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## "Was I a Member of Congress . . .": Zachary Taylor's Letter to John J. Crittenden, January 12, 1838, Concerning the Second Seminole War

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"Was I a Member of Congress . . ."  
Zachary Taylor's Letter to John J. Crittenden,  
January 12, 1838,  
Concerning the Second Seminole War

by HARRY A. KERSEY, JR. AND MICHAEL PETERSEN

ON January 12, 1838, Colonel Zachary Taylor penned a letter to his close friend and confidant Senator John J. Crittenden of Kentucky. Eighteen days earlier, on Christmas Day, 1837, Taylor's command fought the largest and bloodiest pitched battle of the Second Seminole War at Lake Okeechobee. As he wrote from Fort Gardiner on the Kissimmee River, the army was preparing to extend its campaign even further inland.

The long and vituperative dispatch to Crittenden is highly critical of the army's command structure, its shortages of manpower, and its two primary caretakers, Secretary of War Joel R. Poinsett and Commanding General Alexander Macomb. An analysis of the letter reveals several anomalies between it and the official report that Taylor filed after the Battle of Okeechobee, a copy of which he included for Crittenden's information. In addition, it is quite possible that Taylor was attempting to head off potential political fallout from his negative report on the Missouri volunteers' service at Okeechobee by pointing out perceived faults in the army. Given the relationship between these men—Crittenden was married to Taylor's cousin and would engineer "Old Rough and Ready's" ascension to the presidency in 1848—Taylor could feel confident that his fellow Kentuckian would offer unequivocal support.<sup>1</sup> The letter can also be viewed as an important document in that it offers insight into the often highly volatile relationships between upper echelon officers in the antebellum army of the United States. The Taylor-Crittenden letter and an inscribed copy of Taylor's official report which accompanied it are part of the Historical Society of Palm Beach County collection. They were placed on public display

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1. Albert D. Kirwan, *John J. Crittenden: The Struggle for Union* (Lexington, 1962), 16, 205-15.

for the first time during the Florida Sesquicentennial Celebration in 1995. The text of the letter, edited for readability, follows:

*Fort Gardiner on the Kissimmee River, East Florida*  
*70 Miles South East of Tampa Bay*  
*January 12th, 1838*  
My Dear Sir,

Believing that you take some interest in the operations of the Florida War, as well as in its successful termination, also for the welfare and success of an old and sincere friend embarked in the same, I have taken the liberty of transmitting herewith for your information, as well as that of any other of my friends in Congress from this, a copy of a detailed report to the Adjutant General of the battle which took place on the 25th of December, between the hostile Indians and that portion of the Southern Army under my command on the border of Lake Okeechobee, East Florida as well as my movements connected with it from the 26th to 31st of the same month, with a report of the killed and wounded and a rough sketch of the country from Tampa Bay, the point from which we set out, to when we found the enemy, designating our route, and laying down the rivers and lakes we crossed, navigated, and passed by, thinking that it might be a matter of some interest to you as the greater portion of that part of Florida we passed through and operated in was never before to our knowledge penetrated by a white man, as well as adding some remarks not embraced in my official report in relation to the management of the war in question, also hazarding some suggestions which may not have occurred to those in power, as to the best mode of terminating the same, should the campaign now going on fail to bring it to a close. In doing which, I trust you will not consider me obtrusive or presuming.

I reached Tampa Bay on the 8th of November, where I found much more important and responsible duties had been assigned me than I had expected, which was the command of all troops destined to carry on the campaign south of the Withlacoochee [a river in west-central Florida, approximately 90 miles north of Tampa], West of the Kissimmee River, and north of Charlotte Harbor, which embraced

nearly the whole of the disposable force of the West side of the peninsula, and which was to move against the enemy in two columns, one from Tampa under my immediate orders, the other from Charlotte Harbor under the command of General Smith of Louisiana, acting as a Colonel, who was in a great measure to regulate his movements by my directions; I was also instructed to open good wagon roads in the directions I was to operate, establish depots of provisions and forage in advance, and construct suitable defenses for their protection, after which to move in the direction of the Kissimmee River, or in any other, and I might hear of the hostiles being in force, and take the most prompt and decisive measures to capture or destroy them.

I, Sir, entered on the duties assigned me if not with ability at least with good faith toward all concerned, having nothing in view save the good of the service in bringing the war to a close, as well as with zeal, industry, and perseverance connected with my duties, and after having dispatched General Smith with the larger portion of his command, to Charlotte Harbor, completing the depots of provisions and forage ordered to be sent to Forts Dade and Foster on the road by Fort King to Garey's Ferry on the eastern side of the peninsula, opening a good road to Pease Creek forty miles in advance of Tampa, where I established a depot and erected the necessary works for its safety. I left Tampa on the 27th and joined my advance at Pease Creek, and proceeded with my principal force to this place, with my train loaded with supplies, opening a road and making bridges, one 400 feet of solid timber for my trains as I advanced, reaching here the 4th of December, with one company of artillery, nine of the 1st Infantry, eight of the 4th and seven of the 6th making 800 regulars, with 100 Florida Militia, who were discharged a few days after, their term of service having expired, with a few pioneers and 150 Shawnee and Delaware Indians brought from Missouri River, and when I was joined a few days after getting here by 250 mounted Missouri volunteers, making a force of about 1350 men.

Many of the hostiles had settled the last summer at this place and vicinity, also on the lakes connected by the Kissimmee where they had cultivated corn and beans. They,

however, retired southeast as we advanced, without firing a hostile gun until the battle of the 25th. I remained here until the 26th engaged in erecting a picket work with block houses for the bulk of my suppliers, also in transporting thru from Pease Creek, furnishing escorts for the same, throwing a bridge across the Kissimmee, and trying to get the Seminoles in this part of the territory to come in, they having made proposals to that effect before I left Tampa, and to leave the country in conformity to the treaties they had entered into, provided short time was allowed them to do so. I also received a few days after my arrival here a dispatch from Major General Jesup stating that some of the principal chiefs of the Seminoles had come in to Fort Mellon where he then was, giving themselves up, and he had no doubt from their statements that the greater portion of the nation would do so, likewise, that he had assurances that Abi-a-ka Sam Jones, the principal man among the Mikasukis with many of his people, would also come in and surrender. Most of us therefore looked upon the war as being near its close, but on the 19th I received another communication from the General saying that all hopes of terminating the war by negotiation was at an end, Sam Jones and others having determined to fight it out to the last, see my official report for further particulars.

This good intention on the part of the hostiles was frustrated in consequence of a number of the prisoners taken with Osceola Powel, having made their escape about that time from St. Augustine, was confined, and who I learn from good authority not only changed the intentions of the Indians as to surrendering, but their pacific dispositions to that of the most deadly hostility, representing to them that they had been most cruelly treated by the whites during their captivity, and which would be their fate if they put themselves in our hands. As to the policy or propriety of capturing the Indians referred to in the way it was done, I have nothing to do, or at present to say on the subject, but I am free to say that after the act was committed it was certainly bad policy as well as great negligence on the part of their keepers permitting them to make their escape.

It is here proper for me to state that the day after I left Tampa Bay I received an order from Brigadier General

Armistead, brevetted for ten year service in one grade, portion of which time was passed on his farm near Uppersville, Virginia, who had reached that place this day after I left, taking command of the department and troops to which I had been assigned three weeks before. At the same time, I received a communication from the General, Commanding the Southern Army, stating that he (Armistead) was to remain at Tampa in command of the department, but was not to interfere with my arrangements or operations in the field. This arrangement was a most unfortunate one, and should be attributed to the individual who sent the Brigadier General to Florida, to whom all our disasters as regards to our military operations in this field may be attributed for several years past— the General-in-Chief of the Army. The officer commanding in the field should control the depots and transportation on which his operations depended as connected with the same, which has not been my case, and notwithstanding such arrangements bore heavy on me, yet I determined not be discouraged or to shrink from my duty, but to press forward with all the means at my disposal in the heart of the enemy's country, to find and fight them which has been done, which course I hope to pursue again in a few days or as soon as I can rest my horses a little, and get up the necessary supplies, the latter being in a great state of forwardness.

What will be the ultimate result of the battle of the 25th time alone must determine, but should the war end in one of extermination which they had determined should be the case previous to that affair, was I a member of Congress, I would never vote to appropriate a dollar to carry it on under present circumstances, or in fact to carry on any other active military operations, until the army was reorganized, and a different individual placed at its head other than the one now there, who does not possess the confidence, I venture to say, of ten officers now in the Field. It is therefore evident he or they should be gotten clear of.

The Indians in Florida have been very much reduced as to number since the commencement of the war, and it appears to me only necessary to keep up a few posts, judiciously selected, to separate those still unarmed from the whites as well as for the protection of the latter which

could be effectually done with proper arrangements with one company of infantry or artillery and one of dragoons. At same time I would pass a law making it a capital offence for anyone, citizen or alien, to have intercourse with those people, which law should be rigidly enforced. A course of this kind would in my humble opinion bring the war to a close nearly if not quite as soon as it could be done in any other way, with but a little expenditure of life or money, as they cannot exist in the country any length of time independent of other things, without clothing, mosquito bars, etc. For if they are determined to hold out to the last, although few in number, yet their numerous rivers, lakes, swamps, and hammocks afford them such facilities of eluding pursuit, with the abundant means found in the country which they can subsist on without labor, and where there is perpetual summer, you could capture or destroy with as great, if not greater facility, a like number of wolves or panthers. I believe too if they were permitted to occupy without molestation the lakes, rivers, swamps, hammocks they are now in possession of in addition to the sandy pine barrens contiguous to them, which would not be settled by the whites during the next century, if ever, that no danger need be apprehended for them, and long before the country would be wanted for agricultural purposes or any other, they would become extinct, or would follow such of their people as had preceded them west of the Mississippi. Besides which let this war be carried on as it now is, and has been for some time past, and in less than two years Congress must resort to direct taxes, or heavy loans to defray its expenses, as the revenue arising from duties on imports, and the sale of public lands will not be sufficient to do so.

I have had great difficulties to contend with since I have been here, other than the country I had to operate in and such as I expected to meet with from the enemy, not the least of which has been the placing Brevet Brigadier General Armistead in my war authority to control all my supplies of every description as well as to interfere with my arrangements, effects of which are such that I shall immediately request to be relieved from this or any other command under similar circumstances. Beside which there has been a great deficiency of officers among the regulars, as

well as the rank and file of the companies, particularly in the first infantry, which were not half full, averaging 23 men per company and taking the whole company together not a platoon officer per company in the field, which has been the cause of my leaving much undone which might and ought to have been accomplished, and which would have been under a proper state of the service. My means of transportation has been deficient, I found many of the mules on my arrival at Tampa, intended for the wagons, had not been broke to the harness, bridle, or even halter, a large portion too young and of course unfit for the severe labor required for them to perform, and those intended for packing, mostly purchased in Missouri, where a portion of the money for carrying on this war must be expended, were in many instances not worth the cost of their transportation to the country, in addition to which horses of my mounted force, nearly all from Missouri, were for the most part broken down before they took the field, having been near a month at sea between the mouth of the Mississippi and Tampa Bay.

We have received the President's message as well as the report of the Secretary of War. I have not read the first, and barely glanced over the latter which strikes me to be in many respects deficient in one great essential, viz., matters of fact, which I am willing to believe is attributable to others whose interest it was to mislead him. On the whole, it's pretty much on a par with reports of that description which have come from the same department, for the last six or seven years, the object of which as now besides being intended to deceive the public, to increase the patronage of the minister and chief magistrate by new appointments with the view to securing the reelection of the former, as well as to enable him to appoint his successor, which is to be Mr. Benton. Mr. Poinsett says among others, "It will be seen by the statement of the Commander General that the principle part of the regular forces has been drawn from the posts on the frontiers and concentrated in Florida"; but he did not or his Commander General, go on to tell the whole truth in regard to the same, which was that notwithstanding the principle part of the regular troops had been drawn to Florida, two thirds of the officers, particu-

larly company officers, had been left behind, and that neither he nor his General in Chief possessed sufficient energy nor independence to compel them to accompany their units and companies and participate with them in the dangers and privations which have to be encountered in carrying on said war. Neither did he state that out of thirteen colonels of infantry, artillery, and dragoons, only four were in Florida, two of which had to be bribed with the command pay and emoluments of brigadier generals to get them here, one being a near relative by marriage to the honorable Secretary and they had better given the other ten times the amount of his government allowances to have stayed away. In speaking of the difficulties in penetrating an unexplored country, in relation to the employment of Indians he says, "It is under such circumstances that our Indian allies have proved so useful, their peculiar sagacity in detecting the strategies of their race and their untiring vigilance and activity in the field, are the best protection against the ambuscades, night assaults, and surprises which constitute the warfare of these tribes and which are so harassing and to our troops." The whole of the foregoing is founded in error, the Indians referred to have been of no service to us as a body, nor have they in a single instance to my knowledge or that of any intelligent officer with whom I have conversed on the subject, detected any stratagem of the hostilities or been at all remarkable for either vigilance, activity, or courage in the field, or any protection against the ambuscades, night assaults, and surprises of the enemy. A portion of those who accompanied me from here on the 20th deserted on the evening of the 23rd, after I crossed the Kissimmee, and the balance with three or four exceptions fled at or soon after the commencement of the action of the 25th, and before a single one had been killed or wounded.

The Secretary recommends the training of three units of infantry and increasing the rank and file of those already in service, infantry and artillery but he does not tell Congress the companies small as they were or are not kept anything full like the First Infantry. In making out what I have written, I trust you will be able to comprehend my views as regards the principle subject under consideration.

Please remember me most kindly to your good lady, Mr. Thomas, and every member of your family and accept my sincere wishes for the continued health and prosperity of you and yours through a long life.

With respect and esteem,  
Your friend truly and sincerely,  
Z. Taylor

Zachary Taylor's actions before and during the battle deserve attention in order to place his letter in its proper context. The war in Florida had been raging since 1835 and was rapidly becoming a major military and financial burden on the United States. By 1837, the commanding general of the Southern Army, Thomas S. Jesup, and many members of the political establishment were pinning their hopes for ending the war on a massive winter campaign against the Seminoles throughout the peninsula. Taylor arrived in Tampa on November 8, 1837, and was ordered by Jesup to take over the area between the Kissimmee River and Pease Creek in southwest Florida. The new commander was responsible for opening wagon roads, establishing supply depots, and surveying the previously unexplored territory that he was about to enter.<sup>2</sup> He left Tampa on December 19 at the head of approximately 1350 men (at least 35 were officers). All of them were members of the regular army except for a small band of Indians and the Missouri volunteers. On December 21, Taylor stopped to build a stockade for his supplies that eventually became Fort Bassinger. He left a small force to garrison the post and proceeded on with the balance of his men. The army captured a Seminole warrior who showed them where the hostile forces had gathered and were awaiting a fight.<sup>3</sup>

The Indians had taken great care in choosing their position. They occupied a sheltered hammock separated from the nearest dry ground by three quarters of a mile of swamp which was in many places filled waist deep with water. Behind them was Lake Okeechobee. Directly in front of the hammock, grass and scrub

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2. John K. Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War, 1835-1842*, (Gainesville, 1967), 219; Zachary Taylor to J. J. Crittenden, January 12, 1838, 2, Historical society of Palm Beach Collection.

3. Zachary Taylor to Roger Jones, January 4, 1838, Sen. Doc. 227, 25 Cong., 2nd Sess., 3-4; Mahon, *Seminole War*, 226-27.

had been cut down to create a clear field of fire. In addition, the Indians had notched the cypress trees to steady their guns. Finally, the rise of the hammock provided escape routes both to the east and west.<sup>4</sup> Taylor's plan for assaulting this position called for a vanguard made up of the Missouri volunteers to act as a skirmish line to draw the initial fire of the Seminoles. The volunteers were supported by the Sixth and Fourth Infantry Regiments with Taylor's own First Infantry in reserve. The volunteers entered the swamp and deployed themselves in a skirmish line as they approached the hammock. When they came within 100 yards of the hammock, they received a withering fire from the Indians. The volunteers continued their advance through the water and mire of the swamp, but were eventually pinned down as they closed in on the hammock. The infantry regiments behind then began to advance and exchange fire with the Indians, subjecting the volunteers to a murderous crossfire. Taylor later reported that the Missourians, sustaining heavy losses and their commander down, broke under fire. Eventually, the regulars reached the hammock and drove the Indians off to the west. The final cost of the battle was 26 soldiers dead and 112 wounded, compared to 11 dead for the Seminoles and 14 wounded.<sup>5</sup>

Taylor's letter to Crittenden is sternly critical, in fact nearly insubordinate, toward his superiors in Washington and derides their ability to bring the war to a close. He vilified Secretary of War Joel R. Poinsett for intentionally attempting to deceive Congress and the public as to the course of the Florida campaign and bitterly attacked General in Chief Alexander Macomb, "to whom all our disasters in this field may be attributed for several years past."<sup>6</sup> Taylor also angrily assailed the command structure of the military establishment as well as those within it. This disparagement of both Macomb and Poinsett was consistent not only with Taylor's personality, but with the state of the military hierarchy of that era. Taylor had a history of bristling at many of his superiors and convincing himself that there was a conspiracy to hinder his personal and military success. His animosity toward Macomb dated to 1815 when he re-

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4. Willard Steele, *The Battle of Okeechobee*, (Miami, 1987), 10; Mahon, *Seminole War*, 227.

5. Steele, *Okeechobee*, 11-13; Mahon, *Seminole War*, 228. Zachary Taylor to Roger Jones, January 4, 1838, 5-6.

6. Zachary Taylor to J. J. Crittenden, January 12, 1838, 5.

signed after learning that he was to receive a demotion because of the demobilization of many military units after the War of 1812. When he was reinstated in 1816, Taylor's hostility was for various reasons extended to other officers including Colonels John McNeil and Matthew Arbuckle.<sup>7</sup> In addition, many officers on the frontier such as Taylor harbored grudges against colleagues whose assignments kept them on the east coast and close to the politics of Washington, D.C. In his letter, Taylor took particular issue with Macomb. Taylor viewed Macomb as an unqualified armchair general who had no knowledge of frontier warfare or Indian relations. This is clear in his statement to Crittenden: "Was I a member of Congress, I would never vote to appropriate a dollar to carry it on under present circumstance, or in fact to carry on any other active military operations, until the army was reorganized, and different individual placed at its head other than the one now there, who does not possess the confidence, I venture to say, of ten officers now in the field." As one biographer has noted, Taylor felt that Macomb "personified the pettifogging and unrealistic negativism, which verged on jobbery, into which the army's command had lapsed."<sup>8</sup> Taylor's continuous and aggressive involvement in such unseemly feuds clearly indicates how deeply divided the antebellum army was, and his letter to Crittenden bears this out.

Equally important, there are many anomalies between Taylor's official report of the battle, written on January 4, 1838, and his letter to Crittenden, which can be considered an unofficial account of the proceedings in Florida. One of the most noteworthy concerns was Brigadier General Armistead's placement over Taylor in command of the western theater of Florida. Earlier in the war, Armistead had been removed from his position because of ill health, but was reassigned to command in Florida on July 25, 1837. Jesup had no choice but to place Armistead second in command of the entire Army of the South and grant him command of the western half of the peninsula. However, he was specifically ordered not to interfere with Taylor's campaign on the Kissimmee River.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, Taylor clearly felt slighted by this appointment and

7. See K. Jack Bauer's *Zachary Taylor: Soldier, Planter, Statesman of the Old Southwest* (Baton Rouge, 1985), 26-28, 33-42 for Taylor's involvement in several bitter internecine feuds.

8. *Ibid.*, 43.

9. Mahon, *Seminole War*, 220.

blamed Macomb for all the problems incumbent upon such an arrangement. Interestingly, this was never mentioned in Taylor's official report to Congress. The difficulties caused by Armistead's purported interference with the supply and transportation of Taylor's force do not emerge in that document. If the official report is taken at face value, it is clear that the march from Tampa down the Kissimmee River occurred without major incident or delay due to the interference of a superior officer. It must be noted that Taylor did not detail precisely how Armistead interfered with his progress, only that he was able to "control all my supplies as well as interfere with my arrangements."

In recounting the physical difficulties of supply and transportation, Taylor graphically described the problems that hampered his advance from Tampa. The mules that he was to employ were either too young or too untamed. He therefore could not employ as many of them for the wagon train as he wished. Many of the horses of the Missouri volunteers were either washed overboard or rendered unfit for use because of a major storm on their passage from New Orleans to Tampa. This, he claimed, nearly prostrated his entire mounted force. Nonetheless, in Taylor's official report, he only vaguely mentioned the logistical problems associated with the campaign. This was done in a very brief manner and in the context of awarding citations to the quartermaster's department in Tampa. Taylor wrote that "The quartermaster's department, under the direction of that efficient officer, Major Brant, and his assistant, Lieutenant Babbitt, have done everything that could be accomplished to throw forward from Tampa Bay and keep up supplies of provisions, forage, etc., with the limited means at their disposal."<sup>10</sup> It is curious that Taylor delineated the exact nature of logistical problems in personal correspondence but only vaguely implied any such difficulties in his official report.

Furthermore, in his letter to Crittenden, Taylor took Secretary of War Poinsett to task for endorsing the efforts of the army's Indian allies. He clearly indicated that the Indian allies, mostly Delaware and Shawnee, were an unimportant and nonessential adjunct to the army in Florida. Taylor denounced them for being unable to counter the Seminoles' guerrilla warfare strategy and for fleeing in the face of battle. He stated that the Indians who did not desert his

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10. Zachary Taylor to Roger Jones, January 4, 1838, 8-9.

force fled soon after the engagement at Okeechobee began. Taylor made it perfectly clear that the Indians were of very little use to the army either as scouts, translators, or foot soldiers. However, Taylor's official report cites numerous instances where the Indians were in fact very useful. Admittedly, he did note that the Shawnees would not join him in the march from Fort Gardiner, the Indians claiming that they were either sick or had no moccasins in which to make the march. On December 21, three scouts that he had sent out to determine the position of the hostiles returned with information that Alligator, an important Seminole chief, had separated from the hostiles and was expressing a wish to surrender with several other families. As a consequence of this intelligence, Taylor rerouted his enter force on December 22 in order to find these Indians. He came across an old Seminole man whom he recruited into his force and sent him to find Alligator. The man returned with information as to the whereabouts of a major portion of the Seminole forces and an unequivocal message from Alligator that he had determined to fight instead of surrender. In addition, Captain Parks, whom Taylor characterized as "an active, intelligent, half-breed," captured two Seminole warriors who indicated the exact spot that the hostile Seminoles had chosen for their defense. To Crittenden, Taylor said the Indian allies did not comprise an adequate fighting force, but judging from his official report on the campaign, their scouting and intelligence reports were vital in discovering the location of the Seminoles and their Negro allies and precipitating the major battle of the war.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, an issue upon which Taylor expounded most vehemently in his letter, but which received no mention in the official report of the battle, was the deficit of officers in the South. He was particularly critical of Poinsett for disregarding the fact that two-thirds of the officers of the frontier army were left behind at their posts while the men under their command were transferred to Florida. This vitriolic tirade was spurred even further by his claim that some of the officers in the field (including Poinsett's brother-in-law) had to be bribed to enter Florida by Poinsett and Macomb, who, in Taylor's opinion, lacked all qualities necessary for leadership. Curiously enough, the dearth of officers, which did in fact exist throughout the army, was never referred to in the official report. There is

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11. *Ibid.*, 2-4.

evidence to suggest that Taylor did not suffer under the shortage as much as other units did at the time. To be sure, a lack of officers affected his campaign, but Taylor's suggestion that the entire course of the war in Florida had been a disaster because of a shortage of trained officers appears to be a grave distortion of the truth.

It is difficult to comprehend why so many inconsistencies would exist between Taylor's official report of his campaign and his letter to Crittenden. One possible solution lies in his treatment of the Missouri volunteers in the official report. Taylor may have realized that he had infuriated the surviving members of that unit as well as many other citizens of that state by writing that the volunteers broke and could not be reformed despite the best efforts of his officers.<sup>12</sup> As historian John Mahon has noted, "While the general's version of events was supported by others present and by his superiors, controversy flared over the allegations. Taylor, in turn, was accused of misrepresentation and opportunism."<sup>13</sup> Seen in this light, it becomes distinctly possible that Taylor was attempting to seek political cover through Crittenden and "any other of my friends in Congress." Taylor's assumption that he could rely on Senator Crittenden for political support proved correct. Crittenden rose in Taylor's defense when Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri requested authority from the Senate to conduct a congressional inquiry into the controversial events at the Battle of Okeechobee.<sup>14</sup>

Thus it is conceivable that Taylor was providing information to deflect the attention of Congress onto other issues. The poor state of the army as a symptom of its lack of officers was an issue which could easily distract the attention of the Senate from an investigation of his actions at Okeechobee. Taylor was undoubtedly aware that he was not the only one to complain of the scarcity of officers. In 1837 Quartermaster General Truman Cross wrote to Congress, "The various objects of improvements which were in a state of suspense at the date of the last annual report, from the want of officers to superintend their execution, have remained so during the present year, nor can they be resumed or prosecuted, under existing circumstances, without some augmentation of the force of the

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12. *Ibid.*, 58.

13. John K. Mahon, "Missouri Volunteers at the Battle of Okeechobee: Christmas Day 1837," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 70 (October 1991), 166.

14. *Congressional Globe*, Vol. VI, No. 11, 183.

department," and Poinsett wrote to Congress in his Annual Report of December 2, 1837, "As the army is now constituted, officers are drawn off for staff duties, to the great injury of the service of the line."<sup>15</sup> Clearly, the size of the officer corps in the army had become an issue which Congress needed to address. In noting a lamentable lack of trained officers, it is distinctly possible that Taylor was trying to occupy Congress' attention with larger issues.

This effort to get Congress involved in some of these more pressing issues of the war was a tactic pursued on several fronts. The poor state of transportation and supply in Florida demanded immediate redressing. The use of Indian allies against the Seminoles was yet another issue which could be used to distract Congress, and he may have been attempting to stimulate Congress into taking action against the military hierarchy by reigniting his bitter feud with Macomb and citing difficulties with Armistead. By presenting such crucial issues to the legislature, Taylor may have felt that he could avoid any serious Congressional investigation into his command decisions at Okeechobee.

As Taylor rested at Fort Gardiner, he could look back with pride on his accomplishments. He had just won the largest pitched battle of the war and was soon to receive a brevet promotion to brigadier general. Despite the disparity of his losses compared to the Seminoles, Taylor had managed to drive the majority of the natives into the Loxahatchee Swamp where they would soon be engaged by Jesup's forces. Although the war would drag on for four more years, these two battles essentially ended the major Indian resistance in Florida. Nevertheless, Taylor's treatment of the Missouri volunteers, both in the field and in his official report, was an issue which he sensed could imperil his career. This letter to Senator Crittenden may represent a preemptive move on his part to avoid any major charges being brought against him. Without question, Zachary Taylor knew where to turn for assistance, and the support of Crittenden was to lead him past the problems of the Seminole War all the way into the White House.

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15. Secretary of War to Congress, December 3, 1837, Sen. Doc. No. 1, 25 Cong., 2 Sess., 237, 147.