

# What Were the Results of the Second Seminole War

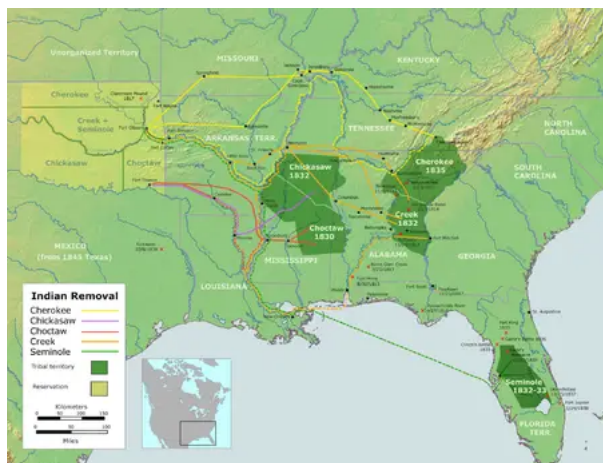


The Florida Everglades

Among all the Indian Wars fought between the United States and the hundreds of American Indian tribes during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, few were as important as the Second Seminole War. From 1835 to 1842 the Seminole Indians of Florida engaged the United States government in a war that was largely characterized by asymmetrical warfare, resulting in the loss of over 1,000 American lives and 3,000 Seminoles. The war was also very expensive, costing the government \$40 million in what really be America's first "Vietnam" – it was a war that the Americans did not lose nor win.

Besides the significant cost and loss of life, the Second Seminole War resulted in a number of changes in Florida and beyond. The United States removed most of the Seminoles from Florida to Oklahoma, but allowed a number to stay in Florida, creating the largest Indian reservation east of the Mississippi River. The end of the war also cleared the way for Florida to become a state in 1845 and helped bolster the career of future President Zachary Taylor. For the Seminoles, the war changed the complexion of their leadership, as many of their older leaders, such as Osceola, died fighting the army.

## President Andrew Jackson and Indian Removal



Map of Indian Removal during the 1830s and the Sites of Major Battles/Resistance to Removal

The Second Seminole War took place in the wider context of the policy of Indian Removal, which began toward the end of President Andrew Jackson's (in office 1829-1837) first term in office. Essentially, the plan was to remove the tribes of the southeastern United States to make room for white settlement. Although these tribes were known as the "Five Civilized Tribes" – Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek, Chickasaw, and Seminole – due to their cooperation with the United States government, general lack of hostility toward their white neighbors, utilization of domestic agriculture, and other elements of their culture, their possession of the land was seen as a hindrance to the growing idea of Manifest Destiny.

The Indian Removal Bill of 1830 made its way through Congress and was signed by President Jackson on May 28, 1830. The bill provided for funds needed to removed the tribes, forcefully if need be, and to establish them in a new homeland known as “Indian Territory” (now Oklahoma). <sup>[1]</sup>

For their part, the Seminoles were always the most independent and recalcitrant of the Five Civilized Tribes. Just after the War of 1812, some of the Seminoles in northern Florida territory engaged the American military, led by future President Jackson, in low-intensity conflict that became known as the First Seminole War (1816-1818). The American-Seminole conflict was thought to have been settled after a number of treaties were signed, but the Americans made several mistakes that led to more warfare.

The Treaty of Adams-Onís was signed between the United States and Spain in 1819, officially making Florida an American territory. Not long after, American settlers began moving into the new territory and the Seminoles were moved to a large reservation in central Florida after several leaders signed the Treaty of Moultrie Creek with the United States in 1823. But as Indian removal became a priority of the Jackson administration, two treaties, both ratified by Congress and signed by President Jackson, gave the Seminoles few options. The Americans worked with what they believed were pliable Seminole leaders to get them to sign the Treaty of Payne’s Landing on May 9, 1832, and then the Treaty of Fort Gibson on March 28, 1833. The treaties called for the removal of all Seminoles from Florida to the newly formed Indian Territory, where they would be given some monetary compensation and allowed a semi-autonomous existence. <sup>[2]</sup> The government thought that the treaties settled the matter because the leaders they negotiated with were happy with the results; after all, they would be among the leadership in the new Indian Territory. But the problem was that the Seminoles were not a unified nation and were instead a collection of several different, sometimes disparate bands of people. Many of the Seminole chiefs were angry that they were not invited to the negotiations and most Seminoles did not want to leave Florida. <sup>[3]</sup>

## War Comes to Florida Territory

The Second Seminole War began when Osceola led two major attacks on American outposts in central Florida and other Seminole leaders led similar attacks in southern Florida, the most notable being the “Dade Massacre.” The attacks left more than 100 American soldiers and settlers dead and several plantations burned to the ground. The primary reason for the attacks was resistance against Indian removal, but other factors played a role. There had been simmering hostility between whites and Seminoles in Florida since the First Seminole War, which in many ways was similar to what was taking place on the western frontier at the same time. The Seminoles were angry at the growing white population, which took more and more land for their settlements and plantations, while the whites saw the Seminoles as an impediment to their progress and were also angry that some bands gave sanctuary to runaway slaves. <sup>[4]</sup>

Overall, the war was like nothing seen before in America. There were few major battles and instead the Seminoles favored hit and run and guerilla tactics against their militarily superior enemy. The Army hunted the Seminoles with bloodhounds in malarial swamps and often resorted to using tactics that many people did not consider ethical, even by the standards of the period, a few of which later played a role in some of the results and after effects of the



Osceola (1804-1838)

war.

During the first few years of the war, Major General Thomas S. Jessup led the American Army. Jessup was immediately confronted with the reality that it was a war like none other and that he stood very little chance of achieving a true victory in the conventional sense, so he resorted to unconventional means, such as capturing Seminoles under flags of truce. Among those captured was Osceola, which the Army hoped would sap the will of the Seminole braves. Seeing the futility of the campaign, Jessup actually recommended to Secretary of War Joel Poinsett the removal of the Seminoles be stopped; but Poinsett stated that the matter had already been settled by the Congress and the president. Jessup resigned his post and the war continued. [5]

While Jessup was capturing Seminoles under flags of truce, Cherokee leader John Ross attempted to bring about a peaceable settlement. The politically savvy Ross hoped that by playing the role of negotiator he could possibly stall or stop the removal of the Seminoles, which could help the prospects of the Cherokees. [6] Ross and a contingent of Cherokee leaders traveled to Florida in late 1837 to meet with representatives of the Seminoles and the American government and asked for the release of Seminole prisoners as a sign of good faith. The peace talks ended with no agreement and no prisoners were released – Osceola died on January 30, 1838 after languishing for three months in prison. [7]

## Zachary Taylor Comes to Florida

Fresh off his campaign in the Black Hawk War, Zachary Taylor was promoted to Brigadier General and given command of Florida. Taylor immediately set to work rectifying what he believed were mistakes made by Jessup by dividing the territory north of the Withlacoochee River in northwestern Florida into twenty miles square sectors and placed twenty men garrisons in each. He also organized incursions deeper into the Everglades using bloodhounds to track Seminole warriors. [8] The results of Taylor's tactics were negligible at best and even he began to see that leaving the Seminoles in the swampy Everglades was probably the best course of action.

Removal was postponed in March 1839 and a *de facto* cease fire followed with peace negotiations at Fort King on May 18, 1839. The talks involved Taylor, General Alexander Macomb, and Colonel Harney for the army, while chiefs Chitto Tustenuggee and Halleck Tustenuggee represented the Seminoles. The Americans agreed to quit pursuing the Seminoles if they stayed south of the Pease Creek, which is located just south of the modern Tampa Bay metropolitan area. It looked like peace would return to Florida, but just as with the early

treaties, four of the major bands did not participate. [9]

With no consensus among the Seminole people, hostilities quickly resumed and the U.S. government was forced once more to find a solution to the expensive, never-ending mess. Taylor parlayed his command of Florida into a better command in the west, so what was becoming an unenviable position was given to Brigadier General Walker K. Armistead in April 1840. Under Armistead's command, military actions against the Seminoles were greatly reduced. The army primarily served by removing the Seminoles who were tired of fighting to Indian Territory, while the holdouts were allowed to stay in the Everglades. [10]

## Conclusion

The Second Seminole War is an often overlooked and little covered period in American history, but it proved pivotal in a number of ways. It was the first true guerilla war that the United States Army

was involved in and would be until later battles with the Indians tribes of the west. The war also resulted in changes by the government in its Indian removal policy toward the Seminoles. Due to the fighting and the difficulty of eliminating all resistance, the government eventually acquiesced, allowing some of the Seminoles to remain in Florida, which resulted in the largest Indian reservation land east of the Mississippi. Finally, the Second Seminole War impacted the leadership of both the Americans and Seminoles. The Seminoles saw one of their greatest leaders, Osceola, die, but live on in place names throughout modern Florida, while Zachary Taylor used the war as another notch in his career belt on his way to the White House.

Zachary Taylor (1784-1850) (President of the United States March 9, 1849 – July 9, 1850)

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