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by JAMES W. COVINGTON

THE THIRD SEMINOLE WAR covers the period from December 1855 to the spring of 1858. Although this war brought to a complete standstill nearly all economic growth in central and southern Florida and involved a large expenditure of money and men by national and state forces, it has been virtually ignored by writers who have preferred to pay more attention to the much more famous conflict which lasted from 1835 to 1842. [1] The Second Seminole War attained national attention because the Indians were not crushed and because such well-known figures as Thomas Jesup, Zachary Taylor, Winfield Scott, Richard K. Call, William S. Harney, and the Indians Wildcat and Osceola played prominent roles in the struggle.

The Third Seminole War could not duplicate the tragic spectacle of an Osceola captured while protected by a flag of truce, or 3,000 persons taken by force from their homes and transported more than 1,000 miles to Indian reservations west of the Mississippi. However, during this war of the 1850s, Oscen Tustenuggee, Billy Bowlegs, and their warriors ran virtual circles about federal and state troops and struck heavy blows against the hapless enemy. It was not until nearly two full years had lapsed after the opening skirmish that an effective American fighting machine was ready for action against the hostiles.

The war began when the Seminoles, becoming alarmed about the several surveying and scouting parties moving through their temporary reserve, attacked one such party. As it turned out, the Indians were probably right in making this drastic decision to make a last ditch fight to defend themselves, since Secretary of

1. This article is part of a general study of the Third Seminole War by the author which is soon to be published. The two best studies relating to the history of the Seminoles, Grant Foreman's *Indian Removal* (Norman, 1953), and Edwin C. McReynolds' *The Seminoles* (Norman, 1957), pay little attention to the Third Seminole War. This is equally the case with William C. Sturtevant's "Accomplishments and Opportunities in Florida Indian Ethnology," Florida Anthropology, Charles H. Fairbanks, ed., *Florida Anthropological Society Publications No. 4,* (1958).

War Jefferson Davis already had reached the decision to force the remaining Seminoles to leave Florida. According to one account, although not entirely trustworthy, leaders and warriors representing every Florida band were invited to participate in a general council which would determine future tribal policy. [2] In the past, whenever the Seminoles had faced a serious crisis, they had sought a solution by scheduling a general assembly. For instance, in a conference held in the Everglades in April 1841, the Indians had decreed that any Seminole, male or female, found communicating with the enemy would be put to death. [3]

The site selected for parley in the fall of 1855 was a hammock "on the east side of Taylor's Creek north-east of Lake Okeechobee, near present Okeechobee." [4] The Indians who gathered generally agreed on an offensive policy, and decided that whenever a suitable opportunity presented itself, they would attack a survey party. According to the only account of this council, Tiger, a warrior in the "prime of life," forcefully presented the arguments in favor of military action. Chipco, on the other hand, opposed a war, and according to the same source some of his warriors refused to support him until he agreed to follow the decision of the majority.

There were approximately 400 Seminoles-men, women, and children-then living in southern Florida. Some spoke Muskogee or Creek; the remainder spoke a related but not mutually intelligible language called Mikasuki, a dialect of Hitchiti. [5] Sometimes members of one group had difficulty communicating with persons from the other group. Villages were situated along the northern rim of Lake Okeechobee and the area which included the Kissimmee River, Fisheating Creek, Lakes Tohopekaliga, Kissimmee, Istokpoga, Hamilton, and adjacent lakes or waterways. Other villages were found in the Everglades extending south of Lake Okeechobee.

The one Seminole who was most influential and who had the

2. John O. Parrish, *Battling the Seminoles* (Lakeland, 1930), 215.
3. John T. Sprague, *The Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of the Florida War* (New York, 1848), 317. See also facsimile edition with introduction by John Mahon (Gainesville, 1964).
4. Parrish, *Battling the Seminoles,* 215.
5. John Goggin, Source Materials for the Study of the Florida Seminole Indians," Laboratory Notes No. 3, University of Florida Anthropology Laboratory (August 1949), 2.

greatest authority and prestige was Holatter Micco or Billy Bowlegs. According to John T. Sprague, noted historian of the Second Seminole War, Bowlegs was "a bold, resolute and unyielding leader. [He is] ambitious, and cunning, remarkably intelligent, speaking English with facility."[6] Holatter Micco was included within the ranks of the Seminole "royal family," and he counted among his ancestors such leaders as the first Bowlegs, King Payne, and Micanopy.[7] His family connections alone, however, did not entitle Bowlegs to his leadership position among the Indians. Otulke-Thlocke the Prophet also had considerable influence within the tribe, and during the final stages of the Second Seminole War was more effective in asserting his authority in tribal matters than Billy Bowlegs. By the end of that conflict, however, the Prophet, because of his timidity and falsehoods, had lost his influence and no longer threatened Billy as principal leader.[8]

Billy Bowlegs, as the most important Seminole, and his two sub-chiefs, Fuse-Hadjo and Nocose Mathla, signed the peace arrangements with Colonel William J. Worth in August 1842. Assinwah, Billy's father-in-law and another important leader, acknowledged the guiding role of Bowlegs by rendering faithful service to him. Sam Jones or Arpeika had become so aged and senile by the time of the Third Seminole War that his influence had waned within the tribe. There were other important leaders, including Chipco, Ismathtee, and Oscen Tustenuggee, but none so influential as Billy Bowlegs.

The constant flow of visitors and the interchange of news indicated the good relationship which existed between the Muskogees and the Mikasukis. It was possible for the young people to meet at the several dances to which all members of the tribe were invited. As a result, there was some divisional intermarriage. Customarily the bridegroom and his bride lived with or near the dwelling of her parents. An informed census taken of the Seminoles in 1852 revealed that a number of Muskogee men were liv-

6. Sprague to Adjutant-General R. Jones, January 11, 1847, 526, Seminole Agency, 1846-1855, Records of Office of Indian Affairs, National Archives, Washington. This letter, edited by James W. Covington, "The Florida Seminoles in 1847," appeared in *Tequesta,* XXIV (1964), 49-57.
7. Kenneth W. Porter, "The Cowkeeper Dynasty of the Seminole Nation," *Florida Historical Quarterly,* XXX (April 1952), 341-49.
8. Sprague, *The Florida War,* 512-13.

ing among the Mikasuki, and some Mikasuki men were found in Muskogee villages with their wives and their in-laws. [9]

From available evidence contributed both by Seminole and white sources, it seems likely that Chipco did oppose the war, but he obviously was not able to keep his band neutral during the conflict. Since some Mikasuki warriors, including war leaders Oscen Tustenuggee and his brother Micco Tustenuggee, had married women from Chipco's band, and, in accordance with Seminole tradition were living with their m-laws, they were able to influence many of Chipco's warriors. In order to avoid suffering a Charley Emathla fate, Chipco accompanied his men on some of the raids, including the attack on the Starling wagon train. Chipco did not bear any special hatred toward the whites though, and apparently he retained their friendship. [10]

An opportunity to deal a crushing blow against the scouting parties was presented on December 7, 1855, when Second Lieutenant George Lucas Hartsuff of the Second Artillery, accompanied by ten men (six mounted men, two foot soldiers, and two teamsters), left Fort Myers and moved up through the center of southwestern Florida then occupied by Billy Bowlegs and his bands. Ten days later, Monday, December 17, the force encamped on a pine island approximately three miles from the camp that Billy Bowlegs had used the previous year. The following morning, Hartsuff and three men entered the deserted village. As they left "some of the party took a bunch of bananas." [11] The next day, December 19, the force visited other Indian villages, which they also found deserted. Hartsuff's orders were to return his force to Fort Myers the next day, and the men, knowing they had a long march ahead of them, turned in early. Meanwhile, under cover of darkness, a party of Seminoles, wearing black and white plumes in their hair, was moving toward the pine tree patch. At approximately five o'clock on the morning of December 20, just as the soldiers were saddling up their horses and packing the

9. Jacksonville *The Florida News,* August 27, 1853.
10. *Tampa Sunday Tribune,* July 15, 1956. On the grounds that he was friendly towards the whites, Charley Emathla was killed by order of Osceola and no Indian would touch his body. It was finally buried by the whites.
11. An account of the banana stealing episode and the battle is found in Ray B. Seley, Jr., "Lieutenant Hartsuff and the Banana Plants," *Tequesta,* XXIII (1963), 3-14.

wagons for the return to Fort Myers, the Indians attacked. Several men were wounded or killed in the initial firing, but the others were able to retreat to a nearby hammock where they could use their own muskets. After killing four soldiers and wounding four others, including Hartsuff, the Seminole attackers withdrew. Judging from the advantage that they had possessed, it is surprising that the Seminoles did not completely overwhelm the camp and kill more of the defenders. The Hartsuff attack on Thursday, December 20, 1855, marks the beginning of the Third Seminole War, the final Indian war in Florida. It is sometimes known as the Billy Bowlegs War.

Acting under authority of an act passed by the Florida legislature in January 1853, Governor James Broome tried to organize as many volunteer companies as possible to resist the Indian uprising. The state's finances were in a precarious condition at the time, and Broome had to check with federal authorities concerning expenditures for these forces. By January 12, 1856, Broome had accepted six companies and had ordered them to protect the frontier. These units were composed of citizens from Manatee, Hillsborough, and Hernando counties, and they had been armed, equipped, and rationed with the assistance of private funds. The force was offered to the Secretary of War, but Jefferson Davis only accepted three mounted companies and two infantry units. [12] Since Governor Broome believed that the number of men mustered into federal service was insufficient to meet both the offensive and defensive needs of Florida, he retained in active service under state control the companies commanded by Captains Francis M. Durrance, LeRoy C. Lesley, William H. Kendrick, Abner D. Johnson, and the detachment under Lieutenant John Addison - a total of 400 men. [13]

12. Each company was required to have seventy-four privates, two musicians, four corporals, four sergeants, one second lieutenant, one first lieutenant, and one captain. Captain A. Gibson to Adjutant-General, April 12, 1856. Letters received, Orders and Ordinance returns, 1856, War Department. Contemporary records indicated that it was very difficult to recruit foot soldiers.
13. The headquarters of the four state mounted companies included: Kendrick, Fort Broome (Hernando County frontier); Durrance, Fort Fraser (area east of Peace River); Wesley, site unselected (Lower Peace River and Manatee River areas), and Jernigan, Fort Gatlin (one half of the company operating east of St. Johns River and other half cooperating with Johnson's Company). See message of Governor Broome, November 24, 1856, *Florida House Journal* (1856), 12.

In anticipation of a possible outbreak of hostilities, the war department assembled in southern Florida a force of men twice as large as the state had been able to mobilize. Scattered about the peninsula were the following units from the First Artillery: Fort Capron on the Indian River, eighty-one men; Fort Dallas at Miami, 168 men; and the barracks at Key West, eighty-eight men. The garrisons of the Second Artillery included 217 men at Fort Myers, and 247 at Fort Brooke on Tampa Bay. [14]

By March 1, 1856, an impressive number of Indian fighters had been assembled to protect the frontier from raiders and to pursue the hostiles deep into the Florida wilderness. There were 800 federal troops stationed in South Florida; 260 state troops in federal service; and 400 troops in state service. Opposing this force of 1,460 men were about 100 Seminole warriors. The Indians were outnumbered by nearly fifteen to one.

Even with such an apparent overwhelming strength, the military units were badly disorganized. There was poor liaison between Colonel John Monroe, federal commander in Florida, and General Jesse Carter, special agent for the Florida militia. Part of the trouble developed from Carter's initial orders to each of his four company commanders late in February 1856. In a communication to Captain William Kendrick, Carter wrote: "One-half of your command will be required to rendezvous at your headquarters and be performing active frontier service, while you will encourage the remaining half to plant and cultivate crops and relieve them alternately at such intervals as you may deem practicable." [15] Similar orders were dispatched to the other commanders. Carter was thus cutting his fighting strength by half.

During the first few months of the conflict, some observers noted defects in the militia and regular military organizations and expressed their concern. After a raid on Sarasota Bay in March 1856, this comment appeared in a Tampa paper: "While the Indians are committing their depredations with an audacity unsurpassed, our meager forces are engaged in guarding posts and sending out small detachments of mounted men on scouting

14. Statement by U.S. Adjutant-General S. Cooper, November 27, 1855, *House of Representatives, Executive Document I,* Part III, 34th Cong., 1st Sess., No. 841.

15. Jesse Carter to William Kendrick, February 27, 1856, *Florida House Journal* (1856), 67. See also Carter to A. D. Johnson and Francis Durrance, *ibid.,* 67-69.

service, in an open portion of the Indian territory, where Indians can never be seen, and in *protecting* the frontier! What have they accomplished? Are the Indians to be removed by this force? The idea is as absurd as it is foolhardy . . . Billy understands all this, consequently his temerity." [16]

While most Floridians by the 1850s had believed that they could easily quell the small handful of Indians if there were trouble, their initial activities against the Seminoles were feeble. Instead of moving directly into Indian territory and carrying the war into the foe's backyard, the military remained on the defensive, and, whenever patrols moved out, they generally tried to stay on travelled roads and trails, obviously the place where Indians would not likely be discovered. Oscen Tustenuggee and his friends quickly noted this lack of strategy, and began utilizing the tactics they had learned during the final phases of the Second Seminole War: ambush, a rapid volley, and a hasty retreat. This type of fighting had proved effective in the Second Seminole War, and it would work again for the Indians in 1856.

While state and federal forces were mobilizing, the Seminoles were readying a series of offensive strikes, aimed at hitting the thin line of frontier settlements and outposts. It must be understood that Seminole raids were not planned in great detail by the leaders, but were arranged more on the "spur of the moment." During the Third Seminole War the Indians never based their forays upon a general pattern designed either to win the war or to drive the white man from Florida, The limited purposes of the raids seem to have been to revenge past wrongs or to obtain slaves, arms, and war booty.

Judging from available evidence, it appeared that war leader Oscen Tustenuggee and his friends in the Muskogee and Mikasuki bands assumed the responsibility for carrying out the offensive phases of the war. [17] Angry because post commander Major Lewis Arnold and his regulars had burned their village, the Seminoles kept a close watch over Fort Denaud on the Caloosahatchee River. On January 18, 1856, a wood party consisting of a cor-

16. Tampa *Florida Peninsular,* March 8, 1856.
17. Oscen Tustenuggee had come from a village situated on Fisheating Creek some two or three miles from present day Palmdale. For an account concerning this Seminole leader see *Tampa Tribune,* June 19, 1960.

poral and five privates was returning to the fort with a load of cypress logs when suddenly a force of fifteen or twenty Seminoles rose from the palmettoes along the crude trail and began firing at the soldiers sitting atop the wagons. Five soldiers and twelve mules were killed in the ambush, and only one wounded survivor was able to make his way back to the fort where he identified Oscen Tustenuggee as the leader of the ambushers. [18] Other Seminole raiding-parties burned a house at present-day Sarasota, ambushed a boat patrol on Turner's River, and attacked a settlement near present-day Miami. One such party, returning from a successful strike at the Braden plantation in present-day Bradenton, was overtaken during lunch time on Big Charley Apopka Creek (Charlo-Popka-Hatchee-Chee or Payne's Creek?) by a force of militiamen. The Indians lost two warriors, seven slave prisoners, three mules, and one pony. Oscen Tustenuggee led on this raid. While he lost his pony, he was able to escape. [19]

The next time the Seminoles struck again at the scattered settlements, they travelled some distance northward of their previous raids. At the tiny outpost of Darby, in the central part of present-day Pasco County, lived Captain Robert Bradley, a veteran of the Second Seminole War, his wife, several children, and his Negro slaves. On the evening of May 14, 1856, two of the younger children were playing in the passageway between the double-log cabin house. Everything seemed quiet and peaceful. Then suddenly the scene changed to one of terror. A bland of some fifteen Indians had crept undetected up to the house and opened fire at the unsuspecting children. The frantic mother attempted to save her screaming youngsters and became a target herself. Before Bradley, rising from a sick bed, was able to join his older sons and return the gunfire, the two younger children were killed. [20] Although news of the attack was carried to a

18. Alexander S. Webb, "Campaigning in Florida in 1855," *Journal of the Military Service Institutions* (November-December 1912), 410-12.
19. For accounts of the attack on the Braden plantation see Carter to Broome, April 12, 1856, *Florida House Journal* (1856), Appendix, 85-86, and Tampa *Florida Peninsular*, April 12, 1856. Also see John Monroe to Cooper, April 16, 1856, M265, Department of Florida, 1856, Box 27, War Department.
20. Palatka *National Democrat* quoted in Tallahassee *Floridian and Journal*, May 31, 1856; S. Churchill to Monroe, May 15, 1856, C3, War Department Records, 1856; D. B. McKay, ed., *Pioneer Florida*, 3 vols. (Tampa, 1959), II, 566-67.

militia post and militiamen hurried to the Bradley homestead, the Indians were able to make their escape. [21] The soldiers did find the body of an Indian killed by Bradley. It seemed odd that the Indians had attacked Darby while by-passing other more likely targets. A possible reason for the attack was that Captain Bradley had killed the brother of Tigertail during the Second Seminole War.

Indian scouts, probably from the same party that took part in the Darby attack, had been observing the traffic along the several military roads leading from Tampa into the interior, and they planned to ambush a wagon train. On Saturday, May 17, 1856, a three-wagon mule train carrying grain from Fort Brooke to Fort Fraser had stopped for water at a small creek, when the young son of Teamster John Starling noticed a Seminole hiding behind a pine tree. He quickly called to his father, but before an alarm could be sounded, the Indians opened fire. Three men escaped the ambush and alarmed the settlers at the camp-ground, but the two Starlings and a Mr. Roach were killed. [22] The hero of this brief skirmish was Tom Hatfield who stood between two mules and maintained a constant fire against the foe. Realizing that he was the only living person remaining in the train, Hatfield jumped on a mule and made his escape. [23]

One of the most important battles of the war took place on June 14-16, 1856, when a Seminole raiding party struck at an isolated farm and, in turn, was attacked by two militia units. In December 1855, Willoughby Tillis, his wife, and seven children moved from Tampa to a homestead site situated near Whidden Creek some three and one-half miles from Fort Meade. While their house was being built, the Tillis family occupied a makeshift storage shelter. Travellers had been warning Tillis for some time that he was exposing his family to Indian raiding

21. J. A. Hendley, *History of Pasco County, Florida* (Dade City, n.d.), 4, 16.
22. Tampa *Florida Peninsular,* May 24, 1856; *Tampa Tribune,* December 4, 1955.
23. Tampa *Florida Peninsular,* May 24, 1856; *Tamba Tribune,* October 30, 1955. The site of the wagon train ambush has been marked by the Hillsborough County Historical Commission. It is on U.S. Highway 92 between Tampa and Plant City, some thirteen miles from Tampa. Until 1932, a pine tree in which shot was embedded could be found at the site, but it was removed during a widening of the roadway.

parties, and finally he moved his wife and children to the Russell farm a mile and a half from Fort Meade. The well-constructed double-cabin pine log house, complete with connecting walkway, brick chimney, and with no visible openings between logs, was shared with another refugee family - Thomas Underhill, his wife, and three children. [24]

On the morning of June 14, while milking her cows, Mrs. Celia Tillis saw an Indian peering at her through the pine rails of the cattlepen. Another look showed others hiding by the rails. She screamed a warning to her Negro slave Aunt Line and to her two boys, and they all raced toward the house. The Seminoles immediately opened fire at the house and its occupants. Underhill, who had been sleeping in the separate cabin connected by the walkway to the Tillis portion of the house, ran to join the others, but in his haste, left all of his ammunition in the other cabin. Since she was the smallest, it was decided that Aunt Line should crawl under the walkway from one cabin to the other for the ammunition. [25] The Negro slave was able to make the trip safely, but later she was slightly wounded on the forehead.

Tillis and Underhill returned an effective fire by shooting through the narrow opening between the logs and brick chimney. Underhill killed an Indian on his first shot which stopped their rush on the house. Since the gun smoke indicated their position, the two whites would fire and then jump back to a safer spot. When the battle ended, it was discovered that nearly all the Indian bullets had lodged within a half-inch of the chimney gap, and a few had passed through the opening and had lodged in the cabin walls.

In the midst of the skirmish, Lafayette Tillis ran from the barn to the house. He had returned from Fort Meade late at night and had retired to the barnloft so as not to disturb the rest of the household. Young Tillis said that the Indians had attempted to burn the barn, but since they had no matches, they were un-

24. William Hooker to Broome, June 19, 1856, Tampa *Florida Peninsular*, July 5, 1856; *Tampa Sunday Tribune*, April 4, 1954. "Original Narratives of Indian Attacks in Florida: An Indian Attack of 1856 on the Home of Willoughby Tillis: Narrative of James Dallas Tillis," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, VIII (April 1930), 179-87.

25. McKay, *Pioneer Florida*, II, 574-75. The two accounts of the Tillis affairs which were given by James Dallas Tillis differ in significant detail and must be regarded with suspicion. Yet, they present valuable information not available elsewhere.

able to start a blaze. Underhill's horse was in the barn, and they cut his throat and shot the dozen horses owned by Tillis that were grazing in a nearby field.

Daniel Carlton's two young sons, driving cattle to pasture, heard the prolonged firing and informed their father, who hurried to Fort Meade with the news. [26] There were only a few militiamen available to answer the call for help, but Second Lieutenant Alderman Carlton from Captain Durrance's Company, who was visiting his family at Fort Meade, assumed command of a hastily-assembled relief force. It included Lott Whidden and Daniel H. Carlton, Lieutenant Carlton's son, from Durrance's Company Three, Florida Mounted Volunteers at Fort Fraser (Bartow), John C. Oats of Captain LeRoy Lesley's Company Seven, Florida Mounted Volunteers at Manatee (Bradenton), and William Parker, John H. Hollingsworth, and William McCulloch from Captain William B. Hooker's Company M, Florida Mounted Volunteers in federal service at Fort Meade. This militia group moved out quickly toward the besieged farmhouse, but hearing the soldiers approaching, the Indians retreated into a heavily wooded thicket nearby and awaited the inevitable clash. [27]

Thickets, with their large trees and dense underbrush and vines, made excellent natural forts for the Indians. They were able to take their toll as the soldiers clawed their way through the tangled undergrowth. Once the attackers came within ten feet of each other, the engagement developed into a series of individual combats - one person stalking the other through the heavy vegetation. Usually after a single rifle or musket shot, the attacker or defender was forced to fight with the aid of a knife, or using his rifle as a club, or even wrestling.

Tillis warned Lieutenant Carlton and his men that the Indians outnumbered them two to one. Nonetheless, three militiamen raced to one side of the Indian position; the remaining four took the opposite side, and both wings closed on the enemy. When Private Daniel H. Carlton saw William McCulloch holding a

26. *Tampa Tribune*, April 4, 1954.
27. Francis Durrance to Carter, June 14, 1856, *Florida House Journal* (1856), Appendix 21. The site of the Tillis farm house battle and the skirmish between seven militiamen and the Seminoles has been worked extensively by phosphate mining operations in the area, and the exact location of these two sites is virtually impossible to determine at this time.

Seminole on the ground, he came to his aid and cut the Indian's throat. Not only were the whites greatly outnumbered, but the Indian position in the wooded area was very strong, and the militiamen were forced to withdraw. In the brief but bloody engagement, Lieutenant Alderman Carlton and two of his men, Lott Whidden and William Parker, had been killed, and John C. Oats, Daniel H. Carlton, and John Hollingsworth were wounded. One Indian had been killed, and it was believed that he was an important leader. [28]

News of the skirmish was carried by Private Daniel H. Carlton to Fort Fraser, and Captain Francis Durrance dispatched First Sergeant F. C. M. Boggess and Second Sergeant Joseph L. Durrance with fifteen men to the scene. Another patrol of eight or ten men, led by First Lieutenant Streaty Parker of Lesley's Company, reached the Tillis place and followed the retreating Indians from the thicket where the struggle had taken place into a hammock which offered a better defensive position. The original band of Indians was believed to have been joined by one or more parties, and Lieutenant Parker decided to return to Fort Meade for reinforcements and more provisions. [29]

After a brief rest at Fort Meade, the aroused and reinforced militiamen emerged ready for battle. On June 16, 1856, twenty-five men under Lieutenant Parker searched through the swamplands along the Peace River, believed to be the hiding place of the hostiles. The following morning, five men were left to guard the horses, one went after provisions, and the remaining nineteen hunted for the elusive foe. At ten o'clock, the Seminole camp was discovered, and a quick rush gave the half-asleep sentry little chance to warn his fellows. [30] The two shots fired at the

28. The Seminoles were unable to recover the body of the dead Indian. Tied to the axle tree of a cart, it was carried to Fort Meade for examination by a doctor. Since the Indian carried many herbs on his person, the whites concluded that he must have been a medicine man or shaman. The body was buried within the stockade at Fort Meade. See *Tampa Tribune*, April 4, 1954.
29. Hooker to Broome, June 19, 1856, Tampa *Florida Peninsular*, July 5, 1856.
30. *Ibid.* Since the water level of the Peace River has been changed by phosphate mining operations and much of the extensive forest cover has been cut by lumbermen, exact location of the Peace River battle presents a challenge to the local historian. The author is greatly indebted to William Bevis of Fort Meade for guiding him to possible scenes of the several skirmishes.

guard aroused the Seminoles, and they quickly sought cover in the woods or tried to swim the river. War leader Oscen Tustenuggee was shot and killed in mid-stream, but his brother, Micco Tustenuggee, saved himself by diving off his horse and swimming underwater to the thickly-wooded bank on the other side. [31]

Once they had recovered from the initial shock, the Indians began returning an effective fire. A high bluff on the opposite side of the river served as a rallying spot for the hostiles. Gunfire from the higher ground killed George Howell and Robert Prine, and wounded James Whidden, William Brooker, and John Skipper. Seeing that they controlled the fighting at this point, some Indians moved across the river, hoping to create a flanking fire. With his force reduced to fourteen able-bodied men, Lieutenant Parker decided to retreat, carrying his wounded along with him. At Brooker's place, a previously-designated rendezvous point, the wounded were treated by a physician and reinforcements joined the party. The dead bodies had been recovered from the battlefield, and the wounded and dead were carried to Fort Meade. Besides Lieutenant Parker from Lesley's Company, the forces in this battle included twelve men from Durrance's Company, three from Hooker's Company, and one from Sparkman's Company. These figures show that Hooker's Company at Fort Meade was not strong enough to defend the countryside from attacking Seminoles.

After removing the dead and wounded, a small army of reinforced militiamen under Captain William Hooker made a determined effort to overtake the Indians. One force of twenty-three men marched five miles on the evening of June 16. Searching through the swamps the next two days, Hooker found the burned Chockaniola bridge, one dead Indian covered by a Starling wagon train canvas, some pools of blood left by dead or wounded Seminoles, but no live Indians. Detachments led by Lieutenants E. T. Kendrick (twenty-five men), B. S. Sparkman (thirteen men), and John Parker also searched through the same general area without finding any Seminoles. The hard pursuit through the heavily wooded country caused some men to become ill; others suffered

31. *Tampa Tribune*, June 19, 1960. Oscen Tustenuggee's body was hidden in a palmetto patch by the Indians, and several nights later two men returned and erected a log pen about his body. This pen was discovered and the body was removed by the soldiers.

from the swarms of mosquitoes prevalent during the summer. By June 20, the Florida forces had given up the pursuit and had returned to their home bases.

At first it appeared that the militia had scored a victory in the Peace River Valley battle. One observer claimed some time later that killing the Indians had been as easy as shooting ducks, and Florida Governor Broome was certain that as many as fifteen had been killed in the battle. [32] Yet facts to the contrary were disclosed at the same time. M. P. Lyons wrote to Colonel Monroe presenting another side to the picture: "Hooker, instead of chasing Indians, bothered more with gathering up his herd of cattle and driving them to sale. Many Indian signs around but he ignored them. When Indians attacked Mr. Tillis house in vicinity of Fort Meade only seven men were mustered and three of them belonged to Captain Hooker's Company C. (Most of men on beef scout). Seven men dashed to relief of Tillis and three were killed and two wounded. When Hooker heard the news he came when the dead were being carried from the field." [33]

The first skirmish near the Tillis house was certainly an Indian victory. Three whites lost their lives, and when the whereabouts of the Indians was discovered, a sizeable force could not be mustered against them. A determined but inadequate detail of nineteen men charged the enemy and were driven back. Finally when a larger force was organized, the Indians could not be discovered. If the militia stationed at Fort Meade had been at full or even at half strength, the Indians might have been defeated or even crushed, but most of the militiamen were engaged in the pursuit of private business of herding cattle. [34]

Evidence concerning the wretched condition of the Florida

32. *Fort Meade Leader* in *Tampa Tribune*, October 26, 1958. For Broome's remarks see *Florida House Journal* (1856), 13.
33. M. P. Lyons to Monroe, July 7, 1856, L7, Box 27, War Department Records, 1856. Lyons preferred charges against Hooker for neglect of duty. Robert F. Prine, George Howell, Alderman Carlton, William Parker, and Lott Whidden were buried together in a common grave at Fort Meade. The spot is marked by a stone monument erected in 1964.
34. Hooker claimed that he was alerted by the full moon and moved to Manatee (Bradenton) in order to prevent a possible attack there. When the attack did not develop, he went to Horse Creek where the Indians usually obtained a supply of potatoes. At this place, two scouts sent to obtain information at Fort Green, returned and informed him about the Tillis attack. See Hooker's report as printed in Tampa *Florida Peninsular*, July 5, 1856.

militia was apparent in the messages written by General Jesse Carter during June 1856. In a letter to Captain Kendrick at Fort Broome he expressed disappointment at not having met Kendrick at the post. He was also surprised to learn that thirty-two men had been given twenty-day furloughs. [35] While the Indians were attacking in the South, Carter, Captain Lesley with eighteen men, and Captain Sparkman with sixteen men, were searching through the hammocks of Chochochattee and Annuttaliga in Hernando County. [36] When news of the Tillis attack reached Carter on June 16, he suggested that Sparkman and his force return to the southern frontier, but it was not until the afternoon of June 19 that the unit made its departure. In his report, Carter tersely noted: "I regret to say, the harmony of cooperation was on the morning of that day, disturbed by an impropriety on the part of Capt. Sparkman, followed by language very discourteous to me." [37]

The victory claims were further deflated when several Seminole women captured a short time later alleged that only twelve warriors had been involved in the Peace River skirmish. Of this number, two were killed on shore, two in the water, and two were wounded. [38] The Indian account was at complete variance with the one offered by the whites, but such variations were typical in frontier history. An Indian could not be claimed as being dead until his body was seen and counted with the general total.

Although some of the poorest features of the militia system appeared during this period, substantial gains were also realized by the whites. First and foremost, the power of the Seminoles to carry out offensive strikes deep into the settled area was broken by the deaths of war leader Oscen Tustenuggee and other warriors in the Peace River fighting. No longer could the Indians carry out such raids, and even when soldiers and militiamen swarmed through their heartland, the warriors hid in the hammocks and grasslands, hoping that they would not be discovered. The Seminoles remained a threat and struck at unwary soldiers, but they did not undertake any raids in force to the north.

35. Carter to Kendrick, June 21, 1856, *Florida House Journal* (1856), Appendix, 122-23.
36. Carter to John Monroe, June 24, 1856, *ibid.*, 124-25.
37. *Ibid.*
38. W. W. Morris to Captain Page, July 26, 1857, M120, Box 30, War Department, 1857.