

# **Not a Shot Fired: Fort Chokonikla and the “Indian War” of 1849-1850**

By Michael G. Schene\*

As the Second Seminole War continued to drag on, draining the government treasury and alarmingly depleting the ranks of the regular army, officials in Washington reluctantly concluded that they could not force the red men to leave Florida and that their only course of action was to negotiate a treaty with the Indians that would confine them to the watery wilds of South Florida. Some of the Seminoles did agree to stop fighting at this time and consented to move on to a reservation – which was located in a desolate part of the peninsula.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the warring Indians did not recognize the treaty, however, and continued to attack whites whenever it was feasible. When a band of these warriors ambushed a detachment of soldiers on the banks of the Caloosahatchee River in 1839, the government decided to resume its efforts to drive the pernicious savages out of the territory.<sup>2</sup>

After three more years of ineffectual campaigning, the government decided to end the conflict and began to withdraw its troops from Florida. At the same time authorities told the Seminoles that they wanted them to join the rest of their tribe in Arkansas and gave each emigrating warrior a cash payment, a rifle, and rations for a year. Those Indians who were adamant about remaining were allowed to do so and were advised that they could live on the tract of land designated earlier for them.<sup>3</sup>

The land selected for the Indians was a swampy, piney-woods tract that was flooded for much of the year.<sup>4</sup> Most of the Seminoles had been residing in this area for several years and were inured to living in this

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\*Mr. Schene is a research historian for the National Park Service and currently on assignment in Colorado. He wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness to the Florida Division of Archives, History and Records Management and the Florida Division of Recreation and Parks for the support which he received in compiling the research data for this article.

inhospitable land – coping also with the harassing presence of the military until the end of the war. As soon as the Indians learned of the government agreement, they moved from the recesses of the Everglades and the Big Cypress Swamp to the banks of the Caloosahatchee River, establishing small villages at the latter point.<sup>5</sup> By the mid-1840s most of them had settled near the Lake Okeechobee side of this river.<sup>6</sup>

Captain John Sprague – an Indian agent serving in Florida – estimated that there were 360 Indians living on the reservation in 1847. Of this figure 120 were adult males. And besides the Seminoles, who were the most numerous, there were Muskogee-speaking Creeks, Uchees, and Choctaws.<sup>7</sup> They were led by Billy Bowlegs – known to the Indians as Holatter Micco – who was elected chief in 1842.<sup>8</sup>

People were beginning to settle near the reservation, encouraged by the government policy of granting land to anyone willing to live near the unpredictable red men.<sup>9</sup> Some hardy frontiersmen settled on both sides of the Manatee River, but in the first years after the war no one ventured beyond this point.<sup>10</sup> Gradually, though, land-hungry whites began to encroach on the fringes of the reservation – which the Indians would eventually resist with arms.<sup>11</sup> Whites, of course, would welcome the opportunity to annihilate the Seminoles and finally free themselves of the constant “fear of the scalping knife.”<sup>12</sup>

The increasingly volatile situation was rendered even more explosive by the presence of an unknown number of Spanish fishermen who regularly anchored in Charlotte Harbor. The Indians gave them access to the reservation and traded furs for contraband goods – principally whiskey. Besides this undesirable commerce the Spaniards probably encouraged the red men to kill their oppressors.<sup>13</sup>

To eliminate this trade the government decided to establish its own store for the Indians. Authorities also intended to use the post as a point where they could regularly meet the Indians and try to persuade them to leave the state. A trading outlet established within the reservation would also eliminate the necessity of the Seminoles having to bring their goods all the way to Fort Brooke (now the modern city of Tampa).<sup>14</sup>

By the fall of 1845 Captain John Sprague had completed a survey of the area around Charlotte Harbor and decided that the most advantageous spot for a store would be near the mouth of the Caloosahatchee River. So on the north bank of the river – a few miles from the Gulf of Mexico – Sprague and a few soldiers erected several rude structures, completing them some time before the end of the year.<sup>15</sup>

Somewhat before the buildings were finished, General William J. Worth – overall commander in Florida – notified the Indians that they

would not be permitted “to resort to Tampa for trade or other purposes, nor to approach the settlements” after the beginning of November.<sup>16</sup>

Selected to operate the Caloosahatchee River trading post was the Tampa merchant Thomas Pugh Kennedy. He arrived at Fort Brooke during the Second Seminole War and was appointed post sutler. Besides furnishing the soldiers with needed dry goods, Kennedy illegally sold **them** liquor. This latter enterprise eventually brought him into conflict with the post commander, Captain John H. Winder, who wanted the Kennedy store closed and the irascible merchant moved from the fort.<sup>17</sup>

The prospect of losing his store at Tampa and the possibility of profiting from the Indian trade probably convinced Kennedy to accept the government offer and move to the Caloosahatchee River, which was done by January 1846.<sup>18</sup> The new Indian trader knew that the Seminoles were most interested in manufactured goods, especially arms and ammunition, and so he kept his store well stocked with these items. The Seminoles, on their part, traded with valuable furs and food crops, both of which were transported to market in the twelve-ton sloop *Julia Ann*.<sup>19</sup> Kennedy soon acquired a partner, John Darling – a former army officer and veteran of the Second Seminole War – who contributed the thirty-two ton schooner *Rosella*.<sup>20</sup> Business was seemingly good and the firm prospered until a fire destroyed the trading post some time in 1848.<sup>21</sup>

After this holocaust, the partners met with government officials, and both agreed to reopen the store at some other point. The Indian agent, Major William W. Morris, apparently wanted the facility located closer to Tampa, probably because of the distance involved. He finally decided to place the new facility on the south bank of an unnamed tributary of the Peace River, which was near the western boundary of the reservation. There, in March 1849, he advised his superiors that he had “granted Messrs. Kennedy and Darling permission, under restrictions, to open an establishment for the purpose of trading with the Indians.”<sup>22</sup>

The firm seemingly erected its own buildings. There was one fairly large structure built to store the firm’s merchandise and used also as a dwelling by the people living on the site. Nearby there were probably several crude log huts, used to house excess goods. At the creek bank a wharf was constructed. A narrow, wooden bridge was erected across the stream later known as Payne Creek, which eliminated the unpleasant chore of fording this body of water.<sup>23</sup> The first months were peaceful and the Indians regularly came to trade. But as the warmth of summer descended on the trading post events were about to unfold that would irrevocably destroy this tranquility and bring the Seminoles to the precipice of disaster.

The crisis was precipitated by five disgruntled Indians – one of whom had recently been outlawed by the tribe – who attacked a small band of settlers living near Fort Pierce. With the whites clamoring for revenge and the Seminoles increasingly worried about the deteriorating situation, the sub-chief Assinwar was sent to capture the troublesome warriors.<sup>24</sup> Before he could find them, however, the renegades had crossed the peninsula and perpetrated another depredation.

On July 17, four of them arrived at the Kennedy and Darling trading post about one-half hour before sunset. They told the store employees – Captain George S. Payne, Dempsey Whiddon, and William McCollough – that they had a bundle of skins on the opposite side of the river. Since they did not intend to bring the skins to the store until the next morning, they asked if they could sleep in the store, but the proprietors declined this request. The Indians seemed to accept this decision with equanimity and retired to the front porch of the store. As the residents of the trading post were preparing to eat their evening meal a short time later, however, the murderous Seminoles directed a withering fusillade on them, immediately killing Captain Payne and Dempsey Whiddon. The other employee, William McCollough, was wounded in the shoulder, but managed to escape from the store with his wife and child. The Indians pursued them and wounded William again – this time in the leg – but he succeeded in hiding his family in some thick foliage and eventually made his way to the safety of a nearby settlement.<sup>25</sup>

A somewhat erroneous version of the incident was subsequently transmitted to authorities at Fort Brooke. The post commander, Major Morris, responded by sending Lieutenant John Gibbon to investigate the situation. The latter left Tampa on July 20 and later that same day met McCollough at the home of Jocky Wheedon. After his conversation with the still convalescing settler, Gibbon hastily rode back to Tampa and reported to his superior that an unknown number of Indians had destroyed the Peace River trading post.<sup>26</sup>

Morris immediately wrote his superiors about the infamous Indian raid and also dispatched infantry Lieutenant Robert Garland to the Peace River. At the site of the recent Indian massacre the young officer found that the “trading house with its out buildings” had been burned and a “small bridge, near by, partially destroyed.” The raiding seminoles, of course, took all valuable merchandise – including a number of guns and a substantial supply of ammunition. In a dreary ceremony, the bodies of Payne and Wheedon were interred in nearby graves.<sup>27</sup>

As news of the incident spread along the frontier, already worried settlers became convinced that the Indian had again taken to the warpath

and barricaded themselves in hastily constructed forts, demanding also that the government protect them from the scalping savages. Although authorities did not know how many Indians were involved in the recent depredations, they feared further massacres, and so to quell the rebellious red men they decided to send an experienced campaigner – along with a substantial number of soldiers – into Florida. General David Twiggs – a veteran of the earlier Seminole wars – was selected for this less than enviable assignment in early August and ordered to leave for the troubled state as soon as possible. Since officials did not know if a general Indian uprising had occurred, they gave Twiggs broad discretion in dealing with the still uncertain situation.<sup>28</sup>

Twiggs finally reached Tampa at the beginning of September and reported that much of Florida was an armed camp. “There seems,” he added, “a general determination not to return until the Indians are removed.” And he tended to agree with the beleaguered whites that the “outrages . . . had been perpetrated by the Indian nation.” The somewhat disgusted commander mentioned that he was trying to deploy his few available troops but had been frustrated because of the lack of “public transportation and the exorbitant prices asked for the country wagons and carts.”<sup>29</sup>

After some vacillation the government finally decided that the unpredictable red men could no longer be allowed to remain in Florida. Secretary of War George Crawford wrote Twiggs near the end of August that he should first try to persuade the Indians to leave their homes before using any force. Crawford hoped that western chiefs and the power of the purse would eventually convince the Seminoles to emigrate. But if these negotiations failed Twiggs was to begin the Indians “forcible removal from Florida, or what may be more disagreeable their partial or entire extermination.”<sup>30</sup>

The Indians, meanwhile, realized that their position was precarious and hastened to arrange a meeting with white leaders. The Seminole chief Bowlegs advised them of his wish to parley by fastening a specially decorated white flag on the door of John P. Bermudez – a Spaniard living at the still unfounded site of Sarasota. Bermudez found the flag, notified the military, and a message was left at the same location for Bowlegs. This communication advised the Indian leader that officials would meet him near Sarasota at the beginning of September.<sup>31</sup>

Captain John C. Casey, the current Indian agent, sailed for Sarasota at this time and anchored offshore to await the arrival of the Seminoles – who suddenly appeared on the third of the month. A meeting was arranged for the next day. At that time the Indians told Casey that the

recent depredations had been committed by five young warriors – “without the sanction or knowledge of the nation.” The tribe earnestly desired peace, the Seminole emissaries explained to the Indian agent, and their chief wanted to do everything necessary to reestablish “friendly relations.” It was agreed that the chiefs and the white commander would meet on the eighteenth of September at the site of the first trading post (located near Charlotte Harbor).<sup>32</sup>

Three days before the scheduled meeting, Twiggs, Casey, and a small guard left Tampa in the steamer *Colonel Clay* – arriving at Charlotte Harbor later that same day. As agreed, the Indians appeared on the eighteenth and somewhat reluctantly consented to hold the scheduled conference on board the white vessel. Bowlegs brought with him three of the culprits and the severed hand of a fourth – killed while trying to escape. The fifth outlaw had escaped but was being earnestly pursued by the tribe. Bowlegs told the white general that the “nation had nothing to complain of on the part of the whites – were desirous of peace, and [were] determined not to allow peaceful relations to be disturbed by the acts of individuals.” He returned the next day with the now decrepit sub-chief Sam Jones, who repeated what Bowlegs had said the day before.

Twiggs had earlier said that he would not mention Indian emigration at this meeting, but he seemingly changed his mind and told the assembled warriors that as long as they remained in Florida there would be no peace for them. He reminded them that “beyond the Mississippi, hunting grounds awaited them, and there the far greater portion of their people were anxious to receive them.”<sup>33</sup> Nothing was decided, however, and Twiggs returned to begin preparations for a possible campaign.

In early October Twiggs wrote his superiors a long letter detailing his campaign strategy.

I would propose a line of posts from the Manatee [River] to [the] Indian River, passing between [the] Kissimee [*sic*] on the south, and Cypress Lake on the North. On this line of 200 miles, posts, of 2 companies each, 10 miles apart, would be required, making 40 companies. Also Depôts at Miami, New and Indian Rivers, St. Johns on the east. Manatee, Charlotte Harbor and Caloosahatchee, on the western side of the Peninsula – with an aggregate garrison of 13 companies, and a mounted force of 300, to be drawn from the footmen to act as escorts, gather information, and to protect isolated settlements in the rear of the line from marauding parties. . . . With this line thus guarded, the settlements might be protected, and the Indians confined to the Southern portion of the Peninsula. With Depôts thus established, I should be prepared to penetrate this still large district:

200 miles in length and of an average width of 130. The Indians probably would at first be embodied and give battle, on advantageous ground, with their whole force, stated in my letter of Sept. 1st at 300 [warriors]. No party of less than 500 should then be thrust into their strongholds. It is not enough to beat them from their ground. To crush, or after battle to be strong enough to guard your wounded and still pursue, can alone produce good results. Two such bodies, making two regiments, is the smallest number with which in so large a country, I might hope, to find, pursue, and harass the enemy. After the first brush, if defeated, the Indians would break into smaller parties and seek safety in concealment. The number of the pursuing parties would then be increased, their strength diminished to increase the active force. In addition the everglades [*sic*] and lake [s] must be penetrated and swept by parties in boats.

Twiggs told the military hierarchy that 4,150 soldiers – almost one-half of the army – would be required for this assignment.<sup>34</sup> While military leaders pondered this astounding figure, Twiggs began to implement the first part of his plan.

One of the first points selected for a fort was the recently destroyed site of the Kennedy and Darling store – known now by a variant spelling of the Indian word for burned house, Chokonikla. The site had probably been selected because it could be used to supply troops campaigning in the upper sections of the reservation and, too, Indian agents could easily communicate with the Seminoles who were accustomed to visiting the site. Twiggs sent Captain Casey to Chokonikla about the middle of October and instructed him “to endeavor to open communications with the Indians.”<sup>35</sup> At the same time the commanding general ordered Major William Morris and three companies of the 4th Artillery Regiment to erect a fortification somewhere in the same vicinity.<sup>36</sup>

Morris arrived at the site on October 26 and immediately began surveying the tract for the most suitable spot to locate a fort. He finally selected some pinewoods, elevated land, which was about one-half mile due north of the burned trading post.<sup>37</sup> The 102 men of the command were quickly divided into work parties, guard details, and camp workers, and somewhat reluctantly set about accomplishing their assigned tasks.<sup>38</sup> In addition Morris hired several area carpenters to assist in the construction. Bartholomew Leonardi only worked for a few days and then quit, which greatly distressed Morris, and he was relieved when Arthur H. Morse agreed to work for him.<sup>39</sup>

The veteran campaigner probably chose to erect a square-shaped palisade, perhaps with blockhouses at opposing ends. In the construction of the picket work, thick, straight trees were selected and marked for

cutting. The most experienced woodsmen would then fell the tree and remove the bark and lower branches. Other men would then laboriously drag it back to camp. There the log would be split about in the middle, placed in a waiting post hole, and dirt packed around it. Next wooden braces were nailed to the flat inside surface of the log and gave it lateral support. The top of the unshaped timber was then hacked into a rough point and holes were cut through each piece about 7 or 8 feet from the ground. Construction was completed by fastening a wooden firing platform around the inside perimeter of the palisade.

One or more blockhouses were probably built along the palisade. The construction of these structures was comparatively easy and involved hewing a shallow cut in the timber at both ends. The logs were next placed on each other in a crisscross pattern, creating a sturdy joint. A pine-shingle roof was probably added when the timbers reached the required height. Supplemental work included installing floors, caulking the sizeable cracks, and hanging doors.

The officers of the command were always delighted when the blockhouses were completed and quickly began to transform them into comfortable quarters. The enlisted men naturally complained about this special privilege, especially when they were assigned to the cold, damp, second-story sentry post.

Just outside the emerging palisade other soldiers were busily engaged in erecting commodious storehouses. They were built like the blockhouses, but without the amenities and of considerably larger dimensions.<sup>40</sup> While all this activity was taking place at the fort site, other members of the command were struggling to construct a bridge and blockhouse near the confluence of the Peace River and the small stream subsequently known as Payne Creek.

Major Morris probably decided to erect a trestle bridge, which was well suited for a narrow, shallow body of water like the Peace River. Following the instructions of the first carpenter, Bartholomew Leonardi, and later Arthur Morse, troops labored in the emerging chill of November to build several trestles. When they were finished the trestles were ferried to designated points in the river and firmly planted in the bottom. They were held in place by anchors or by cables stretched across the river. Roughly finished planks were laid between the trestles and were supported underneath and on the sides by beams of varying thickness. The nailing of the railing into place signaled the end of construction and was a joyous moment for all concerned.<sup>41</sup> Nearby, a blockhouse was constructed at the same time, from which soldiers could fire upon any Indians trying to destroy the bridge.<sup>42</sup>

As the fort neared completion additional troops were sent there. On November 10, General Twiggs sent Colonel Edward Steptoe and Captain George Getty with two artillery companies – known in the field as “red-legged infantry” – to Fort Chokonikla.<sup>43</sup> The arrival of these forces increased the effective garrison to 166 troops. At the same time, though, some 153 of the soldiers assigned to the post were either under arrest, on detached duty, or sick.<sup>44</sup> Still, most of the expanded garrison had to camp outside the picket work, and parallel lines of tents rapidly became a regular feature around the fort.<sup>45</sup>

The damp, chilly weather soon produced an alarming amount of sickness, and during the first two months that the fort was in operation some 149 soldiers were ill. Many were incapacitated by a high, long-lasting fever – known as *Febris Intermittens Tertiana*. Their mounting numbers kept the post surgeon Lafayette Guild constantly occupied and he was grateful for the presence of Orsemus Bannor and his wife Catherine, both of whom were civilian employees assigned to Chokonikla when it was first established. Their combined skills were still unable to prevent the death of Private John Murphy, who became the first casualty at Fort Chokonikla. The hospital was a makeshift facility, consisting of several hospital tents, which were made slightly more comfortable by the addition of flooring and stoves.<sup>46</sup>

Other posts were established near Chokonikla. In the waning days of October, Captain Joseph Roberts and one company of the 4th Infantry Regiment were dispatched from the Manatee River toward Chokonikla. About ten miles from the former point the small force constructed some type of fortification, designated on completion Fort Crawford. At the same time the men hacked a primitive trail through the dense forest vegetation, which was subsequently extended into the interior.<sup>47</sup> In early November Twiggs ordered the erection of a fortified supply depot several miles up the Manatee River – calling it Fort Hamer.<sup>48</sup>

Meanwhile Major Gabriel Rains of the 7th Infantry Regiment had left Fort Brooke and was proceeding to Chokonikla, where he had been ordered to commence the construction of a road to Fort Hamer. Lieutenant George Meade, a topographical engineer, was to assist Rains by surveying the country between the two forts and then recommend the best route for the proposed road.<sup>49</sup>

Rains first marched into the interior – opening a narrow path on his line of travel – and at Myakka Creek he built the first of several bridges. A primitive log stockade – appropriately designated Fort Myakka – was erected on the east bank of the creek and was probably constructed to guard the bridge against a possible Indian attack.<sup>50</sup>

Work on the road continued into December and it was not until the middle of the month that the section between Fort Myakka and Crawford was completed. On this stretch of the route alone it was necessary to construct 11 bridges and 2 causeways. Near the end of the month Rains proudly advised his superiors at Tampa that he had completed the section between Chokonikla and Myakka, which opened communication between Fort Hamer and the Peace River post.<sup>51</sup>

Another road was built north from Chokonikla and intersected several miles from the fort with an already existing east-west road that terminated at Fort Brooke.<sup>52</sup> As soon as the former section was completed, heavily-laden supply wagons began to make regular trips to Chokonikla and by the end of November a wagon train was daily being sent to the Peace River.<sup>53</sup> Each train was handled by one of several wagonmasters, hired by the government for this job. The entire operation was handled by another government employee, Jesse Carter.<sup>54</sup> The vehicle used was either a spring or draft wagon – which had a light body and high wheels – and was pulled by a two- or four-animal team.<sup>55</sup>

In December the troops stationed at Chokonikla swelled to 223 men. Included in this figure were members of the 4th Artillery Regiment band, who arrived at the post on December 10.<sup>56</sup> The increase in forces and the presence of a regimental band were probably arranged for the benefit of the Indians, who were supposed to appear at Chokonikla for a scheduled conference on the fifteenth. About a week before the meeting, however, Kapiklsootsee – a sub-chief of the Mikasuki – appeared at the fort and told Indian agent Casey that he was sure that the other chiefs would not come to the fort. Kapiklsootsee did tell Casey that he was willing to emigrate and would try to persuade his followers to join him.<sup>57</sup>

General Twiggs apparently still decided to visit Chokonikla and had his headquarters there for at least part of December. By this time he had constructed a line of forts across the peninsula – which were connected by a network of roads – and had been sent some 1,736 soldiers.<sup>58</sup> Still, the experienced Indian fighter was unwilling to begin hostilities and again agreed to meet the Indians.

On January 19, 1850, chief Bowlegs and the principal sub-chiefs of the tribe arrived at Chokonikla for a conference scheduled two days later. On the latter date (January 21), General Twiggs and the Seminole leaders discussed their possible emigration from Florida. As Twiggs advised his superior the next day, Bowlegs and the sub-chiefs had “finally expressed their willingness to emigrate, and their determination to use all efforts to persuade as many as possible of their people to accompany them.” The Indians departed, promising to meet Captain

Casey in two or three weeks at the Caloosahatchee River trading post.<sup>59</sup>

The soldiers at Chokonikla were probably somewhat amused by the Indians and they certainly relished an interruption in their otherwise monotonous routine. Yet, soon after the gaily-clad warriors had departed, the garrison was again struggling with the boring pattern of camp life. Drill, meals, and housekeeping chores consumed only a portion of the day, leaving the men idle for long periods of time. Some men used their free moments to fish and hunt, providing them with a welcome respite from the deadly regularity of army fare. Those who could write composed long, florid letters to friends or relatives. A few read available newspapers, magazines, or books. But many soldiers spent their free moments drinking or gambling, both of which usually resulted in some mischief. For all his hard work, deprivation, and sometimes danger, an army private received the small sum of \$7 a month. Thus it is not surprising that only chronic failures, foreigners, or adventurers were willing to join the army.<sup>60</sup>

Near the end of January the 88 soldiers at Chokonikla received the good news that some 48 Indians had appeared at Tampa and indicated that they were willing to leave the state.<sup>61</sup> In early February Twiggs wrote Secretary of War George Crawford that a band of 60 Indians had presented themselves to authorities at Fort Arbuckle—situated near Lake Arbuckle—and that 24 more were expected to arrive shortly. Twiggs then jubilantly related that Seminole leaders had met Captain Casey as promised and told the agent that they would emigrate. “It is believed by them,” Twiggs added, “that the rest of their people will in due time follow their example. Thus far, everything gives promise of good success.”<sup>62</sup>

Twiggs was further encouraged by the early March departure of 74 Indians, who sailed from Tampa in the steamer *Fashion*. He immediately notified the secretary of war of the Indians departure and also told his civilian superior that he was going to exert pressure on Bowlegs and his people to leave the state.<sup>63</sup>

Before Twiggs could take any action, however, the Seminoles began to melt into the dense forest vegetation. The Florida commander anxiously notified Crawford of this development in late March. “I look upon the flight of the Indians,” he said, “as an indefinite postponement of peaceable emigration, if not destruction of all hope of attaining this desirable result.”<sup>64</sup>

Indian agent Casey was immediately sent to confer with the Seminoles and determine their intentions. On April 11 Casey met Bowlegs at Fort Myers (situated several miles up the Caloosahatchee River).

The Seminole chief told the startled captain that “he could not go west, nor could he induce his people to go.” Casey asked Bowlegs why he had earlier expressed his willingness to emigrate. The latter responded that he was afraid that the whites would have seized him if he had raised an objection to removal. Casey returned to Tampa and reported to General Twiggs that he saw “no hope of inducing these people to go west in a body by any pecuniary temptation.”<sup>65</sup>

Twiggs agreed with his subordinate and notified the War Department in mid-April that “all hopes for the peaceful emigration of the Indians are at an end, and it is folly to talk with them any longer on the subject.” Without any hesitation Twiggs relinquished his command, and in his final report suggested that if the government decided to keep any troops in Florida that one company should be stationed at Chokonikla.<sup>66</sup>

The small command at Chokonikla – which had been reduced in February to just two artillery companies – received the disheartening news about the Indians and exchanged their blue-wool winter uniforms for white cotton jackets and trousers – preparing to remain in Florida for an indefinite period of time.<sup>67</sup> The soldiers at Chokonikla were also instructed to construct palmetto-thatched or shingle-covered sheds, which would afford them needed protection from the harsh sun and intermittent rain. Some of the more fortunate were probably able to secure some lumber and used it to build a platform, which relieved them of having to sleep on the damp ground.<sup>68</sup> The death of John Wilmot on April 7 saddened everyone and he was buried with full military honors in the nearby Payne Creek ceremony.<sup>69</sup>

After considerable delay a general court-martial was convened at Chokonikla on April 19 and several enlisted men were tried at that time. One minor case involved William H. Kendrick – a private in the 4th Artillery Regiment – who was charged with sleeping on duty. Kendrick readily admitted his guilt and his sentence involved forfeiture of pay and hard labor for two months.<sup>70</sup>

Several men were tried for desertion – a much more serious offense – found guilty, and sentenced to loss of pay and hard labor for three months. The court was extremely lenient, considering that the ultimate penalty for desertion was death and that many courts punished the culprit with bizarre forms of corporal punishment.<sup>71</sup>

The most interesting case involved Private Edward Parker. The delinquent soldier had been incarcerated for various offenses since he had arrived in Florida in June of the previous year. Parker was brought before the court on a charge of “utter worthlessness” – and even though

he offered a spirited defense – was found guilty and immediately discharged from the service.<sup>72</sup>

As the summer heat began to envelope the soldiers at Chokonikla, they began to wonder if they would ever leave this inhospitable land. Many of them were suffering from the debilitating effects of overexposure, poor food, inadequate sanitation facilities, and germ-infested drinking water. The number of troops hospitalized increased tremendously in the months of May and June. In the latter month about seventy percent of the command were ill, and the men were again saddened by the death of another one of their comrades, Private William Lowrey.<sup>73</sup>

The increasing sickness finally prompted the post surgeon, Jonathan Letterman, to write the commanding officer at Chokonikla a long letter on this subject on July 1.

The prevailing sickness is caused by malarious exhalations, and is chiefly in the form of Intermittent and Remittent fevers, which are in a majority of cases, irregular, and accompanied, frequently with excessive vomiting, owing to an inflammation of the inner coat of the stomach, which is often difficult to allay. There are but few men, among those that have been stationed here for any length of time, who have not been attacked with Intermittent or Remittent fever. And although none have died, yet, from constant exposure to the exciting cause of the diseases, they are continually relapsing – and, as a consequence thereof, there are but few of these men capable of performing duty requiring much exertion or exposure. From the situation of this post, surrounded on three sides by a marsh. . . it is my opinion that these fevers will increase with the progress of the season and terminate in congestive and severe Remittent fevers, and that the troops stationed here will be unfitted for active duty.

The worried physician ended his long letter with a request that Chokonikla “be abandoned, at least for the present, unless there be an urgent necessity for its occupation.”<sup>74</sup>

When his first letter seemingly went unheeded, Letterman again wrote the post commander, Major Francis Octavus Wyse.

The unhealthiness of this post continues to increase, both in the number of cases, and in the severity of attacks. Men are attacked at any and all hours of the day, whether on duty or not. And a day but seldom passes without some men, varying from one to four or five, being taken sick, who were, apparently, in perfect health in the morning. The health of the command is becoming seriously impaired by these renewed attacks of Intermittent and

Remittent fevers, for no cure is permanent, exposed as the command is to the causes of these diseases.

And as in his earlier correspondence, the increasingly agitated surgeon recommended the immediate evacuation of Chokonikla.<sup>75</sup> About a week after this letter, Major Wyse decided that he would have to remove his men from the Peace River site, and on July 18 he notified his superiors that the fort had been “broken up in consequence of sickness,” and the troops were being transferred to Fort Meade.<sup>76</sup> As known, the fort was never used again and gradually the forest reclaimed the site. Today, young pine trees cover what was once great activity and some hope.

## NOTES

1. Major General Alexander Macomb, General Orders, May 18, 1839, in John T. Sprague, *The Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of the Florida War* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1848; reprint ed., Gainesville, Fla.: University of Florida Press, 1964), pp. 228-229; John K. Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War, 1835-1842* (Gainesville, Fla.: University of Florida Press, 1967), pp. 256-258.

2. Captain George H. Griffin to Lieutenant W. K. Hanson, July 29, 1839, in Sprague, *Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of Florida War*, pp. 223-234; Mahon, *History of Second Seminole War*, pp. 261-262.

3. Minutes of a Talk Held at Fort Brooke, Florida, July 21, 1842, by Colonel [William] Worth, with Fosse Hadjo. . . , *Florida Indians, Message from the President of the United States Transmitting Report of the Secretary of War, Relative to Indians Remaining in Florida, House Documents*, 28th Cong., 1st sess., no. 82, p. 8. In 1842 the reservation had the following boundaries: “From the mouth of . . . Peace Creek, up the left bank of that stream to the fork of the southern branch, and following that branch to the head, or northern edge of Lake Istakpga [*sic*]; thence down the eastern margin of that lake to the stream which empties from it, into the ‘Kissimmee’ river, following the left bank of said stream and river to where the latter empties into ‘Lake Okeechobee;’ thence due south through said lake, and the Everglades to Shark river, following the right bank of that river to the Gulf; thence along the Gulf-shore to the place of beginning, excluding all islands lying between ‘Punta Rassa’ and the head of Charlotte harbor.” Worth, Order 27, August 11, 1842, *Message from the President of the United States, Communicating Information in Answer to a Resolution of the Senate, Relative to Hostilities Committed by the Seminole Indians in Florida during the Past Year, Their Removal, & C., Senate Executive Documents*, 31st Cong., 1st sess., no. 49, p. 100. An additional 20 mile perimeter was added in May 1845. Sprague to St. Augustine Herald [*sic*], September 16, 1845, in Sprague, *Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of Florida War*, p. 509.

4. Sprague, *Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of Florida War*, p. 513.

5. *Ibid.*; Kenneth W. Porter, “Billy Bowlegs (Holata Micco) in the Seminole Wars,” Part I, *Florida Historical Quarterly* 45 (January 1967):226.

6. Sprague to William Medill, commissioner of Indian affairs, February 4, 1847, Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1881, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives Microfilm Publication M234, Roll 801 (hereafter cited as Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs).

7. Sprague to [General Roger] Jones, [adjutant general], January 11, 1847, Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, Roll 801.

8. Porter, "Billy Bowlegs," p. 228; Sprague to Jones, January 11, 1846, Letters Received by the Office of the Adjutant General (Main Series), 1822-1860, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 94, National Archives Microfilm Publication M567, Roll 325 of 1846 (hereafter cited as Letters Received Adjutant General's Office).

9. James W. Covington, "The Armed Occupation Act of 1842," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 40 (July 1961):41-52. A list of the people claiming land under the "Armed Occupation Act" can be found in *Report of the Commissioner of the General Land Office, Communicating an Abstract of Permits Granted Under the Acts for the Armed Occupation of Florida, Senate Executive Documents, 30th Cong., 1st sess., no. 39*, following page 39.

10. General W. J. Worth to the Adjutant General, August 19, 1844, *Territorial Papers of the United States, Florida*, Vols. 22-26, ed. Clarence Carter (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1956-1962), 26:948 (hereafter cited as *Territorial Papers*).

11. Sprague to Jones, April 3, 1847, Letters Received Adjutant General's Office, Roll 358 of 1847.

12. Margaret O. Marshall to Mary E. W. Palmes, June 19, 1852, George Palmes Papers, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

13. Worth to Adjutant General, August 19, 1844, *Territorial Papers*, 26:948; Sprague to Jones, July 30, 1846, Letters Received Adjutant General's Office, Roll 330 of 1846; Sprague to Jones, October 19, 1846, Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, Roll 801.

14. Sprague to St. Augustine Herald [sic], September 16, 1845, Sprague, *Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of Florida War*, p. 511.

15. Sprague to T. H. Crawford, commissioner of Indian affairs, September 15, 1845, Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, Roll 289; Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, Map of Florida, 1846, "North America, XIV, Florida," J. and C. Walker, cartographers, at Manning J. Strozier Library, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida.

16. General W. Worth, Special Order 17, September 1, 1845, Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, Roll 289.

17. Thomas P. Kennedy to Major Whiting, June 9, 1846, Captain [John] H. Winder to Jones, Letters Received Adjutant General's Office, Roll 329 of 1846; James W. Covington, "The Florida Seminoles in 1847," *Tequesta* 24(1964):51n; Anthony P. Pizzo, *Tampa Town, 1824-1886, Cracker Village with a Latin Accent* (Miami, Fla.: Hurricane House Publishers, Inc., 1968), p. 23.

18. Sprague to Winder, January 10, 1846, Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, Roll 801.

19. Sprague to Jones, January 11, 1847, Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, Roll 801; Works Progress Administration (Historical Records Survey), "Record Book of Hillsborough County, Territory of Florida, 1838-1846," Vol. 3, pp. 402-403, Florida Historical Society Library, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida (hereafter cited as "Record Book of Hillsborough County").

20. John Darling to General Thomas S. Jesup, January 26, 1841, Quartermaster Consolidated Correspondence File, Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General, Record Group 92, National Archives Building, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Quartermaster Consolidated Correspondence File); "Record Book of Hillsborough County," Vol. 3, p. 454; Darling to [William L.] Marcy, secretary of war, October 1, 1848, Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, Roll 801.

21. Covington, "Seminoles in 1847," p. 51n.

22. [Major] W [illiam] W [alton] Morris, Indian agent, to Jones, March 10, 1849, Letters, Reports, and Orders Received and Other Records, 1848-1849, Letters, Reports, and Orders received and Other Records, 1848-1852, [5th Military Department], Records of United States Army Continental Commands, 1821-1920, Record Group 393, National

Archives Building, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Letters, Reports, and Orders Received, 5th Military Department).

23. Deposition of William and Nancy McCollough, August 11, 1849, given to Judge Simon Turman, Hillsborough County, *Senate Executive Documents*, 31st Cong., 1st sess., no. 49, p. 161 (hereafter cited as McCollough Deposition); Plat and field notes of section survey of Township 33 South, Range 25 East, April 1855, Records of the Internal Improvement Fund, Elliott Building, Tallahassee, Florida (hereafter cited as Surveyor's Field Notes); Jacksonville *The News*, August 11, 1849.

24. Captain John Casey to Major William W. Mackall, assistant adjutant general, September 6, 1849, *Message From the President of the United States to the Two Houses of Congress*, *Senate Executive Documents*, 31st Cong., 1st sess., no. 1, p. 121; Porter, "Billy Bowlegs," Part I, p. 229; James W. Covington, "The Indian Scare of 1849," *Tequesta* 21(1961):54.

25. McCollough Deposition.

26. Morris, Order 105, July 20, 1849, Morris to Jones, July 21, 1849, Letters Received Adjutant General's Office Roll, 411 of 1849.

27. Morris to Jones, July 25, 1849, Kennedy and Darling to Morris, Letters Received July 22, 1849, 1848 (Dec.) and (Jan.-July), Letters Received, 1830 and 1848-53, Western Division and Department, 1820-1854, Records of United States Army Continental Commands, 1821-1920, Record Group 393, National Archives Building, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited Letters Received, Western Division and Department); Jacksonville *The News*, August 4, 11, 1849.

28. Morris to Jones, July 25, 1849, Jones to Major General David Twiggs, Letters Received 1848 (Dec.) and 1849 (Jan.-July), Letters Received, Western Division and Department; Jacksonville *The News*, August 4, 1849.

29. Twiggs to Lieutenant Colonel [William G.] Freeman (assistant adjutant general), September 1, 1849, *Message from the President of the United States to the Two Houses of Congress*, *House Executive Documents*, 31st Cong., 1st sess., no. 5, pp. 119-120.

30. George Crawford, secretary of war, to Twiggs, August 31, September 21, 1849, Letters Received, 1849 (Aug.-Dec.), Letters Received, Western Division and Department.

31. Casey to Jones, August 20, 1849, Letters Received Adjutant General's Office, Roll 403 of 1849; Morris to Jones, August 20, 1849, Letters Received, 1849 (Aug.-Dec.), Letters Received, Western Division and Department.

32. Casey to MacKall, September 4, 6, 1849, Letters Received, 1849 (Aug.-Dec.), Letters Received, Western Division and Department; Casey to Jones, September 9, 1849, Letters Received Adjutant General's Office, Roll 403 of 1849.

33. Twiggs to Freeman, September 6, 23, October 19, 1849, Letters Sent by the Commanding General, July 1848-Dec. 1850, Western Division and Department, 1820-54, Records of United States Army Continental Commands, 1821-1920, Record Group 393, National Archives Building, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Letters Sent by Commanding General, Western Division and Department); Colonel [John Lane] Gardner to Jones, September 17, 1849, Letters Sent, July-Aug. 1848 and Nov. 1848-Nov. 1852, [5th Military Department], Records of United States Army Continental Commands, 1821-1920, Record Group 393, National Archives Building, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Letters Sent, 5th Military Department).

34. Twiggs to Freeman, October 3, 1849, Letters Sent by Commanding General, Western Division and Department, Russell F. Weigley, *History of the United States Army* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967), p. 567.

35. J. Clarence Simpson, *A Provisional Gazetteer of Florida Place-Names of Indian Derivation*, ed. Mark F. Boyd, State of Florida, State Board of Conservation and

Florida Geological Survey Special Publication No. 1 (Tallahassee, Fla.: State of Florida, 1956), p. 46; MacKall, Order 32, October 19, 1849, Letters, Reports, and Orders Received and Other Records, 1848-1849, Letters, Reports, and Orders Received, 5th Military Department. The site name was also spelled Chokkonikla. Military Map of the Peninsula of Florida South of Tampa Bay, compiled by Lieutenant J. C. Ives, April 1856, "Headquarters Map File," Cartographic Records, 1790-1968, Records of the Office of the Chief of Engineers, Record Group 77, National Archives Building, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Ives Map).

36. Morris to Jones, October 26, 1849, Letters Received Adjutant General's Office, Roll 412 of 1849.

37. Morris to MacKall, October 26, 1849, Letters, Reports and Orders Received and Other Records, 1848-1849, Letters, Reports, and Orders Received, 5th Military Department; Surveyor's Field Notes.

38. Post Returns for the month of October 1849, submitted by Major William W. Morris, U.S. Army Commands/Returns from United States Military Posts, 1800-1916, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 94, National Archives Microfilm Publication M617, Roll 1503 (hereafter cited as Post Returns).

39. Report of Persons (Employed) at Fort Chokkonikla, Florida during the Month of October 1849, submitted by Lieutenant A[lbert] L. Magilton, Reports of Persons and Articles Hired, 1849, H-S, Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General, Record Group 92, National Archives Building, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Reports of Persons Employed at Chokkonikla); Morris to Captain A[lbion] P. Howe, October 28, 1849, Letters, Reports, and Orders Received, 5th Military Department.

40. On the construction of Second Seminole War forts, see Michael G. Schene, "History of Fort Foster," mimeographed (Tallahassee, Fla.: Division of Archives, History, and Records Management, 1974), pp. 25-83, *passim*, copy on file at the Florida Department of State, Division of Archives, History, and Records Management, and *idem*, "Fort Foster: A Second Seminole War Fort," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 54(January 1976):319-339. For a general treatment on field fortifications by the outstanding authority at this time, see Denis Hart Mahan, *A Complete Treatise on Field Fortification* (New York: Wiley and Long, 1836; reprint ed., New York: Greenwood Press, 1968).

41. Mahan, *Complete Treatise on Field Fortification*, pp. 187-190.

42. Surveyor's Field Notes.

43. Twiggs, Order 42, November 10, 1849, Orders, July 1848-Nov. 1853, Orders and Special Orders Issued, Feb. 1820-Nov. 1853, [Western Division and Department], Records of United States Army Continental Commands, 1821-1920, Record Group 393, National Archives Building, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Orders and Special Orders Issued, Western Division and Department). The term "red-legged infantry" is derived from the red stripe that was sewn on the outer seam of each trouser leg.

44. Post Returns for the month of November 1849, submitted by Morris, Post Returns.

45. Twiggs, Order 40, November 7, 1849, Orders and Special Orders Issued, Western Division and Department. This order provided that each company in the field was allowed to have 2 wall tents and 10 common tents.

46. Quarterly Report of the Sick and Wounded at Fort Chokkonikla, Florida, for the Quarter ending December 31, 1849, Medical Reports, "Mexican War-Florida," Fort Chokkonikla, Muster Roll of Stewards, Wardmasters, Cooks, Nurses, and Matrons Attached to the Hospital of the Army in Florida from the Thirty-First day of August 1849 . . . to the Thirty-First day of October 1949, Fort Chokkonikla, Muster Rolls, Hospital Corps, Florida, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington, D.C.; Major J[ames] L. Donaldson to Magilton,

November 27, 1849, Letters Sent, April 1847-Nov. 29, 1849, Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General, National Archives Building, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Letters sent – Quartermaster).

47. Lieutenant Colonel Richard H. Ross to “Major,” October 20, 1849, Captain Joseph Roberts to Lieutenant J[ohn] C. Booth, October 21, 1849, Letters Received, 1849 (Aug.-Dec.), Letters Received, Western Division and Department. Fort Crawford was apparently so designated to honor Secretary of War George Crawford.

48. Twiggs to Freeman, November 12, 1849, Letters Sent by Commanding General, Western Division and Department.

49. Twiggs, Order 41, November 7, 1849, Orders and Special Orders Issued, Western Division and Department.

50. Major [Gabriel J.] Rains to [Major William T. H.] Brooks, November 1849, Letters Received, 1849 (Aug.-Dec.), Letters Received, Western Division and Department.

51. Major W[illiam] P. Bainbridge to Booth, December 13, 1849, Rains to MacKall, December 15, 27, 1849, Letters Received, 1849 (Aug.-Dec.), Letters Received, Western Division and Department.

52. Twiggs, Order 43, November 17, 1849, Orders and Special Orders Issued, Western Division and Department; Morris to Brooks, November 24, 1849, Letters Received, 1849 (Aug.-Dec.), Letters Received, Western Division and Department; Major Theophilus H. Holmes to Howe, November 30, 1849, MacKall to Bainbridge, December 21, 1849, Letters, Reports, and Orders Received, 5th Military Department.

53. Instruction to Wagon Masters and Others in Charge of Trains, Donaldson, November 27, 1849, Letters Sent – Quartermaster.

54. *Ibid.*: “Orders,” Donaldson, December 5, 1849, Letters Sent – Quartermaster.

55. Major J[ames] A. Haskin to MacKall, October 31, 1849, [Report of Means of Transportation, Forage & C. on Hand at Fort Brooke, Florida, 31st October 1849], Letters Received, 1849 (Aug.-Dec.), Letters Received, Western Division and Department. General information on wagons of this period can be found in United States Quartermaster Department, *Specifications for Means of Transportation, Paulins, Stoves, and Ranges, . . . for use in the United States Army* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1882). Pertinent chapters of this work are on file at the Florida Division of Archives, History and Records Management, Tallahassee, Florida.

56. Post Returns for the month of December 1849, submitted by Major William W. Morris, Post Returns.

57. Casey, to Twiggs, December 8, 1849, Letters Received, 1849 (Aug.-Dec.), Letters Received, Western Division and Department.

58. Field Returns of United States Troops in the State of Florida, December 31, 1849, Expedition Returns, [Florida], “C-K,” Returns of “Expeditions,” 1806-1916, Records of the Office of the Adjutant General, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington, D.C.

59. Twiggs to Crawford, January 22, 1850, Letters Sent by Commanding General, Western Division and Department.

60. Robert M. Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue: The United Army and the Indian, 1848-1865* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967), pp. 36, 46; Schene, “History of Fort Foster,” pp. 50n, 79n.

61. Post Returns for the month of January 1850, submitted by Morris, Post Returns; Twiggs to Crawford, *Senate Executive Documents*, 31st Cong., 1st sess., no. 49, p. 82.

62. Twiggs to Crawford, February 12, 1850, *Senate Executive Documents*, 31st Cong., 1st sess., no. 49, p. 83.

63. Twiggs to Crawford, March 1, 1850, Letters Sent by Commanding General, Western Division and Department.

64. Twiggs to Crawford, March 27, 1850, Letters Sent by Commanding General, Western Division and Department.

65. Casey to Twiggs, April 15, 1850, *Senate Executive Documents*, 31st Cong., 1st sess., no. 49, p. 96.

66. Twiggs to Crawford, April 15, 1850, Letters Sent to Commanding General, Western Division and Department.

67. Post Returns for the months of February, March, and April, 1850, submitted by Morris, Post Returns.

68. Twiggs, October 27, April 9, 1850, Orders and Special Orders Issued, Western Division and Department; Alexander S. Webb, "Campaigning in Florida, 1855," *Journal of the Military Service Institution of the United States* (November-December 1909):398.

69. Quarterly Report of the Sick and Wounded at Fort Chokkonikla, Florida, for the Period ending June 25, 1850, Medical Reports, "Mexican War-Florida," Fort Chokkonikla, Records of the Office of the Adjutant General, Record Group 94, National Archives Building, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Quarterly Report of Sick).

70. Court-Martial of William H. Kendrick, held at Fort Chokkonikla, Florida, April 12, 1850, pursuant to Order 28, Records of the Office of the Judge Advocate General (Army), Record Group 153, National Archives Building, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Records of Judge Advocate General).

71. Twiggs, Order 33, April 25, 1850, Orders and Special Orders Issued, Western Division and Department; Utey, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, pp. 38-39.

72. Court-Martial of Edward Parker, held at Fort Chokkonikla, Florida, April 12, 1850, pursuant to Order 28, Records of Judge Advocate General.

73. Post Returns for the months of May and June 1850, submitted by Morris and Major F. O. Wyse, Post Returns; Quarterly Report of Sick for Period ending June 25, 1850.

74. Assistant Surgeon [Jonathan] Letterman to Major F[rancis] O. Wyse, July 1, 1850, Letters Received, 1850 Letters Received, 1850 (A-W and Unentered), Letters Received, Western Division and Department.

75. Letterman to Wyse, July 12, 1850, Letters Received, 1850 (A-W and Unentered), Letters Received, Western Division and Department.

76. Wyse to Jones, July 18, 1850, Letters Received Adjutant General's Office, Roll 439 of 1850.