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**HOW TO ESCAPE THE YANKEES:
MAJOR SCOTT'S LETTER TO HIS WIFE
AT TALLAHASSEE, MARCH 1864**

edited by CLIFTON PAISLEY*

THE MIDDLE FLORIDA cotton plantation region that centered in Tallahassee had good reason in the spring of 1864 to fear an attack by Federal forces despite the impressive Confederate victory at the Battle of Olustee on February 20. After this bloody engagement Union troops retreated to Jacksonville, and pursuing Confederates stopped twelve miles short of the city at McGirt's Creek. They dug in there, and for months there was a standoff. Florida's long and poorly defended shoreline provided abundant other opportunities for a Federal assault, however. Middle Florida had become particularly vulnerable to an attack with the withdrawal of Confederate forces to meet the Federal threat at Olustee. A band of deserters hidden in the swamps of Taylor and Lafayette counties had been raiding the plantation country and had become so destructive that in March 1864, a force was sent to try to clear these renegades out of the swamps.¹ These dissidents had also occasionally assisted landing parties from Federal gunboats in raids on salt works. One such raid was near St. Marks, within thirty miles of Tallahassee, on the three days preceding the Battle of Olustee, and \$3,000,000 worth of property was destroyed.²

Such fear of a Federal attack weighed heavily on the mind of a Leon County planter and merchant, Major (later Colonel) George W. Scott, who wrote a 2,200-word letter to his wife Rebekah from a headquarters outpost of the Army of East Florida on Mary 19, 1864.³ Less than a month before, Scott

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1. John E. Johns, *Florida During the Civil War* (Gainesville, 1963), 164-65, 201; *War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, 1880-1901). Series 1, vol. XXXV, pt. 1, 368-69; Samuel Proctor, "Jacksonville During the Civil War," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XLI (April 1968), 354-55.
2. William Watson Davis, *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida* (New York, 1913; facsimile edition, Gainesville, 1964), 208. The original letter was discovered about six years ago, according to a letter from J. J. Scott to the editor, March 23, 1970.

had participated in the fighting at Olustee. This letter to Mrs. Scott, who was then living at their plantation home south of Tallahassee, had practically nothing to say about life in a Confederate camp. Instead, it was filled with detailed instructions on preparation for a 100-mile flight into Georgia should there be a heavy Federal landing on the coast. The planter-soldier probably was the more concerned because his plantation lay exposed to a possible enemy advance from the coast; it was at the southern extremity of the upland plantation country, lying along the south slope of the Tallahassee Hills. The rail line from St. Marks crossed one corner of his property.⁴

Both Scott and his wife were natives of Pennsylvania and Southerners by adoption. Scott had come to Florida as a young man in 1850, settling in Tallahassee where he established a successful mercantile business. An older brother, John, who remained in Pennsylvania, was a prominent attorney who served as a Republican United States Senator from 1869 to 1875. Afterwards he was general solicitor for the Pennsylvania Railroad Company. George W. Scott entered Confederate service in May 1861, and for much of the war he commanded a battalion in the Second Florida Cavalry.⁵

The Federal landings in 1864 which Scott had feared did not take place. However, on March 4, 1865, several hundred Negro troops were debarked from fourteen Union vessels at the Spanish Hole near St. Marks Light. Scott, who had been patrolling the coast, sounded the alarm,⁶ and it was his unit that first engaged the invaders at the East River Bridge. On March 6, at nearby Natural Bridge, Scott's battalion was in the thick of a fight in which regular Confederate forces, militia, and volun-

4. Scott's largest acreage, the 720-acre Craig Place, was acquired in 1862. However, his house was on what later was called the Otis Place on Bel Air Road (present South Adams Street between Palmetto and Orange Avenue). It overlooked the valley where the Florida A. and M. University farm is located. Leon County Deed Book N, 68, and Book R, 71, fix the location of his 1,036-acre plantation. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, March 19, 1889, recorded the burning of the "elegant mansion" formerly owned by Scott.
5. Wallace M. Alston, *The Significance of the Life of George Washington Scott* (Decatur, 1951), *passim*; Clifton Paisley, *From Cotton to Quail; An Agricultural Chronicle of Leon County, Florida, 1860-1967* (Gainesville, 1968), 20-22; U.S. Congress, *Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1961* (Washington, 1961), 1,573.
6. Caroline Mays Brevard, *A History of Florida From the Treaty of 1763 to Our Own Times*, 2 vols. (DeLand, 1924), II, 116.

teers turned back a threatened assault on Tallahassee. Two of the three Confederates who died in this battle were in his command. Scott became a local hero, and on returning to Tallahassee three days after the engagement he was presented with a horse by Green A. Chaires, the prominent Leon County planter.⁷ Chaires had also been apprehensive about a Federal attack on Middle Florida since his plantation lay only eight miles from the Natural Bridge battlefield.

Returning to his business and plantation interests after the Civil War, Scott entered politics briefly. In the spring of 1868 he ran unsuccessfully for governor of Florida on the Democratic-Conservative ticket. In the fall of that year he was visited on his plantation by the editor of the Tallahassee *Floridian* who praised the progressive farming methods of this "man of practical ideas." A sixteen-foot overshot waterwheel had been set up on the lower reaches of his plantation, and, utilizing the drainage from the southern escarpment of the Tallahassee Hills, it powered cotton gins and cane- and corn-grinding machinery. It was also used to crush animal bones for Scott's experiments with cottonseed and bonemeal fertilizer. Scott's farming operations did not prosper. In 1870 he moved to Georgia; in Atlanta he established a fertilizer manufacturing business which eventually became one of the largest in the South. In 1890, Scott made a generous gift to help Decatur Female Seminary become established, and shortly afterwards the school was renamed as Agnes Scott College for Scott's mother.⁷

The original of George Scott's letter to his wife is owned by his grandson, J. J. Scott of Scottsdale Mills, Georgia. He supplied the editor with a photostat of the original and a typescript. The letter is reproduced exactly as it was written.

H^d Qr^s Outpost Army East Florida
March 19th 1864

Dear Bettie,

I send enclosed with this a statement of my affairs which I have often and long intended giving you so that if anything

7. Tallahassee *Floridian and Journal*, March 11, 1865; Mark F. Boyd "The Joint Operations of the Federal Army and Navy Near St. Marks, Florida, March 1865," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XXIX (October 1950), 96-124; Paisley, *From Cotton to Quail*, 20-22.

should befall me you would have a pretty correct idea of how my matters are situated. You had better take care of this statement so that you can refer to it if necessary.

I will also give you some directions about what I now think it is best for you to do should the enemy get possession of the country. It is very hard to say what will be the best, but under my present impressions you had better, when the enemy lands with a large force on the coast, take the clothes that is such as are serviceable the best of the bed clothes and your two best mattresses. Take all your bed clothes if you can and I would quietly have your clothes and bed clothes that you do not use packed up so that you will not be hurried too much if you have to go. You can take all your cuttlry and spoons. I would also pack a bll of your best small dishes such as plates cups & saucers tumblers &c. the large ones you will have to leave as they are so heavy and bulky. You will have to take sufficient cooking utensils with you— don't forget your sifter, take the flour, about 100 lbs of the sugar and a can or bll of syrup— and as many hams as you can well take. Take the best axes, cross cut saw, and other tools that you may need for putting up cabins. Harry can put six mules in big wagon, Bob 4 mules in salt works wagon. Sam Anderson can put Lee and the big Gray mare in the new two horse wagon. Sam Johnston can put Allen Scott's Charlie and the little grey mare in the small two horse wagon and Jeps can take the ox cart with oxen. If the negroes all go with you which I suppose they will this will leave Milton Moses and Major with the assistance of the woman to drive the stock. Should you be by any accident one horse or mule short Harry can take five in big wagon. You will have to see that the negroes do not pyle up the wagons with their stuff—let them only take their clothes blankets & quilts and enough cooking utensils to get along with, the balance of their things you had better have put into one of the rooms of the House I would also before leaving have your things packed and locked in the rooms. I think also that it would be better to have all the meat that you are compelled to leave put into the meat room in the house— would also have all the gear—hoes and tools of all kinds that you leave put into house and locked up Charlott's room might be used for some of these purposes and *leave Aunt Gina* in charge of all—and then I think after you get fixed wherever you

go I think it would be well to send Moses back to stay with her. It will be well to tell the negroes that you will not be gone very long and that Aunt Gina will take care of their things.⁸

As to where you will go you will have to be governed by others I think it would be best and more pleasant for you to go into some neighborhood with those you know, Mr. Fierce, Capt. Brokaw, Dr Randolph & others but I should think somewhere about Albany, Geo-⁹ and I also think that if you are compelled to move that it will be best after you get moved up the country to sell out the stock mules and all for it will be very expensive feeding them and the longer you would keep them the more expensive besides it would be too late to make a crop to feed them on next year. So I think it would be best to sell everything and hire all the servants out except those you want for your own use in that event it would be best for you to rent a house in Albany, Americus, or some other town or village in that region.

I am under no obligation to take the Maxwell negroes you will therefore not take them except Henry & if he wants Jane to go with him you can take her if the Maxwells are willing.

The arrangement about teams would leave you Jim and Stonewall for the carriage and George to drive, the folks of course would all have to walk as you will want to take as many provisions as possible. The negro children would have to be put on one of the wagons. This will give you the big wagon for your own things, Bob's and one of the two horse wagons for pro-

8. Aunt Gina was one of ten slaves obtained by Scott with the farm he purchased on November 7, 1862, from Hannah S. Craig. The recorded deed (N-68) lists her name as Lina; however, this undoubtedly is Aunt Gina as she is listed as "an old woman." The others mentioned in the Scott letter were obtained in the same purchase of land and slaves for \$17,309; Major, about forty-five; Moses, about thirty-eight; Milton, about thirty; Sam Johnston, about twenty-seven; and Sam Anderson, about fifty.

9. Untouched by Federal army activity, southwest Georgia became a place of refuge, and, by the end of the Civil War, some of its towns were said even to have taken on an air of gaiety with parties and theatricals to entertain the refugees. T. Conn Bryan, *Confederate Georgia* (Athens, 1953), 135, 199. Albany was a prosperous community. Its population, according to the 1860 census, compared with Tallahassee's 1,932. Some of its local historians claimed later that at the start of the war Dougherty County was "the richest county of the South, on the basis of per capita wealth." See Thronateeska Chapter, *Daughters of the American Revolution, History and Reminiscences of Dougherty County, Georgia* (Albany, 1924), 363.

visions one two horse wagon for the negroes things and the ox cart for corn and meat. I think I would have the folks shell about 20 bu corn and sack it up in those sacks you had oats in, and have it put away so that it will be ready— if you have the corn and you can have meal ground along the way— 20 bu can go on the cart and that will feed horses and negroes for five days— 2 qts of shelled corn is a feed for a horse— six qts a day.

I would go the Lake Jackson road cross the river on Stewart's bridge¹⁰ then cross the county road to what is known as Hawthorn's trail which leads on by Mrs. Rackley's to Albany—you cannot travel more than 12 or 15 miles a day. You had better take the parlor carpet with you—it will answer to throw over your things in case of rain indeed if you could take both it would be better for you could thro one over wagon to protect your things and if you cannot get a house you can take two forked sticks put a pole across and throw over your carpet which will makea very good tent under which you can put your mattress thus for yourself and children



If you want money of which you should take at least \$500 with you call on Mr. Butler for it but I will not sell the salt I have in Macon for the present and if you should go into Georgia and want money write to Messrs Carhart and Gurd Macon Ga.—and say to them to charge a part salt I have in their hands stating how you came to be there— (viz. that Yanks run you off).

Tell Aunt Gina to take good care of the house and things left—you would have to leave corn and meat plenty for her to get at—that is about the corn some should be brought to the house where she could watch it for the probability is that all corn left at cribs will be carried off. You should also leave her some money.

I believe now I have given you as full direction as I can well

10. Lake Jackson Road is now known as Old Bainbridge Road. According to an 1883 map Stewarts' Bridge crossed the Ochlockonee River into Gadsden County about where U.S. 27 now crosses.

do for circumstances will alter cases very much and it is hard to tell what is best to do.

The tenth of meat we saved last year will be about 450 lbs.¹¹ I wish you would have 3 blls sent to Major Noyes and take rect for us on tax in kind and if there is more than the four hund and fifty lbs let him credit me with the difference at government prices. You had better have the pickel reboiled before you send it—and write the Maj a note stating what it is for & that my tax will be about 450 lbs & if any more to credit me.

You might also see Mr. Butler what he can get for two blls more for I think we can spare at least that much and if he can sell it, it would be well to send some up to him. Have the pickel reboiled on that too—please attend to the meat matter at once. Keep the best blls yourself for fear you have to go off—you had better deliver also the tenths of sugar and syrup.

I believe we made two cans and a bll of syrup which would be at 40 gals each 120 gals and at least 250 or 300 lbs of sugar—but on reflection it would be so inconvenient to send that amount that I will let it be and pay that amount in money if I can do so—12 gals syrup and 30 lbs sugar would be about the tenths.

Now my dear wife do not become alarmed because I write to you thus, for there may be no danger of an invasion of Midl Florida but I will express my views fully to you my dear Bettie for you know how much I love you and our dear little ones and my anxiety to keep you from all harm leads me to make these suggestions, for I would be misserable if I thought those I held so dear were exposed to the annoyances and insults of such a lot of black and white ruffins as the North has sent out against this state.

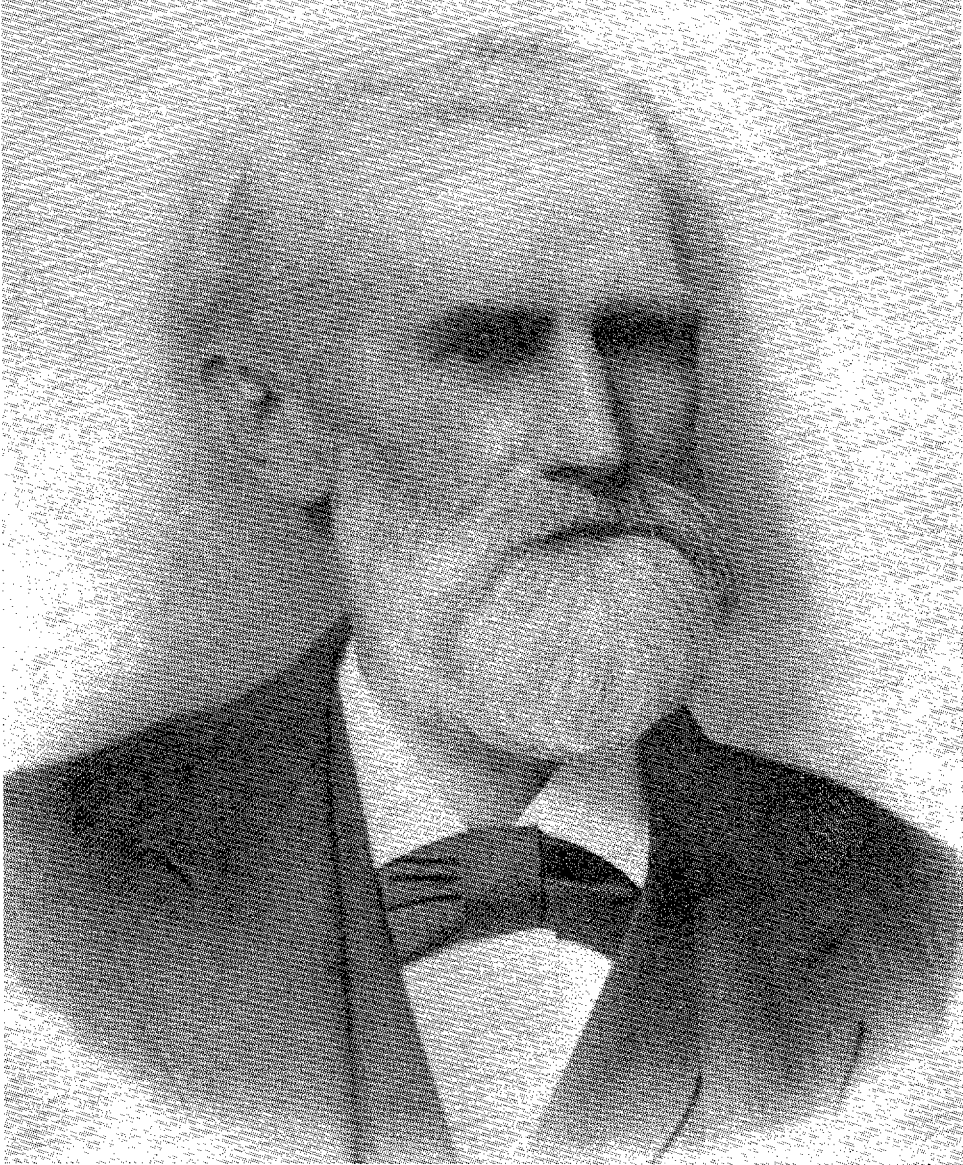
There is no doubt but that the enemy are reinforcing and that they intend to occupy the States if they can— and they have less sense than I give them credit for, if they do not send an expedition to Midl Fla to cooperate with this—I therefore expect they will—but now my dear wife do not mention this as coming from me— for in the position I am in here persons might be disposed to give undue weight to it and thus create

11. The “Confederate tithe” was adopted as a revenue measure on April 24, 1863. It provided for a tax in kind of one-tenth of all agricultural products and was stringently enforced in Florida. See Davis, *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida*, 187.

quite an alarm among the citizens—but just you go along quietly as if you knew nothing about it and get such things ready as you can without attracting attention. It will at least be a wise precaution and if you do not have to go so much the better but it is well to be as well prepared as possible for when the time comes if at all, all will be hurry and confusion. Of course, you will not make a move until it is well ascertained that the enemy are coming into Mid. Fla. Should you go off and not have an opportunity of hearing from me and you should learn that the enemy were there in large numbers, I think the best thing you could do would be to advertise all the stock wagons &c. for sale—keeping about two cows and two horses besides Buck's pony—also the small two horse wagon and gear so as to haul without hands. You might sell off when you get up in the neighborhood of Albany advertising in papers and by hand bills stating number of horses and mules-cows-sheep hogs-wagons, &c. You can get someone to write it for you for I suppose there will be a number of Tallahassee folks there. You can then rent a comfortable house, if possible near some of your friends, keep Milton and George to attend to matters for you and hire the balance of negroes out. You would keep the carriage and two horses to go about with & haul with, & probably you might be fixed so that you could plant a garden some potatoes, &c.

I think this arrangement would give you much less trouble than if you were to attempt to hold on to the teams and hire them out for it would be a great trouble to you and probably very expensive besides if you have to go you would hardly get back in time to save the crop now planted for it would go to ruin in two weeks if not worked. So I think it altogether the best to sell out as soon as you get out of way of enemy and there fix to live as easy and comfortable as possible.

Should Charley Myers or anyone else come for "Stonewall" tell him or them that he is one of the three military horses allowed me by law for my own use, and that I need him myself. Do not let anyone take him away— I wrote to Charley Myers today that I could not let him have him. Joe is failing very fast if you can get "Stonewall" up so that he will do for me to ride I will send Joe home to recuperate.



Well now I believe I have written you everything and it makes a very long letter I am afraid you will tyre reading it.

So my dear wife hoping that you will not have to leave home and that we may soon be permitted to meet again, I remain your ever affectionate husband. Kiss the children and love from papa.

George

Tell Harry he must push up and get plenty of corn planted. Has he planted that new ground on other side of plank road there is near 40 acres of best land there I want planted. Has he planted the part he ploughed on big hill—that next to plank road must be planted on both sides of the ponds and branches. Tell him to select the best land to plant in field back of old quarters. I want all the corn planted that he can manage tell him now is the time to push early and late if he wants to make a crop. He can plant for two or three weeks yet— but he must not neglect his young corn—he must push hard for next three months, don't let the folks lay off for every little complaint you will have to force them out sometimes as they will impose on you. The box was—a great treat for which I am much obliged, how nice the hams are.¹²

George

12. The box with hams probably was a birthday present; Scott observed his thirty-fifth birthday, February 22, only two days after Olustee. He died at the age of seventy-four in Decatur, Georgia. Although Scott left Florida in 1870, he continued to be interested in the state, according to his grandson, Scott Candler, Sr., of Decatur, Georgia. He had owned a winter home at Clearwater, which was sold by the family after his death in 1903, Candler to the editor, June 19, 1969. The *Tallahassee Weekly Floridian*, April 15, 1886, reported that Colonel Scott and his wife were the guests of former Governor Bloxham at his home on Calhoun Street.