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THE JOURNAL OF A. B. MEEK¹
AND THE SECOND SEMINOLE WAR, 1836

edited by JOHN K. MAHON

ALEXANDER BEAUFORT MEEK was born in Columbia, South Carolina, March 17, 1814, the son of a methodist minister.² While he was still young his parents migrated to Tuscaloosa, Alabama, taking him with them. Although inclined to be indolent, learning came easily to the boy. Proof of this is that at a tender age he memorized the entire Old Testament.³ At age nineteen he was graduated from the University of Alabama (1833), and at twenty-two was awarded a master's degree from the same school. Meanwhile, in 1835 he had begun the practice of law in Tuscaloosa.

Just at that moment in his bookish career hostilities flared up in Florida. As his journal reveals, he was so saturated with romanticism that but one honorable course lay open, to volunteer with his fellows of the same kidney, to advance upon Florida and there to subdue the horrid Seminoles. A Volunteer from Charleston, South Carolina, swept along in the same roseate current which engulfed Meek, expressed floridly the pride with which the southern boys enrolled themselves to rescue Florida:

1. The Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama, owns diaries of Meek, but not the brief journal of his volunteer duty in the Second Seminole War, extracts from which are here printed for the first time. That journal somehow was split off from the others and ended up in the Manuscript Division of Duke University Library. A microfilm copy is owned by the P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida. The Duke University Library has kindly permitted publication in extenso. But although brief, the entire journal is not printed here, as parts have no historical interest at all. Omissions are indicated by a series of three or four periods. Interpolations by the editor are enclosed in brackets. Spelling and arrangement are reproduced as they appear in manuscript.
2. Biographical data came from: Margaret G. Figh, "Alexander Beaufort Meek, Pioneer Man of Letters," *Ala. His. Q.*, II (1940), 127-151; William Garrett, *Reminiscences of Public Men in Alabama* (Atlanta, 1872), 711-713; Albert B. Moore, *History of Alabama and Her People* (3 vols., Chicago, 1927), I, 329, 429; Thomas Mc. Owen, *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Biography* (4 vols., Chicago, 1921), IV, 1183, 1184; Ben F. Riley, *Makers and Romance of Alabama History* (np., 1915?), 115-119.
3. Figh, *loc. cit.*, 128.

Never did Rome or Greece in days of yore-nor France nor England, in modern times-pour forth a nobler soldiery, than the Volunteers in the Army of Florida, during the campaign of 1836, from Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana and South Carolina. As the sandal tree sheds perfume on the axe that fells it, so would the vilest Seminole become ennobled by the slaying of the least one of these gallant sons of the South.⁴

It is certain that Meek would have heartily endorsed these lines. In any case, he found himself ensign [the lowest ranking commissioned officer as there were no second lieutenants] in the battalion of Volunteers from Tuscaloosa, commanded by Captain James G. Blount,⁵ who proudly designated themselves the "State Guards."

Sunday February 21 1836 Left Tuscaloosa at 12 o'clock AM on board the Steam Boat *Courier* (Captain Cleaveland) with three companies of Volunteers, the "State Guards," . . . As we sailed out of port the banks of the Warrior⁶ were lined with citizens-male and female-to the number of 2000 persons-presenting one of the most sublime, impressive and affecting scenes I ever saw. Immediately previous to embarking Judge B. F. Porter⁷ delivered an eloquent and pathetic address to the volunteers, who were drawn up in line upon the wharf. The military under the command of Col [illegible] fired numerous salutes with musketry and cannon. . . . Seldom, if ever, have I experienced such feelings as crowded my breast. I received numerous testimonials of esteem and affection. [illegible] handed me one just as I was

4. Myer M. Cohen, *Notices of Florida and the Campaigns* (Charleston, 1836), 135.

5. Unable to identify this man from printed histories and dictionaries of biography.

6. The Black Warrior River which still serves as a water artery to the interior of Alabama.

7. Benjamin Faneuil Porter, born in 1808 in Charleston, S. C.; migrated to Alabama where he practiced first medicine, then law. He was state legislator and judge, and a leader in advocating vital reforms. For example, in 1839 he led the movement which abolished imprisonment for debt. He was also responsible for setting up the penitentiary system in his State. Finally, he was the author of legislation to establish a public school system in Alabama. This victory came in 1854, and it was A. B. Meek who introduced Porter's bill in the House; Owen, *op. cit.*, IV, 1375, 1376; Moore, *op. cit.*, I, 329.

stepping on the boat, the Glove of Miss W. with the admonition from her to keep as a memento and never to dishonor it, which she knew I would not. As the steamboat moved off in grandeur and beauty the air rang with the shouts and plaudits of the citizens on shore, and the farewell huzzas of the volunteers.

At dark stopped at a woodpile about 60 miles below T. As the night was too dark for the boat to run, we lay too until morning and wooded. Much sport and hilarity took place among the men, who were so crowded on the boat as to be compelled to sleep upon the cabin floor-on deck, and upon the cotton bales below. Every means was resorted to to produce laughter and gayety—such as the barking of dogs . . . *February 23d* . . . we arrived in sight of Mobile, and beheld the whole city spread like a chess board before us, and the many masts rising like a forest of pine saplings in the harbor.

We sailed by the wharves which were crowded with citizens with banners flying and music playing and amidst the huzzas and salutations of the spectators . . . and in a little while marched thru the city to “Orange Grove” the place designated for our encampment. We were soon furnished with camps and furniture and in a little while struck tents, and exhibited all the appearances of the martial field. Moody⁸ and myself went into Mobile to the Theater, and saw Hill the celebrated Yankee comedian. He is remarkably natural and correct. We became acquainted with several officers of Volunteers from N. Orleans, and after theatre went to the Shakespeare Coffee House. . . . While at supper we learned that several of the Gamblers who had been expelled from Tuscaloosa last summer were collected below with the intention of attacking us. After supper we went below, but found no one. We then went with the Louisiana officers to the Alabama Hotel and slept.

Wednesday Feby 24th Rose and went to camp before breakfast. Made some arrangements for tenting and came back to town with Sanford and Garrow.⁹ Went to the Register Office

8. Washington Moody, born in 1806 in Virginia. Orphaned early, he received only a limited education, yet became an eminent lawyer in Tuscaloosa. He is not listed among the officers or men of the Tuscaloosa Volunteers; so his connection with the Seminole expedition is not clear. He died in Tuscaloosa in 1879; Owen, *op. cit.*, IV, 1220.

9. Unable to identify these two men from printed histories and dictionaries of biography.

and read papers. In the evening rode with Sanford in his buggy over the city. . . . Returned to camp and at night went into the Theatre. Saw Hill again.

[He continued to record excursions to town, to the theatre, and sleeping at the Alabama Hotel. Not much duty noted.]

Sunday Feby 28, 1836 After visiting the encampment and going into an election, by ballott, for Colonel, Moody and myself went to town to church in the evening.¹⁰ We stepped into the Presbyterian Church and heard Parson Lewis of the Episcopal Church preach for a few minutes; we then went to the Catholic chapel, and heard a sermon in French from a Creole Priest. The Chapel was crowded with Creoles, mullattoes, Indians and Sailors.

Tuesday March 1, 1836 . . . At 5 oclock PM we marched aboard the S. B. Merchant but did not leave harbor. The men were permitted to visit the town and sleep where they pleased. . .

Wednesday March 2 Terra Firma faded . . . in the distance, and repeating Childe Harold's pathetic "farewell"-

Adieu-adieu my native shore fades oer the waters blue
The night winds sigh, the breakers roar, and shrieks the wild
sea mew.

. . . I turned from the white cliffs of Alabama-bade my native land Good night and turned my eyes and my mind to the broad waters before me-I had never been to sea before. The boundless and heaving waters before me were as novel, as they were sublime.

Thursday March 3d This morning when I rose found the boat at anchor in the bay of the Pensacola Navy Yard . . . The point . . . was one of the most beautiful I ever saw. On one side at a distance of about 2 miles lay the Navy Yard surrounded by 7 or 8 of the most elegant brick buildings all uniform in size and construction and presenting a beautiful front to the sea. To the

10. Meek recorded in his diary (in a passage not here reproduced) that Captain William Chisolm of Montgomery was elected colonel of the Regiment of Alabama Volunteers made up of eight companies from here and there in the State. The fact that Chisolm had been a captain during the War of 1812 perhaps accounts for his election. Not much appears on him in volumes on Alabama, but he is listed in Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army to March 2, 1903* (2 vols., Wash., D. C., 1903), I, 299.

The only other officer whom Meek mentions as having been elected was Thornton Taliaferro to be major.

west lay the hospital a beautiful brick edifice with several fine Ionic columns in front. . . . At the distance of about 1 mile & a half lay at anchor three U.S. vessels of war, -one of them the frigate *Constellation*, Com. Dallas.”¹¹ They are all fine and handsome vessels and appeared, as Washington Irving, “like guardian giants prowling around the coast.”

After remaining at anchor for about an hour we sailed up to the other side of the bay and landed at *Fort Pickens* on the little island of *Santa Rosa*.¹² This is one of the most beautiful spots I ever saw, and one of the finest and most impregnable fortifications. . . . It is built of the best brick and granite, and is 1100 yards in circumference and would contain 10,000 men. . . . The island is entirely destitute of vegetation except a few small cypress bushes; the shore is perfectly regular, and the beach covered with shining snow-white sand, beautifully bespangled with glittering and multiformed shells. So brilliant indeed was the beach that it was hard to convince many of the volunteers until they had touched it, that it was not snow! One of them went so far as to assert that he had noticed it falling the previous night.

[The Alabama Volunteers entered Tampa Bay on March 5, but did not disembark until the next day. By that date the following crucial events had occurred in what had become known as the “Florida War.” The Indians, resisting removal from Florida, had, early in November, 1835, murdered one of their own influential leaders, Charley Amathla, because he urged emigration. Then, on December 28, they had killed Indian Agent Wiley Thompson and some of his associates. The very same day that ambushade known as Dade’s Massacre took place with a loss of 104 killed. In retaliation, Brevet Brigadier General Duncan L. Clinch, USA, then in military command in the Territory, had gathered a force of Regulars and Volunteers and engaged a large band of Seminoles at a ford of the Withlacoochie

11. Alexander J. Dallas was commander of that portion of the U. S. Navy known as the “West Indies Squadron.” The title, Commodore, applied to squadron commanders was honorary. Dallas’ rank, the highest in the Navy at the time, was Captain.

12. Ft. Pickens had been started in 1829 and completed in 1834. It was never under fire except during the Civil War. It was one of three forts along the Confederate coast which remained in Union hands throughout the war; Dorothy Dodd, “Ft. Pickens,” *Florida Highways* (Oct., 1950).

River on the last day of 1835. At a cost of four killed and sixty-four wounded he had inflicted about one hundred casualties upon the savages. Meanwhile, the Indians had struck outlying plantations and settlements and wrought much death and destruction.¹³

[Hearing of the trouble at his post in Louisiana, Brevet Major General Edmund P. Gaines, USA, had raised a force of Regulars and Volunteers, transported them to Florida by water, and landed them at Tampa Bay on February 10, 1836. Not knowing that the War Department on January 21 had designated Brevet Major General Winfield Scott, his bitter personal rival, to take command in Florida, Gaines advanced inland and engaged his 1000 men against about 1500 Indians and Negroes near the ford of the Withlacoochie where Clinch had fought them two months earlier. From February 27 until Clinch arrived with reinforcements on March 6, 1836, Gaines' force was virtually besieged in a log and earthworks-protected camp.¹⁴ Five days before Gaines' battle commenced, Scott had arrived in the Territory. He was incensed when he found what his arch enemy had done because he said it disrupted his own careful plans.¹⁵]

Sunday March 6 We landed at Fort Brooke on Hillsborough Bay.¹⁶ It is a picket fort with two block houses, and is no doubt impregnable to any assault the Indians could make. It is surrounded except at the entrances, by wide, deep holes-about 8

13. There are many accounts of Dade's Massacre, but the most concise and accessible is Mark F. Boyd, *Florida Aflame* . . . reprinted as a booklet from *Fla. His. Q.*, XXX (July, 1951).

For data on General Clinch see Heitman, *op. cit.*, I, 310.
For the action on the Withlacoochie see Boyd, *op. cit.*

14. There are several accounts of Gaines' fight of which the most concise, if not most accessible, is By a Late Staff Officer [Woodburne Potter], *The War in Florida* . . . (Baltimore, 1836). The documents concerning the action are printed in, "Proceedings of the Military Court of Inquiry in the Case of Major General Scott and Major General Gaines," *Sen. Doc. 224*, 24 Cong., 2 sess.; also in *American State Papers*, Military Affairs, Vol. VII (Wash., D. C., 1861), 125-465.

15. Scott and Gaines had risen high during the War of 1812; both had been brevetted major general. In the years after that war they developed a bitter personal hostility which colored Army affairs for two decades at least. For data and bibliography on both see, *Dictionary of American Biography*.

16. Ft. Brooke had been established in 1821 at the head of Tampa Bay, abandoned early in the 1830's and then reoccupied; J. W. Covington, "The Establishment of Ft. Brooke," *Fla. His. Q.*, XXXI (1952), 273-278; Boyd, *op. cit.*, 44.

feet deep and three wide, with a long sharp stake in the center reaching to within 2 feet of the surface and covered over with straw so as to conceal them. . . . Fort Brooke, or as it is habitually called "Tampa Bay," is situated immediately on the water's edge in the corner of one of the most beautiful and regular groves I ever saw. The grove is of live-oak and orange trees and resembles more an ornamental college green than the encampment ground of a large army. . . . I have neglected to mention that nearly all the troops were during their passage on the steamboat afflicted with sea sickness. Not more than a dozen of the 400 aboard, had ever been to sea before. . . .

March 7 Monday According to the camp orders issued on yesterday evening, we arose this morning an hour before day, and remained under arms until daylight. The greater part of this day was spent in drilling and manoeuvring the troops. An officers drill was held at 5 PM and we were drilled by Lieut. Mead; another portion . . . by Lieut Casey, both of the U.S. service. . . .¹⁷

There are in confinement at this fort, two hostile Seminole warriors who were captured some weeks since by "Yellow Hair" a warrior of the friendly Seminoles. There is connected with this event much of romantic novelty and interest. Yellow Hair . . . is possessed of great personal strength and beauty. He is 6 feet 4 inches high, finely and perfectly formed-with all the muscular vigor and strength of a Hercules, and all the symmetry and activity of an Apollo. By birth he [was] of obscure and poor parentage . . . early in life however he distinguished himself for his great courage, shrewdness, energy, & strength. . . . He however became devotedly attached to the daughter of Black Dirt the head chief of the friendly Seminoles.¹⁸ . . . Mutual affection took

17. George Gordon Meade who later commanded the Army of the Potomac at the Battle of Gettysburg; *Dictionary of American Biography*; George W. Cullum, *Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the United States Military Academy* (3 vols., Boston, 1891), I, 601. John C. Casey, also a graduate of the Military Academy. He died at Ft. Brooke in 1856; Cullum, *op. cit.*, I, 426, 427.

18. Yellow Hair's Indian name was Emathlochee. He does not seem to have left any especial impress on history. Black Dirt's name was Fucta Lusta Hajo; he is principally noted for friendliness to the white people. He signed the Treaty of Payne's Landing in 1832 agreeing to migrate west of the Mississippi, and thereafter championed emigration among his people; Potter, *op. cit.*, 10, 30, 82; Boyd, *op. cit.* 55.

place between them . . . and Yellow Hair solicited her hand in marriage. Black Dirt, however, anxious to have his daughter wedded to a great chief . . . refused compliance . . . until Yellow Hair should distinguish himself above his fellow warriors. . . In a short while he travelled 60 miles in one day, on foot, to carry a dispatch from Gen Gaines. . . . The fond desires of the youthful couple was thus happily crowned; and Bravery and Beauty wedded in that companionship they always deserve. . . .

Tuesday March 8 1836 . . . The water at this place is horribly bad, -being deeply impregnated with Sulphate of Iron-making it so nauseating that I cannot drink it without pain. To supply the want I use Claret wine, and sometimes water with molasses in it. I have likewise eat several oranges I bought on the SB. The Sutlers store at this place has many things . . . but at a most enormous & extortionary price.

Many of the men are today quite unwell-being troubled with diarrhoea produced no doubt by the bad water and the great and unusual exposure. They have likewise bad colds and coughs. . . . I am somewhat dissatisfied at present as our commanding officer Col. Lindsay¹⁹ seems not to know what to do, and has us here with but 4 rounds of cartridges. . . . This has created great dissatisfaction among the officers and men-being almost a mutiny with the latter. What reason Col. Lindsay can have for not issuing more ammunition, no one can imagine, as there is sufficient in the fort and on the vessels in harbor. . . . If we were now attacked we should be almost defenseless, and could do nothing after 5 fires except with the bayonet. Col. Lindsay has rendered himself entirely detestable to the whole Regt.

Thursday March 10 . . . About 3 o'clock AM an alarm was produced by one of the sentinels firing his gun. I immediately paraded the camp guard. The whole encampment sprang to arms and formed in battle array. . . . All the sentinels except the one fired and two others ran in. From them we learned the position of the sentinel who had fired and after a little while proceeded with the Guard to the post. . . . He stated that he fired at a body of men who had passed out of the encampment

19. William Lindsay had entered the Regular service during the War of 1812, and had risen to be colonel of the 2d U.S. Artillery Regiment in 1832. He died in 1838 while the Seminole War was still in progress; Heitman, *op. cit.*, I, 634.

about a hundred in number. He had hailed them, and they made no reply nor halted. He, in pursuance of orders fired on them. They then stated that they were a scouting party from Major Reed's Battalion of Florida Volunteers. . . .²⁰ Fortunately no one was hit. Every one applauded Garner's conduct. He did not leave his post when he fired, but reloaded and stood like a man.

Friday March 11 Today one of the Volunteers . . . died in the encampment from Dysentery, Pleurisy etc acquired from the exposures to which we have been subjected. . . . I have written the following stanzas suggested by his death

Far,-far away from his home & his friends
The youthful warrior died
Above his grave the palmetto bends
The wildflower by its side

Monday March 14 This morning ammunition was issued. . . . At 12 o'clock orders were given to prepare to march to the interior. . . . About 5 PM we struck tents and marched only a few hundred yards and camped. Considerable excitement took place as we were not furnished with means of transportation for our baggage or provisions. We were however after much quarrelling furnished.

Tuesday 15 March . . . Our force consists of 1200 men and upwards. We march in 2 columns-the baggage waggons & pack horses in the center with advanced, rear, & flank guards. . . .

[Meek's outfit was part of that third of his army which General Scott referred to as the "Center." Composed of the Alabama Regiment of eight companies, three companies of Louisiana Volunteers, some Florida Volunteers, and two companies of U.S. Artillery-1250 men in all commanded by Colonel William Lindsay, USA-it was directed to advance from Ft. Brooke to

20. This battalion was commanded by Leigh Read who came from Tennessee to Florida in 1831 or 1832. Read was in Governor R.K. Call's law firm as associate when Call went to war; so Read went with him. He was wounded at Withlacoochie, but recovered to raise the battalion mentioned here. On May 25, 1836, command of all military forces in Florida passed from General Scott to Governor Call, whereupon Read became major general of Florida militia. He had an active career, but is most notorious for a duel on March 12, 1839, in which he killed Augustus Alston with a duelling rifle. Two years later this victory cost him his own life, for Alston's brother Willis haunted him until in the spring of 1841 he shot Read in the back; *Weekly Floridian* (Tallahassee), Jan. 22, 1878; *Florida Becomes a State* (Tallahassee, 1945), 19.

the Indian village of Chicuchatty by March 25.²¹ Scott's plan was an extremely complicated one for the terrain and the nature of the troops engaged. The Left Wing commanded by Brigadier General Abram Eustis, USA,²² and made up of South Carolina Volunteers and four companies of Regular artillery, about 1400 in the whole command, was supposed to move from Volusia to its starting point near Pilaklakaha to arrive at about the same time.²³ The Right Wing, consisting of Volunteers from Georgia, Florida, and Louisiana, and of some Regulars was to advance from Ft. Drane to a starting point at Camp Izard.²⁴ This, the largest wing, of 2000 plus, was commanded by General Clinch and accompanied by none other than Scott himself. When the three wings reached their starting points they were to communicate with each other by firing cannon, and were then all to converge upon a common center, the Cove of the Withlacoochie River. In this dense tangle of swamp and stream, where white men had seldom penetrated, it was supposed they would corner the main fighting force of the hostile Indians—who had presumably remained in the vicinity where they had fought General Gaines' force—and would wipe them out.^{25]}

Thursday March 17 Passed this morning a small creek over which we had to construct a bridge as the one formerly over it had been burned by the Indians. . . .

Friday March 18 We commenced building today at this post (on the Hillsborough River) a picket fort, as a Depot for provisions and ammunition, and as one of the chain of fortifications which it is said it is intended to establish between Fort

21. Chicuchatty, was an old Indian village located in what is now the southeast $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 26, Township 22 South, Range 19 East. It lies to the southeast of Brooksville in Hernando County; Boyd, *op. cit.*, 13n; J. Clarence Simpson, *Florida Place Names of Indian Derivation* . . . (Tallahassee, 1956), 40.
22. Eustis entered the army through the light artillery in 1808 and rose to brigadier general by 1834. He barely survived the Second Seminole War, dying in 1843; Heitman, *op. cit.*, I, 408.
23. Pilaklakaha was the principal settlement of Micanopy, head chief of the Seminoles. The Left Wing burned it. It was situated in what is now Township 21 South, Range 23 East in Lake County; Boyd, *op. cit.*, 12n; Simpson, *op. cit.*, 92.
24. Camp Izard was the name General Gaines had given to the fortified camp where his army had been besieged from Feb. 27 to Mar. 6, 1836; named thus in honor of Lt. Izard, USA, who had been killed there. It was in the vicinity where Gaiter, Florida, is now.
25. For Scott's plan see Scott to Lindsay, Mar. 13, 1836, and *id.* to Eustis, Mar. 14, 1836, in *Sen. Doc. 224*, 24 Cong., 2 sess., 284, 286.

Brooke & Ft. King, and thus to form a safe line of communications from one side of the cape to the other.²⁶

[Florida Volunteers were left in charge of the new fort, Ft. Alabama, and the rest of Colonel Lindsay's command marched back to Ft. Brooke.]

Monday March 21st . . . At twelve o'clock I eat a very hearty dinner . . . and soon after took a sound sleep for about an hour. I was then awoke by a considerable noise in the encampment, and on running out of the tent, found that many of the men were engaged in a squabble with some Regulars. I went up to the place, found that they had had a fuss with Major Sands²⁷ of the Regulars, and he had ordered the guns of the fort to be pointed on them. . . . This greatly excited me and I made some severe remarks against it, and whilst doing so Col. Lindsay, who was near, stepped quickly forward, and demanded in a loud, angry, and authoritative tone "Who are you sir," Never having been accustomed to such language or tones I sternly [not sure of this word] replied, "Who are you sir." He very angrily told me to consider myself under arrest. I told him when I was taken I would. He then left me. The crowd were greatly excited and all applauded my conduct. Col Chisolm & Col Crabb, who were present, both said I acted very proper.²⁸

Tuesday March 22d About 11 AM struck the line of march on our return to Fort Alabama. The men carried in their haversacks 6 days provisions. This with their knapsacks was a heavy load; but as the QM of the US had neglected to furnish more than 8 or 10 waggons and about 50 poor horses, we had no other means. . . .

26. This temporary post was given the name Ft. Alabama. It was situated about two miles west of Crystal Springs and eight miles north of Tampa on the Hillsboro River; from typed booklet in P.K. Yonge Library of Florida History, Univ. of Fla., prepared by the WPA Writers Project and entitled, *Military Posts and Forts Established Prior to 1860*.

27. Richard Martin Sands had entered the service in 1813 and had risen to brevet major by 1829. He barely survived this campaign, dying in September, 1836; Heitman, *op. cit.*, I, 859.

28. Colonel William Chisolm; see note 10.
George W. Crabb was lieut. col. of the Alabama Regiment. Born in Virginia in 1802, he migrated to Alabama where he read law and was admitted to the bar in Tuscaloosa. Upon his return from the Seminole Campaign he was elected major general of Alabama militia. From 1838 to 1841 he was a Whig member of Congress. He died in 1846; Owen, *op. cit.*, III, 411.

. . . came across a fine drove of cattle at which the men in violation of orders commenced firing. Near 100 guns were fired and about 8 or 10 of the cattle killed. . . . In a short time information was received that the waggon guard had been fired on by a body of Indians, and one man killed. . . . He strayed off to a spring. . . .

Wednesday 23d March . . . I proceeded on very rapidly over the road we had followed on our return from Ft. Ala. without any unusual occurrence until about 3 PM when we came upon a large drove of deer. . . . The men on all sides commenced a general and indiscriminate firing to the great endangerment of their own lives. Many of the deer were killed, and a man belonging to Col Dents²⁹ company was wounded in the right shoulder, tho not dangerously. It was believed by many that the man had been shot by a friendly Indian as he was struck with a rifle ball. Col. Crabb under that impression ordered them to be taken under guard. Col Lindsay countermanded with great passion, the order, and threatened to arrest Col Crabb. Much strong language occurred and great excitement took place. Col Lindsay cried out that it was a mob. . . .

[Narrated thus far are occurrences typical of nearly all volunteer and militia operations, whatever their time and place. For example, in the entry for March 8 we read of a complaint by Meek and his fellow citizen soldiers that the Colonel had not issued ammunition; yet in the entries of March 22 and March 23 he reveals, without recognizing it, why the Regular officer did not want to. Whenever meat on the hoof was in sight, the citizen soldiers blazed away quantities of shot, heedless alike of orders not to do so, and of danger to, the lives of friends. On March 11 we learned of the guard's firing on a body of men who did not heed his orders to stand and be recognized, only to find that they were a body of Volunteers who did not consider it necessary to observe the rules of military security. Finally, we are told of frequent clashes between Regulars and the citizen soldiers. Although Meek clearly considered the professionals ungentlemanly martinets, without proper feelings, the reader can hardly help

29. Dennis Dent was born in 1797 and was thus older than most of his fellow citizen soldiers. He had come to Tuscaloosa in 1820. He raised a company and commanded it during the Seminole Campaign. It is not known why Meek called him colonel; he was captain; Dent died in 1860; *ibid.*, 480.

sympathizing with Colonel Lindsay's agonized lament that he was trying to command not an army but a mob.

[Of interest is the hint concerning weapons in the entry of March 23. "It was believed by many that the man had been shot by a friendly Indian as he was struck with a rifle ball." The interesting implication is that the Indians had rifles, the Regulars and Volunteers only muskets. There is no way of being certain what weapons were carried; beyond question there was a great variety. But it is reasonably sure that most of the Indians had English trade muskets; most of the soldiers U.S. Model 1816 muskets.³⁰ Both weapons, plus any rifles in use, were mainly flintlocks, although limited numbers of percussion type were also on hand.]

Thursday 24th March Left Ft. Ala. about 1 PM on our march to the point designated by despatches received from Gen. Scott, about 40 miles off, as a place of rendezvous on the 25th for the three armies now in Florida.

[He continued to tell of the march during the next several days; including heavy rain, Indians firing on them from cover without ever being seen, and one or two men killed. As ordered, they fired cannon by day and rockets by night to establish contact with the other two wings of the army, but received no return signals.]

Sunday March 27 Just as we resumed our line of march, the Indians again fired on us from a swamp on our left, with more vigor than before. They fired near 60 or 70 rifles without effect as they were 200 yards off. . . . During the fight a ball passed between Col. Crabb and myself who were both on horseback and skinned a tree near us. . . .

Tuesday 29 March Today marched about 8 miles to the borders of the most beautiful and symmetrical lake I have yet seen in Florida and camped to await the arrival of Scott and Eustis, having come to the spot appointed for rendezvous [They were four days behind the time set in Scott's plan, March 25, but the other wings were tardier yet.] . . . The friendly Indians killed & scalped a subchief named Charly [Fixico] who was

30. Carl P. Russell, *Guns on the Early Frontiers* (Univ. of Calif., 1957), 55, 182, 183.

31. The sub-chief's surname is not intelligible in the MS; I have taken it from Potter, *op. cit.*, 178.

known to many of the Florida Vol & commanded about 80 men.³¹ He had a pony, 70 bullets, a pound of powder and an old rifle. . . . The cattle were killed this evening & divided to the companies, who had to jerk it as we had no salt, and were getting out of provisions.

Wednesday March 30 Last night our sentinels were fired on by two Indians. They returned the fire. Neither did any damage. Sent up rockets & fired cannon without reply. Our provisions are drawing very short. Live principally on jerked beef.

Thursday 31 Great dissatisfaction prevails as it is said it is intended to march us to Camp King in pursuance of Maj Reeds wishes; and as we are almost entirely without provisions having nothing but jerked beef. The officers of our Regt have determined to march no where but back to Ft. Brooke or Ft. Alabama and that immediately.

[It would appear that the Volunteer officers had their way, for, although there are no entries in Meek's diary for two weeks after March 31, other records indicate that Colonel Lindsay's Center of the Army of Florida returned to Ft. Brooke on April 4. A day later, the Right Wing reached that post, and soon thereafter, the Left Wing.³² None of the three wings had arrived at their starting points at the designated time; none had established contact with the others; and so Scott's elaborate encirclement had gone unexecuted. Unable to put the General's plan into operation, the three wings had headed instead for Ft. Brooke.

[In a short time, Lindsay's command was ordered back to the Cove of the Withlacoochie. There the Alabama Regiment bivouacked in a spot which it designated Camp Crabb after its lieutenant colonel. Next it was ordered on April 14 to scour the Cove and then to move back to Ft. Alabama, close it out, and return to Ft. Brooke. Colonel Lindsay, upon reaching Ft. Alabama, determined to vary from these orders because he had so many sick and wounded that he could not possibly transport them and at the same time bring away the supplies from the to-be-abandoned fort. Accordingly, he marched his command to Ft. Brooke and then, being ill himself, sent Colonel Chisolm's Alabamans plus a battalion of the 4th U.S. Infantry and twenty

32. *Ibid.*, 178.

members of the 2d U.S. Artillery back to Ft. Alabama to close it and bring off the supplies and equipment.³³

[Colonel Chisolm's men accomplished this mission without incident in one day, and accomplished it with a flourish. They rigged the door so that when it was forced open the fort would be blown up. They had not left the place two miles to their rear when the expected detonation shook the forest.³⁴ Thus, the Alabama Regiment destroyed a fort which they had previously built and named. While still relishing their trick (which we would now call a booby trap) they were struck by fire from a body of Indians—the reports say it was rifle fire—while they were crossing a creek. (The official reports called the creek Thlonotosassa; Meek spelled it Clonotosassa and identified it as Flint Creek. He said the fight on it was fifteen miles northeast of Tampa Bay.) Then ensued for an hour the hardest fight which any portion of Scott's Army of Florida endured. It was necessary for the artillerymen to use their one cannon, and for the Regular infantry to charge with fixed bayonets into the scrub before the action could be concluded. The date was April 27, 1836. Both Major William S. Foster, who commanded the Regulars present,³⁵ and Colonel Lindsay praised the conduct of Colonel Chisolm, who was in command, and of his Alabama citizen soldiers in their official reports. Sweeter than their praise, to the Alabamans was the honor of engaging the largest body of Indians to be flushed out by the whole of Scott's army, an estimated two or three hundred. Total loss to the white force was three killed, twenty-five wounded—one of the three and twenty-two of the twenty-five being men of the Alabama Regiment.

[The balance of Meek's journal, printed below, is concerned with the events outlined above from the time the Regiment undertook to scour the Cove until the action on April 27. Included in the manuscript, but not here reproduced, is a list of the men of the "State Guards" of Tuscaloosa who were engaged

33. Lindsay to Scott, May 7, 1836, *Sen. Doc. 224*, 24 Cong., 2 sess., 347-349.

34. The printed official reports make no mention of this early booby trap, but it is mentioned in Potter, *op. cit.*, 183; also in Cohen, *op. cit.*, 194.

35. William Sewell Foster entered the service in 1812 and attained the grade of brevet major by the time the War of 1812 ended. Early in June, 1836, he was promoted Lt. colonel, but like many of the other officers whom we have noticed, he did not survive the war. He died in 1839.

at Clonotosassa, and another of the field and company officers of the Alabama Regiment.]

Thursday April 14 . . . we struck tents and left our encampment, (Camp Crabb) leaving behind us several sick. . . . Marched as far as the Limestone Spring (two miles) and encamped. We have with us a company of Horse from Wilkes Co. Ga who will march with us till we unite with Gen. Clinch and about 90 Regulars, making with our Regt., (now greatly reduced in number, on account of sickness & fatigue) about 700 men.

Sunday April 17 Today is just 8 weeks since we left Tuscaloosa.-Last night had a great excitement and alarm in Camp. About 9 o'clock one of the sentinels . . . was fired on by three Indians and wounded slightly by each one-in the arm-thigh and left nipple. Several of the sentinels fired their guns, & all ran in. We paraded, and lay down in front of our tents, as we had no breastwork. . . . We then rolled up several logs & made a small breastwork. In a few minutes a general firing commenced on our left, and was continued till near 200 guns were fired. It then ceased, and we learned that the line had fired on the Guard going round to repost sentinels.

Left Ft. Alabama with 10 days provisions, for the Interior, on Gaines Road. Our company flanked thro the Hillsboro Hammock. Marched 2 miles to the finest spring I have yet seen in Florida & camp'd. . . .

Tuesday 19 April Gen Scott and Gen Clinch both arrived at the camp with their separate forces. . . .

Remained at Ft. Ala until Tuesday about 9 oclock when we commenced our return to Ft. Broke. At about 2 oclock we arrived at "Camp Shelton" or Brandy Creek-called by the Indians Clonotosassa or Flint Creek where we had a hard fought battle for about 1 hour and 20 minutes with about 600 or 800 Indians.

This battle ended the participation of the Alabama Regiment in the Second Seminole War. Soon after it the unit returned to Ft. Brooke, was promptly mustered out of Federal service and forthwith shipped back to Alabama. For the Volunteers from Tuscaloosa it was almost exactly three months from departure to return to their home town.

Just two months short of being twenty-two, Alexander B. Meek came back to Tuscaloosa from the only military service he was ever to undertake. In other walks, however, he had before him a life of considerable distinction.³⁶ Hardly was he home than the Governor appointed him Attorney General for the State. Other appointments followed this one. More than once during his time he served as judge of the probate court; but the high point of his career in appointive offices came when President Polk selected him to serve in an advisory capacity in the United States Treasury Department. After two years in Washington, he returned to Alabama as United States Attorney for the southern district of his State. Then on the very eve of the Civil War he held high elective office, being from 1859 to 1861 speaker of the Alabama House of Representatives.

His greatest distinction, however, came not in politics but in letters. He edited a newspaper, *The Flag of the Union*, in Tuscaloosa from 1835 to 1839; then for three years thereafter edited a literary magazine called the *Southron*. There followed nine years during which, for bread and butter, he was judge, treasury official and District Attorney; but in 1851 he returned to his first love, letters, as associate editor of the *Mobile Daily Register*. He published several works, the best known of which are *Red Eagle*, an epic poem suggested by the life of William Weatherford, a great Indian warrior, and *Romantic Passages in South-western History*. He began an ambitious history of Alabama, but never completed it. Even more eloquent with the spoken than the written word, he was in constant demand to lecture on history and literature. Recognizing the scholar in him the University of Georgia awarded him an honorary degree in 1844. He remained associated with learning and with schools. It was he who introduced the bill which finally became law and gave Alabama a public school system. And during the Civil War he was a trustee of his own alma mater.

With the coming of the terrible War between the States, Meek's life was approaching its end. Notwithstanding that he was a deep dyed southron, he saw no service in that struggle because he was then in his upper forties. During 1864 he married a widow who had extensive holdings in Mississippi (she was his second wife) and moved to her state. There, at Columbus on November 30, 1865, he died, aged fifty-one.

36. For the sources for data on Meek's life see note 2.