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"ALL HIS WANTS SHOULD BE PROMPTLY SUPPLIED":

PERSIFOR F. SMITH AND THE CALOOSAHATCHEE RIVER

CAMPAIGN OF 1837-38

By Joe Knetsch



Persifor F. Smith in 1848

Simon Gratz Autograph Collection, Courtesy
Historical Society of Pennsylvania Philadelphia

Writing on December 28, 1837, the "Maligned General," Thomas Sidney Jesup ordered Major I. B. Brant, Quarter Master at Tampa to take every measure possible to keep the Louisiana Volunteers in good supply. In his order he noted:

General Smith reports that he will have eight hundred men in the field, and will not have transportation for more than half his force. His operations, from his

proximity to Holatoochee, will be more important upon the results of the campaign, perhaps, than those of any other commander: All his wants should be promptly supplied. The failure of his column from want of transportation, or from any other cause, would be most disastrous, and might lead to the failure of every other column.¹

In Jesup's plan of operation, access to the west coast of Florida and the area approaching the Big Cypress Swamp had to be denied to the Seminoles and their allies. It was the job of Persifor Smith and his command to stop the Indians from reaching these destinations. It was a crucial role in the complex operations of the United States Army against the Indians of Florida and one that Smith was quite capable of performing to Jesup's satisfaction.

Persifor Frazer Smith was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1798 and later graduated from the College of New Jersey (now Princeton) in 1815. He took up the study of the law while at school and moved to New Orleans in 1819. Smith quickly made his mark in the rough and tumble town and rose rapidly in its politics.² He married into the family of the prominent Francois Bureau, taking Bureau's daughter, Francis Jeanette, as his wife. He also became very active in local militia matters, rising to command of a battalion in a few short years. In 1834, his strong political ally, Edward

Douglass White, became Louisiana's first Whig governor and appointed Smith to the post of adjutant general in the following year. With his political and military connections in place, Smith soon received the news of the outbreak of hostilities in Florida and was in a position to come to the aid of the Territory when General Edmund P. Gaines requested such in early 1836.³

Dr. Canter Brown, Jr. has recently shown the importance of Smith's role in the 1836 campaign. Brown has also noted the difficulties that Smith encountered in raising the first force of volunteers, including getting White to help gather the funds for the thirty dollar per man bounty. The internal politics of this command, well documented by Brown, show the tense situation in New Orleans. These included having White turn down a request by his rival for governor, Major General John B. Dawson, to lead the volunteers in Florida. The governor got around the seniority of Dawson by politely noting that the call for troops from General Gaines was for a colonel's command, eight companies, and as Dawson insisted upon maintaining his rank, the request was denied in favor of Smith. Soon thereafter, Persifer Smith led the volunteers upon the perilous voyage to Tampa to begin their service.⁴

Smith's troops served with valor and distinction during their tenure in Florida. They suffered many of the hardships of army life on the frontier, including bad food, mosquitoes, worn out clothes and shoes and impossible country for campaigning. Their Peace River expedition was difficult and without many positive results, except the exploration of about fifty-two miles of new territory, before the food ran out and they were forced to return to Charlotte Harbor. The volunteers returned to Fort Brooke on April 25, 1836, where they were greeted by

orders for their departure back to Louisiana, thus ending their brief, but difficult service.⁵

The performance of the Louisiana volunteers under Smith's leadership was outstanding and widely recognized in the ranks of the regular army, something highly unusual in a war where volunteers were normally considered second-rate soldiers at best. In late July of the following year, Smith, again, offered to lead Louisiana's volunteers into the field in Florida. This time the command of the regular army was in the hands of Major General Jesup, someone who knew about Smith's capabilities. As he noted to Secretary of War Joel Poinsett:

Sir: I enclose a copy of a letter received today from General P. E. Smith, of Louisiana. The general commanded a regiment under General Scott and General Gaines in the first campaign, not only with credit, but with distinction. If he could bring a regiment of infantry into the field- and I have no doubt of his ability to do so- the service would be greatly benefitted. By adding to his regiment a small body of regular troops he would be able, with naval co-operation, to commence his operations at Charlotte Harbor, or further south, and destroy or drive out the parties of Indians in the southern portion of the peninsula. . . . I consider it of the utmost importance that a regiment should be obtained from Louisiana, and of equal importance that General Smith should command it.⁶

But, this time, the terms of the service would have to be different. As Smith noted in his letter of July 30, 1837, to Jesup: "The regiment I commanded in 1836 left the service of the United States highly and justly discontented with it. They had served the whole time faithfully; indeed, had passed it

nearly two weeks, had been the whole time in constant activity, and when they arrived here, in rags and poverty, found not the slightest preparation on the part of the government to pay them off, notwithstanding the most positive orders on the part of General Scott." The governor of the state, Smith reminded Jesup, actually had to borrow money to pay the command. The army paymaster, who was supposed to have reimbursed the men for expenses, was, in one last bit of frustration for the volunteers, remanded to Alabama and was not on hand in time to perform the required duty. Yet, Smith stated hopefully, a year had passed since this ugly incident and it was probable that he could raise the troops Jesup needed for his Florida campaign.⁷

Two of the major reasons for Jesup's enthusiasm for Smith's Louisiana volunteers were their proximity, compared to Kentucky or Tennessee, and the fact they came from an area with a more similar climate.⁸ Another factor which weighed heavily upon the reasoning of Joel Poinsett was the very cumbersome arrangements necessary to properly staff a volunteer unit, especially under an inexperienced commanding officer. Smith, having proven himself an able and willing administrator, would be able to avoid most of the petty grievances frequently voiced by elected volunteer leaders. Also, the expense and time spent in gathering a new force would be greatly reduced with Smith in charge of the operation.⁹ Taken altogether, Persifor Smith was the ideal candidate to lead a major volunteer force when combined with regular troops against the stubborn foe.

After looking into business affairs in Philadelphia during most of September, Smith returned to New Orleans where his junior officers were already raising the required force.¹⁰ By November 2, 1837,

Persifor Smith and the Louisiana volunteers had left New Orleans, bound for Tampa. There he was supposed to meet with five companies of Philadelphia troops and units of the 2nd Infantry to outfit and get supplies for their trip to the Caloosahatchee country. The force from Louisiana was about two hundred and fifty men.¹¹ The Philadelphia force raised was to be about five hundred men, which, as noted earlier, meant that when Smith was ready to embark from Tampa, his force would number about eight hundred men.¹²

Smith's force was to be but one element in a much larger, more elaborate plan than any yet attempted in Florida. Jesup's plan was very involved and set into motion as many as nine different columns at one time.¹³ The main thrust of the plan, however, involved four columns, each entering the southern end of the peninsula from different routes, driving the Indians into the center of the Everglades and isolating them from any chance for outside assistance. Through constant campaigning and pressure on the food supply, Jesup hoped to end the war by March or April of 1838. To do this effectively would require that his forces would be in the field by no later than October. This hope was not to be. As the master planner stated:

I had desired to commence operations on the 1st of October, because, at that time, the St. John is navigable a greater distance than at a later period; and I could avail myself of more than two months of the services of the Florida troops, whose term of service expired in December. The regular troops, however, did not begin to arrive until near the last of October, and they continued to come in until December. The principal volunteer force arrived about the 1st of December.¹⁴

The late arrivals of the various forces meant that the campaign started later in the dry season and would have to end before the beginning of the rainy season. The tatter meant sickness, death and impossible conditions for a campaign against the Indians.

While Jesup, himself, led forces up the St. Johns River from Fort Mellon, General Joseph Hernandez and his Florida militia would scour the area between the St. Johns and the Atlantic coast. As the distance between these two forces narrowed, the Alabama and Tennessee volunteers and others joined with Hernandez's column and attempted to push the enemy further into the Everglades and deny them the coast. The movement of these troops led to the foundation of a number of establishments, namely Forts Pierce, Jupiter, Lauderdale, Christmas and Bankhead on Key Biscayne.¹⁵

Just as important to the overall success of the campaign were the western columns, outfitted and embarking from Tampa. As Jesup described the first of these: "General Taylor was directed to proceed from Tampa Bay, open a road in nearly an eastern direction into the heart of the country, establish a post on the head of Peas creek, another on the Kissimmee, and attack the enemy in that quarter."¹⁶ This he did with his actions culminating in the Battle of Lake Okeechobee, fought on Christmas Day 1837. The other column, was to rendezvous in Tampa and enter the field through the Caloosahatchee River. The operations of this column covered the whole country from Fisheating Creek, which enters Lake Okeechobee from the west, to Cape Sable, where forces under Colonel Thomas Lawson established Fort Poinsett. This column's activities resulted in the establishment of Forts Deynaud, Center and Keais

(pronounced Keys) and the eventual capture of two hundred and forty three prisoners.¹⁷

Each of these two columns had specific assignments. Smith's was to deny the enemy access to the coast and the Big Cypress Swamp. The former because of the potential for gaining arms and supplies and the latter because it was known to be an impossible area in which to successfully campaign. Also of importance, was the need to keep the Indians south of the settlements and away from their brethren further north. Taylor's troops were to swing around to the east of the big lake and, after establishing Forts Basinger and McCrea, close off any communication with the north via the Kissimmee River valley or the reaches of the upper St. Johns River. With the constant movement of troops from the coastal forts, like Fort Lauderdale, Poinsett, Dallas and Jupiter, pushing inland, attacking the Seminoles and their allies on the "islands" of the Everglades and denying the enemy the "coontie" grounds in southeastern Florida, Jesup felt confident that his campaign would have very positive results in ending the war.¹⁸ The total force at his command, by January of 1838, was 8,993; 4,637 regulars, 4,078 volunteers, 109 seamen and 178 Indians.¹⁹ All of this depended not only on the valor of the troops, but the reliable delivery of supplies and arms.

The supply problem for such a large undertaking as this campaign was enormous. The proper boats had to be ordered from Philadelphia and New York; specially designed steamboats had to be constructed to accommodate Florida's shallow waters; pontooniers had to be organized and assembled; boatbuilders had to be on hand for special needs; great quantities of forage and food had to be advanced to the fighting stations; articles for the construction of the frontier fortifications had to be obtained and

forwarded to the troops; necessary animals had to be procured for the mounted troops and wagon-masters; huge numbers of rations had to be prepared in advance; medical supplies had to be assembled, along with obtaining the medical officers, regular and volunteer, to use them properly; tents, shovels, canteens, belts, caps, etc. all had to be ordered, assembled, shipped and forwarded to the front lines of four major columns. The tasks were daunting and complicated in the extreme. In a lengthy memorandum to Major Collins, Jesup listed the articles needed for an "advanced Depot": 400 blankets for packsaddles, 6 crosscut saws, 200 pounds of spikes, 2,000 horseshoes with nails, 400 cast steel axes, 20 froes, 20 Broad axes, 3 complete sets of blacksmith's tools, 20 coils of rope for packing, 800 packing bags, 2,000 pounds of iron, pitch for boats. Many other "essential" items that the average "advanced Depot" would need to supply the troops in the field could be listed from the above memorandum, however, those materials listed will suffice for demonstration purposes.²⁰ The logistics of this campaign in the swamps of Florida were difficult, complex and, in the end, highly frustrating to the clever general.

As noted earlier, Smith's departure from Tampa was delayed by the fact that he had little in the way of transportation to get him and his command to southern Florida. Jesup, whose office as Quartermaster General of the Army was responsible for getting supplies to the armies in the field, fumed at the constant delays his command suffered during the early part of the campaign. The commander's correspondence throughout this campaign is filled with urgent requests for supplies: "Sir, Send forward to this place [Fort Lane] without delay, the boats which I directed some time ago. I mean barges or flats of the second size. The movement of

the troops will be greatly embarrassed if they should not arrive, had they been sent up when I requested them they could have been sent forward with forage yesterday."²¹ Basic necessities, such as shoes and other articles of clothing were often lacking or not forwarded to the frontier soon enough. In one notable incident, the lack of shoes greatly delayed the posting of nearly four hundred troops because the saw palmetto had disabled some of the men and the General refused to move them further south until the articles needed were supplied.²² Always aware of the men's morale, Jesup found it intolerable that other consumables were lacking or of such poor quality that they were unfit for use, even by the regular troops: "Greatly to my surprise," he wrote on December 29, 1837; "on my return to this post yesterday, I ascertained that there was neither sugar or coffee here for the troops. This is a most unpardonable neglect of some officer of the Commissarys Department. Report, without delay, the cause of this neglect.... The Beans sent to the Army are utterly unfit for issue, if you send any of them send those that are fresh."²³ Delays in troop movement, improperly packaged supplies, not enough equipment for the forward posts, lack of transportation facilities and a myriad amount of other factors caused Jesup great worry and may be one of the more important reasons in the failure of the campaign.

Jesup did, however, have some ability to adapt and adjust, as when he advised Colonel Taylor to improvise in constructing boats needed to explore the Kissimmee chain of lakes. As Jesup advised:

I am induced [illegible word] from information received from the Indians and others, that the chain of Lakes extending from Tohopkaliga to Pahai Okee may be navigated by macinac

boats, if not by those of larger size. Should we find this to be the fact, supplies may be taken from Tampa to the eastern side of the Okee chobee. (It is doubtful whether wagons or even packhorses can be taken to that point from this side.) I will thank you to cause a reconnaissance of those lakes to be made as far at least as the last named, and if you find them navigable, cause boats to be built, or brought from Tampa, to be employed as transport on them. Boat builders might be taken out to Fort Gardner and the boats constructed there. Canoes of Cypress enlarged by sawing them through the center from end to end, and widening them by inserting timber between the parts, in the manner of the fishing boats used on Our bay, would be well adapted to the service we shall have to perform. If the Lakes are navigable, and boats can either be built on them or brought from Tampa, the war may be certainly closed this winter.²⁴

The innovation to be noted is, "in the manner of the fishing boats used on Our bay." Here Jesup is describing the "Chesapeake Bay Log Canoe" which was constructed in just the manner described by the General. Jesup was very familiar with the craft, having been in Washington D.C. for many years. The beauty of this vessel is its great carrying capacity with a light draught of water. By extending the craft outward, as described above, the displacement becomes such that the canoe can navigate in very shallow waters. This, of course, was perfect for the streams and some lakes of the Kissimmee chain and other areas covered by this campaign. Jesup's long career in the army, in numerous frontier assignments and in many important theaters of war, made him aware of the need for such adaption.²⁵

While Jesup was making his way down the east side of the peninsula, Persifor Smith and his force were working their way up the Caloosahatchee River. His mission, as noted above, was to prevent the Indians from attaining refuge in the Big Cypress Swamp or from obtaining supplies from outside along the west coast. Jesup was optimistic about the possibility of ensnaring the enemy in the heart of the Everglades. Writing to Colonel Taylor in early 1838, he noted: "If Colonel Smith can prevent the enemy from passing to the West, or if he can place a few boats on the Okee Chobee, to unite with yours, or prevent the Indians from occupying the Islands and Cypress Swamps to the south of the Lake, I shall entertain no doubt of a sweep."²⁶ On the same day of this letter, January 18, 1838, the General learned of Colonel Smith's capturing Holatoochee and forty of his people, who, along with eighty other prisoners, were sent immediately to Tampa and thence to New Orleans.²⁷ This capture made some national news because it coincided with the surrender of Jumper and his band to Colonel Taylor. Smith's position was reported as "still westward of Col. Taylor."²⁸ To assist Smith and Taylor in holding the Indians in the Everglades, a series of fortifications was established around the lake and along the coasts of Florida. From Smith's forces came the establishment of Fort Center, on Fisheating Creek, Fort Deynaud, on the Caloosahatchee River, Fort Keais, on the northern edge of the Big Cypress Swamp, and Fort Poinsett, on Cape Sable, which was commanded by Colonel Thomas Lawson, best known as the Surgeon General of the Army. In regards to the latter post, Jesup declared: "A post at or near Cape Sable would hold the Indians in Check, and perhaps compel them to retrace their steps."²⁹ The overall strategy of surrounding the Seminoles and their allies in the Everglades, destroying their crops, cutting off all pos-

sible outside supplies and forcing a final confrontation or surrender was well thought out and articulated, however, because of the problems of supplies and the elusiveness of Sam Jones' and other bands, the concept failed in actual application.

Jesup also had to manoeuvre in conjunction with negotiations headed by a delegation of Cherokee Indians, whose presence in Florida was an additional burden on the commander. Yet, though he appears to have had little faith in the results of the negotiations, General Jesup did participate in the attempted diplomacy. As he reported in late 1837, he had met with the Cherokee delegation, arranged a meeting with Micanopy and other Seminole leaders, held a conference where surrenders were agreed to and seems to have acted in good faith with the government's policy. But he had no faith in the Seminole leadership which, he believed, had little or no influence over most of the warring faction.³⁰ Also, he insisted on getting his forces in the desired positions and having the supplies forwarded to them, in case the negotiations failed. In a letter to Secretary of War Poinsett, Jesup stated: "General Hernandez will turn Indian river with his mounted men, and pass the foot and supplies across. I shall not allow his operations, nor those of Colonel Taylor or General Smith, to be checked for a moment by the Seminole councils; and the delay of this column will be more than counterbalanced by the increased efficiency of its means."³¹ After a year of experience and frustration with negotiating with the enemy, the cautious General was not going to be lulled into complacency.

Aside from the capture of Holatoochee and his band and the surrender of Jumper to Taylor, Jesup did not have the war wrapped up as he had planned. Many factors appeared to mitigate against a successful

conclusion in early 1838. In a moment of frustration, he wrote:

Providence seems to have taken the Seminoles under its special protection. I have learnt since I wrote to you, that a vessel loaded with Rice has lately wrecked near New River, and that the Indians had secured a great part of the Cargo, this will give them subsistence for some months to come. ... Act as you may think best for the service; and should approach Colo. Smith's command give him such instructions as from your knowledge of the country and the enemy, you may consider proper, or unite his force with yours if in your opinion any important object can be obtained by it.³²

Indian cattle, too, proved to be something of a problem for the army, in that special attention was given to their capture or purchase. If the wide ranging cattle could be captured, killed or bought, the war would end sooner. The reports given throughout the campaign indicate that there were still substantial numbers of these food animals within procurement distance of the enemy at any time. As the General noted to Colonel Taylor: "It is of the utmost importance that all the Indian Cattle be taken from them, purchase all you can from the Indians and negroes who come in."³³ Keeping supplies with which to carry on the war out of reach of the Indian enemy proved to be a difficult, if not impossible, task for Jesup's forces. The very nature of the fertile Everglades, the free roaming cattle and hogs, the comparative plentitude of game and the occasional ship wreck all worked against the general's scheme of depriving the enemy of supplies.

The plans of the army were also frustrated by the constant barrage of intelligence, most

of it rumor or reports from "escapees" and captives. The frequent references to reports of Indian locations and numbers, all differing from each other, shows how difficult it was to accurately pin-point the enemy's camps. Reports like: "Aligator is on the west side of the Okee Chobee not more than one or two days march from Fort Deynaud, so says an Indian whom I have sent with a message to [illegible, although probably Halotoochee] urging him to go into the Fort."³⁴ Or: "An Indian Negro who came into camp on the evening of the 9th informed me that several small parties of Indians had crossed the Okee Chobee in boats to the south west side, the same place, perhaps, where Captain Munroe destroyed the Canoes."³⁵ Again: "An Indian who went to the head of New River for his family returned last evening, he reports that the Indians, where he left them, were making their way to a Pine Island a few miles from the swamp at the head of the north branch of New River."³⁶ This constant stream of intelligence, though sometimes accurate, was often simple rumor and, maybe, even disinformation, to use the modern term. Good maps, too, were lacking. So uncertain of the exact location of Lake Okeechobee was John Lee Williams, that he did not include this vast inland sea on his famous map of 1837. The army's lack of knowledge in this area was also well known. As Jesup explained to the secretary of war: "... the greater portion of their country was unexplored wilderness, of the interior of which we were as ignorant as of the interior of China. We exhibit, in our present contest, the first instance, perhaps, since the commencement of authentic history, of a nation employing an army to explore a country, (for we can do little more than explore it) or attempting to remove a band of savages from one unexplored wilderness to another."³⁷ The lack of accurate intelligence

was another major factor in the final failure of Jesup's intricate plan of operation.

Colonel Smith's operations during this campaign were closely followed in the press and in the correspondence of his commander. On March 1, 1838, for example, Smith's forces were reported to have surrounded "a large body of Indians, men, women, and children," on an island in the Everglades and that, taken in conjunction with the surrender of a large force of Indians and Negroes at Tampa and General Nelson's success in central Florida, would soon lead to the close of the war.³⁸ On March 8, 1838, Smith was informed of the approval of his plan to head further south into the Everglades to campaign against the enemy supposed to be in that region.³⁹ Six days later, Jesup informed Taylor that Smith's medical officer, a Doctor Steincke, had left the command and that the Colonel had no other medical officer under his command. Jesup ordered Taylor to supply one if it were in his power to do so.⁴⁰ In nearly every report of the expedition of Taylor's force reported in the media, Smith's contingent was mentioned, with the exception of the debate over the Battle of Lake Okeechobee, in which Smith's forces did not participate.

In reporting the progress of his campaign, Persifor Smith, stated that he had left Fort Deynaud and moved south on March 7th with a company of Second Dragoons, a battalion of Second Infantry, marines under Captain Dulany and his own Louisiana volunteers, with the exception of one company he had left to garrison Fort Center. On the edge of the Big Cypress Swamp: "I erected on this spot, which is about 35 miles S. by E. from Fort Deynaud a small work in which I placed 20 days rations & one compy of La. Volunteers, naming the work, until the General's pleasure is known, after one of

the officers who fell with Major Dade.[Keais] This point is on the border of the great Cypress Swamp & within miles of the point where I found an Indian trail entering it, when I was here on the 26th Feby. our wagons could not well approach it nearer." His men then took with them five days rations upon their backs and proceeded to enter the swamp. After "incredible labour & fatigue, being all day Knee deep in water and mud & on wet prairies where the slimy surface is still more difficult," he searched for five days trying to locate the enemy. He was rewarded by finding a woman and her child, who then negotiated with the others to come into Fort Keais or Fort Deynaud. Smith then led his men out of the swamp to await results. However, his description of the territory is worth noting to indicate the extreme difficulty of military operations in this region of Florida.

The difficulties of this march through this part of the country are beyond all belief. No doubt the late rains have increased them, but even in the best season, troops must operate without any baggage but what they can carry on their backs, and in case of sickness, wounds or accident such as snake bites, the sufferers must be carried on the men's shoulders, as we were obliged to do in the latter case, a litter could not be carried through some of the hammocks we passed. One prisoner said the large marsh we crossed was considered by the Indians impassable, and in fact we found no trail in that direction. But having never had any guide here we have got to be expert woodsmen. One prisoner was sent home by the route we came, on account of her children and the difficulties of the way.⁴¹

The whole area, the valiant Colonel stated, was under water during the rainy season,

making it impossible for campaigning. As General Jesup observed: "Colonel Smith has had a most arduous service. His operations are a further proof that the Indians can be concentrated by peaceful means only. . . ."42

By April 16, 1838, Colonel Smith's forces had had some relatively successful campaigning under their belts and he could report the gathering of one hundred and seven Indians for transport to Tampa and New Orleans. He noted in his report: "Some come in every day & a party of 25 or 30 are expected to day or tomorrow."⁴³ By May, the number had increased to one hundred and twenty of the "Halvetochin tribe."⁴⁴ Prior to his leaving the area, he was to receive more prisoners, most of whom came into him at Fort Keais and Fort Deynaud. Once assembled, the prisoners were sent, via Peace River to Tampa and thence to New Orleans to await final transfer to the Indian Territory.

Toward the end of March 1838, some of the troops under Smith's command were at the end of their enlistments. This, of course, caused many adjustments in the plans of the high command, including the proposed abandonment of Fort Poinsett, on Cape Sable. Although this proposal was negated quickly, the fact of its planned abandonment gives an indication of how quickly adjustments had to be made because of the wide-spread use of volunteer forces with limited enlistment periods. Smith had to see that all arrangements for their transportation and mustering were in place and carried out. Some of the Philadelphia volunteers wanted to be discharged at Tampa, while others, particularly the Louisiana men, wished to be mustered out at New Orleans. These administrative details took up much time and concentration of the Colonel commanding and relied on the good communications between posts for their

success. Overall, Persifor Smith carried out all phases of command, including those of a bureaucratic nature, with ability and humanity.⁴⁵

By the end of April, 1838, General Jesup was seeing the ultimate end of the Seminole War as something far removed from the actions of his troops. He saw that the Seminoles would never leave Florida unless forced by circumstances and overwhelming white numbers. He proposed that the area of southern Florida be left in Indian hands for the immediate future because the costs of removal, in money and men lost, would be too great. In essence, Jesup anticipated the actual course of events, including the reserving of lands in South Florida for Indian occupation. He even predicted the eventual passage of the Armed Occupation Act of 1842 when he noted: "I think a corps of Rangers should be raised in Florida of about six companies, . . . it should be raised for war, and each man should in addition to his pay and emoluments, be allowed a quarter section of land in receiving an honorable discharge after the termination of the war."⁴⁶ He would later have the opportunity to help provide the provisions needed by the armed colonists.

Persifor Smith's troops had performed their duty well and honorably. Through the rugged terrain of southern Florida, they had trudged diligently and faithfully. No one could have asked for more from a volunteer force. In quoting the *New Orleans Commercial Bulletin*, the *Army and Navy Chronicle* described Smith's return to Louisiana:

The Soldier's Return. — Our fellow citizen, Gen. Smith, after a rugged tour of duty through the swamps and savannahs of Florida, has returned to the bosom of his family, having reached our

city on the night before last. [May 1, 1838] He appears in fine health, though somewhat reduced in flesh, from the fatigues of the campaign. The scene of his military operations was confined to the southern and western territories of Florida, below Charlotte's Harbor, whither he was sent with a detachment of three hundred men in pursuit of a body of Indians. He hemmed in and drove the enemy to the extremity of the Peninsula, till they could fly no farther and were glad at length to sue for peace. After a talk with the chiefs, the whole Indian camp, amounting to two hundred and twelve in number, came in and surrendered themselves as prisoners of war. Having thus finished the campaign and the term of their enlistment having expired, Gen. Smith disbanded his forces and returned home, where he is greeted with the cordial welcome and high commendations which his arduous services rendered to the State so richly merit.⁴⁷

General Jesup had a less glowing account of the exploits of the Louisiana volunteer's contribution, although he noted a much higher figure of Indians taken prisoner: "His operations covered the whole country from that river [Caloosahatchee] south to Cape Sable. The results were one or two skirmishes, in which he lost a few men, probably killed some of the enemy, and took 243 prisoners."⁴⁸

The Jesup campaign of 1837-38 was an elaborately planned affair which deserved better results. However, it was plagued from the very beginning with poor coordination by the Commissary's Office, the almost total non-performance of certain suppliers, poor topographical information, the reliance upon large numbers of limited-service volunteer forces, including Smith's, and an impossible

task of bringing to an end a war against a capable, resourceful and determined foe. Jesup was fortunate in having many able men in his ranks, too, including Smith, Colonel James Bankhead, Colonel Zachary Taylor, General Joseph Hernandez and many others whose ranks were lower, but whose names appear on the pages of history in a more famous conflict of the 1860s.

Smith's career after this second tour of duty in Florida, was one of exemplary service. He served with distinction on the benches of the city court of Lafayette and Jefferson Parish. His service in the Louisiana militia included a term of office as adjutant general during the administration of Andre B. Roman.⁴⁹ Smith's military service in the Mexican War brought him national attention and lasting fame. There, he again served under Zachary Taylor and, also, Winfield Scott, taking an active roll in both Generals' campaigns and winning a brevet to Brigadier General. He was distinguished for his bravery in the Battle of Contreras and at Mexico City. He later served as the military governor of Vera Cruz in 1848. Persifor Smith was promoted to the brevetted rank of Major General in 1849 and given the command of the Division of the Pacific. Later service included commands of the Department of St. Louis and the Department of Utah, where he was put in command of a force preparing to put down the Mormon disturbances. He was given the full rank of Brigadier General in 1856. While preparing to lead his men into Mormon territory, he died on May 17, 1858, at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Such was the man who led the Louisiana volunteers against the Seminoles of Florida from the army based at Fort Brooke, Tampa, Florida in 1837-38. He served us well.

¹ Letters Received by the Office of the Adjutant General (Main Series), Record Group 94, Roll 167, I-J, 1-90, 1838. National Archives Microcopy No. 567. Washington D. C.: National Archives, 1964.

Letter of December 28, 1837. Jesup to Brant. Hereafter LLAG, date of letter and correspondents. The author would like to thank Mr. Rodney Dillon and the Broward County Historical Commission for their assistance in the research for this piece.

² Robert McHenry, ed. *Webster's American Military Biographies* (Springfield, MA, 1978), 400.

³ Canter Brown, Jr. "Persifor E Smith, the Louisiana Volunteers, and Florida's Second Seminole War," *Louisiana History* 34 (Fall 1993), 391-93. The author would like to thank Dr. Brown for a copy of his article and for his informal discussions of Smith's role in Louisiana and Florida.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 393-99.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 407-10. Also see Brown's *Florida's Peace River Frontier* (Orlando, 1991), 44-45.

⁶ House of Representatives Document No. 760, 25th Congress, 2d Session, 1838. In *American State Papers VII: Military Affairs*. (Washington, 1861), 880. Hereafter, ASP, date of letter, correspondents and page number.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 880-81.

⁸ ASP, Letter of September 2, 1837, Poinsett to Jesup, 848

⁹ ASP, Letter of July 25, 1837, Poinsett to Jesup. 811. While not specifically naming Persifor Smith in the letter, Poinsett discussed the nature and pitfalls of using volunteer forces.

¹⁰ ASP, Letter of July 30, 1837, Smith to Jesup, 881.

¹¹ *Army and Navy Chronicle*, Volume V. November 16, 1837, 315.

¹² ASP, Letter of October 7, 1837, Poinsett to Jesup, 852. This letter specifically notes that five hundred men were to be raised in Philadelphia and meet Smith in Tampa. The Secretary also noted here that as other units were formed, he would forward them to Tampa, clearly making this the central point for all forces headed into the interior of Florida from the west coast.

¹³ There is a difference between two of the leading experts on this point. John Mahon, in his history of the war [*History of the Second Seminole War 1835-1842* (Revised Edition) (Gainesville, 1985),

219-220.] notes seven columns, while Jesup's biographer, Chester L. Kieffer, clearly states that there were nine columns in motion. [Kieffer. *Maligned General: The Biography of Thomas Sidney Jesup* (San Rafael, California, 1979), 191.] My reading of Jesup's report, [found in Senate Executive Document No. 263. 25th Congress, 2d Session, July 7, 1838. 253-54.] indicates that there were at least nine columns. These were led by Smith, Zachary Taylor, Brigadier General Nelson (with his Georgia volunteers), Colonel Snodgrass (with his Alabama volunteers), Lieutenant Colonel Coffee's Alabama volunteers, General Joseph Hernandez and his Florida militia units, Major William Lauderdale with his unit of Tennessee volunteers (Spies), General Abraham Eustis and Lieutenant L. Powell's naval contingent. If one were to include in the total operation, the "scouring actions" of Colonel David Twiggs and Colonel Mills prior to uniting with Eustis and Jesup at Volusia, the number is even higher. The main thrust, however one views the actions, was carried out by four major columns.

¹⁴ Senate Executive Document No. 263, 25th Congress, 2d Session, July 7, 1838, 253. It will be noted by the reader that Smith's force arrived in Tampa about or on November 6, 1837. His force of nearly eight hundred men, which is mentioned in the opening paragraph, is noted in a letter dated December 28, 1837. This would indicate that Smith's column had not reached the main area of his operation at the time of Taylor's battle with Sam Jones, Alligator and others at Okeechobee on Christmas Day of that year. Adding to Jesup's frustration with this campaign is the fact that Colonel Thomas Lawson's unit of Pennsylvania volunteers, destined for assignment under Smith, only reached Florida on the same day, December 25, 1837.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 254. Fort Dallas, which became the site for the present-day city of Miami, was founded after the fort on Key Biscayne.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 253.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 253. The loss to the enemy, in men killed or wounded is unknown. The Seminoles and their allies, if time and the action permitted, removed their dead from the field and secreted them from enemy view. Therefore, as in certain modern wars, the exact number of enemy killed is uncertain.

¹⁸ Mahon, 219-40; Kieffer, 190-212. Also see, Kenneth J. Hughes, "Warriors from the Sea, the Second Seminole War Navy and Their Exploits in Southeast Florida," Parts I and II, *Broward Legacy*,

Volume 11, Nos. 3 & 4 (Summer/Fall 1988) and Volume 12, Nos. 1 & 2, (Winter/Spring 1989). This two-part article gives a fine overview of the entire campaign, with an emphasis on southeastern Florida. Hughes also does yeoman's work in explaining the strategy of Jesup in readable terms.

¹⁹ *Army and Navy Chronicle*, January 11, 1838, 30.

²⁰ LLAG, Letter of January 2, 1838, Jesup to Major Collins.

²¹ LLAG, Letter of December 22, 1837, Jesup to Major Henry Whiting.

²² LLAG, Letter of January 28, 1838, Jesup to Lieutenant L. Powell.

²³ LLAG, Letter of December 29, 1837, Jesup to Lieutenant George Watson.

²⁴ LLAG, Letter of December 30, 1837, Jesup to Taylor.

²⁵ For an excellent discussion of his early career, see Kieffer's *Maligned General*, 1-66.

²⁶ LLAG, Letter of January 18, 1838, Jesup to Taylor.

²⁷ LLAG, Letter of January 18, 1838, Jesup to Major I. B. Brant.

²⁸ *Army and Navy Chronicle*, February 8, 1838. 94.

²⁹ LLAG, Letter of January 15, 1838, Jesup to General Walker K. Armistead, who was technically in command of forces south of the Withlacoochee River, headquartered at Tampa Bay. See also LLAG, letter of January 18, 1838, Jesup to Smith. This letter gave Smith the power to establish Fort Poinsett, "so soon as you can spare the force." Lawson arrived in Tampa on December 23, 1837, at the head of a force of 270 Pennsylvania volunteers and left to join Smith on December 27, 1837. See House of Representatives Document No. 78. 25th Congress, 2d Session, January 8, 1838, Letter of December 25, 1837, General W. K. Armistead to Jesup, 205-06.

³⁰ U. S. Congress, House of Representatives Document No. 78. 25th Congress, 2d Session, January 8, 1838. Letter of December 6, 1837, Jesup to Poinsett, 197-98.

³¹ Ibid., Letter of November 29, 1837, Jesup to Poinsett. 197.

³² LLAG, Letter of February 3, 1838, Jesup to Taylor.

³³ LLAG, Letter of February 2, 1838, Jesup to Taylor. The *Army and Navy Chronicle* for March 8, 1838 (159), reported that Taylor had taken about six hundred head of cattle immediately after the Battle of Lake Okeechobee. This would indicate a substantial supply of fresh beef available to the Indians at this period, even though it was reported that this capture had nearly "exhausted" the Indian's overall supply.

³⁴ LLAG, Letter of March 6, 1838, Jesup to Smith.

³⁵ LLAG, Letter of February 14, 1838, Jesup to Taylor.

³⁶ LLAG, Letter of March 25, 1838, Jesup to Colonel James Bankhead, then commanding officer at Fort Lauderdale.

³⁷ John T. Sprague. *Origins, Progress and Conclusion of the Florida War* (New York, 1848), 199-200. Sprague quoted Jesup's letter to Joel Poinsett, dated February 11, 1838.

³⁸ *Army and Navy Chronicle*, March 1, 1838, 136.

³⁹ LLAG, Letter of March 8, 1838, J. A. Chambers to Smith.

⁴⁰ LLAG, Letter of March 14, 1838, J. A. Chambers to Smith. Also, Letter of March 14, 1838, Chambers to Taylor.

⁴¹ LLAG, Letter of March 17, 1838, Smith to Chambers.

⁴² LLAG, Letter of April 7, 1838, Jesup to Armistead.

⁴³ LLAG, Letter of April 16, 1838, Smith to Chambers. This letter was sent from Fort Keais.

⁴⁴ *Army and Navy Chronicle*, May 17, 1838. 315.

⁴⁵ LLAG, Letter of March 22, 1838, Chambers to Smith. Also, see letter of April 20, 1838, Taylor to Jesup.

⁴⁶ LLAG, Letter of March 30, 1838, Jesup to Colonel W. I. Mills, Florida Militia, then in Washington D.C.

Jesup urged Mills to see his Delegate about the matter.

⁴⁷ *Army and Navy Chronicle*, May 24, 1838, 334.

⁴⁸ Sprague, 189.

⁴⁹ Brown, "Persifor F. Smith ...," 410.