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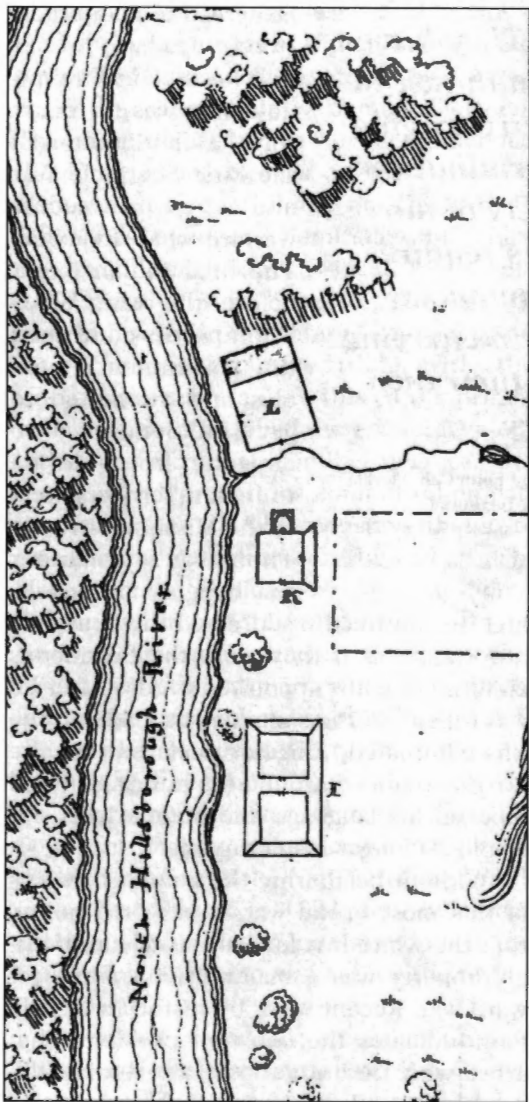
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“... being continually in apprehension of an attack from the Indians...”: Tampa Bay In Early 1836



Drawing of Fort Brooke, ca. 1825, showing the L. Sutler, K. Bakehouse, and I. Public Storehouse located along the Hillsborough River. (Courtesy of the P.K. Young Library of Florida History, Special Collections, Smathers Libraries, University of Florida.)

Pamela N. Gibson and Joe Knetsch, Ph.D.

On January 4, 1836, the young Second Lieutenant Benjamin Alvord of the Fourth Infantry wrote to the Quartermaster General of the United States Army, General Thomas Jesup, that the Schooner *Motto* had just left the post for New Orleans. Its mission was to obtain ammunition for the recently arrived pair of twelve pounders and the small arms then in Fort Brooke. Alvord then added the telling portion: “... being continually in apprehension of an attack from the Indians the commanding officer decides that these materials Furniture &c of *Motto* cannot be turned over (as no officer can properly leave his command) ...”¹ Three days prior to this the new commander of the post, Captain Francis S. Belton of Maryland, commented that the defenses of Fort Brooke were recently extended and strengthened and that the original cantonment had been entirely abandoned. The women and children of the casualties of Dade’s recent battle were shipped off to New Orleans. Brevet Major John Mountfort, another recent arrival, also noted the improvement of the defensive works which now included a trench, new pickets and blockhouses. The total regular force available to defend the new works and the remains of the nearby village were one hundred and eighty men and officers plus a party of citizen rangers numbering about thirty. One hundred friendly Indians were encamped outside of the works and declared their readiness to fight their brethren.² Quoting a letter from “a gentleman attached to Major Mountfort’s

command," the *National Intelligencer* allowed the author to declare: "Through the interposition of Providence, I am now alive to let you know it. We are really in the theater of war of the most horrible kind." This same writer was one of the lucky ones scheduled to ride out and overtake Dade's command and join in the march to Fort King. His group was delayed long enough to meet the three survivors, "horribly mangled" who gave them the news of Dade's demise.³

Fort Brooke, on that terrible day, was totally isolated and without means of defense against a massed attack by the Seminoles and their allies. The December 28, 1835 battle had cost the command at Fort Brooke one hundred and twelve men and left only the sparse garrison described above. The fort had been strengthened but the outlying buildings of the nascent village had been destroyed, "in order to afford no cover by which the approach of the foe might be facilitated." Like their colleagues in Key West they had cleared a field of fire and gave the enemy no chance of surprise attack.⁴ The news did not improve with the knowledge of the defeat of the force under General Duncan L. Clinch at the Withlacoochee River on December 31, 1835. There would be no immediate relief by land.

What brought on this isolation, fear and imminent threat of death? One of the major causes of the Second Seminole War (1835-1842) was the constant and consistent lack of understanding between two differing cultures; one European, the other Native American. The government of the United States refused to listen to those who knew the Native American culture best and insisted upon discussing issues and signing treaties with "the chief" of the tribe. It simply ignored the advice that Creek, Seminole and Miccosukee culture relied upon a tribal council in which no individual chief had any power to conduct negotiations and enter treaties without the approval of said

council. When the U.S. government agent did not get the answers or lands demanded, he often recommended that the government ignore that "chief" and deal only with someone more pliable. That person would then be recognized as "chief" and new negotiations would be conducted until the desired result was reached. The tribal council was totally ignored. The clan system upon which much of the political power within the Native cultures worked was also brushed aside as so much poppycock. The government and its agents were ethnocentric to the extreme. Within this very simplified scheme no meaningful treaty could ever be agreed to and understood.

The Second Seminole War was, in many ways, a continuation of the First Seminole War and the internecine warfare that followed. The final Indian Agent before the war, Wiley Thompson, continued the government's policies and attempted to get the Seminoles to emigrate from Florida to Indian Territory west of the Mississippi River. Thompson's manner was haughty and insulting.

He continually addressed the Seminole negotiators as if they were the President's children or court appointed wards. After he was killed, on the same day as Dade's force was eliminated, Alligator declared that the warriors danced around his hung scalp and mocked his language and mannerisms. He would no longer insult anyone.⁵

Without belaboring the complex origins of this most brutal war, it is worth noting that the white lust for land, cattle and other property was a major driving force toward war. Recent work by historian Ronald Satz indicates the constant problems that arose with the initiation of the Indian Removal Act and the bureaucracy it created. The lack of staff in Washington to oversee the Indian Agents, often corrupt political appointees, the insufficient funding of the removal by Congress, the parsimonious allotments for the military establishment

"... all the Plantations South of Tampa were destroyed. ... They have raised the Tomahawk in despair, they are waging a war of extermination and the Safety of our fellow citizens requires that not a moment should be lost in carrying the war into their own country."

Letter from General Richard Keith Call, Florida Militia, to Florida Territorial Governor John Eaton, January 7, 1836

assigned to carry out this policy and the overall planning deficiencies of the government all helped to create an impossible situation. Many of these difficulties began long before Andrew Jackson became president but they did not improve with his, and subsequent, administrations.⁶ From the initial confusion over supplying the Indians in Florida, through the contract with Benjamin Chaires, to the insensitive administration of Wiley Thompson, the policy of removal in Florida was replete with errors, confusion and corruption. The final outbreak of war was not a surprise to anyone.

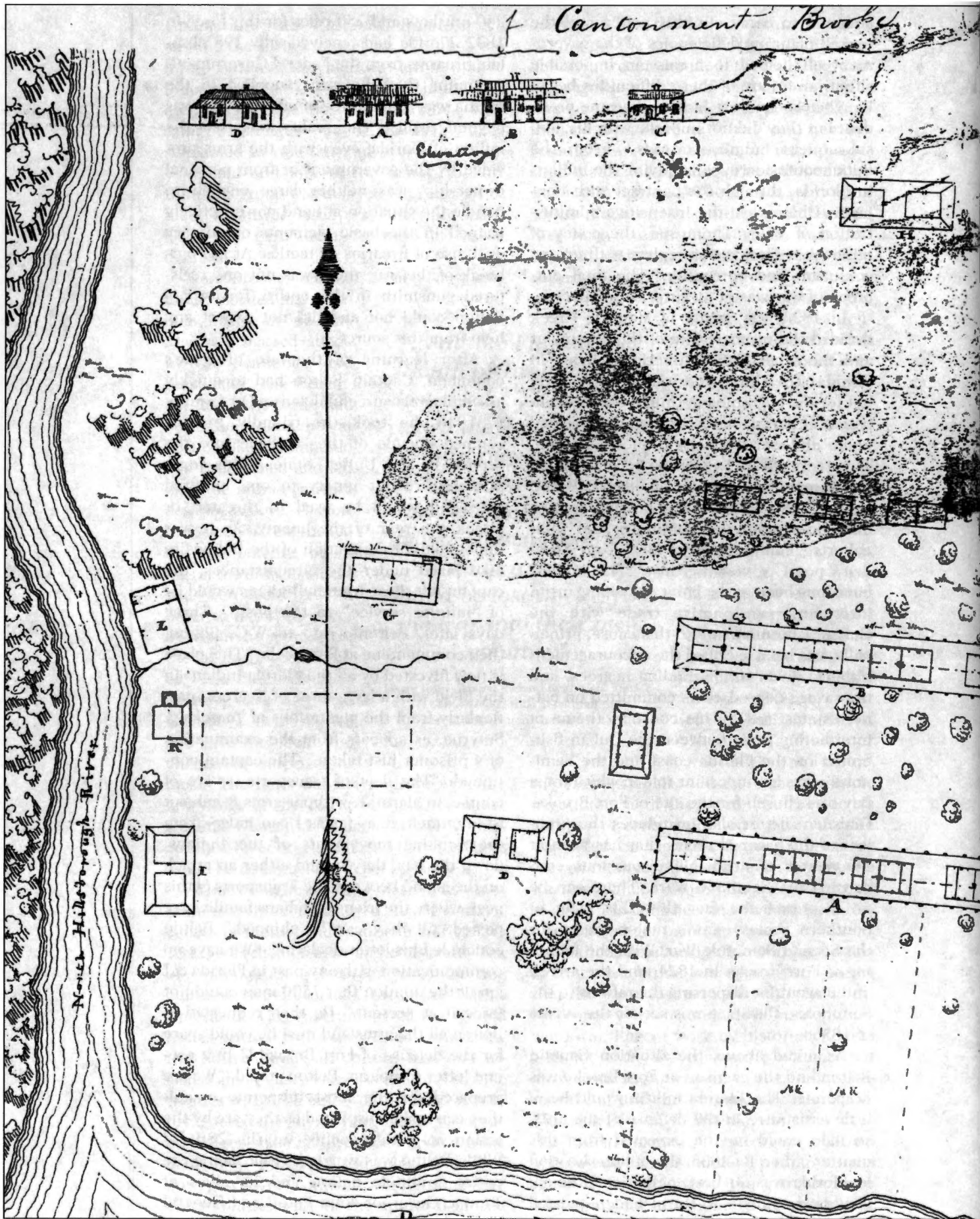
In 1823, the Treaty of Moultrie Creek decided the ultimate fate of the Seminoles and the other Native Americans living in Florida. Their final fate was to be removal but for the beginning of United States occupation of Florida, a reservation was decided upon and surveyed by James Gadsden. This army officer had earlier recommended the Tampa Bay area as an ideal position from which to control any possible foreign influences upon the Seminoles and their cohorts.⁷ Tampa Bay was ideal from Gadsden's point of view because "The Indians have long been in the habit of keeping up an intercourse and active trade with the Cuban fishermen, and to this cause, principally, has been ascribed the encouragement hitherto given to absconding negroes, and the savage depredations committed on cattle, estates, &c."⁸ This constant theme of interdicting trade between the Cuban fishermen on the Florida coast and the Seminoles plays an important role in why Tampa Bay was chosen for the site of Fort Brooke. Gadsden's letter also introduces the problem of the escaped slaves that has been at the center of academic discussions concerning the Seminole Wars. There can be no disputing the fact that this facet of Southern society was a major trigger for the Second Seminole War. With the founding of Fort Brooke in 1824, and the arrival of the agent for dispersing the rations to the Seminoles, the stage was set for the events of 1836.⁹

As noted above, the situation Captain Belton and the garrison at Fort Brooke was desperate. The Florida militia would be of little assistance in the defense of the area, so help could not be expected from this quarter either. By 1835, the militia situation in Florida was, at best, pathetic. Although Governor William P. Duval had requested

240 muskets and 250 rifles for this force in 1832, Florida had received only 198 obsolete firearms from the Federal Government. Assuming that the arms supplied to the militia was a guarantee of effective use was beyond reality. The reality was that the militia of Florida, even with the arms provided by the government or from personal ownership, was neither large enough to handle the situation at hand nor effectively trained in the basic elements of military drill, use of firearms or tactics. At the outbreak of the war, there was not one registered gunsmith in the entire Territory.¹⁰ Belton could not and did not expect any help from this source.

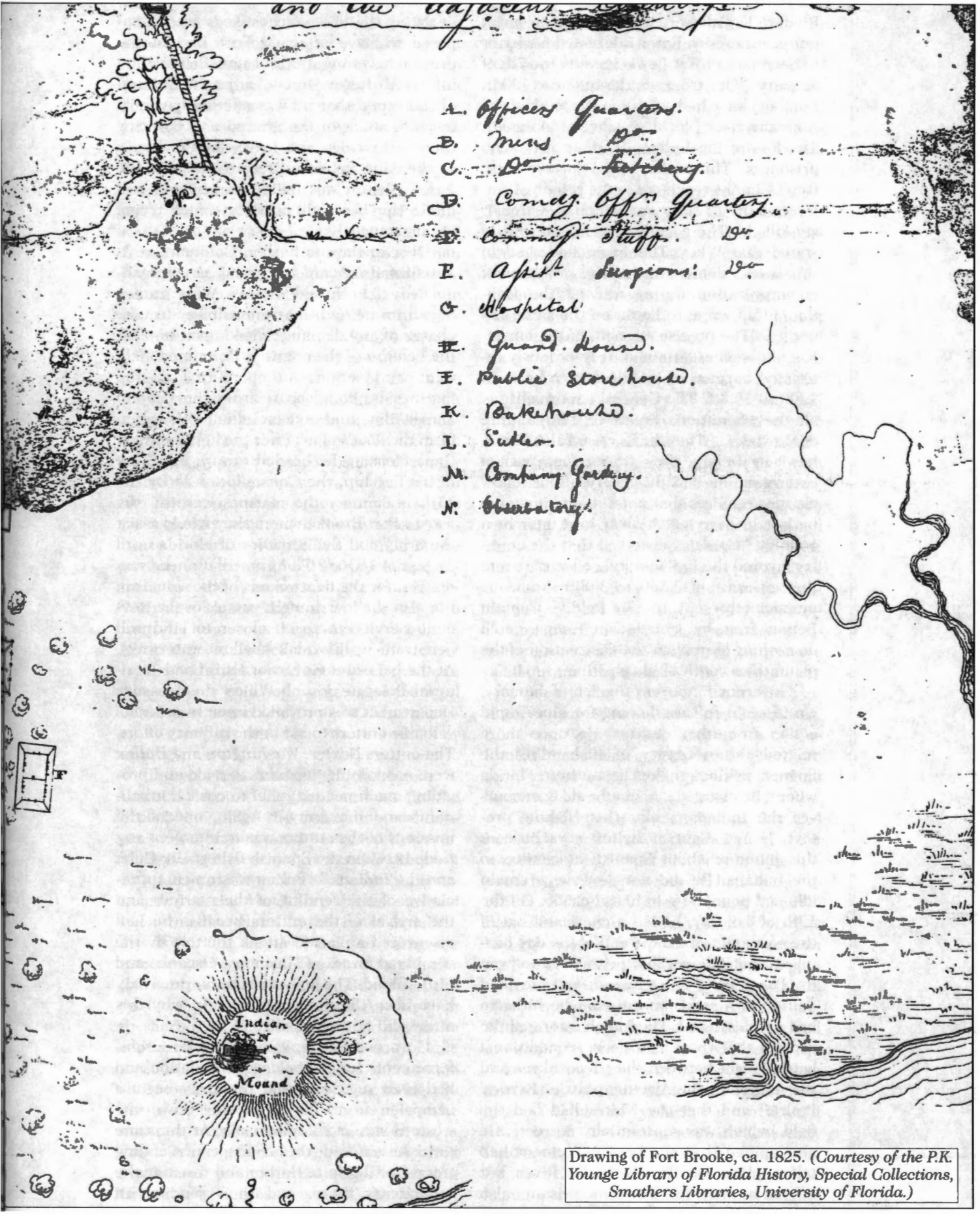
After learning of the fate of Dade's command, Captain Belton had to quickly assemble a resourceful defense. On January 2, 1836, he took the friendly Indians camped outside of the stockade into the service of the United States. This force numbered about ninety to one hundred men and would be used to threaten or attack the rear of the enemy. As it was impossible for emigration of the Indians to take place under the circumstances, the captain felt these friendly Indians would be of "infinite service" to the post.¹¹ Three days later, Belton wrote to W.C. Bolton, then commanding at Pensacola, "This place is now invested by all the Florida Indians in the Field with a large force of Negroes, particularly from the plantations of Tomoka & Smyrna, as appears from the examination of a prisoner just taken." The captain continued: "The fleet of transports ... are of course, in alarm, & without arms & subject to an attack, & as far as I can judge, from the flanking movements of the Indians, down the bay, they intend either an attack on the island between the Transports & this post, where the friendly Indians families are posted, till they can be shipped." Belton concluded his letter declaring: "We have no communication with any post in Florida & I am of the opinion that 7500 men could not force it at present." He then requested of Bolton all the arms and men he could spare for the defense of Fort Brooke.¹² In a second letter to Bolton, Belton stated: "We are prepared for the most desperate assault they can make, inspired as they are by the action at Withlacoochee on the 28th."¹³ While Belton was worried about facing the entire Seminole nation and its allies at Tampa, Governor John Eaton and General

Cantonment Brooke



and the adjacent country

- A. Officers Quarters.
- B. Mens ^{Quarters}
- C. ^{Quarters} Kitchens.
- D. Comdg. Offrs Quarters.
- E. Commg. Staff. ^{Quarters}
- F. Appt. Surgeons: ^{Quarters}
- G. Hospital.
- H. Guard House.
- I. Public Store house.
- K. Bakehouse.
- L. Suttler.
- M. Company Garding.
- N. Observatory.



Drawing of Fort Brooke, ca. 1825. (Courtesy of the P.K. Young Library of Florida History, Special Collections, Smathers Libraries, University of Florida.)

Richard K. Call were writing out their notes on recent events. Eaton addressed his letter to Secretary of War Lewis Cass on the 7th of January: "Our troops & the Indians (400 in number) have had a fight on the bank of the Amaxura river [Withlacoochee's old name]. The loss of the Indians is about fifty - no prisoners. The battle lasted for an hour, Gen'l Clinch's regulars are the principal sufferers. Fifty or sixty are wounded & five or six killed." The governor then erroneously stated that Wiley Thompson had died in this battle, demonstrating the problems of communication during war on the frontier.¹⁴ Call wrote to Eaton on the same day noting: "The precise strength of the enemy has not been ascertained. It is variously estimated by men of intelligence to be from 1200 to 2000." The General continued: "... all the Plantations South of Tampa were destroyed. ... They have raised the Tomahawk in despair, they are waging a war of extermination and the Safety of our fellow citizens requires that not a moment should be lost in carrying the war into their own country." Call also observed that the country favored the Indians' style of warfare and that an army of 2,500 to 3,000 should be immediately sent to the field.¹⁵ Captain Belton, from his isolation in Tampa, could do nothing to prevent the destruction of the plantations south of his position.

Governor Eaton, on the 9th of January, wrote again to Cass hoping for more rapid action from that quarter. He once more related the necessity of disbanding the Spanish fishing ranchos in southern Florida where, he charged, "no doubt aid & encourage the Indians, under their fishing pretext."¹⁶ Yet, Captain Belton says little at this juncture about Spanish assistance to the Indians. He did not, however, remain idle and penned up in his stockade. On the 12th of January, he led a command out of the post and toward the end of the day captured one Indian. This prisoner was from the Peace River encampment and provided Belton with some information he hitherto had not possessed. The Indian informed the captain that there had been an additional battle fought between the Miccosukees and the militia on the Alachua prairie (Paynes' Prairie) and that the whites had fled the field [which was substantially correct]. He also opined that another engagement had taken place on the Santa Fe River but offered no specifics. The same prisoner also

declared that the Miccosukees were supposed to have attacked Fort Brooke the previous evening, but did not. Belton then informed Roger Jones, adjutant general of the army, that he was affixing bayonets to poles stuck in the ground and covering them with twigs and leaves in the hopes of breaking up any direct assault on the fort.¹⁷ Belton was taking no chances and doing the best job possible under trying circumstances.

Over in Havana harbor, Commander A. J. Dallas also heard the news. As commander of the United States West Indies Squadron he had the responsibility to take charge of any demands made upon him for the defense of the country. He immediately went into action. After ordering all the marines he could spare from the fleet to Tampa Bay, and a detachment of seamen from the fleet to look after the light house at Cape Florida, he headed toward Key West in his flagship, the *Constellation*.¹⁸ By the 17th of January the marines were on the way to Fort Brooke where they would assist the army and the Territory of Florida until August of 1836.¹⁹ The immediate need was not just for the fleet vessels of the squadron but also shallow draught vessels of the Revenue Service to reach closer to land and penetrate up Florida's shallow waterways. At the behest of Governor Eaton and Territorial Delegate Joseph White, the Treasury Department was prevailed upon to order its valuable cutters to aid in the military effort. The cutters *Dexter*, *Washington* and *Dallas* were soon doing yeoman's service and providing much needed relief to coastal inhabitants and the army.²⁰ Again, one of the missions of the cutters was to intercept any trade between the Spanish fishermen, Cuba and the Indians.²¹ Belton was much appreciative of the sending of the marines and the arrival of the cutters because he had discovered a plan to attack the fort by the combined forces of Micanopy, Osceola, and Little Cloud. The arrival of the marines may have been the deciding factor in why this attack did not materialize.²²

Governor Eaton was also seeking reinforcements for the beleaguered station and had even suggested that the army begin a campaign from Tampa moving down the western side of the peninsula. At the same time he offered the concept of sending troops to Charlotte Harbor and rescuing the inhabitants there, and then sending an

additional force up the Peace or Myacca Rivers in a sort of pincer movement to cut off the Indians in that area. In addition to the inhabitants of the fisheries in Charlotte Harbor, there was also a customs collector, Dr. Crews, and his family stationed there. Crews had already been a few years on the job at the time of the outbreak and knew most of the local Indian and Spanish fishermen. So far removed from any type of military force, he was in immediate danger and Charlotte Harbor was more isolated than Tampa Bay. It was thought that Eaton's suggested plan of operations would crush the Indians on the west coast and save the inhabitants and collector at the same time.²³

The arrival of the marines under Lieutenant N.S. Waldron was one of the more important events in forestalling an attack by the Seminoles and their allies. With detachments from the *Constellation* and the *St. Louis*, it was an obvious signal that other troops were on the way. Arriving aboard the *Vandalia* and the other transports, this force greatly augmented the numbers visible to spies. The *Vandalia* remained in the harbor, too, which added an imposing spectacle for the attackers to contemplate.²⁴ With the almost daily arrival of supplies from the numerous transports the Seminole leadership was quick to realize that other troops and ships would soon be in the area. The obvious build up of men and materiel could only mean one thing to this enlightened group, it was time to rethink their strategy.

The obvious landing of the forces of General Edmund P. Gaines at Fort Brooke probably signified the end of any real danger to the fort and nearby settlers. However, his landing almost did away with the post! In a letter to Captain Thomas Webb, commander of the *Vandalia*, Gaines outlined his immediate plans. In this letter of February 10, 1836, Gaines proposed using the marines and crews of the navy to transfer the men, inhabitants and Indians from the post to the empty transport ships in the harbor for better security. He asked the captain if he would allow this action to take place under the protective guns of his proud ship. Gaines was contemplating using the entire garrison force, including the marines, to go to the relief of the forces at Fort Drane (Clinch's partially fortified plantation home in northern Marion County).²⁵ Gaines was still thinking of

abandoning the post on the 13th of February when Captain Webb notified Dallas of the proposal. With the arrival of the Louisiana Volunteers under General Persifor Smith, the need for the garrison troops was lessened and it may be presumed that this arrival saved the fort for the time being.²⁶

As word of the Seminole attacks in Florida reached the rest of the nation, the people of the neighboring and other southern states began to volunteer for service in Florida. These fresh troops were under few illusions as to the nature of the enemy. In its January 29, 1836 edition, the prominent *National Intelligencer* noted the tenacity of the Seminoles and their allies: "The Indians themselves, heretofore a conquered people, and from whose energy no danger was apprehended, have been profiting from the false security of the whites. Gaining experience from past defeats, and putting into exercise their whole skill and resources, have on a sudden started up a courageous and determined host." The paper continued in noting the tactics of the Seminoles: "Nor have these rude sons of the forest displayed any want of skill or foresight; on the contrary, they have manifested a wary dissimulation, celerity of movement, courage in attacking and a skill in retreating, subversive of all our military plans."²⁷ This wily enemy of white civilization lay in wait for the volunteers from South Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia and the District of Columbia. The nation was also getting ready to send in one of its finest generals, Winfield Scott, a true hero of the War of 1812.

Gaines' force soon left Tampa Bay and headed toward the Withlacoochee where it would meet with great difficulty and be rescued by the very forces it had come to relieve. At the same time, General Winfield Scott was amassing a large force of regulars and volunteers for a push from the eastern portion of the Territory in an elaborate plan to entrap the Seminoles in a three-pronged pincer movement. In early March, Colonel William Lindsay, Second Artillery, arrived in camp and proceeded to organize for the coming campaign. Sent by Scott to move his troops, the marines and a large contingent of Alabama volunteers northward toward the Cove of the Withlacoochee, Lindsay had difficulty from the beginning. By the 13th of March, the column had begun to move out toward the final staging

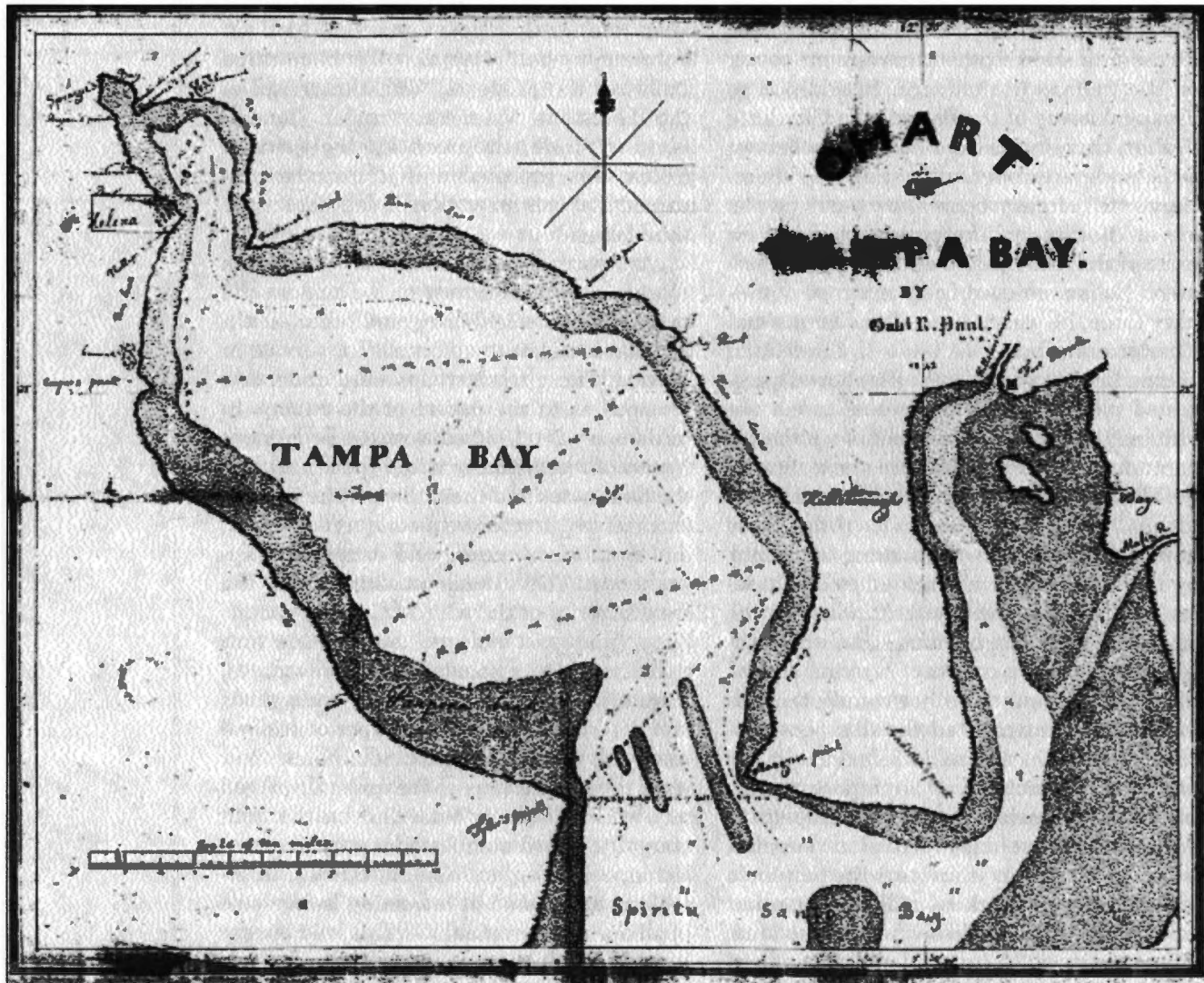


Chart of Tampa showing Fort Brooke at the mouth of the Hillsborough River in the top right. (Courtesy of the National Archives Microfilm Collection.)

area, Chocachatti (near modern Brooksville). On the way, Lindsay decided to construct a post closer to their line of march and ordered the building of Fort Alabama (later the site of Fort Foster). Arriving too late, and wasting time and energy firing guns and scouting the area, the force never made its rendezvous and turned around and headed back to Tampa on the 31st of March. They fought one major skirmish along the way, but accomplished very little except an almost continual quarreling among the volunteers and Colonel Lindsay. This was indicative of what would happen to other grand plans during this war.²⁸

By mid-March 1836, the forces of the United States Army and Navy were working to expand their knowledge of the area and to send out several reconnaissance missions. One of the earliest was led by U.S. Navy Lieutenant Levin M. Powell, who led a

detachment of twenty-five men to the shores of the Manatee River. The mission discovered no Indians at the alleged camp, but did see signs of recent activity including a large number of foot prints and cattle tracks. All seemed headed toward the area of Sarasota Bay or further south.²⁹ By the end of the month, the command at Tampa Bay was confident enough to send Lieutenant Powell with a force from the *Vandalia* northward to the Anclote River after reexamining the Manatee River to the head of boat navigation. Most of the islands between the Manatee River and the Anclote River were explored for recent signs, but, again, they found nothing. Powell attributed the lack of signs on the Anclote Islands to their distance from the mainland, which made them difficult to access.³⁰ The Seminoles and their allies had apparently fled inland to await their next battle.

Charlotte Harbor was examined at the end of March by the U. S. Revenue cutter *Washington*, under the command of Captain Ezekiel Jones. The command fell in with a number of Indians camped at the mouth of the Myacca River. About twenty-two Indians were seen in one body by the boat under Lieutenant Smith and numerous fires were seen in the distance. The two guides, both from Bunce's fishing ranchos, proceeded ahead of the main body of men and met with three of the "hostile" party. They soon recognized each other and entered into a parley. The two intrepid guides could not, however, ascertain the numbers or size of the other encampments without giving themselves away as enemy spies.³¹ On April 2nd, Lieutenant Powell left the *Vandalia* and proceeded to some of the islands in Charlotte Harbor. Here Powell, "found the inhabitants flying in every direction to escape the fury of the Indians." Upon examination of the collector's house, he found it burnt to the ground and no sign of Dr. Crews or his family. Sailing Master Stephen C. Rowan was then dispatched to the nearest mainland and came upon some of those responsible for the destruction. Rowan immediately attacked this band and reported killing two and taking one captive. The others escaped into the nearby woods where Rowan's small force dared not go.³² The report filed by Lieutenant Powell indicates that the inhabitants of "Josepa" Island were those he helped to rescue from the clutches of Wy-ho-kee and his band.³³

Captain M.P. Mix of the U.S.S. *Concord* wrote on the 30th of April that there were still some inhabitants left at Charlotte Harbor and that little protection could be offered them as the closest units were thirty miles away. He also wrote to A.J. Dallas that: "The Indians are assembling in all directions with a determination, as they threaten, to destroy all of the fisheries in the Bay and to burn the Transports at anchor in Hillsboro Harbor, or such of them as may remain after the departure of the volunteers." Mix was concerned that the troop strength and the condition of the stockade made it possible, in his opinion, for the Indians to succeed. Mix also noted that General Scott had requested that the *Concord* remain at anchor in the harbor and that Lieutenant Waldron's marines also stay aboard. He declared that a "state of anxiety" existed at Tampa Bay for want of

knowledge of the next moves by the Seminoles and their allies. Such a state of anxiety was probably unfounded but it is very understandable given the successes of the Indians in resisting the United States' best generalship.

The high tensions at Tampa Bay were likely to be increased as the news from two other borders reached the area. In Texas, the revolution for independence was drawing much of the national press interest and there was daily discussion as to the role of the United States in that conflict. Many were in favor of sending regular troops into the foray and committing the navy to a full time blockade of Mexico. Regular voyages were undertaken by the navy to gather information and keep a watchful eye on the developments there. Most of these sailings came from the West Indies Squadron, thus drawing away needed naval strength from the Florida coasts. In the north, the revolt in Upper Canada also drew away some of the military attention and forces to guard against any problems arising there. This further depleted the military strength available to fight the Seminoles in Florida. As the total military might of the United States numbered less than ten thousand men at this time, any venture away from the center of action had possible dire consequences.

Even after the scoutings of the Manatee River by the forces under Lieutenant Powell, rumors still persisted about a large force of "Indian negroes" on that waterway. According to the *St. Augustine Florida Herald* for April 23, 1836: "Three days ago two Indian negroes were taken - from one of whom information was obtained of a negro fort on the Manatee River, about 15 miles south of Tampa Bay. Gen. Eustis had taken up the line of march to attack. It was not known how many negroes are in the fort, but the negro stated there was a large number." Such gossip spread among the territorial newspapers like a wild fire and added greatly to the anxieties of the population.

In mid-April, General Persifor Smith of the Louisiana Volunteers and Captain Ross of the U. S. Marines came on board the *Dallas* to discuss the coming short campaign up the Myacca River, where the enemy had been previously reported. From April 12th to April 17th the men from the *Vandalia*, *Dallas* and other smaller vessels prepared for their adventure. For a while there was some hope that the enemy would be found

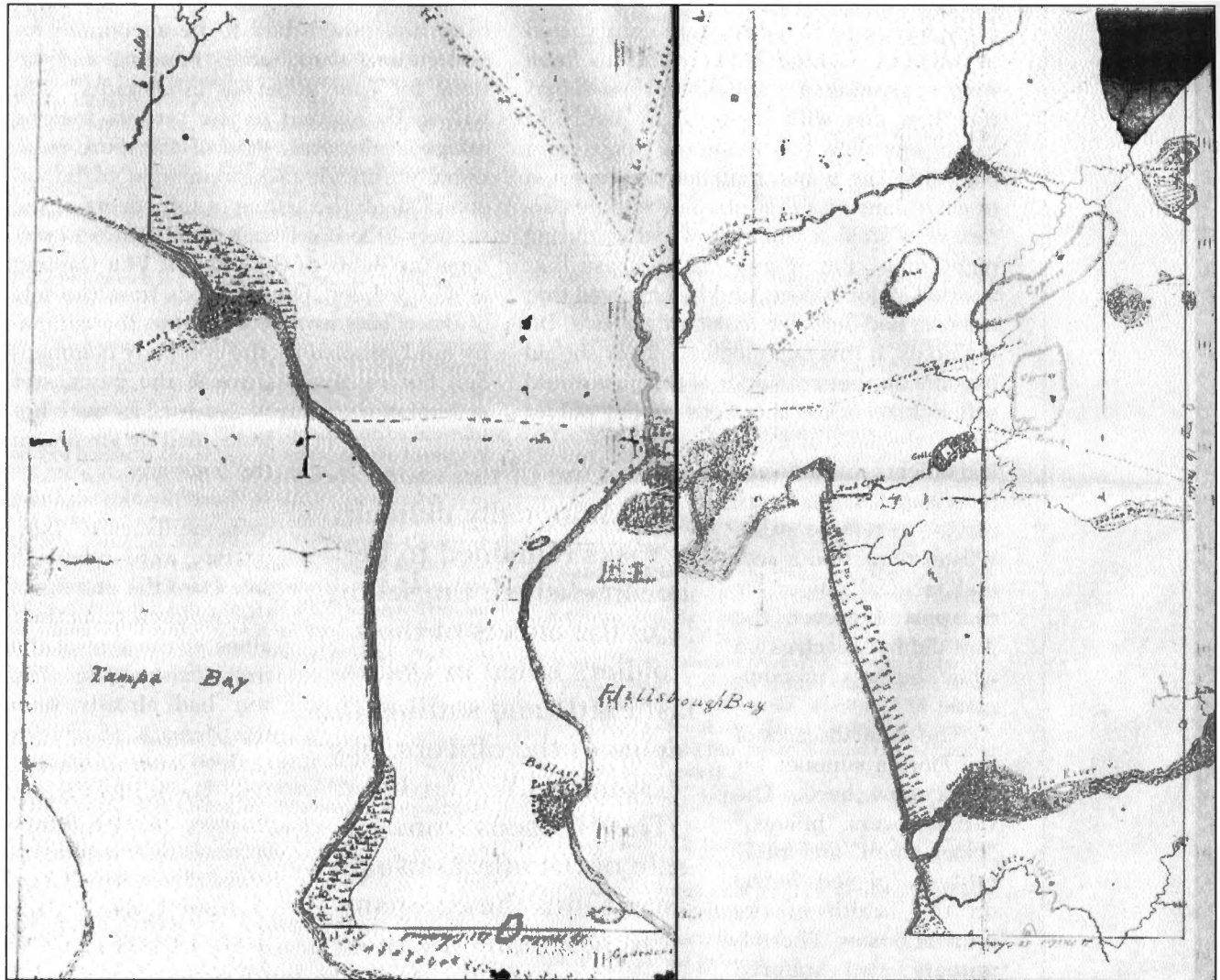
but after the troops' departure on the 18th of April, little could be expected. Dr. Crews' body, and that of his assistant, had been found and it was presumed that most of those responsible had already left the area. This was confirmed when General Smith and his forces returned with nothing much to show for their extended efforts. According to the *Florida Herald* for May 12, 1836, "... there seems to be an opinion that the Indian captured by Lieut. Powell committed the outrage on Dr. Crews, as he was employed in the boat of Dr. C. and was heard to make threats to that effect previously."³⁴

By the end of April Fort Brooke was beginning to take on a familiar appearance. According to one writer, stationed at "Shelton Camp, (16 miles from Tampa Bay)," the fort was a breath of fresh air: "Tampa is a beautiful place, with orange and pride of India trees in blossom, the sight of which was reviving to us thirsty travelers in the desert. The air acted on my lungs like exhilarating gas."³⁵ John Erwin of the Tennessee volunteers also observed the fort: "Fort Brooke situated on Tampa Bay was a military post of considerable importance as it was situated within the hollow of a curve in the bay it was three parts out of the four surrounded by water, its watch towers and sentinel could be seen a mile before reaching it, our camp was one mile north of the fort." Erwin also raved about the abundance of oysters nearby which he claimed made his men "better and fatter immediately."³⁶ These observations differ significantly from those recorded by earlier visitors prior to the change in location. The old fort, at the time of the earliest expeditions against the Seminoles, was described by W.F. Rowles, surgeon for the Creek Volunteers. Writing in the *Southron* magazine in 1841, the doctor recalled: "The appearance of Fort Brooke during the stay of the Creeks was singularly animating. The Barracks and store houses are built facing the bay and the river Hillsboro, and present long rows of low combustible shanties, some of them white-washed and neatly paled in with old staves of barrels, tierces, &c. It was amusing," he continued, "to see the taste and ingenuity of our officers exerted in such a place, with such means, to make their quarters comfortable. The post was guarded by a circle of sentinels. The underbrush cut down for some rods towards the forest and beyond the Hillsboro." He too noted the watch tow-

ers and added that many of the tents were lining the old streets among the orange trees. Numerous cannon were to be seen pointing "ominously toward all the approaches."³⁷ Alexander B. Meek noted in his journal the existence of the famed Live Oak trees and the numerous orange trees on the grounds. He compared it favorably to "an ornamental college green" and declared the post impregnable against any possible Indian attack.³⁸ It should be remembered that most of the small settlement had been destroyed to create an open field of fire for the garrison. The settlement contained about thirty or forty families, all of whom were considered quite poor.³⁹

The beginning of May brought on sickness and it was reported that Fort Brooke was no exception. According to the *National Intelligencer* for May 6, 1836, "There was 400 sick at Tampa Bay, and the climate was getting worse and worse for the Army." This report came on the heels of the Battle of Thonotosassa. Here the forces sent back to Fort Alabama to remove materiel and equipment were fired upon by the Seminoles while attempting to cross Thonotosassa Creek. It was the hardest fighting any of General Scott's forces faced in their time in Florida. Members of the Fourth Infantry and the Second Artillery were joined by the Alabama Volunteers under Colonel William Chisolm in a very spirited battle in which two whites were killed and twenty-five wounded (the majority of them from the volunteer ranks). The loss to the Seminoles and their allies is unknown. The fight lasted about an hour and ended with a charge with fixed bayonets by the regulars and volunteers. The battle also featured the use of cannon to some effect, an unusual occurrence in this war. The Indians had chosen their position well. It was on a curve in the creek lined with dense hammocks. The first fire, as is common in such battles, caused the most damage to the U.S. forces. The men then retired to Fort Brooke to recoup and refurbish themselves.⁴⁰

May of 1836 not only signaled the onset of the "rainy season," but it also saw the beginning of the agitation to remove the marines back to Pensacola and other naval assignments. Major Henry Wilson, then commanding the fort, refused to release Waldron's marine detachment for other duties. He felt strongly that the security of the post would be compromised if the



Map of Tampa and Hillsborough Bay, showing Fort Brooke in the center at the mouth of the Hillsborough River. (Courtesy of the National Archives Microfilm Collection.)

marines left at this juncture. Captain Mix, of the *Concord*, disagreed with this assessment. Mix noted that there was a relative lull in activity for the marines and that much of their time was spent guarding William Bunce's rancho at the mouth of the bay. Wilson was waiting for either reinforcements or replacements for Lieutenant Waldron's valuable force. Until such time as either of these alternatives arrived, the major was not about to release the marines. [They did not leave until August of 1836.]⁴¹

One of the more humanitarian gestures found in this period of activity involved the removal of the families around Sarasota Bay, known locally as the Caldes Rancho. On May 8th, Lieutenant Charles P. Childs of the revenue cutter *Washington* was ordered to sail to Sarasota Bay and confer with "Old Caldes" or his son. He was to convey to them the danger to which they were ex-

posed and advise them to move to either Tampa or to Bunce's Rancho were they could be afforded protection. The settlers were not eager to leave their homes and were afraid that the army would separate the families because many of the wives were Indian. Many residents of the settlement had already departed when Childs arrived; he did, however, observe about twenty individuals living there at that time. All were busy loading canoes, which were filled to capacity, and were riding low in the water. The only thing preventing the final departure was the weather.⁴²

Early June found the army clearing out the ever growing shrubs and weeds from the open area. Making the post more inhabitable by larger numbers was also on the agenda of the officers. Gardens which had been neglected had to be tended and some of the early crops harvested. In addition,

three advanced redoubts were constructed at this time. Colonel Lindsay and his force were ordered on to Mobile, and his departure was met with approval by many in camp, especially the remaining troops from Alabama. The only Indian activity reported in early June was that of a few raiding parties who stole a number of cattle during night raids. But it was the sickness that worried Major Wilson, and he observed that the post had only one assistant surgeon, Dr. Reynolds. If this one medical officer should become ill, the remainder of the post would suffer. Like other shortages in the officer corps, the lack of medical officers was a severe handicap for the army serving in remote areas. Wilson requested a second medical officer for the post, however, the post did not receive one while he was in command.⁴³

The usual diseases of the Florida summer hit the troops hard. The various fevers, "bilious," "black vomit" and intermittent, played havoc on the health of the army and navy. The volunteers also suffered from the climate. Colonel John Warren commanded the Second Military District for the Florida Militia and reported, on June 9th, an outbreak of the "measles" among his troops.⁴⁴ This is no longer a serious disease in this day and age, but it was deadly to the frontier settlers and military personnel. Mumps, too, made their appearance in Florida in the 1830s but did not reach Tampa Bay. The army, because of the fevers' appearance in the summer months and the deadly affects it had on the troops, seldom campaigned in the "rainy season" in Florida. Not until Colonel William J. Worth took command in 1841 did Florida see a summer campaign.

The rainy season did bring on new administrative tasks for the commander and garrison at Fort Brooke. Money for the emigration of the Seminoles of Black Dirt's

band and others had to be accounted for and rations distributed. Funding and rations for the "suffering inhabitants" also had to be allotted to the settlers seeking refuge in the area. One of the more emotionally difficult tasks remained to be accomplished; the selling of the effects of the soldiers killed in Dade's last battle and settling the debts of the officers, like Captain G.W. Gardiner. The proceeds from the sale of the effects usually went into the company fund handled by the company commander, but receipted through the paymaster general of the army.⁴⁵ Such tasks were not welcomed by anyone in the company.

Fort Brooke and the settlements near Tampa Bay were relatively safe from the attacks of the Seminoles and their allies at the end of the first campaigns. The war had already seen the defeats of armies under Generals Clinch, Call, Gaines and Scott. Waiting in the future were the terms of Generals Thomas Jesup, Zachary Taylor, Walker Armistead and William Jenkins Worth. Six more years of guerrilla warfare remained ahead for the army, navy, marines and volunteers. The Second Seminole War was to be the longest continually fought and most expensive of all of the wars the United States fought with its Native Americans.

This war brought glory to none of the political or military leaders and played a role in the increasing agitation against slavery, just then beginning in the northern portion of the nation. The panic and terror in the Tampa Bay area during the first six months of the war subsided into a near routine of shuffling the troops into and out of the territory and seeing to the emigration of most of the Seminoles, blacks and Miccosukees to the west. Those who survived those first months of the war never forgot them. It was a time to try the souls of all men, women and children of both sides.

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ENDNOTES

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17. LLAG. Roll No. 117. Letter of January 14, 1836, Belton to Jones.
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40. Mahon, "Journal of A. B. Meek," 316-317. Also see LLAG. Roll 127. Letter of May 2, 1836, Colonel William Lindsay to General Winfield Scott.
41. LLAG. Roll 134. Letters of May 8 through 30, mostly those between Mix and Wilson.
42. Captains' Letters. Roll 217. Letters of May 11 and 12, E. Jones to C. Childs and Childs to Jones.
43. LLAG. Roll 133. Letter of June 1, 1836, Wilson to Roger Jones. When Dr. Reynolds did finally receive a leave of absence, he was replaced by Dr. Lee, another assistant surgeon. See Wilson's letter of June 7, 1836 on Roll No. 134.
44. LLAG. Roll 122. Letter of June 9, 1836, Warren to Major J. F. Heileman.
45. LLAG. Roll 128. Letter of July 6, 1836, James Morgan to Roger Jones; and LLAG. Roll 131. Letter of June 25, 1836, William Landers to J. B. Benjamin. (The latter gives an itemized account of Captain Gardiner's debts.)