



Uncle Lemuel

in the
Florida
War

UNCLE LEMUEL
IN THE FLORIDA WAR

PETER DUNBAUGH SMITH

front cover: detail from “Attack of the Seminoles on the Blockhouse” by T. F. Gray and James, Charleston, South Carolina 1837.

back cover: detail from “Burning of the Town of Pilaklikaha by General Eustis” by T. F. Gray and James, Charleston, South Carolina 1837.



Uncle Lemuel in the Florida War
copyright © 2023
Peter Dunbaugh Smith
Williston Highlands, Florida USA
www.pdsmith.net

CONTENTS

FOREWORD	p.1
PROLOGUE	p.3
I. WILLIAM & LEMUEL	p.5
II. FORT KING & FORT DRANE	p.6
III. PREDATOR & PREY	p.8
IV. BLOODY WITHLACOOCHEE	p.10
V. GENERAL GAINES	p.12
VI. CAMP BARNWELL	p.14
VII. CAMP IZARD	p.15
VIII. "I AM SATISFIED"	p.16
IX. GENERAL SCOTT	p.17
X. FIRST COMMAND	p.18
XI. THE MASTER PLAN	p.20
XII. OAKLAND PLANTATION	p.22

XIII. THE FORGOTTEN BLOCKHOUSE	p.24
XIV. CHE-CHO-TER'S WARNING	p.26
XV. GENERALS AT MIDNIGHT	p.27
XVI. MAJOR HEILEMAN	p.29
XVII. FINAL COMMAND	p.31
XVIII. ENSLAVEMENT & LIBERATION	p.33
XIX. BURNING SEASON	p.36
XX. THE CORN DANCE	p.39
XXI. SEASON OF PESTILENCE	p.40
POSTSCRIPT	p.42
AFTERWORD	p.45
APPENDIX I	p.51
APPENDIX II	p.54
APPENDIX III	p.56

FOREWORD

October 2023

My grandmother's grandmother was only seven years old when her Uncle Lemuel died in the Florida War. She probably never knew much more about him than just this one fact. As an historical account, this book was never intended to be a scholarly reference. It's simply a humble attempt at earnest story-telling. Sometimes one finds epic tragedy in lost local tales of forgotten family members. Sometimes too, one discovers the reasons why some stories remain hidden.

My home is less than twenty miles west of the former site of Fort Drane, and for many years my office was just seven miles away from Fort King. The events that occurred in this region have largely been erased from human memory. However, one can still read their consequences mapped over a cultural landscape that was nurtured on battle-scarred soil and still seems to revel in its pain.

P. D. Smith
Williston Highlands



“Map of the Seat of War in Florida” (detail)
Bureau of U. S. Topographical Engineers
Washington City 1838

PROLOGUE

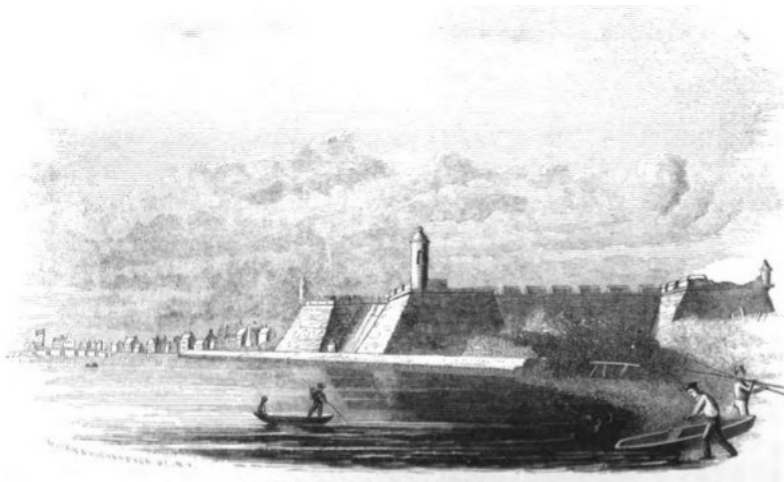
There were residents of this region who could still remember the year 1818, when General Andrew Jackson attacked and burned their homes at the settlement of Old Town on the Suwanee River. The 1819 Adams-Onís Treaty with Spain had promised them that the “inhabitants of the territories” would be “admitted to the enjoyment of all the privileges, rights and immunities of the citizens of the United States.” However, when Florida legally became a U. S. Territory in 1821, the majority of them were denied every right of citizenship.

The 1823 Treaty of Moultrie Creek between the United States government and Seminole tribal leaders, had established a sovereign reservation at the center of the Florida peninsula. Lonely Fort King, near the site of modern-day Ocala, was constructed in 1827 to maintain the northern boundary of that reservation.

The Indian Removal Act was signed into law by President Andrew Jackson in 1830. This legislation was a state-sanctioned ethnic-cleansing program that effectively nullified all prior treaties. Many Floridians discovered that

they would be shipped to the Indian Territories in Oklahoma as wards of the United States federal government, while others learned that they would be delivered into the hands of slave holders.

For many years, unscrupulous slave poachers preyed upon the Seminoles' black allies, many of whom had previously been British or Spanish subjects. They were now forced to contend with America's deplorable slavery code. Incursions onto their reservation were becoming more and more frequent. Conflict seemed inevitable.



“The Castillo de San Marcos” (Fort Marion), engraving from, *Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of the Florida War* by John T. Sprague, 1858.

I. WILLIAM & LEMUEL

Uncle William survived the Florida War. His brother Lemuel didn't make it out alive. Their father, also Lemuel, had served in Washington's artillery at the Battle of Yorktown and the boys grew up under his command at Fort Independence in Boston. William entered West Point's first class as a thirteen year-old cadet and became its eleventh graduate. After service as an officer in the War of 1812, he was assigned to his father's old command at Boston.

Before the outbreak of war, Major William Gates commanded Fort Marion at the Castillo de San Marcos in Saint Augustine, with Lieutenant Lemuel Gates serving alongside him as an officer in Company C, First Artillery. Uncle Lemuel was eight years younger than Uncle William. He doesn't seem to appear on any of the lists of West Point's graduates.

II. FORT KING & FORT DRANE

In the Spring of 1835, Lemuel was stationed at Fort King under General Duncan Clinch's command. As an officer in Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Fanning's battalion, Uncle Lemuel may have witnessed Osceola's historic April 24th repudiation of the tainted and largely unsigned "Treaty of Payne's Prairie," and there is a similar chance that he may have participated in the Seminole leader's humiliating incarceration soon after that council. Tensions escalated in October after the summary execution of cooperating chief Charley Emathla, a cattleman and near-neighbor to General Clinch, by a council of warriors led by Osceola.

After ten years as a first lieutenant, Uncle Lemuel was finally promoted to captain, just as his company received its orders to garrison Fort Drane, twenty-five miles northwest of Fort King.

Fort Drane was situated on General Clinch's 3000 acre sugar-plantation, "Auld Lang Syne" at a place called Wetumpka. The plantation house, excluding slave quarters, had recently been palisaded into a wooden fortress, and renamed after its engineer. A young West-Pointer named Edgar Allen Poe remembered a story about Gustavus

Drane, who had been bricked up in a wall after killing a popular cadet in a duel. Drane's presence at Lang Syne proves that Poe's source was unreliable. However, "The Black Cat" and "The Cask of Amontillado" still remain with us.



“Osceola's Mode of Signing the Treaty,” (detail)
engraving from, *Origin, Progress, and Conclusion
of the Florida War* by John T. Sprague, 1858.

III. PREDATOR & PREY

Captain Lemuel Gates departed from Fort Drane's gates on Monday December 28th along with 250 army regulars under General Clinch and 500 mounted Florida militiamen under territorial governor R. K. Call. Together, they marched South through the hammock in the direction of the Seminole settlements at the Cove of the Withlacoochee. It will take more than three days for Uncle Lemuel to cover the next thirty miles of slogging, so let's take just a brief moment to flesh out a sequence of recent events...

Early that previous Saturday morning, Colonel Fanning had accompanied three artillery units to Fort Drane in preparation for Clinch's campaign, depleting Fort King's garrison. Later the same afternoon, Osceola, seizing the opportunity, attacked and killed Indian Affairs Agent General Wiley Thompson, along with four others just outside the fort. This action facilitated the escape of a number of individuals who had been held enslaved by Thompson.

One hundred reinforcements led by Major Francis Dade had already left Fort Brooke in Tampa, but they were still only half-way to Fort

King. On Monday morning, a combined force of around 180 warriors under Chief Micanopy ambushed Dade's troops on the trail, and utterly destroyed two entire companies of the United States Army.

His warriors vanished back into the Cove of the Withlacoochee leaving behind a grim tableau on the battlefield. All-out war had begun, on the same day that Uncle Lemuel entered the wilderness.



“The Death of General Thompson,” engraving from *The Youth's History of the United States* by Edward Ellis, 1887.

IV. BLOODY WITHLACOOCHEE

As Lemuel's company approached the north bank of the Withlacoochee River on the morning of December 31st, General Clinch gave the order to ferry across its flooded currents a few men at a time in a small canoe found abandoned on the bank. Uncle Lemuel was among the regulars who, first to cross, found himself separated from the militiamen on the opposite side of the river.

Suddenly, at midday, accompanied by the sounds of war whoops and gunfire, a force of around 250 warriors attacked. Osceola led from the front. Lemuel and his fellow artillerymen immediately positioned themselves in an unbroken line and faced the assault. When Osceola's men attempted a flanking maneuver to cut them off from the river, Uncle Lemuel was at the front of the two bayonet charges that successfully repulsed them.

The battle continued for almost an hour as the militia crossed the river and reinforced the defensive perimeter. After ten more minutes of hard fighting, the tide turned in favor of the United States. Osceola was reported wounded and his forces soon retreated, ending the battle. Four

soldiers were killed and fifty-nine wounded, with four of the latter from Lemuel's own company of artillery. Judged objectively, General Clinch had survived the first Battle of Withlacoochee. However, it cost him almost a quarter of his regular troops.



“The Death of Major Dade,” engraving from
*A History of the United States for the Use of
Schools and Academies* by J. Olney, 1852

V. GENERAL GAINES

Osceola's losses are unknown, but his reputation as a warrior grew. Clinch's campaign against the settlements had been beaten back, and the United States Army was carrying its dead and wounded back to Fort Drane. It was nearly three weeks into the new year before Lemuel learned of the Dade Massacre.

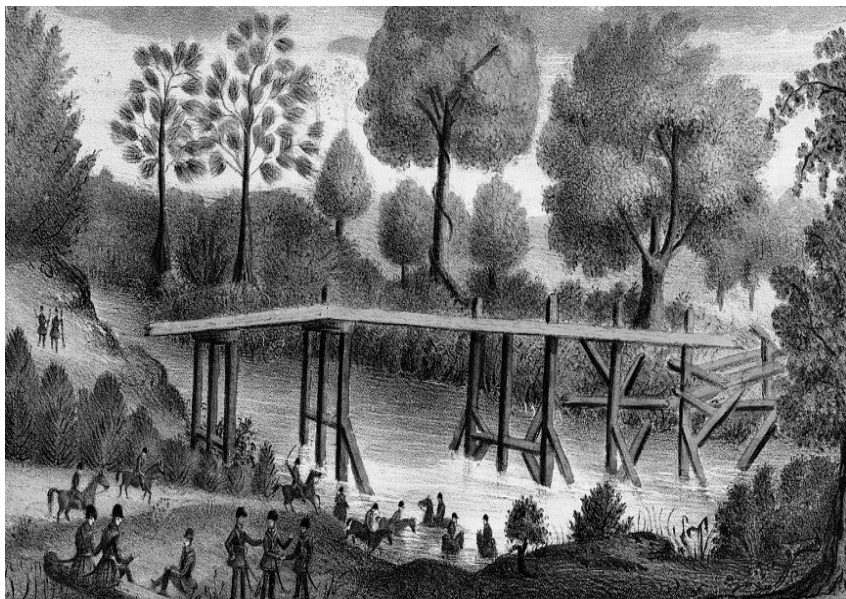
By mid-February, there was a rumor running through Fort Drane's garrison that General Edmund Gaines had sailed out of New Orleans with an army of nearly a thousand newly recruited volunteers. Meanwhile, the War Department in Washington had placed General Winfield Scott, Gaines' longstanding and bitter rival, in total command of the war effort.

Without orders, Gaines' recruits arrived in Tampa anticipating supplies, but empty storehouses at Fort Brooke drove them onward to Fort King. They followed Major Dade's fateful route. Seven weeks after the event, theirs would be the first official survey of the massacre site.

Gaines' men buried all 106 bodies with full military honors and erected their "six-pounder" cannon over the graves as a marker. Captain Ethan

Allen Hitchcock, the aforementioned Poe's former professor at West Point, described the somber tone of the scene: "Three graves were dug, and the bodies interred therein. We of the regulars marched around the graves to the dead march."

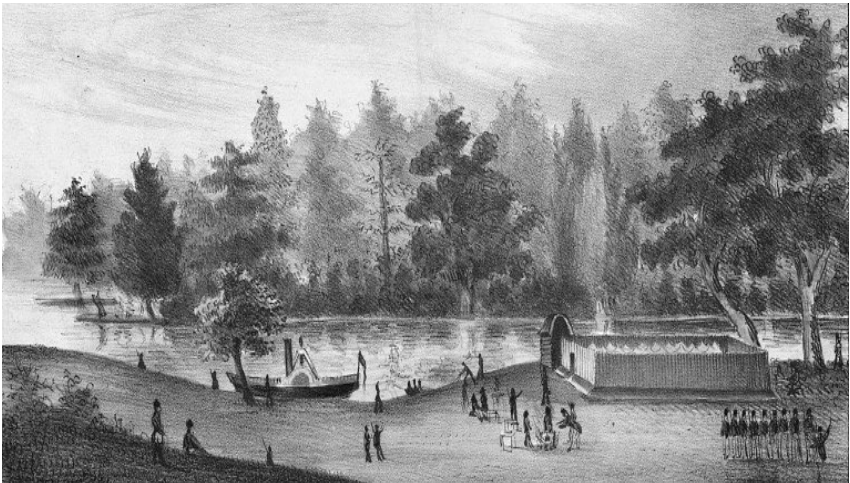
Unfortunately, Gaines' unexpected arrival at Fort King found its stores depleted, too. Despite low supplies, he marched his raw recruits out of Fort King and straight towards the Cove of the Withlacoochee, aiming them in the general direction of Clinch's recent battle.



"Dragoons Crossing the Withlacoochee,"
lithograph by T. F. Gray and James, 1837

VI. CAMP BARNWELL

Meanwhile, near the opposite coast of the territory, Major William Gates, in command of 140 troops, was just beginning his disembarkation at the transfer station of Picolata, near Saint Augustine on the Saint Johns River. Transportation from Savannah on the steamboat, “Forester” had been foreboding. His arrival was delayed for almost a week by dangerous weather conditions. Uncle William soon took command of Camp Barnwell at Volusia, along with two companies of army regulars including the sick and injured.



“Camp Barnwell on the St. Johns,”
lithograph by T. F. Gray and James, 1837

VII. CAMP IZARD

Gaines' expedition has been well-documented by subsequent courts of inquiry. At an ox-bow in the river, his soldiers were pinned down by a barrage of heavy rifle fire delivered by a force of around 800 warriors under Chief Micanopy's leadership, and commanded by a constellation of powerful chiefs including Osceola, Halpatter Tustenuggee (Alligator), Micanopy's nephew Heneha Mekko (John Jumper), King Philip's son Coacoochee (Wildcat), John Caesar, and Abraham. In early fighting, many of the old general's remaining teeth had been knocked out by a well-aimed, but under-powered musket ball.

Express runners were harried back to Fort Drane from Camp IZARD. Named after their first casualty, Gaines' improvised breastworks were two miles upriver from Uncle Lemuel's earlier encounter with Osceola. At first, reports described a standoff, then a siege. After a week, these included descriptions of desperate privation, including consumption of horseflesh and camp dogs for sustenance.

VIII. "I AM SATISFIED"

Back at Fort Drane, Uncle Lemuel was among General Clinch's officers during deliberations over how to respond to General Scott's puzzling refusal to rescue Gaines. Finally, taking personal responsibility for the initiative, Clinch ordered 600 troops to Camp IZARD with enough provisions, including livestock on the hoof, to relieve the hapless recruits. Once again, Lemuel left the gates of Fort Drane behind him, and entered the frontier.

Following a brief skirmish on their first approach, a messenger from Gaines arrived reporting that successful peace negotiations were being conducted through Captain Hitchcock and Abraham, a Black Seminole often described as Chief Micanopy's "sense-bearer."

Unfortunately, Uncle Lemuel may have been among those troops who failed to decamp quietly, resulting in a disruption of the delicate parley. Warriors and negotiators scattered immediately, and talks ended prematurely. After this moment though, the attacks ended. It was as if the council of chiefs had established, and were cautiously maintaining, a full cease-fire as a baseline for further negotiations.

IX. GENERAL SCOTT

The combined forces returned to Fort Drane on the evening of Friday March 11th. Officers retired to the plantation house, regulars to their barracks, and the volunteers set up tents. Soon, General Winfield Scott arrived with two more companies of regulars. He was impatient to implement his textbook-perfect, three-pronged assault against the Cove of the Withlacoochee and was resentful of Gaines' intrusion into his brilliant plan. It also appears that he had no intention of recognizing the council's cease fire or its peace initiative. General Gaines' re-assignment of his new recruits to General Clinch's authority was followed by a couple of chilly evenings at Fort Drane's officer's table, until Gaines and Hitchcock decided to ride for Tallahassee.

X. FIRST COMMAND

Within days of General Scott's arrival at Fort Drane, Uncle Lemuel received his first command. He would return to Fort King and deliver his orders to Lieutenant Colonel Ichabod Crane, whose own garrison had been reassigned to Fort Defiance at the village named after Chief Micanopy, a thirty mile ride northward.

It seems that, years earlier, Colonel Crane had met a young writer named Washington Irving, who incorporated his name and likeness into a popular short story he called, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow."

Captain Lemuel Gates took command of Fort King in mid-March with two lieutenants, a surgeon, and a garrison of fifty troops from Company C, First Artillery. At first, there were only two of Clinch's wounded soldiers left in the infirmary.

Soon, eighty-five Louisiana volunteers, casualties from Gaines' expedition, were carried in from Fort Drane and flooded Lemuel's sick wards, filling them beyond capacity. Two-a-bed policies and a lack of sanitation provided perfect conditions for infectious disease.

Incapacitating illness had weakened Fort Drane's forces and then the fever flamed through Fort King. Lemuel's surgeon was still decades away from the medical knowledge that could arm him against an enemy that had penetrated their strongest defenses so effortlessly. Although an impressive catalog of local ticks, fleas, and arachnids inspired a wide variety of novel scourges, malaria and yellow fever would remain the most frequent diagnoses.



“The Death of Waxe Hadjo,” engraving from
The Exiles of Florida
by Joshua R. Giddings, 1858.

XI. THE MASTER PLAN

Throughout late March and early April, the region buzzed with activity as Scott's master plan unfolded. In support of his grand scheme, five thousand volunteers were steamed into Florida's ports, then marched through the Cove of the Withlacoochee in a pincer movement. While Lemuel and William maintained command of their respective posts, General Eustis brought in troops from the East, Colonel Lindsay led from the South, and General Clinch covered the West from Fort Drane. To the council of chiefs, it was probably already evident that the cease-fire was over.

It was during Scott's campaign that there were a series of raids against Uncle William's defenses at Camp Barnwell, back in Volusia. In mid-April, he sent out a burial party of four, with orders to inter two deceased soldiers and give them their last rites. A sudden rifle attack killed two of the living and sent the survivors running for cover. It was later confirmed that William had assessed the casualties himself, but under heavy fire was forced back into the blockhouse. He continued to maintain a defensive posture, but determined not to retrieve the corpses until after the assault had

ended, hours later. A frustrated General Winfield Scott condemned this decision as cowardice, and repeatedly used the phrase “breastwork panic” to characterize Uncle William’s command. Scott soon pressed charges.

Despite a few energetic skirmishes, the residents of the Cove of the Withlacoochee had preemptively evacuated most of their main settlements, leaving behind little for the U. S. Army to conquer. With the notable exception of General Eustis’ provocative destruction of Abraham’s hometown at Pilaklikaha, much of Scott’s vaunted campaign consisted of fending off guerrilla attacks from small groups of warriors who worried the tails of his supply lines.

Almost immediately after the troop movements were completed and the volunteers’ terms of service had ended, General Scott dispersed his grand army for the summer season, with little to show for his efforts. Lemuel remained at his post, in command of Fort King.

XII. OAKLAND PLANTATION

General Clinch was resting his exhausted horses at Camp Izard, still on his way back home from Fort Brooke, the final terminus of Scott's campaign, when word of the previous night's attack on Fort Drane first arrived. In the early morning of Wednesday April 20th at two o'clock, preceded by Osceola's distinctively shrill war cry, there had been a full-press assault against the fort's front pickets. Despite the absence of a complete garrison, its depleted defenses were still able to drive off the main body of warriors. A number of people who had been enslaved by General Clinch made their escape during this attack. As we'll soon discover, many of these were already playing an integral role in the resistance.

It was assumed at the time, that delivering formerly enslaved opponents back into bondage was simply a part of a soldier's duty. Clinch's description of his losses, "they succeeded however in carrying off three of my negroes and seventeen of my horses," indicates his unwillingness or inability, to distinguish between human beings and chattel property. This tragic blindness was a

strategic vulnerability that would continue to undermine the army's progress throughout the war.

About five miles northeast of Fort Drane was Oakland, a cotton plantation owned by Colonel McIntosh, General Clinch's brother-in-law. It was around this time when his gin-house and cotton stock were set ablaze. Clinch estimated the immediate losses at around five thousand dollars, and posted a small garrison of around two dozen soldiers at McIntosh's plantation house.

It's unknown if anyone managed to escape from Oakland that particular evening, but the warrior, Heneha Mekko, attacked Pilgrim Plantation in nearby Micanopy just a few days later. His forces liberated twenty-nine people who were held enslaved by the region's previous Indian Agent, Colonel Gad Humphries.

Humphries would eventually file claims for the loss of fifty-nine individuals who escaped his captivity. The ranks of the resistance were swelling with motivated fighters, whose desire for revenge found full expression in the desperate defense of their own liberty. Their collective numbers would soon dwarf every other uprising of the enslaved that had ever occurred in this nation's history.

XIII. THE FORGOTTEN BLOCKHOUSE

Attacks against local plantations continued, and crowds of refugees sought shelter in the safety of the army's fortifications. Many were directed away from the immediate threat to the fort at Newnansville, around thirty miles north of Micanopy, which reported over 100 women and children huddled in improvised shelters and sharing sparse army fare. Others had been moved further east, to Black Creek near the Saint Johns River.

On April 26th Lemuel was still in command at Fort King when General Clinch convened a Council of War. Fort Drane had just received a desperate call for emergency relief from a small company of forty militiamen who had been stationed downriver from Camp Izard as a resupply blockhouse during Scott's grand maneuvers.

Located on the south bank of the Withlacoochee, they were fifteen miles from the gulf, just beneath the first rapids. Their commander dead, and their roof burned away, they had been held under siege by a force that ranged in number from two to five hundred warriors. After the illness and death of an officer in Scott's chain of command, the

outpost and its men had apparently been completely forgotten for weeks.

Clinch argued that he didn't have enough soldiers to send to their aid because of rampant illness. He wasn't even sure if he could field enough men to protect his own defenses against the level of force that the residents of the Cove seemed able to raise so consistently.

Given the self-evident severity of their own shortage of manpower, the council sent a recommendation to General Scott that Uncle Lemuel's command at Fort King should be evacuated, and that its defenses be abandoned.

On the night of May 23rd, after almost eight harrowing weeks, a gunboat finally steamed up the Withlacoochee River and retrieved the survivors of the besieged blockhouse, without incident.

XIV. CHE-CHO-TER'S WARNING

A pre-dawn Sunday confession on the first of May at Fort Drane reported that Osceola and the entire Seminole nation were, at that moment, encamped just six miles outside of Fort King and were planning their own version of a three-point attack the next day, culminating in the burning of the fort. If true, this would have been a critical moment for Lemuel's command.

The intelligence came from a wife of Osceola, Che-cho-ter (Morning Dew), who was a familiar figure at Fort King in earlier years. Out of character as her betrayal was, and despite the severe shortage of available soldiers, Clinch quickly decided to send a company of artillery, including four wagons of provisions and a six-pounder with an escort of mounted dragoons to strengthen Uncle Lemuel's defenses.

The attack never came.

XV. GENERALS AT MIDNIGHT

Over the course of the next few days, as express riders arrived at the gates of Fort King, Lemuel would have received a dizzying flurry of reports. General Scott disagreed with the council's request to evacuate Fort King, and he countermanded their decision.

At the same time, Scott was in Saint Augustine, acting as accuser and lead witness for Uncle William's court martial. The trial went badly. The court found Major William Gates guilty of abandoning his soldiers' bodies outside of the barricades. He "ceases to be in the army."

It was also at this time that General Clinch retired his command. He resigned from the army and departed Florida on the 11th of May, leaving behind his fort, his sugar plantation, and the people he had enslaved to work on it. Adding to the confusion, soon after this, General Scott was taken out of Florida by a War Department that had lost patience.

Among his departing commands was this order: "The post and steamboat on the Suwannee, Fort King, Oaklands, Micanopy, and Garey's Ferry, will all be under the immediate orders of the field officer, Major Heileman, stationed at Fort Drane."



“Osceola,” engraving from
The Youth's History of the United States
by Edward Ellis, 1887.

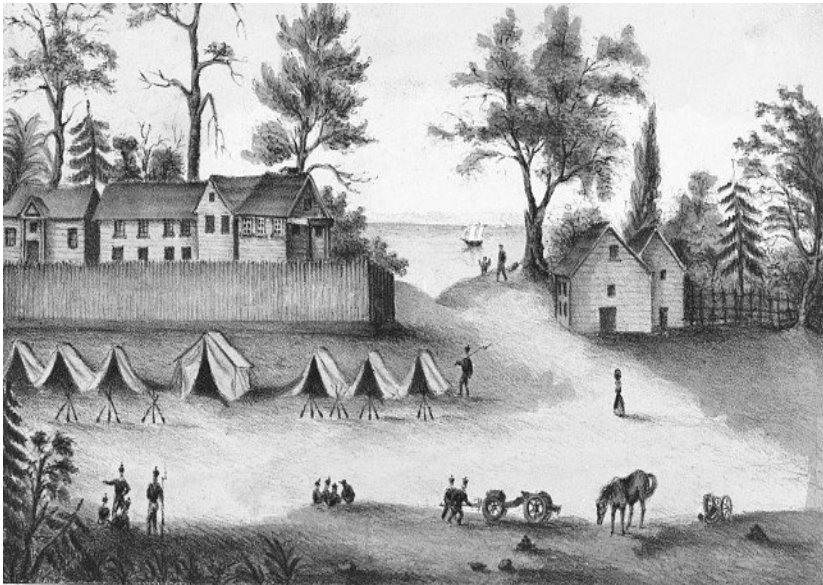
XVI. MAJOR HEILEMAN

Faced with so many persuasive arguments against the basic competency of his commanding officers, Uncle Lemuel would have found great comfort in the person of Julius Heileman. A widely respected and well-liked artilleryman, Heileman and Uncle William went back to the earliest days of West Point together. Both were held back a year when it was discovered their instructors hadn't included gunnery practice in the curriculum for these two budding artillery officers. William and Lemuel's late brother Samuel was also part of that first class. The Academy's sixth graduate, Samuel left the army after only a brief military career.

We have to assume that Heileman supported William's hopeful assertion that, if he could only travel to the Hermitage in Nashville and plead his case before President Andrew Jackson, then Old Hickory would certainly understand the situation and intervene to stop General Scott's irrational vendetta against him. This sort of optimism might have provided at least a bit of solace for a younger brother who would have been stunned by such devastating news.

Finally, near the end of the month, General Abraham Eustis stepped in and took full command of the war. This time, the orders were clear. Fort King would be abandoned and Lemuel's command would be split apart. Healthy members of his company accompanied him to Fort Drane, while Lieutenant Andrew Humphries led the remainder to Garey's Ferry at Black Creek.

Uncle Lemuel evacuated Fort King on a Friday. His troops were the last American soldiers and he was the last United States Army officer, who would ever cross that familiar threshold.



Untitled lithograph by T. F. Gray and James, 1837.

XVII. FINAL COMMAND

On Sunday May 29th 1836, Captain Lemuel Gates arrived and took command of Fort Drane. Five generals had failed to force the residents of the territory from their native home. Now, only one of them remained in the field. General Eustis established his headquarters at Saint Augustine, on the far coast.

Uncle Lemuel found himself at the edge of a contested frontier, with his brother disgraced, and an undefeated army literally knocking at his front door. At this moment, he probably would have been hesitant to contend with yet another crisis. Nevertheless, a crisis emerged, one that had been smoldering within his own command.

It was evident that communication had been ongoing between Osceola's Black Seminole allies and the plantation workers who had been enslaved by Clinch, very probably since the earliest days of "Auld Lang Syne." Lemuel may not have fully understood the gravity of his situation, but there had to have been an instance when he realized that every word ever spoken at Fort Drane's officer's table or in the plantation house, had been immediately delivered directly to Osceola, or to Heneha

Mekko, or to whoever else needed the information the most.

Embedded within this critical failure of military intelligence was another harsh reality. The world's most experienced English translators of Micosukee and Creek language dialects could be found among those same Seminole allies.

It appeared that detailed knowledge of Major Dade's progress, Clinch's troop movements, Scott's grand plan, and even Che-cho-ter's story had all been integrated into the various strategies of resistance that had been unfolding over the course of the past few months.



“Marines Battle Seminole Indians in the Florida War,”
from the National Archives and Records, c. 1842.

XVIII. ENSLAVEMENT & LIBERATION

In early June, Uncle Lemuel must have felt events accelerating around him. Much of what we know of this period in his command comes from the journal of Lieutenant Andrew Humphreys, who was stationed at Micanopy. He learned of these occurrences through the few reports that made it past the gauntlet of warriors surrounding both of these increasingly isolated forts. His description of events follows.

“About the beginning of June, a plot had been discovered among General Clinch's negroes by which it appeared that they had held constant intercourse with the Indians and were, on the night of the day that the discovery was made, to have gone off with a party of Seminoles, who were to have made a feint upon the pickets so that it might appear that the negroes were forced off.”

Humphreys goes on to describe the imminent nature of the planned escape.

“Their bundles were already made up and they began disposing of some of their truck to the soldiers, which causing suspicion, finally led to their detection.”

The coordinated liberation strategy was fully revealed to Lemuel’s soldiers through a warning, a simple act of compassion that prevented the plan’s success, and denied these hopeful individuals their envisioned freedom.

“One of the negro women in the end confessing the plot. Upon the overseer's going to the negro houses, a woman warned him away and then told him that the Indians were lying in wait not 50 yards ahead to shoot him. He returned at once to the pickets and a detachment was sent out that brought in all the negroes who were at once confined, six of them ironed.”

It’s uncertain if Uncle Lemuel’s regimented New England upbringing might have somehow prevented him from recognizing the full implications of his own situation. He had to have realized though, that the enslaved workers who had previ-

ously been held in bondage by General Clinch, were now subjugated by a new captor. His name was Captain Lemuel Gates.



“Massacre of the Whites by Indians and Blacks in Florida,” (detail) wood engraving by Daniel Blanchard & others 1836.

XIX. BURNING SEASON

Early on Wednesday morning June 8th, Major Heileman and two companies of seventy-five reinforcements, approached Micanopy from Black Creek with the intent of stopping over on their way to Fort Drane. A quarter of a mile from the fort, his soldiers encountered a force of around 200 warriors. Lieutenant Humphries' journal reveals concern over Heileman's "enfeebled and sickly state," but despite the need for others to lift him off his horse, Heileman ordered his officers to divide forces and engage the attackers with artillery. After vigorous exchanges for almost an hour and a half, his soldiers forced a retreat at the cost of one life and several others wounded.

The battle was renewed the following morning when Heileman's soldiers were drawn out from Fort Defiance by a provocative volley of rifle fire. At one point in the battle, the warriors had the fort surrounded. After another hour of hard fighting, and through the firepower of their reliable six-pounder, the army was able to finally drive off the attack,

Back at Fort Drane, Uncle Lemuel's opportunities for self-reflection had been few. Due to the

severe shortage of manpower, he had been forced to leave General Clinch's sugar works and slave quarters unguarded. Later on that same day, a large force of warriors once again attacked the fort. The sugar house was about a quarter of mile from the safety of the palisades, while the slave quarters were nearby. Soon, everything outside of the pickets was up in flames.

Then, the front barricades of Fort Drane were threatened. Out of frustration after so many months of having been forced to respond to guerilla tactics, Lemuel pulled the fort's howitzer outside of its gates and fired randomly into the underbrush. Wherever he heard a response, he sent his soldiers in with bayonets. Once again, the assault evaporated into the forest, providing his garrison with at least a brief respite.

During daylight hours on the following day, a large formation of warriors presented themselves in McIntosh's cotton fields to the twenty-seven soldiers who remained there to defend Oakland Plantation. The garrison had been left without any large artillery of the type that had recently proven so effective in the defense of Fort Defiance.

Major Heileman sent the order for Lemuel to abandon the small garrison at Oakland, to destroy

its plantation house, and to burn anything remaining of McIntosh's cotton or sugar works that might be used against them. Under Uncle Lemuel's command, Fort King had been evacuated. Now the garrison at Oakland was abandoned.

Heileman's forces finally made it to Fort Drane on the 11th of June. He arrived in a visibly weakened condition. Though physically incapacitated, he remained alert and maintained command. Uncle Lemuel had been experiencing his own bouts with illness, punctuated by episodes of better health. Over the course of the next week, the garrison would witness the suicide of Lieutenant Wheelock, whose own sickness led to his desperate act. This was followed by a continuation of attacks against the expresses between Fort Drane and Fort Defiance, and the destruction of a plantation on the Suwanee, which rearmed the resistance with 2,800 pounds of confiscated lead.

XX. THE CORN DANCE

Suddenly, the attacks ceased. The season for the traditional green corn ceremony had finally arrived. The corn dance was a collective tradition in native communities throughout the Americas, and for generations in Florida, tribes assembled from across the region to participate in this sacramental event. The sacred nature of the ceremony provided a few days of repose for Uncle Lemuel and the beleaguered remnants of the U. S. Army who still remained to defend these remote and increasingly isolated outposts.

On June 27th, at the end of the multiple-day observance, Lieutenant Colonel Julius Heileman died from yellow fever. The fortifications of his former command at Garey's Ferry, on Black Creek, were subsequently renamed Fort Heileman, in his memory.

On that same day, the abandoned pickets of Fort King were put to the torch by warriors of the resistance, who burned its remaining defenses, and left nothing but smoldering timbers. The season for the corn dance was over.

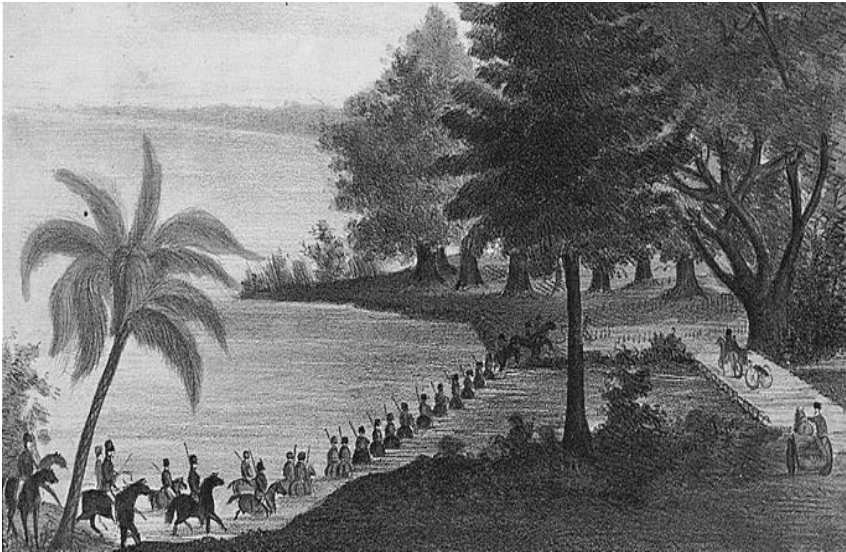
XXI. SEASON OF PESTILENCE

The War Department had assigned Lemuel yet another new commander-in-chief. On the 4th of July, Territorial Governor Call sent out the order to abandon Fort Drane. The order pointed out that there was only one commanding captain and six lieutenants, with four of these officers on the sick list. In light of subsequent events, we have to assume that Uncle Lemuel was one of the stricken. Portentiously, Governor Call had left a blank space where the name of Fort Drane's commander should have been inscribed. A visiting captain from the Florida Militia observed that, in a garrison of over 200 soldiers, 140 of them were incapacitated.

On the 18th of July, a report arrived out of Fort Defiance. Responding to Governor Call's order, Lieutenant Maitland wrote that he had, "in consequence of the large and increasing sick report, determined to move the troops to this place." At eight o'clock in the morning, Maitland left Fort Drane with twenty-two wagons, sixty-two soldiers and the fort's five-and-a-half inch howitzer. A mile from Fort Defiance, near We-li-ka Pond, the attacks began. A force of around 250 warriors engaged the soldiers with rifle fire. Reinforcements arrived from

Fort Defiance. At the end of the encounter, eleven had been wounded, and two would die of their wounds. Lieutenant Humphries had accurately estimated that it would take over twenty such trips to strip “Auld Lang Syne” of all its resources.

Uncle Lemuel’s silence during the evacuation of Fort Drane suggests that he was already incapacitated by his illness. One of the many wagons bouncing along that fatal trail would have carried Lemuel away from his former command and brought him to his final destination, Fort Defiance.



“Troops Fording Lake Ocklawaha,”
lithograph by T. F. Grey and James, 1837.

POSTSCRIPT

On Sunday August 7th, 1836, Captain Lemuel Gates died at Fort Defiance in the village of Micanopy. Lieutenant Humphrey's hypothesis was that his death was the result of some unripe peaches he had recently eaten. A more rigorous diagnosis might have recognized the malaria that had been decimating the region for so long.

There's also the possibility that a waggish newspaper correspondent might have been correct, when he suggested that William's trial was the cause of Lemuel's death.

Although it would require a poetic flight of karmic conjecture, it's still interesting to consider whether mosquito bites were shared between Uncle Lemuel and Osceola, particularly given the premature deaths of these two longstanding opponents.

Uncle William's replacement in the field was Major Benjamin Pierce, brother of the future fourteenth president. The final evacuation of Fort Drane was completed on the same day as Lemuel's passing. Pierce arrived at Fort Defiance two weeks later.

Saddling his horse at two o'clock the next morning, he rode towards General Clinch's abandoned plantation leading 110 mounted regulars with a field artillery piece in tow. Pierce's sunrise attack on Fort Drane revealed a fort commanded by Osceola and occupied by around 300 men, women, and children living off the bounty of the crops and supplies left behind by the army.

First, his mounted forces chased down the attacking warriors, then after about an hour of vigorous fighting, the occupiers dissolved into the hammock. Fort Drane had been abandoned once again. Pierce's soldiers retired, and were back at Fort Defiance before ten o'clock breakfast. They had lost one man killed, and sixteen wounded. Pierce estimated that Osceola had lost ten warriors.

On August 27th, Major Pierce gave the command to abandon Fort Defiance. The justification was cited as, "pestilence." The next day, he ordered its palisades torched just before the army departed for Black Creek.

Uncle Lemuel left behind a widow and five children, not counting five year-old Lydia, who died ten years before he did. In the middle of that pestilential August season, Sarah M. Gates traveled with two of their children to Saint Augustine for his

interment, then she returned by steamer to Virginia.

In the July 1886 issue of the “Armed Forces Journal” we find the following notice: “The venerable widow of Capt. Lemuel Gates, First Artillery, died at St. Paul’s Church Home, Richmond, Virginia, June 18, aged 87. Her husband died fifty years ago within a few weeks.”



engraved illustration, from *Indian Wars of the United States from the Discovery to the Present Time* by William V. Moore, 1855.

AFTERWORD

Uncle William did, in fact, make it to Nashville. President Jackson agreed that risking living bodies for dead ones was bad leadership. In true Jacksonian manner, he nullified the court's decision and returned Major William Gates to full rank, just months after Uncle Lemuel's death.

New fortifications had been built over the ashes of Fort Defiance, and placed under William's command in August of 1837. Fort Micanopy's new name referenced the Alachua chieftain, just as the local villagers did then and continue to do today.

Over the course of that year, it seemed as though small forts colonizing the area were blossoming as fast as tickseed, expressed most visibly through the rebuilding of Fort King along with most of the region's other abandoned fortifications. It appeared as if the army had finally discovered its strategy for conquest.

The inability to respond to losses in force due to disease and resignations remained an issue. As Uncle William complained from his headquarters at Fort Micanopy, "I now have five companies under my command and only three officers to take charge of them."

In the Fall of 1837 William returned to his old command at Fort Marion. By December, he would receive a promotion to Lieutenant Colonel. Just a little more than a year earlier, the citizens of Saint Augustine had published genuinely moving testimonials in support of William's trial defense. There had been similar petitions from the populace of Barnwell, home of the South Carolina volunteers who served under him. Uncle William had been targeted by a frustrated General Scott, and he had survived.

In October, the arrest of Osceola caused a national outcry. General Jesup's personal valor may be forever sullied in the memory of the generations because of his decision to violate a white flag of peace for the purpose of capturing an undefeated opponent.

Uncle William's pension records indicate that he participated in this arrest. However, by all appearances he was not present when General Hernández first apprehended him under Jesup's orders. As commander of Fort Marion though, William would have taken custody of Osceola and his fellow Seminole warriors. They were held in the ancient castillo's prison.

Osceola's allies' daring escape from Fort Marion is yet another thrilling tale, but one best saved for another day. Before the end of winter, confinement and chronic malaria would contribute to Osceola's death at Fort Moultrie, just outside of Charleston.

Following Jesup's precedence, the army's honor was again questioned after an incident at Fort Pierce, when commanding officer Colonel William Gates ordered young lieutenant William Tecumseh Sherman to arrest Coacoochee, put him in chains, and remove him to the Indian Territories in violation of their truce. Later, Sherman's journal would describe his experiences traveling across the Florida peninsula, from Saint Augustine to Pensacola, as military escort for Colonel and Mrs. Gates.

Uncle William's role in the Seminole "Trail of Tears" must be acknowledged. This meant passage by Navy brigantine out of Tampa to New Orleans, then by steam up the Arkansas River to Fort Gibson in the Oklahoma Territory. Many Floridians who were coerced into making the decision to leave, did so under extreme duress and after years of living under grave peril. Sadly, resignation breeds consent.



“The Arrest of Osceola,” engraving from *Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of the Florida War* by John T. Sprague, 1858.

William continued the war in Florida, earning merit for his contributions at the Battle of Loxahatchie. He commanded Fort Picket near Pensacola from 1839 to 1842 before going off to fight in the Mexican War, where he served as conquering military governor for the battered city of Tampico.

Yet another moment of crisis came in the middle of a hurricane off the coast of South Carolina, after the entire superstructure of the steamship *San Francisco* had been ripped away by the powerful storm. A lapse in gallantry led Colonel William Gates into yet another military courtroom for delinquency of duty. Once again he faced General Winfield Scott. As a consequence, from 1856 to 1861, Uncle William was left on the Army's "waiting list," without active duty.

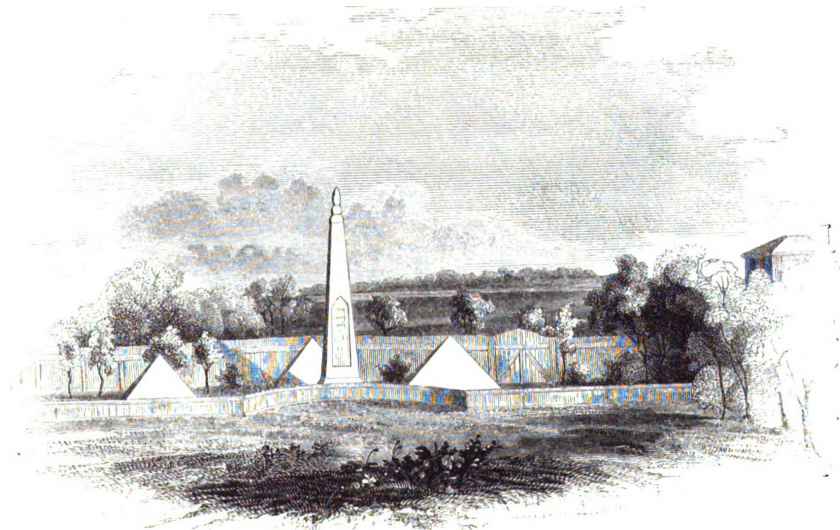
Soon after the Civil War broke out, the seventy-three year old soldier was called back into active service to defend the coast of Connecticut as commander of Fort Trumbull. He later commanded Fort Constitution in Portsmouth, where he ended his military career.

Before his retirement in 1867, William received a brevet rank of Brigadier General. A "New York Times" article pointed out that he was the longest serving officer in the United States Army and had held his commission even longer than Winfield Scott. Of topical interest, the newspaper's very next article listed the treasonous acts committed by slave-owner and former Confederate Senator, David Levy Yulee, for whom the entire region between the Suwanee and Withlacoochee

rivers is now named. In 1868, Uncle William died at New York City.

General William Gates was buried at the military cemetery on the island of Fort Independence in Boston Harbor alongside his mother Lydia Whitmore Gates, his wife Sarah, his son Major Collinson Gates, and two daughters Mary and Lydia. Benjamin Franklin Pierce was also buried there, along with his children. They've all been moved to Cypress Hills National Cemetery in Brooklyn.

Uncle Lemuel remains in Florida, at the burial grounds outside of the Castillo de San Marcos.



“Monument at St. Francis' Barracks, St. Augustine,”
engraving from Sprague's “Origin, Progress, and...” 1858

APPENDIX ONE
excerpt from the diary of
Ethan Allen Hitchcock

The staff officer was then ordered to return to them, and, in the plainest language, to tell them the exact truth as to the force ordered into the country to subdue them that additional force was expected every day that the time was near when every Indian found with a rifle in his hand would be shot down.

This was communicated with such explanations as were deemed necessary to give it force and they then said they would go and hold a council, and would assemble again in the afternoon to give an answer.

At ten o'clock in the morning some half a dozen of them approached the camp from its rear, unarmed and under a white flag, and I was directed by General Gaines to meet them. I took an orderly and went to the interview. Among the visitors I found Osceola, "Alligator," and a chief called Jumper who did the talking for the Indians. He said the Indians did not want fighting; they wanted peace; enough men had been killed. If white men came to plant, they said, they wished to know it; but they wanted the troops to go away. I tried to

persuade them to go into the camp and talk with the General, but they declined. He must come out and meet them on neutral ground, they said. When I asked them to come the next day, they expressed a wish to make peace at once, and not put it off, a smart negro suggesting that we might have armed friends coming, and they too might have friends out, and these would fire on each other, and “there have been enough killed” they kept repeating. I reported to the General, who told me to state explicitly the large force coming and the certainty of their being crushed if they persisted.

I went out and made a long talk, enlarging on the merits of General Gaines, his willingness to do them justice, the bleeding of his heart for their sufferings, etc., telling them that 5000 soldiers were coming, some from one place, some from another, with supplies of all kinds that had been massing on the borders of their country for two months, and that any Indian found with a rifle in his hand would be shot. I then soothed them a little by adding, what, indeed, I believed, that no doubt they thought they had suffered great wrong, but that, if so, they had had satisfaction. Osceola spoke up and said, “I am satisfied,” and this was all he said in the council. The fact is, they have been abused. They listened

very attentively to my talk, and their appearance indicated their entire sincerity.

They said they would go and hold counsel and return in the afternoon. At about 4 p.m. they came in the same order to the same place. I met them. They spoke much of the loss of men killed; said blood enough had been shed, and they wished to put a stop to it. They added that they wished to consult their head chief, Miccanopy, who was absent at a distance. They asked for a cessation of the war.

I told them that General Gaines had no authority to talk with them, but that another officer was coming from the President, with authority to treat, and he would see them if they would go on the other side of the river and remain perfectly quiet till sent for. They promised to do so.

APPENDIX TWO
article in Aug. 20, 1836
“The Washington Sun”

The death of Captain Lemuel Gates of the first regiment of artillery of the United States army, adds another to the melancholy catalogue of disasters that have characterized the Florida campaign against the Indians.

This gallant and promising officer closed a life of hardship and peril, in the service of his country, at Micanopy, on the 7th of August, 1836, in the fortieth year of his age, leaving an affectionate wife, five small children, and a large circle of relatives and friends, to lament his loss to them and to his country.

Capt. Gates, as a man and a gentleman, was intelligent, honorable, high-minded, honest, and upright; justly admired for a liberal share of all those moral and social qualities that adorn the human character, and give a charm to social intercourse.

He was an officer of high promise, well informed, prompt and correct in every duty, vigilant, enterprising, and brave. It is not invidious to

say that, in his rank, he had few equals, and no superiors, in the army.

He died of the disease incident to the climate, brought on by the privations and severity of his duties; and he now sleeps in the soil of that ill-fated country, surrounded by the gallant and the brave who have shared his perils and have met his fate. Their names will live in the pages of our history, and we trust their widows and orphans will share liberally of the gratitude of their country! Peace to thy spirit, gallant soldier!



“The Indians Hiding Behind the Rescue Troops,”
engraving from *Florida Memory*, c.1842.

APPENDIX THREE
article in Dec. 21, 1837
"The Army and Navy Chronicle"

"Today we have received five Cherokee chiefs, who have come in to negotiate with the Seminoles," wrote Col. Gates from Ft. Mellon. "They had a conference with Osceola and others, and three selected, have gone out to invite Sam Jones and others to a talk. Coahadjo is here, and declares his sincere belief that they will come in to a talk, and that all will be peace again. They are all looked for in two or three days. We have so often been deceived by their negotiations, that I have very little confidence in their good faith. The principal chief of the Cherokees has sent in his pipe, and Coahadjo is quite certain the Seminole chiefs will respect it. He seems agitated at the idea of our troops removing soon, and hopes the cavalry will not meet any of his people before some come in. For one, I am prepared to pass the winter in pursuit of them, through mud and water."

Uncle Lemuel and his brother William were both officers in the U. S. Army. Their duty sent them deep into the newly acquired territory of Florida. Their orders were to enforce President Jackson's Indian Removal Act, but Florida's native inhabitants resisted every effort to drive them from their homeland. They defended their freedom with intensity and ingenuity. Uncle Lemuel never made it out alive.

This historical narrative describes the dramatic events leading up to his premature death in 1836.

