

Warriors from the Sea

THE SEMINOLE WAR NAVY AND THEIR EXPLOITS IN SOUTHEAST FLORIDA

PART I

by *Kenneth J. Hughes*

The Second Seminole conflict was a war of attrition, a fight which stemmed from disagreements over land ownership, misunderstood treaties, and most of all, from the inability of the Americans and the Indians to co-exist. Years of sporadic depredations by the Seminoles against the expanding white settlements, and the United States government's efforts to enforce a policy of Indian removal exploded into warfare on December 28, 1835, when Major Francis Dade and a patrol of 109 men were ambushed on the road between Fort Brooke at Tampa and Fort King, near present-day Ocala. During the same day, Indian agent Colonel Wiley Thompson was killed by a band of Seminoles led by Osceola while strolling outside the gates of Fort King. These attacks initiated seven years of

bitter conflict between U.S. military forces and the elusive Seminoles throughout the Florida Territory. Although much of the war was fought on land, the United States Navy also played a significant role, particularly in the southeastern portion of the peninsula, where the Atlantic Ocean, the Everglades, and numerous rivers, marshes and inlets made aquatic navigation indispensable to the war effort.

At the time the war broke out, United States naval forces consisted of 4,412 sailors and 1,235 marines. They protected United States coastal stations and sailed the seas in eighteen vessels. A part of this fleet, the West Indies Squadron under Commodore Alexander J. Dallas, was assigned to the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico, including the west coast of Florida.

This small squadron, composed of one frigate, two sloops of war, and one schooner, shared jurisdiction over Florida's Gulf coast with the U.S. Treasury Department, whose cutters were manned by U.S. Revenue Marines with authority to enter American ports and prevent illegal trade. The Treasury Department had become actively involved in Florida's Indian unrest a few months prior to the Dade Massacre, when the commander of U.S. military forces in the territory, General Duncan L. Clinch, had called for a revenue cutter to sail the Florida west coast, with orders to instruct any Seminoles they met to assemble for emigration at Fort Brooke. These orders were upgraded in Washington by U.S. Secretary of the Navy Mahlon Dickerson, who authorized a navy vessel to follow

Although the Second Seminole War is usually thought of as a land war, Florida's numerous waterways dictated that much of the maneuvering would take place over water. Naval authorities recognized this fact early in the war, but not until the conflict was well underway did the navy acquire the techniques and equipment to operate effectively in the territory's mysterious inlets, inland waterways, and Everglades. Even then, logistics, natural obstacles, and lack of familiarity with the region often conspired to thwart their efforts.

In Part I of "Warriors From the Sea," Kenneth

J. Hughes describes the efforts of the navy and marines to protect southeast Florida's scattered settlers and penetrate the vast 'glades from the outbreak of the war to the end of General Thomas S. Jesup's southeast Florida campaign of 1838. Part II of this article will appear in a future issue of Broward Legacy.

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Commodore Alexander J. Dallas (left, in an early portrait, courtesy Naval History Division, CNO), and U.S. Navy Secretary Mahlon Dickerson (right, courtesy Library of Congress) were instrumental in involving the navy in the Second Seminole War.



similar instructions, thereby opening the door for naval participation in Florida affairs.

Naval activity increased with the outbreak of war. In the weeks following the Dade Massacre, a small detachment from Commodore Dallas's squadron began patrolling the shore between Pensacola and Fort Brooke, and revenue marines were active throughout the Tampa Bay area.

Despite these efforts, most of Florida's long shoreline remained unprotected. The vulnerability of the isolated settlements on the territory's east coast was illustrated on January 6, 1836, when Indians attacked the New River settlement, massacring the family of William Cooley and driving the other settlers to seek protection at the Cape Florida Lighthouse on Key Biscayne. Cooley and several other men were away from the settlement at the time, salvaging cargo from the brig *Gil Blas*, shipwrecked at the Hillsboro Inlet, nine miles to the north. The violence at New River signified, in part, that depredations now extended across the entire Florida peninsula.

As hostilities spread, the United States Army launched a major campaign against the Seminoles' strongholds in central Florida. This plan to defeat and forcefully remove the Indians from Florida proved to be a total disaster. Army commanders such as Generals Clinch, Edmund P. Gaines, and Winfield Scott quickly realized the futility of traditional military tactics and the difficulty of sustaining ade-

quate supply lines in the Florida wilderness. The soldiers were also encumbered with inadequate regulations and equipment in an unfamiliar territory. In comparison, the Seminoles were well adapted to Florida's interior, and inspired with confidence that they were fighting on their home territory.

The one benefit derived by the American forces from this otherwise dismal campaign was the new strategy adopted by the navy expeditions operating on its periphery. Here, along the Gulf coast and in the inland waterways of central Florida, both seamen and marines experienced for the first time a new method of reconnoitering the Florida wilderness. The use of small boats to search for the enemies on inland rivers and bays gave an added mobility to the invading military forces. In succeeding years, as the war pushed southward, this would become the conventional means of pursuing the Seminoles into south Florida's Everglades, thereby enabling United States servicemen to travel as the Indian traveled. In effect, the conflict would evolve into a guerrilla war.

While the main body of military personnel struggled against hostile Indians and inhospitable terrain in central Florida, the inhabitants of the southern peninsula were anxiously petitioning the federal government for protection. Although naval vessels occasionally stopped at Key West, the settlers on the Florida Keys, including many refugees from the abandoned mainland settlements adjacent to Bis-

cayne Bay and at New River, requested a more permanent show of force. As a result, the cutter *Dexter* cruised between Charlotte Harbor and Indian Key throughout May and June. Then, on July 7, 1836, Master Commandant Mervine P. Mix of the sloop-of-war *Concord* dispatched the schooner *Motto* to protect the settlers on Indian Key and to secure about five tons of lead said to be on board the wrecked brig *Gil Blas* at Hillsboro Inlet. Nine days later, Commodore Dallas ordered the cutter *Washington* to proceed to Key West to protect that island.

The Indians again made their appearance along the southeast coast on July 24, 1836, when a renegade band attacked the Cape Florida Lighthouse and set fire to all combustible structures. Lighthouse keeper John Thompson was wounded and his black assistant, Carter, was fatally shot. Lieutenant Thomas J. Leib and the nineteen seamen and marines of the *Motto* saw flames in the direction of Key Biscayne, when anchored off New River that very same evening. They proceeded to rescue Thompson, who was then taken to the army hospital in Key West. Before leaving the area, however, the *Motto* and a private schooner, the *PeeWee*, skirted Cape Florida and the abandoned Miami plantations, observing their total destruction by the Indians.

Turning their attention to the southeast Florida coast, military officials recognized its importance to the Seminoles. They knew that the Indians

favored the region for its abundance of coonti (arrowroot). Once harvested and stacked to dry, the root of this plant could be pulverized into an edible flour. Shipwrecks were also considered as another source of supplies for the Indians, and Atlantic gales became a notorious provider. Generally, when a shipwreck occurred, the Seminoles were certain to be near. Therefore, when other supplies were exhausted, the Seminoles could survive almost indefinitely in this region.

Autumn brought an increase in military activity throughout Florida. In central Florida, General Richard Keith Call, the territorial governor, led a force composed of militiamen and regulars against the Seminoles encamped at the Cove of the Withlacoochee, but the rain-swollen river prevented the troops from crossing and carrying out their objective of "destroying the Seminole nation." At the same time, the U.S. Navy flotilla and marines readied an expedition against some 200 Seminoles supposedly concentrating near Cape Florida and New River. The *Vandalia*, the *Washington*, and two schooners, the *Carolina* and the *Firefly*, were therefore assembled at Key West.

The general plan of the expedition was designed by the new commanding officer of the *Vandalia*, Captain Thomas Crabb. He intended the force to be placed on Cape Florida under the cover of darkness, and then to move inland in hopes of surprising and capturing the Seminoles in their fastness. Recent Indian depredations on Key Largo and Key Tavernier, how-

ever, resulted in a change of operations. On October 16, 1836, three days after setting sail from Key West, Lieutenant Levin Powell's fifty sailors and ninety-five marines arrived at Indian Key, where they procured a few additional boats from the island's leading resident, wrecker Jacob Houseman. The expedition then moved against a band of seventy Indians lingering in the upper Keys, pursuing them both on land and in the water. During this reconnaissance, only two Indians were actually encountered. Others, however, escaped unseen to warn their fellows of the impending danger. Nevertheless, Lieutenant Powell moved his force northward, assured by the added support of a few volunteers.

The success of this naval expedition relied, in part, on the assistance of guides, as the seamen were unfamiliar with the territory. Therefore, the knowledge of William Cooley, Dr. E. Frederick Leitner, and Stephen R. Mallory was essential in penetrating the inland water passages — a key maneuver in the operation and necessary to maintain the element of surprise. Mr. Cooley's previous experience as a sea captain and several years' residence in south Florida provided the expedition with valuable coastal knowledge, as well as data regarding the fringes of the Everglades, which Cooley had explored to a greater extent than any other white man while residing at New River.

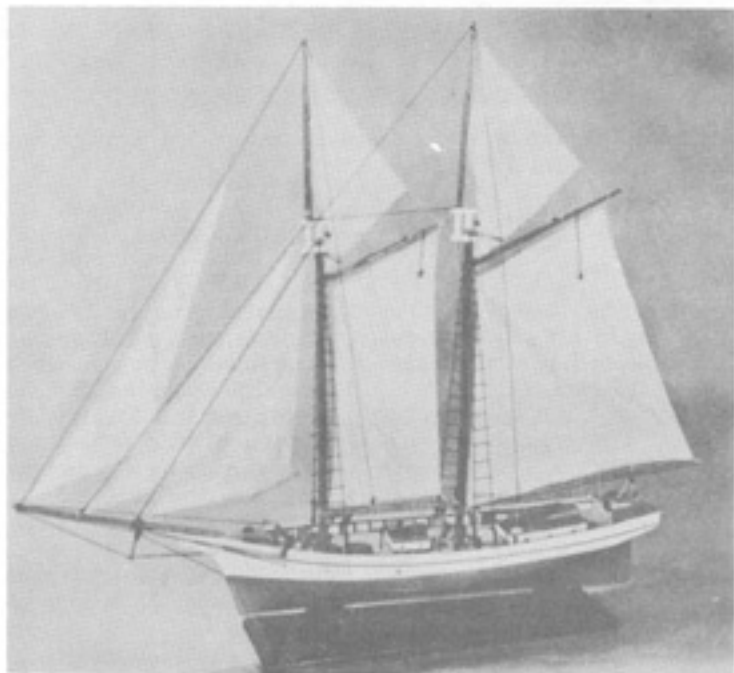
Dr. E. Frederick Leitner and his assistant, Stephen R. Mallory, were also experienced explorers, although

they had not resided on the mainland of south Florida as long as Cooley had. Nevertheless, they, too, were familiar with the upper reaches of the coastal estuaries. Being a naturalist, the German-born Leitner had come to south Florida for the purpose of studying the fauna and topography. Before his research was halted by the outbreak of Indian hostilities, he had resided at the New River settlement for part of one year, and had conversed with the Indians of that region. He and Mallory, a longtime Key West resident who had also lived for a time on New River, therefore became valuable additions to Powell's naval expedition.

The flotilla arrived at Key Biscayne on October 21, and devoted the next few days to reconnoitering the Miami River, Little River and Arch Creek. During that time, Powell's men established a temporary camp at the mouth of the Miami River. After concluding that the Seminoles were no longer in the region, the expedition divided and proceeded to New River. The strategy designed to surprise the Indians required part of the patrol to move inland. Powell therefore led part of the flotilla, including First Lieutenant Nathaniel S. Waldron's U.S. Marines, to the headwaters of the Rio Raton (Snake Creek), disembarked and marched northward to New River. En route, they destroyed an abandoned village. The remainder of the flotilla, under the leadership of Lieutenant William Smith, U.S.N., proceeded to the mouth of New River. There they remained, awaiting any Seminoles that Powell might flush out of the interior.

Powell's command rejoined Smith's party on October 30, after an uneventful march. They then established a temporary camp on the west bank of New River and proceeded to reconnoiter the area. The seamen, accompanied by Surgeon Charles A. Hassler and by the three guides, Cooley, Leitner, and Mallory, sailed up New River, exploring the encompassing territory into the eastern fringes of the Everglades. At the same time, Lieutenant Smith led a six-day reconnaissance along the coastline, searching inlets and bays northward to the Indian River.

On first impression, Lieutenant Powell described the Florida Everglades as a "dreary waste." "A grassy sea," he wrote, "with island hammocks on the horizon." He also added that the boats had proved inadequate for navigation in the "shallow lake," and that "matted sawgrass combined with deep sluices discouraged foot patrols." The distant islands he there-



Model of a United States revenue cutter from the Seminole War era.

fore deemed unapproachable, at least for the present time.

Neither William Smith nor Levin Powell succeeded in locating the Seminoles on the southeast Florida mainland. The latter concluded that the Indians must have finished their harvest early and returned northward. Consequently, the naval flotilla abandoned their search early in November, relieved their guides, and endured the next several weeks by exploring the southern extremities of the peninsula, following the coast around to Charlotte Harbor. They returned to their respective commands in December, finding that General Call had been succeeded by Major General Thomas Sidney Jesup as commander of the forces in Florida.

The forty-eight-year-old major general had assumed command of the Florida War on December 9, 1836. For the next six months he battled troop shortages and logistical problems in an attempt to provide adequate protection for the settlers who had clustered in a number of north Florida towns. As a result of the shortages which plagued the army, Commodore Dallas reorganized his fleet so that additional navy personnel could be detached for field duty. As a result, both seamen and marines now constituted the garrisons of Forts Brooke, Clinch, Drane, and Foster, all under the regional command of Brigadier General Walker K. Armistead, relieving soldiers for field duty, where they were so desperately needed.

Most regrettably, the Gulf coast squadron was also operating with insufficient strength, operating its vessels with sixty fewer crew members than it had had at the beginning of the conflict. And notwithstanding this new jeopardy to the coastal defenses, the naval presence on the mainland still failed to ease the fears of Floridians. In St. Augustine, for example, citizens had no choice but to rely on protection from the militia, at least until the army in Florida was supplemented with a larger number of recruits. With the pressing need for reinforcements and the failure of Powell's and Smith's expedition to locate Indians in southeast Florida, that region was neglected throughout the first half of 1837.

The situation in southeast Florida remained static until summer, when General Jesup began preparing for a bold new campaign. His strategy specified that three main wings of his command march into south Florida, and this required more than 6,000 men in order to be effective. Jesup also required the use of steamboats to supply his troops in the interior, and

requested that Commodore Dallas hand over the *America* and the *Major Dade*. Unfortunately, the latter of these two steamers had been scrapped, being deemed unfit for service. In July, the commodore was instructed to release from his command the cutters *Dexter* and *Jefferson* so that they could return to their previous stations under the authority of the U.S. Revenue Department.

As the approaching campaign drew near, Commodore Dallas received orders from Secretary of the Navy Dickerson instructing him to cooperate

the General Orders . . ." The commodore also added that when his squadron would be ordered to sea early in October, it was to have directions similar to those of the previous year — to examine the coast of Florida and to prevent any supplies of ammunition from Cuba from reaching the Indians.

Navy Lieutenant Powell had not forgotten about the services he had rendered almost one year earlier when reconnoitering in southeast Florida. He was aware that Jesup's forces would push the Indians further down the



Major General Thomas Sidney Jesup, commander of United States Army forces in Florida, 1836-1838.

with the land forces. In reply, Dallas offered to do all in his power to aid Jesup, but explained that the same degree of alacrity as was exhibited the previous year could not be expected from the navy. The grounds for this qualifying statement, the commodore explained further, was that Lieutenant Powell and other naval officers had rendered every service that could be asked of them, yet in all general orders, credit was only given to the volunteers, the militia, and the regulars. As for the navy, Dallas protested, there was "no mention of their service in any of

peninsula, and he believed that an amphibious assault force should be assembled to pursue the Seminoles into the Everglades. Therefore, he wrote Secretary of War Joel R. Poinsett, offering to lead such an expedition. Once this concept was approved, the navy and war secretaries exchanged correspondence to determine the design of the guerrilla strike force. They summarized that 100 sailors with an equal number of soldiers should comprise the expedition, and that none of the soldiers should outrank the navy lieutenant. All supplies for this flotilla

were to be provided by Major General Jesup.

When Levin Powell began organizing the inland strike force, he relied on the experience attained from the 1836 New River expedition. The use of small and inadequate boats during that reconnaissance had prevented the sailors from crossing the Everglades morass to distant island hammocks. Powell therefore received permission to obtain suitable vessels for the forthcoming operations. In mid-October, he traveled to Charleston, South Carolina, to purchase two boats and fourteen pirogues. He also ordered the construction of an additional twelve vessels, "square boats" of the Mackinaw variety. Powell was still in South Carolina when the cutter *Jefferson* was ordered back to the west coast, since Commodore Dallas had ordered its captain to reestablish a coastal patrol between Indian Key, Key West, and Tampa Bay, and to communicate with Jesup.

The Florida commander also relied on the navy to prevent trade between the Seminoles and Spanish fishermen from Havana, as his force pushed their adversaries to the south and away from the settlements. However, considerable delays plagued Jesup's effort to place the army in the field during the fall. His greatest problem stemmed from difficulties in assembling a sufficient number of troops, as well as in receiving and storing supplies. Yet, a few favorable events did occur, which, Jesup believed, might place the end of the war in sight. In September and October, his soldiers seized several important Indian leaders and their followers, among them King Phillip, Tomoka John, Coacoochee, Yuchee Billy, Osceola, and Coahadjo. Jesup also received substantial public criticism since some of these Indians had been seized while meeting under a flag of truce.

The 1837-1838 winter campaign began after the arrival of additional U.S. troops during the closing days of October. Three independent forces entered the wilderness and began pushing the Seminoles into south Florida, while constructing numerous forts and depots en route. Soon, almost 9,000 troops were stationed across Florida, the largest force ever assembled against the Seminole Indians. Lieutenant Colonel Persifor Smith of the Louisiana Volunteers transported a force of regulars and volunteers up the Caloosahatchee River in southwest Florida, extending his area of operations into the Big Cypress. Colonel Zachary Taylor led his own force of infantrymen, in addition to Missouri Volunteers and Indian scouts, across from

Tampa Bay and down the Kissimmee River, encountering the Indians in a costly battle near Lake Okeechobee on December 25, 1837.

The main wing, divided into two groups, marched down the east coast with the objective of receiving any Indians pushed at them from the other forces. The first column, comprised of an artillery regiment, as well as Florida and Tennessee Volunteers under Florida militia General Joseph Hernandez, marched along the beach ridge from St. Augustine to the Mosquito Inlet, crossed to the west side of the Indian River and continued their campaign to Indian River Inlet, where they established Fort Pierce. Jesup himself directed the second column, composed of three companies of Alabama Volunteers and seven companies of dragoons, numbering 600 men. They followed the west bank of the St. Johns River to its termination in a marsh, then followed a natural ridge leading southward. A supply train and several companies of artillerymen followed Jesup, several miles to the rear.

In the meantime, the navy assisted the move south by guarding the coastline, and Lieutenant John McLaughlin, a seaman who had spent much of his Florida service attached to the army and had been wounded in battle at Lake Monroe in January 1837, transported detachments of the First Artillery from New Smyrna to Mosquito Inlet. Lieutenant Powell returned to Florida from South Carolina at this time, bringing the equipment necessary for the Everglades expedition, as well as four contracted schooners which served to transport soldiers between St. Augustine and New Smyrna. Three additional officers were also attached to the small flotilla upon Powell's arrival. Midshipmen Peter U. Murphy and William P. McArthur came directly from the naval school at Norfolk, Virginia, and Midshipman Horace H. Harrison joined the expedition at St. Augustine.

Lieutenant Powell's Everglades expeditionary force set sail from New Smyrna early in December 1837. The next three weeks were occupied by drilling the command and preparing for operations while encamped at the Indian River Haulover south of Mosquito Inlet. Late in December they explored the inland estuaries and moved their camp to Indian River Inlet, a location better adapted to facilitating supply shipments.

The land forces involved in the campaign were also dependent on vessels to transport soldiers and supplies. In December, General Jesup and Colonel Taylor corresponded over the possibil-

ity of using Mackinaw boats or even larger craft to navigate the chain of lakes extending from Lake Tohopkaliga to the Pai-hai-okee, or Everglades. On the east coast, Jesup's troops were fortunate to have near-sufficient rivers upon which supplies could be conveyed. Of course, now as before, much effort was required to keep these supply lines opened to the advancing army. First, on January 9, the commander wrote the quartermaster, Major Henry Whiting, at St. Augustine, requesting that he move any disposable steamers from the St. Johns River. These vessels, in addition to the contracted schooners, were immediately directed to transport supplies, forage and tools to Indian River Inlet. Here, Powell's command was to construct canoes, boats, and supply depots.

Jesup also authorized the quartermaster department to hire laborers and oarsmen for duty at Fort Pierce as an added measure against critical delays. Unfortunately, the inevitable was about to occur. The inland column of the main wing overextended their advance far beyond the line of vital sustenance. At the same time, the quartermaster department experienced insurmountable delays in supplying Powell's force at Indian River Inlet, due to severe coastal gales. Jesup responded by delaying the Everglades expedition. He reasoned that if the boat patrols moved too far south in advance of the troops, Powell's small force would not accomplish anything except to disperse the enemy.

While waiting for his army to make its slow progress south, Jesup carefully analyzed Lieutenant Powell's prospects. To Powell he relayed reports that Seminole bands were secluded on islands in Lake Okeechobee and suggested the possibility of transferring boats to that lake by placing them on wagons or by sending them up New River or another south Florida stream. Jesup also intended to send Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Pierce's artillerymen and the Tennessee Volunteers south to support Powell as soon as supply lines could be linked to the proposed area of operations. While awaiting authorization to penetrate the Everglades, Powell was instructed to assist General Hernandez on an examination of the St. Lucie River and points to the south. Upon completion of that reconnaissance, Powell was to meet with Jesup at Fort Pierce to discuss future operations in the southern extremity of the peninsula.

Further to the north, Lieutenant John McLaughlin remained on the St. Johns River, delivering supplies between Fort Mellon and Fort Lane, while a navy detachment occupied the

post at Volusia. Detachments of seamen were also stationed at several forts between Tampa Bay and the mouth of the Withlacoochee River, while a group of United States Marines was also stationed at Tampa.

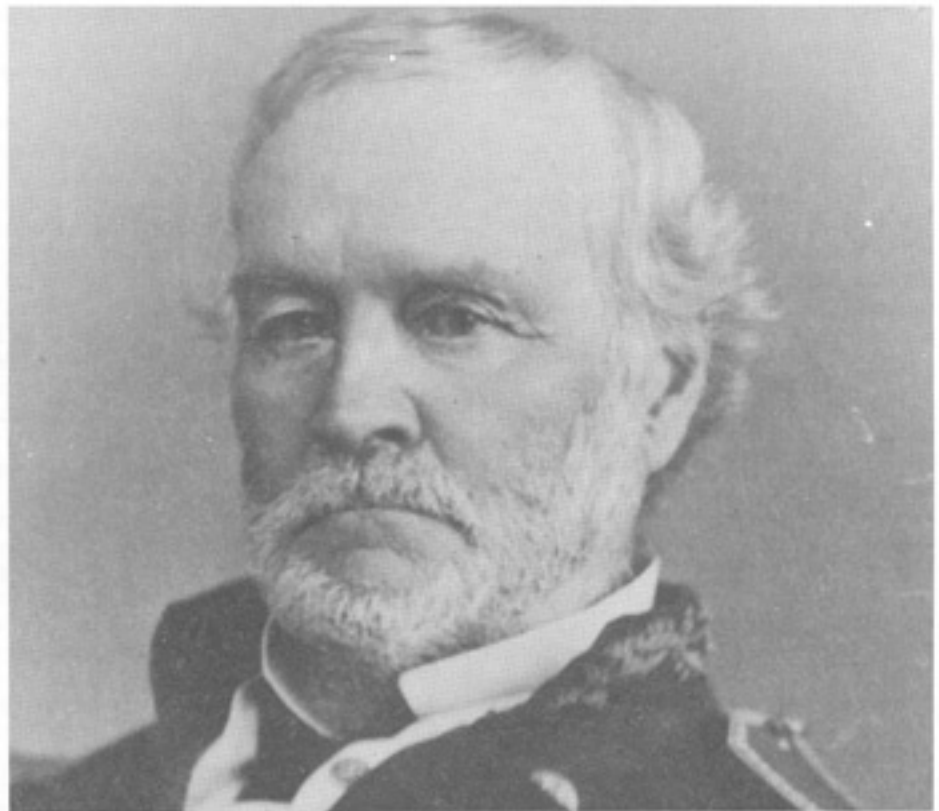
By mid-January, both Colonels Persifer Smith's and Zachary Taylor's forces had successfully entered south Florida. Yet, on the east coast, Lieutenant Colonel Pierce, incapacitated with sickness, was unable to lead his advance force any farther than Indian River. In consequence, General Hernandez delayed his march for the St. Lucie, leaving Lieutenant Powell to proceed with his force of ninety-six men and boys in boats.

While journeying down the St. Lucie River, the navy group exchanged shots with a small party of Seminoles. At this point, Lieutenant Powell became concerned about the percentage of inexperienced volunteers on his reconnaissance, and left the Washington City Volunteers in a camp near Gilbert's Bar. As the remaining expedition proceeded southward, Indian signs became increasingly obvious.

On January 15, 1838, the small force left their boats at the headwaters of the Jupiter River. Twenty-three men remained as guards while the remaining party marched inland. An Indian woman was soon captured, and from her Powell learned that more Seminoles were in the vicinity. After a five-mile march, the party confronted fifty to sixty Seminoles in a cypress swamp.

The ensuing skirmish resulted in an embarrassment for the Americans. The inexperienced sailors quickly became disorganized when three division leaders were shot. It was left to a small number of regulars to hold the Indians in check as the others hastily retreated. If not for the regulars, Powell stated later, this encounter could have resulted in total annihilation for the expedition. The regulars eventually withdrew from the field of battle at the approach of darkness. Both weary and stunned, the group returned to Fort Pierce, having suffered twenty-seven casualties. Five members of the command never returned.

On receiving news of Powell's defeat, Major General Jesup ordered the main wing of his army to march for Jupiter River. While attempting to cross the Loxahatchee Creek on January 24, they received the same reception as had the navy group. This time the fighting took place in a hammock, bordered by an almost impenetrable slough. The Indians eventually retreated, but not before inflicting thirty-eight casualties, including a facial wound received by General Jesup. In contrast, only one



Lieutenant Levin M. Powell, seen here in a Civil War-era photo (courtesy U.S. Army Military History Institute).

dead Indian was found on the battleground.

Following the battle, the army crossed the creek and exited from the hammock, directly into an abandoned Seminole camp. Nautical books from Powell's command lay scattered about, and the body of one of his casualties was found nearby. Dr. Jacob Rhett Motte, a surgeon in Jesup's army, surmised that the column had crossed into Powell's battlefield.

After the Battle of Loxahatchee, the main wing of Jesup's army halted, again hampered by a lack of sustenance, shoes, and clothing. The quartermaster department at St. Augustine made every effort to reestablish a supply link, but severe weather remained a continuing obstacle. Rough seas grounded outgoing transports on the bar at Indian River Inlet, and those able to weather the storm as far south as Jupiter were unable to enter the inlet there. To make matters worse, efforts to establish an inland supply line were temporarily thwarted. One day before the Battle of Loxahatchee, Jesup had requested Lieutenant Powell and the senior officer at Fort Pierce to bring all of their disposable forces and sustenance to the Jupiter encampment. Upon reaching the place where

the navy patrol had disembarked before its skirmish, Powell found the river bank lined with a large number of Indians. Although the Seminoles appeared to be retreating to the south, the small boat patrol avoided an encounter and retreated northward. Soon afterwards, Jesup established his headquarters along the river, three miles west of the inlet, and there erected Fort Jupiter.

Lieutenant Powell's second attempt to supply the main wing was more successful, bringing 10,000 rations by way of the St. Lucie River, Hobe Sound, and the Jupiter Narrows. Powell met Jesup's forces on January 26. However, the footwear that the soldiers so desperately needed had still not arrived, leaving Jesup no alternative but to send only his mounted troops to scout the region. At Powell's request, he also attached an additional company of artillerymen to the Everglades expeditionary force, and directed the navy lieutenant to take the large transports, which were unable to enter the inlets, to Key Biscayne, where they could serve as store vessels. Supplies from these vessels, he instructed Powell, were to be delivered to the army upon its arrival at either the Rio Ratones or New River. Again, Jesup displayed concern for the small force



This 1842 portrait of a midshipman — one of the earliest known naval photographs — shows the uniform worn during the Second Seminole War (courtesy Newport Historical Society).

operating deep in hostile territory when he authorized Powell to establish a depot at one of those rivers. "I desire you to do so," he wrote, "... providing it can be done without too much exposing your small force to the attacks of a superior force of the enemy." Yet, an expedition deep into the Everglades was at this time out of the question. Before departing southward, Powell transported 20,000 additional rations to Jesup's headquarters at Fort Jupiter on February 2, 1838. On this task he was accompanied by artillery lieutenant John B. Magruder and by Lieutenant Colonel Pierce, who was also slated to proceed to Key Biscayne with his First Artillery Regiment.

As Jesup concentrated his forces in southeast Florida, he attempted to ascertain the locations and strength of the Seminoles in that region. Since

the main body of Indians was still believed to be concealed on an island in Lake Okeechobee, he instructed Colonel Zachary Taylor to send a detachment of the Fourth U.S. Artillery on a reconnaissance of the lake shore, to search for an outlet from the lake, and to capture all dugouts and retain them for army use.

Jesup estimated that 600 Seminoles now remained south of the three army wings stretching across south Florida from the Caloosahatchee River to Jupiter Inlet. Most, he believed, were secluded in the region between Lake Okeechobee and the Atlantic Ocean. If they could be prevented from returning north, the general wrote, he "hoped to wind up the war by April 1."

Much to the dismay of Jesup and of war-weary Floridians, scattered Seminole bands continued their depreda-

tions against the north Florida settlements, which were protected only by detached regulars and volunteers. One such attack, early in 1838, took place only twenty miles from Tallahassee. As a result, naval forces and marines sailed for St. Marks. At the same time, the revenue cutter *Madison* was added to the naval fleet and ordered to extreme south Florida to "aid vessels in distress, in [the] Gulf of Florida and . . . persons cast away amongst the Keys."

General Jesup penned disdainful comments about one such wreck from which provisions had been recently obtained by the Seminoles. "Providence seems to have taken the Seminoles under its special protection," he wrote to Colonel Taylor, "... a vessel loaded with rice was lately wrecked near New River, and that the Indians had secured a great part of this cargo — this will give them subsistence for some months to come . . ." Regardless of such setbacks, Jesup's army continued their march southward on February 5, after each and every man had received sufficient clothing and footwear. Rather than proceeding to New River or Rio Ratones as originally planned, the main wing trailed and confronted a large band of Seminoles twenty-eight miles south-southwest of Fort Jupiter. Jesup's interpreters advanced under a white flag, resulting in a conference. At this parley at "Camp Truce," a ceasefire was declared, and Jesup convinced the Seminoles to move northward and camp near Fort Jupiter for the purpose of attending further conferences. Encouraged by this unexpected turn of events, and to satisfy the conditions of the ceasefire, the Florida commander wrote the secretary of war, suggesting the negotiation of a permanent truce and the establishment of a reservation in south Florida.

The prospects of an end to the costly war stalled the progress of the land forces, but Lieutenant Powell's expedition was instructed to proceed south as planned. Should hostilities renew, Jesup hoped his efforts at negotiation would have at least bought him time to establish a foothold in extreme southeast Florida where he could trap the Seminoles. Thus, on February 11, Lieutenant Powell and Captain Lucien B. Webster of Company C, First U.S. Artillery, arrived at Key Biscayne aboard the steamer *Poinsett*. By this time, Powell commanded a somewhat stronger force than that which had fought the skirmish at Jupiter. His naval forces were divided into two divisions commanded by Lieutenants Horace Harrison and Peter Murphy. Two companies of the First U.S. Artillery, led by Lieutenants John B.

Magruder and Robert McLane also accompanied the expedition. West Point graduate and former army officer Joseph E. Johnston served Powell's command as a volunteer civilian topographical engineer, and Acting Surgeon William T. Leonard replaced Dr. Leitner, who had been killed in the fight at the Jupiter River. During the second half of February, more than 100 sailors, marines, and artillerymen under Powell's command established a depot on Key Biscayne. At the same time, Captain Webster with fifty artillerymen established a post on the mainland, at the mouth of the Miami River, which they dubbed Fort Dallas in honor of the West Indies squadron commander.

Although the expedition met no initial resistance, General Jesup remained unsure of the Seminoles' true intentions and questioned their willingness to encamp near his Fort Jupiter headquarters as agreed. Nevertheless, he did convince a large number of blacks who traveled with the Seminoles to move to the reservation west of the Mississippi. Consequently, he assembled 130 of these "Indian Negroes" in an emigration camp near the fort. This accomplishment ultimately divided the resistance of the enemy.

In addition to separating the blacks from the Seminoles, Jesup avoided deploying any troops in the Loxahatchee area so as not to raise suspicion among the Indians. At the same time, however, he instructed Lieutenant Powell at Key Biscayne to move inland on his Everglades expedition. For the most part, Powell's patrol was to reconnoiter the island hammocks in an attempt to flush the Seminoles towards Fort Jupiter. To best accomplish this objective, Jesup suggested that the expeditionary force enter the glades from the Miami River and exit by way of New River.

The general based this recommendation on a report that a large body of Indians was encamped near the head of New River or on a pine island or hammock in the Everglades. If this report could be verified, Jesup intended to send Lieutenant Colonel Pierce of the First Artillery to reinforce Powell. The major general also considered moving to New River himself within a few days, if the Indians did not hasten to assemble at Fort Jupiter. Powell, aware of these plans, directed some of his men to board a few of the vessels, convey supplies and forage to New River, and await the arrival of the land forces.

Plans changed almost daily as efforts to negotiate a peace continued. Less than twenty-four hours after indicating a probable march to the south,

Jesup held a council with the Seminoles and established conditional arrangements to peacefully conclude the war. He then notified Captain Webster at Fort Dallas that additional troops might not be sent to Key Biscayne or New River after all. Nevertheless, he emphasized, Fort Dallas should remain occupied through the summer months. Lieutenant Powell received a similar letter from Jesup requesting that Key Biscayne also remain occupied.

With Indian hostilities in abeyance, Jesup's main concern was a shortage of contracted vessels. He instructed Webster to see that at least one vessel remain at New River, although the steamboat there was desperately needed at Fort Pierce, because of its shallow draft. Meanwhile, conditions at Jupiter Inlet still prevented any large vessels from bringing supplies to the army, so sustenance continued to be delivered in shallow draft vessels by way of the inland water route. Lieutenant John McLaughlin, U.S.N., assisted in this effort, bringing the mail, dispatches, whiskey, and other supplies to Fort Jupiter.

Although not wishing to alarm the Seminoles, General Jesup recognized the need for the armed forces to increase their presence along the south Atlantic coast. Accordingly, he sent Lieutenant W. B. McLean of the U.S. Marines down the peninsula from Fort Jupiter in late February, in advance of the land forces. Jesup directed McLean to reconnoiter the coastline and to remain available to deliver dispatches between Forts Dallas and Jupiter. McLean was also directed to stop at New River, inquire about recent Indian activities, and relay any pertinent information to Captain Webster and Lieutenant Powell. At the same time, Jesup ordered Captain Napoleon L. Coste of the revenue cutter *Campbell*, temporarily assigned to the army, to patrol the coast between Cape Sable and Jupiter Inlet and to relay any reports of Indian activities or distressed vessels to the officers at Key Biscayne and Fort Dallas.

While anxiously awaiting a decision from Washington on his truce proposal, General Jesup gradually intensified his patrols throughout southeast Florida. On March 2, 1838, Lieutenant Robert Anderson's Third Artillery Pioneers and two companies of Tennessee Volunteers under Major William Lauderdale set out for New River to inform the Seminoles there of the truce and bring them back to Fort Jupiter. The following day, Captain Webster sailed to Fort Jupiter, bringing news that a number of the Indians at New River belonged to sub-chief Tuskegee's band, the remainder of which was al-

ready camped at Fort Jupiter along with Halleck Hadjoe's band.

Jesup's hopes for a peaceful conclusion of the war were shaken by renewed Seminole depredations in Middle Florida, as well as by Indian incursions into the Okefenokee Swamp region of southeast Georgia. The present campaign had clearly not pushed all Indians to the south as the general had hoped. Although the largest concentrations of Seminoles were ensconced in south Florida's Everglades and Big Cypress regions, small bands were scattered over the entire peninsula. On March 5, General Jesup commended Commodore Dallas for his prompt action in detaching marines to Jefferson County to protect the Middle Florida settlers. In the same letter, the general praised Lieutenant Powell for his close cooperation with the army, and stated that Powell's force now stood ready to enter the Everglades.

In reality the ailing naval lieutenant hesitated to begin his reconnaissance until backed by a substantial force, since recent reports indicated that a large body of Seminoles lay hidden in the vast glades. The Lauderdale-Anderson expedition, traveling overland, reached New River on March 5, but Lieutenant Colonel Pierce, scheduled to lead troops south since January, remained incapacitated with illness. Consequently, Jesup ordered Brigadier General Abraham Eustis to Fort Pierce to replace Pierce, to purchase additional boats for the Everglades expedition, and to sail for New River. Before Eustis could respond, Jesup countermanded these orders, ultimately directing Eustis's force to reinforce panic-stricken Middle Florida. Determined to reinforce Powell, despite these numerous setbacks, Jesup then ordered Lieutenant Colonel James Bankhead of the First Artillery to Key Biscayne.

From Fort Pierce, Bankhead sailed to Biscayne Bay on the steamboat *Charleston*, so as not to alarm the Indians camped near Fort Jupiter. As Lieutenant Colonel Bankhead moved south, Lieutenant Powell's command sailed from Cape Florida to New River, where they established Camp Powell on the south side at the forks, near Major Lauderdale's newly-erected blockhouse.

Shortly after the naval expedition reached New River, the captain of a small sloop, a steamboat engineer, and a black man were shot by Seminoles while fishing three miles from Fort Lauderdale. The perpetrators, later identified as part of Chekika's band, were immediately chased upstream by the sailors in boats and by Lauderdale's volunteers on the river bank,

but escaped capture. This incident, coupled with the arrival of a Seminole sub-chief at Fort Jupiter with news that the Indians formerly at New River had moved eight or ten miles to the north, led General Jesup to order Powell and Lauderdale to reconnoiter the country to their north and south, while Lieutenant Colonel Bankhead was directed to march his force north from Fort Dallas to New River, searching the wilderness en route.

While combing the vicinity of his New River camp, Powell reconnoitered the perimeter of the Everglades and found that his mission was partially defeated by unusually dry conditions. In a March 15 letter from his "Station on New River," he wrote, "The long continued dry weather has nearly drained them [the Everglades], and left a great prairie marsh barely penetrable to footmen, perfectly uninhabitable, and destitute of subsistence and shelter for man." He added that, "On the Miami, the glades were nearly destitute of water . . . a deep marsh would have shown the trail of a single Indian . . ."

It took Powell's men two days to drag their boats within one mile of the pine islands, which the lieutenant determined to be from eight to ten miles west of the headwaters of the New River. A subsequent examination of this small group of islets failed to discover any living thing or any means of subsistence.

After attempting to ascertain the limits of the Everglades in the region directly west of New River, Lieutenant Powell opined on the conditions he found in the Pai-hai-okee as they affected the Seminole Indians. He believed that his adversaries could not take their women and children far into the glades during the dry season. The tall sawgrass, being boggy and forbidding, could only provide temporary protection to the Indians who were avoiding pursuit, therefore, Powell surmised, few Indians were south of New River. With the Everglades providing as perfect a barrier as the sea, he believed that the Seminoles could only be concealed in "inaccessible plains" on the border of the Everglades, somewhere between New River and Jupiter.

When Lieutenant Colonel Bankhead reached Fort Lauderdale on March 18, 1838, New River became the scene of the largest concentration of United States troops and sailors south of Lake Okeechobee during the entire Second Seminole War. Jesup hoped that a vigorous operation by these 600 soldiers, sailors, and volunteers would cause the Indians to fly to his camp. Sometime between March 12 and 17, two Indian leaders, believed at the time to

be Coacoochee (Wildcat), who had recently escaped from his Fort Marion prison cell, and Alligator, had requested a conference with Bankhead. The lieutenant colonel's friendly Indian scouts reported that these two Seminoles led a band of about 100 warriors, and that Sam Jones's Mikasukis were encamped only three miles from them.

While indisposed with cold and fever aboard the steamer *Alabama* at New River, Bankhead wrote Jesup that, if the Indians refused to appear for talks as promised, he could ascend the New River's north fork to within a mile or two of the swamp in which they were camped. This feat could be accomplished by relying on the steamer and on Lieutenant Powell's force.

After Bankhead's arrival, the force at New River received orders to move against the Seminoles. By that time Jesup had received his long-awaited communication from Washington rejecting his proposal for a permanent truce and a south Florida reservation. Hostilities resumed in full force. The commander ordered an immediate seizure of all Indians camped near Fort Jupiter, resulting in the capture of 513 Seminoles and 147 rifles. Eleven Indians, including one principal leader named Passuck Micco, escaped. "If he should go below," Jesup informed Bankhead, "he will be troublesome. Your measures should therefore be prompt."

Much to Bankhead's dismay, news of the failed truce reached the Indians in the vicinity of New River before Jesup's dispatch reached Fort Lauderdale. When the lieutenant colonel sent a response to the two New River Indian leaders, the messengers returned with the news that all the Seminoles declined to come in and were in the process of leaving the vicinity. Bankhead immediately dispatched a reconnaissance party, both on land and in boats, and from them learned that a fresh trail now crossed the river from the north.

On March 21, most of Bankhead's troops were embarked on the steamer *Isis* and in Lieutenant Powell's boats. Two additional mounted companies and a few boats were sent ahead in pursuit of the trail, and one company of volunteers remained to guard the blockhouse. The U.S. forces captured three Seminoles that day and also discovered that the trail they had located did not cross the south fork of New River. "It was evident that the Indians were either between the two forks of the river," Lieutenant Colonel Bankhead wrote in his report, "or had gone west." Therefore, after nightfall, the soldiers hauled Powell's boats overland about one mile into the Everglades.

Bankhead's command located a fresh trail leading to the northwest on the morning of the twenty-second. With ammunition and accouterments deposited in the boats and knapsacks secured on a small cocoplum island, the nearly 600 soldiers and sailors plunged into the Everglades in pursuit of their adversaries. For the next seven hours they struggled through waist-deep mud and water. The sawgrass was frequently up to their armpits, and many of the men became so bogged down that they required assistance to free themselves from the mire. At five o'clock in the afternoon, the troops came upon a pine island from which rose smoke, presumably from Indian campfires. Bankhead immediately directed one company forward, bearing the white flag in an attempt to negotiate. As this party neared the island, the Seminoles opened fire on them and commenced yelling.

When the Indians began firing, Colonel Bankhead hastily ordered his force to envelope the northern point of the island hammock. Lieutenant Powell's group he directed to take their boats to the west side, while the soldiers approached from the east and north. Lieutenant John Magruder of the First Artillery approached in advance of the foot soldiers, firing a four-pound cannon from the bow of his boat. Brevet Major Reynold M. Kirby, also of the First Artillery, advanced to the east side of the island, formed a line, and attempted to execute a flanking maneuver. Almost simultaneously, Powell landed his force on the west side, causing the Indians to withdraw from the immediate vicinity.

The United States forces did not pursue the Seminoles beyond the island because of approaching darkness. They camped for the night around the Indians' fires, where they noted that the Seminoles, in their precipitate flight, had left everything but their rifles. Before leaving the island, Bankhead's command captured and destroyed numerous provisions, including cooking utensils, machinery for processing coonti, and packs of clothing and cowskins. They also recovered a quantity of lead and several pounds of gunpowder in canisters. On the following morning, Bankhead's force pursued a trail leading from the southern end of Pine Island west into the sawgrass, but cut their chase short in mid-morning because of low provisions and exhaustion, returning to Fort Lauderdale on the evening of the twenty-third.

From Fort Lauderdale, Bankhead wrote General Jesup, detailing the skirmish at Pine Island and explaining his belief that all hostile Indians had

been driven from that section of the territory. He commended his soldiers and noted that he had received prompt and efficient aid from "Captain Powell" and the naval officers who had accompanied his expedition. Furthermore, Bankhead recommended that the New River region be abandoned, and welcomed orders transferring him to north Florida. Fort Lauderdale, he explained, was difficult to provision because of a precarious sandbar across New River Inlet, and its only purpose would be to prevent the Seminoles from obtaining coonti from the surrounding area. In contrast, Bankhead recommended that Key Biscayne should remain occupied, since the lighthouse there was of great importance to the nation's commerce.

In an ironic conclusion to the Everglades expedition, General Jesup notified Lieutenant Colonel Bankhead that Coacoochee and Alligator were not in the New River region after all, although Sam Jones with twenty or thirty warriors was reported to be nearby. Realizing that the hostile force in the south was not as large or as concentrated as he had expected, Jesup ordered Bankhead to occupy a position as high up New River as possible to prevent the Seminoles from reoccupying the mainland. Meanwhile, he instructed Zachary Taylor's infantrymen at Lake Okeechobee to prepare for a return to north Florida rather than directing them to the southeast as he had originally planned. Two of Taylor's officers, Captain John Munroe of the Fourth Artillery and Major Gustavus Loomis of the First Infantry, had successfully circumnavigated Lake Okeechobee in boats, but had not found an outlet from the lake.

Farther to the southeast, Seminole leaders Halleck Hadjoe and Tustenuggee, with four other warriors, arrived at Bankhead's New River camp on March 28. While their families were held captive at Fort Jupiter, these subchiefs volunteered to converse with other Indians about emigration. Soon afterwards, they met with an unfortunate demise, being condemned as traitors and assassinated by their own people. Within days after Halleck Hadjoe's and Tustenuggee's deaths, Lieutenant Colonel Bankhead received his anticipated orders to proceed to the Suwannee River. In his communique, General Jesup summarized his opinion of the 1837-1838 winter campaign: "I don't believe the enemy will concentrate again — they have received a blow from which they can never recover — this campaign, although without important results, has silenced more than four hundred Seminole rifles—this is so great a loss to

them that even should they continue hostile, an army [of immense proportion] will not again be required in Florida."

Knowing well that Seminoles were now dispersed in small bands throughout the southern peninsula and that the Everglades were virtually inaccessible, Jesup also thanked Lieutenant Powell for his zealous cooperation with the army, and conveyed his regret that the low level of water in the Everglades had prevented the navy group from exploring them. Several army expeditions had met similar difficulties. No navigable streams with access to the Pai-hai-okee had been found, either from Lake Okeechobee or on the Gulf coast between Charlotte Harbor and Cape Sable. In fact, Jesup had been informed by one Seminole, who was quite familiar with south Florida, that "the glades must be entered from this [the east] side, if entered at all . . ." Jesup added, "There are many islands in the glades, I have been informed by an Indian who is perfectly acquainted with the whole of that labyrinth, on which the Indians may secrete themselves, and where they may obtain an abundant supply of subsistence from the fish and water turtle which they will be able to take. Their object is to conceal themselves until the approach of summer shall compel us to leave the country. Then, they will seek the Pine Barrens, and perhaps return to the frontier."

Because the Seminoles had succeeded in eluding Bankhead and Powell, detachments of soldiers were ordered to the south side of Lake Okeechobee to determine if a trail might not connect the lake to New River. No such pathway could be found. Following this reconnaissance, Jesup advised the adjutant general that, in the absence of an overland trail, the southeast Florida Indian bands must have escaped along a yet-undiscovered water route. This evaluation was substantiated when an Indian prisoner

informed the major general that the Seminoles traveled south in canoes, thereby eluding the soldiers and sailors on New River. In consequence, the Florida commander concluded, "they are probably beyond our reach for the season."

During April, most of Jesup's army pulled out of south Florida. The Tennessee Volunteers evacuated Fort Lauderdale on April 4, after being relieved by Lieutenant Colonel William Selby Harney with fifty dragoons. Major General Jesup, his staff, one company of artillerymen, and one company of dragoons left Fort Jupiter for Tampa on April 9. Lieutenant Levin Powell's group concluded their inopportune yet eventful service in this campaign by conducting a coastal reconnaissance as far south as Key West and then up the Gulf coast, arriving in Pensacola on May 2, less than one week before the few remaining companies of soldiers evacuated Fort Lauderdale.

Upon the conclusion of the 1837-1838 winter campaign, the demand for coastal protection lessened, causing Commodore Dallas to release from the West Indies Squadron the revenue cutters *Madison* and *Jackson*. In the meantime, General Jesup considered launching a campaign from his headquarters at Tampa, but the frustrations inherent in trying to corner the scattered Seminoles and escalating criticism from both Congress and the general public led the major general to resign his Florida command on May 15, 1838. Before returning to his previous duties as Quartermaster General for the United States Army, Jesup transferred the Florida command to Brevet Brigadier General Zachary Taylor. By the time Taylor assumed command, government cutbacks forced a change of strategy in the Florida theater, and marked an end to major military campaigning in south Florida. Ironically, this development would increase the demand for naval participation in that region.

U.S. Marine Corps button
from the Second Seminole War,
recovered from the
Caloosahatchee River
area of Southwest Florida.

