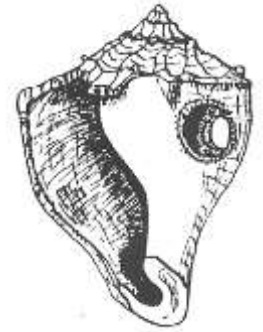


SWFAS

NEWSLETTER

THE SOUTHWEST FLORIDA ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY



JOHN G. BERIAULT, ACTING EDITOR

VOLUME 18, NUMBER 1

JANUARY, 2002



AN ISLAND IN THE GLADES

EVERGLADES TREE ISLAND CIRCA 1905: A great illustration from the “golden age” of magazines. Can anybody guess the location of a possible archaeological site? This island may still be out there to be placed in the State Computerized Site File – to heck with Bali Hai, let’s go find *this* island!

SWFAS DECEMBER PICNIC A DELICIOUS EVENT!

We’ve had some great picnics over the years. I recall the first

several were held at Charlie Strader’s beautiful place at the headwaters of the Imperial River. The next several were held at the Collier County Museum.

These picnics are always fun, just to see and socialize with the nice people we have in our group. We also have a bunch of great cooks, so that’s a plus too. This picnic – to the Mound House – was great, as usual, on both those counts. The setting was magnificent – a shell mound with historic house overlooking a broad sweep of inland waterway. And our host Rebecca Harris, director couldn’t have been nicer to us or been a greater credit to the City of Fort Myers Beach. We need to thank her personally at the next SWFAS meeting at which she will be the featured speaker. I think it’s wonderful we continue certain traditions down through the

years – this tradition – the December Picnic - is one we definitely need to maintain.

One other tradition we are about to re-enact is the SWFAS Rummage Sale & Silent Auction January 19th, (Saturday 11AM - 3 PM) Bonita Springs Community Center on Old 41. Come early (if you are a SWFAS member and planning to help) by 9:30 AM. Read the other information in this Newsletter and bring your trash and treasures **PRE-PRICED!** Thanks! - and see you there!

Inside this Newsletter

- 1 We have Moved! Florida Gulf Coast University is the new site of our General Meetings**
- 2 Zachary Taylor’s Christmas Party – Part Three!** Read Dr. Robert Gore...
- 7 SWFAS GARAGE SALE IS JANUARY 19th!** See article this issue...

THE DATE BOOK

January 12th SWFAS Board Meeting – Hampton Inn, Bonita Springs, 7:00 PM

January 16th SWFAS General Meeting and Annual Election of Officers – 7:30 PM, Rm. 110, Academic Building 3, Florida Gulf Coast University

January 19th, 2001 SWFAS Rummage Sale and Silent Auction, Bonita Springs Community Center, downtown Bonita Springs on Old U.S. 41, 11:00 AM – 3 :00 PM

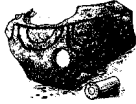
About SWFAS

The directorate: President Betsy Perdichizzi, first vice president Don Taggart, membership secretary Charlie Strader, treasurer Charlie Strader, recording secretary Jo Ann Grey, directors Steve Tutko, Sue Long, Dottie Thompson, Jo Ann Grey, Charles Dugan, Jack Thompson, Tom Franchino, John Beriault, Charlie Strader and Dr Michael McDonald.

The committees: Field: Beriault, 434-0624; Hospitality: position open; Membership: Charlie Strader; Publicity: Dottie Thompson, 597-2269; Sales: position open; Finances, Jack Thompson 597-2269, 774-8517; Lab: (774-8517), Art Lee, 261-4939, Walt Buschelman, 775-9734, Jack Thompson, 597-2269.

To Join: Address your check to the Southwest Florida Archaeological Society, P.O. Box 9965, Naples, FL 34101. Dues are: Individual \$20, Individual Sustaining \$50.00, Family \$35, Student \$15.

Any questions, comments, contributions to the Newsletter: John G. Beriault, acting editor, P.O. Box 9074, Naples, FL 34101-9074 or Email to: JGBeriault@aol.com.



POTSHERDS AND POTSHOTS... AN ONGOING SERIES BY ROBERT GORE

COLONEL ZACHARY
TAYLOR'S YULETIDE
PARTY, 1837. III.

The troops were ordered into position, guidon flags were raised, the order to advance was shouted across the ranks, and the white and blue lines advanced in a slow, wavering, ragged attack. The 1st Regiment, Missouri Volunteers, still semi-resplendent in their white caps and uniforms, although now much bespeckled with mud, led the way. Their large white silk standard, embroidered with the Stars and Stripes, was unfurled and flapped gently In the breeze, its proud motto emblazoned for all to see.- "Gird, gird, for the conflict. Our banner wave high. For our country we live. For our country we'll die." Some

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Missourians would very shortly get that chance.

Tripping in depressions, stumbling into solution holes, the first line moved across the prairie towards the hammock. The mounted troops jerked angrily on their horses' reins as the nearly exhausted animals were urged forward but Instead danced sideways, snuffling and snorting loudly at the alien smells they had already detected on the wind. Eyes of equally tired and apprehensive men squinted and strained, looking for any movement, and untoward activity, any flash of powder or puff of white rifle smoke. Although the day was not yet overly warm, adrenaline-charged sweat began to run down foreheads under hats and caps, further darkening the summer whites and sky-blue kersey jackets already sweat-stained and reeking from nearly a week of back- country travel and travail. Mouths went dry, breathing became labored, and the entire skirmish line changed into a long, serpentine, yet tightly coiled human spring under palpable, nearly unbearable tension, ready to snap open at the first sign of defense from the hammock. In the distance the fronds of the cabbage palms along the hammock's edge waved lazily in the breeze.

After proceeding slowly across the wet prairie for almost a quarter-mile without incident the frontline encountered another obstacle. Before them lay a

freshwater marsh, at least three-quarters of a mile wide, and so thick with five-foot high saw-grass and deep, watery mud that the exhausted horses could never pass through. Here, a deep meandering creek drained the cypress sloughs, hammocks and prairies east of the Kissimmee River, before disemboguing toward Lake Okeechobee, to add its own watery burden to that of a dozen other nameless tributaries emptying into the Lake. This particular waterway was to become a stream of destiny, debacle, and death. What the Indians called it, if anything, will never be known. The tributary was also never named on military maps, but may have been part of the seasonally ephemeral drainage into what eventually would be called Nubbin Slough or Mosquito Creek. But on that Christmas Day, along its unnamed banks, the Battle of Lake Okeechobee was about to begin.

Seeing the hopelessness of pushing further through the sawgrass on horses, Colonel Taylor ordered most of the men to dismount. A guard was established (depleting the attackers' numbers further), the horses tethered, and the baggage secured as best as could be on the wet ground. Two other companies of regular mounted 4th Infantry, under Captain George W. Allen, remained on horseback but were detached from the central sortie force to probe the large cypress swamp and hammock that extended off to the right (westward) along the stream. The

remainder of the troops were ordered, muskets and rifles at the ready, into the sawgrass on foot. Colonel Gentry, leaving about 20 Missourians to guard his horses, turned with his remaining 132 militiamen, and those of Major Morgan, toward the hammock.

The Missourians moved forward, Gentry in the center, Major Harrison H. Huhes, 2nd Missouri Battalion, to his left, and Lieutenant-Colonel John W. Price's 1st Missouri Battalion on his right. Price's battalion was itself flanked by Captain (Acting Major) Sconce's Spies, and Captain Cornelius Gilliam's detachment. On the far right flank was Captain Joseph Parks' remaining Delaware and Shawnee Indians. About 50 yards behind them was Foster's 6th Infantry Regiment and Thompson's 4th Infantry Regiment. Taylor's 1st Infantry Regiment, some 173 men, stood at ease in reserve. Approximately 560 men, regular army, volunteer militia, and Indian scouts in the advance were about to earn their pay. They didn't know it yet, but 27 of them who had traveled some 145 miles through pineland, prairie, hammock, swamp, and slough, were about to die for Florida. Another 111 men would carry the scars, wounds, and lasting pain of the engagement with them for

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the rest of their lives. But they all had one thing in common--they were all about to become an indelible part of the history of Lake Okeechobee.

It was 12:30 PM, Christmas Day, 1837.

Moving now with that combination of fearful caution and reckless fatalism that often descends on men tried too long in the crucible of war, the 227 men of Gentry's Volunteers and Morgan's Spies, followed by the small party of Delaware and Shawnee Indians, and some 335 men in 11 heavily depleted companies of the dismounted 4th and 6th Infantry Regiments, waded into the marsh. The 173 troopers of the 1st Infantry Regiment standing in reserve watched them become swallowed up in the sawgrass. Around them all the dank, moldy aromas of rotting vegetation soon mixed with the lactic acid-and-onion pungency of their own perspiration. Cursing quietly, but unable to silence the sound of their own splashing, the men stumbled forward over submerged rocks or collapsed suddenly into cavities in the marsh floor. Holding their weapons high to avoid the water the troops moved ponderously but resolutely forward, eyes glinting in fear as they searched the shadowed cabbage palm trees that lay just ahead for any sign of movement.

Several of Gentry's men, discovering the cut-down sawgrass paths, moved quickly along them and were the first to emerge from the sawgrass. They could not have liked what they next saw, but in a moment it would make no difference.

Ahead and along the hammock margin, and rising above the troops, the cabbage palms blocked the early afternoon sun with a damp, warm shade. The fallen fronds around the tree bases formed misshapen piles of dry, gray-brown litter. The wading men knew that this would crackle and snap loudly as their leather boots trudged across. Other fronds, bent with the weight of animal and plant debris in the centers, further blocked the soldiers' vision and progress. Viewed from their perspective the sawgrass-cabbage palm biotope was a tangled dark morass that seemed to go on, and in every direction, forever.

Then, as the men approached, the palm trees began to thin out. A border of mottled-bark, gray-gangly dahoon holly trees rose up out of a mixed lush understory of dark green swamp fern and lime green shield fern. Here and there black-barked bay trees twisted upward from the shallowing water. Behind these, on still higher ground, more cabbage palms rose vertically, their spikey, olive-drab fronds and sharply pointed gray frond-bases or boots giving the trees the appearance of great ringed arrows shot into the hammock floor. Just beyond the

palms, bromeliad-festooned limbs of laurel oaks reached outward and upward toward the forest canopy and the post-noon sun. In the lower areas, standing in the shimmering black water, huge, buttressed cypress trees rose like thick gray lances toward the sun-broken canopy overhead. Down near the crotches of the oak limbs and branches of the cypress, curiously large and

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misshapen bundles of Spanish moss dripped down in tangled gray spirals, some waving gently in the warm breeze, others unnaturally still. A passing sunbeam glinted metallicly off one bundle, but all too briefly to be noticed.

As the first Missourians moved slowly forward, the hammock floor gradually rose

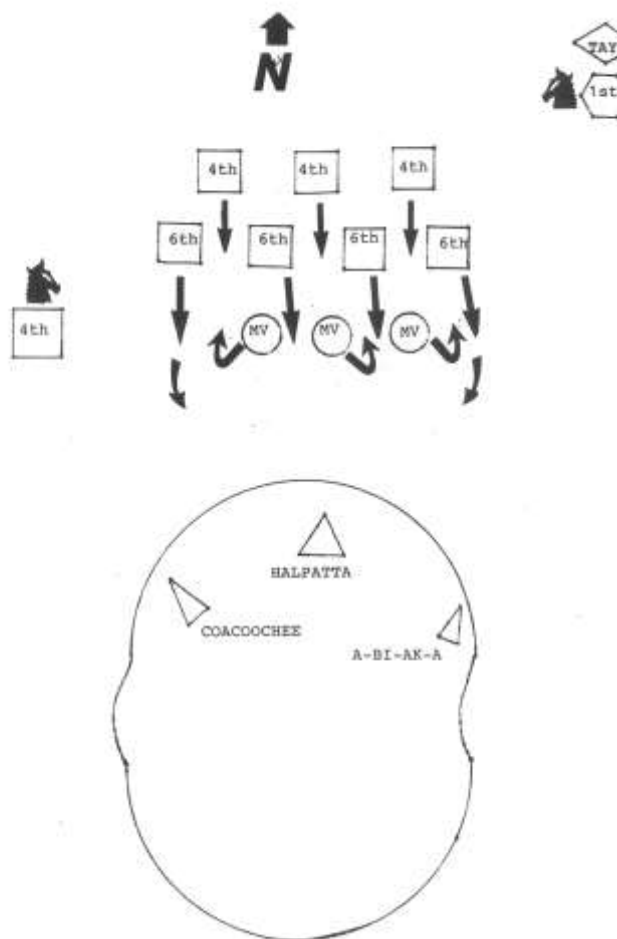


FIGURE 3:
APPROXIMATE ORDER OF BATTLE, LAKE OKEECHOBEE, 1230-1300 HOURS, DECEMBER 25, 1837.
TRIANGLES: INDIANS CIRCLES: MILITIA
SQUARES: U. S. ARMY
All Locations and Compass Directions Approximate

toward the interior, a vegetal pastiche of mahogany-brown and tan and burnt umber--the colors of the Indians who were waiting. In the early afternoon sunlight that filtered through the more open canopy the tree trunks, leaves and fronds dissolved into a sepia-toned montage against the more distant dull, green background of wild coffee shrubs and feathery ferns. Like a subtropical Eden, the hammock spread outward, its lush greenery offering a peaceful and cooling respite from the heat of the overhead sun. The white uniforms of the Missourians were the only glaring contrast. For one brief and seemingly timeless moment there was absolute silence.

The first volley exploded like ragged thunder, rolling and reverberating among the trees. A dozen Volunteers immediately fell backward or forward into the water, some crying out in agony, others lying face down and still within a slowly spreading stain that colored the tannic brown water even darker. The first volley was immediately followed by a more staccato roar as targets of opportunity were selected by the Indians from the troops still standing. Men who had cursed the sawgrass-and-water morass through which they had ridden, walked, waded, and stumbled for almost a week, now lovingly and desperately embraced it, seeking any protection at all at its surface from the Indian snipers' fire. The few men still uninjured at the hammock's edge scrambled for cover behind the trees as the

cacophony of battle echoed and re-echoed through the forest. Colonel Gentry, hit in the chest on the first volley, tried to rally his wavering men. "Come on, boys! We're almost there! Charge on Into the hammock!"

The deadly sounds of war were everywhere. The sharp report of rifle and musket was overlain by the vicious and continual buzz of rifle balls splitting the air like dozens of deadly hornets. Sharp cracks and whines told where projectiles smacked into the water and ricocheted away. Duller cracks and flying splinters and bark marked where rounds slammed into trees. From overhead an irregular rain of broken twigs, branches, leaves, and debris showered down--the clippings and litter of shots gone wild. All too often a heavy plok! followed by a grunt or scream, showed where the lead balls had found their human marks. And over it all rose the terrifying, almost unearthly ululation of the Seminole war cry, mixing with the curses and shouts of the Volunteers just outside the hammock. Out of sheer desperation the fire was returned in force, but without telling effect. Huddling in the water and sawgrass, muskets and rifles could not easily be ramrodded, powdered, patched, loaded, aimed and fired.

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The Volunteers and Spies, the leading edge of the skirmish line, suddenly found themselves at a triple disadvantage: they were exposed on the low, wet ground; the Indians fired at will from cover on the higher hammock ground; and the Missourians had to expose themselves to this deadly fire any time they wanted to shoot. In ones and twos they continued to fall, the curses of the living and the screams of the wounded blending in a despairing chorus with the fearsome continuo of smoke, fire, and fury from flashing gunpowder and sizzling rifle balls. Richard Gentry, still able to command in spite of his wound, rose up once more to charge his men forward. He immediately took a second rifle ball through the body and pitched forward mortally wounded. The same projectile continued onward, smashing through and shattering the arm of his son immediately behind him, before finally lodging in a tree. Three other Missouri officers, Captain James Chiles, Lieutenant Charles B. Rogers, and another named Flanagan, also took severe hits. Suddenly, the Missouri Volunteers became almost leaderless.

The men of Morgan's Spies fared little better, losing two enlisted men immediately in the first volley. More serious for command structure was the wounding of four officers, Captain John Sconce, and Lieutenants William Gordon, John T. Hose, and Hugh

Van Landingham, each picked off while they, too, attempted to urge their men forward and take the charge to the enemy. Seeing their leaders dying or wounded, the enlisted Missouri irregulars began to panic. Gone was the romance of war, of cleansing the land of redskin thieves, beggars, and murderers. Gone was the glory of service, the girding for conflict, and the living and dying for country. Ahead lay only fire, fury, Indians and death, Behind lay the single respite--sawgrass and swamp water to be sure, but sure and certain exit from the battlefield too. Around them lay 36 fellow Missourians, wounded, dying, or dead. It was simply too much for undisciplined troops to bear. Many now considered themselves "hard pressed" and, following their orders, began to fall back. Some were dismayed by the rifle fire that suddenly began from behind them, until they saw that the U. S. 4th and 6th Infantrymen were now firing over and through their decimated ranks toward the hammock. Dismay turned to despair as the Missourians then realized that they were now caught in a murderous crossfire between foe and friend.

First one, then two, then half a dozen, then by the score most of the surviving men of the Volunteers and Spies, including their Indian scouts who were still alive and unwounded, broke ranks. But instead of an orderly withdrawal, firing, covering, loading, retreating, firing again, many simply ran. Sensing the

beginnings of a rout Captain Gilliam and Lieutenant John C. Blakely tried to restore order, exhorting the fleeing men to retreat but reform as per Instructions behind the 6th and 4th Infantry Regiments immediately to their rear, and there prepare to rejoin the battle. Many did; others paid no attention and instead stumbled, wallowed, slid, fell, and crawled out of the fearful arena and straggled back more than a mile to where the horses had been tethered and the baggage piled up prior to battle. There, in total disarray, the majority ignored the blasphemies, vituperation, and entreaties to regroup from Lieutenant Joseph P. Taylor, the Army commissary officer. Several others, feeling at last a sense of duty and regaining some composure, finally rejoined the action under Captain John Curd, functioning as medical aids, helping the wounded regulars and militia from the swamp.

The situation, as seasoned Infantry commanders might say, had deteriorated badly. Not only were the supine Missourians being shot from the trees, but any advance forward, and any retreat backward meant almost certain injury or death. Captain James Chiles had quickly assumed command of the Missourians from their fallen Colonel Gentry. He sent a messenger back to Zachary

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Taylor requesting immediate support from the reserves. Taylor, not certain whether the 6th and 4th Infantries had engaged the enemy, or how badly they were faring, was tightly loath to commit his reserves too soon. His reply to Chiles via his messenger was both militarily correct and deadening: "You must sustain yourselves." Immediately thereafter Chiles was hit.

Meanwhile, Colonel William Davenport's mounted 1st Infantry, standing in reserve well away from the hammock, heard the killing of friends and fellow soldiers with that agonizing sense of helplessness that duty and obedience to orders often brings. Also unaware of how the battle was going, they only saw the stumbling, running figures of the Irregulars emerge in ones and twos from the edge of the sawgrass, followed by others in Missouri white or Army blue, carrying the wounded and each other back to safety. Unwilling to second-guess his commander, a frustrated Davenport and his men held their position even after a second pleading request for help came from Gentry's decimated Volunteers. Away in the distance they could hear the rapid popping of gunfire, overlain by a faint but almost continual yelling. A white haze of gunpowder smoke began to rise above the trees of the hammock, drifting and swirling in eddies before being dispersed by the early afternoon

breeze across the prairie toward Lake Okeechobee.

It was now 1:00 PM, Christmas Day, 1837.

[TO BE CONCLUDED]

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SWFAS JANUARY 19th RUMMAGE SALE

Thanks to all the members that have volunteered to help at our upcoming fund raiser. As you know we don't have many and not one each year, so please help make this a success and participate. If the past is any prediction, the event should also be exciting and a lot of fun. It provides a good study of cultural interactions at many levels - if nothing else, it validates the old saying - One person's treasure is another person's trash.

To make the sale a financial success, we need all SWFAS members to consider donating items. Don't be hesitant to mention the sale to your family, friends, neighbors, coworkers and even business and ask them if they have items they would like to donate. SWFAS can even provide a receipt of donation to a nonprofit organization for tax purposes. For those who do not have treasure to donate, remember that we will also be selling snacks and drinks. You could consider bringing food items

for sale as an alternative.

Please try to be there early to help out. Best to be there by 9:30AM. Please remember to bring empty bags/boxes for the buyers. I look forward to seeing you there. Call me at 992-9660 if you have questions.

SWFAS Rummage Sale & Silent Auction
January 19th, (Saturday
11AM - 3 PM)
Bonita Springs Community
Center on Old 41

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Rebecca L. Harris, Director of the Fort Myers Beach Cultural Museum and Environmental Learning Center, will be the speaker at the January 16th meeting of the Southwest Florida Archaeological Society. The group will meet at Florida Gulf Coast University in Building Academic 3 in room 110 at 7:30 P.M. Her talk will be entitled "Time and Space in Southern Florida: Environmental Dynamics of the Lake Okeechobee Basin".

Rebecca Harris received her BA from the University of Florida, her MA from Florida Atlantic

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University and is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Arkansas. She is a Registered Professional Archaeologist and has worked throughout the Southeastern US. Rebecca is currently focusing on prehistoric settlements in the wetlands of southern Florida.

Avocational and professional archaeologists as well as those interested in history are welcome to attend. For further information call 941-597-2269.

Dorothy L. Thompson
576 Retreat Drive, Apt. 202
Naples, FL 34110

941-597-2269