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## **REBEL BEEF: FLORIDA CATTLE AND THE CONFEDERATE ARMY, 1862-1864**

by ROBERT A. TAYLOR

**F**LORIDA supplied the Confederacy with thousands of head of cattle during the Civil War. Beef provided an important food source for soldiers in the lower South. Beef kept the Army of Tennessee from starving during the winters of 1863 and 1864, and meat sustained the defenders of Charleston while under Union seige. The Confederate Commissary Bureau had little difficulty supplying their armies with beef during the first year of the war, but by the beginning of 1862, it became increasingly hard to procure. To increase the number of available cattle, the Bureau awarded contracts to civilian agents to locate and bring in beef. A contractor system seemed natural for the wilderness that was Florida, where large cattle herds were known to exist. The state was expected to supply 25,000 head to the military by the beginning of 1863.<sup>1</sup>

Confederate reverses in Tennessee in 1862 placed great strain on the army's ration system. General Braxton Bragg's abortive invasion of Kentucky can be seen in part as an effort to supply his troops from the richness of the area's agriculture. While in Tennessee his men had been able to subsist on that state's meat supply with ease, especially since little transportation was needed. The Bureau reported that two-thirds of the cattle being slaughtered for the army came from Tennessee, the remainder from Virginia and other places like Florida. If the armies could hold these areas there would be adequate meat in late 1862 and early 1863; if not, a serious crisis would occur.

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1. Mary E. Massey, *Ersatz in the Confederacy* (Columbia, 1952), 61; Charles P. Roland, *The Confederacy* (Chicago, 1960), 66; Richard D. Goff, *Confederate Supply* (Durham, 1969), 36; United States War Department, *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC, 1880-1901), Series 4, vol. 1, 873-75 (hereinafter cited as *O.R.*).

The loosely-knit organization of the military showed signs of inefficiency as army commissaries frequently competed with those contracted by the Bureau in Richmond. Such competition existed in middle Tennessee during the winter of 1862-1863, and made the gathering of needed supplies difficult.<sup>2</sup>

The year 1863 began with the thunder of massed guns as Union and Confederate armies battered and bloodied each other at the Battle of Murfreesboro. After an inconclusive three-day struggle, the Army of Tennessee began a retreat southward in the general direction of Chattanooga. The soldiers nearly starved along the 200-mile march, for the path of their retreat had been thoroughly scoured by Commissary Bureau agents who had removed, among other things, thousands of head of cattle. The main supply depot in Atlanta presented a gloomy picture of its available stocks, the bulk of which had been shipped to Lee's army in Virginia. Major John F. Cummings, commander of the depot, had 4,000 head of cattle on hand, but knew that they could not feed 40,000 hungry men for very long. All the provisions were already earmarked for the Army of Northern Virginia. Critical scarcity was fast approaching unless energetic steps were undertaken.<sup>3</sup>

Secretary of War James Seddon assured Joseph E. Johnston, the new theater commander in the west, that the Confederacy was being ransacked for army supplies. Any deficit in rations would be made up from other sources. Major Cummings, one of the best and most efficient commissaries in the Bureau, would be able to collect and ship the necessary food. Johnston had faith in Cummings's abilities, but faith alone could not feed hungry men. Bragg estimated that his men would need 400,000 pounds of meat to fulfill ration requirements just for the month of March 1863. Cummings forwarded only about 191,000 pounds, less than one-half Bragg's needs, and had little prospect of sending more. As supply officers pondered their options, it was known that Florida had large herds of cattle, some of which it had already been providing the military. More Florida beef was needed to help ease the shortage. If meat was not obtained, it

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2. Goff, *Confederate Supply*, 37; Gilbert E. Govan and James W. Livingwood, *A Different Valor: The Story of General Joseph E. Johnston, C.S.A.* (Indianapolis and New York, 1956), 187.
  3. *O.R. Series 1*, vol. 23, part 2, 680, 689; Thomas L. Connelly, *Autumn of Glory: The Army of Tennessee, 1862-1865* (Baton Rouge, 1977), 17.

would be impossible to feed the Army of Tennessee. The disintegration of a major Confederate field army hung in the balance.<sup>4</sup>

Governor John Milton issued a special message to Florida farmers, ranchers, and planters early in 1863. Production of all foodstuffs must be increased, he urged, for the war would not be ending in the foreseeable future, and the army must have a steady supply in order to prevail. As supply officers looked towards Florida's resources, there was a marked change in the relationship of the state's cattle trade with the Confederate military. Cattle smuggling would greatly expand in scope, and the open-market-contract system would deteriorate. Florida could no longer remain a secondary source if the needs of the military were to be met. A comprehensive system of commissary agents to maximize collection and shipment of cattle would be created, replacing the contractor operation. The state would now have a chief commissary officer who would control collection and distribution, and who would deal with both the Commissary Bureau and the supply officers in those armies operating in or near Florida. Commissary-General Lucius B. Northrop believed that when the system was in place there would be no part of the Confederacy that would not be providing the army with supplies. Such a network of energetic officers would mean that wherever Confederate troops moved all the supplies of the country would be tributary to their use.<sup>5</sup>

As April 1863 passed, the food situation in the Army of Tennessee showed some signs of improvement. Three thousand head of cattle, mostly from Florida, were on hand in Georgia. The cattle driving season had begun in Florida, and cows from the southern portion of the state began arriving at army supply depots. But events in the west would soon affect Florida's posi-

4. *O.R.* Series 1, vol. 23, part 2, 658, 702; Joseph E. Johnston, *Narrative of Military Operations, Directed during the Late War Between the States* (New York, 1874; reprint ed., Bloomington, 1959), 351.
5. George W. Randolph to John Milton, April 3, 1862, General Correspondence, John Milton Papers, Florida Historical Society Collection, University of South Florida, Tampa (hereinafter cited as Milton Papers); W. Buck Years, "Florida," *The Confederate Governors*, W. Buck Years, ed. (Athens, GA, 1985), 65-66; John E. Johns, *Florida During the Civil War* (Gainesville, 1963), 143; William W. Davis, *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida* (New York, 1913; facsimile ed., Gainesville, 1964), 268-70; Thomas R. Hay, "Lucius B. Northrop: Commissary-General of the Confederacy," *Civil War History* 9 (March 1963), 7.

tion in the Confederate supply equation. Union forces moved steadily down the Mississippi, slowing to a trickle the flow of supplies from the Trans-Mississippi region. As the number of cattle swimming the river into the southern heartland decreased to almost none, Richmond urged that efforts to bring them over somehow be stepped up. The lack of Texas beef did not have a very great influence on the price of Florida beef purchased for the army. Beef delivered in Georgia sold for between eighteen and twenty-five cents per pound, and that price remained steady. In the case of beef, government attempts at price controls seemed to be having some influence.<sup>6</sup>

The new chief commissary agent of Florida, Pleasant W. White, had no sooner settled into his assignment when a blow was struck from which the South would not recover. On July 4, 1863, the garrison at Vicksburg surrendered to Union General Ulysses Grant, and the Mississippi once again flowed unimpeded to the sea. Union patrols ranged up and down the river and effectively stopped any attempt to move substantial numbers of cattle or other supplies across. The Confederate high command now had to depend even more on Florida beef to feed its soldiers. The loss of the Mississippi, coupled with the Union occupation of Tennessee, served to make the South's position even more precarious. It made it increasingly difficult for the Commissary Bureau to provide the needed rations.<sup>7</sup>

Joseph D. Locke, chief commissary of Georgia, estimated that Florida would have to ship 1,000 head of cattle per week to meet the needs of General Bragg and the forces at Charleston under General P. G. T. Beauregard. "This requisition," wrote Locke, "is indispensably necessary for the public interest."<sup>8</sup> This urgency was underlined by a reduction in the meat ration of each soldier in July to one-quarter pound per day. The commissary-general publicly minimized the dangerous shortage, say-

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6. *O.R.*, Series 1, vol. 23, part 2, 759-60; Willard E. Wright, ed., "Some Letters of Lucius Bellingier Northrop, 1860-1865," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 68 (October 1960), 466, 471-74; *General Orders of the Adjutant and Inspector General's Office, Confederate States Army* (Columbia, 1864), 76 (hereinafter cited as *General Orders*).

7. Paul Gates, *Agriculture and the Civil War* (New York, 1965), 73-74.

8. Joseph D. Locke to Pleasant W. White, n.d., Pleasant W. White Papers, Box 1, Florida Historical Society Collection (hereinafter cited as White Papers).

ing that European peasants rarely saw meat and that the people of Hindustan never had any. But privately he reported that there were only thirty days worth of rations left for the entire Confederate army.<sup>9</sup>

By August 1863 cattle were being moved out of Florida in large numbers, but not the 3,000 head per week that the army had called for. Collecting and driving semi-wild bovines was an assignment that only experienced wranglers could handle effectively. Requests for detailing men who had experience working with cattle for duty in Florida had been granted in only a few cases. In spite of these obstacles, cattle were getting through. Between 1,500 and 2,000 reached Bragg's army from the depot at Madison, Florida, during the five-week period. August was traditionally the last month of the cattle driving season as trail conditions—heat, humidity, and a lack of water supplies—in Florida made it impractical to drive beef any considerable distance. But in 1863 this was not to be the case.<sup>10</sup>

On August 25 an urgent appeal from General Bragg arrived at White's headquarters in Quincy. The loss of supplies from Tennessee had deeply cut available stocks, and Georgia was unable to make up the differences. Troops in his army were suffering from a food shortage such as they had never known before. Could Florida help? White wasted no time in his response. He ordered an additional 6,000 to 8,000 head collected and forwarded to Georgia. White promised Bragg in a letter that he would try to ship 1,000 head per week, but the advanced season would make it very difficult to maintain that rate.<sup>11</sup>

In Atlanta, Major Cummings did not believe that all was being done to secure and deliver Florida beef. His agents in the state told him that there was an abundance of cattle, "but the people are indisposed to sell them for our currency and drivers cannot be found." Many head of cattle could be had in Florida, but it would take a proper organization and an energetic approach to make them available. Cummings received authorization to secure cattle from the region himself, but he realized that he would need more men and the assistance of state offi-

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9. John B. Jones, *A Rebel War Clerk's Diary at the Confederate States Capital*, Earl Schenk Miers, ed. (New York, 1961), 246.

10. White to John F. Cummings, August 25, 1863, White Papers, Box 2, Letterbook 1.

11. White to A. G. Summer, August 25, 1863, *ibid.*

cials.<sup>12</sup> White defended his methods of obtaining beef by making it clear that the heavy demand that had been placed upon him could only be met with cattle from the ranges south of Tampa Bay. The bulk of the state's cattle grazed there, and that was where White would be forced to go in the future. Only Floridians, it seemed, understood how to collect cattle on these southern ranges. They knew the ever-present dangers of the trail: snakes, sudden storms that caused stampedes, lack of water and grass, and sawgrass marshes that could cut both men and cow to pieces if they tried to pass through.<sup>13</sup>

The nagging food shortage contained to plague the Confederate troops near Chattanooga into the fall. Major White, forced by the gravity of the situation, accepted the dispatching of Cumming's men into Florida to find cattle. Captain Charles F. Stubbs was authorized by White to act as Cummings's agent and to receive beef for the Army of Tennessee or for General Beauregard's command, or both, as the case might be. The supply officers realized that it would not be possible to secure the cattle needed in depleted north or central Florida. Beauregard alone required 100 head per day for his men, a figure that exceeded all efforts in collections and herding. A lack of drivers also hampered operations. Cattle had to be driven all the way to the point of delivery, and in many cases there was no available manpower. In theory the beef could be transferred to cattle cars in Georgia capable of carrying them speedily to Savannah. Here they would either be diverted to Dalton, Georgia, via Macon and Atlanta, or continue directly to Charleston. Overland drovers usually followed the rails to the besieged city, while those herds earmarked for the Army of Tennessee plodded toward the main depot in Atlanta by the easiest roads or trails.<sup>14</sup>

While records are sketchy, it is evident that significant numbers of Florida cattle did make the trek northward. In the second half of September 1863, over 2,100 head were gathered in the Fourth Commissary District, an area covering most of north

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12. *O.R.*, Series 1, vol. 30, part 4, 552.

13. White to Lucius B. Northrop, August 29, 1863; White to Locke, September 2, 1863; White to Summer, September 2, 1863, White Papers, Box 2, Letterbook 1; Joe G. Warner, *Biscuits and Taters: A History of Cattle Ranching in Manatee County* (Bradenton, 1980), 76-79.

14. Summer to White, September 2, 1863, White Papers, Box 1; George H. Dacy, *Four Centuries of Florida Ranching* (St. Louis, 1940), 52.

and central Florida; 1,420 were sent to Charleston and 706 were held to fill future requests. Curiously, the bulk of this district's beef went to Beauregard, even though the Army of Tennessee had been given priority on all Florida beef shipments. Florida cattle were getting to the front lines, but there was just not enough to meet even minimal needs.<sup>15</sup>

A new appeal for beef was made by the chief commissary of the Army of Tennessee on October 2. There was apprehension in Atlanta that White would fail to meet the army's urgent needs. Aware of this lack of confidence, White urged his district commanders to do everything in their power to increase purchases even if they had to neglect their other duties. Shipping cattle was "first and paramount for the next two months." Florida beef was all that was now available for South Carolina. Messages practically begging White to put every agency into motion to forward cattle through Georgia to Charleston began arriving at his headquarters. Major Henry C. Guerin, chief commissary of South Carolina, joined in placing all hopes of feeding his men on beef from Florida. "Our situation," he wrote, "is full of danger . . . from want of meat, and extraordinary efforts are required to prevent disaster."<sup>16</sup>

Tension between the various commands increased after yet another urgent appeal from the chief commissary of the Army of Tennessee for cattle. White responded that he could not have anticipated the concentration of troops in the greater Atlanta area, which made the large requisition necessary. He felt that if the army had taken him into its confidence, perhaps some of the shortages could have been avoided. White explained that he had gone to south Florida himself, where he had "ridden through mud and water by day and night among alligators and insects" to spur collections and driving. In this same combative spirit, he sent an inquiry to the commissary-general in Richmond asking why all the district commanders in Georgia had been promoted to the rank of major while his men in Florida had not been so advanced. "I suppose the reasons for

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15. "Report on Commissary Stores," Fourth District, September, 1863, White Papers, Miscellaneous Correspondence.

16. Samuel Proctor, ed., *Florida A Hundred Years Ago* (Tallahassee, 1960-1965), October, 1963, 1; Johns, *Florida During the Civil War*, 191; White to John P. Baldwin, October 2, 1863, White Papers, Box 2, Letterbook 1.



this promotion," he wrote, "could be equally applicable to those in this state."<sup>17</sup>

Braxton Bragg, his army in the grips of a crippling food shortage, had little time for musing about advances in rank. He bitterly complained to Richmond that there were only a few weeks of scant rations left in the Atlanta depot. There had been no meat to issue for days, and he wanted immediate action from the commissary-general. Northrop caustically blamed Bragg for the crisis; by evacuating Tennessee he had abandoned its stocks of cattle and other supplies. If Bragg needed food for his army, he should take steps to recover Tennessee as soon as possible. Rumors flew through the ranks of the Army of Tennessee that millions of pounds of beef and pork were being stripped from Georgia and Florida for General Lee's use in Virginia while they were going hungry. Northrop assured the secretary of war that every effort was being made to feed all the gallant sons of the Confederacy. Bragg's army, dependent on Georgia and especially Florida, was suffering because the rail system in that area was not adequate to handle the volume of traffic needed to haul supplies to feed the troops.<sup>18</sup>

These arguments did little to ease the meat shortage in Georgia and South Carolina. Major Guerin had 40,000 soldiers and laborers to feed, and the cattle available in South Carolina were not one-tenth of what was needed. A commissary officer on leave from the Army of Tennessee told White of the suffering that he saw on a daily basis in the camps. The stock of beef and bacon was said to be exhausted; the army must now depend entirely on what could be gathered on a weekly basis. One officer recorded that "starvation stares us in the face; the handwriting is on the wall." General Beauregard's demands became even more desperate toward the end of October. To meet his needs, White reserved one-third of the cattle he had on hand for delivery to Charleston; 400 were deemed the minimum on which the forces defending the city could survive.<sup>19</sup>

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17. White to Northrop, October 5, 1863; White to Locke, October 5, 1863, *ibid.*

18. *O.R.*, Series 1, vol. 30, part 4, 714-15; Jones, *A Rebel War Clerk*, 288; Connelly, *Autumn of Glory*, 114; Stanley F. Horn, *The Army of Tennessee: A Military History* (Indianapolis and New York, c. 1941; reprint ed., Norman, 1953), 282.

19. Henry C. Guerin to White, October 9, 10, 1863; Cummings to White, October 6, 19, 20, 1863, White Papers, Box 1.

When the beef was slow in arriving, a staff officer was dispatched to Florida to check the delay and get the cattle shipments moving quickly. When he arrived at the commissary headquarters at Quincy, he found that White was on an inspection tour of east Florida. A day later he met Major White, whom he believed to be a competent and hardworking soldier. Delays in shipping had not been caused by the presence of supply officers from Bragg's army as had been believed. The officer concluded that White's organization was new and not operating at full capacity; it was a wonder that he had been able to accomplish so much under the circumstances. The major returned to Charleston with the assurance that the promised one-third of all available beef would be forwarded to Beauregard.<sup>20</sup>

All efforts aside, the lack of beef, especially Florida beef, may have had a direct effect on the military situation. The Army of Tennessee reeled from a series of battles fought around Chattanooga in November that culminated at the Battle of Missionary Ridge on November 25, 1863. The "miracle" of Missionary Ridge turned out to be anything but for the Confederates. After the center of their lines collapsed, Bragg's troops broke and fled in panic. They rallied near Dalton, Georgia, but only after the army had lost more than 6,000 men in the fighting. One wonders how much of this Confederate defeat was caused by the months of poor rations and little hope for better food. Perhaps the seeds of the defeat were not to be found in the Clan of the Union troops, but in the lack of Florida beef in the mess tins of the Confederates. The cliché about battles being lost for the want of a nail may be valid in this case.

A survey of available supplies did not bring much Christmas cheer to Florida supply officers. The projected amount of all types of meat which could be procured by the tax in kind, impressments, and purchases would meet minimal army needs only until May 1864. This was not only true for Florida, but the entire Confederacy. Speculators stood ready to reduce stocks even further. White reported speculator applications as being equivalent to the state's entire agricultural surplus. The parties making these requests also far out-bid the fixed schedule of prices so that commissary officers were forced to impress or get

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20. White to Charles F. Stubbs, October 23, 1863; White to Baldwin, October 31, 1863, *ibid.*, Box 2, Letterbook 1; *O.R.*, Series 1, vol. 30, part 4, 717.

nothing at all. White asked the secretary of war for authority to remove such competition and let the government become the sole purchaser. Secretary Seddon agreed that the existing laws relating to speculation were flawed, but while they existed they must be obeyed.<sup>21</sup>

In late December 1863 the district commissaries reported that the cattle in their areas would not be able to survive the drive to the army depots; there was a lack of proper grazing along the trails. White ordered that no cattle be forwarded until they were in sufficient condition to stand a drive to the depot at Albany, Georgia, or to the railroad for shipment to Charleston. He had hoped to suspend all cattle operations till spring, but events changed his plans. Orders had come down from the Army of Tennessee for 20,000 head to be delivered as soon as possible. Such a figure was clearly impossible to meet, but White decided that Florida must send something to ward off added hunger in the army camps. "The cattle will arrive in bad condition," reported White, "yet I do not see how I can get along without them . . . we must continue the supply no matter how poor or how bad is their condition."<sup>22</sup>

December saw a change in the command of Florida's largest beef customer. General Joseph E. Johnston replaced Bragg as commander of the Army of Tennessee on December 16. Johnston faced the task of leading an army that had undergone both defeat and months of near-famine. Secretary Seddon warned the new commander that he would have serious difficulties in providing the supplies required for the subsistence of his command. Seddon assured Johnston that the Commissary Bureau would be directed to aid in meeting his supply needs to the best of its ability. The general wrote a stinging reply in which he declared that under the present system he had to depend on "three majors in each state, none of whom owed him obedience." Johnston himself had no taste for logistical work, but believed that he should have the responsibility instead of a

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21. White to Joseph Finegan, December 11, 1863; White to James Seddon, December 15, 1863, White Papers, Box 2, Letterbook 1.

22. White to B. French, December 23, 1863; White to Alonzo B. Noyes, December 27, 1863; White to Isaac Widgeon, December 18, 1863; White to Summer, December 25, 1863, *ibid.*; James McKay to White, December 16, 1863, *ibid.*, Box 1.

number of officers “who had not been thought by the government competent to the duties of high military grades.”<sup>23</sup>

Johnston’s remarks were not only unkind, but they showed an unusual lack of tact. These officers that he thought incompetent held the fate of his army in their hands. Florida beef was at that moment moving toward his supply bases at Albany and Quitman, Georgia, long after the cattle driving season should have ended. The government’s order to continue driving until Christmas showed a lack of understanding of the conditions in Florida. Major White, on his own initiative, ordered those cows unable to continue the northern trip to be kept in pastures in Taylor and Lafayette counties where they would be held till the spring when they would be ready for General Johnston’s men. This was not the act of an incompetent officer, and Johnston’s outburst may only reflect the frustration of a proud man losing a war.<sup>24</sup>

A year-end look at one of the Florida districts shows the extent of the shipment of beef to the Confederate armies. Charleston had received 5,679 head from the Fourth District in 1863, Savannah stockyards held 899, and the Army of Tennessee had received 3,564 head of beef cattle. The Fourth District, when the requisitions for units operating in Florida are included, had sent a total of 10,142 head of cattle. White estimated that around 30,000 head had been moved out during 1863; how many had been taken illegally was not known. The following year would not be as productive for only 20,000 head could be expected from the state at best. While the figures may vary, Florida was keeping a considerable number of Confederate soldiers fed, albeit poorly, and therefore in the ranks.<sup>25</sup>

The continuing supply of Florida beef was just one of the problems that faced the embattled Confederacy in early 1864. Lee’s army was suffering from its most acute food shortage of the war. Alabama reported that all its surplus would be needed by troops in that state and no more could be exported. Officials estimated that within three weeks time, the state of Georgia would be completely stripped of foodstuffs. However, Sherman

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23. Johnston, *Narrative of Military Operations*, 263, 266.

24. White to Stubbs, December 30, 1863, White Papers, Box 2, Letterbook 1.

25. “Report of Beef Cattle,” Fourth District, December, 1863, White to Northrop, February 4, 1864, *ibid.*, Box 1.

would still be able to find rations for his army later during his march through this same area. The shortage was debated heatedly in the Confederate Congress. On January 6, 1864, a Mississippi representative called for the speedy replacement of the commissary-general; if this incompetent remained in office after he had forfeited the confidence of Congress and the nation, he charged, the blame must be laid on President Davis himself. Davis, unconcerned, defended his old friend, General Northrop, calling him "one of the greatest geniuses in the South." If Northrop had the physical capacity, Davis declared, he would put him at the head of an army.<sup>26</sup>

The supply of Florida beef was also coming to a halt as the last few cows arrived at the front. Those beeves that did make it were so lean that they provided very little meat. White put some of his idle drovers to work slaughtering and salting some of these cattle in Jackson County. The lack of barrels and boxes and the materials to manufacture them hampered the packing operation. White ordered it continued, however, in the hope that at least a few barrels of salted beef might be shipped northward. It was difficult to obtain even a few extra pounds with the swarms of agents from other organizations that were operating in the region. Agents of Georgia's Governor Brown, agents from the city of Savannah, commissary men from other states, and a legion from the Mining and Nitre Department and the railroad companies were buying all the beef and other products that they could get their hands on. None stopped to ask about the legality of this under a Florida law that forbade this type of activity. Florida commissary officers, however, had to compete with them and found it exceedingly difficult to purchase anything at all. Higher prices added to an already soaring inflation rate.<sup>27</sup>

Florida's problems seemed inconsequential in comparison to those of South Carolina. General Beauregard took it upon himself to discharge the state commissary agent, Major Guerin.

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26. "Proceedings of the First Confederate Congress: Fourth Session, 7 December 1863-18 February 1864," *Southern Historical Society Papers*, 52 vols. (Richmond, 1876-1959), L, 196-97; Jones, *A Rebel War Clerk*, 326; Douglas S. Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command*, 3 vols. (New York, 1946), III, 316.
27. *O.R.*, Series 1, vol. 35, part 1, 522; White to Cummings, January 6, 1864; White to Wilkinson Call, undated, White Papers, Box 2, Letterbook 1; Proctor, ed., *Florida A Hundred Years Ago*, January, 1964, 1.

Beauregard felt that Guerin lacked administrative ability, but what he really lacked was Beauregard's confidence. Northrop defended his subordinate with the charge that the general did not understand that Georgia and Florida had been called upon to send large quantities of beef to the Army of Tennessee that would have normally gone to Charleston. Had Beauregard's orders in regard to the management of supplies been followed, "it would have been impossible to keep up the supply of beeves from Florida as long as has been done." Guerin was reinstated by presidential order, but the commissary department in South Carolina remained under a cloud as long as General Beauregard commanded in the state. Florida was fortunate not to have such ego clashes in its supply system.<sup>28</sup>

Richmond did not let up, however, on its demands for Florida beef during this time. Northrop decided that his plans could succeed only if the flow of beef continued non-stop. Surely, mused the commissary-general, a state so rich in cattle could spare another thousand or so until summer returned. Major White must have wearied of explaining to his superiors how all the cattle that could be safely moved had already been transferred. South Florida could possibly supply more, but the long trip from the range to the nearest railroad line would be far too much for the emaciated cattle. There were definite limits to Florida's potential as a cattle supplier, and for this season the limit had been reached. Even Governor Milton admitted that the supply was not as abundant in his state as he had supposed.<sup>29</sup>

In the meantime, White sought the sort of military protection that the Confederacy's beef larder so clearly deserved. He sent several letters to General Beauregard, detailing the situation and the potential danger from Union forces. Beauregard sympathized, but was unable to send any troops. Those available units in north Florida ultimately confronted the Union forces in the Battle of Olustee on February 20, 1864. While it was not the only reason for the Olustee campaign, the desire to interdict the flow of cattle into Georgia was an important factor in General Truman A. Seymour's ill-fated march toward Lake City.

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28. *O.R.*, Series 1, vol. 35, part 1, 508, 520.

29. Milton to Northrop, January 13, 1864, Milton Papers, Milton Letterbook; White to French, January 18, 1864; White to McKay, January 19, 1864, White Papers, Box 2, Letterbook 2.

The disruption of supply lines caused by the fighting could be seen in the privation of soldiers under seige in Charleston. The troops had been getting a little beef four days out of every ten, but in February no meat had been issued for several days. Major Guerin was not sure when the next beef rations could be issued. Commanders complained that front-line troops needed protein in the form of beef to be able to function under fire.<sup>30</sup>

Guerin could only answer with the hope that they would be well fed on Florida beef as soon as possible. The summer's meat ration would have to come from Florida sources. "If that should fail," he wrote, "the privation, I fear will be greater." Major White was well aware that the army around Charleston often went without fresh meat. A similar fate awaited General Johnston's command. White desperately tried to head off the coming crisis by sending all the bacon and pork in the state to the front. The 2,500 Confederate troops in Florida could get along on short rations of stringy native beef for a while. "Let us send," White said, "to those who deserve it our best meat." His Commissary Bureau men would accept this added burden, White believed, because they were in the service from a sense of duty and not for mundane reasons.<sup>31</sup>

The Olustee campaign into the interior had a stinging effect on Floridians in and out of uniform; they now seemed more willing to come forward and help supply government forces. But there was one group of government charges that found little comfort or benefit in this renewed spirit. Union prisoners of war were on the bottom of a long list of people depending on the Confederate military for their food. On March 15, 1864, Captain H. M. Allen tried to secure 2,500 head of cattle to feed the 6,000 prisoners in his district which included Columbus, Georgia, and the new camp that came to be known as Andersonville. Allen could find no beef in his state, so he contacted White for help. The major had no ready beef to send, giving the poor quality of the cattle and the cold and continuous rains during the winter as reasons. None could be available before the end of April.<sup>32</sup>

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30. White to Call, February 2, 1864; White to Northrop, February 28, 1864, *ibid.*  
 31. *O.R.*, Series 1, vol. 35, part 1, 615; White to Widgeon, February 8, 1864; White to French, February 9, 1864, *ibid.*  
 32. White to Locke, March 12, 1864; White to H. M. Allen, March 30, 1864, *ibid.*; Allen to White, March 15, 25, 1864, *ibid.* Box 1.

As the time drew near for the 1864 cattle season to begin, doubts existed about Florida's ability to supply cattle on the same scale as it had the previous year. White himself thought that the number, while large, would not come close to the 1863 levels. The threats posed by the Union army and navy, pro-Unionists, deserters and draft evaders, and perhaps even the Seminoles, grew daily. The isolated and unprotected herds made easy and tempting targets. The Confederates could spare no regular troops for the vital ranges of south Florida, and soldiers detailed for droving duty had proved unpredictable. If the situation in the South was not stabilized, no cattle could be brought out. Supply officers knew the consequences of that for the armies, and in the end for the Confederacy itself.

Such conditions could not be allowed to continue if the needs of the Confederate army were to be met through another lean winter. White answered a query as to the number of cattle Florida could deliver in late October 1864; 300 to 500 per week were the best that could be expected. With luck the figure might be boosted to 1,000, but this would become difficult as winter grew near. Major Guerin complained that troops in South Carolina already faced shortages and could be supplied with any sort of meat only occasionally. Unrest gripped the city of Charleston as citizens of the lower classes grumbled about going without meat while the more elite groups had at least an occasional meal that included beef or a little pork. To stave off disaster, Guerin placed minimum requirements at 3,000 head per month and asked that the cattle be moved to Savannah as soon as possible.<sup>33</sup>

White interpreted Guerin's request as an attempt to give him a direct order. He angrily replied that he was under the authority of the commissary-general, and that "no general can command me and I will obey no orders except from those to whom I report."<sup>34</sup> Three thousand head per month was not even remotely possible; all that could be spared would be sent into Georgia where Guerin could order his own drovers to collect them. Guerin, realizing that White's good will was essential to future shipments of Florida beef, quickly sent an apologetic note clarifying his statements. He had not intended to relay a

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33. M. B. Millen to White, October 31, 1864; Guerin to White, October 31, 1864, *ibid.*

34. White to Guerin, November 2, 1864, *ibid.*, Box 2, Letterbook 2.



command but to convey a request; it was vital to have some idea of how much cattle Charleston could expect from Florida. White estimated 300 to 500 head a week if there was an uninterrupted flow from south Florida.<sup>35</sup>

Cattle operations once again were forced to continue late into the fall of 1864, and about 500 head per week were crossing the Florida-Georgia border. One officer thought that the number would not vary unless "some raid of the enemy, or interference of our Commissary-General, or some unanticipated course breaks into our operations."<sup>36</sup> Drovers from Georgia received permission to cross into west Florida to gather such cattle as they could find. The Georgians, however, complained that the area assigned to them was inside Union lines. These men found few cows in the area, since the bulk of them had been removed or hidden by their owners. The 150 head they had collected did not satisfy them, and their commander, Colonel D. F. Cocke, was not a friend of White's due to an earlier incident. White had learned that Cocke had made personal investments in large numbers of south Florida cattle with the hope of gaining great profits. Major White warned Cocke that such purchases were unwarranted and might be illegal. The beef in question must be turned over to Confederate authorities, or Cocke would face the consequences.<sup>37</sup>

As usual, much was expected from Florida during the winter months of 1864. One Confederate official believed that as many as 25,000 head could still be obtained there, which would yield 10,000,000 pounds of beef. To counter such optimistic pronouncements and to fend off congressional attacks, Northrop issued a report on the availability of the Confederacy's beef supply. Florida, he noted, had supplied large quantities of meat and planned to continue the flow of beef. Twenty thousand head might be possible, but claims that Florida could supply hundreds of thousands of cattle were not valid. "These marvelous accounts," wrote Northrop, "are believed to be idle, as this bureau has received accurate information of the number."<sup>38</sup>

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35. Ibid.

36. I. C. Clancy to Guerin, November 23, 1864, *ibid.*

37. White to D. F. Cocke, November 2, 1863, *ibid.*; Cocke to White, November 29, 1864, *ibid.*, Box 1.

38. Charles H. Wesley, *The Collapse of the Confederacy* (Washington, DC, 1937), 7; *Southern Historical Society Papers*, II, 99.

While Florida could still supply beef for the Confederacy in the future, the cattle season for 1864 came to a close in January 1865. The collection of cattle in south Florida ceased as of January 9. Two factors influenced the decision to call a halt to the trade: the position of Sherman's army had disrupted communications and made it unsafe to move any more beef northward into Georgia, and there was the continuing problem of forage shortages in the winter months.<sup>39</sup> Cattle moved again in the spring and continued until the end of the war. By war's end at least 75,000 head had been delivered to the government, while untold numbers had been traded covertly.<sup>40</sup> Despite the amount of beef exported from Florida for the use of the Confederate army between 1862 and 1864, the expectations placed on the state by those in charge of logistical planning were never met. The many senior Confederate officers who had served in Florida during the antebellum years, Commissary-General Northrop and Robert E. Lee included, should have been able to provide better information on conditions in the region. Supply officers there were forced to try to meet unrealistic requests for more and more cattle.

Need for Florida beef had greatly increased after the fall of Vicksburg and the re-organization of the Confederate supply system in 1863. Florida cattle were vitally important for the feeding of Confederate soldiers from Chattanooga to Charleston and giving them the nourishment to continue the struggle in the face of increasingly overwhelming odds. In the end, cattle from Florida could not keep Confederate troops free from the pangs of hunger. Florida beef managed only to prolong the contest, but not to alter its outcome.

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39. White to McKay, January 9, 1865, White Papers, Box 2, Letterbook 2.

40. This estimate is derived from the 25,000 head of the Summerlin contract and the 50,000 White believed would be delivered by the end of 1864. Joe A. Akerman, Jr., *Florida Cowman: A History of Florida Cattle Raising* (Kissimmee, FL, 1976), 85-87.