

1950

A. Journal of Lt. Robert C. Buchanan during the Seminole War: The Battle of Lake Okeechobee

Frank F. White Jr.



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Florida Historical Quarterly by an authorized editor of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.

Recommended Citation

White, Frank F. Jr. (1950) "A. Journal of Lt. Robert C. Buchanan during the Seminole War: The Battle of Lake Okeechobee," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 29 : No. 2 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol29/iss2/6>

A JOURNAL OF LT. ROBERT C. BUCHANAN
DURING THE SEMINOLE WAR

Edited by FRANK F. WHITE, JR.

THE BATTLE OF OKEECHOBEE

The journal of Lieutenant Robert C. Buchanan, adjutant of the Fourth Infantry, contains the chronicle of the operations of a unit in the campaign against the Seminole Indians from November 1837 to January 1838.¹ Written during the pursuit of the Seminole Indians along the Kissimmee river and Lake Okeechobee, the journal reveals the conditions under which the soldiers lived and fought, his description of the country, and his views on the Seminoles and the war. There is also a description of the famous battle at Lake Okeechobee on December 25, 1837, for which action Buchanan received a citation.

Robert Christie Buchanan was born in Baltimore on March 1, 1811, the son of Andrew and Carolina Virginia (Johnson) Buchanan. He was a nephew of Louisa Catherine Johnson, the wife of President John Quincy Adams. Following his graduation from West Point, Buchanan was commissioned second lieutenant of infantry and assigned to the Fourth Regiment. He served with this organization during the Black Hawk, Seminole, and Mexican wars. In the Civil War, Buchanan at first commanded the defenses of Washington. Later, he served as a brigade commander in General Sykes's "Regular Division" at Gaines's Mill, Malvern Hill, Second Bull Run, Antietam, and Fredericksburg. During the Reconstruction period, he commanded the Department of Louisiana during the difficulties with the Ku Klux Klan. He died on November 29, 1878.

Buchanan had arrived in Tampa with his regiment on February 10, 1836 to participate in the pursuit of the Seminoles.² Because of illness, however, he had been ordered in the fall of 1836 to Baton Rouge until the state

1. The original journal is in the Robert C. Buchanan Papers, Maryland Historical Society, to whom grateful acknowledgement is made for permission to publish it.

2. John T. Sprague, *The Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of the Florida War*. (New York: 1848), p. 107.

of his health would be such that he could once more resume his duties.³ While at that place, he was authorized to visit relatives in Washington,⁴ where he remained until October 1837, when he was ordered to rejoin the Fourth Infantry at Tampa.⁵ He did not, however, arrive in Florida until November 23, 1837, the date of the commencement of his journal. Following the battle at Lake Okeechobee, Buchanan remained in Florida until he was transferred in the early summer of 1838 to Fort Cass, Tennessee.⁶

JOURNAL OF THE CAMPAIGN

Thursday Nov. 23, 1837. I arrived at Tampa Bay after a boisterous passage of nine days from New Orleans.

Nov. **24th.** Went ashore and reported myself to Col. Taylor, 1st Inf.⁷ who was in command at that Post. He ordered me to remain, and accompany his command to Pease [Peace] Creek on Monday.

Nov. **25th and 26th.** The troops have been and are preparing to start for the Kissimmee tomorrow morning.

Nov. **27th.** The command consisting of the 1st Infy (Lt. Col. Davenport), a detachment of artillery Lt. Gunnison 2nd Art. (Ordnance Officer), and the Shawnees, the whole under Col. Taylor, started this morning at 10 o'clock for Kissimmee. Lt. Col. Cummings 2nd Inf.¹⁰ was left in command at Tampa Bay with one compy 1st Inf. one of the 4th Inf. (H) and one of the 4th Art. We marched 12 miles this day and encamped on one of the chain of ponds called Thlonoto-sassa or plenty of flints.

3. Col. Roger Jones, The Adjutant General, to Lieut. Robert C. Buchanan, November 21, 1836. Buchanan Papers.

4. Jones to Buchanan, December 8, 1836.

5. Jones to Buchanan, October 2, 1837.

6. Buchanan received letters throughout the spring of 1838 addressed to him at Port Basinger and Fort Brooke. On March 28, he had been ordered to proceed to Tampa Bay with his company in charge of a detachment of Indian prisoners. See Orders No. 98, Headquarters Army South of the Ouitlacoachee, Fort Basinger, Florida, March 28, 1838. Buchanan Papers.

7. Col. Zachary Taylor (1784-1850).

S. William Davenport of Pennsylvania. Lt. Col. 1st Inf.

9. John W. Gunnison of New Hampshire. 2nd Lt. 2nd Artillery.

10. Alexander Cummings of Pennsylvania. Lt. Col. 2nd Inf.

An express arrived from Tampa this evening bringing information of the arrival of Cap. Lowd¹¹ and his company of artillery from Fort Mitchell¹² in a steam boat of light draught, and also of the arrival of Lt. Cross¹³ with a detachment of Recruits, and of the vessel containing the horses of Col. Gentry's Missouri Volunteers.¹⁴ Information was likewise received from Col. Smith,¹⁵ of his having forced his way 30 miles up the Sinnibal, and of his being stopped in his progress by the grounding of the steamboat which had his command on board.

Nov. 28th. We marched this day to a small running branch about seven miles from Pease Creek.

Nov. 29th. We marched this day to Fort Frazer Pease Creek, where we arrived about 11 o'clock a.m. The work which was finished, was called Fort Frazer¹⁶ after the lamented Col. [Capt.] Frazer¹⁷ who fell on the memorable 28th December 1835.¹⁸ Col. Taylor assumed the command of its garrison consisting of the 4th Inf., Lt. Col. Foster,¹⁹ the 6th Inf., Lt. Col. Thompson,²⁰ and Capt. Munro [e]'s²¹ Compy, Artillery. The Florida Volunteers joined today under Major McRae. The Delawares came up last night.²² An order was issued directing us to be ready to march to-morrow for the Kissimmee, directing Capt. Lowd's company to garrison Fort Frazer, and thanking Lt. Col. Foster, his officers and men, for the prompt and able manner in which the Fort was constructed by them. I assumed my duties as Adjutant 4th Infy. this day.

11. Allen Lowd of Massachusetts, Capt. 2nd Artillery.

12. Fort Mitchell, Alabama. On the west bank of the Chattahoochie river, near Columbus. Established 1825. Abandoned 1837.

13. Osburn Cross of Maryland. 1st Lt. 1st Inf.

14. Col. Richard Gentry of Missouri. *vid.* *Full Justice. The Story of Richard Gentry and His Missouri Volunteers in the Seminole War.* St. Louis, 1937.

15. Col. (sometimes called General) P. F. Smith, commanding officer of a regiment of Louisiana Volunteers.

16. Fort Frazer was a temporary fort on Peace Creek near Lake Hancock.

17. Capt. Upton S. Frazer of New Jersey.

18. Dade's Massacre.

19. William S. Foster of New Hampshire. Lt. Col. 4th Inf.

20. Alexander R. Thompson of New York. Lt. Col. 6th Inf.

21. John Munroe of New York. Capt. Co. G 4th Artillery.

22. Some of the friendly Indians used as scouts.

SEMINOLE WAR JOURNAL

135

Now. *30th*. I started at 1 o'clock this afternoon and marched about 7 miles to a small marsh which required bridging, and halted for the night. A tree fell and struck the waggon train (several broken).

December 1st. Marched today until 10 o'clock a.m. when we halted to bridge a small creek connecting two ponds, which detained us three hours. Many ponds in our course. Halted for the night at the Buffalo Ford. Distance marched to-day about 5 miles. The country passed over is most hilly but well watered.

December 2nd. Started about ten o'clock and crossed the Buffalo Ford on a bridge 137 yards long, which had been thrown across between the time of the halt yesterday, and that hour. This ford appears to be the gorge of a chain of lakes, and is very much overgrown with high grass. The country over which we passed today was hilly and abounding in ponds of very good water. The distance marched was about five miles, and the direction E.N.E.

December 3rd. Started at daybreak and marched steadily until 11 o'clock a.m. when we were interrupted by a very wide swamp. It was crossed, however, without bridging, the bottom being hard sand. After passing the swamp and crossing a small prairie which skirts it, was defiled through a narrow swamp into the opening of the gorge of the everglades. Our course now changed in direction to N.E. by N. and after marching five miles we reached the Kissimmee where we encamped. Numerous fresh trails of cattle were seen along the latter part of our course. The whole distance marched today is twelve miles. The Kissimmee at this place is about twenty yards wide, with a fine sandy bottom, and a current of about $1\frac{1}{2}$ mile per hour. The water is a dark color and very good quality. The banks when the river is low, are bluff, but at a high stage of water are overflowed. A species of seed cane grows very abundantly immediately on the eastern bank, and farther back, is the ordinary pine growth of the territory. The river at its present stage is fordable at this point. Bridging will be necessary, however, for the purpose of crossing the waggons.

December 4th. A bridge was commenced this morning across the river, as were also a picket work and two block-houses for its defence. Capt. Allen²³ with Lieut. Grandin²⁴ and their two mounted companies of the 4th Infy., comps "D" and "K" started on a scouting expedition across the Kissimmee and in the direction of Fish [eating] Creek. They went eight miles when they met with an obstacle in the swampy nature of the ground which was so boggy that they could not cross their horses. They saw numerous trails of cattle, and Indians, men, women, and children. These trails appeared to lead to Fish[eating] Creek. Major McRae of the Florida Volunteers was also sent out with his battalion in the direction of Lake Istokpoga, or Dead Man's Lake. After a march of 10 miles they returned and reported that they had crossed a creek connecting two lakes south of our present position, and that they met with trails leading from Fish[eating] Creek to Istokpoga. Col. Gentry with his Missouri Volunteers arrived this afternoon. He brought information that 200 of his Regiment had returned to their homes, on account of not having any horses, theirs having been lost on the passage to Tampa from New Orleans. He was very much mortified at their defection, which was most dastardly on their part. Col. Gentry's command was ordered to encamp near Capt. Allen on the opposite side of the river.

December 5th. The bridge and defences are still in progress of construction. Last night about nine o'clock a Spaniard and Seminole came into camp from the Indians at Istokpoga. They reported that the Indians were disposed to adhere to the treaty made with General Jessup,²⁵ but, owing to the treatment of some of those who had been taken and placed in irons, and the capture of Powel,²⁶ they had not as much confidence in the good

23. George W. Allen of Massachusetts. Capt. 4th Inf.

24. William G. Grandin of New York. 2nd Lt. 4th Inf.

25. General Thomas Jessup (1788-1860), Taylor's predecessor in command of the Army in Florida.

26. For a full account of Powell or Osceola see Chas. H. Coe, *Red Patriots*. Cincinnati, 1898. *passim*.

faith of the whites as they formerly had. They likewise said that they were coming in within four days to see the commanding officer preparatory to bringing in their wives and children, The Seminole whose name is Thle-ha-jo or "Crazy Arrow" started back this morning with a small supply of provisions to meet the Indians and assure them from Col. Taylor that they should be kindly received and well tolerated in the event of their coming in. And moreover that if, after having a talk with him, they should decide on continuing the war, he would allow them to return to their friends without harm, for he was determined on his part, to keep the most perfect good faith with them in every thing which he might promise to do. The waggons were sent back to Tampa Bay this morning, escorted by 40 men under the command of Capt. Barker²⁷ of the 1st and Lieut. Brooke²⁸ of the 6th and Screven²⁹ of the 4th. In the afternoon a company of Missourians, the Berthunters as they style themselves, arrived from Tampa under the command of Major Morgan.³⁰ The bridge and defences not being completed, they were obliged to ford the river to get to their camp ground near Col. Gentry's Regiment.

December 6th. The bridge was finished today. In the afternoon, Capt. Russell³¹ arrived with a company of the Missourians, which completed Col. Gentry's command. They joined his camp.

December 7th. Last night was marked by a pleasant occurrence. About nine o'clock, Jumper,³² his son Holatoochee,³³ and Antonio,³⁴ came into camp on a visit of

27. Thomas Barker of New York. Capt. 1st Inf.

28. Francis J. Brooke of Virginia. 1st Lt. 6th Inf.

29. Richard B. Screven of South Carolina, 1st Lt. 4th Inf.

30. Major Alexander G. Morgan, commander of scouts with Taylor's detachment.

31. Samuel L. Russell of New York, killed Feb. 28, 1839.

32. Jumper, a Seminole chief characterized as "a cunning, intelligent, and deceitful Indian." Sprague, op. cit., p. 97. Cohen, Notices of Florida and the Campaigns, Charleston, 1836, p. 239.

33. Holatoochee, "a brave warrior and great hunter." Sprague, op. cit., p. 98.

34. Probably one of the Indian-Negroes.

friendship. With them came also Parks³⁵ and three other Delawares who had been sent into Alligator's Camp for the purpose of persuading them to come in. The Commanding Officer had a talk with Jumper and the others this morning. They renewed the assurance of their intention to adhere to the treaty made with Genl. Jessup, and called his attention to the fact that they had not killed or fired on one single white man since that treaty was made. They required ten days to be employed in collecting their people and cattle, at the end of which time they promised to be at Pease Creek and ready to surrender. About 3 o'clock they left camp and Abraham who had been with us for a long time as a guide, accompanied them. I started this morning about nine o'clock in company with Capt. Taylor³⁶ and Dr. Abadie,³⁷ in a boat made of a wagon body, for the purpose of exploring the Kissimmee to its entrance with the lake below, and also to examine the island nearest to the main land upon which a mound was said to be. We found the river very crooked, having taken forty courses by the compass between the bridge and the mouth. The banks on either side of the river are overflowed in high water and have abundant growth of cane on them. The water varied in depth from five to ten feet, and entered the lake by two distinct channels. The channel coasting the land on this, the west side, carried the greatest depth of water. I consider the river as navigable for vessels not drawing more than four feet, even in the lowest stages. The lake seems to be many miles long; but as it was filled with islands, and we could not go far into it we could only conjecture its length, which was estimated at twenty or thirty miles. Its width seems to be about five miles. There was ten feet of water within 100 yards of the shore. We visited the Island and found the mound which our guides had described as being on it. Its base was 100 paces in circum-

35. Capt. Parks, "an active and intelligent half-breed who is at the head of the friendly Indians." Sprague, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

36. Capt. Joseph P. Taylor, 2nd Artillery (a brother of Col. Zachary Taylor).

37. Asst. Surgeon Eugene H. Abadie.

ference, and its height about 20 feet. We found fresh signs of Indians on foot and on horseback, and a trail which, from what I have since learned, must lead to Alligator's Camp. The Island was so large that we could not form any idea of its size. We started home about $\frac{1}{2}$ past one, and found the current of the river so strong that we did not reach camp until six o'clock. At night about nine o'clock one of the sentinels fired three times at what he took to be men. A false alarm.

December 8th. The Battalion of Mounted Georgians commanded by Major McCree left us this morning on their return to their homes after serving six months. They are to be mustered out of service at Wewnansville. The fort being finished, was this day called Fort Gardner³⁸ in memory of Capt. George W. Gardner, 3rd Art., who fell on the 28th December 1835. This work is very small, too much so for the purposes which it is to serve.

December 9th. Capt. Allen with Comps. "D" and "K" 4th Inf. started this morning after reveille, for Fort Frazer in order to procure forage for his horses. Capt. Parks, chief of the Delawares, accompanied by Tony, the interpreter, and some of the friendly Indians, started for Alligator's Camp, and took with them pack-mules to assist in bringing in the effects of the Seminoles who promised to come in. They left camp at $\frac{1}{2}$ past nine a.m. Antonio the Seminole who came in with Holatoochee, and who was left here by him, started about nine o'clock in company with an interpreter and a soldier, to take a canoe down the river and into the lake to the creek over which it is said to be necessary to cross in order to get to Alligator's Camp by the shortest route. He drew for me on paper a map of the country about this neighborhood, shewing me the positions and giving me the names of the various lakes and streams in the vicinity. An express arrived from Tampa in the evening and brought a large mail. Col. Taylor received a letter from Genl. Jessup in

38. Fort Gardner was located on the Kissimmee river near Cypress Lake. It was in use as a temporary fort during the Florida War.

which he informs him that Micanopy³⁹ was to meet him with his band on the 5th inst. and after thanking Col. Taylor for his exertions and success he directs him to take the utmost care to secure and retain Alligator⁴⁰ in the event of his falling into our hands. The mail brought me a letter from the Eastern Shore of Maryland, which, if it did not make me feel perfectly happy, at all events proved to me that those whom I esteem as friends there, have not failed to think of me with kindness and good will during my absence.⁴¹

December 10th. We are still lying in camp and time begins to hang heavily. Nothing new today.

December 11th. Went this morning to find a ford across Walk-in-the-Water creek but did not succeed. About three o'clock p.m. a negro named Whann, son-in-law to Abraham⁴² came in from the other side of the river. He stated that the chief O-pis-hajo, from whose camp he came had not heard of the movements of Hola-too-thee and Jumper when he left on the day before at noon. He said that the news would reach him that *same evening*. He has cattle which he wishes to sell, and which he can bring in, in one and one half days. One of the Delawares died to-day, and at night one of their chiefs came to Col. Taylor to say that it was their custom among them to fire off guns during the night and just before day, and that he wishes permission to do so. It was granted.

December 12th. According to custom, the Delawares fired two guns about ten o'clock last night, and two others about half an hour before daybreak this morning.

December 13th. A part of the train returned yesterday from Tampa with provisions. Capt. Allen's mounted companies "D" and "K" 4th Inf. returned this after-

39. Micanopy was the legitimate head of the Seminole nation, fifty years of age, "very fat and excessively lazy." Sprague, op. cit., p. 97.

40. Alligator was "the most shrewd, crafty, politic, and intelligent chief of the Nation." *Ibid.*, 97-98.

41. Buchanan received a letter from an old friend of the family informing him of the wedding of the son of Gov. Edward Lloyd of Maryland. Buchanan Papers.

42. For a full account of this remarkable Negro see *Florida Historical Quarterly* XXV p. 1.

SEMINOLE WAR JOURNAL

141

'noon from Pease Creek. The pack mules loaded with oats arrived from Tampa.

December 14th. The train and pack mules returned to Pease Creek escorted by Capt. Allen's command.

-December 15th. Two boats arrived this day from Tampa. Toney arrived with Ho-colen from Jumper's camp. He states that Abraham is with Gen. Smith on the Coloosa-hatchee, and will return in a day or two.

December 16th. A train of 25 waggons loaded with provisions and forage arrived from Pease Creek escorted by Lieut. Grandin and a mounted detachment. Toney and Ho-colen left early today for Alligator's camp. The latter is a nephew of Hola-too-thee.

December 17th. Four negroes came in from the other side of the Kissimmee and brought with them 40 head of cattle. Abraham returned late in the evening.

December 18th. An order was issued today directing the 4th Inf. to proceed to Pease Creek and then in the direction of Charlotte Harbour, whilst the mounted men took the route to Alligator's camp. The day is very rainy and disagreeable.

December 19th. The order of yesterday was countermanded, and preparations commenced for a general move toward Alligator's and the Mikasukies.⁴³ We are to march at daylight tomorrow morning. Major Wilson⁴⁴ started about 2 o'clock p.m. for the purpose of taking command of Fort Frazer, and receiving Jumper and Hola-too-thee who are daily expected at that post. Major Graham⁴⁵ of the 4th and Capt. Noel⁴⁶ of the 6th joined their Regiments this morning. They brought with them the information of the greatest affliction which has befallen me for many years. My kind and beloved friend Thos. B. Adams is no more. He died on the 14th inst. at Fort Dade of typhus fever, regretted by all who had the good fortune to know

43. The Mikasuki tribe formerly lived in the Tallahassee region. Sam Jones was chief at the time of the Battle of Okeechobee.

44. Henry Wilson of Pennsylvania. Major 1st Inf.

45. William M. Graham, of Virginia. Bvt. Major 4th Inf.

46. Thomas Noel of Maryland. Capt. 6th Inf.

him.⁴⁷ As an officer, he was one of the brightest ornaments of the Army, As a man, he was truly one of the noblest works of God! May our Father in heaven receive him into his bosom and grant him eternal and everlasting happiness. Amen. This event has so depressed me, that I feel a melancholy depression of spirits which I cannot shake off. Poor Tom! If my grief is a proof of my affection for you, my tears will show how deeply I deplore your loss. Thus is there added one more to the list of those noble souls sacrificed to the outrageous and scandalous policy pursued by our Government toward the Seminoles. And more yet remain and must follow unless Congress should in their wisdom devise some other means of putting an end to this expensive and most disgraceful war. May Heaven soon grant us its termination!

December 20th. The Army started this morning after sunrise. Lieut. Harrison,⁴⁸ Lieut. Gunnison 2nd Art. and Asst. Surgeon Abadie were left at Fort Gardner, with all the sick of the command. We marched 14 miles today, when we met Jumper and his party on their way to deliver themselves up at Pease Creek. Jumper is an elderly man, but yet very hale and hearty. He looks very much as if he were moving more from fear than from inclination. His son is with him. Our course today is S.E. by E.

December 21st. Started at daylight and marched through large prairies with an occasional open pine growth to separate them. Small islands of live oak and other forest trees are scattered through all these prairies, and their appearance would indicate that they are entirely covered with water in a rainy season. We met one of Jumper's men and his wife who had lost their ponies and were following the party. Lieut. Gaillard⁴⁹ 1st Inf. being too unwell to proceed any further was obliged to leave us and return to Tampa this morning. We marched 20 miles

47. Thomas B. Adams of Massachusetts. 1st Lt. 1st Art. Died December 14, 1837. A temporary fort on the Caloosahatchie river was named for him.

48. Joseph P. Harrison of Alabama. 1st Lt. 6th Inf.

49. Peter C. Gaillard of South Carolina. 2nd Lt. 1st Inf.

today on yesterday's course. The mounted men encamped two miles in advance of us.

December 22nd. An express bringing information in relation to some movement of Indians, came in from the advanced camp about 10 o'clock last night, and caused Col. Taylor to move with the Missourians and Capt. Allen's command about 3 o'clock this morning. The 1st and 6th with the train followed after, about sun-rise. About 11 a.m. we arrived at and forded a creek which is the outlet of Lake Istokpoga or "Dead Man's Lake," so called from several Indians having been drowned in attempting to cross it in their canoes. This creek empties into Lake Kissimmee. We reached Alligator's camp about two o'clock and found the mounted men resting there. Moved on and encamped on the lower Kissimmee about 4 p.m. The country today was better wooded than that passed over yesterday, but is still mostly overflowed in rainy seasons. Indeed, my own impression is, that, in any other than a remarkably dry season like the present, it would be utterly impassible for a waggon train. Alligator's camp was remarkably well situated. It was on the edge of a thin pine woods with a large prairie on either side of it, and commanding a view of both. From here, he could, without being seen himself see any one approaching him from either direction, and could advance or retreat as circumstances might require. He was not in his camp and had only left two or three old or infirm men and boys, with a few women. He still professes peace, but that is all fudge. He has doubtless gone to join Sam Jones.⁵⁰ I forgot to mention that Jumper's son had returned with us yesterday. He remained this evening, with the friendly Delawares in Alligator's Camp.

December 23rd. Col. Foster, Major Graham, and four men went back this morning to Alligator's Camp and returned about 1 p.m. bringing with them Alligator's party. Among them is one of Micanopy's wives with her two children. They did not appear to like the idea of coming into our

50. The chief of the Mikasukies. "A great prophet and medicine man." Sprague, op. cit., p. 99.

camp. One of the men is Coacoochee-or William [Wild Cat], a fine, tall, handsome looking fellow possessing some influence.⁵¹ A Fort, to be called Fort Basinger,⁵² after one of my class-mates who fell on the 28th December 1835, was commenced this morning, on the west bank of the Kissimmee. The Army started at 2 o'clock p.m. in pursuit of the Indians, forded the river, and marched about seven miles when we encamped. Capt. Munro [e] with his company of Artillery, Lt. Babbitt,⁵³ A.Q.M. and Garrison's Pontoneers with all the sick, were left to build and garrison the Fort.

December 24th. Started this morning at daybreak, in a hard rain, over an extensive, wet prairie. At 10 o'clock a.m., we arrived at a cabbage hammock, when Capt. Allen with his mounted men, surprised a number of Indians, men, women, and children. Five men came out with an old one at their head, bearing a white flag. Four of them were retained, and the old fellow was released upon the express condition that he should proceed with the whole party to Fort Basinger and arrive there tomorrow evening. These Indians informed us that Sam Jones and his band were encamped about eight miles north east of that place on a lake and in a large cypress hammock, where he was ready to fight us. We started again to look for Sam, and arrived at the hammock about four in the afternoon. Preparations were made to pass through the hammock and it was done by sunset. They did not attack us, as we had expected. As the rear guard was crossing, Capt. Parks of the Delawares, discovered two hostile Indians, one mounted and the other on foot. This fellow was well armed and equipped. He stated that Sam Jones is a few miles off awaiting our approach, with a large force. We are encamped this evening in a place which they have occupied within a few days, and if accounts be true, we shall have some warm work tomorrow. Could we

51. Coacoochee, "the most dangerous chieftain." *Ibid.*, 98.

52. Fort Basinger **was** a temporary fort on the Kissimmee river, **seven**. teen miles above its mouth. It was named after William E. Basinger of Georgia, 2nd Lt. 2nd Artillery, killed in Dade's Massacre.

53. Edwin B. Babbitt, of Connecticut. 1st Lt.

settle this business at one blow, I should feel satisfied, but it cannot be, and we are likely to get nothing but hard work for our pains. As fighting is our trade, we must e'en pay our respects to Samuel with a good grace in the morning. By the way, I wonder how he feels just about this particular time. He cannot fail to have an exalted opinion of his own consequence, when he sees how many men are about to visit him. We have marched about 16 miles to-day. It ceased raining about four this afternoon;

[The Battle of Okeechobee]

December 25th. A Merry Christmas to all of my friends at home, and may they have many happy returns of the season !! Mine I am inclined to think will be more lively, but not so pleasant as theirs. We started this morning at sunrise, and after marching through pine woods for three miles, arrived at another hammock which seems to be a branch of the first one. Here again we expected to be attacked in crossing, but were not; A part of the Missourians were dismounted, and led the advance of the left column composed of the 1st and 4th. The hammock had a deep creek running through it, and was bordered on the opposite side by a small but very muddy swamp. The right company of the 4th was hardly over, when an Indian was discovered on horse-back, running like a good fellow. As soon as he found that he was discovered, he came up and surrendered himself. -He informed us that the Indians amounting to 2,000 men, women, and children were in a large hammock on Lake Okee-chobee, waiting to give us battle. He said that there were more than 200 warriors, and that they were in a very bad place where we could find it hard to get at them. He is a brother-in-law of John Cavallo,⁵⁴ who is with the hostiles, having made his escape from Saint Augustine. He said that the hostiles were only a half of a mile distance from us. In the mean time, the whole army being crossed, Col. Taylor proceeded to make his arrangements for battle: The

54. John Cavallo was a half-breed. His later career was noteworthy in Indian Territory and Mexico.

officers were called together, and informed of the plan of attack, and the troops were again put in motion under the guidance of our last prisoner. In about half an hour we came to a camp which had evidently been just abandoned in great haste. The fires were still burning; and provisions were before them scattered and cooking. The disposition for battle was immediately made in the following order. Two lines were formed, the first composed of the Delawares on the right, Morgan's spies in the centre, and Gentry's Regiment on the left. The second was formed by the 6th and 4th, the 6th on the right. The first line was ordered to receive the enemy's fire, and in the event of its proving too severe, the line was to retire in rear, and form behind the 2nd line, which was to continue the battle. The first line advanced according to instructions, received the fire of the enemy and broke, after which they could not be rallied again. The 6th and 4th moved on in position and continued the fight and finally drove the enemy and retained possession of the field until night, when we retired to hard ground and encamped. The enemy was posted in the strongest position that I have ever seen in Florida. He was in an immense hammock on the borders of Lake Okee-chobee, having, at the point where we penetrated it, a saw-grass swamp three quarters of a mile wide and several miles long. The mud in the swamp was knee deep, and we were completely tired out before we reached the hammock. The right of the 6th in entering, was on the large Indian trail leading through it, and where the grass joined the hammock, the Indians had posted themselves both behind and in tops of the trees, having cut away the grass so as to clear a large space directly within shot of them. From this position they poured so deadly a fire on the 6th that most of the officers and men were soon killed and wounded, and the companies on the right were forced to give way. The 4th gained the hammock without much loss. Although the enemy opened pretty heavily on our left flank, Major Graham and Lieut. Screven, with comps. "B" and "C" having penetrated by the right flank, succeeded in driving

him across a deep creek about half a mile on the left. In the meantime, the Regiment having crossed the hammock in line, found itself taken in rear and on the right flank by the enemy, who having succeeded in crippling and repulsing the 6th, had full opportunity to turn their attention to the 4th. As soon as I perceived this, I reported the fact to Col. Foster, who immediately ordered a change of front by inversion, to the right, which brought us face to face with the Indians.⁵⁵ The 4th saved the day by this maneuver, for although the Indians charged and endeavoured to drive us, they could not make any impression, and were themselves driven back. They charged us three times after our change of front, and at the second attempt a mistake on our part occurred which proved very fortunate for them. As they came up within a few yards of our line, some of the men hailed them to know if they were Delawares, whereupon Col. Foster called out to them to know if such were the case. They answered "yes, Delaware! Delaware!" but at the same time continued to take up their positions behind trees and stumps, from whence they soon gave us a volley which caused more injury than all of the others during the fight. During the parley, I brought up my rifle and took a deliberate aim at an Indian, and while in that position six crossed my bead, when, thinking that they were Delawares, I brought my piece down without firing. At the same time, I ordered a man of "I" Company not to fire, just as he was about pulling trigger, and I had hardly got the words out of my mouth, when the rascals having got their places behind the trees, commenced firing, and our men began falling. However, we rushed them, and drove them and when they returned, it was in a very reduced force. In fact they were then whipped. Two companies of the 6th from the left had by this time joined our line on the right and remained with us during the rest of the engagement. When the firing was nearly over, the 1st

55. Buchanan was cited for this particular action by Col. Foster in a letter to Col. Zachary Taylor summarizing the engagement, March 26, 1838. Buchanan Papers.

Infantry which had been left outside us as a reserve, were sent into the hammock, but had none of the fighting. They marched up and down the hammock but were too late for the fun; it was all over and the Indians had retired. We left the hammock about sunset and encamped on the hard ground outside the saw-grass. In this action, besides performing my duties as Adjutant, I commanded companies "G" and "I" which were without any other officers, and by the time that the battle was over I was very much fatigued. In fact the men were so much jaded, that it was with the utmost difficulty they could bring out the bodies of the dead. Our loss was severe, particularly in the 6th Regiment. The total killed was four officers and twenty-one non-commissioned officers and men. Total wounded one hundred and eleven. Total killed and wounded 137. Among the killed were Lt. Col. Thompson, Capt. Van Swearingen,⁵⁶ 1st Lt. F. L. Brooke, and 1st Lt. and Adjutant J. P. Center,⁵⁷ all of the 6th Infantry. Among the wounded were Col. Gentry of the Missourians, Capt. G. Andrews,⁵⁸ and Lieut. Walker of the 6th⁵⁹ and Lieut. Hooper of the 4th,⁶⁰ the first severely and the last very slightly. A sad Christmas has this been; for us and our friends.

December 26th. Col. Gentry died last night. His son was wounded by his father's side at the same instant almost, that the colonel was shot. Today has been passed in burying the dead, and making litters for the wounded. The mounted men were sent out this morning to scout, and reported on their return that they had endeavoured to head the cypress-swamp but could not succeed. The friendly Indians have captured, yesterday and today, nearly three hundred head of cattle and about 150 ponies. We start for Fort Basinger tomorrow and many expect an attack at the crossing of the big cypress.

December 27th. We started this morning shortly after

56. Capt. Joseph Van Swearingen of Maryland.

57. 1st Lt. John P. Center of Massachusetts.

58. Capt. George Andrews of Washington, D. C.

59. 2nd Lt. William H. T. Walker of Georgia.

60. 1st Lt. John L. Hooper of Massachusetts.

sunrise and made good progress with the wounded; without being attacked. We encamped this evening at a cabbage hammock about seven miles from Fort Basinger. The Sergeant Major of the 6th⁶¹ and one private died on the march. An express will start tomorrow morning for Tampa. Major Loomis, 1st Inf.⁶² with one compy of Missourians will go as far as Fort Gardner to send provisions to meet us.

December 28th. Wrote home to say that I was safe, last night, by the light of the fire and with a lead pencil, on my knee. I hope that Father will be able to decypher the writing. It will be a bad old business if the mail should get wet. Marched to Fort Basinger. We find the litters to be most convenient and easy for the men who are badly wounded. They are far preferable to the Ambulances.

December 29th. Started for Fort Gardner, and marched about 18 miles. Capt. Munro[e] 4th Art. with his "G" Compy and Lt. Lamotte⁶³ with "A" Comp. 1st Inf. were left to garrison Fort Basinger. Capt. Allen with the mounted companies of the 4th started for Charlotte Harbour. On the march today Major Graham and myself were left with ten men to make a litter for Private Dougherty of "I" Compy 4th Inf. who was so badly wounded as not to be able to travel in a waggon. We did not overtake the Army till near sunset.

December 30th. Marched today to within 14 miles of Fort Gardner. A long march which the wounded bear remarkably well.

December 31st. Marched to Fort Gardner. Met the train on its way to Fort Basinger. Major Loomis with a mail was with it. Lieut. Gates⁶⁴ with 28 men from Fort Hamilton⁶⁵ joined today. These men of the 4th had been sent away on account of sickness. Lt. Berrien of the 6th⁶⁶ also

61. Henry Sleephack who died of wounds received.

62. Gustavus Loomis of Vermont. Bvt. Major 1st Inf.

63. Joseph H. Lamotte of North Carolina. 1st Lt. 1st Inf.

64. Collinson R. Gates of New York. 2nd Lt. 4th Inf.

65. A temporary fort in Florida during the war.

66. William D. Berrien of Georgia. 1st Lt. 6th Inf.

joined with some of the sick. I found our letter here, not from home. I certainly write. very often.

January 1st 1838. The commencement of a new year ! May Heaven shower its blessings on my parents and grant them the enjoyment of health during this year. May its protecting hand be stretched over all my relatives and friends, and may they show themselves sensible of and grateful for its mercy. And lastly may I so improve in my habits and manners as to render myself worthy- of the love of those whom I am most anxious to love me. Col. Foster with the 4th and 6th and the wounded started this morning for Fort Fraser ; the Indian prisoners were with us. A false alarm was caused by the Missourians who started in advance, just as we were crossing a bad swamp. An act, just in keeping with their usual courses of conduct. I am more and more convinced every day that volunteers are utterly worthless as troops. Marched to within 2 and one half miles of the Buffalo Ford.

Jan. 2nd. Marched to Fort Fraser, where we were joined by Lt. Lincoln, 4th Inf.,⁶⁷ one of the new citizen appointments. He brought me a letter from Newcomb.⁶⁸ We found in addition to the Garrison of the Fort, Capt. Thistle's company of Phila. Volunteers. The Shawnees, and Seminoles under Jumper who had delivered themselves up, were encamped about three miles from the Fort. The 4th took up its old position and encamped.

Jan. 3rd. Capt. Noel proceeded with the 6th, the wounded and the prisoners to Tampa this morning. Parks was ordered to escort the Seminoles into Fort Brooke. All went but about 28, the Shawnees and Delawares escorting them. Preparations are made to establish the 4th in the vicinity in order to recruit them for another trip. Major Graham went with the 6th.

Jan. 4th. The 4th moved across the river this morning and encamped about three quarters of a mile from the Fort, at a round pond. Camp Rest was established and a little

67. George Lincoln of Massachusetts. 2nd Lt. 4th Inf.

68. Possibly Lt. Francis D. Newcomb of Massachusetts, who resigned his commission on September 30, 1836.

rest is hoped for. Arms discharged and cleaned. Trains are beginning to pass in both directions to and from Tampa.

January 5th. Fourteen Seminoles came in and joined Jumper's party which has been encamped between, the Port and us. Jumper was permitted to remain here, it being thought that his presence might assist in bringing in the others.

January 6th. Lieut. Screven, Doct. McPhail,⁶⁹ and myself started for Tampa this morning and after a hard ride reached there. at night. I rode in an ambulance not being able to ride on horseback. We met on the road Major Graham with Comp. "H" of the 4th which has hitherto been kept at Tampa, and a waggon train. Major G. was accompanied by Doct. Satterlee,⁷⁰ Capt. Barker, 1st Inf., and Lieut. Hill, 2nd Inf.⁷¹ The sick of the 1st and 4th having recovered were sent out with this train. On my arrival at Tampa I went direct to call on the ladies, and found them well.

January 7th. Busied myself today in preparing my returns of Clothing and Ordnance. The Indians being about to start for Fort Pike⁷² today, Screven and I accompanied them down the bay to their ship. There we found Holo-too-thee and 50 others who, having surrendered at Ponta Ras[s]a had been shipped to Tampa. Holo-too-thee has the fiercest countenance of all the Seminoles whom I have seen. His nephew Ocolegu was with him. We returned to Tampa in the afternoon. Col. Cummings 2nd Inf., Lt. Tibbetts [Tibbatts], 4th Inf.,⁷³ and Col. Gentry's son went over with the Indians, the first two in charge of them, and the last as a passenger.

69. Asst. Surgeon Leonard C. McPhail of Maryland.

70. Asst. Surgeon Richard S. Satterlee of Michigan.

71. James M. Hill of Maine. 1st Lt. 2nd Inf.

72. Fort Pike was located about 35 miles northeast of New Orleans.

73. Stephen T. Tibbatts of Maryland. 2nd Lt. 4th Inf.