

Second Seminole War



Seminole War, Second

Seminoles attacking a fort, possibly on the Withlacoochee River, in December 1835 during the Second Seminole War.

Second Seminole War, conflict (1835–42)

that arose when the United States undertook to force the Seminole Indians to move from a reservation in central Florida to the Creek reservation west of the Mississippi River. It was the longest of the wars of Indian removal.

Following the end of the First Seminole War (1817–18) and the transfer of Florida from

Spain to the United States, several Seminole leaders, headed by Neamathla, met with territorial governor William Duval and diplomat James Gadsden in September 1823. They signed the Treaty of Moultrie Creek, which obligated the Seminoles to move to a reservation of four million acres in central Florida, with the U.S. government to provide monies and supplies to help in the relocation. The treaty also stipulated that white settlers could build roads and seek runaway slaves within the reservation. In addition, a few Seminole villages were allowed to remain along the Apalachicola River. However, neither side fully observed the treaty. The government was slow in delivering cash, and incursions by both settlers and Seminoles took place with increasing frequency as time went on.

In 1830 Pres. Andrew Jackson, who had fought in the First Seminole War, signed the Indian Removal Act, authorizing the resettlement of all Native American peoples to lands west of the Mississippi River. Gadsden then negotiated the Treaty of Payne's Landing (1832) with various Seminole leaders. It called for the Seminoles to move within three years to the land assigned to Creek Indians west of the Mississippi if Seminole leaders found the land to be suitable and for the Seminoles to be absorbed by the Creeks. It also required that African Americans living on the Seminole reservation be left behind so that they could be claimed as slaves. A delegation of Seminoles

went to the Creek lands and, finding them acceptable, in 1833 were coerced into signing the Treaty of Fort Gibson, which affirmed the terms of the earlier treaty. The Seminoles subsequently denied that they had agreed to being removed.



Osceola, detail of a lithograph by George Catlin, 1838

General Wiley Thompson was assigned to oversee the removal of the Seminoles in 1834. After learning that they did not intend to leave Florida, he informed the Seminoles that President Jackson had authorized him to remove them by force if necessary. Osceola emerged as a leader among the Seminoles determined to resist resettlement. On

December 28, 1835, as Major Francis Dade was leading more than 100 soldiers from Fort Brooke (near Tampa) to Fort King (near present-day Ocala), some 180 Seminoles and their allies ambushed the troops, killing all but three. The Dade Massacre marked the start of the Second Seminole War. That same day Osceola also killed Thompson. On December 31 another contingent of some 750 soldiers and volunteers, led by General Duncan Clinch, was ambushed on the Withlacoochee River and forced to withdraw.

Throughout 1836 Seminoles attacked plantations, outposts, and supply lines, and they stymied several efforts by the United States to subdue them. Near the end of the year, however, General Thomas Jesup took charge of the U.S. forces, and he instituted a change in strategy, sending small contingents of men to pursue Seminole bands. The tide subsequently began to turn. In October 1837 Jesup set up a false truce and captured Osceola and dozens of his followers. In December Colonel Zachary Taylor led some 1,000 men against a reported Seminole encampment at Lake Okeechobee. In the ensuing battle, the badly outnumbered Seminoles imposed heavy losses but were nonetheless forced to withdraw. The final major engagement, the Battle of the Loxahatchee River, took place in January 1838. A contingent of sailors and soldiers led by Lieutenant Levin Powell encountered a large group of Seminoles and was forced to retreat. A few days later Jesup dispatched some

1,500 men to engage the Seminoles, who fought valiantly but were defeated.

Over the next four years, small engagements continued to take place, and increasing numbers of Seminoles were induced or forced to move west to the Creek reservation. By 1842 some 3,000 to 4,000 Seminoles had been resettled, and only a few hundred remained. The Armed Occupation Act of 1842 promoted white settlement in Florida, and the Second Seminole War was declared over on August 14, 1842.

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