

The Wayback Machine - <https://web.archive.org/web/20160115201947/http://www.history.a...>

Chapter 7

THE THIRTY YEARS' PEACE

Extracted from

AMERICAN MILITARY HISTORY

ARMY HISTORICAL SERIES

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF MILITARY HISTORY

UNITED STATES ARMY

[148]

CHAPTER 7

The Thirty Years' Peace

When an express rider galloped into Washington on the night of February 13, 1815, with the news that the War of 1812 was over, ended by the treaty signed at Ghent on Christmas Eve 1814, there began the period in American military history sometimes called "The Thirty Years' Peace." Though border warfare with the Indians flared up from time to time, no foreign enemy during these thirty years seriously menaced the peace of the United States.

Toward a Professional Army

Yet in 1815 a long period of freedom from foreign aggression could hardly have been foreseen. After Wellington's victory at Waterloo in June, there was a general expectation in Europe that America would have another war with England. This was reported to Secretary of State James Monroe by Brig. Gen. Winfield Scott, who was in Paris in the summer of 1815 observing the magnificent victory parades of Britain and its allies, collecting every current book, in French and in English, on army management and training, and studying the tactics of the Napoleonic Wars.

The Napoleonic Wars had revived the old tactical issue of column versus line. Linear tactics, well adapted to the highly trained professional armies of the eighteenth century, which aimed to win battles by maneuver, were unsuited to the huge conscript armies under Napoleon. He therefore employed the massed column as the formation for attack, using skirmishers to provide flexibility. In addition, by giving his artillery an unprecedented degree of mobility he was able to mass his firepower at critical points on the battlefield. Yet the issue of massed column versus line had not really been settled, for Napoleon had after all lost the war and the British ascribed their victories to their "thin red lines."

Those who sought to return to the "good old days" while at the same time retaining the best features of Napoleonic warfare found support in the writings of Maj. Gen. Antoine Henri Jomini, who analyzed the Napoleonic Wars in terms of basic principles and of classic, traditional warfare. His first

work, *Traité des Grandes Opérations Militaires*, published in 1804-05, was early brought to the United States; his greatest work, *Précis de l'Art de la Guerre*, published in 1838, had a profound effect on military thought in America. The influence of Jomini's great contemporary, Maj. Gen. Karl von Clausewitz, was not felt in the United States until long after; the latter's *Vom Krieg*, published posthumously in 1831, was not translated into English until 1873.

The Americans of 1815 were less receptive to the concept of "total war" than were the Americans of the Revolutionary period. In the War of 1812 there had been no surge of revolutionary ardor. Only a small portion of the nation had been directly involved. Neither side had attempted to destroy the other's capacity for continuing the war.

The glory of the victories on the Niagara frontier in 1814 had gone not to the citizen soldier but to the professional. The citizen soldier properly led, as at the Battle of New Orleans, had on occasion done well; but after the war many military realists questioned the ability of the Army to employ him effectively. There were several reasons. It was extremely hard to obtain from state governments accurate figures on how many militiamen were available. Moreover, the states jealously kept control of arming, disciplining, and training their militia. Though training was crucial, the War Department was limited to making recommendations and supplying training manuals. The Army could not enforce the type of rigorous training that had enabled General Scott to convert Regular soldiers into some of them as raw as militiamen into the professionals who had excited the admiration even of the British at Chippewa and Lundy's Lane.

As soon as President Madison proclaimed the peace in February 1815, the Congress, forced to meet at Blodgett's Hotel because the Capitol lay in blackened ruins, acted promptly to create a small but efficient professional army that was thought adequate with the addition of the militia to guard against a repetition of the disasters of the War of 1812. Congress voted a peacetime army of 10,000 men (in addition to the Corps of Engineers), about a third of the actual wartime strength, a figure in marked contrast to the 3,220-man Regular peacetime establishment under President Jefferson. Organization and leadership were improved. The 9 wartime military districts, headed generally by superannuated holdovers from the Revolution, were converted into 2 divisions, a northern with 4 territorial departments and a southern with 5, commanded by officers who had made their reputations in the War of 1812, Maj. Gen. Jacob Brown, Division of the North, and Maj. Gen. Andrew Jackson, Division of the South.

By midsummer 1815, for the first time in nearly a year, President Madison had a full-time Secretary of War. After the forced resignation of Secretary of War John Armstrong at the end of August 1814, mainly as a result of the burning of Washington, Secretary of State James

Monroe served as Secretary of War until March 1815 when illness induced him to turn over the office to Secretary of the Treasury Alexander J. Dallas as an additional duty. In the spring of 1815 President Madison appointed William H. Crawford, Minister to France, Secretary of War. By August 1815 he had returned from Paris and was able to take up his duties.

Crawford had a record of distinguished service in the U.S. Senate. He had declined the appointment as Secretary of War later offered to Armstrong, but had maintained a deep interest in the War Department, especially in the General Staff created by Congress in the spring of 1813. Because its purpose was mainly to conduct the housekeeping functions of the Army, it was not a general staff as the term was used a hundred years later, but resembled rather the modern special staff. Under it had been placed the Quartermaster's, Topographical, Adjutant General's, Inspector General's, Ordnance, Hospital, Purchasing, and Pay Departments; the Judge Advocates; the Chaplains; the Military Academy; and the commanding generals of the nine military districts and their logistical staffs. Furthermore, by stationing in Washington at the War Department certain officers of the General Staff—the Adjutant and Inspector General (a dual function performed by one officer) with two assistants, the Commissary General of Ordnance with three assistants, the Paymaster of the Army, and the Assistant Topographical Engineer—Congress had provided a management staff for the Secretary of War, who hitherto had only a few clerks to assist him.

Watching events from Paris in the fall of 1813, Crawford begged Albert Gallatin "For God's sake" to "endeavor to rid the army of old women and blockheads, at least on the general staff." The reorganization of the Army in the spring of 1815 weeded out most of the incompetents. When Crawford took office he recommended to Congress the retention of the General Staff because, as he stated in his recommendation, the history of the early campaigns in the late war had convinced him of "the necessity of giving to the military establishment, in time of peace, the organization which it must have to render it efficient in a state of war."

The only major change he recommended was the addition of the Quartermaster General to the management staff in Washington. He also recommended an increase in the Corps of Engineers. Congress put Crawford's proposals into effect by the act of April 24, 1816, and a few days later authorized the President

to employ a "skilful assistant" in the Corps of Engineers, thus securing the services of a brilliant military engineer, General Simon Bernard, who had served under Napoleon. Congress also voted \$838,000 for a major program of coast fortification, an effort intended to prevent a repetition of the humiliations suffered in the War of 1812.

At the same time, \$115,800 was appropriated for new buildings at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and \$22,171 for the Academy's books, maps, and instruments. Under Crawford's sponsorship, facilities and staff of the Academy were expanded, the curriculum was broadened, regulations for admission were tightened, and provision was made for a Board of Visitors. In September 1816 the cadets first received gray uniforms, honoring (according to tradition) the Regulars of Chippewa and Lundy's Lane, who wore rough gray kersey because they lacked jackets of regulation blue.

Having fostered a peacetime professional army, Crawford might have used his considerable influence with Congress to strengthen it if he had been left in office longer, as he wished, but in the fall of 1816 President Madison asked him to resign and become Secretary of the Treasury in order to bring Henry Clay into the cabinet as Secretary of War. Clay and several others declined the appointment. For more than a year George Graham, the War Department's chief clerk, was Acting Secretary of War. During that period, as the threat from Europe lessened, Congress began to lose interest in the peacetime army. The actual strength had fallen to about 8,200 men at the time John C. Calhoun took the oath as Secretary of War on December 8, 1817. The new Secretary was faced with proposals to cut the Army's authorized strength, abolish the General Staff, and discontinue the Military Academy. But before Calhoun could devote his talents to staving off such proposals, he was faced with an outbreak of Indian warfare on the border between Georgia and the Spanish province of Florida.

The War Hatchet Raised in Florida

The Indians threatening the Georgia frontier were the Lower Creeks, a faction of the Creek Nation which had fled to Florida after being defeated in 1814. Called the "Red Sticks" from their red war clubs, they settled in the swamps and palmetto forests along with Seminole Indians and bands of fugitive Negro slaves and were unrestrained by weak Spanish officials, shut up in their enclaves at St. Augustine on the east coast, St. Marks in central northern

Florida, and Pensacola on the west.

152

The Lower Creeks and Seminoles had been incited to attack American settlers in Georgia by two British adventurers from the Bahamas. One was Lt. Col. Edward Nicholls, who had employed the Indians in his abortive expedition against Mobile in the summer of 1814 and had left them well armed when he sailed away to England in 1815. Another was a trader, Alexander Arbuthnot. Both preached to the Lower Creeks the same false doctrine that the southern part of Georgia, which had been surrendered by the Creeks in the treaty of 1814, had been returned to them by the Treaty of Ghent, and that therefore Americans were settling on lands that belonged to the Indians.

By the fall of 1817 the U.S. Army was attempting to protect the settlers by reinforcing Fort Scott, a log fort built at the southwestern tip of Georgia where the Chattahoochee and Flint Rivers combine to form the Apalachicola, which, flowing through Florida to the Gulf, provided a supply route from Mobile or New Orleans to the fort. At the end of November 1817 an Army keelboat ascending the Apalachicola in advance of supply transports was attacked from the bank by a party of Indians who killed or captured thirty-four of the forty persons aboard—soldiers and wives of soldiers.

The news of the attack, reaching Washington on December 26, 1817, brought on the conflict known as the First Seminole War. Calhoun ordered Maj. Gen. Andrew Jackson to proceed immediately from Nashville to Fort Scott and take command, authorizing him, in case he thought the force on the scene insufficient—800 Regulars and about 1,000 Georgia militia—to request additional militia. Jackson, who had already reported to the War Department that he was expecting trouble in Florida, "The war hatchet having been raised," acted promptly. Calculating that the 3-month Georgia militia might have gone home before he could arrive at Fort Scott, he sent out a call for a thousand 6-month volunteers from West Tennessee. Dispatching to Fort Hawkins, in central Georgia, an officer with \$2,000 to buy provisions and ordering further stores to come forward by ship from New Orleans, Jackson, escorted by two mounted companies, set off in advance of the troops.

Riding into Fort Hawkins on the evening of February 9, he was enraged to discover that the contractor who had agreed to supply him with rations had failed to do so. For more than a

thousand men, he reported to Calhoun, there was not "a barrel of flour or a bushel of corn." Procuring locally some pigs, corn, and peanuts, he kept going, arriving at Fort Scott on March 9. There he learned that ships loaded with provisions from Mobile had come into the mouth of the Apalachicola. To Jackson it was all-important to protect these boats from Indians who might attack them from the riverbank. He set off next morning with his Georgia militiamen and about 400 Regulars from Fort

153

Scott on a protective march down the east bank of the Apalachicola. Six days later he was at the river mouth. There he halted his force and ordered Lt. James Gadsden of the Corps of Engineers to build a fort, named Fort Gadsden, for storing the supplies he was expecting from New Orleans.

His supply flotilla, delayed by a gale, did not arrive until March 25. The following day he began his campaign. His objective was a large Indian settlement on the Suwannee River, some 150 miles to the east, where a force of several thousand Indians and Negroes under a Seminole chief, Billy Bowlegs, was said to be preparing for battle. But because Jackson needed a supply base nearer than Fort Gadsden, he decided to take the Spanish fort of St. Marks on the way and arranged for his supplies to be brought by ship to the bay of St. Marks.

Stopping at the Ochlockonee River to make canoes for the crossing and farther along to clean out some Indian villages, on April 7 Jackson took St. Marks, in the process capturing Arbuthnot, whom he imprisoned. In the meantime a brigade of friendly Upper Creek Indians had ridden up, also the first detachment of the Tennessee volunteers. Because of the failure in supply, the main body of Tennesseans did not catch up with Jackson until April 11, when he was well on the swampy trail to Bowlegs' Town.

The campaign was something of an anticlimax. From Bowlegs' Town the Indians and Negroes had fled, having been warned by Arbuthnot. The only gains were corn and cattle to feed the troops and the capture of a third adventurer from the Bahamas, Robert C. Ambrister, who had been arming and drilling Bowlegs' men. Ambrister was taken back to St. Marks and along with Arbuthnot was tried by a military Court and executed. Dismissing the Georgia militia and the Indian brigade, Jackson proceeded west with his Regulars and

Tennesseans. At Fort Gadsden early in May he learned that Indians were assembling in Pensacola. He seized Pensacola, ran up the American flag, and left a garrison there as well as at St. Marks when he returned to Nashville late in May.

Jackson's highhanded actions in the First Seminole War—his invasion of Spanish territory, capture of Spanish forts, and execution of British subjects—might have had serious diplomatic repercussions if Spain or Great Britain had chosen to make an issue of them; but neither nation did. Negotiations with Spain for the purchase of Florida were already under way, and shortly after the return of the forts to Spain, Florida was ceded to the United States in February 1819 by the Adams-Onís Treaty.

For the Army, the most significant aspect of the war had been the breakdown in supply. From the time Jackson rode out of Nashville in late January 1818 until his first encounter with the Indians early in April, he had had to devote all his energies to feeding his troops. The reason had been the failure of

154

civilian contractors. The folly of depending on civilians for so essential an item as rations had been demonstrated by the War of 1812, to Calhoun as well as to the Army. Jackson's experience in the First Seminole War underlined it. At Calhoun's suggestion the Congress in April 1818 required contractors to deliver rations in bulk at depots and provided a better system of transportation and stricter control by the Army. For the first time since the Revolutionary War, the Army had a Subsistence Department, headed by a Commissary General of Subsistence.

John C. Calhoun and the War Department

Calhoun was convinced that the American frontier ought to be protected by Regulars rather than by militia. Calling the militia into active service, he wrote Brig. Gen. Edmund P. Gaines, was "harassing to them and exhausting to the treasury. Protection is the first object, and the second is protection by the regular force." But providing a Regular force capable of protecting the frontiers north, south, and west, as well as the seacoast, was another matter.

In 1820 the Congress called upon the Secretary of War to report upon a plan for the reduction of the Army to about 6,000 men. Calhoun suggested that the reduction, if it had to come, could be effected by cutting the enlisted personnel of each company to half strength. In time of war the Army could be quickly expanded to a force of approximately 19,000 officers and men. This was the start of the "expansible army" concept. Congress rejected Calhoun's plan, however, and reduced not only the company strength in the case of the infantry companies 26 men were dropped, leaving only 42 but also the number of regiments.

The act of March 2, 1821, provided for 7 regiments of infantry and 4 regiments of artillery instead of the existing 8 regiments of infantry, a rifle regiment, a regiment of light artillery, and a corps of artillery comprising 8 battalions. The Ordnance Department was staffed by artillery officers; no ordnance officers were commissioned until 1832. The Northern and Southern Divisions were abolished and replaced by an Eastern and a Western Department, under the respective commands of Brig. Gen. Winfield Scott and General Gaines. Only one major general was provided. Because General Jackson had resigned from the Army to become Governor of Florida, the commission remained with Maj. Gen. Jacob Brown.

To provide a senior line officer in the chain of command, lack of which had been a serious deficiency in the War of 1812, Calhoun brought Brown to Washington in a position which later became known as Commanding General of the Army. Brown held it until his death in 1828, when he was succeeded by

155

Maj. Gen. Alexander Macomb. When Macomb died in 1841, Maj. Gen. Winfield Scott was appointed. Made brevet lieutenant general in 1847 (the first three-star general since George Washington), Scott served until his retirement in 1861.

In Calhoun's administration other important innovations in Army management were accomplished. Beginning in mid-1822 recruiting depots were opened in major cities, east and west, to enlist men for the Army at large, not for specific units. Though regimental recruiting continued, the General Recruiting Service in its first three years of operation enlisted about 68 percent more men than did the regiments. General Scott prepared a new manual of infantry tactics for Regulars and militia and, on the basis of his research in Paris

in 1815, prepared the Army regulations of 1821, going minutely into every detail of the soldier's life, including the ingredients of his soup. The soldier's diet was further improved by the first commissioned Surgeon General, Joseph Lovell, who was appointed by Calhoun. Also, by requiring daily weather reports from all medical officers, in an attempt to find some correlation between weather and army diseases, Lovell provided basic data for the first study of weather in the United States and the most complete data of the sort in the world.

Under Calhoun, the work of seacoast fortification went steadily forward. By 1826 eighteen harbors and ports from the Penobscot River to the mouth of the Mississippi had been fortified with a total of thirty-one works, consisting in general of sloping earthworks covered with grass and backed by stone or brick walls. By 1843 the harbor defense program had been extended to 35 or 40 coastal areas with 69 fortifications either in place or under construction. By then greater emphasis was being placed on heavy artillery (24- and 32-pounder guns and 8-inch howitzers) to keep pace with increasingly heavy naval armaments.

Calhoun early turned his attention to the Military Academy, where Crawford's attempts at rehabilitation had been impeded by controversy stirred up by the arbitrary actions of the superintendent, Capt. Alden Partridge. After Partridge was removed and Bvt. Maj. Sylvanus Thayer was appointed superintendent in July 1817, the Academy became a vital force in maintaining a corps of professionally trained officers. Thayer had been sent by the War Department to Europe in 1815 as one of the first of a succession of Army officers sent abroad in the early nineteenth century to study, among other things, foreign military schools. With Calhoun's support, he organized the West Point cadets into tactical units, created the office of the commandant of cadets, improved the curriculum, and introduced new methods of instruction. For his achievements during his 16-year superintendency, Thayer became known as the father of the Academy. Military education was further advanced in 1824, when, as a result of

a proposal by Calhoun for a "school of practice" for men in service, the Artillery School at Fortress Monroe was established as the first of the Army's specialist schools, though unlike most modern schools it instructed not individuals but an entire unit, which was assigned to it for a year's tour of duty. It was closed in 1835 when all the students were sent to Florida to meet the threat of the Second Seminole War, and it was not reopened until 1858.

The first official and complete artillery system for the three categories of artillery—field, siege-and-garrison, and seacoast—was put into effect by Calhoun in 1818, following recommendations by a board of artillery and ordnance officers he had appointed to study the problem. It was based largely on the system of field carriages developed by the famous French artillerist, General Jean Baptiste de Gribeauval. During the next twenty years, growing doubts about the Gribeauval system led succeeding Boards of Ordnance to recommend a newer French system (based on that of the British) called the stock-trail because the carriage used a single trail, of a solid block of wood, rather than the old twin trail. It was simpler than the previous system and introduced interchangeability in carriages and parts. Approved by Secretary of War Joel R. Poinsett and adopted in 1839, it was substantially the artillery system used in the Mexican War. The same board that recommended it also endorsed the introduction of rockets and rocket units into the U.S. Army. The rocket contemplated was patterned after the famous Congreve used by the British in the War of 1812.

Pioneering in the West

In the three decades after 1815, the Army pushed westward ahead of the settlers, surveying, fortifying, and building roads. (*Map /9*) Stockades and forts built and garrisoned in Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas became the footholds of settlement in the wild frontier; just outside the walls could be found gristmills, sawmills, and blacksmith shops, all of them erected by the troops. Fort Leavenworth, established in 1827 on the Missouri River, was the base for Army expeditions sent out along the Santa Fe and Oregon Trails. An important Army explorer in the 1830's was Capt. Benjamin L. E. Bonneville of the 7th Infantry who on a four years' leave of absence made valuable observations concerning the Pacific coast.

These early expeditions were made by infantrymen using steamboats, wagons, and ox carts. The discovery that the Indians on the Great Plains were horsemen led the Army in 1832 to organize its first battalion of mounted rangers, which was expanded the following year into a regiment of dragoons—the first cavalry to appear in the Regular Army since 1815.

A western man became Secretary of War in 1831. He was Lewis Cass, former Governor of Michigan, and he was to be the first long-term Secretary since Calhoun. Like Calhoun, he had hardly assumed office when an Indian war broke out. By 1831 American emigrants pouring westward after the opening of the Erie Canal in 1824 were settling on lands in western Illinois from which the Sac and Fox Indians had been pushed out to the prairies west of the Mississippi River. A band of Sac warriors under Chief Black Hawk, called the "British Band" because they had served with the British during the War of 1812, crossed the Mississippi in the spring of 1831 and began burning settlers' houses. General Gaines, commanding the Western Department, moved in with a large body of Regulars and volunteers, and Black Hawk retired across the river. But the chief returned a year later with 500 warriors and 1,500 women and children with the intention of establishing himself on the east bank of the river.

Cass, who knew the importance of impressing the Indians with a show of force, ordered Col. Henry Atkinson, commanding at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, to take the field with Regulars of the 6th Infantry and also ordered General Scott to bring about 1,000 infantry and artillery from the east coast. The Governor of Illinois called out a large force of militia, most of them mounted. After an inconclusive brush with the Indians, most of the Illinois volunteers returned home. On August 2, 1832, Atkinson with about 500 Regulars and as many volunteers as he had been able to collect caught up with the Indians in southern Wisconsin at the confluence of the Bad Axe River and the Mississippi

158



Map 19

159

and defeated them decisively, with the help of an Army steamboat carrying a 6-pounder gun firing canister. Five days after the battle, General Scott arrived; but he had with him only a remnant of his forces. Asiatic cholera had broken out aboard his crowded transports on the Great Lakes, killing or disabling one third of the force; others had deserted or could not be brought forward for fear of contagion.

The Second Seminole War

Early in 1832 at the direction of Secretary Cass, the U.S. Indian commissioner in Florida negotiated a treaty with the Seminoles, ratified in 1834, by which the Indians would relinquish their lands in Florida and move to Arkansas. The time limit was eventually set at January 1, 1836. Long before the deadline, the Seminoles, led by a half-breed named Osceola, demonstrated that they would not go peaceably. Outbreaks of violence led the Army to reinforce Fort Brooke on Tampa Bay and Fort King about a hundred miles to the northeast. By December 1835, 9 companies of artillery and 2 of infantry ♦ 36 officers and men ♦ were in Florida, under the command of Bvt. Brig. Gen. Duncan L. Clinch.

On the afternoon of December 28, 1835, Osceola with sixty warriors hidden near Fort King killed Wiley Thompson, the agent appointed to superintend the removal, as he was taking a walk outside the fort. The same day another party of warriors attacked a column of 110 Regulars marching from Fort Brooke to Fort King, led by Bvt. Maj. Francis L. Dade and moving at the pace of the oxen drawing their 6-pounder cannon. The Indians massacred all but two men, who escaped severely wounded. The Second Seminole War had begun.

Although the Dade Massacre took place west of a line dividing the Eastern and Western Departments and was therefore in General Gaines' department, President Andrew Jackson and Secretary Cass preferred to give the command to General Scott. Gaines, who was then on an inspection trip at New Orleans, was ordered to the western frontier of Louisiana to take command of all U.S. troops in the region adjoining the boundary with Texas.

General Scott left Washington on January 21, 1836. Stopping in South Carolina and Georgia to arrange for militia and supplies and to set up a depot in Savannah, he did not arrive at his headquarters in Florida near St. Augustine until February 22. Because of logistical

troubles and the difficulty of moving troops over primitive, unexplored terrain to Tampa Bay, where he had planned a three-pronged offensive to bottle up the Seminoles in a swamp nearby, it was April 5 before he could begin his campaign at Tampa. By that time, the Seminoles had melted away into the Everglades. Since hot weather had set in, the

160

militiamen, whose three months' term of service had expired, were ready to go home. As a South Carolina militia officer summed up the campaign, "Two months were consumed in preparations and effecting nothing, and the third in marching to Tampa and back again."

Though Scott's experiences in the Second Seminole War resembled in some respects those of Jackson in the First Seminole War eighteen years before, there were two important differences. First, the logistical failure was a failure in transportation, not in supply; the depots had been adequately stocked by the Commissary General of Subsistence, but wagons, roads, and Army maps were lacking. Second, General Scott had to contend with the intrusion of a subordinate commander, General Gaines, who, disregarding orders, brought a large force of Louisiana militiamen from New Orleans by ship to Tampa Bay in February. Supplying this force with rations intended for Scott's troops, Gaines fought an inconclusive battle with the Indians, which he reported as a victory—thus further impeding supply—and returned to New Orleans in March.

During May, General Scott at his headquarters near St. Augustine antagonized the Florida settlers by accusing them of cowardice and also the volunteers by officially requesting Washington that he be sent 3,000 "good troops (not volunteers)." Floridians burned him in effigy and cheered when he was transferred to Georgia at the end of May to put down an uprising of the Creek Nation, which was threatening to spill over from eastern Alabama into Georgia and Florida. There the general got into trouble with Bvt. Maj. Gen. Thomas S. Jesup, in command of operations in Alabama, who won a battle with the Indians before Scott could put his own elaborate plans into effect. In a letter to one of the President's advisers, Jesup charged Scott with unnecessary delay—"the Florida scenes enacted all over again."

The upshot of the controversy with Jesup was Scott's recall to Washington to face a court of inquiry. The court absolved him of all blame for the Florida fiasco, but he was not returned to the Seminole War. Instead, he was given diplomatic missions, for which he had

demonstrated his ability during the South Carolina Nullification Crisis in 1833, when he managed to strengthen the federal forts around Charleston without provoking hostilities. He was successful in resolving several conflicts that broke out between American and Canadian settlers on the northern frontier and in persuading 15,000 Cherokee Indians in Georgia to move west peaceably.

The war in Florida continued for six years. General Jesup, commanding from late 1836 to May 1838, was not able either to persuade the Indians to leave Florida or to drive them out. His successor, Bvt. Brig. Gen. Zachary Taylor, adopted a policy of dividing the disaffected region into small districts and search-

161

ing out the Indians with a pack of bloodhounds provided at one time by the state of Florida—a brief and unsuccessful experiment that aroused a furor in the United States. Taylor's search-and-destroy methods might have produced results, given time, but the War Department insisted on another attempt at negotiation and suspended hostilities. The raids were resumed. Taylor asked to be relieved and was followed by Bvt. Brig. Gen. Walker K. Armistead, who again tried negotiation and failed. In May 1841 Armistead was succeeded by Col. William J. Worth, who brought about a radical change. Hitherto the campaign in Florida had been suspended during the summer season when fever and dysentery were prevalent. Worth campaigned throughout the summer of 1841, preventing the Indians from raising and harvesting crops. By waging a ruthless war of extermination and by destroying food supplies and dwellings, he routed the Indians out of their swamps and hammocks and permitted the war to be officially ended in August 1842.

The Second Seminole War had been guerrilla warfare, of a kind the Army was not equipped to fight. The effort depleted the Regular Army so seriously that in July 1838 its authorized strength had to be increased from around 7,000 to about 12,500 men. A total of about 10,000 Regulars and perhaps 30,000 short-term volunteers had been engaged. Almost 1,600 men had lost their lives in battle or from disease and about \$30 million had been spent in order that 3,800 half-starved Indians might be shipped west.

With some of this money and effort, the Army had bought experience, especially in transportation—the most pressing problem of the war. For example, the Quartermaster

General had developed a light ponton wagon, lined with India rubber cloth, for crossing rivers. At General Jesup's request, the Secretary of War revived the corps of artificers that had been authorized for the War of 1812. It provided mechanics and laborers to keep wagons and boats in repair. The war taught a great deal about water transportation. Before it was over the Army was turning away from dependence on steamboats hired from private contractors to Army-owned steamboats, more reliable and cheaper in the end. The problem of navigating shallow rivers was solved by building flat-bottomed bateaux. These lessons in transportation were to be put to good use in the Mexican War.

Westward Expansion and the Texas Issue

Army pioneering expeditions from Fort Leavenworth in the 1820'S and 1830'S had been undertaken mainly for making treaties with the Great Plains Indians and for protecting trading caravans. Beginning in the early 1840'S the prime consideration was to help the American settlers pouring westward. In

162

1842 2d Lt. John C. Fremont of the Corps of Topographical Engineers led an expedition to explore and map the Platte River country for the benefit of emigrants moving over the Oregon Trail; on a second expedition in 1843 he reached Sacramento, Upper California.

In 1842 Fremont reported seeing emigrant parties totaling 64 men and 16 or 17 families. Three years later, when Col. Stephen W. Kearny took five companies of the 1st Dragoons over the Oregon Trail on a march undertaken primarily for the protection of the emigrants, he saw on the trail 850 men and about 475 families in long caravans followed by thousands of cattle.

Some of the pioneers on the Oregon Trail settled in Upper California; but the main stream of American emigration into Mexican territory went to Texas. Between 1825 and 1830 approximately 15,000 emigrants with several thousand Negro slaves poured into Texas. In March of 1836 they proclaimed their independence from Mexico. The Mexicans, under General Antonio Lopez de Santa Ana, moved against the rebels and destroyed the garrison

in the Alamo after a siege that lasted thirteen days. American volunteers rushed across the Sabine River to help the Texans. General Gaines, stationed on the western frontier of Louisiana to defend Louisiana and maintain American neutrality, was authorized to cross the Sabine River, generally regarded as the boundary line, but not to go beyond Nacogdoches, fifty miles west of the Sabine, which marked the extreme limit of American claims. He was at the Sabine when General Sam Houston won his victory over Santa Ana at San Jacinto on April 21, 1836. Fired by wild rumors of Mexican reinforcements, Gaines crossed the Sabine with a force of Regulars and in July occupied Nacogdoches, remaining there until recalled in December 1836.

For nearly ten years Texas existed as an independent nation, desiring annexation to the United States but frustrated because annexation had become tied up with the slavery controversy. Northerners saw annexation as an attempt by the South to extend slavery. During this decade Mexico, refusing to recognize Texan independence, made sporadic attempts to recover its lost province. Raids marked by extreme ruthlessness and ferocity by both Texans and Mexicans kept the country along the border in constant turmoil.

page updated 27 April 2001

[Return to the Table of Contents](#)

[Return to CMH Online](#)