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THE POLITICAL ACTIVITY OF THE FREEDMEN'S BUREAU IN FLORIDA

by GEORGE R. BENTLEY

In its first five months the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands was completely inactive in Florida. An assistant commissioner - that is, state head of the Bureau - was appointed early enough, but he had charge also of Georgia and South Carolina, and he limited both his interests and his activities to the Palmetto State. He was General Rufus Saxton, an ardent abolitionist and a long-time protege of Salmon P. Chase.¹ During most of the war he had been in charge of the Sea Islands Experiment with free Negro labor.² In the early months of the Freedmen's Bureau he used his office as assistant commissioner to continue his work on the Sea Islands, but did little more, assigning only three men to do the work of the Bureau on the mainland of South Carolina, only two for all Georgia, and none at all for Florida.³

Partly because of Saxton's negligence, in September 1865 new assistant commissioners were appointed for Georgia and Florida. The one for Florida was Colonel

Note. This paper was presented in large part before the annual meeting of the Florida Historical Society in April last.

- 1, In a speech to the Negroes at Zion Church, Charleston, on May 12, 1865, Saxton said. "I want the colored men in this department to petition the President of the United States and Congress for the right to exercise the elective franchise" *The Charleston Courier*, May 13, 1865. He believed that, "The late master knows less of the negro's character than any other person." *Report of the Joint Committee on Reconstruction*, part II, 219.
- 2, Albert Bushnell Hart in his *Salmon Portland Chase*, page 260, says that Stanton appointed Saxton to this position at the request of Chase.
- 3, Joseph S. Fullerton to Oliver O. Howard, July 22, 1865, in Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (MSS in the National Archives, War Records Division, Record Group no. 105), National Office, Assistant Adjutant General's Office, Letters Received. (Hereinafter records of this office will be cited simply as "Bureau Records"; other records of the Bureau will be cited with specific reference to the office to which they pertain, as "Bureau Records, Quartermaster's Office," or "Bureau Records for Florida.") Fullerton to Absalom Baird, August 16, 1865, in Bureau Records, Letters Sent Book, 1:229; Clinton B. Fisk to Howard, September 2, 1865, *ibid.*, Letters Received. Fullerton was a Bureau inspector; Fisk was one of the Bureau's assistant commissioners; Howard was its head.

Thomas W. Osborn, who previously had been assigned to head the Bureau in Alabama. That state now went to a more important personage, General Wager Swayne, the son of an associate justice on the Supreme Court of the United States.⁴

Osborn, unlike both Swayne and Saxton, was not one of Secretary Stanton's appointees to the Bureau,⁵ and in 1865 he was inexperienced in politics and probably not strong in his party convictions. Before the war he had been a Douglas Democrat studying law in New York state.⁶ From Gettysburg until General Johnston's surrender to Sherman, Osborn had served as chief of artillery under General Oliver O. Howard. His position in the Bureau was Commissioner Howard's reward to "a quiet, unobtrusive officer of quick decision and of pure life."⁷

In Florida Osborn soon demonstrated that he had learned well the military lesson of cooperating closely with his superiors in the policies they laid down. He was as capable of getting along with Democrats in 1866 as he was of leading Republicans in later years. He was as severe towards the Negroes before their enfranchisement as his organization was generous to them after that event. He was the only assistant commissioner in the Bureau to reduce himself practically to the status of a staff officer under the department commanding general. Elsewhere there was much controversy and jurisdictional conflict between the Bureau and the regular military-but not in Florida.⁸ And, happily for that

4, Circular letters of June 13 and September 19, 1865, in Bureau Records, Circulars and Circular Letters, 7, 18; Oliver O. Howard, *Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard* (2 vols. New York, 1907), 2:217.

5, Stanton virtually directed several of the appointments, and was careful to see that the bureau was in the hands of persons not unfriendly to the Radical Republicans.

6, *The Washington Chronicle*, July 2, 1868.

7, Howard, *Autobiography*, 2:218.

8, Howard's First Annual Report, December 18, 1865, in *House Executive Documents*, 39 Congress, 1 session, no. 11 (serial 1255) 27; Howard, *Autobiography*, 2:227-228; Foster's general orders number 35, June 11, 1866, in Bureau Records for Florida, Special Orders and Circulars, 113.

state, the commanding general, John G. Foster, usually cooperated well with the civil authorities.⁹ Therefore, Osborn did too. He and Foster would not permit the courts to punish Negroes at the whipping post or in the stocks,¹⁰ but on at least one occasion Foster furnished a Southern planter with soldier overseers who hung Negroes by the thumbs to make them do the work demanded of them.¹¹ Osborn enforced the vagrancy laws against freedmen and threatened to make them move from one part of the state to another where their labor was more needed.¹² Several years later, one of the Negroes under Osborn's care expressed his opinion that until the black men could vote most Bureau agents in Florida treated them more harshly than did the local authorities.¹³

Therefore, from the beginning to the end of his administration Osborn received the plaudits of local conservative newspapers. Their editors deplored the existence of the Bureau, but delighted in the fact that in Florida it was headed by a man like Osborn.¹⁴ Similarly, in June 1866, President Andrew Johnson's Bureau-baiting investigators, Generals Steedman and Fullerton, had only favorable things to report about Osborn. They

9, The Tallahassee *Sentinel*, March 3, 1866; *ibid.*, March 31, 1866, quoting the *Quincy Commonwealth*; William Watson Davis, *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida* (New York, 1913), 357, 368.

10, The Tallahassee *Floridian*, February 6, 1866. General Foster and Governor David S. Walker agreed that Negroes sentenced in civil courts should be punished by the military at the rate of one day's hard labor with ball and chain per stripe or per two minutes' pillory time. The *Floridian* objected to any interference with the operation of the civil laws, but thought the arrangement was fair. The Tallahassee *Sentinel* believed it would work. (February 6, 1866).

11, Susan Bradford Eppes, *The Negro of the Old South, A Bit of Period History* (Chicago, 1925), 124-125.

12, Bureau Records for Florida, Special Orders and Circulars, 19-23, 47 (circulars of November 15, 1865, and January 16, 1866); Osborn to Howard, February 19, 1866, with enclosures, in Bureau Records, Letters Received.

13, John Wallace, *Carpetbag Rule in Florida . . .* (Jacksonville, 1888), 41-42.

14, The Tallahassee *Floridian*, April 24 and May 25, 1866; the Tallahassee *Sentinel*, February 19, 1867; Davis, *Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida*, 380.

liked the friendliness existing between civil authorities and the Florida Bureau; they approved Osborn's aptitude for cooperating with the military forces; and they were pleased by what they mistook for loyal support of the President's policy by Osborn.¹⁵

However, even before Steedman and Fullerton finished their tour of investigation, Congress passed over the veto a bill extending the life of the Bureau and making of it a strong weapon for the Radical Republicans to use in their fight to control the South.¹⁶ Then the November elections resulted in substantial Radical majorities in both houses of Congress. Probably as a direct reflection of these national events, the Bureau in Florida began moving rapidly in the direction of Radicalism.

General Foster had now become assistant commissioner for the state, as well as department commander. Osborn, whose removal was merely part of Commissioner Howard's new policy of subordinating his Bureau more directly to the regular military,¹⁷ stayed on for a time as Foster's staff officer, then accepted a lucrative and influential office in Salmon Chase's Florida organization.¹⁸ In three of his six monthly reports Osborn's successor emphasized the growing influence of Northerners on the economy and politics of Florida and the importance of Bureau support to Yankee settlers in the state. More former officers of the Union armies were planting near Tallahassee than in any other locality, reported Foster, but "numbers" of them were "scattered over the state." "This interest," concluded the Bureau official, "with that of other Northerners investing in the lumber business is fast increasing and

15, The Tallahassee *Floridian*, June 8 and 28, 1866; Steedman to Johnson, June 26, 1866, in the Andrew Johnson Papers (MSS in the Library of Congress), volume 96.

16, *Congressional Globe*, 39 Congress, 1 session, 3413, 3842, 3851.

17, Howard to Osborn, March 13, 1866, in Bureau Records, Letters Sent Books, 2:107; Howard to Foster, March 13, 1866, *ibid.*, 105; Howard to Stanton, April 4, 1866, *ibid.*, 137.

18, Foster's general orders number 35, June 11, 1866, in Bureau Records for Florida, Special Orders and Circulars, 113. Osborn's new office was Federal Commissioner of Bankruptcy. Davis, *Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida*, 543.

will soon become powerful-If protected it will in a few years obtain the entire political control of the State-*For this purpose* [!] and for the protection of the freedmen it will be necessary to maintain a military force here for one or two years longer-in fact it is a vital necessity that this be so upon national grounds alone-This force need not be large, a few regiments directed by good officers being a sufficient exponent anywhere of the power of the Government." ¹⁹

The political importance of Northerners in Florida was further attested by Foster's successor, the fourth assistant commissioner for the state, Colonel John T. Sprague. On March 31, 1867, Colonel Sprague informed Commissioner Howard that military reconstruction was very beneficial to the freedmen and that if it were "properly directed" Negro suffrage would also be helpful. He feared that the white Floridians would try to control the colored men's vote "by kindness, fraud, or intimidation," but he proposed to protect the freedmen in the exercise of their rights. They were, he concluded, generally inclined to follow the political leadership of Northerners in the state. On October 1 he reported the results of his efforts to direct and protect the new voters. He had registered 15,441 of them as against 11,151 white men, and he had "taken measures for their quiet instruction, through the medium of sub-assistants, in their rights and duties under the reconstruction acts." ²⁰ So far as their mere "rights and duties" were concerned, the instruction of the freedmen need not have been "quiet." Probably Sprague's instructions, however, were as much concerned with partisan politics as they were with the mere mechanics of voting-that would account for their being made quietly. Certainly the Freedmen's Bureau in Alabama, Louisiana, and Vir-

19, Foster's report of July, n.d., 1866, in Bureau Records for Florida, Letters Sent. See also Foster's reports of August 10, 1866, and September 14, 1866, both in Bureau Records, Letters Received.

20, Sprague to Howard, March 31 and June 5, 1867, both in Bureau Records, Letters Received; Sprague to Howard, October 1, 1867, excerpt in *House Reports*, 41st Congress, 2 session, no. 121 (serial 1438), 47.

ginia was working actively for the Republican party in this period.²¹ And certainly in the spring and summer of 1867 at least three of Sprague's lieutenants in Florida were haranguing the freedmen, reminding them that most of their former masters were Democrats, and praising the Republican party.²²

In the same period Commissioner Howard himself interposed to correct a grievous lack of radicalism in the Bureau's school system in Florida. The Reverend E. B. Duncan had been occupying the position of superintendent. He had aroused some opposition on the part of people who believed he was using his office to proselyte the Negroes to his own church, the Methodist Episcopal South, and he was accused of favoring Southerners rather than Northerners for teachers. He denied both charges, but admitted that he had reminded white Southerners that if they would not teach the Negroes the Yankees would. When he declined to use his school system to distribute copies of a recent speech in which Thad Stevens had advocated confiscating the property of "rebels," Duncan lost his office.²³ General Howard wrote to inform Assistant Commissioner Sprague that he had appointed C. Thurston Chase in place of Duncan. Chase, according to Howard, was thoroughly versed in the management of freedmen's schools and enjoyed the entire confidence of important benevolent societies. However, a year later Howard's own inspector reported that Chase had been very negligent of his duties and

21, Thomas W. Conway to J. M. Edmunds, July 16, 1867, in the *Washington Chronicle*, July 18, 1867. Frank R. Chase to Thomas D. Eliot, January 28, 1868, in Bureau Records, the T. D. Eliot Papers. In his report to Edmunds, President of the National Council of the Union League, Conway praised the Bureau's assistant commissioners for Alabama, Louisiana, and Virginia for their support of the Union League. Chase, Superintendent of Bureau Schools in Louisiana, wrote: "I see no particular reason for the continuance of this Bureau, so long as Rebels [sic] law (so called civil) executed by Rebels, (supported and encouraged by Govt. Officials) is paramount, But under a Republican Government, with loyal men in office, there is an indispensable need of its continuance. . . ."

22, Wallace, *Carpetbag Rule in Florida*, 107-110; the *Tallahassee Floridian*, May 7, 1867.

23, *Ibid.*, June 14, 21, 1867.

had spent most of his time in Jacksonville and New York.²⁴

Meanwhile, as the Radicals gained power in Congress and as Negroes swelled the registration lists in the South, Thomas W. Osborn had become leader of a moderate wing of the Republican party in Florida.²⁵ In that capacity he enjoyed the full support of the Bureau he had earlier headed. Officials of the Federal agency were key figures in Osborn's stubborn and successful attempt to control the constitutional convention of 1868. The convention was first dominated by an opposition wing of the party, led by other Northern Republicans—Liberty Billings, Daniel Richards, and William M. Saunders. Delay tactics were employed by the Osborn faction while they waited for their forces to muster a majority of the convention. The leader in this effort to postpone any decisive action was W. J. Purman, a local agent of the Freedmen's Bureau.²⁶ When he and his aids found they could not control the convention; they disappeared in the night, and left a "rump" that was lacking a quorum. Seven nights later the seceders stole back into the hall of the convention. Two of the delegates they brought with them to provide a quorum were Negroes enticed by Charles M. Hamilton to quit the "rump" and join the "seceders." Until very recently Hamilton had been an agent in the Bureau, and the two colored delegates thought he still exercised Bureau

24, Howard's adjutant to Sprague, May 10, 1867, in Bureau Records, Letters Sent Books, 3:211; Frederick D. Sewall's report of May 11, 1868, *ibid.*, Letters Received.

25, Davis, *Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida*, 401, 473; Wallace, *Carpetbag Rule in Florida*, 42; the *Florida Union* (Jacksonville), June 18, 1868.

26, Assistant Commissioner Sprague permitted agents Purman and Marcellus L. Stearns to act as delegates to the convention. He later granted both these men and A. A. Knight and W. L. Apthrop, land locating agents for the Bureau, leaves of absence during the session of the state legislature. Sprague's special orders number 40, June 7, 1868, in Bureau Records for Florida, Special Orders and Circulars, 297. The history of the convention is well told in Davis, *Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida*, Chapter XIX, and in Philip D. Ackerman, Jr., *Florida Reconstruction from Walker through Reed, 1865 to 1879* (an unpublished thesis at the University of Florida, 1948), Chapter IV.

authority. That materially helped him to persuade them to shift their allegiance from Billings to Osborn.²⁷ For the next week both factions pretended to be the bona fide convention. Then General Meade arrived to settle the matter. He tried to persuade the two groups to meet together ; then he conferred with the local commanding officer, Colonel Sprague. That official—who was also state head of the Freedmen's Bureau—soon informed Liberty Billings' faction that it was out of favor with Meade.²⁸ In all probability Sprague had largely influenced Meade to make this decision. Then, with Sprague in the chair, the convention reorganized. Osborn now had a comfortable majority, which shortly ousted Billings, Richards, and Saunders.²⁹ One of the men seated to replace these delegates was Marcellus L. Stearns, then an agent in the Freedmen's Bureau and later a Republican governor of Florida. The constitution which Stearns helped to draw up, in the reconstituted convention, was sometimes referred to by Florida Democrats as the Freedmen's Bureau and Post-Office constitution," because the convention had been so much dominated by Bureau officials and by Harrison Reed, the United States Post Office Agent for Florida.³⁰

In the ensuing election the Bureau supported the "Regular Republican" ticket of Reed for governor, William M. Gleason for lieutenant governor, and Hamilton for member of Congress. (Gleason, like Hamilton, had been a local agent under Osborn, Foster and Sprague.) Sprague reported to his superiors in Washington that the presence of the military in Tallahassee during the convention had exercised a "most salutary influence upon the colored politicians of the northern States."³¹ But,

27, Wallace, *Carpetbag Rule in Florida*, 69.

28, Ackerman, *Florida Reconstruction*, 120-121.

29, Purman was chairman of the eligibility committee which ousted Billings, Richards, and Saunders. The Tallahassee *Sentinel*, February 20, 1868.

30, Tallahassee *Floridian*, July 21, 1868, quoting Wilkinson Call's speech to the Democratic National Convention, New York, July 10, 1868.

31, Sprague's report of February 29, 1868, in Bureau Records, Letters Received.

said Sprague, "irresponsible men" had "done much to unsettle the minds of the freedmen, and to disorganize the councils of the regular republican party. Such men," concluded the assistant commissioner, "are injurious to the country and retard reconstruction."³² The "irresponsible men" Sprague referred to were Billings, Richards, Saunders, Charles H. Pearce, Jonathan C. Gibbs, and others who had organized chapters of the Union League and who had enjoyed more colored support than had the Bureau officials. However, during the course of the electoral campaign Saunders shifted sides, and with him came many Florida Negroes. They were impressed by the success of the Osborn-Reed party in the convention, by its military support, and by the largess Bureau officials now were dispensing to freedmen.³³ The latter item also impressed Liberty Billings. On May 4, 1868, he bitterly wrote to the Bureau's local agent at Tallahassee, "Carse: . . . The prostitution of your position as Bureau agent, rations, &c, to electioneering purposes, . . . will be investigated."³⁴

Carse had no need to fear either Billings or official investigation. After the election he became adjutant-general in Governor Reed's cabinet.³⁵ Purman was secretary of state, then Jackson county judge.³⁶ Osborn went to the United States Senate, and Hamilton to the House of Representatives. Gleason was elected lieutenant governor, and Stearns was soon to be speaker of the Florida Assembly.³⁷ In helping to Republicanize Florida, the Bureau had not failed to take care of its own. But it also had helped remove its political reason for being. In June 1868, Congress "readmitted" seven ex-Confederate states to the Union. Then, at the insis-

32. Sprague's report of April 30, 1868, *ibid.*

33. Wallace, *Carpetbag Rule in Florida*, 42; the Tallahassee *Floridian*, July 21, 1868 (Call's speech); Davis, *Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida*, 504, 524.

34. Liberty Billings to George B. Carse, May 4, 1868, in the Tallahassee *Floridian*, May 26, 1868.

35. The Tallahassee *Floridian*, August 24, 1869.

36. Ackerman, *Florida Reconstruction*, 135.

37. Davis, *Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida*, 527, 532, 612.

tence of conservative Republicans,³⁸ the Radicals agreed to bring an end to the Bureau. As a final precaution they extended its life past the November elections, but ruled that on January 1, 1869, the Bureau should suspend its activities except in the schools and in the payment of Negro veterans' claims.³⁹

Even after that time the much reduced Bureau in Florida sometimes played politics—on April 25, 1870, the Bureau's superintendent of schools for Florida reported, "Carrying out the spirit of my instructions, I took an active part in the late Municipal election [in Jacksonville] and did what I could to carry the election in favor of the Republican party."⁴⁰ However, it was in 1867-1868 that the Bureau's major political activity occurred in Florida. Then the Freedmen's Bureau contributed very much to the political success of Thomas W. Osborn, whom the conservative Tallahassee *Floridian* would later dub "the great 'Von Moltke' . . . really head of the government . . . head of The Ring."⁴¹ And the Bureau provided much of the influence which made a national leader of the freedmen able to say, in 1870, "Politically . . . the Negro . . . entertains sentiments of gratitude and confidence toward and in the Republican Party, gives it his vote, and . . . the day is distant when he will be numbered with the voters of any other [party]."⁴²

38, The Cincinnati *Semi-Weekly Gazette*, June 26 and 30, 1868; *Harper's Weekly*, quoted in the Mobile *Nationalist*, July 30, 1868; Moses Bates to Andrew Johnson, December 31, 1867, in the Johnson Papers, volume 128. As early as May 26, 1866, the *New York Times* had suggested that "preparations should be made for the early termination of its [the Bureau's] functions."

39, *United States Statutes at Large*, 15:193.

40, George W. Gile to Howard, April 25, 1870, in Bureau Records, Letters Received.

41, The Tallahassee *Floridian*, July 4, 1871.

42, John M. Langston to Howard, September 17, 1870, in Bureau Records, Letters Received.

FRANCIS P. FLEMING IN THE WAR FOR
SOUTHERN INDEPENDENCE
SOLDIERING WITH THE 2ND FLORIDA REGIMENT
edited by EDWARD C. WILLIAMSON

Camp Chicohomenie Bridge
20 miles from Richmond
May 10th, 1862

My dear Brother ²

You have probably ere this heard of our retreat from Yorktown, and the battle of Williamsburg in which our Regiment was engaged. Seton is severely wounded, and in the hands of the Yankees, but before particularizing I will say that it is not thought to be mortal by two surgeons who examined it - the ball entered just to the left of the backbone and came out just above the right hipbone. It did not break a bone, and so far as could be ascertained had not injured the intestines. Our General would not allow me to remain with him as I desired, but I left him at the house of a kind lady in Williamsburg who I have no doubt will take good care of him. ³ But to return to the fight - we left Yorktown last Saturday night being among the last to leave and arrived at Williamsburg twelve miles distant next morning two miles beyond which place we camped until Monday about ten o'clock. The enemy had in the mean time followed us up and had a skirmish with our Cavalry the evening before. At about ten A.M. Monday our brigade (Earley's) ⁴

- 1, The writer of these letters, Francis P. Fleming (governor of Florida 1889-1893), was born at Panama, Duval county, Sept. 28, 1841; he enlisted as a private, July 13, 1861, in the St. Augustine Rifles which later became Company H., 2nd Florida Infantry Regiment of the famous Florida Brigade commanded by General E. A. Perry. The 2nd Florida served as part of the Army of Virginia. The letters are a part of the Fleming Papers in the Florida Historical Society library at St. Augustine, recently presented to the Society by Mrs. Hester Fleming Williams.
- 2, Francis P. Fleming left in Florida a brother, Frederic, and a half-brother, Louis I. Since the envelope is missing the brother to which the letter was sent is in doubt.
- 3, Seton Fleming, 1st Lt. Co. H, brother of Francis P. Fleming. For an account of Seton Fleming during the Civil War see Francis P. Fleming, *Memoir of Capt. C. Seton Fleming* (Jacksonville, 1884).
- 4, General Jubal A. Early commanding. This was before there were sufficient Florida soldiers in Virginia to form a brigade.

was ordered towards Williamsburg. The fight had then commenced and was going on about a mile from town on the York road we were held in reserve until one or two o'clock P.M. and were then marched to the [front] at a doublequick step through the mud (it had been raining all day). When we arrived the enemy had been driven from the field and had taken shelter in a lot of fallen timber on the edge of a wood from which position they poured a heavy fire into us. We then advanced to the relief of our forces who were engaging them on the edge of the fallen timber and fired several volleys into them being at the time not more than twenty or thirty steps from, but they were so well sheltered that we could not tell the effect of our fire. It was at that time that our gallant Colonel fell, he was struck by a ball in the bre[ast] and one in the head.⁵ Poor old Col! his loss is severely felt by the Regiment - a braver man, or more perfect gentleman never lived. We were then ordered to retire as it was thought that the enemy was flanking us. We fell back to a ravine about 300 yards to the rear and after forming again advanced about 100 yards and took position behind a fence waiting the advance of the enemy from the woods from where they were constantly pouring a heavy fire into us. Capt. Call, Seton and four men volunteered to make the attempt to recover the Col's body which was left on the field when we fell back. They had to advance quite near the enemy's lines to get it which they succeeded in doing and were bringing it back when the enemy's fire was directed on them and Seton received his wounds, a ball also grazed his ankle but did no injury. Capt. Call and the others that were with him supposing him killed left him and returned to the regiment which at the time fell back a second time and took position on edge of a hill just in the rear. I did not know for some time that Seton was wounded, as I ascertained it from Capt. Call he offered to go with me to his relief or as we then thought to get his body but before we started he was brought in by

5, Colonel George T. Ward, commanding the 2nd Florida.

Lieut. Ballantine of Capt. Perry's Company. I found him in better condition than I expected. Got some men and a litter and took him to a house near Williamsburg where I remained with him until quite late that night, waiting for an ambulance that I sent for to take him in to the hospital which failing to arrive took him on a litter, and got him into a private home about 2 o'clock that night. Fortunately I met two surgeons who examined his wound and made him as comfortable as possible. Next morning I left him to try and get a conveyance to take him to the hospital but failing to do so was returning to him when I was met by Gen. Stewart who ordered me immediately on, as the army was all leaving, and the Yankees were fast advancing on the town.⁶ I explained Seton's condition to him and besought to be allowed to remain with him, but he told me I would only be taken prisoner and seperated from him by the Yankees and that he being wounded would be taken good care of by them, and that I must immediately move on which I was obliged to do without again seeing him or telling him goodbye. Poor fellow! it cost me many a better pang to leave him in such a condition but the surgeon that I met at the house when I left him said that the lady was very kind and do anything in her power for him. He seemed so cheerful and made so little complaint that my hopes of his speedy recovery are very great. His only regret seemed to be that he was wounded before having much of an opportunity of fighting. He acted very gallantly and bravely on the field, as every one in the Regiment will testify. The loss of the Regiment was about six killed about fifty wounded. Three of our Company were among the latter - Henry Hickman slightly in the arm, John Gray in the leg and J. Hatcher in the side. Hatch was left in Williamsburg with a great many other wounded. Edward Fernandez was wounded (I think slightly) and also left in Williamsburg. Our loss altogether in killed and wounded was about [blank]. It is impossible to state the loss of the enemy but it was

6. General J. E. B. Stuart, famed Confederate cavalry leader.

very heavy we took about five hundred prisoners I will not attempt to discribe our retreat which was commenced a week ago, but you can perhaps form some idea of the movement of about seventy thousand men and the requisite number of wagon. When you read this you will oblige me by sending it to Hibernia. I have not time write another, and do not know how to direct. Do not Mother be too much worried about Seton. I believe he will be kindly treated and cared for. The Regiment was reorganized today. Capt Perry was elected Col. Maj. Pyle Lt. Col. and Capt Call Major. Seton would have been elected major had he not been wounded and left behind. Moseley is our Capt Carlile [Carlisle] 1st Lt-Wm Watson 2d & F Baya 3rd. ⁷ We have a large army here and are expecting a fight every day. I have no fear that McClellan will get to Richmond by this route - write as soon as possible direct to Richmond, Moseley's Co. 2' Fla - Earley's Brigade - Tell me how to direct to Hibernia - Capt L'Engle is in Richmond. I have not seen John since we left Yorktown.

Give my love to Mary Aunt niece and all relatives and friends.

your affe brother

F. P. Fleming

P. S. Excuse mistakes &c I write in a hurry.

Camp 2nd Fla Regt
near Richmond
May 27th 62

My dear Aunt Tilly ⁸

Your kind letter of the 17th inst. was received yes-

7, Capt. E. A. Perry, Massachusetts born Pensacola lawyer, commanding Co. A. ; Major Louis G. Pyles of Alachua County ; Capt. George W. Call, late secretary of the Florida Railroad, commanding the Davis Guards, (Co. K) ; Capt. Alexander Moseley, son of ex-Governor Moseley ; Lt. A. M. Carlisle was a former corporal of the company; Lt. William B. Watson had been 1st Sgt., *Soldiers of Florida in the Seminole Indian, Civil and Spanish-American Wars*, Board of State Institutions (Live Oak, 1903), pp. 77-79, 91-92.

8, Miss Matilda Seton.

terday. It gave me great pleasure to hear from you after so long a silence, which though, was more my fault than yours, but ever since my return from Florida we have been in such a stu and excitement that I have had scarcely time or opportunity to write to anyone. I trust that you are under a wrong impression in supposing Seton dead. When I left him (and I was one of the last who saw him) I don't think that he had any idea of dying. Two surgeons examined his wound before I left Williamsburg, and told me that though a severe one, they did not consider it a mortal wound. Up to the time that I left him he was quite cheerful, and in very good spirits, and complained very little about his wounds. The ball struck a ridge of the backbone and came out just above the right hip. The surgeons who examined it did not think his backbone injured. He was wounded in the back, it is true, but it was not in running from the Yankees, but in the attempt to recover the body of our lamented Colonel that was left on the field. He had to advance almost to the guns of the enemy, when they were pouring a very heavy fire into us, to reach the Col's body and had returned about half way to the regiment with it when he was shot down. A ball also struck him on the ankle, but merely grazed the skin, and did no injury of any consequence. I would never have left him voluntarily, but was ordered away by Gen Stewart, who told me that the Yankees would take me prisoner and would not allow me to remain with him, and that he would be well taken care of by them I have since seen a surgeon who remained in Williamsburg with our prisoners who told me that the wounded were all well taken care of, though he would tell me nothing particularly of Seton, probably because he was left at a private house instead of the hospital. He was left at the house of a very kind lady, who the surgeon that I met at her house told me, would take every care of him. The battle of Williamsburg was quite a severe fight; the Yankees acknowledge the loss of about 4000 killed, wounded, and prisoners. Our loss was scarcely half that number. The

loss of our Regiment was not so large as you supposed, being about four killed, twenty-eight wounded and ten missing.⁹ I can't describe the hardships and suffering that we have gone through, since leaving Yorktown. The day of the fight was one that I shall never forget. It rained the whole day, and we were double quicked (which gait I suppose you know is a slow run) about two miles through the clay mud. I scarcely know how we got through it, the fatigue was so great, but the excitement kept us up. After arriving on the battlefield in that condition, we had to charge the enemy. I was never much more exhausted and as I said before, were it not for the excitement I would not have been able to stand it. In our retreat from Williamsburg we frequently had to march through mud about knee deep, and the greater part of the time without very little to eat. We lived for two days on parched corn and a little fresh pork without any salt.

We are camped about two miles from Richmond, daily expecting a fight, which will probably be as large and severe a one as has been yet fought; our army is very large, and it will fight desperately to defend Richmond.

I am well acquainted with the Burroughs and Maxwell.¹⁰ They are all well.

I am at present in the Quarter Master's Department, a clerk for Capt L'Engle.¹¹ He desired to be kindly remembered to you.

I envy you the pleasant weather that you are enjoying in Florida. This is the most disreputable climate that can well be imagined. It is as hot for a day or two as any

9, In the Peninsular campaign the retreating Confederates turned at Williamsburg and checked the slow-moving Union Army under McClellan. The Confederate losses were 288 killed, 975 wounded, 297 missing-total 1,560; the Union losses: 456 killed, 1,410 wounded, 373 captured or missing-total 2,239. The 2nd Florida lost 4 killed, 31 wounded, 5 missing-total 40. *Official Records of the Rebellion*, Series 1, XI, 568-559, 587, 450.

10, B. Maxwell Burroughs, Eben Burroughs, D. Elwell Maxwell, enlisted men in Co. H, *Soldiers of Florida*, pp. 91-92.

11, Capt. E. M. L'Engle, Quartermaster on the staff of the 2nd Florida, *Soldiers of Florida*, p. 79.

weather we have in Florida in the middle of summer, it then clouds up and rains and turns in a few hours as cold as winter, which as the Regiment has no tents we feel quite sensibly.

I will endeavor to see Mr. Lee, it will be a great satisfaction to see him again.

I am glad to hear that Uncle George has recovered his health. He was quite sick when I last saw him on his way to Tallahassee just before I left Lake City. I am sorry that I was not able to make that visit to you before leaving Florida, but hearing of the expected battle at Yorktown, I was anxious to get back to the Regiment as soon as possible.

Write soon, your letters always give me great pleasure.

Your affe nephew

F. P. Fleming

P. S. Excuse this being written in pencil, but in Camp we have to use what we can get.

F -

Camp near Winchester, Va.

Oct. 24th, 1862.

Dear Aunt Tilly

Your long and interesting letter of Aug. 24th and your's of Sept. 9th have just been received, where they've been traveling for the last two months, almost. I am at a loss to say, but ever since leaving Richmond last August, we have not had a regular mail until about two weeks ago, which is probably the reason that they were so long on the way. I read them however with as much pleasure as though they were of a later date.

I scarcely know how to answer you in regard to your coming on to Richmond. I can see no impropriety in it. Your best plan is to take Mrs. Reed's advice on the subject, as she has the superintendance of our hospital.¹²

12, Mrs. Robert R. (Mary Martha) Reid, ministering angel to the sick and wounded Floridians in Virginia. Mrs. Reid, the widow of a Florida territorial governor, established the Florida Hospital at Richmond. Her only son, Raymond J. Reid, was killed in the Battle of the Wilderness.

I made a visit to Richmond about two weeks ago with Edward L'Engle who went on to Florida to get shoes and clothing for the Regiment.¹³ While there, I saw Mrs. Reed and visited our hospital. She has it very nicely fixed up. Dr. Saval of Jacksonville is Surgeon in Charge.

We have been lying idle for the last three weeks, a few miles north of Winchester, until which time ever since leaving Richmond we have been constantly on the march, and a considerable part of the time fighting. I presume you have seen an account of our visit to Maryland where we remained about two weeks. We did not meet with the welcome that I had looked for, though the part of the country through which we passed - the vicinity of Frederick City and Harper's Ferry - is said to be the strongest "union" part of the states that there is being settled principally by a Dutch and German class. Those of the higher class are generally "secesh" (As the Yankees call us) and extended to us a most enthusiastic welcome, while traveling slowly along with our train of wagons. While in Maryland, one day, I saw on the side of the road a carriage with several ladies in it, who appeared to be pleased to see us. As it was not frequently that we could enjoy the pleasure of the society of ladies, I resolved to take advantage of the opportunity, and forthwith addressed them. They expressed great pleasure at seeing our army in their state, and seemed to enjoy conversing with a Confederate soldier. In the course of conversation with one of the young ladies (there were several) she asked me what state I was from. After telling her, she said that she had an uncle who for several winters previous to the war had been visiting East Florida. Thinking that he might be an acquaintance, I asked her his name. She answered "Mr. Teirnan". I immediately told her of my intimate acquaintance with her uncle and my name. She seemed very much pleased, and said that she had often heard Mr.

13, Obviously there was not the traditional chasm between the officer and the enlisted man in the 2nd Florida.

Teirnan speak of our family. She was a Miss Carroll of Baltimore and was then on a visit to her sister Mrs. Horsey, who was with her in the carriage at the time. They were very anxious that I should visit them, but as I was only passing through that section, I of course had to deny myself the pleasure. Miss Carroll told me that Mr. Teirnan was then on a visit to Mr. Peper at Tauneytown that he had been very active in giving our cause all the assistance in his power, that he belonged to a society in Baltimore who were engaged in sending men to our army. Several Companies joined us while we were in Maryland.

The scenery in Maryland is the most beautiful and picturesque that I have ever beheld—mountainous and hilly. From the top of one of the mountains that we crossed (of the range of the Blue Ridge) you had a fine view of the most beautiful, undulating valley, stretching out for many miles to the north and south, thickly dotted with neat farm houses and fine fields almost ready for the harvest. But the grandest scenery is in the vicinity of Harper's Ferry, which is situated on the point of land formed by the confluence of the Potomac and Shannandoah rivers. The heights on either side of the Potomac as you approach the town rise perpendicularly about five hundred feet above the level of the river. I am glad to hear that Uncle George has been appointed Q Master. Seton has been appointed Capt. of Jacquelin Daniel's Company. He went home about a month ago, but I expect him back soon. Col. Perry has been appointed Brigadier General and will have command of our Florida troops here. It was indeed a severe blow to hear of the death of father.¹⁴ I could scarcely realize it at first. It is consoling to know that he lived a useful and Christian life, and died at an advanced age. I am sorry that Gen. Finigan was not able to keep the Yankees from again getting possession of the St. Johns.¹⁵

14, Col. Lewis Fleming (1798-1862), a veteran of the Seminole War.
15, Brig.-Gen. Joseph Finnegan, commanding the Dept. of Middle and East Florida.

I understand that they have carried off all the negroes that they could get hold of. I hope none of ours.

Write soon. Continue to direct to Richmond, and our letters will be forwarded to us wherever we may be.

Your affe nephew

F. P. Fleming

Camp near Fredericksburg, Va.
Jany 9th, 1862 [1863]¹⁶

My dear Aunt Tilly

Your kind and interesting letter of Nov. 2th, 62, I received a few weeks ago with much pleasure. It deserved a more prompt reply; but ever since the return of Capt. L'Engle from Florida I have been so busy as to have but little time to devote to letter writing; having to perform both the duties of Clerk and Q. Master Sergeant, to which latter office I was appointed about two months ago, my predecessor having been elected to a 2nd Lieutenantcy in the 8th Fla. Reg't.¹⁷ You are mistaken in supposing that I get a good salary in the Q. M. Department. I only received, as Clerk, the extra pay of twenty-five cents per day in addition to my pay of eleven dollars per month as private. I now-as Q.M. Sg't-receive twenty one dollars per month, which at the present prices of everything, does not equal half the amount in times of peace and ordinary prices.

You ask me in what battles I have fought. The battle of Williamsburg is the only *large* battle that I have been engaged in. A few days before the battle of Seven Pines I was detailed in the Q.M. Department. My reason for accepting the position at the time was that I was then quite unwell, and had been so for some weeks previous. In the line we were very much exposed, having lost all of our tents and nearly everything else, on the retreat

16, The contents of the letter indicate that Sgt. Fleming made the mistake so often made in January of dating the letter a year previous. The correct date should be 1863.

17, Thomas W. Givens, promoted 2nd Lt., Co. K, 8th Florida Regiment, later captain, wounded at Gettysburg, *Soldiers of Florida*, p. 79.

from Yorktown. My situation in the Q.M. Office gave a good tent to sleep in, and otherwise prevented my exposure, but for which I have no doubt that I would have [been] seriously ill. Capt. L'Engle would not afterwards spare me from his office. I begged him very hard to allow me to join, my Regiment while the battles before Richmond were being fought; but he, having at his own request, been appointed to the Command of a company, for the time, refused saying that if he got killed that I was the only one who could settle up his business. After leaving Richmond and during the Campaign of Northern Virginia, when we were expecting a battle every day he consented to let me take a musket and go into the ranks. I marched for about a week with my Regiment, during which time three Brigades, ours (then Pyrors) being of the number, had skirmish with the Yankees near the Rappahannock, when several of our Reg't were wounded by the enemy's shell. Capt. L'Engle sent for me a few days before the battle of Manassas was fought, which prevented me from participating in that engagement, but our Brigade though exposed to a heavy fire from the enemy's batteries on the occasion, did but little fighting. I have been in the Q. Master Department ever since.

How have you enjoyed the Christmas holidays? I have no doubt that it was rather a dull Christmas in all parts of the Country-How many firesides mourn the loss of some loved one, whose now stilled voice was wont, but two short years ago, to enliven and make merry the Christmas festivity.

I spent Christmas rather more pleasantly than I had anticipated. Having to take a trip of about thirty miles to procure forage for the horses Maxwell Burroughs (who is detailed in the Q.M. Dept.) and myself started on Christmas eve and arrived that night at the house of an old Virginia farmer-an old bachelor-with whom we stopped, he treated us next morning to a delightful egg-nogg, which we took great pleasure in doing justice to; he afterwards took us to visit a neighbor's house, and

gave us an introduction to several very pretty, charming and interesting young ladies, with whom, as you may imagine, we enjoyed ourselves exceedingly, and altogether spent a very pleasant Christmas. How do you think you would like a Virginia niece?

I presume that it is useless to give you a narration of our victory at Fredericksburg. Suffice it to say that our Gallant old Chief Gen. R. E. Lee has once more immortalized his illustrious name-would that we had a Lee in the west!

Many thanks for your kind offer to procure clothing for me. I am just now, as well supplied as a soldier in the field should be. If at anytime I should need anything of the kind I shall be glad to avail myself of your kindness. I must also thank you for the jacket that you sent me. I have not yet received it, but have no doubt that Mrs. Reid will send it to me at her earliest opportunity, as I learn that it is in Richmond.

Miss Carroll was dressed in mourning. She made no mention of her brother.

Do you know that Johnny O'Neil is a Captain in our Regiment? ¹⁸

The weather for the last three weeks has been very fine reminding me of our Florida winters.

Write soon, your letters always interest me very much, and give me great pleasure.

Your affe nephew
F. P. Fleming

Camp near Fredericksburg, Va.
April 11th, 1863

Dear Aunt Tilly

I have no doubt that you think me a very poor correspondent. As your kind and interesting letter of January 5th has reminded so long unanswered, but I assure you that it was from no indifference on my part that

¹⁸, Johnny B. G. O'Neil, Co. K, 2nd Fla., made captain, June 1862, *Soldiers of Florida*, p. 95.

I have so long remained silent. Shortly after receiving your letter, Elwell Maxwell arrived here from Florida and told me that on the railroad, somewhere in Georgia, as he was changing cars, he saw you, but did not have an opportunity to speak to you, not hearing from you in the mean time, I was at a loss to know where to address you. But Seton tells me that you did not mention having taken a trip off when he saw you in Florida ; therefore I suppose that Elwell must have mistaken some one else for you.

Seton got back about ten days ago; his health is much improved, in fact he is almost perfectly well.¹⁹ I was much gratified to learn that he had visited you. He spoke of his visit with much pleasure and said that you seemed very much pleased to see him.

We have had several days of pleasant, warm, spring weather that is fast drying up the roads, and soon very soon-two hostile armies, that are now only separated by a narrow stream, will be in motion, and the horrors of another campaign will commence, and Virginia's thirsty soil will again be watered by the best blood of our beloved South, and will claim fresh victims to the bitter hatred of our despicable foes.

I visited Fredericksburg this morning, from which place we are encamped about five miles in a northeasterly direction.²⁰ Quite a number of persons have moved back to town, and the place looks much more lively and cheerful than it did a few weeks after the battle. A good many houses have been repaired and patched up, but there are still numbers that are perfectly riddled, and some partly knocked down by shot from the enemy's batteries on the opposite side of the river, and the town is still at the mercy of those batteries; but they paid so dearly for it when they tried to force our position here that I don't think they will renew the attempt. One house, near the stone wall just on this side of town, that Cobb's Brigade so gallantly defended, and where Gen.

¹⁹, Lt. Seton Fleming was exchanged Aug. 5, 1862, *Soldiers of Florida*, p. 91.

²⁰, The Battle of Fredericksburg occurred Dec. 13, 1862.

Cobb fell, is so riddled by musket balls as to almost resemble a seive. Long trenches six or eight feet wide, into which the Yankee dead are promiscuously thrown and covered over so slightly with earth that in some places where it has settled you can see their arms, feet and faces sticking out, bear silent evidence of the terrific slaughter inflicted upon them on the field of Fredericksburg.

Did you receive a letter that I wrote you, I think, in the early part of January? I did not know at the time that you were living in Madison County, and I directed to Monticello, to the care of the person at whose house you had been staying. (I can't think of his name). I am very anxious to hear from home, when Seton left Mother, he had just persuaded her to move off of the Island, considering it very unsafe for her to remain there while the Yankees had Jacksonville garrisoned with negro Regiments.²¹ I have heard since that the Yankee forces have been withdrawn from Jacksonville, and therefore do not know whether or not Mother has moved. I hope that she has, as the Yankees are liable at any time to occupy the place and commit ravages on the river. I wish we had some one in command of the Department of East Florida who would not be affraid to risk the lives of his troops when he has every opportunity, by so doing, to destroy, capture or drive the enemy off. The idea of about twelve hundred *negroes* holding the town of Jacksonville against a *superior* number of our troops.²¹ I suppose that Gen. Finegan would have attacked them in the town, but the gunboats would have shelled him! ! How terrible! He might have got several men killed!²² I think that the service would be

21, March 3, 1863 the Union forces occupied Jacksonville for the third time. The invading military consisted of the 1st. and 2nd. South Carolina Colored Infantry which were later reinforced by the 6th. Connecticut and the 8th. Maine. William Watson Davis, *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida* (New York, 1913), pp. 171-172.

22, Sgt. Fleming does not take into account the fact that Florida was stripped of the cream of her manpower for the fighting further north. General Finnegan had a vast area to defend with a minimum of supplies and few combat experienced soldiers.

highly benefited by sending all of the troops in Florida, including their Commander, to part of the Country where they could hear in earnest the whistling of a shell and the roar of Artillery; and where, as has been the case several times with our Regiment, troops go into a fight and get half their number placed hors du combat.

I was glad to hear that you were teaching, as I suppose your duties are not very erksome, and you must be much more - I won't say agreeably, but satisfactorily situated.

I enclose you a few stamps. I wish that I was able to send something more valuable; but everything is so intolerably high that I spend about all I make. That you can form some idea of the prices in this vicinity I mention one article that I bought this morning. A package of envelopes at *ten cents a piece*.

Seton tells me that he saw Uncle George in Florida. Do you ever see the Williams of St. Augustine? Write as often as you can.

Your affe nephew
F. P. Fleming

(This series of letters will be continued in the next issue)