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“THE LITTLE AFFAIR”:
THE SOUTHWEST FLORIDA CAMPAIGN,
1863-1864

by RODNEY E. DILLON, JR.

THE southern half of Florida played a unique and significant, if often underrated, role in the Civil War. The Federal occupation of the Charlotte Harbor-Caloosahatchee River area in late 1863 and early 1864, though a small-scale operation compared to military activities elsewhere in the country, proved to be one of the most important campaigns in the region. Taking place between the Union stronghold in the Keys and Confederate possessions at Tampa and points north, this campaign highlighted many elements characteristic of the struggle in south Florida. Despite the isolation of the area, and the small number of men involved, it had a marked impact on the course of the war throughout the state.

Fort Taylor and other military installations at Key West and Fort Jefferson in the Dry Tortugas were the only bases in the South, besides Fort Pickens at Pensacola and Fortress Monroe in Virginia, to remain in Federal hands throughout the war. They provided the North with an important advantage in the southernmost extremity of the country.¹ During the first half of the war, effective Federal use of these bases set patterns which ultimately gave the Union virtual control over the southern peninsula. From the outbreak of hostilities, Confederate sympathy in Key West, then Florida's second largest city, was vigorously suppressed by Federal military and civil authorities on the island.² In 1862, Key

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1. Dorothy Dodd, "Florida in the War, 1861-1865," in Allen Morris, comp., *The Florida Handbook, 1961-1962* (Tallahassee, 1961), 261.
2. William H. French to George L. Hartsuff, May 8, 1861, *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1880-1901), ser. I, vol. I, 411-12 (hereinafter *O.R.*); Jefferson B. Browne, *Key West, the Old and the New* (St. Augustine, 1912; facsimile ed. Gainesville, 1973), 94, 220-21; Christian Boye to Frank Henry Boye, September 23, 1862, Boye Family Papers, possession of Mrs. F. B. Waters, Winter Park, photo-

West, which had served the United States as a naval base for forty years, became the headquarters of the East Gulf Blockading Squadron. Though small in numbers, the squadron was responsible for the blockade of the entire Gulf coast of Florida, the Atlantic coast south of Cape Canaveral, and the upper Caribbean.³

By 1863, the Confederate mainland of south Florida was feeling the effects of the Federal blockade. The closing of sea trade to the otherwise isolated region brought severe economic hardships, which were compounded by the wartime labor shortage and desperate Confederate taxation measures.⁴ This situation, by the middle of the war, had resulted in desertion, conscription evasion, and rising Union sentiment among many of south Florida's approximately 7,000 inhabitants.⁵ At the same time, the state and Confederate governments, concentrating their efforts on events of greater magnitude elsewhere, had left the region virtually defenseless. Other than scattered local guerrillas, the only Confederate force in south Florida in 1863 was a small garrison at Tampa, comprised of under 100 men.⁶

In spite of these unfavorable conditions, south Florida assumed new importance as a prime source of Confederate food supplies in the second half of 1863. The fall of Vicksburg and subsequent severance of the cattle-producing trans-Mississippi region in July made south Florida beef particularly valuable. By December, an estimated 2,000 head of cattle were being driven from the state each week to supply the hungry southern armies.

copies in P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, Miscellaneous Manuscripts, Box 27, University of Florida, Gainesville.

3. Gideon Welles to William W. McKean, January 20, 1862, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, 30 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1894-1927), ser. I, vol. XVII, 56 (hereinafter *O.R.N.*); Stanley L. Itkin, "Operations of the East Gulf Blockading Squadron in the Blockade of Florida, 1862-1865" (master's thesis, Florida State University, 1962), 1-3.
4. Dodd, "Florida in the War," 292-95; John F. Reiger, "Deprivation, Disaffection and Desertion in Confederate Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XLVIII (January 1970), 279, 283-84.
5. John Milton to George W. Randolph, October 5, 1862, *O.R.*, ser. I, vol. LIII, 258; Reiger, "Deprivation, Disaffection and Desertion," 288; John E. Johns, *Florida During the Civil War* (Gainesville, 1963), 160-61.
6. Milton to Judah P. Benjamin, March 5, 1862, *O.R.*, ser. I, vol. VI, 402, Robert E. Lee to James H. Trapier, March 13, 1862, *ibid.*, 406; Theodorus Bailey to Welles, October 24, 1863, *O.R.N.*, ser. I, vol. XVII, 571, Thomas R. Harris to A. A. Semmes, October 18, 1863, *ibid.*, 576.

Half of these came from middle and south Florida.⁷ Southern Florida also served as a vital source for other commodities, including salt, sugar, hogs, and blockade-run goods.⁸

Although Federal forces held a strategic advantage in south Florida, and the resources produced there were extremely vulnerable, no serious Union efforts to occupy the mainland had been made. During the first two and one-half years of war, Federal attacks had been limited to naval bombardments and temporary shore expeditions.⁹ The only Union base in the region, other than those at Key West and the Tortugas, was the small refugee camp at Egmont Key in the mouth of Tampa Bay.¹⁰ In December 1863, however, as the area's significance as a Confederate supply source and the value of local Unionists and other refugees to the Federal cause became apparent, the nature of the war in south Florida began to undergo a striking change.

The catalyst for this change was the arrival at Key West, on December 2, of Enoch Daniels, a refugee from the Charlotte Harbor area. Daniels had journeyed to the Union stronghold to urge armed Federal support for the raising of a volunteer refugee force which he felt could "occupy and conquer the country between Charlotte Harbor and Tampa Bay." He believed that if the refugees who had fled to Key West could be mustered into service, armed, supplied, and backed by approximately 100 northern troops, they could encourage Unionism in southwest Florida and gather a force sufficient to break up cattle drives in the area.¹¹

Though sparsely populated, the region encompassing Char-

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7. Johns, *Florida During the Civil War*, 190-91; Daniel P. Woodbury to Charles P. Stone, December 23, 1863, *O.R.*, ser. I, vol. XXVI, part 1, 873.
 8. Maxwell Woodhull to Charles Steedman, October 7, 1862, *O.R.N.*, ser. I, vol. XIII, 369; C. McClenaghan to H. C. Guerin, October 29, 1863, *O.R.*, ser. I, vol. XXVIII, part 2, 461-62, John K. Jackson to S. Cooper, August 12, 1864, *ibid.*, vol. XXXV, part 2, 606-08; Alfred Jackson Hanna and Kathryn Abbey Hanna, *Lake Okeechobee, Wellspring of the Everglades* (Indianapolis, 1948) 75.
 9. By December 1863, Tampa had been bombarded by Union naval forces on four separate occasions: April 13, 1862, June 30-July 1, 1862, March 28-April 2, 1863, and October 16, 1863. Federal shore expeditions landed at several points along the south Florida coast in 1862 and 1863, including the Pinellas peninsula, Jupiter Inlet, the Manatee, Miami, Hillsborough, and Peace rivers, and several locations on the Indian River.
 10. John W. Stafford, "Egmont Key: Sentinel of Tampa Bay," *Tampa Bay History*, II (Spring/Summer 1980), 22; Walter Keeler Scofield, "On Blockade Duty in Florida Waters, Excerpts From a Union Naval Officer's Diary," ed. by William J. Schellings, *Tequesta*, XV (1955), 62-64.
 11. Bailey to Woodbury, December 2, 1863, *O.R.N.*, ser. I, vol. XVII, 593.

lotte Harbor and the Caloosahatchee River was one of the most strategic in southern Florida. The mouths of these two bodies of water lay approximately ten miles from one another, connected by Pine Island Sound and sheltered from the open Gulf by a string of islands including Gasparilla, Cayo Costa, Captiva, and Sanibel. From this protected estuary, several major rivers, including the Peace, the Myakka, and the Caloosahatchee, penetrated deep into the interior. The value of the region as a point of access between the Gulf and the inland prairies made it a natural target for Federal occupation. Thus Daniels found the Union command at Key West extremely receptive to his proposal.¹²

Rear Admiral Theodorus Bailey, commanding the East Gulf Blockading Squadron, conferred with Daniels the same day that the refugee arrived, and expressed his approval of the venture. Furthermore, Bailey heartily recommended the plan to Brigadier General Daniel P. Woodbury, commander of the Federal District of Key West and the Tortugas. If the general wished to follow Daniels's basic proposal, Bailey added, the blockading squadron would furnish necessary transportation and support for the expedition.¹³

Woodbury, too, was enthusiastic, and almost immediately began to set the plans in motion. On December 14, he informed department headquarters in New Orleans that between 200 and 800 Confederate deserters and conscription evaders were hiding in the woods between Charlotte Harbor and Lake Okeechobee. Woodbury felt confident that "many of these men would join the forces of the United States should a military post be established in their neighborhood," and he announced his intention to establish such a post at Charlotte Harbor. From this base, he hoped to break up cattle drives and launch additional expeditions inland and up the Gulf coast.¹⁴

Nineteen refugees in Key West were quickly enlisted for this venture, and Woodbury felt sure that many more would join them if guaranteed that their first Federal service would be within the state. The men comprising this little band dubbed

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*

14. Woodbury to Stone, December 14, 1863, *O.R.*, ser. I, vol. XXVI, part 1, 855-56.

themselves the Florida Rangers, and Enoch Daniels was unofficially appointed their captain. In the following days, the number of new recruits rose to twenty-nine. A sergeant and six privates from the Forty-seventh Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry, at that time the only regiment stationed in the Keys, were assigned to duty with the Florida Rangers. The entire group was then placed under the command of Lieutenant James Meyers of the Forty-seventh Pennsylvania. Upon arrival at Charlotte Harbor, the expedition was to receive additional reinforcement from naval forces blockading that body of water.¹⁵

On December 16, Admiral Bailey supplied Lieutenant Meyers's command with muskets and cartridges, and sent them aboard the steamer *Sunflower*. The following day, the *Sunflower* sailed from Key West, bound for Charlotte Harbor.¹⁶ In his final instructions to Meyers, General Woodbury outlined the initial goals of the expedition: to encourage Union men to enlist, to recruit able-bodied Negroes for United States service, and to supply Federal troops and blockading vessels with cattle. Once eighty local Unionists had enlisted in the Florida Rangers, he added, that unit would be officially organized as a company. According to Woodbury, few, if any, regular Confederate troops were active south of Tampa, but, the general emphasized, "guerrillas and unauthorized men calling themselves regulators occasionally scour the country to drive away cattle and to enforce the conscription." While Woodbury authorized the seizure of property belonging to inhabitants who aided the Confederacy, he stressed that no attempts at revenge must be taken, and that no peaceful citizens, particularly women or children, should be disturbed.¹⁷

At the mouth of Charlotte Harbor, the transport *Sunflower* was greeted by the bark *Gem of the Sea*, which was blockading the area. To Lieutenant Irvin B. Baxter, commander of the *Gem of the Sea*, was entrusted the duty of landing Meyers's force on one of the harbor's many islands, preferably Useppa Island, and providing them with all possible protection and assistance. Within

15. Ibid., Woodbury to Nathaniel P. Banks, December 17, 1863, 874; Bailey to Robert Handy, December 16, 1863, *O.R.N.*, ser. I, vol. XVII, 604.

16. Bailey to Handy, December 16, 1863, *O.R.N.*, ser. I, vol. XVII, 604; Bailey to Edward Van Sice, December 16, 1863, *ibid.*, 605.

17. Woodbury to Banks, December 17, 1863, *O.R.*, ser. I, vol. XXVI, part 1, 874-75.

days, boats from the bark peacefully landed Meyers and his men at Useppa Island.¹⁸ Strategically, Useppa was an ideal point from which to launch the expedition. Situated near the mouth of the harbor, in the upper reaches of Pine Island Sound, it provided ready access to the Gulf, larger islands nearby, and most points along the mainland.

Meyers's men immediately set up camp on the island and prepared for action. On December 23, General Woodbury reported that they were ready to "commence a nucleus of operations" on the mainland. If their efforts were successful, Woodbury planned to join them with a full company from the Forty-seventh Pennsylvania and establish a more permanent base on the mainland.¹⁹

The refugees and northern soldiers on Useppa Island and the crew of the *Gem of the Sea* lost no time beginning their "nucleus of operations." At one o'clock on the afternoon of December 24, a launch and a cutter left the Federal ship with fifteen men, arms, and eight days' provisions aboard. At Useppa Island, the two small vessels embarked Enoch Daniels and fifteen refugee rangers. On December 25, the little group proceeded up Charlotte Harbor, arriving at the mouth of the Myakka River at 5:30 in the afternoon. A forward party of five refugees, led by Daniels, came ashore and scouted the mainland for one and one-half miles. The rest of the force then landed, set up camp, posted pickets, and placed breastworks to protect their boats. Once the camp was secured, Daniels and his fifteen men started inland, to scout "through the country for recruiting." Before leaving, the refugee leader had made arrangements with Acting Ensign John H. Jenks, commander of the landing party, to return to the camp within seven days. Jenks, with his fourteen Federal sailors, remained behind to guard the camp.²⁰

Within a half hour after their arrival, the Federal force sighted a large fire, apparently a signal, on the east side of the Peace River, several miles distant. Fifteen minutes later, a second fire, on the west side of the Peace River, was reported. The fol-

18. Woodbury to Stone, December 23, 1863, *O.R.*, ser. I, vol. XXVI, part 1, 873; Bailey to Irvin B. Baxter, December 16, 1863, *O.R.N.*, ser. I, vol. XVII, 605.

19. Woodbury to Stone, December 23, 1863, *O.R.*, ser. I, vol. XXVI, part 1, 873.

20. John H. Jenks to Baxter, December 31, 1863, *O.R.N.*, ser. I, vol. XVII, 611, Baxter to Bailey, January 2, 1864, *ibid.*, 610.

lowing day, with no word from Daniels's party, Jenks's command reconnoitered the area for several miles and marked the shoreline with stakes, set in three feet of water. The next day, December 27, passed quietly until 7:30 in the evening, when a shot, probably fired by Confederate guerrillas, aroused the Federal camp. The Union pickets were doubled, and the seamen remained armed and on alert throughout the night, but no attack came.²¹

After leaving the camp on the evening of the twenty-fifth, Daniels's refugee party had scouted the wilderness for ten miles to the north, and camped for the night in a hammock. On the twenty-sixth, they continued their journey, but still encountered no people. On the morning of December 27, Daniels sent four of his men to Fort Hartsuff, a small settlement on the Peace River approximately forty miles northeast of Charlotte Harbor. Later in the day, the remainder of Daniels's command joined them there. At nightfall, the entire party proceeded a few miles west to Horse Creek, where they camped for the night. Shortly after their arrival, a heavy rainstorm swept the area, completely obliterating their trail.²²

While Ensign Jenks and his sailors guarded their camp at the mouth of the Myakka, and Enoch Daniels's refugees made their way inland, Lieutenant Meyers's force manned the base at Useppa Island, and the *Gem of the Sea* guarded the entrances to Charlotte Harbor. On December 26, the *Gem of the Sea* was joined by the sloop *Rosalie*, which had sailed from Key West. Two days later, on the twenty-eighth, the *Rosalie* arrived at the mouth of the Myakka to provide further protection for the Union force there. The sloop arrived at her destination at four o'clock in the afternoon, and anchored in a covering position eighty yards from the Federal camp.²³

At six o'clock that evening, Jenks's men again sighted two fires, which they estimated to be three or four miles distant. Two hours later, Confederate scouts fired on the Union pickets, then withdrew, and the camp was again placed on alert. Near mid-

21. Jenks to Baxter, December 31, 1863, *O.R.N.*, ser. I, vol. XVII, 611-12.

22. Enoch Daniels to James Meyers, January 2, 1864, U.S. Army Continental Commands, 1821-1920, Department and District of Key West, 1861-1868, Record Group 393, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereinafter R.G. 393).

23. Peter F. Coffin to Baxter, December 31, 1863, *O.R.N.*, ser. I, vol. XVII, 613-14.

night, the anxious Federal sailors spotted a figure waving a torch approximately three-quarters of a mile away. The unidentified figure continued to signal for some time before his torch was extinguished, and darkness and quiet again fell on the camp.²⁴

The mysterious signals sighted by Ensign Jenks's men appear to have been connected to a series of events which confronted Enoch Daniels's party. Daniels left his command at the Horse Creek hammock early on the morning of December 28, and proceeded to the nearby home of a Union sympathizer, where he hoped to obtain information on Confederate guerrilla activity. The man informed him that he knew of no substantial Confederate force in the area, although seven men were herding cattle and intended to drive them to a cattle pen in the vicinity that night. Planning to surprise and capture the cattle drivers, Daniels posted guards near the pen at dusk, and then lay down to rest. Within an hour and a half, he was awakened and informed that the sentinels had vanished. After a night of examining the abandoned picket posts and consulting with his informant, he concluded that the missing men— six in all— had deserted and joined the Confederate cattle drivers. The informant expressed fear that the Confederate party, apprised of Daniels's activities by the deserters, would try to intercept and attack his column. Accordingly, as December 29 passed, Daniels broke camp and began the march back to Ensign Jenks's encampment.²⁵

Back at the mouth of the Myakka, Jenks's men spent the morning of the twenty-ninth cleaning and preparing their arms and scouting the surrounding countryside. Although unaware of the events which had faced Daniels's party the previous night, they were sufficiently alerted by the gunshots they had heard and the signals they had seen to worry about the safety of their camp. At noon, Jenks and the *Rosalie's* pilot took a launch one and one-half miles upriver and located a suitable site to which the camp was subsequently moved. By four o'clock in the afternoon, construction of the new camp was completed, and the *Rosalie* was repositioned, in shelling range, 200 yards offshore. During the afternoon, the *Rosalie* was supplied with beef and venison by the sloop *Matilda*, manned by three local refugees.²⁶

24. Jenks to Baxter, December 31, 1863, *O.R.N.*, ser. I, vol. XVII, 611-12.

25. Daniels to Meyers, January 2, 1864, R.G. 393.

26. Jenks to Baxter, December 31, 1863, *O.R.N.*, ser. I, vol. XVII, 611-12, Coffin to Baxter, December 31, 1863, *ibid.*, 613-14.

At approximately eight o'clock in the evening, the Federal sailors heard noises from the palmettos near the old camp site. Shortly thereafter, they sighted a fire in the same direction. Believing that it might be a signal from Daniels attempting to return to the original camp, Jenks ignited his own signal fire, and sent two men in a boat to investigate. Unable to ascertain the source of the fire or the noises, the men returned, and the Federals, suspecting a trick, exercised "every precaution . . . to avoid a surprise." The noises of rustling bushes, voices, and the sound of dogs were heard periodically throughout the night.²⁷

The constant vigilance of Jenks's command, as the camp was surrounded by signals and noises for four nights, was not in vain. Between four o'clock and 4:45 on the morning of December 30, Jenks's pickets discovered figures moving in the darkness through the tall grass toward the camp. The pickets challenged the intruders twice, but received no answer. Ensign Jenks himself then challenged them and received the reply that they were Daniels's men. Jenks ordered them to halt, advance one at a time, and give the countersign. At this, the approaching party, an estimated thirty to forty men, rose in a semi-circle and opened fire with shotguns and Colt revolving rifles fifteen yards from the picket line. Fire was especially heavy on the Federal right, as the attacking Confederates attempted to cut the Union sailors off from their boats. The pickets returned the shots, then fell back, continuing to fire for about five minutes. Outnumbered, the Federal seamen retreated to the shore, where Jenks signalled the *Rosalie* for support. His men continued shooting for a few minutes as the *Rosalie* opened shrapnel and canister fire on the attackers. Amidst the flying projectiles, Jenks ordered his men to man their boats and shove off.²⁸

At the time of the Confederate attack, Daniels's party was nearing the river, and had stopped to rest and make coffee. Realizing that the attacking Confederates stood between them and the boats, and believing that they could be of little assistance to the beleaguered sailors, they retreated to a hammock, where they remained hidden throughout the day.²⁹

Despite the heat of the little battle, only one Union seaman

27. Jerks to Baxter, December 31, 1863, *O.R.N.*, ser. I, vol. XVII, 611-12.

28. *Ibid.*, Coffin to Baxter, December 31, 1863, 613-14.

29. Daniels to Meyers, January 2, 1864, R.G. 393.

received a direct shot, being hit in the leg. By the time Jenks's party left the shore, the Confederates had advanced to within fifteen yards of their boats. The boats came alongside the *Rosalie* as the sloop continued to fire, driving the Southerners back from the shore and into the brush until they were out of range. The *Rosalie* fired shells toward shore periodically until daybreak. The Union vessel had been struck several times, and several of her crewmen had been grazed by Confederate shots. Ensign Jenks later estimated that at least six or eight Confederate guerrillas had been killed or wounded.³⁰

As dawn broke over the scene of the fighting, Jenks returned to shore with his two boats and collected the remaining equipment from his camp. Since Daniels had not returned, the ensign believed that he and his men had been captured. At about three o'clock p.m., having delivered a launch with the wounded sailor to the *Rosalie*, Jenks and the remainder of his command boarded their boats and returned down the harbor. On his return voyage, he reported seeing Confederates, "who saluted us with yells," on several points of the mainland. The *Rosalie* also made her way back to the mouth of Charlotte Harbor, anchoring overnight off Pine Island, and returning to the *Gem of the Sea* at 7:30 on the morning of December 31.³¹

Almost immediately, the captain of the *Gem of the Sea*, Lieutenant Baxter, reprovisioned the *Rosalie*, the launch, and the cutter, and ordered the expedition back to the mouth of the Myakka. They were ordered to remain there for six days or until Daniels's party reappeared. On the morning of January 1, 1864, the three vessels returned to the *Gem of the Sea*, this time with Daniels and five of his men. The refugees had returned to the camp site on December 31, and finding it evacuated, had scouted the area and awaited the return of the boats. In addition to the six men who had deserted on the night of the twenty-eighth, precipitating the Confederate attack, four of Daniels's men had become separated from the party and failed to return.³²

30. Jenks to Baxter, December 31, 1863, *O.R.N.*, ser. I, vol. XVII, 612-13; Coffin to Baxter, December 31, 1863, *ibid.*, 614.

31. Jenks to Baxter, December 31, 1863, *O.R.N.*, ser. I, vol. XVII, 612; Coffin to Baxter, December 31, 1863, *ibid.*, 615; Baxter to Bailey, January 2, 1864, *ibid.*, 611.

32. Baxter to Bailey, January 2, 1864, *O.R.N.*, ser. I, vol. XVII, 611; Woodbury to Stone, January 22, 1864, *O.R.*, ser. I, vol. XXXV, part 1, 460; Daniels to Meyers, January 2, 1864, R.G. 393.

When word of the skirmish at the Myakka River reached Key West, Admiral Bailey warmly commended the men who had been involved in the "little affair." "Although the skirmish was unimportant, either in number or results," he remarked, "the vigilance, skill, and bravery displayed . . . give sure promise of brilliant success whenever occasion shall offer."³³ While the fight took on nowhere near the proportion of a major battle, Bailey may have underestimated its importance, for it had a significance all its own. To be sure, it had ended, like other Union raids and expeditions against the mainland, with the withdrawal of Union forces, but the commitment to permanent Federal occupation and continued refugee organization had not been abandoned.³⁴

During the first week of 1864, General Woodbury prepared to launch the second phase of the southwest Florida campaign—the establishment of a permanent base on the mainland. Despite the recent setback at the Myakka River, northern and refugee troops under Lieutenant Meyers remained encamped on Useppa Island, and the *Gem of the Sea* continued to patrol the mouth of Charlotte Harbor. An event which must have cheered these men in the first days of the new year was the return of the four refugees from Enoch Daniels's command who had become separated from their fellows and stranded on the mainland during the Myakka River skirmish. These four had traveled inland along the northwest bank of the Peace River until they came upon a small schooner. Seizing the vessel, two crewmen, and four and one-half bales of cotton, they sailed out to the entrance of the harbor.³⁵

Meanwhile, in Key West, General Woodbury was readying one full company of the Forty-seventh Pennsylvania to accompany him to southwest Florida for the purpose of establishing a Union army base. Although department headquarters in New Orleans could not spare additional men for this mission, they did order 500 muskets with ammunition and accouterments sent to Key West on January 2, 1864. Three days later, the army schooner *Matchless* and the navy steamer *Honduras* sailed for the main-

33. Bailey to Charles H. Rockwell, January 18, 1864, *O.R.N.*, ser. I, vol. XVII, 614-15.

34. Woodbury to Stone, January 22, 1864, *O.R.*, ser. I, vol. XXXV, part 1, 460-61.

35. *Ibid.*, 460.

land with General Woodbury and the Pennsylvania company aboard.³⁶

Because of the unexpected resistance met by Ensign Jenks's landing party at the Myakka River, Woodbury decided to land this second expedition several miles to the south, and the two vessels arrived at the mouth of the Caloosahatchee, near Punta Rassa, on January 7. That night, Woodbury sent his men twelve miles upriver to occupy Fort Myers. The general hoped that under the cover of darkness the Union soldiers would surprise any guerrilla force or pro-Confederate inhabitants who might attempt to destroy the abandoned Seminole War fort to prevent it from falling into Federal hands. This was a wise precaution. When the Union soldiers arrived, they captured three men who "had made preparations to burn the buildings."³⁷ Two of the men, George Lewis and a Mr. Griffin, were known blockade runners. At the time of their capture, they were reputed to be serving as Confederate Indian agents and supervising the trading of cloth, tobacco, lead, and rifle caps for hogs with the Seminoles. Lewis and Griffin were held at Fort Myers until January 16, when they were transported to Key West and imprisoned at Fort Taylor.³⁸

As soon as Fort Myers was secured, the small detachment of soldiers and refugees at Useppa Island under Lieutenant Meyers joined the new force there. Most of the fort's buildings, constructed by the United States Army during the 1850s, remained in excellent condition. In succeeding weeks, those structures needing renovation were repaired, and new ones were built. While the fort was being enlarged, the Federal soldiers scoured the surrounding countryside in search of cattle, refugees, and evidence of Confederate activity. A nine-man party scouted the north bank of the Caloosahatchee for several miles on January 17. Although they found no cattle, they captured four barrels of turpentine belonging to the prisoner Griffin which had been hidden in an old shed. On January 20, a detachment of twenty men marched upriver to old Fort Thompson, now LaBelle,

36. *Ibid.*, 460-61; Stone to Woodbury, January 2, 1864, *ibid.*, 451; Bailey to Thomas R. Harris, January 4, 1864, *O.R.N.*, ser. I, vol. XVII, 620.

37. Woodbury to Stone, January 22, 1864, *O.R.*, ser. I, vol. XXXV, part 1, 460-61; Bailey to Welles, January 6, 1864, *O.R.N.*, ser. I, vol. XVII, 621.

38. Woodbury to Stone, January 22, 1864, *O.R.*, ser. I, vol. XXXV, part 1, 460-61; Woodbury to William H. Gausler, January 16, 1864, R.G. 393.

where they located three suspected Confederate guerrillas. As the Union force approached, the men escaped from the house where they had been staying, and ran for the woods. The Federal soldiers opened fire, and two of the fleeing men fell, but they quickly regained their feet and disappeared into the brush. As darkness was falling, the Federals soon abandoned their pursuit. January 23 brought the seizure of a small, weathered sloop and eight bales of cotton at Griffin's camp on the Caloosahatchee, east of Fort Myers, by a scouting party of fifteen men in three boats. One week later, the Federal refugees posted a picket at Fort Denaud, approximately twenty miles east of Fort Myers, and set flags of truce to reassure the Indians. Cattle pens were also erected at several points east of Fort Myers.³⁹

Encouraged by the successful establishment of a base on the mainland of south Florida, the Federal commanders optimistically began drawing up plans for future operations in that region. On January 19, Admiral Bailey at Key West notified the United States Navy Department that his expectations for recruiting refugees had "not been justified." Still, he reported, "3,000 to 5,000 men embarked in steamers of light draft would undoubtably insure to us the possession of the whole [Florida] peninsula."⁴⁰ General Woodbury, who returned to Key West on January 19, also held hopes for substantial reinforcements and subsequent large-scale movements. On January 22, he informed department headquarters that with 1,000 infantrymen, 200 cavalrymen, and light-draft steamer transports, he could launch a "moveable attack upon the most assailable parts of the coast and adjacent land," breaking up the coast guard, aiding the escape of refugees and fugitive slaves, and destroying salt works and contraband trade too far inland to be reached by blockading vessels. With 4,000 infantrymen and 1,000 cavalrymen, Woodbury added, he could occupy Tampa and one or two points to the north, sending troops into northern Florida to destroy the railroad and break up cattle driving there.⁴¹

The reinforcements necessary to carry out such grandiose plans were not forthcoming, and south Florida refugees had not rallied

39. Woodbury to Stone, January 22, 1864, *O.R.*, ser. I, vol. XXXV, part 1, 461; Richard A. Graeffe to Woodbury, February 1864, R.G. 393.

40. Bailey to Welles, January 19, 1864, *O.R.N.*, ser. I, vol. XVII, 631.

41. *Ibid.*; Woodbury to Stone, January 22, 1864, *O.R.*, ser. I, vol. XXXV, part 1, 461.

to the Union cause as rapidly as had been expected. Still, the Federal presence and the deteriorating economic situation brought about a steady shift in the course of events. By 1864, vast quantities of cattle continued to be shipped from the state while many Floridians were on the verge of starvation. Many of these cattle were seized by hated government impressment agents. On January 12, the probate judge of Hernando County, north of Tampa, informed Florida Governor John Milton that cattle drivers from the state's Fifth Commissary District had "stripped the county of every beef steer that they can find, from two years old and upward, and are now taking the cows, many of which have been known to have calves."⁴² The situation was probably much the same in other areas of the fifth district, which encompassed southwest Florida.

The worsening economic and supply situation which plagued Florida naturally led to increased dissatisfaction and desertion. On January 23, the *New York Times* described the large number of refugees and deserters in Florida: there were "nearly enough refugees in St. Augustine and Fernandina to make a regiment."⁴³ Economic hardships and the resulting breakdown of morale affected south Florida as well. Governor Milton reported on January 29, that deserters were concentrated in several parts of the state, including the stretch of southwest Florida between Tampa and Fort Myers. Whereas, in the past, deserters had usually hidden out alone or in small groups, the governor reported that they were now organizing themselves into large, strong bands.⁴⁴

By early February, fifty-two deserters, evaders, and Union sympathizers had arrived at Fort Myers and enlisted in the Federal army. These new recruits, as well as the old Florida Rangers, were organized into a company of the Second Florida (Union) Cavalry, under the command of Captain Henry Crane. Crane, a Tampa man, had been placed in command of the company at the suggestion of General Woodbury. The general felt that the original refugee commander, Enoch Daniels, though an able scout, was not the right man to lead a large contingent of

42. P. G. Wall to Milton, January 12, 1864, *O.R.*, ser. IV, vol. III, 48.

43. Samuel Proctor, ed., *Florida A Hundred Years Ago* (Coral Gables, January 1964), 4, quoting *New York Times*, January 23, 1864.

44. Proctor, ed., *Florida A Hundred Years Ago*, January 1964, 4.

troops. Before joining the Florida Rangers in December, Crane had served over a year with the Federal navy. Admiral Bailey characterized him as "a refugee from Florida, of a far superior stamp to the greater part of those who have come over to us . . . well known and popular among the people of Lower Florida."⁴⁵

The refugee company took an active part in local campaigning. On the night of February 2, forty men from the Second Florida, led by Captain Crane, were attacked by a small party of mounted Confederates after building a cattle pen at Twelve Mile Swamp, east of Fort Myers. The attackers fired twenty to thirty shots and wounded one Union sentinel before vanishing into the brush. Despite this encounter, the refugees continued their reconnaissance the following day, and reported sighting a group of approximately forty uniformed Confederate horsemen.⁴⁶

The Second Florida Cavalry was more successful in succeeding weeks. On February 13 and 14, the company skirmished with Confederate guerrillas near the Peace River, killing one, wounding four others, and capturing twenty-two horses. A number of Confederate supplies were destroyed, and the only Federal casualty was one man slightly wounded. Nearly a week later, on February 20, the refugee cavalry again engaged guerrillas near the Peace River. This time, two "Rebel Spies" and twenty horses were captured, and a "notorious Rebel chief named Underhill" was killed. The Second Florida suffered no losses.⁴⁷ The refugees of the Second Florida Cavalry inspired enough confidence that when the Forty-seventh Pennsylvania regiment was transferred from south Florida in late February, responsibility for maintaining a Federal foothold on the mainland was entrusted to the company. Although General Woodbury gave Captain Crane the option of retreating to an island in Charlotte Harbor or Tampa Bay should such duty prove unsafe, the refugees garrisoned Fort Myers unaided until fresh northern troops arrived in April.⁴⁸

45. Woodbury to Stone, February 19, 1864, *O.R.*, ser. I, vol. XXXV, part 1, 485, December 23, 1863, vol. XXVI, part 1, 73-74, Bailey to Woodbury, December 18, 1863, *ibid.*, 875-76; Bailey to Welles, December 17, 1863, *O.R.N.*, ser. I, vol. XVII, 605-06.

46. Woodbury to Stone, February 19, 1864, *O.R.*, ser. I, vol. XXXV, part 1, 486.

47. "Record of Events, A Company, 2nd Reg't, Florida Cavalry," April 15, 1864, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s-1917, Record Group 94, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

48. Woodbury to Stone, February 19, 1864, *O.R.*, ser. I, vol. XXXV, part 1,

Regular Federal troops from the 110th New York Infantry and the Second United States Colored Infantry reinforced Fort Myers in the spring, but the additional forces requested by General Woodbury and Admiral Bailey for the capture and occupation of Tampa and other key points along the Gulf coast never arrived. Still, active Union campaigning in southwest Florida and the increase in Confederate desertion and evasion brought approximately 140 refugee recruits to Fort Myers by May. Recent arrivals were promptly organized into a second company of the Second Florida Cavalry.⁴⁹ One early southwest Florida settler explained the situation when he wrote, nearly forty years later, "The people were poor, they were not able to move and maintain their families. If they joined the Confederate army they would have to move their families. They could go to Fort Myers and join the Federal army and be with their families."⁵⁰

By spring, Fort Myers had become a depot for stock raided from Confederate commissary officials and cattle drivers throughout the Charlotte Harbor-Caloosahatchee valley region. The situation was serious enough that on May 23, Governor Milton lamented the refugees' and deserters' "many depredations" in the southwestern portion of the state, "the principal source of meat supply for the Confederate forces."⁵¹ Despite the concern of state officials, and the formation of a Confederate cattle guard unit, deserters and Union details drove cattle down the Caloosahatchee valley to Fort Myers and Punta Rassa throughout the summer. Cattle traffic at the landing at Punta Rassa, where the herds supplied Federal blockading vessels, was so busy that Union troops constructed a wharf and a large barracks there.⁵²

486; Bailey to J. N. Quackenbush, April 16, 1864, *O.R.N.*, ser. I, vol. XVII, 682; Bailey to Charles H. Rockwell, April 16, 1864, *ibid.*, 683.

49. John Wilder to Mary F. Wilder, April 2, 1864, Wilder to Eben Loomis, August 7, 1864, Wilder-Loomis Family Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, Connecticut, photocopies in the P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, Miscellaneous Manuscripts, Box 47, University of Florida, Gainesville; Woodbury to William Dwight, May 12, 1864, *O.R.*, ser. I, vol. XXXV, part I, 390; Van Sice to Bailey, May 8, 1864, *O.R.N.*, ser. I, vol. XVII, 694; Bailey to Quackenbush, April 16, 1864, *ibid.*, 682; Bailey to Rockwell, April 16, 1864, *ibid.*, 683.
50. Francis C. M. Boggess, *A Veteran of Four Wars, the Autobiography of F. C. M. Boggess* (Arcadia, 1900), 67.
51. Proctor, ed., *Florida A Hundred Years Ago*, May 1964, 3, quoting Milton to Stephen R. Mallory, May 23, 1864.
52. Karl H. Grismer, *The Story of Fort Myers* (St. Petersburg, 1949), 82.

While Federal and deserter raids hurt Confederate supply efforts, another Federal objective— use of southwest Florida as a launching point for expeditions northward— was also realized. On May 6, 1864, the two companies of the Second Florida Cavalry from Fort Myers, along with a detachment of black troops from Key West and naval support, captured Tampa.⁵³ The town was abandoned by the Federals within days after its seizure, but Union forces based at Fort Myers and Punta Rassa operated freely along the Gulf coast until the end of the war.

Although such operations were generally successful and beneficial to the Union war effort, initial plans to expand the southwest Florida campaign into a full-scale invasion of the state were never carried out. Numerically, the campaign remained a small affair. The exact number of participants is difficult to gauge, since both pro-Union refugees and pro-Confederate guerrillas often emerged from and then faded back into civilian life, and sometimes changed their allegiance as well. Available evidence indicates, however, that no more than 200 Federal troops were active on the southwest Florida mainland at any one time between the initial landing at Useppa Island in December 1863 and the skirmishes around Fort Myers in February 1864. Confederate forces involved in the campaign were probably somewhat smaller. Skirmishes fought during this period were lively, but rarely involved more than a handful of combatants.⁵⁴

The significance of the campaign lay in the fact that, despite the small numbers involved, it had such a tremendous impact on the Charlotte Harbor-Caloosahatchee region and on the state as a whole. In southwest Florida, the sometimes stagnant and often monotonous situation of Federal blockade and intermittent raids became an active struggle for vital supplies, territory, and the minds and hearts of the inhabitants. The establishment of a Federal presence on the mainland, and the interruption of the cattle supply hindered Florida's, and ultimately the Confederacy's, abil-

53. Woodbury to Dwight, May 12, 1864, *O.R.*, ser. I, vol. XXXV, part 1, 389-90; Stark Fellows to H. G. Bowers, May 10, 1864, *ibid.*, 390-91; Van Sice to Bailey, May 8, 1864, *O.R.N.*, ser. I, vol. XVII, 694.

54. *Ibid.*; Jenks to Baxter, December 31, 1863, *O.R.N.*, ser. I, vol. XVII, 611-12; Woodbury to Stone, February 19, 1864, *O.R.*, ser. I, vol. XXXV, part 1, 485-86; Graeffe to Woodbury, February 1864, R.G. 393; "Record of Events, A Company, 2nd Reg't, Florida Cavalry," April 15, 1864, R.G. 94.

ity to wage war. The Federals never mustered a sufficient force to occupy any sizable portion of the lower peninsula, or to crush Confederate resistance there completely, but their activities around Charlotte Harbor and the Caloosahatchee River in the closing days of 1863 and the early weeks of 1864 proved to be a turning point in the Civil War in south Florida.