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A SCOUTING EXPEDITION ALONG LAKE PANASOFFKEE

by FRANK F. WHITE, JR.

By the early spring of 1842 the Second Seminole War was drawing to its close. Since the noteworthy engagement at Lake Okeechobee on December 25, 1837, when the Indians had been defeated and had fled into inaccessible hiding-places, few pitched battles had been fought. Consequently, for several years the troops had engaged in a series of scouting expeditions which were designed to ferret out the numerous small bands of Indians and capture them.

To terminate the war, Colonel William J. Worth who commanded the army in Florida decided upon the complete scouring of the country to explore and penetrate the Indians' favorite retreats. One of the more important of these scouting expeditions was the pursuit into the Palaklakaha Swamp, the largest of a succession of dense hammocks. This affray which lasted from April 14 to 24, 1842, has been portrayed in a journal ¹ kept by Captain Robert C. Buchanan of the U. S. 4th Infantry who participated in the examination of the west side of Lake Panasoffkee. In this action the enemy was engaged, routed, and dispersed. The result was the capture several days later of chief Malleck Tusteneggee and the removal of the last of these warrior bands shortly thereafter.

Captain Buchanan was no stranger to Florida. He had arrived with his regiment in 1836 and had participated in the

Note - While there is no fighting in this journal, it has an interest as a sample of a very large part of the operations of the U. S. Army during the seven successive winters of the Seminole War. In the mistaken notion that Florida summers were unhealthy, even dangerous, operations were largely suspended in summer - the reason, more than any other, for the length of the War (*Ed.*).

1. The original journal is in the Robert C. Buchanan Papers, Maryland Historical Society, to whom grateful acknowledgement is made for permission to publish it. I also acknowledge the assistance given me by my uncle, Warren Dilsaver of Tampa.

skirmishes at Camp Izard, Olokhikaha, and Lake Okeechobee.² In 1838, he assisted in the removal of the Cherokees to the West where he spent the next two years on frontier duty at Fort Gibson and opening the military road to Fort Smith. He returned to Florida in the fall of 1841 when the 4th Infantry took the field to wage a nine months' campaign until the termination of hostilities in August, 1842.

Although Captain Buchanan's journal bears no date, it was possible through the reconstruction of his military career to recognize the events about which he wrote. Although he did not personally participate in the battle at Palaklakaha, his journal reveals the strategy which was employed by one organization of the punitive expedition.

By April 12, 1842, the four detachments were in position to examine the country around Wahoo Swamp, the Withlacoochee River, and Lake Panasoffkee.³ On the following day, these detachments penetrated the swamps and hammocks from every quarter and converged on a common rendezvous. One detachment under Major William G. Belknap composed of two companies from the 8th Infantry examined thoroughly Lake Panasoffkee and descended the Withlacoochee to Camp Izard. A second detachment under Captain Buchanan and Lieutenant Benjamin Alvord of the 4th Infantry scouted the west side of the lake and examined all the swamps on its borders. It is this action which Buchanan has described in his journal. A third detachment had, meantime, commanded by Major Joseph Plympton of the 2nd Infantry, a similar responsibility for covering the south side of the lake. Last of all, a fourth detachment led by Lt. Col John Garland of the 4th Infantry moved directly on the rendezvous point. In that manner, their search had been so minutely

2. There is a more complete sketch of Buchanan's life as well as his description of the Battle of Lake Okeechobee in my article, "A Journal of Lt. Robert C. Buchanan during the Seminole War," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XXIX (October, 1950), 132-151.

3. See Reports of Col. William J. Worth to The Adjutant General, April 21, and April 25, 1842. *Niles' Register*, May 14, 1842.

and thoroughly conducted that the Seminoles were pursued rapidly, forced to fight, and, after a vigorous action, they were convinced that further resistance was useless.

Captain Buchanan ended his journal abruptly with his entry for April 24. After resting for several days, he moved on from his camp on the Withlacoochee to explore it as far as he could navigate with his canoes. He then returned without observing any signs of importance. Nevertheless, he was impressed by his reconnaissance of Lake Panasoffkee. It was, he wrote, "about 6 1/2 miles long and 1/2 broad running from NNW to SSW. The water when I saw it having a cloudy appearance like that of the Mississippi when not quite clear. . . . The Outhlacochee was very low, and many shoals and falls were exposed which could probably be hidden in high water."⁴

Following the completion of this scouting expedition, Buchanan remained in Florida until his regiment departed for Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, in August and September, 1842.

The Journal

14th. Started this morning at 1/2 past 7 A.M. Took Capt. Page⁵ in our canoes with 11 of his men. Prince⁶ and Wallen with the others go by land. Opposite to Cabbage Island.⁸ Canoes very heavily laden. In my canoe ten persons with their Arms and knapsacks, one barrel of beef and two barrels of bread. Met a great deal of grain and water lettuce and finally brought up in a boggy hammock. Mr. Gates⁹ was in front and after a trial to go through a channel in the Hammock, the attempt was abandoned. A sort of council was held and it was determined to go up the Panasufkie outlet to where the road

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4. Buchanan to Major S. Cooper, Asst. Adjt. General, Fort King, Fla., April 29th, 1842. Buchanan Papers.
 5. Captain John Page of the 4th Infantry.
 6. 1st Lt. Henry Prince of the 4th Infantry.
 7. Lt. Henry D. Wallen of the 4th Infantry.
 8. Unidentified, but probably a small island in the Withlacoochee River so called because of the cabbage palm trees growing on it.
 9. Lt. Collinson R. Gates of the 8th Infantry.

from Fort Clinch ¹⁰ crosses it, and thence start by land for Cabbage Island. Landed about 5 P.M. A command was sent across the Panasufkie to bring Co. G 4th Infantry to our camp. They returned at 10 P.M. A small log pen was built to put the prisoners in during our scout. We are to start tomorrow with five days rations in our haversacks.

15th. Started at 1/2 past 8 A.M. Left canoes and provisions with a guard of one sergeant, one corporal, and fifteen men. Smith ¹¹ in advance with twenty men. 5 columns. At 10 A.M. came across Major Plympton's camp, ¹² followed his trail for some time. Found abundant oranges. Our route was through hammock land and sawgrass swamp and cypress. Could not find Cabbage Island and returned to our camp on Panasufkie. As we passed Plympton's camp, stopped half an hour and while there Lts. Long ¹³ and Murray ¹⁴ came in from a scout. Alvord ¹⁵ left us there.

16th. Left camp at 8 A.M. in canoes. My company in advance to find the channel of the Ouithlacoohie, and Prince's command took 4 days' ration for Page's men. Found the channel where we turned back on the 14th. Found company F and Page joined it. Went on to look for Cabbage Island, and as usual could not find it, and turned back. On our return I examined a landing about a mile below camp in the Panasufkie. Found Long's trail of yesterday, and a large orange grove. Got back about 6 P.M. We were much disappointed at being compelled to turn back without doing anything. Maj. Belnap ¹⁶ and myself disagree about the point at which we turned back. He says that we were in Jumper Creek, but I think we were in the main Ouithlacoohie. The stream was about 40 yards wide and a foot deep. Belnap

10. Fort Clinch was located near the mouth of the Withlacoochee.

11. Probably Lt. Sidney Smith of the 4th Infantry.

12. Maj. Joseph Plympton of the 2nd Infantry.

13. Probably Lt. Edwin R. Long of the 2nd Infantry.

14. Lt. Edward Murray of the 2nd Infantry.

15. Lt. Benjamin Alvord of the 4th Infantry.

16. Maj. William G. Belnap of the 8th Infantry.

is certainly the most disagreeable man to serve with that one can find. Jumps to conclusions and uses assertion for argument. Coarse in feeling, overbearing in disposition and vulgar in manner, it is strange that he should be able to impose so thoroughly on Col. Worth.¹⁷ I find him prudent to timidity and more cautious of his person than a miser of his money. We had not yet got settled in Camp when Colonel Worth and staff with Colonel Garland¹⁸ escorted by Lt. Arnold¹⁹ of Ker's Dragoons²⁰ rode up. Colonel W. will remain all night and Col. G. returns to Maj. Plympton's camp. Some men of the 8th found a field of corn and pumkins in it. This afternoon about 1/2 of a mile from Camp the corn had been hoed within two days.

17th. Colonel Worth left us this morning for Jumper Creek. I am to proceed with Company I to scout a part of the hammock round Panasufkie Lake on the North East, while Graham,²¹ and McCall²² meet me from the South East. Belknap with two companies of the 8th will enter the Lake by boats to catch them who may be driven to the water by men. Major Plympton scouting around the South West. After this I proceed with Graham and McCall to Fort McClure²³ where we get further orders. It is said that we had a long scout in the Okahumky before us. Left Camp Page at 1/2 past 5 P.M. and arrived at Camp Plympton at 8. Found Doctor Wright²⁴ in charge of the Depot. Alvord joined us this evening at Camp Page.

18th. Broke up the Depot and sent the Waggons round by the road to Warm Springs under the Doctor with an escort of 16 men. Left camp at 7 1/2 A.M. to scout the borders of the Panasufkie. About 10, found a trail a week old, and followed it for some hours but finding that it did not freshen, left it to go

17. Col. William J. Worth of the 8th Infantry.

18. Lt. Col. John Garland of the 4th Infantry.

19. Lt. Ripley A. Arnold of the 2nd Dragoons.

20. Capt. Croghan Ker of the 2nd Dragoons.

21. Bvt. Major William M. Graham of the 4th Infantry.

22. Capt. George A. McCall, of the 4th Infantry.

23. Fort McClure was located at Warm Springs on the Withlacoochee.

24. Asst. Surgeon Joseph Jefferson Burr Wright.

to the point when I was ordered to meet Major Belknap. Met Capt. Montgomery ²⁵ with his and Gates' companies. B. has remained with the boats. Left him about 12 M. and at 1, dined in Halleck's Old Town and in his lodge. Had an orange stick cut there, as a memento of the tramp. Proceeded to Warm Springs and arrived about 1/2 past 5. Found on our arrival that Colonel Worth with Colonel Garland's command of the 4th, Maj. Plympton's of the 2nd. Ker's Dragoons and Reeve's Company ²⁶ of the 8th had started for Okeehinky, the guides having discovered a trail only an hour old. I am therefore too late. I find that my presence here was not looked for, so there is an order here for Alvord but not for me. This I take to be Belknap's doings as he probably wanted to get rid of me. The doctor and waggons have not arrived today.

19th. Sent Isaac ²⁷ to look for the waggons at daylight this morning. He returned at 10 A.M. but saw no signs of them. I fear they have gone to Fort King. ²⁸ At 2 P.M. sent a sergt. and 12 men with Isaac to look for them. An express arrived from Fort King. Reported by it to Col. Worth. The waggons arrived this evening. They have been to Fort King as I feared. Left them this morning. A soldier came into camp and reported that Col. Worth had a fight this morning.

20th. Remain here yet. Nothing came from the battlefield.

21st. Col. Worth and Staff, Major Plympton and Staff, and Ker's Company arrived this afternoon. I received orders to proceed to Cedar Keys in canoes via the mouth of the Wacassassa, up which river I am to make a reconnaissance. It appears that Col. W. met Halleck's party 21 strong and after some sharp skirmishing had one Private of Dragoons killed and a sergeant and two privates Dragoons wounded and 1 private of Infantry

25. Capt. William R. Montgomery of the 8th Infantry.

26. Lt. Isaac V. Reeve of the 8th Infantry.

27. Isaac was "as great a rascal as ever went unhung - a smart negro." George A. McCall, *Letters from the Frontiers*. (Philadelphia: 1868), p. 406.

28. Fort King was located in Marion County.

wounded.²⁹ The troops got all of the packs, skins, [illegible] etc. belonging to the Indians, and chased them a long way. That next day one old Indian was taken by Lt. Long, supposed to have been sent in by Halleck. Col. Garland has crossed the Ocklawaha in pursuit taking the old Indian with him. He has been ordered to give up the chase. Col. W. hoping to get Halleck in by negotiation. He is to hear from him through the old man on the 27th. Alvord returns to Fr. Clinch.³⁰

22nd. Left camp this morning with four canoes on waggons wheels to take water in the Lake at 7 A.M. Alvord started by land and marched 5 miles, and then launched our canoes, and after pushing about 100 yards through saw grass entered the lake. This is a pretty sheet of water running in length from N.N.W. to S.S.E. about 6 miles, and being 1/2 miles broad. The water is rather muddy. Stopped to dine at Camp Page and halted at night to dine at an old Indian field about a mile above Peace Bluff. Distance traveled by water today 25 miles.

23rd. Started at a quarter before 7 A.M. and reached Camp IZARD³¹ at 11. I went ashore and examined the old spot. Recognized every thing. Examined the place where poor IZARD was buried, and found that it was undisturbed. The sight brought a host of recollections to my mind. Started again at 11 1/2 and dined at the 2nd of our camps on the way up. Arrived at Fort Clinch at 7 P.M. Found the 8th there. They are waiting for a steamboat to take them to Cant. Morgan³² where they will remain a few days to recruit. Capt Ker met us at the landing having arrived from Camp Warm Spring about 2 hours before us. I ordered Sergt. Bonsfield and 9 others down by land to day

29. There is a complete list of the casualties in this battle printed in John T. Sprague, *The Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of the Florida War.* (New York: 1848), p. 462.

30. Fort Clinch was located on the Withlacoochee.

31. Camp IZARD was located on the Withlacoochee. It was named for 1st Lt. James F. IZARD of the 1st Dragoons who had been killed on Feb. 28, 1836.

32. Cantonment Morgan was located at Cedar Keys.

from the place where ordered. They have not yet arrived. Got a mail on my arrival.

24th. Bonsfield and party arrived about 10 A.M. Started for the Wacassassa at 3 P.M. having taken four canoes in the place of those in which we came. Encamped at the mouth of the river on Selma Island.