

2015

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Recommended Citation

Rizzi, Christine A. (2015) ""The Indians Are Scattering, I Fear": Mobility and Power in the Second Seminole War," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 94: No. 3, Article 7.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol94/iss3/7>

"The Indians Are Scattering, I Fear": Mobility and Power in the Second Seminole War

by Christine A. Rizzi

Five days after Christmas in 1837, Brigadier General Thomas Sidney Jesup wrote a letter to Colonel Zachary Taylor on the subject of cypress canoes. The latter officer was fresh off an engagement against a large band of Seminole Indians. Taylor's force of 800 regular soldiers and volunteers engaged some 400 Seminole warriors and their black allies on the north shore of Lake Okeechobee.¹ The Indian group, led by fabled leaders Sam Jones, Alligator, and Wild Cat, retreated across the lake after injuring and killing a significant number of Taylor's detachment.² With the enemy withdrawing across the large, unfamiliar lake, and Taylor boat-less, the U.S. Army found itself once again stymied by circumstance.³

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- 1 Historian Joe Knetsch puts the total number of Seminole warriors involved in the Battle of Okeechobee between 380 and 480. John and Mary Lou Missall likewise estimate that around four hundred warriors fought in the battle. Joe Knetsch, *Florida's Seminole Wars, 1817-1858* (Charleston, SC: Arcadian Publishing, 2003), 103; John and Mary Lou Missall, *The Seminole Wars: America's Longest Indian Conflict* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), 142.
- 2 The final tally of casualties for Taylor's forces, according to Knetsch, was 26 dead and 112 wounded. The Seminoles incurred 11 dead and 14 wounded. Knetsch, *Florida's Seminole Wars*, 103.
- 3 As John and Mary Lou Missall argue, the Seminoles retreated from the battlefield after Taylor ordered his fresh reserve forces "against the Indian's right side." In addition, the Seminoles' goal in the battle did not involve keeping the ground. Instead, they endeavored "to slow the Americans down enough to allow the women and children to escape." John and Mary Lou Missall, *The Seminole Wars*, 143.

Jesup's letter, brimming with optimism, offered a strategy for pursuing the Seminoles. He acknowledged that it was "doubtful whether wagons or even packhorses can be taken" to the eastern side of Okeechobee from the principal headquarters of the army, Fort Brooke, located on Tampa Bay. Instead, the army should employ cypress canoes. Jesup received intelligence from "Indians and others" that the lakes extending just south of Kissimmee were navigable and connected to Lake Okeechobee. Frustrated in his attempts at drawing out the enemy, Jesup realized that he had to use the technology of the Seminoles in order to access their hiding places and achieve the dubious goal of his tenure in Florida: the removal of the entire Seminole tribe. Jesup conjectured that, if the intelligence concerning the lakes was true, and the canoes could be easily obtained, "the war may be certainly closed this winter."⁴

For those who know how the war ended, Jesup's optimism is laughable. The war would not conclude by winter. In fact, it would continue another five years, and it would end up costing millions of dollars and the lives of thousands on both sides of the conflict.⁵ Jesup himself would tire of the war by May of 1838, when he handed command over to Taylor. Jesup's futile canoe strategy was yet another hard lesson learned in the Florida wilderness.

Numerous volumes recount the major engagements of the Second Seminole War and the larger-than-life personalities who directed the conflict. The earliest work that aimed to grapple with the conduct of the war came from a man who served in the conflict, John T. Sprague. Although Sprague intended his account as a historical treatment, he could not help but give voice to the frustration felt by men of the U.S. military endeavoring to remove the Seminoles in an unforgiving landscape.⁶ Indeed, the role of

4. Thomas Sidney Jesup to Zachary Taylor, December 30, 1837. Military Correspondence, Second Seminole War, 1835-1842; Letters between Walker Keith Armistead, 1785-1845; James A. Chambers; William Grigsby Freeman, 1815-??; Thomas Sidney Jesup, 1788-1860; Thomas Beasley Linnard, ?-1851; Frederick, K. Searle, Florida Misc. Manuscripts, 00,137, P.K. Yonge Library of Florida History (hereafter cited as PKY), University of Florida, Gainesville, FL.

5. John K. Mahon estimates that the U.S. government spent between \$30 and \$40 million to wage the Second Seminole War. Total U.S. deaths numbered approximately 1,466, according to John and Mary Lou Missall, with disease claiming the most lives. Seminole warriors killed 269 officers and enlisted men in all. John K. Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1967), 326; John and Mary Lou Missall, *The Seminole Wars*, 204.

6. John T. Sprague, *The Origins, Progress, and Conclusion of the Florida War* (New York: Appleton & Co., 1848).

Florida's difficult terrain remains an integral factor in studies of the war. For example, George Buker gives extensive treatment to the development of specialized warfare in the Everglades in *Swamp Sailors in the Second Seminole War*.⁷ Comprehensive summaries of the war, including John K. Mahon's *History of the Second Seminole War*, Joe Knetsch's *Florida's Seminole Wars*, and John and Mary Lou Missall's *The Seminole Wars*, also explore the impact of the landscape on Seminole guerrilla strategy and the army's struggle to conform their tactics to Seminole fighting. A plethora of new research likewise addresses the longstanding importance of the Florida wilderness to the conduct of the war, while also using various lenses to ask new questions of the war generally. These approaches include exploring individual diaries of servicemen, shifting chronological or geographical focus, or asserting the force of race and identity to the execution of the war on both sides.⁸

This article seeks to fit the wartime challenges of Florida's landscape into a larger framework of the difficulties Americans faced while encountering new frontier environments. I argue that

7 George E. Buker, *Swamp Sailors in the Second Seminole War* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997).

8 Recent books on the Second Seminole War include Frank Laumer, *Amidst a Storm of Bullets: The Diary of Lt. Henry Prince in Florida, 1836-1842* (Tampa, FL: University of Tampa Press, 1998); John and Mary Lou Missall, *This Miserable Pride of a Soldier: The Letters and Journals of Col. William S. Foster in the Second Seminole War* (Tampa, FL: University of Tampa Press, 2005); Joe Knetsch, ed., *Fear and Anxiety on the Florida Frontier* (Dade City, FL: Seminole Wars Foundation, Inc., 2008); William S. Belko, ed., *America's Hundred Years' War: U.S. Expansion to the Gulf Coast and the Fate of the Seminole, 1763-1858* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011). Recent articles include James M. Denham, "Some Prefer the Seminoles': Violence and Disorder Among Soldiers and Settlers in the Second Seminole War, 1835-1842," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 70, no. 1 (July 1991): 38-54; C.S. Monaco, "Fort Mitchell and the Settlement of the Alachua Country," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (Summer 2000): 1-25; James M. Denham and Keith L. Huneycutt, "Everything is Hubbub Here': Lt. James Willoughby Anderson's Second Seminole War, 1837-1842," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 82, no. 3 (Winter 2004): 313-359; Matthew T. Percy, "'The Ruthless Hand of War': Andrew A. Humphreys in the Second Seminole War," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 85, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 123-153; Evan Nooe, "'Zealous in the Cause': Indian Violence, the Second Seminole War, and the Formation of a Southern Identity," *Native South* 4 (2011): 55-81; C.S. Monaco, "Alachua Settlers and the Second Seminole War," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 91, no. 1 (Summer 2012): 1-32; C.S. Monaco, "'Wishing that Right May Prevail': Ethan Allen Hitchcock and the Florida War," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 93, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 167-194; Cameron Strang, "Violence, Ethnicity, and Human Remains during the Second Seminole War," *Journal of American History* 100, no. 4 (March 2014): 973-994. A recent thesis produced on the war is by Toni Carrier, "Trade and Plunder Networks During the Second Seminole War in Florida, 1835-1842," (MA thesis, University of South Florida, 2005).

the disparity in environmental knowledge that characterized the Second Seminole War typified a much larger conflict over access that emerged in the nineteenth century. As the American frontier gradually moved westward, the reach of American power simultaneously extended south into Florida. The Florida frontier, like the frontiers of the West, alternately captivated and frightened Americans. Frontier spaces harbored both potential wealth and almost-certain danger.

The allure of the Florida frontier justified the importance of the Second Seminole War to the United States. Removing the Seminoles, according to supporters of Indian Removal, would open more territory to American cultivation and development. The painstaking progress of the American military, however, exposed the difficulty of controlling frontier space and people. Indeed, native people on American frontiers often held the upper hand in navigating space. White Americans frequently relied on Native American knowledge of routes and waterways to guide their own travel or, as in the Second Seminole War, deeply resented Native American control of territory. Studies by scholars such as Thomas W. Dunlay, Lisa Blee, Angela Pulley Hudson, and Daniel Papsdorf explore the complex role of Indian knowledge about space in shaping the white experience of various American frontiers.⁹ Indian routes of travel initially helped white Americans to reach and settle frontier areas. Gradually, however, settlers tried to impose their own travel needs onto native spaces, leading to contestation. In Florida, white settlers and the American military used Indian guides both prior to and during the Second Seminole War. Toni Carrier's work on trade and plunder networks focuses on the importance of Seminole interactions to white settlers and other travelers in Florida. Jesup used Creek Indians hostile to the Seminoles, such as Echo Harjo, and captured Seminole Indians or Black Seminoles, such as Tomoka John and the legendary Abraham, to

9 Thomas W. Dunlay, *Wolves for the Blue Soldiers: Indian Scouts and Auxiliaries in the United States Army, 1860-1890* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987); Lisa Blee, "Mount Ranier and Indian Economies of Place, 1850-1920," *Western Historical Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (Winter 2009): 419-433; Angela Pulley Hudson, *Creek Paths and Federal Roads: Indians, Settlers, and Slaves and the Making of the American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Daniel Papsdorf, "Fear and Dependence: Native Control of Euro-American Travel in the Mississippi River Valley During the Late Eighteenth Century," (paper presented at annual meeting of the Gulf South History and Humanities Association, Natchez, MS, October 1, 2015).

gain knowledge of the Florida terrain.¹⁰ The overwhelming experience of mobility for the U.S. military in the Second Seminole War, however, was one of profound frustration toward Seminole ways of using the landscape.

From the start, the primary challenge working against the U.S. military was the Seminoles' superior knowledge of the waterways and topography of Florida, especially their capacity to move quickly and to blend into the dense palmetto brush and hammocks of the landscape. The first major engagement of the war, the Dade Battle of 1835, was an ambush that depended on the ability of Seminole warriors to maintain an invisible presence alongside the marching detachment of Major Francis L. Dade. As Dade and his men made their way from Fort Brooke to the undermanned Fort King, they came upon the Wahoo Swamp in which a large force of Seminole and Black Seminole warriors led by Jumper, Alligator, Abraham, and Micanopy lay in wait. In Alligator's own words, "Every warrior was protected by a tree, or secreted in the high palmettos," awaiting Jumper's signal to open fire.¹¹ In a succession of attacks, the concealed Seminoles decimated Dade's ranks. The ambush taught the army a costly lesson: Seminole invisibility was deadly. The Seminoles continued to use environmental features, such as hammocks, swamps, and marshes, to plan and execute ambushes throughout the war. Their guerrilla-style tactics posed a significant dilemma to the U.S. military with its West Point, European-style training.¹²

10 "...wrote to Echo Harjo requiring him with 100 of his warriors to come to Tampa Bay." Diary Entry, December 24, 1836. Thomas Sidney Jesup Diary. State Library of Florida. Tallahassee, FL.; J.A. Chambers to Brig. Gen. Abraham Eustis, Jan. 7, 1838. Military Correspondence, Second Seminole War, 1835-1842. For more on use of Black Seminoles as guides, see Kenneth W. Porter, "Negro Guides and Interpreters in the Early Stages of the Seminole War, December 28, 1835- March 6, 1837," *Journal of Negro History* 35 (1950): 174-182; Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War*, 283-284; George E. Buker, "The Mosquito Fleet's Guides and the Second Seminole War," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (January 1979): 308-326; Larry E. Rivers and Canter Brown, Jr., "The Indispensable Man": John Horse and Florida's Second Seminole War," *Journal of the GAH* 18 (1997): 1-23.

11 "December 28, 1835: Alligator (Halpatter Tustennuggee) gives his account of the Dade Battle," *In Their Own Words: Selected Seminole "Talks,"* ed. John & Mary Lou Missall and Frank Laumer, (Dade City, FL: Seminole Wars Foundation, 2009), 21.

12 Sgt. Maj. Joel W. Jones described the guerrilla strategy of the Seminoles in his letters home, which he quoted in his memoir. The Seminoles, he said, "follow our columns of soldiers about, keeping themselves out of danger, plundering when opportunity offers a chance, and picking off sentinels and stragglers." Joel W. Jones Memoir: A New Yorker in Florida's Second Seminole War. Transcription. Joel W. Jones Journals, PKY, <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/>

In the early years of the conflict, the Seminoles were able to deploy large numbers of warriors, yet maintain surprise and concealment. The Seminoles and black warriors that attacked Dade and his men numbered almost two hundred individuals.¹³ Later battles at Dunlawton, Withlacoochee Cove, and Okeechobee also featured large forces. The goal of pitched Seminole fighting, however, rarely aimed at a definitive victory. Warriors endeavored to create enough confusion and casualties to allow for gradual withdrawal into the Florida wilderness. Indeed, traveling with families and other noncombatants made such withdrawals a necessity.¹⁴ Withdrawal also allowed Seminole warriors to plan and execute other surprise attacks. The strategy essentially created a chase across the peninsula, with the U.S. Army in constant pursuit of an enemy that always seemed somewhere in front of them. As the war dragged on, however, the piecemeal defeat of Seminole bands, coupled with a negotiated surrender of many of the Black Seminoles, decreased the Seminoles' ability to field large, strong forces, and meant that large, pitched battles were no longer feasible.¹⁵ The last major engagements of the war, the Battle of Okeechobee in 1837 and the 1838 Battle of Loxahatchee, ushered in a change in Seminole tactics, which still exploited the natural landscape. Small groups of Seminoles concealed themselves in the hard to reach areas of Florida to avoid capture and removal. Small raids, guerrilla tactics, and near-constant mobility became the dominant strategy. Subsistence strategies became essential to the mobile nature of Seminole life during the war. As Patsy West notes, the Seminoles were able to secure food and supplies in the Everglades and the southern coasts

AA00017193/00003, 64 (accessed February 6, 2016). For more in-depth studies of Seminole guerrilla strategy, see Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War*; John C. White, Jr., "American Military Strategy during the Second Seminole War," (MA thesis, Marine Corps Command and Staff College, 1995); James W. Covington, *The Seminoles of Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993).

- 13 John and Mary Lou Missall estimate approximately 180 warriors at the Dade Battle. *The Seminole Wars*, 96.
- 14 John and Mary Lou Missall note that the famous Battle of Okeechobee resulted after the army discovered the Seminoles' principle hiding place in marshes on the banks of the lake. Mikasuki leader Sam Jones and Seminole warriors Alligator and Coacoochee led an assault with the ultimate goal "to slow the Americans down enough to allow the women and children to escape." *The Seminole Wars*, 143.
- 15 Black Seminoles especially feared removal because of the potential consequences to their freedom. When they received confirmation from the government that they would not be sold into slavery, they agreed to depart for Indian Territory (Oklahoma).

of the peninsula, using wrecking and other means to sustain the small groups still opposing the U.S. military and removal.¹⁶

The decentralized nature of Seminole settlement also meant they could move through the landscape with greater ease than an American military force. The tribe already existed as a decentralized collection of bands that often formed around towns and a sub-chief of considerable influence.¹⁷ Bands included warriors, families, and slaves. During the war, family units could disperse if danger came too close and they deemed fighting impossible. The diffusion of Seminole bands made collecting them for removal a time-consuming process, a fact that some chiefs used to their advantage. A standard response in negotiations was to inform military officials that bands were gathering together to surrender, then use the time to relocate away from danger or prepare a series of raids and strikes. Jesup complained to Taylor in 1837 that sub-chief Holatoochee caused Jesup much embarrassment by assuring the general "that he was collecting his people, when [Jesup] had information the day before the Seminole Camp broke up near Tampa that [Holatoochee] had made no effort to do so."¹⁸ Distrust of Seminole intentions affected all ranks, and soldiers freely shared their opinions that chiefs were simply playing tricks to elude capture. Captain Joseph Rowe Smith lamented to his wife in February of 1838 that he was afraid the army "shall not do much more this campaign. The Indians are scattering, I fear."¹⁹ "Although it is no

16 West characterizes wrecking, one of the subsistence strategies of the remaining Seminole population, as "actively engaged in salvaging materials and foodstuffs on the Atlantic beaches from the numerous wrecked ships or jettisoned cargos that were seasonal weather casualties of Gulf Stream shipping lanes." Patsy West, *The Enduring Seminoles: From Alligator Wrestling to Casino Gaming* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 5. See also Patsy West, this issue.

17 Seminole identity was rooted in connections to matrilineal clans, villages, and bands rather than an overarching tribal identity. Indeed, the group of native people who came to comprise the Seminole tribe originated from their resistance to Creek centralization. See John K. Mahon and Brent Weisman, "Florida's Seminole and Miccosukee," *The New History of Florida*, ed. Michael Gannon, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996); Brent Weisman, *Unconquered People: Florida's Seminole and Miccosukee Indians*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999); James Covington, *The Seminoles of Florida*; Patsy West, this issue.

18 Jesup to Taylor, December 30, 1837. Military Correspondence, Second Seminole War, 1835-1842, PKY.

19 Joseph Rowe Smith to Juliet Smith, February 14, 1838. Joseph Rowe Smith Correspondence, Military and Personal, 1837-1844, PKY, <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00017217/00001/allvolumes> (accessed February 6, 2016).

great matter to capture an Indian," he continued, "still so many have failed to do so,—that it is in fact quite a feat."²⁰

Later operations in the Everglades proved no more successful in corralling bands of Seminoles, whom Lieutenant Colonel N.S. Clarke characterized as "erratic," due to their dispersal and "the facility with which they usually elude search and pursuit."²¹ Lieutenant John Bonnell Marchard likewise testified to his Mosquito Fleet Commander Lieutenant John T. McLaughlin that Marchard had "every reason to believe that many of the Islands in [the Everglades] are peopled with [Seminoles]."²²

The Seminoles' knowledge of the Florida landscape made both their early battles and the eventual scattering of bands possible. The diverse environment of the territory allowed Seminoles to conceal themselves in various types of terrain in order to coordinate attacks. Captain Smith found the area surrounding the Suwannee River to be "a most beautiful hiding place for the Indians," due to the "country alternating with hammocks, and pine barrens, oak ridges and Cabbage hammocks... [and] in many places, a very luxuriant growth of Palmetto."²³ The Seminoles also surreptitiously mapped the movements of the army through their territory. While in pursuit of a band of Seminoles, Smith stumbled upon a tree carving on the bank of the Suwannee River that indicated the presence of patrol boats. The drawing of two schooners above a crooked line, "was designed, undoubtedly, to convey to the other Indians, the information of vessels being somewhere on the river."²⁴

Military men apparently were not surprised at seeing marks and signs left by Seminole scouts when they occurred in fairly open areas like hammocks and pine barrens. Spotting clues in inhospitable marshes and swamps, however, truly shocked the men of the U.S. Army. They found such terrain "nearly impracticable for man," and it suggested to them that Indians could go where it was

20 Smith to Smith, February 29, 1840. Joseph Rowe Smith Correspondence, PKY.

21 N.S. Clarke to S. Cooper, July 9, 1841. Box 1, Folder 2, Edward T. Keenan Papers, PKY.

22 McLaughlin referred to his joint Army and Navy Everglades detachment as the Mosquito Fleet. Letter from John Bonnell Marchard to John T. McLaughlin, March 6, 1842, Marchard, John Bonnell, Lt. Com. 1808-1875 - Letters written when in command of the steamer Van Buren 1841-1842, Florida Misc. Manuscripts, 00,986, PKY [copies, originals in the Naval War College]. For an in-depth study of the Mosquito Fleet, see George E. Buker's *Swamp Sailors*.

23 Scouting report by Smith, Feb. 1, 1840. Joseph Rowe Smith Correspondence, PKY.

24 Ibid.

impossible for whites to follow.²⁵ This fed a prejudice that existed even before the war that Indians, being "primitive," could live in places that no white settler would consider. After completing a survey of the eastern bank of the Ocklawaha River in 1827, Major Joshua A. Coffee reported to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs that "no white person would think of residing" on the land.²⁶ The report of Lieutenant C.R. Gates in 1841 echoed Coffee's opinion. Gates stated that the area along the Withlacoochee River, which the Seminoles favored, did not possess "one acre of land which is hospitable for a white man."²⁷ The movement of the Seminoles through rugged terrain during the war reinforced the perceived differences between the Seminole tribe and white society.

Although the Seminoles were able to stay mobile and maintain concealed hideouts, the rigors of such heightened movement strained their ability to produce crops or maintain food supplies and caused considerable hardship. Hardships fell not just on the warriors but on women, children, the elderly, and the infirm. Captain Smith came across the trail of a lone woman and child while scouting near Fort Fanning in February of 1840. Their tracks were close to a large Indian camp of what Smith estimated to be about eight or ten families, where he saw signs of agricultural cultivation.²⁸ Indeed, Seminole women attempted to farm in concealed areas where bands made their camps. They performed this necessary labor despite the probability that the site would have to be abandoned or would be destroyed by soldiers on expeditions. While scouting in the Everglades in 1842, Lieutenant Marchard reported the vast amount of cultivation taking place on remote islands in the area around what he referred to as Cocoa Nut Island. One such island held five acres of crops, including corn, pears, beans, and pumpkins, all of which "had a thriving growth." Marchard proudly reported that he "destroyed every thing useful to the Indians."²⁹ In

- 25 Scouting report by Joseph Hatch LaMotte, July 28, 1841. Joseph Hatch LaMotte, ?-1888. - Report of a scout along the Waccasassa River, Florida Misc. Manuscripts 00,514, PKY.
- 26 The Bureau of Indian Affairs commissioned Coffee to supervise the border of the Seminole reservation created in 1823. Joshua A. Coffee to Thomas L. McKenney, June 13, 1827. J.A. Coffee - Letters to Thomas L. McKenney, Florida Misc. Manuscripts, 00,212, PKY.
- 27 C.R. Gates to N.S. Clarke, July 3, 1841. Box 1, Folder 2, Edward T. Keenan Papers, PKY.
- 28 Scouting Report by Smith, February 1, 1840, Joseph Rowe Smith Correspondence, PKY.
- 29 Marchard to McLaughlin, March 23, 1842. John Bonnell Marchard Letters, PKY.

fact, as the war progressed, destruction of Seminole food supplies became a major goal of the U.S. military as an indirect means of inducing tribes to give up.

In contrast to Seminole mobility, the U.S. military experienced slow progress during forays into Florida. As discussed above, the military strategy of the U.S. broke down into two categories. First, early in the war, commanders attempted to engage the Seminoles in open combat in the style familiar to all trained U.S. officers. This strategy was deemed ineffective due to the eventual dispersal of the Seminole tribe. Search-and-capture then became the dominant method for waging the war. In both cases, the U.S. experience resulted in deep frustration for soldiers over their inability to traverse complicated and unfamiliar terrain.

Attempting to coordinate the movement of large forces over frontier space made the first year of the war especially grueling for the U.S. army. The example of territorial governor Richard Keith Call's expedition of 1836 was especially instructive on the difficulties that could result in the Florida wilderness. Call, a favorite of President Andrew Jackson, tried to gain prestige as the newly appointed governor of Florida by leading troops to the Wahoo Swamp on the southern bank of the Withlacoochee River, the stronghold of the Seminoles.³⁰ As one Call biographer wrote, Call's campaign, intended to launch in the summer of 1836, "met with every hindrance imaginable."³¹ The draft of discontented Florida volunteers and the late arrival of the Tennessee volunteers delayed Call's departure to September. Upon arriving at the Withlacoochee, where he intended to cross, Call discovered that General Leigh Read had failed to establish a crucial supply depot due to the grounding of a supply vessel. Crossing the Withlacoochee proved impossible owing to the swiftness of the current and the high water. With his men and horses possessing rations for only two additional days, Call led his men back to Fort Drane. That fort, however, possessed few supplies as well. Call, after "[losing] horses daily to starvation, and the Tennessee boys grumbl[ing] to the point of near mutiny," led the contingent all the way back to Black Creek, far northeast

30 Call pleaded to Jackson for the chance to lead an expedition, writing that he would "be highly gratified to command the army and believe I could soon bring the war to a close." Sidney Walter Martin, "Richard Keith Call, Florida Territorial Leader," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (April 1943), 341.

31 *Ibid.*, 343.

of his intended target.³² Though he subsequently brought his men back to the field to engage the Seminoles, overall his expedition failed for two important reasons. First, Call underestimated the difficulties of establishing supply caches on the sparsely settled frontier. Second, despite previous experience in the Creek War and in Florida, he was unprepared for the nature of the terrain and the length of time needed to traverse it.

Faced with situations like Call's, the main concern of the U.S. Army was to tame the landscape through the construction of roads. The military constantly worried about the integrity of supply routes in the Florida interior, especially because wagons and pack animals necessitated open, easy-to-follow roads. After Taylor assumed command in May of 1838, he crafted a winter campaign strategy that consisted principally of road construction.³³ The surveying and building of roads allowed for the manning and supply of more outposts as bases for army operations. Officers frequently commented on the practicability of road construction in their scouting reports. Many of them found the prospect unsavory, however, given the propensity for impossibly thick brush and the alarming amount of standing water. In the absence of roads, marching proved dangerous. More often than not, the military found maps to be unreliable, and getting lost with dwindling provisions could be disastrous. Marching through undeveloped terrain was also physically grueling. Marchard reported that part of his force had to return to Fort Henry due to the "laceration of their feet caused by the sharp limestone rocks over which they passed in the pines." "Indeed," he said, "many of the men returned almost barefooted."³⁴

Sergeant Major Joel W. Jones likewise recounted the pain endured on overland expeditions. Although Jones did not find St. Augustine to be a picturesque location, his foray into the Florida interior, begun on March 13, 1836, made him long for the town.³⁵ Jones' detachment was "much fatigued" from marching all day on March 21 in an area Jones curtly described as having "No roads. Water most of the time knee deep." Indeed, although the men pos-

32 Due to Call's unfortunate foray, Secretary of War Benjamin F. Butler removed him as commander of forces in Florida, installing Jesup instead. Knetsch, *Florida's Seminole Wars*, 95.

33 Missall and Missall, *The Seminole Wars*, 158-160.

34 Marchard to McLaughlin, March 4, 1842. John Bonnell Marchard Letters, PKY.

35 Jones, Memoir, "St. Augustine is full of soldiers and all sorts of rioting and drunkenness are indulged in," 60, PKY.

sessed mules and wagons to move supplies, the men had “to assist the mules in getting along with the wagons and two pieces of artillery.” Insult piled onto injury on the morning of March 30 after Jones and his men could not pursue a retreating band of Seminoles into a dense cypress swamp. According to Jones, the Indian group “absolutely laughed at us and when we retired they jeered at us.”³⁶

Traversing waterways was almost as daunting as contending with overland travel. The army struggled early in the war with river crossings, and soldiers suffered dearly for their trouble. The Withlacoochee Cove area witnessed three failed attempts by the army to successfully cross the river and engage a large force of Seminole fighters on the south bank. General Duncan Lamont Clinch was the first to attempt a crossing on New Year’s Day, 1835. The commander, possessing what John and Mary Lou Missall politely term “an imperfect knowledge” of the river, tried to ferry his men across one of its deepest points using an abandoned canoe that the detachment discovered on the north bank.³⁷ The difficult crossing gave the Seminoles ample opportunity to plan a surprise attack from a dense hammock, resulting in an American retreat. General Edmund P. Gaines fared little better, returning to the exact same spot in February of 1836. After a harrowing attempt to cross the river, he erected a small fort on the north side called Camp Izard.³⁸ Near-constant Seminole pressure, however, forced Gaines to eventually abandon the position.³⁹ Finally, as previously noted, territorial governor Call tried his hand at crossing the Withlacoochee in October of 1836. His supply issues, coupled with the fact that his men brought no tools with which to make rafts, forced Call to abandon the crossing.⁴⁰ The Withlacoochee offered no quarter for the over-confident and under-prepared U.S. military.

Marshes and swamps proved especially vexing during the search-and-remove phase of the war. Marching through standing water was both unhealthy and physically draining, leading to many instances of disease and exhaustion. W.E. Pima’s scouting report from July of 1841 spoke directly to the harsh conditions his men endured during their trek inland from Cedar Key. Pima lamented

36 Ibid., 62-63.

37 Missall and Missall, *The Seminole Wars*, 98-100.

38 Gaines named the fort after the only casualty of their first crossing attempt, 1st Lt. James F. Izard. Seminole snipers killed Izard from the opposite bank of the Withlacoochee River.

39 Ibid., 107-109.

40 Ibid., 119.

that his "movements were somewhat impeded by the appearance of sickness among the men." He also reported that, of the distance traveled by the group, three-quarters of it was under water. They encamped in hard-to-find hammock land, but the abundant mosquitos deprived his men "of that rest the fatigue, incident to the duty, required."⁴¹ The soldiers' zeal in tracking fleeing Seminoles through such terrain could sometimes result in absurd difficulties that made the army's progress even more labored. Smith's men made a nearly fatal error while searching for Seminoles in the swampy area between Fort Fanning and Fort Jennings in what is now Levy County. After following a stream, the detachment discovered a well-supplied but recently abandoned Indian camp that had several cypress canoes. The soldiers destroyed everything in the camp, including the canoes, in an attempt to limit the access of the Seminoles to another hiding place. The soldiers' pride turned to consternation the next day, however, when they discovered they were on an island and had destroyed their only means of transportation the day before. They hastily repaired the canoes, which nonetheless sank during the crossing. Luckily for them they only lost a musket in the debacle.⁴²

The Everglades proved similarly confounding for the U.S. Navy, which struggled for mobility in the seemingly endless expanse of water and grass. Before the navy could properly scout the area, they needed to figure out which boats worked best for the Everglades, eventually employing shallow-draft, flat-bottomed boats for the purpose. Possessing vessels well suited for traversing the waters of the glades, however, did not guarantee success at finding the Seminoles. Marchard reported that his fellow officer, Lieutenant Rodgers, was "almost in despair at not having caught any Indians on his last scout."⁴³

The combined effects of such difficulties with the Florida landscape created a pervasive atmosphere of frustration among U.S. soldiers. Smith took the time in a Valentine's Day letter to grouse to his wife that Congress "appear[ed] to think the army is toiling

41 Scouting report by W.E. Pima, July 30, 1841. Pima, W.E. - Letter describing scouting expedition along the Gulf Coast inland from Cedar Key, Florida Misc. Manuscripts, 00,520, PKY.

42 Scouting report by Smith, February 1, 1840. Joseph Rowe Smith Correspondence, PKY.

43 Marchard to McLaughlin, February 25, 1842. John Bonnell Marchard Letters, PKY.

in vain... through the Swamps of Florida.”⁴⁴ If the expectations of the American public weighed heavily on a captain, they must have been more cumbersome to the numerous generals who served their time in Florida. Although Taylor found acclaim in the wilds of Florida, the frustration of wrestling with the treacherous landscape tarnished the reputations of most other commanders. The questionable decisions made by numerous officers evidence the extreme political stress under which they labored. Jesup earned the ire of soldier and civilian alike when he began taking captives under a flag of truce.⁴⁵ Brigadier General Walter K. Armistead used the same tactic after chiefs Tiger Tail and Halleck Tustenuggee embarrassed him by fleeing during negotiations. General Alexander Macomb came under fire by some for using bloodhounds in the pursuit of the Seminoles.⁴⁶ Lower-ranked officers and enlisted men demonstrated a more existential unease concerning their mission in Florida. Lieutenant Colonel N.S. Clarke remarked that his men “have been animated by a desire to achieve something. That they have not achieved more may be attributed to the nature [of] the country.”⁴⁷ Non-commissioned officer Sergeant Major Jones described the entire conflict as “senseless and useless,” avowing that “Uncle Sam shall not catch me in such a place again.”⁴⁸ Finally, in an anonymous letter to the *National Intelligencer* in March of 1837, one man vented the frustration common to his fellow soldiers. He outlined the difficult marches through hammocks and swamps, the ease of the Seminoles in retreating to concealed locations, and the “maledictions” of the press that assailed the efforts of the military. To all of this, the soldier replied that, “No one, certainly, can pretend to say that the swamps and hammocks of Florida are more easily penetrated than the fastnesses of the brigand and guerilla.”⁴⁹ Overall, the frustration of tracking Seminoles and their

44 Smith to Smith, February 14, 1838. Joseph Rowe Smith Correspondence, PKY.

45 According to Major Reynold Kirby, Jesup “surprised and made prisoners of 516 of these stupefied and miserable creatures [Seminoles]. [...] These People were all under the protection of the white flag. Thus has been again perpetrated a great National Crime by General Jesup.” Diary entry by Reynold Marvin Kirby, August 16, 1837. Kirby, Reynold Marvin Major, 1790-1842. - Transcript of diary, Aug. 16, 1837 - May 18, 1838, PKY.

46 Missall and Missall, *The Seminole Wars*, 171-173.

47 N.S. Clarke to S. Cooper, July 9, 1841. Box 1, Folder 2, Edward T. Keenan Papers, PKY.

48 Jones, *Memoir*, 64, PKY.

49 “The Army in Florida,” *National Intelligencer*, March 21, 1837.

black allies through unforgiving terrain fomented a palpable self-consciousness among the members of the U.S. military

In conclusion, the role of movement is crucial to understanding the Second Seminole War. The restrained mobility that typified the U.S. experience during the war weighed heavily on the minds of the soldiers sent to remove the Seminoles. Marching, searching, and fighting were physically exhausting exercises, especially when exacerbated by disease. The monotony of pouring over the wilds of Florida also mentally drained U.S. soldiers of all ranks. In their reports, letters, and diaries, men fighting in Florida bemoaned their arduous movements and their disappointing efforts at removing the Seminoles. The slow progress of the war took on personal and collective meanings. Individual soldiers, including high-ranking officers, internalized their frustration. Many also feared the implications of the war for the strength of the American will.

While the men of the U.S. military grappled with these questions, they only fleetingly thought of the plight of the Seminole Indians. Indeed, the Seminole tribe would be almost completely removed from the territory that they fought to call home. Those that the U.S. forced to emigrate encountered a perilous and often debilitating journey to Indian Territory. The Seminoles who remained in Florida kept to the relative security of the Everglades and only rarely interacted with whites. Even with their relegation to the extreme south of the peninsula, the Seminoles would again have to defend their freedom during a third war in 1855. Ultimately, the Second Seminole War slashed the Seminoles' access to the peninsula to a fraction of its original size, all in the American pursuit of land, resources, and power.