peace nor war, prostrated every exertion and crushes the ardent anticipation of officers and men."¹⁰ The conditions in Florida were worse than what even the most experienced soldiers had endured. Capt. George McCall wrote, "We were marching through water from six inches to three feet deep, forty-eight days. . . . No more than two hundred men of the eight hundred could be mustered for duty; fevers, diarrheas, and swollen feet and ankles . . . having laid up in the hospital three-fourths of the command."¹¹

Private Lynch of the Dragoons told of a two-hundred-mile march through the wilderness from Fort Mellon to Fort Jupiter. "Horses floundered, sank into the mire, and had to be shot. Dismounted soldiers felt the soft earth tremble and give way, sinking them waist deep in the black mud. . . . Yet amidst all this our troops, barefooted, their pantaloons cut off as high as the knee by the saw palmetto, press forward in defense of their country."¹²

Describing the intense heat and lack of water during the dry season, Surgeon Motte noted in his journal, "We suffered very much during this march from the scarcity of water, every part of the ground being parched by the excessively hot sun. Our only mode of procuring it on many occasions was to dig holes in the ground, it being generally found at a depth of one to two feet from the surface, but of the colour and consistency of ink. We had to drink that or go without."¹³ Later, summing up the frustration felt by many in the army, Motte wrote, "Florida is certainly the poorest country that ever two people quarreled for. It is in fact a most hideous region to live in; a perfect paradise for Indians, alligators, serpents, frogs, and every other

kind of loathsome reptile. . . . Then not why in the name of common sense let the Indians have kept it?"¹⁴

Summers were difficult to live through, but winter could also be a killer. It was easy for a soldier to be caught off-guard and not prepared for unpredictable weather. At Fort Pierce in February 1838, Maj. Reynold Kirby, a New Englander who certainly understood cold weather, wrote in his diary, "On the night of the 3d it became very cold & on the 4th, 5th & 6th suffered more from cold than ever in my life—a man of the Washington Volunteers frozen to death on the night of the 5th."¹⁵ If it had been continually cold in the winter, as it was in the north, a soldier might have been prepared. The problem was that Florida winters could be just as warm as a northern summer. A year to the day after Kirby made his report, Captain Vinton reported a temperature of 88 degrees at Key Biscayne.¹⁶ A soldier might start a patrol dressed lightly for summerlike weather but find it impossible to keep warm when a sudden cold front passed through.

Civilians, especially in areas far removed from Florida, had no idea what the soldiers were going through and how impossible their situation seemed. Disappointed that no brilliant and decisive victories had been achieved, armchair generals were quick to blame the army. Motte complained of the "abusive comments of some civilians . . . vomited forth reproaches, sneers, and condemnation . . . assailing the characters of those who . . . were compelled to remain in this inglorious war . . . and finally, when worn out by arduous service, sent home with ruined constitutions."¹⁷ For all involved, be they soldiers and sailors on patrol, civilians living in fear of random attacks, or the hounded Seminole, the war continued to drag on.

The war may not have been over, but the government was certainly tired of paying for it. In orders issued to Worth upon his taking command, the secretary of war told the colonel to "diminish, in a spirit of sound economy, all unnecessary drains upon the treasury, by discharging all persons employed in civil capacity, whose services you shall not deem indispensable to the duties of your command." Worth, in turn, called for special reports from all his junior commanders, listing the resources available. It was time to trim the fat.¹⁸

Cutting expenses meant cutting well-paid civilian jobs. As Sprague pointed out, "The employment of clerks, and mechanics of all kinds, teamsters, laborers, &c., for so long a time, drawing their monthly pay with regularity, at exorbitant rates, induced many to look upon the Florida war as . . . a state of things which would secure employment profitable and lasting."¹⁹ At the top of Sprague's list of people who would prolong

the war for personal profit were the black interpreters. Cuban fishermen living along the Gulf Coast also had an interest in keeping the war going. For many of them, fishing was often a pretense for smuggling arms and ammunition to the Seminole. Even slaveholders profited from the war by hiring their slaves out as laborers to the army. For all these people the continuation of the war meant a steady paycheck, and many would do whatever they could to keep the conflict going.

Another expense Worth was determined not to incur was the volunteers. Every Indian scare, whether real or imagined, brought out another appeal for the mustering of a company of volunteers. Some reports turned out to be nothing more than willful fabrications. One overly zealous militia officer reported to Governor Call, "Yesterday, about ten in the morning, the Indians made an attack on Mr. Osteen's house . . . killed Mrs. O. and were still firing on the house when the express left." An army contractor traveling in the area disputed the claim, "I learned there that she was not killed, but it was generally supposed that she *might* have been shot at by an Indian. I reached Mrs. Osteen's the same day, found her in good health, and learned that she had not been shot. I was told by her neighbors that she had not even been fired on, and there was great doubt expressed whether any Indians had been in the vicinity."²⁰ The governors of Florida and Georgia both attempted to force the civilian troops upon Worth, but he would have none of them. When Gov. Charles MacDonald of Georgia pressed the matter with the War Department, a series of frosty letters began to pass between the Georgia capital at Milledgeville, the War Department in Washington, and Worth's headquarters at Fort Brooke. Fed up with the whole matter, Secretary of War John Spencer backed Worth completely.²¹

As the weather began to cool in October, Worth put more of his men into the field, especially in south Florida. One of the more ambitious expeditions left Fort Dallas on October 9 under Capt. Martin Burke of the army, who joined Lieutenant McLaughlin of the navy at Chakaika's Hammock on the thirteenth. With a force of about 260 men traveling in canoes, they headed west across the Everglades. It was unexplored territory, and even their guide was unsure of the path. When the water was too low the men were forced to portage their vessels, and when it rained, there was usually nowhere to take shelter. After about two weeks traversing the entire width of the peninsula they finally reached the west coast. They then paddled north until they reached Punta Rassa at the mouth of the Caloosahatchee River on the twenty-eighth.²²

The expedition rested for a few days, getting their things in order and stocking up on supplies. One soldier died while at Punta Rassa, and some men, including Captain Burke, were too sick to continue. On November 3 the expedition headed up the Caloosahatchee, making for Lake Okeechobee, which they entered on the thirteenth. Heavy winds and waves swamped several of the canoes, forcing the expedition off the lake and back into the Everglades somewhere along the south shore of the lake. From there they traveled southeast, returning to Fort Dallas on the twenty-fourth, fifty-three days after they departed. In his report to the secretary of the navy, McLaughlin summed up the trip. "If our labors have not been rewarded with the capture of any of the enemy, they have at least gained us information of an extensive country which had never heretofore been explored, and exhibited an imposing force in the heart of a country hitherto deemed impenetrable."²³

An expedition led by Capt. Richard D. Wade of the army fared better. Leaving Fort Lauderdale on November 5, a company of sixty-five soldiers in twelve canoes traveled north and soon surprised an Indian fishing near Hillsborough Inlet. "By operating on his hopes and fears," as Wade put it, he was able to induce the Indian to lead him to a village fifteen miles inland. The soldiers were able to surprise the village the next morning, capturing twenty Seminole and killing eight as they attempted to escape. Under the guidance of an old Indian named Chia-chee, the soldiers were then led to another village, where they managed to capture another twenty-seven Seminole and destroy a large store of provisions. On their way back to Fort Lauderdale one Indian approached and surrendered voluntarily, and after returning to the post, Wade let Chia-Chee go out on his own after promising to bring in some others. A few days later the old man brought in six more Seminole men and boys.²⁴

Worth intended for the pressure to be unrelenting. During December more than a thousand men were operating in and around the Big Cypress and Everglades. Soldiers and sailors penetrated the Seminole's territory from the east, south, and west coasts and from the Caloosahatchee, coordinating their various movements as best they could. As Sprague noted, "Night after night officers and men were compelled to sleep in their canoes, others in damp bogs, and in the morning cook their breakfast over a fire built on a pile of sand in the prow of the boat, or kindled around a cypress stump."²⁵ Worth wanted to capture or force the Indians to surrender; he didn't want them killed. In a letter to Maj. William Belknap, who was in command south of the Caloosahatchee, Worth wrote, "There is difficulty in finding

men who can be made to comprehend that there is more true patriotism, sense, and decency, in ridding our country of this incubus in a quiet way, than in cutting down a solitary Indian, who may have been guilty of the indecency of defending his own country in his own way.”²⁶

Realizing how valuable the aid of Coacoochee had been in convincing many of the Indians to emigrate, the colonel asked that some influential leaders be returned from Indian Territory in an attempt to persuade others to join them. One of those who returned was Alligator, who was able to talk Tiger Tail into surrendering. This action alone brought in more than 150 Seminole. In a “talk” sent to Holata Micco, Alligator referred to Othulke, an associate of Abiaki’s known as the Prophet. “The Prophet has passed for a great man, and you listen to his talk, but you must also listen to what Alligator has to say. Are you willing that all your women and children should be killed for the sake of the Prophet? Do you love him more than you do your women and children?”²⁷ It was no doubt a powerful argument, but neither Abiaki nor Holata were listening.

Perhaps the ambition and energy of their commanding officer inspired the men under him, because they now seemed more determined than ever to carry the war to the Seminole. Maybe they simply realized that the only way they were going to get out of Florida was to end the war or die trying. As the soldiers went about their work, every effort was made to move in silence and to keep fires small so as not to alert the Seminole of the army’s presence. Yet for all their hard work, few Indians were actually seen. Trails were found, often crossing or diverging in a manner calculated to make tracking difficult, yet the people who had made the trails could not be located. On one occasion, Major Belknap’s efforts were thwarted by one of his own men who got lost and fired his musket three times as a signal for help. Belknap later discovered a Seminole camp only a few miles away that he would have been able to surprise had the Indians not been warned by the firing of the musket. Worse yet, the alerted Seminole were waiting in ambush and in a short skirmish two soldiers were killed.²⁸

Naval Lieutenant McLaughlin was as determined as Worth to do whatever was necessary to bring the war to an end. In a letter to the colonel he wrote, “Be pleased to . . . suggest any . . . operation in which I can render my command useful; the harder and more hazardous the service the better.”²⁹ The capture of Abiaki appeared almost an obsession to the lieutenant. After he and his sailors had been fruitlessly examining the lower Everglades in search of the elusive Mikasuki leader, he received word that Abiaki was probably east of Lake Okeechobee near Jupiter. McLaughlin told a subordinate officer, “Should you capture any of the enemy . . . you are directed to

use any measures of severity to compel them to lead you to the haunts of Jones [Abiaki].”³⁰ Packing ten days’ rations and ordering the men to subsist on half-rations, the sailors and Marines moved toward Jupiter, encountering nothing but difficult travel and no Indians. McLaughlin wrote to the secretary of the navy, telling him, “It was one continuous portage over stumps and cypress knees, with occasional glimpses of open water. For six days we continued our search through the swamps, meeting but little success.”³¹

The southern offensive continued into January. A naval force under Lt. John Rodgers explored Lake Okeechobee, Fisheating Creek, and the Kissimmee River up to Lake Tohopekaliga. In a letter to McLaughlin, Rodgers reported “living in our canoes fifty-eight days, with less rest, fewer luxuries, and harder work, than fall to the lot of that estimable class of citizens who dig our canals [slaves or foreign laborers].”³²

The extensive patrols forced the Seminole to scatter into small parties and go into deep hiding. They often planted their crops some distance away from where they made camp, making it more difficult for the soldiers to find them. They also learned to keep a very close watch on their surroundings. Only five miles from Fort Dallas, a group of Marines came upon a series of Seminole settlements, but, “The instant he [the Marine commander] was discovered, signal fires sprang up in every direction, as if by magic, and fields and settlements were as suddenly deserted.”³³ At Lake Tohopekaliga, Lieutenant Rodgers reported, “No sooner had the first canoe emerged from its outlet, than a large fire sprang up on the opposite side of the lake.”³⁴ After spending more than two exhausting months on patrol south of the Caloosahatchee, an officer wrote in his journal, “Thus ended the Big Cypress campaign, like all others: drove the Indians out, broke them up, taught them we could go where they could; men and officers worn down; two months in water; plunder on our backs; hard times; trust they are soon to end. . . . The only reward we ask is the ending of the Florida War.”³⁵

Worth was confident he could grant that request, but not until a pair of hostile bands in the north of Florida were taken care of. One of the bands, a group of Mikasuki led by Halleck Tustennuggee, was considered the most dangerous. On December 20, 1841, Halleck and between twelve and twenty warriors struck the settlement of Mandarin, south of Jacksonville along the St. Johns River. Having experienced no Indian trouble in the area for quite some time, the townspeople had let their guard down. With nearly all the men away on a hunting trip, the town was exceptionally vulnerable, a fact the Seminole were no doubt aware of. After killing two men, two women, and an infant, the warriors celebrated in the burning town for sixteen hours before leaving. A petition from the town calling for protection soon arrived

on Worth's desk, and he responded by telling them that troops were already in the area, but that it was impossible to stop small bands from slipping through. The colonel then asked why, out of the fifty-one signers of the petition, none had been present to defend the town.³⁶

The other group Worth was concerned about were remnants of the Red Stick Creeks who had settled somewhere between the Suwannee and Withlacoochee Rivers and were led by Octiarche. Although they harbored a deep hatred of the whites, they could be just as hostile toward those of their own people whom they considered traitors. One of those they had an especial loathing for was Nethlockemathlar, an old chief who had returned from Indian Territory to assist Worth in trying to convince his brethren to surrender. Octiarche conspired to assassinate the old leader, but when Nethlockemathlar was informed of the plot he went to Worth and requested to be allowed to take his own revenge.

For Worth, it was an immense risk that almost went horribly wrong. Nethlockemathlar was asking the colonel to arm and equip thirty warriors and supply them with horses. What if it was a ruse, and the warriors took the opportunity to flee back to their own people and continue the war against the whites? How could Worth have explained such a thing? Still, he trusted Nethlockemathlar and allowed him to select his warriors from among those awaiting transportation to the west. What neither of them knew was that Nethlockemathlar's younger brother Tiger Tail and some of the warriors selected for the war party were in on the assassination plot. Soon after Nethlockemathlar's departure from Fort Brooke, Tiger Tail fled the embarkation camp. A suspicious army officer, noticing some women carrying small bundles from the camp, checked and found Tiger Tail gone. An express was sent to catch up with Nethlockemathlar at Fort Clinch on the Withlacoochee, and the plot was foiled. Not knowing which of the thirty warriors were complicit in the plot, Worth had them all shipped west with the exception of Nethlockemathlar.³⁷

By February 1842 Worth began to believe that it might actually be possible to end the war. After shipping 230 Seminole west he estimated that there were approximately 300 left in Florida, only about a third of them being warriors. Even though the estimate was low, it still presented a problem: The more pressure he put on, the more they scattered, and the more difficult it was to find them. He also realized that as long as he stayed on the offensive, so would the Indians. If his mission was to bring peace to Florida, then continuing the war was the worst way to bring it about. Pointing out how difficult it would be to catch those still at large, Worth suggested that

for the time being, the remaining Seminole should be allowed to live in the extreme southern portion of the peninsula. Yet even with the concurrence of Governor Call, the War Department rejected the suggestion for reasons of “national honor.” Of those who were consulted on the decision, only General Jesup supported the idea of ending the war. It was, after all, the same recommendation he had made four years earlier.³⁸

Although the War Department had instructed Worth to continue the war, they hadn’t given him any specific orders on how to accomplish the task. Instead, they had given him full discretion to manage the war as he saw fit, and scaling back operations was what he saw fit to do. One of the first things he did was pull most of the troops out of the Everglades and Big Cypress, retaining just two companies at Fort Harvie (later Fort Myers) and leaving Forts Dallas and Lauderdale in the hands of the navy. Two of the withdrawn companies were sent in the direction of Lake Istokpoga, where they were able to make contact with some of the Indians that had fled from the Everglades. After some negotiation, sixty-eight agreed to emigrate. If the war was going to be ended, this is how Worth expected to do it.³⁹

Not only were troops being withdrawn from south Florida; they were also being taken completely out of the territory. In early February the Third Artillery regiment was sent to their normal stations, manning forts along the Gulf coast.⁴⁰ Later in the month the Sixth Infantry, totaling 480 men, was sent to Jefferson Barracks at St. Louis.⁴¹ Like all the previous campaigns, the climate had taken its toll on the soldiers. While Worth had been in command the maximum strength of the army had been almost five thousand men. During that period, there were a total of 15,794 instances of men being on the sick list (often repeatedly), resulting in 234 deaths and 117 disability discharges. In his history of the war, Sprague urged the establishment of a retirement home (“asylum”) for old soldiers who had been left broken and destitute in the service of their country. He saw it as a “resting place of the faithful soldier, instead of the sepulcher which now receives them—the alms-house, and a scanty, secluded grave.”⁴²

Of course it wasn’t just the army that was suffering. Harassed by the incessant patrols, the Seminole were continually on the run, and, as always, it was the women, children, and elders who endured the worst privations. Forced to live out in the cold in temporary shelters with much of their food destroyed by the army and many of the necessities of life abandoned when forced to flee in haste, they continued to hold out hope for an end to the war. We tend to focus on the hardships endured by the soldiers simply because whites kept written records that allow us to show just how severe life was for those caught up in the war. It was even more severe for the

Seminole. Nethlockemathlar told how “the troops closed in upon us from year to year, depriving us of crops, and subjecting our women and children to sickness and want.”⁴³ Even as hardened a warrior as Halleck Tustennuggee could not ignore the toll the war was taking on his people. “My people are wild, and start at the cracking of a bush; they live in swamps, and will always live there as long as your troops pursue them. . . . We have no place to live, no fields to plant, no friends and relatives to talk with, our wives and children are gone.”⁴⁴

By March orders for the transfer of the Second Infantry reduced Worth’s force to about two thousand men. The colonel was also determined to continue cutting back on expenses. By concentrating his forces, the need for wagons, mules, and horses was much reduced, along with feed and tack. It also allowed him to release hundreds of teamsters and blacksmiths. Unnecessary posts were closed, and maintenance ceased on those that were slated to be abandoned at war’s end. Clerks, stable hands, mechanics, and day laborers were also let go, with many of their duties taken over by soldiers.⁴⁵ Whether the fact was officially recognized or not, it was obvious the war was ending.

Worth realized that if he could capture Halleck Tustennuggee, it would mean that one of the last serious obstacles to ending the war had been eliminated. Most of the other large Seminole bands, including those of Abiaki and Holata, were hiding in south Florida, doing their best to avoid the whites. Since the attack on Mandarin in December, every available unit had been put in search of Halleck and his men. Back in early January, not long after the Mandarin attack, his camp near the St. Johns had been surprised, forcing the Indians to flee in haste. The attack also resulted in the capture of war leader Powis Fixico and five other warriors.⁴⁶ Halleck’s band was then able to elude the army until mid-April, when Worth finally located the chief and forty followers near Lake Apopka. The Seminole, outnumbered ten to one, made a stand in a well-defended hammock. Eventually the army was able to come in on the Indians’ flank, forcing the warriors to disperse into the thick foliage.⁴⁷ It was the last battle of the Florida War. Halleck and his followers had escaped, but the army had managed to capture his camp and most of his group’s supplies. For Halleck, time was running out.⁴⁸

Only one Indian had been captured in the battle, but the old man turned out to be Halleck’s father-in-law, and he convinced Worth that he could talk Halleck into coming in to negotiate. Worth was willing to let him try; there was really nothing to lose. Five days later the old man returned with news that Halleck was coming in to talk, but first the chief needed a shirt, having lost all his good clothing in the battle. A few additional days

were spent stalling, but finally, on April 29, Halleck met with Worth at a camp near Warm Springs. Not that the fierce warrior intended to surrender. He was, as was his habit, hoping to play the army for a fool, to gather supplies, then once again disappear into the wilds and continue the fight.⁴⁹

Worth let the chief have his way for a few days, letting Halleck's band gather near the camp, supplying the Indians with food and other commodities, and even letting his officers and men socialize with them. While visiting the Seminole camp the officers reconnoitered the area, looking to see if the camp could be surprised, but the Indians were too wary. Worth then asked Halleck to accompany him to Fort King, where powder and lead could be purchased. It was too much of a temptation for Halleck to resist. After the two men had left, Halleck's people, lured to the white camp by the promise of some sort of festivity, were taken prisoner. Word was immediately sent to Worth, who took Halleck prisoner at Fort King. The chief raged in anger, realizing he'd fallen into a trap of his own making. He and his followers were immediately loaded on wagons and sent to Fort Brooke.⁵⁰ Weeks later, as he boarded ship for the west, Halleck lamented, "I have been hunted like a wolf, and now I am to be sent away like a dog."⁵¹

That left Ociarche and the Creeks as the only large band still active in north Florida. When Worth had been negotiating with Halleck, a runner had been sent to the Creeks offering them peace, and Ociarche was inclined to listen. Unfortunately, several of his young warriors had gone out on their own and committed several murders in the Newnansville area. In another risky move, Worth let Halleck go out to speak with the Creeks, but kept his wives and children as hostages. Halleck had been determined never to leave Florida, but he was not willing to give up his family in the process. Ociarche listened, wasn't convinced of Halleck's or the army's sincerity, but promised to suspend hostilities for the present time. Worth then sent Holatoochee to explain that if all the Indians gathered south of the Peace River, they could live in peace. He also warned them that if they broke the peace, the army would once again hunt them down, and "men, women, and children, would be indiscriminately slaughtered." Convinced of the government's sincerity, Ociarche agreed to contact Abiaki and Holata Micco and meet with Worth at Cedar Key to finalize the agreement.⁵²

There had, since February, been a change of heart in Washington. The capture of Halleck and a general quietness throughout Florida helped convince the administration that the war was truly ending. On May 10 Secretary of War Spencer informed commanding general Winfield Scott that President Tyler wanted hostilities ended as soon as possible. On August 5 Worth met with Holata Micco at Fort Brooke, after which they

traveled to Cedar Key to meet with Octiarche and Tiger Tail on the ninth. Worth assured them they would not be molested if they removed themselves to the area south of the Peace River, and as the weeks progressed most of the Seminole quietly drifted south. On August 14, 1842, Worth declared the war over.⁵³

The only thing left was to properly bury the dead. Worth had earlier ordered that all officers who had died in the conflict and all enlisted men who had been killed in battle be disinterred from the scattered burial grounds throughout the war zone and brought to St. Augustine. There, on August 15, a solemn ceremony was held and the remains of hundreds of soldiers, including Major Dade and the men who had perished with him almost seven years before, were laid to rest under three stone pyramids in the military cemetery next to the St. Francis Barracks. A marble obelisk was later erected in front of the pyramids, paid for by the soldiers serving in Florida. It and the pyramids still stand today, a monument to those who made the supreme sacrifice in a conflict in which no one could truly claim victory.



Pyramids and obelisk at St. Francis Barracks National Cemetery in St. Augustine, erected at the end of the Second Seminole War.

Photo by the authors.

Worth, after going to Washington and receiving a brevet promotion to brigadier general, took a much deserved leave. Although the war was officially over, there were still scattered incidents of violence committed by several small bands that remained at large and had not yet heard of the war's end. Col. Josiah Vose, in command during Worth's absence, was ordered to hunt down the remaining Indians in the northern part of the territory. Realizing that these Seminole were no threat, he decided to ignore the order, believing it might reignite the war. The War Department later concurred with his decision.⁵⁴

As 1842 drew to a close, the final stage of emigration was taking place. Aboard one of the ships was Tiger Tail, the last of the major prewar leaders to leave his homeland. Sickened, he died in New Orleans, midway between the old home and the new. In a final show of respect he was buried with full military honors. For seven long, desperate years he had fought to remain on the soil of his birth. The will to continue had finally left him. He, and his homeland, were now at peace.⁵⁵

• 18 •

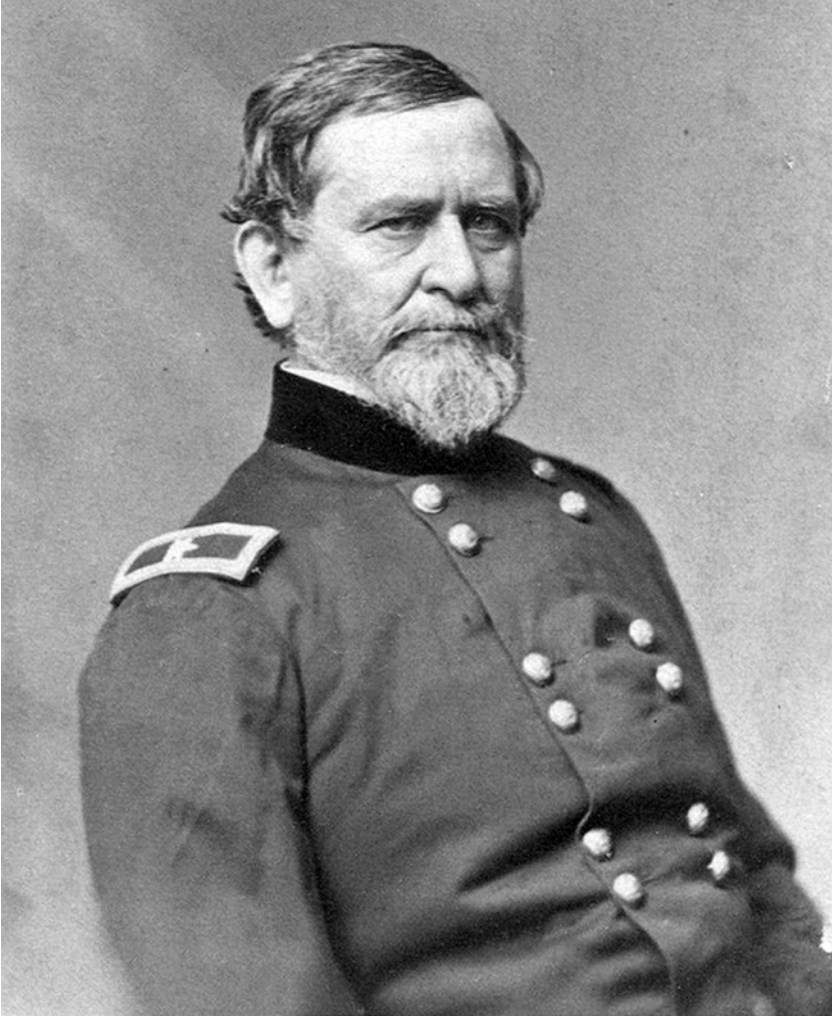
1843–1855

Peace, Panic, and Pressure

For the vast majority of Americans, the Second Seminole War was forgotten almost as soon as it ended. There were no banner headlines, no parades for the returning soldiers, and very little reflection upon what had transpired. It had been an unpopular, embarrassing war, and no one wanted to talk about it. For the nation as a whole the war in Florida was simply part of a long, continuous struggle against the Native Americans, and the end of hostilities in Florida certainly did not signal the end of the nation's "Indian problem." Indeed, the famous Indian wars of the American west were just beginning.

It's unfortunate that in an age when many Americans were fascinated or obsessed with literature and history, only one full account of the war was written. Several of the participants left diaries or other records of their experiences, but only Capt. John T. Sprague (General Worth's son-in-law and former aide) was able to publish a history of the war from beginning to end. Others may have made the attempt but found little encouragement. Army surgeon Samuel Forry went as far as to contact a publisher in New York. The editor replied that "The Florida war is so unpopular that any work on the subject, however interesting and well-written, would fall still-born from the press." If there were any lessons to be learned from the war, no one seemed willing to find out what they were.¹

For many Americans the war could not be forgotten. Thousands of people on both sides were forced to live with the emotional and physical scars that had been dealt out over seven years of desperate conflict. The most obvious sufferers were the soldiers and warriors who had sustained grievous wounds that would never heal and would, in time, prove fatal for some. Many soldiers had contracted some form of tropical disease and



Brig. Gen. John T. Sprague, historian of the Second Seminole War and General Worth's aide and son-in-law. He also accompanied General Macomb on his peace mission in 1839.

Courtesy of John Titcomb Sprague Collection, Julia Turwiler Library, University of West Alabama, http://library.uwa.edu/images/J_T_S_Coll_0001.jpg.

were never able to fully recover. Others bore the inevitable emotional scars resulting from what they had experienced on the field of battle. For many soldiers, the extreme hardship of duty in Florida had been more than their constitutions could bear.

The number of people who died in the war was small when compared to the number that would perish on the Civil War battlefields two decades later, but it was significant at the time. The official tally for the army was 1,466 dead, a large number for such a small army. The biggest killer was not Seminole bullets but disease. More than 1,100 men succumbed to some sort of sickness, usually dysentery, diarrhea, or fever. Many died from “disease unknown.” A surgeon in the Eighth Infantry classified the vast majority of his regiment’s losses as being due to “disease incident to climate and severe service in Florida.” Surgeon Richard Satterlee said, “I have not the least hesitation in saying that the constant and long exposure of the soldiers of our army in Florida to the influence of malaria, and their suffering from fevers both remittent and intermittent, was the cause of the great mortality, as well as the great number of cases of dysentery and diarrhea that occurred there.”²

All in all, the Seminole were not very impressive as battlefield killers. One reason was the type of weapons used. Although their muzzle-loading rifles were accurate, they also took the better part of a minute to load. Very often, one good shot was all a warrior would get. After that, sloppy loading and shooting in haste caused most Seminole bullets to miss their mark. Disciplined soldiers, who took the time to properly load and aim their weapons, even under fire, proved deadlier. The Dade Battle, the Battle of Okeechobee, and the Caloosahatchee Massacre accounted for almost half the army’s losses to Seminole warriors. Over the course of the war the Seminole managed to kill 269 of the army’s officers and enlisted men.³

Just being in the army could be dangerous. Accidental or violent deaths took 85 lives, and in a land of rivers, lakes, and swamps, most of those were from drowning. Murders and accidental shootings were also high on the list. Surprisingly, snake bite or alligator attack is never mentioned as a cause of death, even though encounters with the deadly reptiles are occasionally mentioned by diarists. What we can never know is the number of suicides. Personal accounts mention several, but none are officially recorded. Record keepers usually felt it was kinder to list the cause of death as “disease unknown.” We must also remember that the numbers given above are only for the U.S. Army. The U.S. Navy and Marine Corps officially lost 41 men, though the squadron commander, Lieutenant McLaughlin, added that he sent 125–150 men north as “incurable.” By far the biggest gap in our knowledge of casualties is in the militia and volunteer units. Because these were state troops the army did not keep track of their losses.⁴

Soldiers are not the only people affected by war. What of the uncounted widows and orphans? What of the parents, spouses, and siblings who were forced to care for those who returned with some form of disability? It was,

after all, a time when social welfare systems were almost totally nonexistent. Jacksonian democracy was, more than anything else, an every-man-for-himself political system. Pensions usually required an individual “Act of Congress” (which might take years with no guarantee of passing) and were often nothing more than the soldier’s base pay. Ten dollars a month might be sufficient for a soldier on active duty, where food, shelter, and clothing were provided, but it wouldn’t last long in the civilian world.

And what of the civilian population of Florida? How many had lost their lives, homes, and livelihoods to the war? How many had lost loved ones to Indian depredations? How had the war affected the growth of the territory in general? It took more than twenty years for Florida to achieve the status of statehood. Had the threat of Indian hostilities forced potential immigrants to look elsewhere for a new home? There are, of course, two sides to every coin. There can be little doubt that in the process of hunting down the Seminole, the government was forced to explore a large territory that had previously been almost totally unmapped. As would happen throughout the expanding nation, army posts often became magnets for settlement. Many Florida towns owe their existence, and some their names, to the Seminole Wars.

As high as the price of war had been for the Americans, it was higher still for the Seminole nation. Approximately four thousand Seminole had been forced from their homes at gunpoint, loaded aboard ships, and deported to a strange land that was nothing like the one they had left.⁵ The number of Seminole deaths is impossible to estimate. Battle reports turned in by army officers tended to err on the high side or drift into the realm of exaggeration when listing the number of Indians killed or wounded. Rarely would anyone think to report Seminole civilian casualties, either accidental or intentional. Although better adapted to the Florida climate, Indians were certainly not immune to tropical diseases and were often more susceptible to infection when held in detention camps prior to deportation. Life on the run, living in inhospitable hideouts, and the inevitable stress of war all served to weaken the Seminole’s constitutions. And who can measure the emotional toll taken by the deaths of loved ones or the pain of having families torn apart when members were captured and shipped west? At times we wonder how any survived.

Yet survive they did. The story of the hardships endured by the Seminole during the migration, and the challenges they faced after the arrival in their new homes are important tales to tell, yet it would do injustice to the sufferings of these people to attempt such a thing in the limited space avail-

able here. The subject has been treated well and often, and we will, in this work, barely scratch the surface of the extremely sad tale of the displaced Seminole. The first trial for those who were emigrating was simply getting to their new homes. Each group that traveled west was escorted by an army officer, and it is to their credit that many of those officers did everything within their power to make the trip as comfortable and safe as possible. Unfortunately, their power was very limited. Actual arrangements were made by low-bid private contractors who placed profit above the Indians' survival. To maximize income, corners were cut and standards lessened. When the inevitable delays and shortfalls occurred contractors would shrug their shoulders, and the Seminole would suffer.

Even when supplies were plentiful and fit for human consumption, the trail could still be fraught with dangers. Disease could break out in overcrowded ships and camps. When on the trail, the parties often had to stop for the sake of the sick and dying. The weather could, and often did, turn bad. Rain could fall in torrents for several days, forcing the emigrants to ford flooded streams and rivers.⁶ Snow could fall in winter, something native Floridians were ill-prepared for. For the sick, the old, and the very young, the trip to Indian Territory was often more than their frail bodies could endure.

Even those who had willingly consented to emigration did not fare well. The bands of Holahte Emathla and Black Dirt had gathered at Fort Brooke when the war commenced, deciding to emigrate rather than fight. More than four hundred of their people left Tampa Bay in mid-April 1836. It took less than four weeks by sailing ship and steamboat to reach Little Rock, but in the process twenty-five lives were lost. Then the trip became difficult. For another month the group labored across 127 miles of unsettled wilderness. It rained heavily almost every day, making the few primitive roads impassible and the numerous streams impossible to ford. Deaths averaged about two a day. Black Dirt lost his wife and daughter. On the night of June 3, Holahte Emathla died, just two days from his promised land. Of the 407 Seminole that had left Florida, only 320 survived the passage. Who can tell how many later died as a consequence of the trip?⁷

Being in their new homes did not mean automatic prosperity. In Florida the Seminole had been surrounded by hostile whites. In Indian Territory they were surrounded by hostile Indians and were under the political control of the hated Creeks. Not surprisingly, many of the promises the government had made to them were never kept. Annuities were either delayed or used to pay off whites who brought financial claims against the Seminole. Subsistence assistance was cut off at a designated time, even though it was still desperately needed. Farm implements and promised services were often

not delivered. No one knows how many Seminole died of starvation or exposure while trying to adjust to their new homeland. It is a testament to the tenacity and strength of the Seminole people that, in time, they were able to thrive in their new surroundings and retain their identity.⁸

The end of war and a new homeland did not bring peace to a number of Seminole. One group that felt especially threatened was the blacks. Despite having been promised their freedom, the threat of being sold into slavery was ever-present. Unscrupulous slave traders made deals with the Creeks to capture and turn over many blacks. Others were simply kidnapped. Blacks who had either escaped slavery or had never known it were now faced with the prospect of losing the freedom they had fought so hard to preserve.⁹

In addition to the blacks, there were many Seminole who did not feel safe on their new reservation. Some of the leaders who had fought longest to remain in Florida found themselves with very little political power when they arrived in Indian Territory, while those who had emigrated years earlier had been accumulating a measure of wealth and influence. These later emigrants found themselves left with the scraps from what was already a lean table. The best land was taken, and the foremost political positions were already occupied. In addition, there was often a measure of resentment between those who had left early and those who had stayed behind. Angry words had been said before or during the war, and violent deeds had been committed. Some warriors could not, or would not, forget. The Seminole had always been a collection of tribes that often did not see eye to eye. Old animosities had been put aside for the sake of the war effort, but in the new land the pressure of trying to survive often brought those ill feelings to the surface once again.¹⁰

In August 1842, as the war was drawing to its conclusion, Congress passed the Armed Occupation Act, designed to help populate Florida. In exchange for setting up and defending a homestead for five years, a family would be given title to 160 acres of land. The intention was for well-armed settlers to bravely defend their homes against what few Indians were left in the territory. In reality, many of the homesteaders didn't even own a gun, and at the first rumor of Indian trouble they quickly fled to the safety of the nearest town or military post. In the end, the Armed Occupation Act fell short of its goals. It did help to populate some remote areas of Florida, but not to the extent envisioned, and it did little or nothing to control the Indians.¹¹

In order to boost population, leaders in the territory began the difficult task of promoting Florida to wary settlers. One of Florida's most en-

thusiastic proponents was Congressional Delegate David Levy. In a letter to the *National Intelligencer* Levy laid forth, in the most glowing terms, all the advantages of life in Florida:

To the wealthy planter, Florida is eminently inviting. . . . But to the poor and the moderate in circumstance, it is, beyond comparison, the paradise of earth. There are no freezing winters to be provided against by closed houses [and] magazines of supplies for embargoed and shivering families. . . . The means of subsistence are obtained with less labor, and labor is more productive, and industry more quickly blessed with accumulation and plenty than is conceivable to the inhabitants of a less fortunate region.”¹²

It was a tough sell. Years of negative press had made people wary of Florida. The independent nation of Texas and lands just west of the Mississippi were far more attractive than Florida. Nonetheless, settlers trickled in. Statehood finally came on March 3, 1845, in conjunction with Iowa, the required free state needed to counterbalance the influence of adding another slave state to the Union. Although the ascension to equal status with the rest of the Union was cheered throughout Florida, it was not without some reservation: the new flag was emblazoned with the motto “Let Us Alone.”

The same motto might well have suited the Seminole of Florida. By 1843 most of the Indians in Florida were living in the remote southern portion of the peninsula and were content to be there. Official estimates put their population at 360 and stated that primary leadership had fallen to two men.¹³ Abiaki (Sam Jones) was in his sixties and commanded great respect among the Mikasuki. Among the remnants of the Alachua Seminole, Holata Micco (Billy Bowlegs) had become the principal chief. Intelligent and moderate, he was also one of the few Seminole leaders who spoke English. Because he was more accessible than the reclusive Abiaki, whites erroneously considered him the representative of all Seminole in Florida. The name “Bowlegs” had nothing to do with a physical trait, but was a corruption of the Seminole name Bolek. Two other prominent leaders were Othulke, a Mikasuki known as “The Prophet,” and Assinwar, a close associate of Holata.¹⁴

There were also the remnant Red Stick Creeks, who had settled north of Lake Okeechobee, along the Kissimmee River. This was the band that had been led by Octiarche, but when he began causing trouble in late 1842, Worth had him taken prisoner and sent west.¹⁵ Although many whites called the Creeks “Seminole,” they certainly didn’t see themselves that way. If nothing else, they spoke Muskogee, not the Hitchiti tongue



Holata Micco, more commonly known as Billy Bowlegs. Along with Abiaki (Sam Jones), he was one of the two primary leaders of the Seminole in the Third Seminole War.

State Archives of Florida, <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/27148>.

that the Mikasuki and Alachua Seminole used. United in the war against the whites, the Creeks often fought alongside the Seminole, but politically and socially, they usually kept to themselves. They were also the most likely to endanger the fragile peace that was settling over Florida, due to their living closer to white settlements, their deep-seated hatred of the Americans going back to the time of the Creek Civil War, and a growing mistrust between themselves and the larger Seminole bands.

The fragile peace held for the better part of seven years, though it was not because everyone had decided to forgive and forget. Simply put, there was little opportunity for violent interaction. True to their promise, the Seminole generally kept to their south Florida reservation, having decided that the best way to keep their Florida homes was to completely avoid contact with the whites. They would, on occasion, make hunting trips north of the line, but they endeavored to keep a low profile and avoid areas frequented by whites. On the other side of the equation, few settlers attempted to make their homes in the vicinity of the Seminole. It was difficult for hostilities to break out when the adversaries rarely came into contact.¹⁶

No matter how peaceful the intention of the Seminole, jittery settlers in exposed areas never felt totally comfortable, and they petitioned their representatives, demanding that the remaining Seminole be removed. Bowing to the pressure, Secretary of War William Wilkins ordered Worth to “resort, without delay, to the adoption of all peaceful means to induce the remnant of Indians in Florida to emigrate to the country West of the Mississippi river.” He knew that no matter how good everyone’s intentions were, sooner or later violence would break out. “No one can be responsible for the continuance of perfect tranquility—one mischievous white man, or one revengeful Indian, may disturb the whole country and produce much disaster.”¹⁷ Yet whatever the War Department’s wishes, affairs in Florida became secondary when the nation went to war with Mexico in 1846, leaving the Seminole temporarily forgotten.

During these years of relative peace official contact with the Indians was maintained by army Captains Sprague and John C. Casey. Sprague was officer in charge of Indian Affairs until he left Florida in 1849, and during those years he wrote his history of the Florida War. Casey, who suffered from tuberculosis, had been friendly with the Seminole while serving in Florida during the war and had requested a posting in the state for health reasons following the war with Mexico. More than any other man, the Seminole trusted Casey. As one officer put it, “He never deceived them; never told them a lie, and never made a promise he did not fulfill if within his power. . . . By this simple means he gained the confidence of the whole nation.” It

was largely through his and Holata's efforts that Florida remained at peace long after the war ended.¹⁸

Maintaining the peace was going to be difficult. Army Inspector General Sylvester Churchill feared trouble from white squatters, saying, "Not satisfied with what they can find out of the Ever Glades, some, no doubt, will be disposed, for no commendable object, to establish themselves in or contiguous to the Indian district. . . . If they are allowed to fix themselves on the Indian line, apprehended dangers and war will soon be realized." He then suggested a twenty-five-mile buffer zone be established between the reservation and any land available for white settlement.¹⁹

To help keep contact at a minimum, General Worth authorized the establishment of a trading post at Charlotte Harbor, thereby allowing the Seminole to conduct their business without having to go to Tampa and pass near white settlements. To operate the store he selected Tampa merchants Thomas P. Kennedy and John Darling.²⁰ After a deadly hurricane nearly destroyed Tampa in September 1848, Kennedy and Darling decided the Charlotte Harbor store was in too vulnerable a position and were given permission to erect a new store farther inland. They chose a location along a small tributary of the Peace River just outside the northern extremity of the Seminole reservation, near today's Bowling Green.

On July 12, 1849, the peace began to unravel when four young warriors visited the small settlement that had grown up around the abandoned Fort Pierce. Although the settlement was outside the boundaries of the reservation, such visitations were not uncommon, and by all accounts the visit was friendly. Several hours later, William Russell and James Barker were conversing in a field about a quarter mile from Russell's home when the Indians approached and suddenly opened fire, wounding both men. Barker, unable to run away, was quickly overtaken and killed. Russell, with a serious wound in the arm, ran back to the settlement and spread the alarm. Alerted, the community's residents quickly rowed out to the safety of a vessel anchored in the Indian River Lagoon. They returned the next morning to find one house burned and two others looted and vandalized.²¹

Seventy-five miles to the west of Fort Pierce was the new Kennedy-Darling trading post near the Peace River. Manager of the store was Capt. George S. Payne, assisted by Dempsey Whidden, son of a local settler. Employed as a clerk was William McCullough, accompanied by his wife, Nancy, and their infant daughter. About a half hour before sunset on July 17, four warriors approached the store, saying they had skins on the opposite side of the river that they wished to trade, but needed the storekeeper's boat to

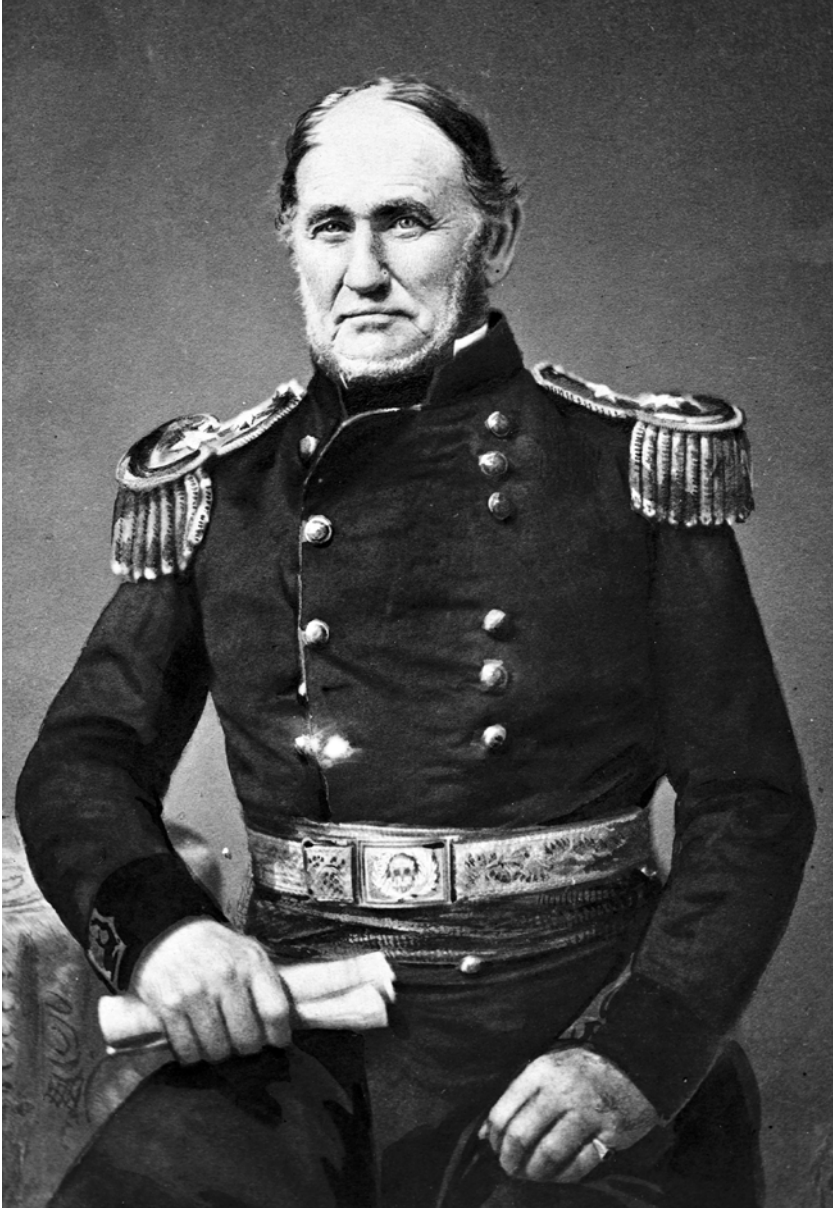
bring them across the river. Payne offered to get the skins after supper, and then he and the others went indoors for their evening meal. A few minutes later the door burst open, and the Indians fired at the diners, instantly killing Payne and Whidden. The McCulloughs, infant in hand, fled out the back of the building. Both were slightly wounded as they ran, but managed to elude their pursuers and reach safety a few days later.²²

News of both attacks quickly spread throughout the countryside. Not realizing the raids were carried out by the same small band, frontier residents assumed a general Indian uprising was taking place and fled in panic to the military outposts. Although many, including Captain Casey, doubted an uprising was taking place, the War Department was forced to react. Five companies of soldiers from Southern states were ordered to the area, along with much of the Seventh Infantry, which was stationed at the Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis, Missouri. The force was placed under the command of Maj. Gen. David E. Twiggs, a veteran of both the First and Second Seminole Wars.²³ Yet Twiggs's mission was not to gather the Seminole for emigration; President Zachary Taylor already knew how difficult that would be. Instead, Twiggs was to build a cordon of posts across the state and keep the two parties separate.

The Seminole realized the gravity of the situation. They had been allowed to remain in Florida only upon the promise of being totally unobtrusive neighbors, and the two violent attacks now put the whole tribe in jeopardy. Holata contacted Casey and told the officer that the murders had been committed by five young warriors "without the sanction or knowledge of the nation." A meeting was arranged for September 18 at the abandoned Kennedy-Darling store at Charlotte Harbor.²⁴

The meeting took place as planned, and Holata promised to hunt down and turn over the murderers. For him it was a delicate, risky situation. No Indian would willingly turn over one of their own people to the whites, but in this case, it had to be done. He also had to be careful not to upset Seminole politics. The killers had been identified by survivors, and some were related to important leaders. They were also a mix of Alachua, Mikasuki, and Creek warriors. Keeping everyone happy would be more difficult than finding the murderers.²⁵

Casey gave the Seminole thirty days to fulfill the promise, and on October 18 he and Twiggs returned to Charlotte Harbor, where Holata turned over three men.²⁶ Two of them were individuals who had been identified, but the third was not part of the raiding party and was evidently an unfortunate substitute for someone with more political clout within the tribe. As for the other two accused of the crimes, one had



Maj. Gen. David E. Twiggs. A veteran of both the First and Second Seminole Wars, he became the South's oldest general after surrendering all federal military installations in Texas to the Confederacy at the commencement of the Civil War.

Courtesy of Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/cwp2003004476/PP/>.

been wounded but escaped, and the other had been slain. As proof, Holata turned over a bloody rifle and a severed hand.²⁷ Yet if anyone expected the perpetrators to be quickly hanged from the ship's yardarm, they were mistaken. Seminole justice would have called for immediate execution, but the white man's courts didn't work that way. Taken back to Tampa, the men languished in confinement while the authorities decided who had jurisdiction in the matter. In the end, no one took up the case, so the prisoners were given \$100 and sent west.²⁸

Holata's swift action in delivering up the outlaws quieted things for a time, but an Act of Congress in 1850 served to undermine all his best efforts. The Swamp and Overflowed Land Act gave to the states all federal lands that were more than half covered with water and that might be drained and made useful. In Florida that was a considerable amount of territory, some twenty million acres. Normally the development of federal lands tended to be slow and sporadic. Under state control, those same lands might be made available for immediate sale. Suddenly land that was considered totally worthless fell under the gaze of speculators and developers. Elaborate plans for draining the Everglades were formulated and submitted to the state legislature. Many of our present problems over Everglades restoration stem from this 1850 law.²⁹

In the eyes of many people there were fortunes to be made in southern Florida, and the only thing standing in their way was the presence of a few hundred Seminole Indians. No one seemed to consider the insects, diseases, unbearable heat, and waterlogged terrain. Pressure mounted on politicians in both Tallahassee and Washington to remove the remaining Seminole. The first part of the effort, already underway after the raids of 1849, was the building or reactivation of a string of forts across the peninsula that would serve to separate the Indians and whites. The project required a force of over seventeen hundred men and served to impress upon the Seminole that the government was willing to use force when necessary.³⁰ One of the forts was constructed near the site of the attack on the Kennedy-Darling store on the Peace River and named Fort Chokonikla (burnt store). Captain Casey's agency was then moved there to keep the Indians away from the populated areas near Tampa.³¹ Another important post, Fort Myers, was erected at the site of old Fort Harvie on the Caloosahatchee, within the reservation and close to the Seminole villages in the Big Cypress.

To assist Casey in his efforts, Congress provided \$100,000 to use for payments to those Seminole who were willing to leave.³² The government also sent a delegation of western Seminole who they hoped would convince their Florida brethren that Indian Territory wasn't such a bad place to live.

The delegation arrived at Tampa on November 10, 1849, and was then taken out to Fort Chokonikla, where negotiations would hopefully take place.³³ The Florida Seminole were wary, and talks didn't begin until the day after Christmas; neither Abiaki nor Holata was there.³⁴ The negotiations continued on and off into January of 1850. On the seventeenth Holata and Assinwar came in for a talk, along with a number of other leaders. A "Grand Council" was held on the twenty-first in which General Twiggs offered Holata \$5,000 to emigrate.³⁵ It was a considerable sum, equal to about four years' worth of Twiggs's base salary. Still, the Seminole leader was noncommittal and agreed to nothing but another meeting to be held at Charlotte Harbor on February 10.³⁶

At first the negotiations seemed to be going well. Sixty Indians turned themselves in on February 12, and by the end of the month the number had increased to seventy-four.³⁷ Then the Seminole announced that no one else would come in until the western delegation had left for home.³⁸ To signal that the talks were over, they departed from their camp near the Caloosahatchee and returned to their homes in the Big Cypress.³⁹ Casey tried for weeks to get things going again, but was continually put off. Finally, on April 12, Holata met with Casey and told him there would be no more talk of emigration. Hoping to be left alone, he also suggested the reservation boundary be moved further south.⁴⁰

It was once again time for a change in leadership in Washington, but this one wasn't planned. On July 9, 1850, President Taylor died while in office. For the Seminole, it was the loss of an important ally. Just a few weeks prior to his death, Taylor had told General Twiggs, "Tell Bowlegs whenever you see him, from me, that if his people remain within their limits—& behave themselves—they shall never be disturbed while I am in office."⁴¹ Taylor's successor, Millard Fillmore, would not be as sympathetic.

The situation got worse for the Seminole when eight-year-old Daniel Hubbard went missing on August 6, 1850, west of present-day Orlando. Suspicion soon fell upon a group of Creeks who had been seen in the area, yet without a body or any other evidence it was impossible to prove what had happened to the boy.⁴² Under pressure from Secretary of War Charles Conrad, Casey kept up his investigation, and seven months after the disappearance he discovered the names of two of the murderers, which were later confirmed by Holata.⁴³ A month later the three killers were turned in at Fort Myers, and about a week after that the trio were found hanging in their cell at Tampa.⁴⁴

With Floridians once again demanding that the Seminole be removed, the Bureau of Indian Affairs hired Luther Blake, an agent who had expe-

rienced some success in getting Creeks to remove from Alabama, and who promised he could do the same with the Seminole. He arrived in Fort Myers in May 1851 and met with Casey and the other officers present. Casey was cordial, but not impressed. For starters, Blake intended to use Creek leader Paddy Carr to do the negotiating. Carr had led Creek forces against the Seminole in the previous war, and if the Florida Indians wouldn't talk to their own people from the West, what chance did Carr have of making any headway?⁴⁵ Realizing this, Blake went out to Indian Territory to find someone else. It was a hard task. After being rebuffed in the previous attempt and still waiting on payment from the government, none of the western Seminole wanted to make the trip. To make matters worse, Blake fell ill and was confined to his bed for two months. Stymied, Blake asked Washington to provide some sort of incentive. To accommodate, the Bureau of Indian Affairs promised to look into something the Seminole should have been offered in the Treaty of Payne's Landing twenty years earlier: separation from the Creeks, and their own reservation. With all the delays, it wasn't until February 1852 that Blake was able to return to Florida and begin his work.⁴⁶

Throughout the spring and into the summer of 1852 Blake met with the Seminole, but could get no commitment from them, no matter what bribes or other inducements he offered. Frustrated, he tried to intimidate them by bringing in the commander of the Florida Militia to make threats. Having held off most of the U.S. Army for seven years, Holata and the other Seminole weren't the least bit cowed.⁴⁷



"BILLY BOWLEGS" AND HIS RETINUE.

Seminole delegation in New York, prior to traveling to Washington to meet with President Fillmore and other officials.

State Archives of Florida, <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/4363>.

Stymied, Blake then used what he considered his most potent weapon: A trip to Washington. On August 31 Holata and a delegation of five Seminole leaders left Tampa, arriving in New York on September 11. After the obligatory tour and photographs, the group traveled by rail to Washington, where they met with President Fillmore, the secretaries of war and the navy, and the head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Fillmore and his officials were all very courteous and sympathetic, but remained inflexible. In the end, Holata told them what they wanted to hear and went home.⁴⁸ Soon after their arrival, the Seminole moved deeper into the wilderness and refused to speak to Blake any more. The whole effort had been an enormous waste of time and money.⁴⁹

The problem of how to deal with the immovable Florida Indians now fell to incoming President Franklin Pierce. Seeing how little the Bureau of Indian Affairs and their chosen agent Luther Blake had been able to accomplish, Pierce turned the matter over to his secretary of war, Jefferson Davis. The secretary, who knew Captain Casey and held him in high regard, placed him back in charge of dealing with the Seminole.⁵⁰ Casey was determined to do his best, even though he was now down to 108 pounds, often coughed up blood, and found it difficult to speak for lack of breath.⁵¹

For about a year Davis let Casey try gentle persuasion and outright bribery. None of it worked.⁵² Finally, in May 1854, Davis decided it was time for a change of course. He told the agent:

Believing that the time for negotiating with the Florida Indians is past, and that coercive measures only will induce them to emigrate, I have to direct that you will hold no more "talks" with them, but give your attention to putting a stop to their trade and preventing them from obtaining supplies of any kind from the whites. In the mean time the Department of the Interior will be requested to take measures for the sale of the lands heretofore withheld from settlement, as rapidly as they may be demanded by settlers.⁵³

In a letter to Florida Senator Stephen Mallory and Representative Augustus Maxwell, Davis explained, "It is hoped that the pressure produced by a steady adherence to this policy will induce the Indians to surrender themselves for removal, but should this not be the case, the Department will not hesitate to adopt forcible means to effect the object whenever there is a prospect that it can be used with success."⁵⁴

The pressure was subtle but obvious. Posts to the north of the reservation were closed and old ones reopened in the southern portions of the

peninsula. Fort Myers now became the base of operations in the effort to remove the Seminole, and in January 1855 command of the post passed to Col. Harvey Brown.⁵⁵ Overall command in Florida was still in the hands of Col. John Munroe at Tampa, but Brown was the man who would be dealing with the Seminole. The army was also ordering boats. Most of the vessels were canoes and shallow-draft Mackinaw boats, but some were a new metallic design that could better hold up to the rigors of use in the Everglades and on Lake Okeechobee.⁵⁶ The Seminole could feel the pressure and warned the whites what to expect. Assinwar told Casey, "If you pull a little dog by the tail back & forth—to & fro—he will finally get mad & bite you and you have to knock him in the head."⁵⁷

The army was also busy building roads into the Big Cypress, locating water routes within the Everglades, and mapping the locations of Seminole camps. By May 1855 numerous expeditions had explored the area south of the Caloosahatchee, cutting roads and erecting depots and blockhouses. As the summer rains commenced, expeditions were launched to explore Lake Okeechobee and the interior of the Everglades.⁵⁸ In a report summing up the past season's operations, Brown took time to tell Secretary Davis how worthless south Florida was for the white man's purposes, how well it suited the Indians' mode of living, and how desirous they were of peace. Davis didn't take the hint.⁵⁹

Summer passed into autumn and the season for active operations drew near. On December 7, 1855, Col. Brown dispatched Lt. George Hartsuff and ten men to reconnoiter the Big Cypress and determine the status of the posts that had been abandoned for the summer. For two weeks Hartsuff and his men explored the Big Cypress and found most of the abandoned posts destroyed. They also visited many of the known Seminole villages, but they appeared to be abandoned, and the only Indians they met were a man and boy herding hogs.⁶⁰

On the morning of the twentieth, as Hartsuff's soldiers were making their breakfast and packing the wagons, shots suddenly rang out. Four of the soldiers, all standing out in the open, were either killed instantly or received mortal wounds. Three of the soldiers took up defensive positions behind a wagon and returned fire, while another, more exposed, returned fire then ran for the woods, where he was able to conceal himself until after the battle ended. The detachment's sergeant and corporal found themselves separated from the others and without weapons, so they abandoned their comrades and fled for their lives. Lieutenant Hartsuff, in his tent when the shooting started, came out with his revolver blazing, shot at least two Indians, and joined the others at the wagon.⁶¹

The Seminole kept shooting, and soon one of the privates was severely wounded and crawled off to a nearby hammock where he died. Hartsuff and the two remaining soldiers continued to return fire until the lieutenant received a ball in the abdomen and another that broke one of his arms. He then told the remaining two soldiers to attempt to make it back to Fort Myers and report to Colonel Brown. Hartsuff then fled to a pond, where he hoped to hide from the attackers.

The two soldiers worked their way back toward Fort Myers, keeping to swamps and wooded areas to avoid detection. One of them stopped about fifteen miles from their destination, too exhausted to go on. His companion reached the fort the evening after the attack and sounded the alarm. An ambulance wagon was immediately dispatched to pick up the other soldier and a rescue party left the next morning in hopes of finding any other survivors.⁶² Three days later a badly wounded Hartsuff stumbled into their camp near Fort Simon Drum. Three other survivors also found their way back to Fort Myers in the days following the attack. Jefferson Davis and the government had been pushing; the Seminole had shoved back.⁶³

January–June 1856

The Army Is Frustrated, the Seminole Attack

The attack on Lieutenant Hartsuff and his party raised one immediate question: Why then? What had triggered the assault? A legend arose that Holata Micco was angry because the soldiers had destroyed his banana plants, but there is little evidence to support it. True, the soldiers had taken some bananas, but it is unlikely that they destroyed Holata's grove. Banana plants die after bearing fruit, and new ones are always popping out of the ground.¹ The simple fact is that the Seminole didn't need an excuse to start the war. The government had made it abundantly clear that it intended to force the Indians out, and the timing of the attack may have been nothing more than a matter of opportunity.

Because the fight took place near his abandoned village, whites assumed Holata was behind the attack, but there is no record he was actually there or that either he or Abiaki had authorized the action. There is always the possibility that the ambush was the work of a group of hot-headed young men acting on their own, anxious to prove themselves as warriors. In the end it didn't matter why the attack was made or exactly who carried it out. Once the shooting started, there was no going back. The Third Seminole War had begun.²

When news of the attack reached Tampa, Captain Casey sent word to Secretary Davis, informing him that "a peaceful removal is impossible."³ To Gov. James Broome he wrote, "The Seminoles finding no alternative left but emigration or hostilities, have chosen the latter." He then assured the governor that the army had sufficient troops in the area to take the war to the Seminole, but suggested placing two companies of volunteers along the Peace River "to give confidence and protection to the extreme frontier settlers."⁴

The calling up of volunteers would be a contentious issue between the state and federal governments for most of the war. As in the previous conflict, regulars and volunteers considered each other worthless and wanted little to do with one another. Colonel Brown told Casey he preferred “no *mounted* volunteers anywhere, no volunteers in the Indian country.”⁵ Meanwhile, Governor Broome was telling Secretary Davis, “The present United States force stationed in Florida is inadequate, and experience has demonstrated the inefficacy of such a force, when compared with the volunteer militia.”⁶

It was also a matter of money. Now that Florida was a state, the federal government was much less inclined to pick up the tab for the expensive volunteers. Broome had to be careful as to how many volunteer companies were mustered into service, because without approval from the War Department the state would be stuck with the bill for troops the nearly-empty state treasury could not afford. Throughout the early stages of the war the volunteers would be at the center of a constant tug of war between Washington and Tallahassee. In Washington, Davis had to put up with a Congress that was hesitant to spend money, while in Florida, Broome was beholden to his constituents, who would very much appreciate being on the federal payroll.

Matters were made worse by the fact that in the first part of the war the volunteers were often not up to the task. Some companies spent more time tending their own farms or herding cattle than in patrolling the countryside looking for hostile Seminole. Citizens complained of drunkenness, intimidation, and a general lack of protection.⁷ Richard Bradley of Hernando County told Secretary Davis, “These troops are allowed to stay at home and work their farms. Some eight or ten men pretend to scout a day or two, then go home. . . . Such protection against the Indians is equivalent to no protection at all.”⁸ A citizen of New Smyrna complained, “I hear all the scouting they do is to the store for rum & all the duty they have performed is to destroy the neighbor’s property, & if this is our protection for God sake take them off & send the Indians.”⁹ The volunteers also lacked the organization and infrastructure necessary to wage a protracted campaign in the wilderness. As much as they liked to brag about their expertise at living off the land, the volunteers found they needed provisions on a regular basis. This required a supply chain and transportation system that took time and money to organize.

Whether they liked it or not, both types of troops would be required if the government wanted to successfully prosecute the war, and it was up to the state and federal leaders to see that the right men were in the right place doing the right job. The army simply didn’t have the manpower to send as large a force to Florida as was needed, so Davis authorized Colonel

Munroe to accept a limited number of state troops for six months. Three companies would be used to protect the frontier, while two would be made up of trackers and hunters who would assist the army in the Big Cypress. Mentioning the difference in cost between mounted and foot soldiers, Davis left it up to Munroe to decide which were needed where.¹⁰ In the meantime Governor Broome, realizing he could not manage the state's portion of the war from Tallahassee, appointed Gen. Jesse Carter of Tampa as his Special Agent to coordinate the efforts of the volunteer units with the needs of Colonel Munroe.¹¹ It would prove a difficult, thankless job, and Carter often found himself the man in the middle who could please no one.

At Fort Myers, Colonel Brown began to put his troops in motion. One of the first things he did was countermand an order closing Fort Center on Fisheating Creek at the west side of Lake Okeechobee.¹² Patrols were sent up the Caloosahatchee to explore the area around the abandoned Fort Thompson, and another went downriver to examine the shores of Charlotte Harbor.¹³ He then ordered Fort Deynaud brought up to full strength and the construction of a blockhouse and stables for seventy-five animals on the opposite side of the river. Throughout the war, Fort Deynaud would be a major staging area for expeditions into the Big Cypress and a supply point for Fort Center and other posts to the north.¹⁴ The Seminole also knew the importance of the fort, and on January 18 they attacked a woodcutting party operating a few miles east of the fort, killing five out of six soldiers.¹⁵

Brown would have liked to have had more troops, but he was determined to do what he could with those he had on hand. He believed it was imperative that he strike at the Seminole villages in the Big Cypress, but Nature was determined to aid the Indians. December through April was normally the dry season, when water levels dropped enough to render the area passable for overland expeditions. In January 1856, however, record rains fell, raising water levels to what they might be in summer.¹⁶ Brown informed Munroe, "The whole country is under water—at Fort Thompson the water inches to the block house—and on the road between Fort Deynaud and this place the water in several places reaches up to the horse's belly."¹⁷ Lt. Alexander Webb was ordered to take forty-five men and proceed to Fort Simon Drum to determine if the fort could be repaired and used as a supply depot. He later reported:

My men marched or struggled at times through water more than two feet deep, and for from fifteen to twenty miles of the road or track the water varied from six inches to twenty inches in depth. . . . It was hard to find a dry spot on which to camp for the night, and the men suffered not



Maj. Gen. Harvey Brown. An 1818 graduate of West Point, he was a veteran of the Second Seminole War and the Mexican/American War. He commanded Ft. Pickens near Pensacola at the beginning of the Civil War and prevented its capture by the Confederacy.

Courtesy of Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, Frederick Hill Meserve Collection, MS Am 2242, vol. 9.

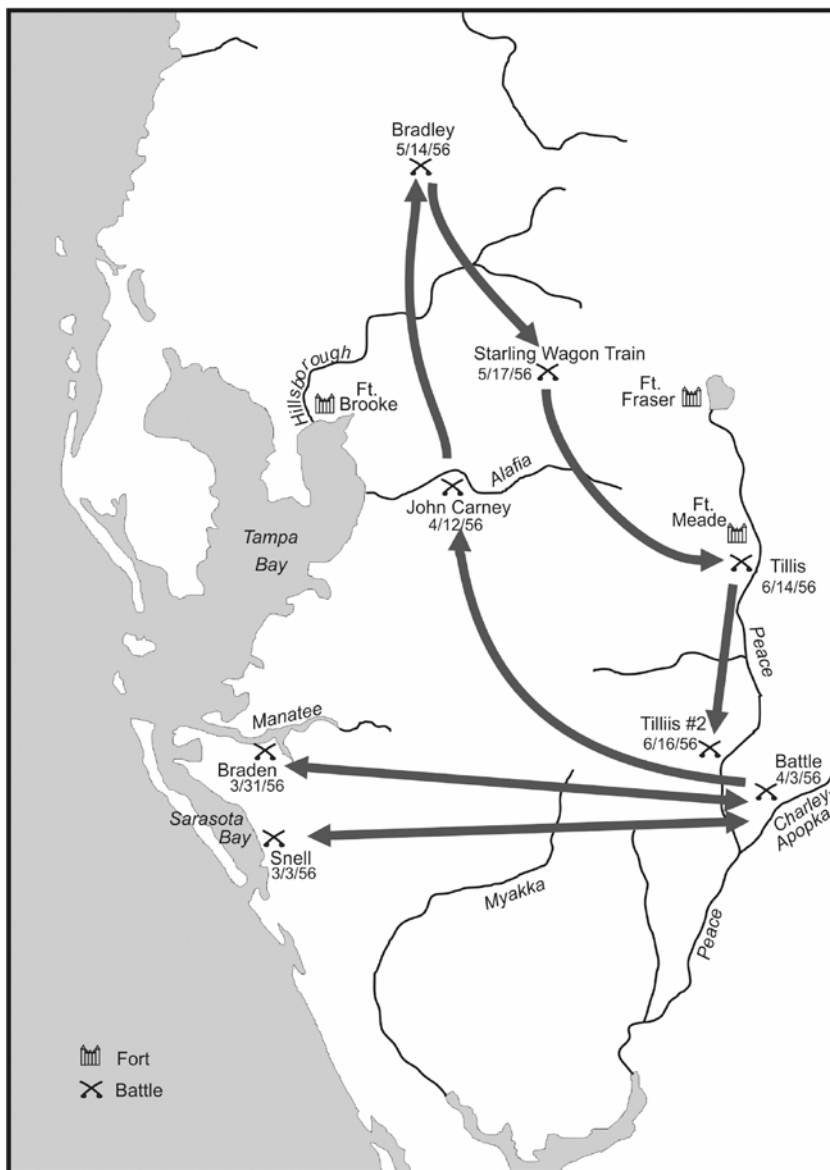
only from the weariness consequent upon the constant struggle through the water, but they were discouraged when worn out. . . . It was a hard task to prevent the men from cutting off the bottoms of their trousers. These had become heavy from wet and sand.¹⁸

Both the state and federal governments wanted the Seminole removed, but without the cooperation of the weather, it wasn't going to happen. If the ground didn't dry out, the whole campaign season would be lost, and the removal would be delayed for another year. The War Department, hoping cash incentives would prove useful, offered a bounty of \$100–\$500 for each Indian captured or otherwise induced to emigrate. Knowing the hatred the state troops felt toward the Seminole, Casey stressed that the bounty was for *living* Indians.¹⁹

While the Seminole and Mikasuki living in the Big Cypress and Everglades were preparing to defend their homes, the Creeks living north of Lake Okeechobee were preparing to go on the offensive. Led by Oscan Tustenuggee, on March 3, 1856 they attacked the home of State Senate President Hamlin V. Snell in Sarasota, killing one person, Owen Cunningham. The discoverer of Cunningham's body reported, "The skull I found in pieces all round the remains of the body which make me think that the head was partly departed from the body."²⁰

On the evening of March 31, Oscan struck again, attacking a sugar plantation owned by Dr. Joseph Braden at today's Bradenton. As the warriors shot at the stone-walled house, Braden returned fire and dispatched a slave to the nearby settlement for help. Repulsed, the attackers departed, doing little damage beyond taking seven slaves and a few mules.²¹ The attack proved to be the Indians' first real setback of the war. Not only had they been repelled at "Braden Castle" (the remains of which still exist), but the volunteers were hot on their trail. On April 3, a group of about twenty mounted volunteers found the raiders' camp on Charley Apopka Creek, a tributary of the Peace River. A thirty-minute skirmish ensued, resulting in the death of four of the Creeks. Two of the victims were scalped and the trophies exhibited in the nearby towns.²²

In the Big Cypress the army was attempting an offensive of its own, the ground having dried out enough to commence operations. On April 7, Maj. Lewis Arnold, with 113 men, was operating near Holata's abandoned village when they were ambushed by a large force of Seminole. After taking some initial casualties, the soldiers formed ranks and charged their enemy, who were firing from a nearby cypress swamp. The hard-fought battle lasted



Seminole offensive, Third Seminole War, 1856.

Map by John Missall.

from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., and for much of the time the soldiers and warriors were operating in waist-deep water.²³ Militarily it was a small skirmish, with one soldier dead, five wounded, and an unknown number of Indian casualties. Still, in terms of the number of combatants engaged, it would be the largest battle of the war. It also showed that the majority of the Seminole were still in the Everglades and Big Cypress.

On the east coast a patrol departed Fort Dallas in search of islands in the Everglades where the Seminole might be hiding. It was arduous duty. The soldiers were traveling by canoe, but in many places there wasn't enough water, and the heavy vessels had to be portaged. After traveling not less than 240 miles in twelve days, the patrol was only able to report the finding of one island that had been recently inhabited. No Indians were seen.²⁴

The Creeks may have suffered a loss after the Braden attack, but they were certainly not defeated. On April 12 Oscan's war party burned an abandoned house and looted another, all within two miles of a volunteer post on the upper Manatee River.²⁵ Three days later they shot and killed a settler named John Carney while he was tending his fields near the Alafia River. Aware of the danger of an Indian attack, Carney had sent his family to Tampa but had remained behind to finish the spring planting of his crops. Many settlers were faced with the same difficult decision: Did they risk death by Indian attack in the spring, or face starvation from lack of crops the following winter?²⁶

In spite of these attacks, Colonel Munroe ordered several companies of volunteers to Fort Deynaud to aid in the hunt for the Seminole. Two companies immediately complied, but a third, Capt. Francis Durrance's, refused to go. General Carter, the governor's agent in Tampa, told Durrance, "You can readily imagine my mortification, and, I may add, my indignation, upon learning that these orders have been disobeyed."²⁷ After receiving no reply after six days, Carter informed Durrance "that until these duties are performed, no further delivery of supplies or communications can be made to you from this office."²⁸

The two companies that did go to Fort Deynaud soon learned some valuable lessons. First, the regular army wasn't so bad to work with. Volunteer Capt. Abner Johnson, serving alongside Lieutenant Hartsuff, had to admit, "He is an excellent man and a perfect gentleman."²⁹ The volunteers were also learning how difficult it was going to be to defeat the Seminole. No sooner had they arrived at their camp in the Big Cypress than a small group of six or seven warriors opened fire on them. Dismounting, the volunteers charged the swamp where the warriors were firing from but were

never able to catch them. Later, after operating with Major Arnold, Johnson reported that while they had traveled many miles and had destroyed a number of Seminole fields and villages, they had not seen the first Indian. He concluded that "The country at present is one in which there is no probability of operating successfully. Horses cannot penetrate the swamps, and the footmen not to such an extent as to overtake and capture Seminoles."³⁰

Summer was fast approaching and with it the rainy season. So far it hadn't been much of a war. The Indians had made a few small raids and killed a handful of people, but the widespread destruction of the frontier that settlers feared hadn't happened. On the other hand, the army had killed a few Indians, scoured the Big Cypress and burned several villages in the process, but was no closer to capturing the Seminole than they had been at the commencement of the conflict. Colonel Brown knew it would be impossible to conduct operations much longer, and if the Seminole continued to avoid the army, he would never catch them with the small number of men and supplies at his disposal. Hoping for better success the next time, he urged the War Department to plan for a much larger campaign in the fall.³¹ For the moment, Holata, Abiaki, and their people were safe.

The Seminole and Mikasuki in the south may have been looking forward to the respite, but Oscan's Creeks to the north were intent on continuing their raids against the whites. On May 14 they attacked the home of Capt. Robert Bradley, west of Dade City and well north of Tampa Bay. The attack came at dusk, while Bradley's children were congregated in the open passageway that connected the two halves of their house. Killed almost instantly were a boy of fifteen and a girl of ten. Rising out of his sick bed, Bradley grabbed his gun and was able to chase the Indians off just as they were ascending the steps of the passageway. Neighbors, alerted by a pair of Bradley's daughters who had been out tending cattle, eventually came to his aid.³² As news of the attack spread throughout the frontier, panic followed, and reports of Indian "sign" became widespread. Ten citizens from Hernando County wrote to Secretary Davis asking for immediate assistance. Using the common phraseology of the time, they told him, "We are poor and our little funds exhausted. . . . our wives and children is exposed to the tomahawk and scalping knife of the merciless savage."³³

Seminole families far to the south could have expressed similar sentiments, complaining of being exposed to the shotgun and hunting knife of a merciless army. While Oscan's band was making their way toward the Bradley home, Major Arnold was conducting his final foray of the season against the Indians in the Big Cypress. In a letter to Colonel Brown he reported that he would have to relocate his supply depot due to recent

rains and the impossibility of transporting provisions through the flooded landscape. Notwithstanding, he was determined to complete his mission. He divided his force, taking approximately seventy-five regulars down one trail and sending Lieutenant Hartsuff and 104 mounted volunteers down a different trail. In a sign that the volunteers were learning to cooperate with the regulars, Arnold was happy to report that the Floridians had exhibited “wondrous subordination” and “cheerfully” proceeded on foot when forced to dismount due to high water. Despite everyone’s best efforts, no Indians were found, and Arnold had to conclude that the Seminole had moved deep into the Everglades.³⁴

Upon hearing news of the Bradley attack, General Carter ordered the volunteers in the region to be on the lookout. He believed the raiders were moving south and told the commanders to position their men in the places most likely to intercept the marauders.³⁵ Carter was correct in his assumption, but the instructions came too late. On May 17, three days after the raid on the Bradley home, the Creeks struck again. This time they ambushed a small wagon train carrying military provisions from Tampa to the Peace River when it stopped at a place known as Simmon’s Hammock. Slain in the assault were James Starling, his young son, and one of the guards. A party of volunteers from a nearby fort went in pursuit of the attackers early the following morning, but could find no sign of them. Capt. Simeon Sparkman began to appreciate how difficult it would be to track down and capture every last Seminole in Florida. “I am totally at a loss to know how to proceed to capture or scourge those small parties of Indians that are among us. I have been in my saddle every day for eight days past and without any success whatever.”³⁶

Colonel Brown at Fort Myers was ready to readjust the deployments of his troops for the summer. Knowing the Big Cypress would soon be too wet to operate in, he proposed having the troops penetrate the Everglades from the coast in boats. To that end he ordered Fort Center closed and the men and boats brought back to Fort Deynaud.³⁷ For the volunteers working in the Big Cypress, orders were issued to resume patrols in the Kissimmee and Peace River areas. If Brown intended for many of the regulars to remain at Fort Deynaud, his plans were altered when he received a report on June 8 telling him:

At 8:30 P.M., a terrible fire occurred at Fort Deynaud, and the barracks (palmetto sheds), Sutler’s store, guardhouse and two large stables. We could not save anything. . . . A great many muskets and pistols having of necessity been left loaded in their racks, and becoming heated, the

musket-balls flew around in every direction and rendered it rather dangerous for one to do his duty. However, no one was hurt, and we now remain with the men in tents pitched on the hot sand.³⁸

Fire was always a potential hazard at Florida forts. The buildings were usually constructed of pine logs that oozed flammable sap and were roofed with tinder-dry wood shingles. Even when tents were used in a semi-permanent manner, palmetto frond roofs were often built over them to ward off the rain and sun. Soldiers were not surprised when forts that had been abandoned for the summer were found burned down in the fall. The structures were so easy to set alight that if they didn't catch fire from some natural cause, the Indians were sure to do it, if only for the joy of watching the hated symbols of white encroachment go up in flames.

Although no one could see it at the time, the course of the war was about to change. On the morning of June 14, 1856, Osen and his men attacked Willoughby Tillis's isolated homestead south of Fort Meade on the Peace River. Taking refuge in the house, the family returned fire and were able to hold off the attackers. At Fort Meade, volunteer Lt. Alderman Carlton heard the gunfire and in the company of six others went to the relief of the beleaguered settlers. As Captain Durrance later reported, "On the approach of those men, the Indians fled to a thicket nearby. Lieut. Carlton, with his little band of brave men, charged them, and a desperate engagement ensued. Lieut. Carlton and Lott Whidden, of my Company, were killed, and Daniel Carlton wounded. William Parker, of Capt. William B. Hooker's Company was also killed, and J. H. Hollingsworth wounded. There were three Indians killed, and several wounded."³⁹

It was close, desperate, hand-to-hand fighting, with men falling on both sides. Captain Hooker later reported, "One [Indian] charged on William McCullough, as in a fisty-cuff fight, they striking and fending off with their empty guns; had it round and round, till McCullough threw down his gun, clenched the Indian, and threw him down and caught and held his wrists until D. Carlton ran to his assistance and cut the Indian's throat, leaving him for dead." It was the same William McCullough who had narrowly escaped with his wife in the 1849 attack on the Kennedy-Darling Store, the same attack where the slain Lott Whidden's brother Dempsey had been killed. For fighting men on both sides, the war was very personal.⁴⁰

The volunteers had paid dearly for their heroic effort, and their comrades were determined to avenge the loss. Other volunteers soon arrived at

the Tillis farm and took up the pursuit, tracking the Indians to a dense hammock by late afternoon. With night falling, unsure of the enemy's strength and in need of supplies, they returned to Fort Meade for provisions.⁴¹ Better organized and supplied, the soldiers returned to the trail on the morning of the fifteenth. All day they tracked the Indians through the swampland, until darkness forced them to withdraw to dry ground for the night.⁴² Leaving a few men to guard the horses, nineteen volunteers under Lt. Streaty Parker reentered the swamp the next morning and resumed the search. About ten o'clock, near present-day Zolfo Springs, they located and surprised the warriors' camp. About half a dozen Indians were killed before they could mount a defense, but the rest were able to take a good defensive position and return fire, killing two volunteers and wounding three. Facing a stalemate and with wounded to care for, both sides withdrew.⁴³

The following day a large force of volunteers gathered and went in pursuit of the surviving Indians, keeping up the search for two days. Knowing they were being hunted, the warriors made their escape to more secure hiding places. At the captured camp, the volunteers found goods that had been looted from the wagon train attacked a month earlier.⁴⁴ Small as it was, the Tillis Battle would turn out to be the most important action of the war. In the number of men dead and wounded on both sides, it would be one of the deadliest and most hard fought. More significantly, one of the Indians killed was Oscan Tustennuggee. The loss of Oscan and the killing of so many of his followers served to remove most of the threat to the homesteads in the Peace River valley. From this point forward, the war would be fought along the Kissimmee River and in the Big Cypress and Everglades.⁴⁵

July 1856–May 1858

General Harney, Colonel Loomis, and the Volunteers

After the Tillis Battle the nature of the war changed. Except for a few targets of opportunity, Seminole offensive operations ceased. Indeed, the remainder of the war can appear very one-sided, as if the army were fighting a tribe of ghosts. Abiaki and Holata both knew that their people's only chance of staying in Florida was to elude the army by staying hidden. From this point forward the Seminole only fought when the army was close to their homes or stockpiles of provisions. For the most part they even refused to come out to negotiate. What the reader must keep in mind is that the Seminole were not lounging in their chickees while the army wandered lost in the swamp. They were usually on the run, working hard not to be discovered, often hungry, and frequently forced to sleep in inhospitable places. As historians who want to provide a balanced narrative, we find this frustrating. It's difficult to tell both sides of the story when one side is doing their best to remain invisible.

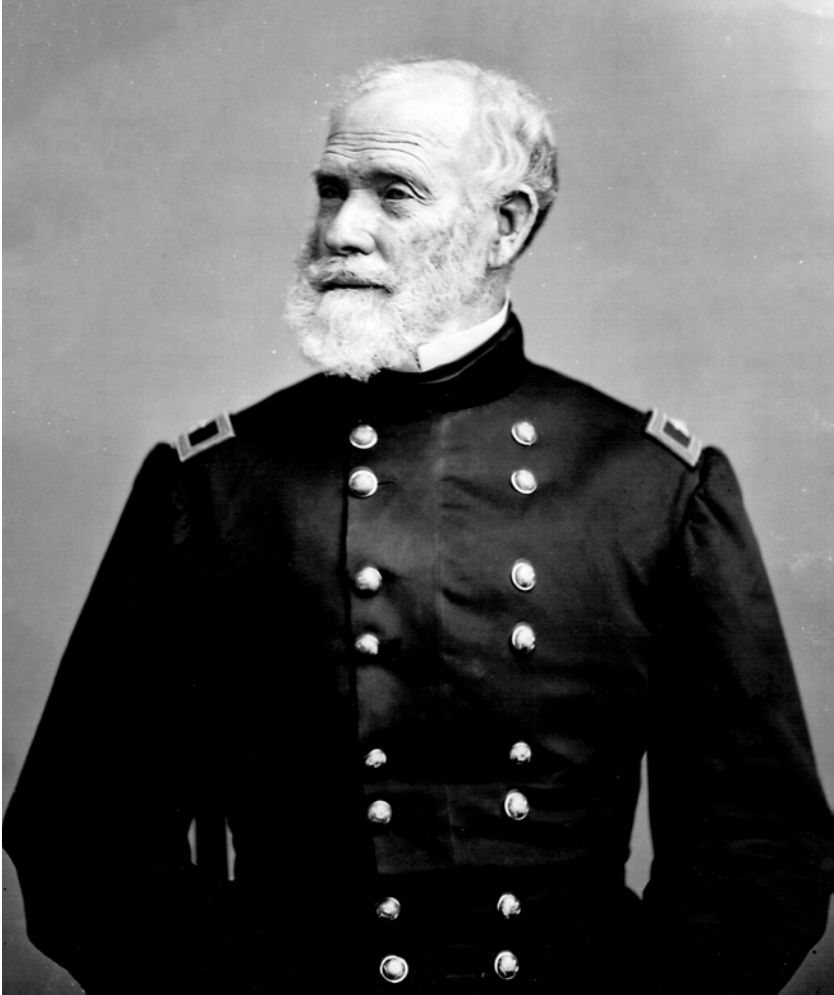
As usual, the summer forced a slowdown in the war, but actions did not completely cease. On August 2, 1856, one soldier was killed and another wounded while gathering shells on Sanibel Island.¹ Over on the east coast, two companies under Lts. Loomis Langdon and George Bell began an extended scout of the area south and west of Fort Dallas after Indians were sighted in the vicinity. Langdon, traveling by canoe, took the water routes, while Bell scouted by land. The two groups' paths occasionally crossed, and they eventually merged, going as far south as Key Largo. Several camps were found, some recent and others not having been used in some time, but no Indians were seen.²

One of the prime causes of the Seminole rejection of the Treaty of Payne's Landing and the onset of the Second Seminole War was the stipulation that they would be living under Creek domination in the Indian

Territory. In a classic case of false economy, the government, wanting to save a few thousand dollars in the administrative costs associated with running a separate Seminole Agency, had refused to budge on the stipulation, resulting in a multimillion-dollar war. Faced with another expensive war, Washington now decided some flexibility might be wise. To that end the new treaty that had been talked about in 1850 was negotiated with the western Seminole, giving them their own two-million-acre reservation, \$100,000 for resettlement expenses, and \$500,000 to be deposited in a trust fund. For the western Seminole it was a good deal, but there was one catch: Half the trust fund money would be withheld until the Florida Seminole gave up and emigrated. The government no doubt hoped it was the sort of incentive that would make both the eastern and western Seminole willing to negotiate.³

If the new treaty wasn't enough to pull the Florida Seminole west, the War Department was also determined to renew the effort to push them out. During August and September Secretary Davis met with Brig. Gen. William S. Harney, the same man who had narrowly escaped death at the Caloosahatchee Massacre and had hunted down and executed Chakaika. Harney stated that he would need two regiments of soldiers (about two thousand men) and perhaps ten companies of volunteers. Even at that, he didn't sound too optimistic. "With a force not less than above stated, I believe I can drive the Indians from Florida during the coming season if it is *possible* to drive them out at all, which I consider very doubtful indeed."⁴ To the people of Florida, Harney was the knight in shining armor who would take care of all their problems. "Gen. Harney was the friend and protégé of Andrew Jackson, and having had experience in Florida, there can be no doubt that within six weeks after his arrival in the land of 'sun, sand and flowers,' no more will be heard of Indian disturbances in that quarter."⁵ If asked, the Seminole might have told them differently.

Harney began to plan his coming campaign. The two regiments that had been in Florida since before the war were rotated out and replaced with fresh men. The quartermaster at Fort Brooke ordered the means of transport he felt would be needed, in addition to what was already on hand. "One low pressure, Sea Steamer side wheel, and drawing loaded not exceeding five and one half feet water. . . . 438 mules; 35 horses; 60 wagons; 3 ambulances; 60 mule harnesses; 40 saddles and bridles (riding); 50 pack saddles & bridles . . . 33 Boats for Gulf and Everglades operation."⁶ In the meantime the volunteers kept up their patrols, especially in the Kissimmee and Peace River areas, and although they found one large, deserted village, they saw not the first Indian.⁷



Brig. Gen. William S. Harney. A veteran of all three Seminole Wars, he was well known for dealing harshly with hostile Indians.

National Archives, <https://research.archives.gov/id/528814>.

The government expected Harney to be vigorous in his prosecution of the war, but it had also learned to be flexible. Getting Holata out of the state was a necessity, but Abiaki was another matter. Rumor had it that he was near ninety and perhaps imbecilic (he was neither) and of little threat to the whites (true, unless provoked), so Harney was given permission to allow him and his family a small reservation if he would aid in convincing

the others to leave. Davis also realized that there were some Indians, such as guides who had worked for the army, who would be in mortal danger should they emigrate. If need be, Harney could also allow those people to remain in Florida, but the total number could not exceed twenty-five men, women, and children.⁸

On November 18, Harney arrived at Fort Myers and relieved Colonel Brown, who was being transferred north. Colonel Munroe would remain at Tampa, but would henceforth play a lesser role in managing the war.⁹ Knowing he would not be ready to commence offensive operations until all the men and equipment were in place, Harney made an attempt at diplomacy. After ordering a suspension of hostilities, he sent out instructions to place white flags near all the forts. Past the point of negotiation, the Seminole more or less ignored them.¹⁰

The decision to put out the flags brought an unexpected rebuke from Secretary Davis, who wanted immediate action against the Seminole.¹¹ Davis was also unhappy that Harney had countermanded the orders to transfer some of the existing companies out of Florida. The general was forced to remind the secretary that they had discussed retaining some of the more experienced companies for a short period so that their knowledge could be passed on to all the fresh troops who were being sent to replace them. He also told Davis that until his men were completely ready to go on the offensive, there was no good reason not to attempt negotiations, especially since the government was attempting to bring another delegation from Indian Territory. Harney believed that sending patrols out before everything was in place would be counterproductive, in that they would force the Indians to disperse, thereby making them even harder to locate.¹²

On January 14 Harney reported to the Adjutant General that everything was in place to begin the offensive. To better organize his large force Harney had divided the state into three military districts. The First District, north of Lake Okeechobee, had three companies of mounted volunteers that were to scour the area from Tampa Bay to the Caloosahatchee River, while two companies of regulars and two companies of volunteers would search the area between the Peace and Kissimmee Rivers, with special emphasis on the Lake Istokpoga region. In the Second District, besides the troops at Forts Myers and Deynaud, two companies were in the Big Cypress, four companies were operating out of boats along the Southwest Florida coast, and another boat company was patrolling Charlotte Harbor. In the Third District there were the troops at Fort Dallas, several companies of regulars and volunteers from Forts Vinton and Drum who would cover the area east of the Kissimmee, and boats from Forts Center and McRae

that would patrol Lake Okeechobee. Harney didn't know exactly where the Indians were hiding, but he was determined to find out.¹³

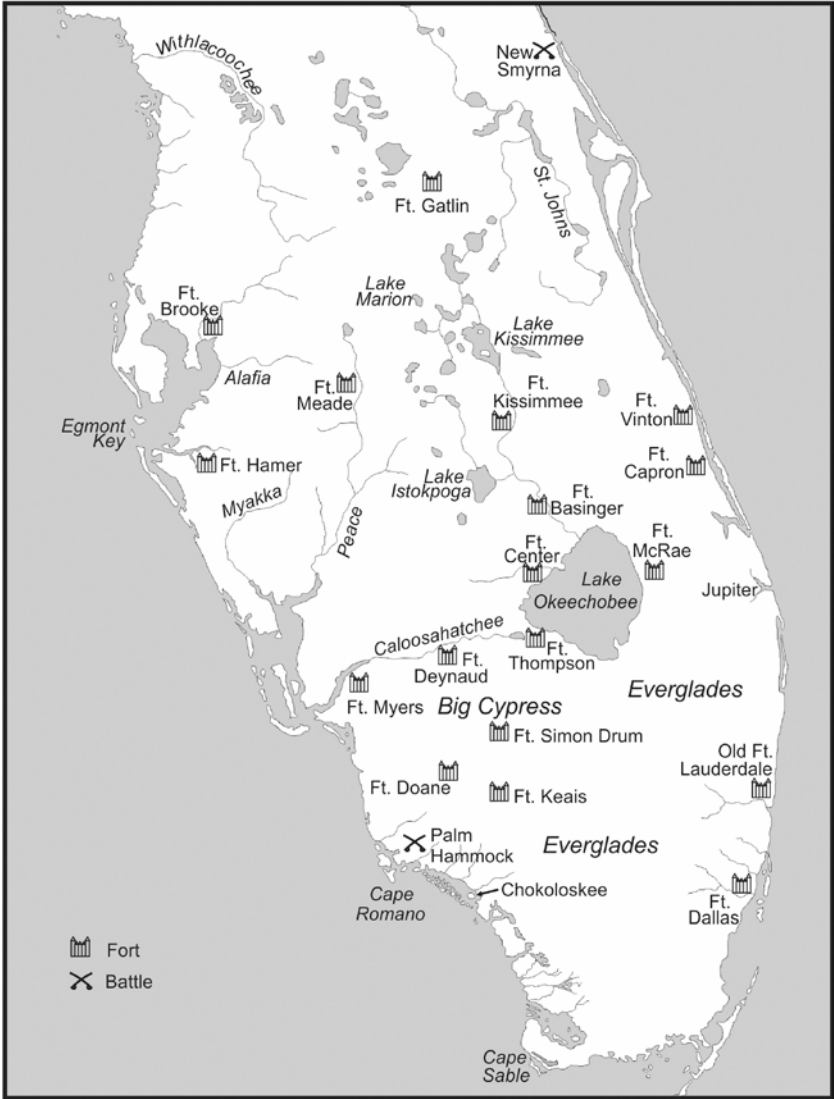
For the soldiers serving on the prairies and in the open pine woodlands of Florida, the search for the Seminole seemed very similar to the hunting of any other game, and they began to employ the same tactics they would when hunting deer, wild hog, or turkey. One of those tactics was the use of fire to flush out their quarry. January through April was the height of the dry season, and much of the land was tinder dry and easy to set on fire. Harney gave the order that as the volunteers and regulars scouted along their assigned routes they were to systematically set fire to the surrounding landscape.¹⁴

Patrols were out in force all over the southern half of the peninsula, but few indications of a Seminole presence were found. In February a major village was discovered near Lake Istokpoga that might have been home to the Creeks living in the area, but it had been abandoned just before the arrival of the troops.¹⁵ Most of the patrols were grueling, weeks-long marches. One group left Fort Kissimmee on February 1 and reached Fort Dallas four weeks later. After resting and replenishing their supplies, they turned around and retraced their steps. During the whole trek, not one Indian had been seen.¹⁶ In the Big Cypress, Col. Gustavus Loomis reported, "I shall try to accomplish the wish of the Genl. to get in the Indians, but how it is to be done, I can't imagine, as I can neither find them or any signs of them."¹⁷

Loomis may not have been able to find the Seminole, but the Seminole had no trouble finding the white men. On March 5, about twenty miles from Fort Keais, a small group of soldiers was attacked, with one killed and four wounded. Reinforcements arrived, and on the next morning they attacked the Indians, who were positioned in a nearby hammock. After a skirmish that lasted fifteen to twenty minutes the Seminole retreated, leaving four soldiers dead and five severely wounded. Although Harney described it as a "gallant skirmish," it was certainly not a victory for the army.¹⁸

The patrols north of Lake Okeechobee continued, but with meager results. One Seminole family was spotted, and in trying to escape, the warrior was slain and scalped and his wife and child taken prisoner.¹⁹ Sometime later a Black Seminole was killed and his family taken prisoner and sent to Fort Myers.²⁰ Both women were interrogated by General Harney, even to the point of being threatened with the death of their children, but neither would divulge the hiding places of their people.²¹

Even though the Indians couldn't be brought to a fight, the army's presence was certainly having an effect upon them. Harney reported that Capts. John Robinson and John McCown, scouting from Cape Sable to



Third Seminole War forts, 1856–1857.

Map by John Missall.

Palm Hammock, had discovered recently abandoned camps. At one camp, wild potatoes were left baking on the fire, with alligator meat and palm cabbage nearby. At another site the fleeing Indians left “packs of bear skin, otter skin, wooden spoons & ladles, pipes, fish lines, spears, garden seeds, bottles

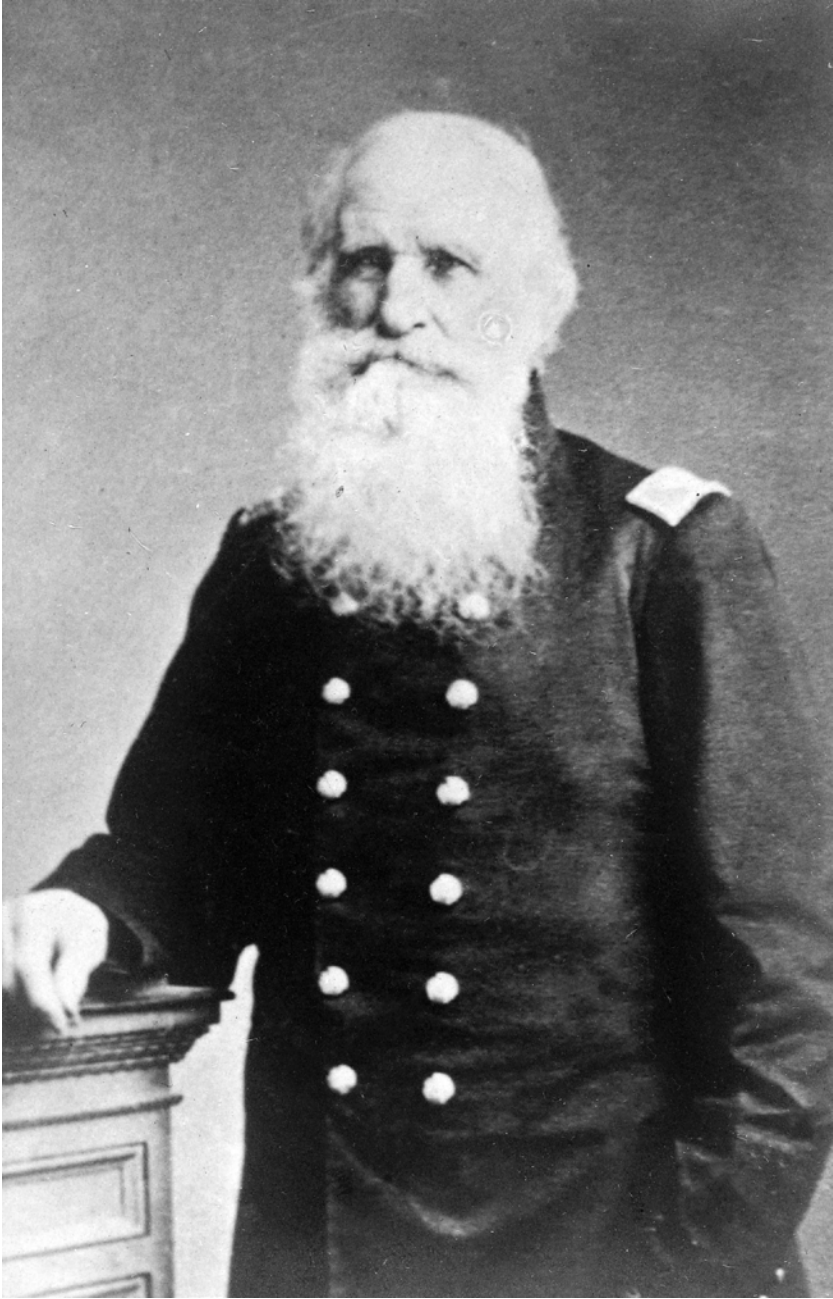
of salt, knives, etc.” The army gave chase for five miles, but was forced to abandon the pursuit because of a shortage of rations.²²

In the Kissimmee region, results were more promising for the army. At the mouth of the river, a patrol came across a pair of Indians fishing from a canoe. In order to avoid capture the Indians abandoned the vessel and disappeared into the thick foliage, leaving behind spears, fishing tackle, caught fish, and a turtle. It may not seem like much, but it was food desperately needed to keep their families alive.²³ To the east, two Indian boys were killed, one about eleven or twelve, the other sixteen to eighteen, fully armed. Not far away, a girl of about twelve was captured.²⁴ Near Lake Istokpoga one warrior and two women were killed, and five women and children captured.²⁵ The Seminole, with such a small population, could ill afford to lose so much of the next generation.

The war in Florida may have been important, but it was not the only problem facing incoming President James Buchanan and his new Secretary of War, John Floyd. Foremost among those problems was “Bleeding Kansas,” a violent dispute over whether Kansas would be admitted as a slave or free state. Farther west, a disagreement had arisen with the Mormons, who had fled to Utah in order to escape persecution in the east. Concerned that the Mormons might be setting up their own little theocracy, President Buchanan appointed a new governor and dispatched a large force of soldiers to see that he was safely installed. Fearing the army was being sent to destroy them, the Mormons prepared for war. All this need for manpower in remote areas of the nation was bound to have an effect on the war in Florida, and on April 22 Harney received orders to turn command over to the next senior officer and depart immediately for Fort Leavenworth in the Kansas Territory.²⁶

Col. Loomis, the new commanding officer of the Florida War, was nothing like his predecessor. General Harney was a fit and active man, an officer who commanded attention through his mere presence. Loomis, on the other hand, was sixty-eight years old, somewhat frail in appearance, and sported a long white beard that made him look even older. As Lt. Oliver Otis Howard put it, “Colonel Loomis is very old, in his dotage really, and totally unfit to have the direction of an active campaign. He is, however a very good man & pleasant gentleman.”²⁷

Loomis may have been an old man, but he was very much up to the task. He also had little use for the rivalry between the regulars and volunteers. He no doubt realized that if federal troops were withdrawn to serve in Kansas or against the Mormons, volunteers would be all he



Brig. Gen. Gustavus Loomis. An 1811 graduate of West Point, he served from the beginning of the War of 1812 until the middle of the Civil War.

Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, Frederick Hill Meserve Collection, MS Am 2242, vol. 13.

would have to work with. In his first report to the War Department, Loomis praised Capt. Abner Johnston of the volunteers for his action against a party of fifteen Indians discovered near Lake Istokpoga on April 12.²⁸ He also upbraided one of his regular officers when the man decided not to cooperate with a volunteer force operating in the same area.²⁹ Loomis understood that both groups had now been serving long enough to know the hardships they would have to endure and what it would take to dislodge the Seminole. At the beginning of the war the regular soldiers knew nothing of guerilla fighting, while the volunteers had suffered from poor leadership, discipline, and organization. Time had helped eliminate some of those problems, and the professional and volunteer soldiers were beginning to learn common respect.

The fact that the Seminole fighting spirit was still alive and well was demonstrated on April 23, when a group of Indians attacked ten soldiers filling water barrels from a well at Palm Grove in the coastal Everglades. The initial attack killed two soldiers and wounded two more. The situation then became confusing and did not reflect well upon the fighting spirit of the regulars. Some threw down their weapons and ran, and when the sergeant in charge was asked to go on the offensive against the Indians, he refused.³⁰ Farther north, about eight miles below Fort Kissimmee, the Seminole scored another victory when a small group of volunteers who thought they were chasing Indian women discovered their quarry were well-armed warriors ready to fight. Suffering one fatality, the rest of the volunteers were lucky to get away alive.

On June 7 Loomis's fears of troop transfers were realized when he received notice that the entire Fifth Infantry, half his regular force, was to depart immediately for Missouri.³¹ When the War Department told him he'd have to call up more volunteers to replace the regulars, Loomis wasn't sure it could be done. What he needed were boat companies, which were hard to raise at the low foot-soldier rate. In addition, most of his present volunteers' enlistments were about to run out, and he doubted the state could find enough men to fill both the new companies and the replacements.³² He needn't have worried. Floridians were anxious to be rid of the Seminole and were willing to do the job themselves if Washington would let them.

The removal of troops caused Loomis to reevaluate the entire situation. General Harney had assumed that his mere presence would frighten Holata into negotiating. Loomis realized the Seminole were not as frightened of the general as everyone believed and were certainly not ready to talk. On the other hand, the Indians living north of the reservation had so far suffered the majority of the losses in the war and might be more willing to surrender.

Loomis decided it was time for a change in strategy. He would attempt to open a line of communication with the northern bands while increasing pressure on the Indians to the south.³³

One of the most effective volunteer units was a boat company commanded by Capt. Jacob Mickler that operated on the Kissimmee and Lake Okeechobee. On July 17 they managed to surprise a camp on the north shore of the lake and take fifteen to twenty women and children prisoners.³⁴ As the number of prisoners increased, Loomis began to worry about the possibility of an escape. To prevent such a thing happening, he opened a detention camp on Egmont Key at the entrance to Tampa Bay. No boats were kept on the island, and only those vessels with prior permission were allowed to land.

It was now mid-summer 1857, but Loomis wasn't about to let up on the Indians. He told the War Department, "I have strong hopes that if I am enabled to carry out my present plans of active operations, the Indians cannot hold out much longer—and I hope for a speedy termination of the war. We have now in the Volunteer Service some of the best material of the state—the best guides and trailers, and each company emulating another in the active pursuit of the campaign."³⁵ The boat companies of Captains Mickler and Richard Turner were sent to the Shark River to penetrate the southwest Everglades and establish a supply depot. Maj. William Morris and units of the Fourth Artillery were sent to the upper keys to examine the southern Everglades, and the troops at Fort Dallas were to penetrate the Everglades from the east. The three commands were to use as much stealth as possible, communicate any location of Indian activity, and coordinate their efforts whenever practical. Loomis meant to give Holata and his people as little opportunity to rest as possible.³⁶

Just as the plans were being put into effect, Loomis received notice that the seven companies of the Fourth Artillery were being sent west, leaving him with only four companies of regulars in Florida. The state had always said the volunteers could defeat the Seminole by themselves. It was now their chance to prove it.

Despite the removal of nearly all his regulars, Colonel Loomis was determined to commence his autumn campaign. It was now October 1857, the weather was cooling, and the ground was drying out. More critically, the entire volunteer force was due to be mustered out between the end of December and the end of March, so he had to act quickly.³⁷ In all, there were now twenty companies of volunteers in action. Ten of them were the "Independent" companies, scouting the areas east and west of Lake Okeechobee and points north. The other ten were part of a regiment commanded by

volunteer Col. Samuel St. George Rogers and were generally operating in the Everglades and Big Cypress.³⁸

To some extent, the prosecution of the war was now in the hands of Rogers. With the transfer of Colonel Munroe to the West, Loomis had moved his headquarters to Tampa, leaving Rogers as the senior officer at Fort Myers. By mid-November all was ready, and Rogers began his offensive. On November 18 he left Fort Myers in eight open boats with a force of 110 men and supplies for forty days, intending to penetrate the Everglades from the west coast. His men were not sailors. "My Regiment was raised in the interior and consists almost entirely of men wholly unfamiliar with the use of oars or sails, very many of them never having even been upon the water until the present term of service."³⁹

In the Big Cypress, Capt. William Cone and 115 men surprised a small group of Seminole, killing two, wounding one, and capturing five women and thirteen children. On the following day they discovered several villages containing forty structures and large stores of corn, rice, and pumpkins. After the buildings were looted, everything of value to the Indians was put to the torch. As Loomis later reported, there was a good chance Cone and his men had discovered Holata's home:⁴⁰

A great many trinkets were found, among them two daguerreotypes, one of Billy's group, which was taken in Washington. There is convincing proof that the hiding place of Billy Bowlegs has been found at last, and that he has received a severe blow in the capture of his women and children. The town where the Indians were captured was newly built, and the depots of supplies were found in three different towns.⁴¹

The Seminole had suffered a major loss and were intent on revenge. They trailed Cone's force for four days before the opportunity arrived. Near Depot No. 1 they found the soldiers safely encamped for the night with sentinels posted. Unable to attack the men, the Indians turned on the horses, grazing about a mile and a half from the camp. By the time they were finished, thirty-six horses were dead.⁴²

On November 22 Colonel Rogers's boats reached Chokoloskee Island at the edge of the Everglades. Two days later, Capt. John Parkhill of Tallahassee and seventy-five men went up a nearby river, traveling nine miles before reaching the end of the navigable portion, then wading through three miles of marshland before finding solid ground. For three days the men searched for some sign of the Indians. At last they came upon a trail, which led to a still larger trail. Finally, they came upon a village. In a later report, Colonel Rogers told what they found:⁴³

There were about thirty lodges and about 40 acres of lands cleared and in cultivation. Large quantities of pumpkin, potatoes, peas, corn and rice was found. The corn, peas, & rice, hid away carefully in houses built off in the swamp, the trails leading to which were carefully concealed. The pumpkins were in the fields, and the ground was literally covered with them of all ages and sizes. Even the trees were full, the vines having run over them. The ground was full of potatoes. Everything was destroyed that could be.⁴⁴

On the following morning, November 28, Parkhill led his men farther along the trail and soon came across a succession of Seminole fields and houses, each one about two hour's march apart. Later in the day Parkhill and twenty-five to thirty men started back to the nearest village to begin the work of destroying what they had found. Before getting there, they came across another trail with fresh moccasin tracks. Following it for a distance, they came to a deep stream about twenty yards wide with thick cypress growth on either side. The captain and five or six men entered the stream, but before they could cross gunfire rang out from the opposite bank. Led into an ambush, Parkhill fell mortally wounded, and five others were injured. The remainder of the soldiers returned fire, but it was too late. The Seminole warriors, having accomplished their mission, disappeared into the swamp after the first volley. In 1861 a monument to Parkhill was erected in front of the capitol building in Tallahassee. He would be the highest-ranking officer killed in the Third Seminole War.⁴⁵

With wounded to attend to and running low on supplies, Rogers and his men made their way back to Fort Myers. He was later able to report, "We have unquestionably discovered the hiding place of the whole of them. The fields discovered amounted to 80 to 100 acres of land and the houses destroyed to sixty or seventy. . . . The corn, rice, peas we destroyed seemed to be what they had hidden away for seed another planting season."⁴⁶ The net around the Seminole was fast closing.

To the north, near the remains of Fort Shackleford, the final battle of the war was about to take place. Capt. C. L. Stephens of the mounted volunteers was leading a combined force of ninety-three regulars and volunteers in search of Seminole villages. On December 2 he found one with about fifty houses, along with ten acres of corn and a crib filled with corn, rice, and peas. Late in the day he dispatched a scouting party that walked into an ambush in which one soldier was killed. Realizing his position was vulnerable, Stephens marched his men toward a better location. The path took them into a cypress swamp, but instead of passing through, he ordered his men to take up hidden positions and prepare their own ambush. In about



Monument to Capt. John Parkhill in front of the Florida Historic Capitol, Tallahassee.
Photo by the authors.

half an hour the warriors who had been trailing them approached, and Stephens's men opened fire, killing two and severely wounding one. Instead of moving on or chasing the Indians, Stephens instructed his men to hold their positions, and about two hours later they were able to open fire on warriors

who had come to retrieve the bodies of their fallen comrades, killing three and badly wounding another.⁴⁷

The war may not have officially ended, but in truth there was little fight left in either side. Colonel Loomis informed the War Department, "I learn from the captured squaws that Bow-Legs has held councils and at the risk of his life has entreated the Indians to come in. . . . The Micasukies [Abiaki's group] are said to be as hostile as ever and will not permit any of the Indians to talk about peace."⁴⁸ Colonel Rogers wanted to press his advantage, but his men simply weren't up to it. "Out of five whole companies and detachments from three others, I could raise but one hundred and fifteen men able to do foot service, or reported able by their company officers and by the Surgeon of the post, and of these, had I desired to select *able bodied healthy* men, I should unquestionably have rejected nearly one half. . . . I may therefore safely say that so far as my Regiment is concerned, this campaign is at an end."⁴⁹

Some additional volunteers from the northern companies arrived and using what healthy men he had, Rogers kept the pressure on the Seminole. Patrols continued in the Big Cypress, but all they found were abandoned villages, some of them burned by the Indians themselves.⁵⁰ One patrol came very close to catching Abiaki, but were not able to close the distance before nightfall. The same patrol was able to report, "On our way out we found . . . a field of 20 or 25 acres covered nearly all over with potatoes and beans and round in the hammock we discovered & destroyed 4 corn and rice houses containing near 100 bush. of corn and 10 or 12 of rice. . . . We discovered on this route 9 fields not seen before, and 6 cribs."⁵¹

Out in the deepest reaches of the Everglades, the Seminole were waiting, wondering what would happen next. Their farms had been torn up, their villages burned, and their stored provisions stolen, scattered, or consumed by flames. They had once thought they could hide forever in the trackless swamps of south Florida, but the relentless pursuit by the military had proven them wrong. It was the Florida Seminole's darkest hour.

After a year's delay, the long-awaited delegation of western Seminole arrived at Tampa on January 19, 1858. After a visit to the detention camp at Egmont Key, Loomis and the delegation headed south, arriving at Fort Myers on January 27. Two days later Loomis issued an order for hostilities to cease. On February 6, the delegates were escorted to Fort Loomis in the Big Cypress in hopes of encountering someone who would take a message to Holata or Abiaki.⁵² It took two weeks for the Seminole to respond to the white flags posted near abandoned villages, and even then it was a very tentative contact. Finally, on February 27, Holata and two representatives from

Abiaki's band came in for a talk. A more formal talk was held three days later, in which terms were reached between Holata and the government agent, Elias Rector. Final acceptance, however, depended on a vote of the tribal council, which was held on March 14. On March 27 Holata returned and announced the government's offer had been accepted. The Seminole War, all forty-six years of it, was now over.

It took time for those Indians who were emigrating to gather at Fort Myers. Most, but not all, of Holata's people accompanied him to the West when the steamer *Grey Cloud* left Egmont Key on May 7. Others may have been willing to join him, but the white offensive had been so successful in scattering the Seminole that several bands could not be located and were left behind. Abiaki and a good many of the intractable Mikasuki steadfastly refused to leave, no matter what the inducements or threats. More than two hundred Seminole did not go west, and the approximately four thousand Seminole who now reside in Florida are descendants of those tenacious warriors and their wives, a people who fought for the simple right to live in their homeland and enjoy their own customs. They and their descendants truly have earned the right to call themselves "unconquered."⁵³

Epilogue

*P*lace may have finally come to Florida, but it wouldn't last. Within three years of Holata's departure the American nation began to tear itself apart. Both the Union and Confederacy courted aid from the Seminole, but for the most part the Indians remained noncommittal, happy to sell provisions to either side, but unwilling to take part in the fighting. Long, painful experience had taught them to be wary of any overtures from the white man. Because the Indians did not take up arms, white Floridians began to realize they had little to fear from their Native neighbors. Some influential whites even became close friends. Capt. Francis A. Hendry (namesake of Hendry County) had served in the volunteers during the final war and had been a Confederate agent to the Seminole. After the war he settled in the Fort Myers area and later helped found the Friends of the Florida Seminoles Society.¹

As many a soldier in the Seminole Wars had pointed out, if the Indians had been left alone they would have threatened no one and would have occupied land that whites had little or no use for. During the remainder of the nineteenth century, that seemed to hold true. The Seminole and Mikasuki people kept to their Everglades and Big Cypress villages and had little contact with whites, except for visits to trading posts or stores in nearby towns. The population of Florida was growing, however, and the isolation couldn't last. As the twentieth century progressed, portions of the Everglades and Big Cypress were drained, affecting the patterns of Seminole life, including where they lived, how they traveled, and what they hunted. With the building of the Tamiami Trail, a highway that ran south from Tampa then east through the Everglades to Miami, avoiding the whites became an impossibility. Conditions

were also changing to the north, where the Creeks lived. The Kissimmee River was dredged and straightened to allow for large-scale agriculture, notably the sugar industry, and after the devastating 1928 hurricane, Lake Okeechobee was surrounded by a dike. Land that the Creeks had lived on for generations began to be developed into new towns and cane fields. Although there was no talk of shipping the Seminole west, their homes, livelihoods, and way of life were once again in danger.

The Seminole could have reacted violently to these new incursions, but they didn't. Instead, they did what they had so expertly done for over one hundred years: they learned new ways to survive. The Seminole had a long tradition of raising cattle, and some went to work as cowhands in the thriving Florida cattle industry. Many others entered the tourist trade. By the early twentieth century the Indian wars were over, and Americans had developed a fascination for the very cultures they had tried so hard to destroy. Florida was also booming as a tourist destination, with the automobile and railroads bringing in thousands of visitors who came in search of new experiences. The Seminole, with their fierce reputation, colorful patchwork clothing, and interesting customs, proved the perfect tourist attraction. Some set up villages along the highway where travelers could stop and explore the chickees and perhaps purchase a palmetto-fiber doll, a patchwork skirt, or maybe just a cold drink. Others set up camp inside white-owned "jungle parks" where they went about their daily routines and posed for photographs. Seminole men learned the art of alligator "wrestling," which became a tribal tradition. Some whites felt the Indians were being demeaned and exploited, but the Seminole didn't see it that way. It was simply a new way to make a living.

As cities such as Miami and Fort Lauderdale grew, the Seminole faced a new threat. The remote villages where they had lived for generations were soon surrounded by the expanding suburbs. Lands that nineteenth-century Floridians saw as worthless were viewed by twentieth-century real estate developers as priceless. Unfortunately, the Seminole held no title to the land they occupied. Having signed no peace treaty, they had been allotted no official reservation.

Thankfully, during the 1930s the government that had once attempted to drive the Seminole out of Florida now began to help them stay. Working with whites who were friends of the Seminole, three reservations totaling eighty thousand acres were assigned to the Indians. These were located in Dania (now Hollywood, near Fort Lauderdale), Big Cypress (in the center of the state midway between Fort Lauderdale and Naples), and Brighton (on the northwest side of Lake Okeechobee).

Smaller reservations were later added at Immokalee, Tampa, and Fort Pierce. Those who lived in Hollywood, Big Cypress, and the Everglades were primarily of Mikasuki descent, while those living on the Brighton reservation were Muscogee-speaking Creeks. The government also helped by reintroducing cattle ranching on the Brighton reservation. Today the Seminole Tribe is one of the nation's leading cattle producers, a testament to their skill in animal husbandry.

The Seminole were surviving, but many, especially those living on the Hollywood reservation, were hard-pressed. Surrounded by white society, it became impossible to maintain their cultural isolation. Then, in the 1950s, Congress decided it was time to end assistance to tribes such as the Seminole. Once again facing cultural extinction, most of the Seminole came together and organized the Seminole Tribe of Florida in 1957. Many of the Indians living west of Miami on the Tamiami Trail remained separate and were officially recognized as the Miccosukee Tribe of Florida Indians in 1962. Their lands include a thin strip along the Tamiami Trail and a portion of the Big Cypress tract. A few small bands refused to make any arrangement with the government and remain as independent groups.

The Seminole people of Florida have always considered themselves a sovereign nation, and in the late twentieth century they used that independence to raise themselves out of poverty. It started with tax-free tobacco sales, grew into bingo halls, and blossomed into a multimillion-dollar casino/resort business. Today they are a respected political and cultural force both within the state and throughout the nation, and a source of pride for all Floridians.²

From a present-day perspective, the wars seem such a waste. Forty-six years, tens of millions of dollars, and thousands of lives. For what? Were the Seminole really such an immense threat? To many white Americans of the time they were, or at least they were *perceived* to be. Sadly, it made no difference if the threat was real or imagined; people react to imagined threats in much the same manner as they do to real ones. For Native Americans, on the other hand, the threat was very real. The larger, more dynamic white society was expanding, and the Indians stood in the way. A determination on the part of the United States to control the entire continent, and an equal determination on the part of the Indians not to surrender to the cultural onslaught meant conflict was inevitable.

As in any study, there are lessons to be learned. That's the irony in writing history: Yes, it's about the past, but it's really about the future. The only way we can hope to stop repeating the mistakes of the past is

to learn from our experiences and work to prevent them from happening again. Militarily there was much to be learned, and places such as West Point and various war colleges do study the conflicts. Unfortunately, although the military has learned from the experience, our elected officials and society in general hasn't, as evidenced by our involvements in lengthy, no-win conflicts such as Vietnam and Afghanistan. One of the things the Seminole Wars teach us is that if a nation intends to defeat a determined indigenous population on its home soil, that nation must be prepared to spend whatever it takes in terms of time, lives, and money to overwhelm the natives militarily. More significantly, it must also be prepared to occupy the disputed land until there are no significant numbers of hostile natives left. Because the United States saw Florida as an integral part of its future, Americans were willing to make that commitment. The wars also teach us that even the most determined aggressor can be outlasted. Because the Seminole were so tenacious in the struggle to retain their homeland, they are still in Florida today.

Those are some of the practical lessons we can learn from the Seminole Wars, and they are important. Practical lessons teach us what is, and what is not, possible. If applied, they can prevent us from wasting time, money, and most significantly, lives. Yet the truly important lessons are the ones that teach us about ourselves and our society.

We occasionally hear people say that the United States had no "right" to take Indian land. Technically, that isn't true. Just because the Native Americans were here first doesn't mean they had some eternal right never to be dispossessed of the land they lived on. We are all subject to conquest; it's why we spend untold billions of dollars on the military. We tend to forget that rights aren't something that exist on their own; they are granted by those who have the power to grant them. Jefferson said people should enjoy certain "unalienable Rights" because they were "endowed by their Creator." Rights granted by law exist only if the government has the power and will to guarantee those rights. Those with the power set the rules as they see fit. Outside of human society there are no guaranteed rights.

In the early United States, white Americans believed they had the right to conquer the land and the power to do it, just as the Natives had every right to attempt to stop them. What we think today is immaterial. Make no mistake about it: conquest is what it was, pure and simple. We might give it less offensive names such as Manifest Destiny, expansionism, imperialism, or colonization, but those are just fig leaves for the brutal business of conquest. The urge to conquer is certainly not a racial trait,

as some would have us believe. Every race and region has had its empire builders. Europeans had their Romans, Spanish, and British; Asians their Mongol “Hordes” and the Chin Dynasty; and Africans their ancient Kingdoms of Mali, Ghana, and Zimbabwe. The list is seemingly endless. New World inhabitants were no different, with powerful empires like the Aztec, Inca, and Calusa. We certainly wish the United States had taken a different path when it came to dealing with the Native Americans as its own empire expanded, but it didn’t, and it’s something we all, as humans, have to live with.

While there can be little doubt that white America’s insatiable quest for land, wealth, and power was responsible for all the suffering of the Seminole Wars and every other Indian conflict, we see little use in trying to “hold these people accountable,” as many suggest. It all seems rather pointless. How do you punish someone who has been dead for a century and a half? Is there anything we can do today to make those people change the opinions they held or the actions they took so long ago? More to the point, will it somehow erase all the pain and anguish suffered by the Seminole of the time? It might be argued that placing blame or posthumously punishing individuals or segments of society will somehow make up for past wrongs. It won’t. The truth is, nothing we can do will “make it right.” The time for that has long since passed, and the shame cannot be erased by a few symbolic measures. In the end, placing blame does no one any good. It may make us feel superior to our ancestors—as if we are too enlightened to make the same mistakes—but that is nothing more than self-deception. Two hundred years from now our descendants will no doubt find fault with actions we considered wise and necessary today.

So how should Americans of today feel about what happened to the Seminole? As individuals, that is up to each of us to decide for ourselves. No one alive today should feel guilty for what individuals in the past have done, even if they are direct descendants. Every person’s conscience is their own and cannot be left as an inheritance. What does get passed down are the benefits of those actions. People committed wrongs to benefit themselves, but also their posterity, whether it be their own children or their fellow countrymen. As individuals, those of us who are recipients of those benefits should feel a degree of shame and remorse, and those emotions should inform our present attitudes and actions. We owe it to those who were wronged in the past to do what we can to see it doesn’t happen again.

How the nation as a whole should feel is more difficult to say. The individuals who committed these wrongs are gone, but the nation has

endured. Most of us feel the nation does bear a burden of responsibility, but what should the United States do to atone? The people who made up the nation when these evil deeds happened have long since died. It is, quite literally, a different nation, with different attitudes and, in part, made up of the descendants of those who were wronged. How do we apportion responsibility? Is a descendant of immigrants who arrived long after the Indian wars were finished as responsible as a descendant of Floridians who fought against the Seminole? If we made cash reparations to each descendant of those who were wronged, would that really provide them or their children with better lives, and would it mean an end to the matter? These types of questions are endless, and anyone who thinks they have all the answers is a fool. These are questions for the nation to decide, and certainly not any historian, no matter how well schooled in the subject.

Those who would condemn one particular group, in this case white Americans, are missing the most important lesson of the Seminole Wars: It's not what white Americans did to the Native Americans or the enslaved Africans; it's what *people* did to *people*. It's what every dominant group did to every native people they encountered, all the way back to the early modern humans who displaced the Neanderthals. By focusing our wrath on one particular group we deny a very uncomfortable truth: The destruction of rival peoples is part of all our histories, and given the proper circumstances, everyone (including a Seminole) is capable of unspeakable evil. If there is to be any hope of humanity not destroying itself or committing further atrocities, we must quit blaming it on "them," and accept our own dark nature. Only then can we strive to suppress it.

We do not feel it is for us to say what white Americans should have done in regard to the Seminole. We weren't there, and we'll not be so arrogant as to think we are any better or wiser than they were. Could the whole experience have been handled better? Obviously. But, like punishing the dead, advising the dead is just as impossible. Again, it goes back to the reason we study history. We see what people did in past situations, and we see the consequences of their actions. It forces us to look at ourselves in similar situations and to think about the consequences of our own actions. We can do nothing for those who suffered so long ago. We can do a lot for those who suffer today. History is a window that allows us to peer into humanity's past. We need to have the courage to turn the window into a mirror.

We also reject the idea that the Seminole were simply pawns in the game and bear no portion of responsibility (small as it might be) for the

horrors of the wars. Denying the Seminole's agency in deciding their own futures is no less insulting than Andrew Jackson's insistence that the Creeks and Seminole were simple dupes of the British.³ Throughout the whole period, the Seminole were doing what they thought best for themselves. We must not forget that it was they who decided on war. Without a doubt, white aggression forced them into a situation where they were given no choice but to react, but the choice of how to react was always theirs. They had at least three options: They could have acquiesced and gone west, stood their ground and fought, or simply taken refuge in the Everglades and avoided the whites altogether. They knew the ramifications of each option, what they were up against, and the possible outcomes. They discussed these matters thoroughly and came to a decision that suited them and their culture. Was going to war the right decision? That's not for us or anyone but their descendants to say. We can only admire them for their courage in making the decision and their tenacity once it was made.

In a way, the worst thing that ever happened to the Seminole (the wars) was the best thing that ever happened to those who survived the conflict. The Seminole of today are culturally strong because white America tried to destroy their way of life. Throughout half a century of war and aggression, the Seminole fought to keep alive the things that were most important to them. If you want to make someone treasure something, try taking it away. Sadly, we may find that in a hundred years, the opposite holds true. The best thing that ever happened to today's Seminole (wealth from gaming and other enterprises) might become the worst thing that ever happened to them. Affluence has brought them into the mainstream of American culture. Many young Seminole speak English as their first language and are not fluent in either of the native tongues. More are choosing to marry outside the tribe and to live and work off the reservation. There is nothing inherently wrong with that; most Americans today are far removed from the cultures of their ancestors. Unfortunately, with each succeeding generation, the number of true Seminole who actively participate in the culture must inevitably dwindle. To their credit, the Seminole recognize the danger and have devoted considerable time and resources to combat the trend and to keep the culture alive. We sincerely hope they are successful.

Today, for good or bad, the Seminole are often viewed as one of Florida's many tourist attractions. Instead of hiding out in the Everglades in fear, they have erected billboards along I-75 beckoning people to visit the Big Cypress Reservation and take a ride on the "Billie Swamp Safari." Instead of companies of soldiers leaving Fort Myers in search of war parties,

tour buses run from Fort Myers to the Seminole Hard Rock Casino, where the public is invited to “play Indian games.” The descendants of those few last survivors, those who sought refuge in the inhospitable swamps and hammocks, have learned to prosper in the land their ancestors once fought so doggedly to remain in. Most Floridians cannot imagine a great war taking place in this most inviting of places. Yet there was a time, not that long ago, when true fear gripped Floridians of all races, and the blood that was spilled soaked into sands that people were willing to die for.

Abbreviations

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| AGOLR | Adjutant General's Office, Letters Received |
| A&NC | <i>Army & Navy Chronicle</i> |
| ASPFR | <i>American State Papers, Foreign Relations</i> |
| ASPLA | <i>American State Papers, Indian Affairs</i> |
| ASPMA | <i>American State Papers, Military Affairs</i> |
| ASPMi | <i>American State Papers, Miscellaneous</i> |
| HQFLS | Head Quarters Florida, Letters Sent |
| IRCML | Indian River County Main Library |
| NA | National Archives |
| OIA | Office of Indian Affairs |
| RG | Record Group |
| TGI | Thomas Gilcrease Institute |
| TP | <i>Territorial Papers of the United States</i> |
| USACC | U.S. Army Continental Commands |
| USHD | <i>United States House Document</i> |
| USHED | <i>United States House Executive Document</i> |
| USMA | United States Military Academy |
| USSED | <i>United States Senate Executive Document</i> |

Notes

CHAPTER 1

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3. Weisman, "Background and Continued Cultural and Historical Importance of the Seminole Wars," 392-93.
4. Milanich, *Florida Indians and Invasion*, 1-2, 37-97; United States Census Bureau, 1990.
5. Wickman, *Tree That Bends*, 113.
6. Milanich, *Florida Indians and Invasion*, 105-36; Stojanowski, *Bioarchaeology of Ethnogenesis*, 118-30.
7. Wickman, *Tree That Bends*, 67-81.
8. Milanich, *Florida Indians and Invasion*, 167-80.
9. Stojanowski, *Bioarchaeology of Ethnogenesis*, 88; Milanich, *Florida Indians and Invasion*, 222-27, 230-31.
10. Milanich, *Florida Indians and Invasion*, 222-27; Braund, *Deerskins and Duffels*, 33; Stojanowski, *Bioarchaeology of Ethnogenesis*, 128-53.
11. Weisman, "Background and Continued Cultural and Historical Importance of the Seminole Wars," 392.
12. Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles*, 2-5, 8; Weisman, *Unconquered People*, 6-8; Frank, *Creeks and Southerners*, 19-20; Braund, *Deerskins and Duffels*, 3-4; Weisman, "Cultural and Historical Importance of the Seminole Wars," 396.

13. Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles*, xiv, 3; Weisman, *Unconquered People*, 12-13; Braund, *Deerskins and Duffels*, 6-8.
14. Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles*, 3, 7; Weisman, *Unconquered People*, 13.
15. Stojanowski, *Bioarchaeology of Ethnogenesis*, 128-53.
16. Milanich, *Florida Indians and Invasion*, 207-9; Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles*, 126; Braund, *Deerskins and Duffels*, 76.
17. Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles*, 4; Calloway, *American Revolution in Indian Country*, 248-49; Frank, "Creating a Seminole Enemy," 277-79; Wickman, *Tree That Bends*, 192-98.
18. Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles*, 59; Braund, *Deerskins and Duffels*, 70; Coker and Watson, *Indian Traders*, 35.
19. Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles*, 41; Braund, *Deerskins and Duffels*, 121-24.
20. Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles*, 56-57; Braund, *Deerskins and Duffels*, 136-38.
21. Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles*, 4.
22. Weisman, *Unconquered People*, 30-42; Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles*, 18-20; Frank, *Creeks and Southerners*, 2-22; Braund, *Deerskins and Duffels*, 3-25.
23. Weisman, *Unconquered People*, 30-42; Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles*, 18-20; Frank, *Creeks and Southerners*, 2-22; Braund, *Deerskins and Duffels*, 3-25.
24. Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles*, 30-31; Covington, *Seminole of Florida*, 6-7.
25. Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles*, 29-30; Covington, *Seminole of Florida*, 6; Braund, *Deerskins and Duffels*, 21-22; Debo, *Road to Disappearance*, 25; Swanton, *Social Organization Creek Confederacy*, 66, 97-107.
26. Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles*, 22, 27-28, 37-40; Braund, *Deerskins and Duffels*, 24.
27. Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles*, 22, 27-28, 37-40; Frank, *Creeks and Southerners*, 23.
28. Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles*, 86-87; Rivers, *Slavery in Florida*, 4-6.
29. Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles*, 84-85; Rivers, *Slavery in Florida*, 4-6.
30. Weisman, "The Plantation System of the Florida Seminole Indians and Black Seminoles during the Colonial Period," 136-49; Rivers, *Slavery in Florida*, 193; Cohen, *Notices of Florida*, 76.
31. Calloway, *American Revolution in Indian Country*, 263; Rivers, *Slavery in Florida*, 193; McCall, *Letters from the Frontiers*, 160.
32. Giddings, *Exiles of Florida*, 79; Simmons, *Notices of East Florida*, 76; Williams, *Territory of Florida*, 239-40; McCall, *Letters from the Frontiers*, 160.
33. Williams, *Territory of Florida*, 239-40.
34. Rivers, *Slavery in Florida*, 196-97; Simmons, *Notices of East Florida*, 76-77.
35. Porter, *Black Seminoles*, 5-6, 28-29.
36. Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles*, 85, 91; Calloway, *American Revolution in Indian Country*, 259-61.

CHAPTER 2

1. Prucha, *The Great Father*, 57–60, 111–12.
2. Sprague, *Florida War*, 509.
3. Sprague, *Florida War*, 59.
4. Cherry, ed., *God's New Israel*, 25–27, 54, 61, 118.
5. Cass, "Removal of the Indians," 77; Benton, *Thirty Years' View*, 2:474.
6. Kappler, ed., *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, IV:1166–67.
7. Kappler, ed., *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, IV:1169–70.
8. Meltzer, *Hunted Like a Wolf*, 44.
9. Cusick, *Other War of 1812*, 27.
10. Cusick, *Other War of 1812*, 15; Patrick, *Florida Fiasco*, 9–10; Cox, *West Florida Controversy*, 329–30; Adams, *History during Administrations of Madison*, 214–16; Madison to Livingston and Monroe, and Madison to Monroe, July 29, 1803, *American State Papers: Foreign Relations* (hereafter *ASPFR*), 2:567–69, 626–27; *State Papers and Publick Documents of the United States*, V:469–71; *Annals of Congress*, 8th Cong., 2d sess. (November 5, 1804 to March 3, 1805), 1364–461.
11. Cusick, *Other War of 1812*, 15, 23–24; Patrick, *Florida Fiasco*, 10–11; Owsley and Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists*, 7–9; Cox, *West Florida Controversy*, 395–407; Smith, *Plot to Steal Florida*, 61–65; Rhea to Holmes, September 26, 1810 and Smith to Claiborne, October 27, 1810, *ASPFR* 3:396–98; Adams, *History during Administrations of Madison*, 214–17. A detailed account of the Republic of West Florida is given in Davis, *The Rogue Republic*.
12. Smith, *Plot to Steal Florida*, 228–29; Patrick, *Florida Fiasco*, 122; *Charleston Courier*, March 11, 1812; Adams, *History during Administrations of Madison*, 217–18, 260–63.
13. Patrick, *Florida Fiasco*, 3–4; Cusick, *Other War of 1812*, 27–28.
14. Cusick, *Other War of 1812*, 30–31; Stagg, "George Mathews and John McKee," 273.
15. Cusick, *Other War of 1812*, 37; *Secret Acts*, 6; Patrick, *Florida Fiasco*, 35; Isaacs to Mathews and McKee, March 31, 1811, Carter, ed., *Territorial Papers* [hereafter *TP*], *Mississippi*, VI:188–89; Stagg, "George Mathews and John McKee," 278.
16. Cusick, *Other War of 1812*, 52–53, 57, 67; Patrick, *Florida Fiasco*, 46–47.
17. Cusick, *Other War of 1812*, 59–69; Patrick, *Florida Fiasco*, 56.
18. Cusick, *Other War of 1812*, 71, 75–76, 167; Patrick, *Florida Fiasco*, 62, 65.
19. Patrick, *Florida Fiasco*, 92–93; Cusick, *Other War of 1812*, 121; Owsley and Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists*, 70.
20. Cusick, *Other War of 1812*, 85–92; Patrick, *Florida Fiasco*, 72–73, 84.
21. Cusick, *Other War of 1812*, 107, 124–25; Patrick, *Florida Fiasco*, 89–96; Clarke, "The Surrender of Amelia," 90–93.
22. Patrick, *Florida Fiasco*, 109.

23. Cusick, *Other War of 1812*, 136–38; Patrick, *Florida Fiasco*, 114–21; Monroe to Mathews, April 4, 1812, *ASPCR* 3:572.
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25. Cusick, *Other War of 1812*, 166, 170–74, 178; Patrick, *Florida Fiasco*, 123, 134–35; *Secret Acts*, 33.
26. Cusick, *Other War of 1812*, 139, 169–71, 174–80, 184; Patrick, *Florida Fiasco*, 129, 139.
27. Alexander, “The Ambush of Captain John Williams,” 288; Davis, “U.S. Troops in Spanish East Florida,” 101; Porter, *Black Seminoles*, 8; Cusick, *Other War of 1812*, 6.
28. Cusick, *Other War of 1812*, 191, 181; Patrick, *Florida Fiasco*, 149.
29. Patrick, *Florida Fiasco*, 220; Speech of Senator William Hunter, *Annals of Congress*, 13th Cong., 1st sess. (May 24, 1813 to August 2, 1813), 504–35.
30. Speech of Senator William Hunter, *Annals of Congress*, 13th Cong., 1st sess. (May 24, 1813 to August 2, 1813), 504–35.
31. Cusick, *Other War of 1812*, 214–16; Patrick, *Florida Fiasco*, 179–84.
32. Cusick, *Other War of 1812*, 217–224; Patrick, *Florida Fiasco*, 185–89.
33. Cusick, *Other War of 1812*, 226–28, 232–235; Patrick, *Florida Fiasco*, 192–93.
34. Cusick, *Other War of 1812*, 240–44; Patrick, *Florida Fiasco*, 199–206.
35. Cusick, *Other War of 1812*, 248, 255–57, 252–254; Patrick, *Florida Fiasco*, 157, 231–36.
36. Cusick, *Other War of 1812*, 252–54, 266–267, 269, 286; Patrick, *Florida Fiasco*, 248–53, 259.

CHAPTER 3

1. Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles*, 10, 30, 120, 152–53, 166; O’Brien, *Bitterness and Tears*, 18–25.
2. Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles*, 145–47, 165–71.
3. O’Brien, *Bitterness and Tears*, 55.
4. O’Brien, *Bitterness and Tears*, 35–36.
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6. Hawkins to Armstrong, July 28, 1813, *ASPIA* 1:849–50.
7. Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles*, 172; O’Brien, *Bitterness and Tears*, 41–42; Halbert and Ball, *Creek War*, 125–42.
8. Henri, *Southern Indians and Hawkins*, 284–86; Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles*, 155; O’Brien, *Bitterness and Tears*, 42–48; Halbert and Ball, *Creek War*, 147–57.
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12. Jackson to Armstrong, December 16, 1813, Jackson to Blount, December 29, 1813, Bassett, ed., *Correspondence of Jackson*, 1:396–97, 416–20; O'Brien, *Bitterness and Tears*, 108–15; Halbert and Ball, *Creek War*, 241–54.

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CHAPTER 10

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33. Asst. Surgeon R. M. Sherry Jr.’s Report, September 20, 1839; Surgeon Madison Miles to Col. William Davenport, September 30, 1839; Lt. S. Woods to Col. William Davenport, November 27, 1839, William Davenport Papers, <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00024129/00001/allvolumes>.
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35. *A&NC*, November 28, 1839, 9:365.
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CHAPTER 16

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2. Sprague, *Florida War*, 247.
3. Poinsett to Macomb, May 5, 1840; Poinsett to Armistead, May 13, 1840, Carter, *TP, Florida*, 25:147–48, 150–51.
4. *A&NC*, May 28, 1840, 10:348.
5. *A&NC*, June 4, 1840, 10:364.
6. *A&NC*, June 4, 1840, 10:364; Sprague, *Florida War*, 538.
7. *A&NC*, June 4, 1840, 10:364.

8. *A&NC*, July 2, 1840, 11:14; Lt. Col. Bennet Riley, 2nd Inf., Heitman, *Historical Register*, 831.
9. *A&NC*, June 18, 1840, 10:394
10. *A&NC*, June 18, 1840, 10:394; July 2 and 16, 1840, 11:13–14, 41.
11. Capt. G. J. Rains to Col. Twiggs, May 29, 1840, *A&NC*, July 2, 1840, 11:12–13.
12. *A&NC*, August 6 and 13, 1840; September 3, 1840, 11:93, 106, 155.
13. *A&NC*, September 3 and 17, 1840, 11:155, 189.
14. *A&NC*, August 27 and September 3, 1840, 11:139–40, 153–54; John McLaughlin to Secretary of the Navy J. K. Paulding, August 11, 1840, Carter, ed., *TP, Florida*, 26:194–95.
15. Armistead to Sec. of War, August 17, 1840, Carter, ed., *TP, Florida*, 26:197.
16. Gov. Reid to Sec. of War, August 22, 1840, Carter, ed., *TP, Florida*, 26:202.
17. Delegate Downing to the President, August 28, 1840, Carter, ed., *TP, Florida*, 26:206–8.
18. Poinsett to Gov. Reid, October 23 and November 4, 1840, Carter, ed., *TP, Florida*, 26:222–23, 225–26.
19. Poinsett to Armistead, July 6, 1840, Carter, ed., *TP, Florida*, 26:165.
20. *A&NC*, November 19, 1840, 11:331; *Niles' National Register*, March 27, 1841, 60:63; Sprague, *Florida War*, 250.
21. *A&NC*, December 17, 1840, 11:395.
22. Denham and Huneycutt, eds., *Echoes from a Distant Frontier*, 144–45.
23. *Niles' National Register*, January 2, 1841, 59:322; Sprague, *Florida War*, 249.
24. Poinsett to Armistead, January 10, 1841, Carter, ed., *TP, Florida*, 26:238–39.
25. *Niles' National Register*, January 2, 1841, 59:322.
26. The best accounts of the navy's role in the Second Seminole War can be found in Buker, *Swamp Sailors*; Sprague, *Florida War* (chap. 9); and *Army & Navy Chronicle*.
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28. Wilson, *Presidency of Van Buren*, 52.
29. *Congressional Globe*, 25th Cong., 1st sess. (1837), 5:43.
30. *Congressional Globe*, 25th Cong., 1st sess. (1837), 5:43.
31. Mahon, *Second Seminole War*, 293.
32. Poinsett to Taylor, May 30, 1839, Carter, ed., *TP, Florida*, 25:613; Sprague, *Florida War*, 250; White, "Macomb's Mission," 162.
33. Croffut, *Fifty Years in Camp and Field*, 123; John Page to T. Hartley Crawford, January 24, 1841 and Poinsett to Armistead, February 1, 1841, Carter, ed., *TP, Florida*, 26:243–245, 250–51; Sprague, *Florida War*, 250.
34. Armistead to Poinsett, January 26 and 30, 1841, Carter, ed., *TP, Florida*, 26:247–48, 249–50.
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36. John Page to T. Hartley Crawford, April 3, 1841, Carter, ed., *TP, Florida*, 26:298–99.
37. Sprague, *Florida War*, 262.

CHAPTER 17

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2. Sprague, *Florida War*, 287–88.
3. Sprague, *Florida War*, 289.
4. Sprague, *Florida War*, 289.
5. Sprague, *Florida War*, 258–59, 263, 267, 299–303, 320–23.
6. Sprague, *Florida War*, 281.
7. *A&NC*, September 23 and October 14, 1841, 12:300, 322.
8. *A&NC*, October 28, 1841, 12:339.
9. Laumer, *Amidst a Storm of Bullets*, 61; Sprague, *Florida War*, 526.
10. Sprague, *Florida War*, 248.
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12. McGaughy, “Squaw Kissing War,” 112.
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14. Motte, *Journey into Wilderness*, 199.
15. Reynold Marvin Kirby Diary entry of February 8, 1838, Kirby Diary, <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00017216/00001>.
16. John Rogers Vinton Journal entry of February 10, 1839, John Rogers Vinton Diaries: in Journal I (1839–1841), Miscellaneous Manuscripts, Special Collections, Providence Public Library; Missall and Missall, *The Army Is My Calling*, 170.
17. Motte, *Journey into Wilderness*, 144.
18. Worth’s efforts to cut expenses are detailed in Sprague, *Florida War*, 266–69, 275, 305–8.
19. Sprague, *Florida War*, 268.
20. George E. McClelland to Gov. Call, February 28, 1842; L. B. Branch to Col. Worth, March 23, 1842, Sprague, *Florida War*, 418–19.
21. Sprague, *Florida War*, 403–27.
22. Capt. M. Burke to Maj. Thomas Childs, November 3, 1841, Sprague, *Florida War*, 334–35.
23. Capt. M. Burke to Maj. Thomas Childs, November 3, 1841, Sprague, *Florida War*, 334–35.
24. Capt. R. D. A. Wade’s Report, November 13, 1841, Sprague, *Florida War*, 392–93.
25. Sprague, *Florida War*, 354.
26. Sprague, *Florida War*, 353.
27. Sprague, *Florida War*, 352; West, “Abiaka,” 404–5.
28. Maj. W. G. Belknap to Worth, December 23, 1841, Sprague, *Florida War*, 354–57.
29. Lt. John T. McLaughlin to Worth, December 26, 1841, Sprague, *Florida War*, 378–81.

30. McLaughlin to Lt. John Rodgers, February 1, 1841, Sprague, *Florida War*, 381–82.
31. McLaughlin to Sec. of the Navy A. P. Upshur, December 23, 1841, Sprague, *Florida War*, 358–59.
32. Lt. John Rodgers to Lt. McLaughlin, April 12, 1842, Sprague, *Florida War*, 384–86.
33. McLaughlin to Sec. of the Navy Upshur, May 26, 1842, Sprague, *Florida War*, 388–90.
34. Lt. John Rodgers to McLaughlin, April 12, 1842, Sprague, *Florida War*, 384–86.
35. C. R. Gates's Journal entry of February 7, 1842, Sprague, *Florida War*, 376.
36. Sprague, *Florida War*, 400.
37. Sprague, *Florida War*, 430–33.
38. Sprague, *Florida War*, 438, 441–45; Hall, "A Reckless Waste of Blood and Treasure," 78.
39. Sprague, *Florida War*, 435.
40. Sprague, *Florida War*, 436.
41. Sprague, *Florida War*, 446.
42. Sprague, *Florida War*, 447.
43. Sprague, *Florida War*, 454.
44. Conversation between Col. Worth and Halleck-Tustenuggee at Warm Springs, Florida, April 29, 1842, Sprague, *Florida War*, 463–65.
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46. Sprague, *Florida War*, 429.
47. Sprague, *Florida War*, 396, 399–400, 456–60.
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CHAPTER 18

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4. Sprague, *Florida War*, 526–47.
5. Mahon, *Second Seminole War*, 321.
6. Foreman, *Indian Removal*, 333.
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8. Lancaster, *Removal Aftershock*, 24–25, 28–30, 33–37, 46–47, 52, 56–67.
9. Lancaster, *Removal Aftershock*, 37–41, 68–71.
10. Lancaster, *Removal Aftershock*, 20, 24, 28–30, 42, 49.
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12. *National Intelligencer*, October 1, 1842.
13. Sprague, *Florida War*, 512.
14. Porter, “Billy Bowlegs,” 219.
15. Sprague, *Florida War*, 500.
16. Watson, “Seminole Strategy,” 164.
17. Secretary of War Wilkins to Worth, October 18, 1844, Carter, ed., *TP, Florida*, 26:967–68.
18. Cullum, *Biographical Register*, 1:426–27; McKay, *Pioneer Florida*, 2:560.
19. Sylvester Churchill to Worth, March 31, 1845, Carter, *TP, Florida*, 26:1039–40.
20. Covington, “Thomas P. Kennedy: Indian Trader,” 57, 59; John Darling, 2nd Lt., 5th Infantry, 1838, resigned 1839, Heitman, *Historical Register*, 1:353.
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22. William and Nancy McCullough Affidavits, August 11, 1849, *USSED 49*, 161–63.
23. Crawford to Messrs. Gale and others, August 14, 1849, *USSED 49*, 5; Crawford to Twiggs, August 21, 1849, *USSED 1*, 117–18.
24. Casey Diary entry of September 4, 1849, John Charles Casey Diaries, United States Military Academy (hereafter USMA); Casey Diary entry of September 4, 1849, John Charles Casey Papers, Thomas Gilcrease Institute (hereafter TGI); Twiggs to Crawford, September 6, 1849; Casey to Mackall, September 6, 1849, *USSED 49*, 61, 121; Casey to Jones, September 9, 1849, United States Congress. House. *Executive Document No. 5* (hereafter *USHED 5*), 31st Cong., 1st sess. (1849), “Message from the President,” 122–24.
25. Casey Diary entry of September 4, 1849, John Charles Casey Papers, TGI; William and Nancy McCullough Affidavits, August 11, 1849, *USSED 49*, 161–63.

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29. Knetsch, “John Darling,” 14.

30. Twiggs to Jones, November 26, 1849, *USSED* 49, 66–67; Munroe to Bliss, January 14, 1856, United States Army Continental Commands. Letters Sent, Letters Received, Head Quarters, Department of Florida (hereafter USACC, HQFLS), RG 393, M-1084, roll 1, NA; Casey Diary entry of February 6, 1850, John Charles Casey Diaries, USMA; “Return of the troops employed in suppressing Indian hostilities,” November 28, 1849, *USSED* 1, 189.

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33. Duval to Brown, November 5 and 12, 1849, *USSED* 49, 143–146; Casey Diary entry of November 10, 1849, John Charles Casey Papers, TGI.

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36. Casey Diary entries of January 22–February 6, 1850, John Charles Casey Diaries, USMA; A brigadier general’s base pay was \$104/mo. (excluding allowances for rations, horses, and servants). A 2nd Lieutenant of Artillery or Infantry was paid \$25/mo. (excluding allowances). Adjutant General’s Office, *Official Army Register*, 40, 42.

37. Twiggs to Crawford, February 12 and March 1, 1850, *USSED* 49, 83–85.

38. Casey Diary entry of March 3, 1850, John Charles Casey Diaries, USMA; Casey to Twiggs, March 26, and Twiggs to Crawford, March 1 and 27, 1850, *USSED* 49, 84–85, 91–92.

39. Casey to Twiggs, March 26, 1850; Twiggs to Crawford, March 27, 1850; Casey to Twiggs, April 9, 1850; Twiggs to Crawford, April 14, 1850, *USSED* 49, 91–92, 94–95.

40. Casey Diary entries of April 2, 11 and 12, 1850, John Charles Casey Diaries, USMA; Twiggs to Crawford, April 3, and Casey to Twiggs, April 9, 1850, *USSED* 49, 92, 94–95.

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42. Summerlin to Brown, October 2, 1850, United States Congress. House. *Executive Document No. 1* (hereafter *USHED 1*), 31st Cong., 2nd sess. (1850), "Message from the President," 89–90; Casey to Maj. H L. Scott, October 2, 1850, AGOLR, Main Series, 1822–1860, RG 94, M-567, roll 426, NA.

43. Casey to Conrad, January 11, 1851, AGOLR, Main Series, 1822–1860, RG 94, M-567, roll 443, NA; Casey Diary entry of April 13, 1851, John Charles Casey Diaries, USMA.

44. Casey Diary entries of May 13, 19 and 23, 1851, John Charles Casey Diaries, USMA.

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46. Blake to Lea, June 1, 1851; Lea to Blake, September 23, 1851; Blake to Lea, February 15, 1852, OIA, Letters Received, Seminole Agency Emigration, RG 75, M-234, roll 807, NA; Darling to Brown, February 4, 1852, Territorial and State Governors, RG 101, State Archives of Florida, Series S-577, Florida Gov. James E. Broome Correspondence (1849–1853), Box 2, Folder 4; Casey Diary entry of February 14, 1852, John Charles Casey Diaries, USMA.

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51. Casey Diary entry of December 31, 1853, John Charles Casey Diaries, USMA.

52. Casey Diary entry of January 13, 1854, John Charles Casey Diaries, USMA.

53. Davis to Casey, May 10, 1854, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 3, NA.

54. Davis to Mallory and Maxwell, August 5, 1854, Tallahassee *Floridian & Journal*, September 9, 1854.

55. Casey Diary entry of January 10, 1855, John Charles Casey Diaries, USMA.

56. Jesup to Munroe, December 7, 1854, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 3, NA.

57. Casey Diary entry of January 13, 1855, John Charles Casey Diaries, USMA.

58. Benson to Brown, June 7, 1855, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 4, NA; Munroe to Cooper, July 15, 1855, roll 1; Hill to Haines, July 3, 1855, roll 4; Haskin, comp., *History of the First Regiment of Artillery*, 389; Langdon, "Campaigning in the Everglades," 62, copy in State Archives of Florida, Loomis L. Langdon Papers (1856–1906), RG 900000, Series M74–06.

59. Brown to Haines, June 21, 1855, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 4, NA.

60. Brown to Vincent, December 24 and 27, 1855, including statements of Privates John Hanna, William Baker, and Otto Hersch, Sgt. Daniel Holland and Corp. Williams, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 4, NA.

61. This account of the Hartsuff Battle is derived from official statements of the five enlisted survivors and Hartsuff's verbal report as related to Col. Harvey Brown. The statements of Hartsuff, Baker, and Hanna are generally corroborative, with little added by Hersch, Holland, and Williams, who quickly fled the scene. The biggest discrepancy is in the identities of the wounded. In his final report, Brown lists four killed, four wounded, and three uninjured, making eleven total, but gives no names. Hartsuff departed on the patrol with a sergeant, a corporal, and eight privates, so the total is correct. We know who the three uninjured are: Holland and Williams (who fled), and Hersch (who concealed himself soon after the attack commenced). We know three of the injured: Hartsuff, Hanna, and Baker, who had a wound on his thigh from where a bullet struck his knife. So, who is the other wounded soldier? Nearly all the survivors mention Private Murtaugh (with various spellings) being severely wounded in the abdomen and left at the scene, and there is no account of him or any of the other soldiers being rescued or returning to camp. Of the four soldiers killed, three of them were mentioned more than once in the reports: Privates Curran, Foster, and Horth. At first, we weren't sure if Horth might not be a misspelling, but the Register of Enlistments shows a William H. Horth being killed in action on December 20, 1855, near "Billy Bowlegs's Camp." We also found similar entries for Patrick Murtaugh, William Foster, and Michael Curren (spellings are those in the register). A Private Bonsedh (the spelling is questionable, the three middle letters being difficult to read in the original) is mentioned once by Hanna before the attack took place, but no such name, or anything close, shows up in the Register of Enlistments. Major Arnold, who was present when the bodies were later discovered, thought the remains were those of "Foster, Carran, Muller [Murtaugh?], & Hough [Horth]." Until further investigation can provide an answer, we can't be sure who the fourth wounded man is. Brown to Vincent, December 24 and 27, 1855, including statements of Privates John Hanna, William Baker, and Otto Hersch, Sgt. Daniel Holland and Corp. Williams, and Arnold to Brown, December 28, 1855, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 4, NA; AGO, Register of Enlistments, RG 94, M-333, NA.

62. Brown to Elzey, to Arnold, and to Vincent, December 21, 1855, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 4, NA.

63. Brown to Vincent, December 24 and 27, 1855; Statement of Private Otto Hersch, December 26, 1855, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 4, NA.

CHAPTER 19

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2. A detailed account of the war is given by Knetsch, Missall, and Missall, *History of the Third Seminole War, 1849–1858*.

3. Casey to Davis, December 23, 1855, United States Congress. House. *Report No. 4*, 53rd Cong., 1st sess. (1893), “The Reports of Committees of the House of Representatives,” 2:19.

4. Casey to Broome, December 23, 1855, Florida. *House Journal* (1856), “Journal of the Proceedings of the House of Representatives of the General Assembly of the State of Florida at its Eighth Session,” 1–2.

5. Harvey Brown Letterbook entry of December 31, 1855, Harvey Brown Letterbooks, MssCol 414, Department of Manuscripts and Archives, New York Public Library.

6. Broome to Davis, December 31, 1855, Florida. *House Journal* (1856), 35–36.

7. Munroe to Broome, January 12, 1856, Florida. *House Journal* (1856), 24–25; J. D. Shelton to Munroe, May 11, 1856, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 6, NA; H. W. G. Clements to Bvt. Maj. J. McKinstry, April 4, 1856, AGOLR, Main Series, 1822–1860, RG 94, M-567, roll 542, NA.

8. Bradley to Davis, March 22, 1856, AGOLR, Main Series, 1822–1860, RG 94, M-567, roll 533, NA.

9. J. D. Shelton to Munroe, May 11, 1856, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 6, NA.

10. Cooper to Munroe, Jan. 7, 1856, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 5, NA; Florida. *House Journal* (1856), 6–7.

11. Munroe to Broome, January 12, 1856, Florida. *House Journal* (1856), 25.

12. Brown to Arnold, December 27, 1855, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 4, NA.

13. Brown to Vincent, December 28, 1855; Brown to Benson, December 29, 1855, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 4, NA.

14. Brown to Arnold, January 14, 1856, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 4, NA.

15. Arnold to Brown, January 18, 1856, Webb, “Campaigning in Florida,” 410–12.

16. Brown to Churchill, May 3, 1856, AGOLR, RG 94, M-567, roll 535, NA.

17. Brown to Vincent, January 19, 1856, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 4, NA.

18. Webb, "Campaigning in Florida," 413.
19. Casey to Carter, March 28, 1856, Florida. *House Journal* (1856), 12–13; Davis to Mallory, March 21, 1856, AGOLR, Main Series, 1822–1860, RG 94, M-567, roll 542, NA, as noted in Crist and Dix, eds., *Papers of Jefferson Davis* (Index of letters from 1856–1860), 6:381.
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22. Moore to Hooker, April 6, 1856, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 4, NA; Tampa *Florida Peninsular*, April 12, 1856.
23. Webb, "Campaigning in Florida," 421; Loomis Langdon to George W. Langdon, April 9, 1856, Letters (1856), RG900000, State Archives of Florida, Series M74–06, Box 1, File #1.
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25. Carter to Broome, April 16, 1856, Florida. *House Journal* (1856), 94; Tallahassee *Floridian & Journal*, April 26, 1856.
26. Carter to Broome, April 19, 1856, Florida. *House Journal* (1856), 96; Casey Diary entries of April 17 and 18, 1856, John Charles Casey Diaries, USMA.
27. Carter to Durrance, April 22, 1856, Florida. *House Journal* (1856), 96.
28. Carter to Durrance, April 28, 1856, Florida. *House Journal* (1856), 99–100.
29. Johnston to Carter, May 6, 1856, Florida. *House Journal* (1856), 15–16.
30. Johnston to Brown, May 8, 1856, Florida. *House Journal* (1856), 17–18.
31. Brown to Churchill, May 3, 1856, AGOLR, Main Series, 1822–1860, RG 94, M-567, roll 535, NA.
32. Churchill to Cooper, May 15, 1856; Bradley to Churchill, May 15, 1856, AGOLR, Main Series, 1822–1860, RG 94, M-567, roll 534, NA; Tallahassee, *Floridian & Journal*, May 31, 1856; *New-York Times*, June 4, 1856.
33. John Turkett to Davis, June 2, 1856, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 5, NA; Adams, *William S. Hamey*, 147, 321.
34. Arnold to Brown, May 16, 1856, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 5, NA.
35. Carter to Lesley, May 16, 1856, Florida. *House Journal* (1856), 105.
36. Sparkman to Monroe, May 21, 1856, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 6, NA.
37. Webb Journal entries of June 2 and 3, 1856 in Webb, "Campaigning in Florida," 425.
38. Webb Journal entry of June 8, 1856 in Webb, "Campaigning in Florida," 426; *New-York Weekly Tribune*, July 12, 1856.
39. Durrance to Carter, June 14, 1856, Florida. *House Journal* (1856), 20–21.
40. Hooker to Munroe, June 19, 1856, AGOLR, Main Series, 1822–1860, RG 94, M-567, roll 542, NA.

41. Hooker to Munroe, June 19, 1856, AGOLR, Main Series, 1822–1860, RG 94, M-567, roll 542, NA; Durrance to Carter, June 14, 1856, Florida. *House Journal* (1856), 20–21.
42. Hooker to Munroe, June 19, 1856, AGOLR, Main Series, 1822–1860, RG 94, M-567, roll 542, NA; Durrance to Carter, June 14, 1856, Florida. *House Journal* (1856), 20–21; *Tampa Florida Peninsular*, June 21, 1856.
43. Hooker to Munroe, June 19, 1856, AGOLR, Main Series, 1822–1860, RG 94, M-567, roll 542, NA; Durrance to Carter, June 14 1856, Florida. *House Journal* (1856), 20–21.
44. Hooker to Munroe, June 19, 1856, AGOLR, 1822–1860, RG 94, M-567, roll 542, NA; Durrance to Carter, June 14, 1856, Florida. *House Journal* (1856), 20–21.
45. Covington, *Billy Bowlegs War*, 51–52; Brown, *Fort Meade*, 25–30.

CHAPTER 20

1. Brown to Page, August 2, 1856, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 5, NA; *Mobile* [Al.] *Daily Register*, August 22, 1856; Casey Diary entry of August 5, 1856, John Charles Casey Diaries, USMA.
2. Langdon and Bell to Hill, September 23, 1856, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 5, NA.
3. Kappler, ed., *Indian Affairs: Laws & Treaties*, 2:756–63.
4. Harney to Davis, August 31, 1856, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 5, NA.
5. Tallahassee *Floridian & Journal*, November 8, 1856.
6. Maj. M. McKinstry to Jesup, September 13, 1856, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 6, NA.
7. Carter to Broome, October 25 and November 11, 1856, Florida. *House Journal* (1856), 133–35.
8. Davis to Harney, November 4, 1856, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 5, NA.
9. Brown to Cooper, November 19, 1856, AGOLR, Main Series, 1822–1860, RG 94, M-567, roll 534, NA.
10. Thomas Williams Diary entry of November 26, 1856, Williams Family Papers, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.
11. Cooper to Harney, December 10, 1856, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 5, NA.
12. Harney to Cooper, December 26, 1856, AGOLR, Main Series, 1822–1860, RG 94, M-567, roll 539, NA.
13. Harney to Thomas, January 14, 1857, AGOLR, Main Series, 1822–1860, RG 94, M-567, roll 558, NA.

14. Lt. L. H. Pelouze to Lt. W. S. Abert, January 30, 1857, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 8, NA; McParlin to his mother and brother, January 30, 1857, Thomas A. McParlin Papers, Guy Weatherly Collection of McParlin Family Papers, Special Collections, Maryland State Archives.

15. Bvt. Capt. G. A. DuRussy to Lt. W. H. Lewis, February 7, 1857, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 9, NA.

16. Capt. Joseph Roberts to Pleasonton, February 16, 1857, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 9, NA; McParlin to his mother and brother, March 1, 1857, Thomas A. McParlin Papers, Guy Weatherly Collection, Maryland State Archives; Thomas Williams Diary, entry of March 1, 1857, Williams Family Papers, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.

17. Loomis to Pleasonton, February 7, 1857, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 8, NA.

18. Harney to Col. L. Thomas, March 8, 1857, AGOLR, Main Series, 1822–1860, RG 94, M-567, roll 559, NA; Capt. C. L. Stevenson to Pleasonton, March 6, 1857, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 9, NA; Howard to his wife, March 11, 1857, Oliver Otis Howard Papers, Mitchell Department of Special Collections and Archives, Bowdoin College Library, Brunswick, Maine.

19. Thomas Williams Diary entry of March 6, 1857, Williams Family Papers, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library; Harney to Col. L. Thomas, March 8, 1857, AGOLR, Main Series, 1822–1860, RG 94, M-567, roll 559, NA.

20. Tampa *Florida Peninsular*, April 11, 1857.

21. Hancock, *Reminiscences of Winfield Scott Hancock*, 26–35.

22. Harney to Thomas, April 10, 1857, AGOLR, Main Series, 1822–1860, RG 94, M-567, roll 558, NA.

23. Thomas Williams Diary entry of April 6, 1857, Williams Family Papers, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.

24. Capt. John McNeill to Munroe, April 3, 1857, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 8, NA; Capt. Francis M. Durrance to Munroe, April 4, 1857, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 7, NA.

25. Lt. James Weeks to Capt. A. Johnston, April 20, 1857; Johnston to Harney, April 21, 1857, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 8, NA.

26. Harney to Cooper, April 22, 1857, AGOLR, Main Series, 1822–1860, RG 94, M-567, roll 558, NA.

27. Howard to his wife, April 29, 1857, Oliver Otis Howard Papers, Mitchell Department of Special Collections and Archives, Bowdoin College Library, Brunswick, Maine.

28. Loomis to Thomas, May 1, 1857, AGOLR, Main Series, 1822–1860, RG 94, M-567, roll 558, NA.

29. Loomis to Thomas, May 1, 1857, AGOLR, Main Series, 1822–1860, RG 94, M-567, roll 558, NA.

30. Lt. Robert C. Hill to Lt. W. H. Lewis, April 29, 1857, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 8, NA; Tampa *Florida Peninsular*, May 9, 1857.

31. Loomis to Cooper, June 7, 1857, AGOLR, Main Series, 1822–1860, RG 94, M-567, roll 558, NA.
32. Loomis to Cooper, June 7, 1857, AGOLR, Main Series, 1822–1860, RG 94, M-567, roll 558, NA.
33. Loomis to Cooper, June 23, 1857, AGOLR, Main Series, 1822–1860, RG 94, M-567, roll 558, NA.
34. Mickler to Loomis, August 28, 1857, United States Congress. Senate. *Executive Document No. 11* (hereafter *USSED 11*), 35th Cong., 1st sess. (1858), “Message from the President,” 143–44; Capt. S. L. Sparkman to Col. John Munroe, July 21, 1857, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 9, NA.
35. Loomis to Thomas, August 30, 1857, AGOLR, Main Series, 1822–1860, RG 94, M-567, roll 558, NA.
36. Tampa *Florida Peninsular*, September 5 and 12, 1857.
37. Loomis to Irvin McDowell, December 2, 1857; Floyd to Perry, December 23, 1857, AGOLR, Main Series, 1822–1860, RG 94, M-567, roll 558, NA.
38. Loomis to McDowell including statement of volunteer companies, December 2, 1857, AGOLR, Main Series, 1822–1860, RG 94, M-567, roll 558, NA.
39. Col. S. St. George Rogers to Page, November 17 and December 2, 1857, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 9, NA.
40. Loomis to McDowell, December 6, 1857, AGOLR, Main Series, 1822–1860, RG 94, M-567, roll 558, NA.
41. Loomis to McDowell, December 6, 1857, AGOLR, Main Series, 1822–1860, RG 94, M-567, roll 558, NA.
42. Loomis to McDowell, December 6, 1857, AGOLR, Main Series, 1822–1860, RG 94, M-567, roll 558, NA.
43. Rogers to Page, December 2, 1857, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 9, NA.
44. Rogers to Page, December 2, 1857, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 9, NA.
45. Rogers to Page, December 2, 1857, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 9, NA.
46. Rogers to Page, December 2, 1857, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 9, NA.
47. Stephens to Harris, December 4, 1857, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 9, NA. On some maps the fort is spelled “Shackelford.”
48. Loomis to McDowell, December 6, 1857, AGOLR, Main Series, 1822–1860, RG 94, M-567, roll 558, NA.
49. Rogers to Page, December 31, 1857, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 9, NA.
50. Rogers to Page, January 9, 1858, USACC, HQFL, RG 393, M-1084, roll 10, NA.
51. Capt. L. S. Sparkman to Rogers, January 20, 1858, USACC, HQFLS, RG 393, M-1084, roll 10, NA.

52. E. Rector to Charles E. Mix, February 10, 1858, OIA, Letters Received, Seminole Agency Emigration, RG 75, M-234, roll 802, NA.

53. Tampa *Florida Peninsular*, May 1, 1858; March 19, 1859; West, "Abiaka," 407–8.

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1. Kersey, "The 'Friends of the Florida Seminoles' Society," 5.
2. For a detailed account of the post-war Seminole, see West, *The Enduring Seminoles*.
3. Jackson to Calhoun, April 8, 1818, *ASPM4*, 1:699–700.

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