

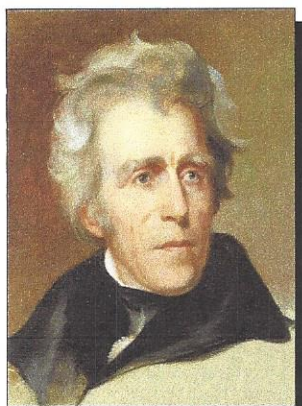


## ***"Drums along the Everglades"***

### ***The US Marines in the Second Creek and Seminole Wars***

Being the smallest of the services the Marine Corps has had a continual struggle to maintain its identity and existence. During Andrew Jackson's term as President the Marines would fight two wars: a military conflict against the Creek and Seminole Indian Tribes in Alabama and Florida, and a political fight to preserve the Corps' very existence. After President Jackson had recommended to the Congress that the Marine Corps be merged into the Army, Marine Corps Colonel-Commandant Archibald Henderson would make a compelling argument to preserve the Corps which would lead to a workable compromise with President Jackson and the Congress. The Reform Act of 1834 or the "Act for the Better Organization of the Marine Corps" provided that the president could now direct the Marines to perform such duties as his judgment dictated, and clarified that, under direction of the president, whenever the Marines were participating in land operations with the US Army they would fall under the control of the Army. It also said that the Marine Corps, afloat or ashore, was part of the Department or the Navy, but separate from the Navy

itself. Coinciding with the Act it was directed that the Corps adopt a new uniform that would "return to the Old Corps traditional colors of green and [white] buff" of the Revolution. Although approved by the President in 1833 this new uniform was not formally adopted until 1835. Disliked by the Marines for its "Grass Green" color which had a bad tendency to rapidly fade, the uniform saw only a short term of service. However it would become inseparably identified with the Marines of this era.



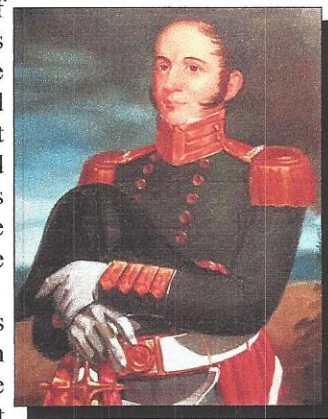
**President Andrew Jackson**

#### **Prelude to War**

The events during this time in our history have often been glossed over and/or ignored. This was a period of 'nation building' as espoused by President Andrew Jackson as '*extending the area of freedom*', later known as 'Manifest Destiny', to have our nation stretch from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The several tribes of eastern Indians posed a problem in the effort to achieve that goal. There were many conflicts where the two cultures clashed, and there is enough blame for those problems on both sides of the argument. To separate the two to have peace was the prevailing thought. The government solution that was decided upon was to move the Indians to an area out of the way to end the conflicts.

To some of that period it was the right solution. Many had lost family and friends to the constant fighting. To others it seemed atrocious to take people from their homes and force them to move. Greed for the fertile land that the original occupants [Indians] possessed led to many of the problems. In the middle was thrown the military to enforce the law of the land. The Marines would do their duty no matter how they felt about it, but their feelings and displeasure over many of the policies they were task to enforce are reflected in the letters that have survived.

During the 1830s Commandant Archibald Henderson and his Marines would not only have to contend with political issues at home but would become embroiled in hostilities against both the Creek



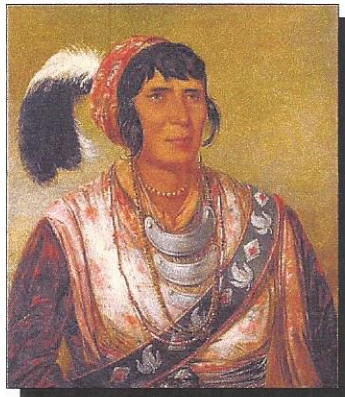
**Col. Archibald Henderson,  
Commandant of the  
Marine Corps**



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Indian tribes in Alabama and Georgia, and the Seminole Indians in Florida. These conflicts would result after President Andrew Jackson would push an Indian Removal Act through Congress. This Act ordered the removal of all Indians from east of the Mississippi River to the Arkansas Territory.

With the ratification of the Adams-Onís Treaty in 1821, the United States officially purchased Florida from Spain. Taking control, American officials concluded the Treaty of Moultrie Creek two years later which established a large reservation in central Florida for the Seminoles. By 1827, the majority of the Seminoles had moved to the reservation and Fort King (Ocala) was constructed nearby. Though the next five years were largely peaceful, some American settlers and plantation owners began to call for the Seminoles to be relocated west of the Mississippi River. This was partially driven by issues revolving around the Seminoles providing sanctuary for escaped slaves. In addition, the Seminoles were increasingly leaving the reservation as hunting on their lands grew poor. In an effort to eliminate the Seminole problem, Congress passed the Indian Removal Act in 1830 which called for their relocation west.



**Seminole warrior Osceola**

In 1832 officials discussed relocation with the leading Seminole chiefs. Coming to an agreement, the Treaty of Payne's Landing stated that the Seminoles would move if a council of chiefs agreed that the lands in the west were suitable. After seeing the lands the chiefs council agreed and signed a document stating that the lands were acceptable. However, returning to Florida, they quickly renounced their previous statement and claimed they had been forced to sign the document. Despite this, the treaty was ratified by the US Senate and the Seminoles were given three years complete their move.

Further complicating the problem with the Seminoles was the fact that many run away slaves were living among the Seminoles. Some as free men and some as slaves to the Seminoles. There was much friction along the Georgia-Florida border as slave catchers made incursions across the border into what the Seminoles considered their land to retake escaped slaves. This would lead to reprisals by the Seminoles who would attack plantations and settlements in north Florida and south Georgia.

In October 1834, the Seminole chiefs informed the Indian agent at Fort King, Wiley Thompson, that they had no intention of moving. Thompson began receiving reports that the Seminoles were gathering weapons. The commanding officer at Fort King alerted Washington that force may be required to compel the Seminoles to relocate. After further discussions in 1835, some of the Seminole chiefs agreed to move, however the most powerful leaders, including Osceola, refused. With the situation deteriorating, Thompson cut off the sale of weapons to the Seminoles. As the year progressed, minor attacks began occurring around Florida. As these began to intensify, the territory began preparing for war. In December, in an effort to reinforce Fort King, the US Army directed Major Francis Dade to take two companies



**Rendition of the Seminole attack on Maj. Dade's column.**

north from Fort Brooke (Tampa). As they marched, they were shadowed by the Seminoles. On December 28, the Seminoles attacked, killing all but two of Dade's 110 men. That same day, a party led by the warrior Osceola ambushed and killed Thompson. These actions would culminate in the US Government declaring a second war with the Seminole tribes.

War with the Creek tribes broke out at the same time after groups of Creeks who refused to comply with the removal act, attacked plantations in Alabama and Georgia. The local governments called on the federal government for assistance.

### **Operations of Commandant Hendersn's Marines with the Army and the Navy's Mosquito Fleet**

President Jackson would quickly realize that, although he had tried to have the Marines abolished just a year before, the small US Army could not manage both of these situations without the assistance of the Marine Corps and Navy, and militias from several states.

In May 1836, as hostilities with the Creeks and Seminoles intensified, Colonel Commandant Archibald Henderson offered the services of his Marines. In a entry in his diary on 21 May 1836 Major General Thomas Jesup, who would command operations against the Creeks and later against the Seminoles, would write: *'Colonel Henderson volunteered his corps which was accepted by the Secretary of War, and sanctioned by the President.'*

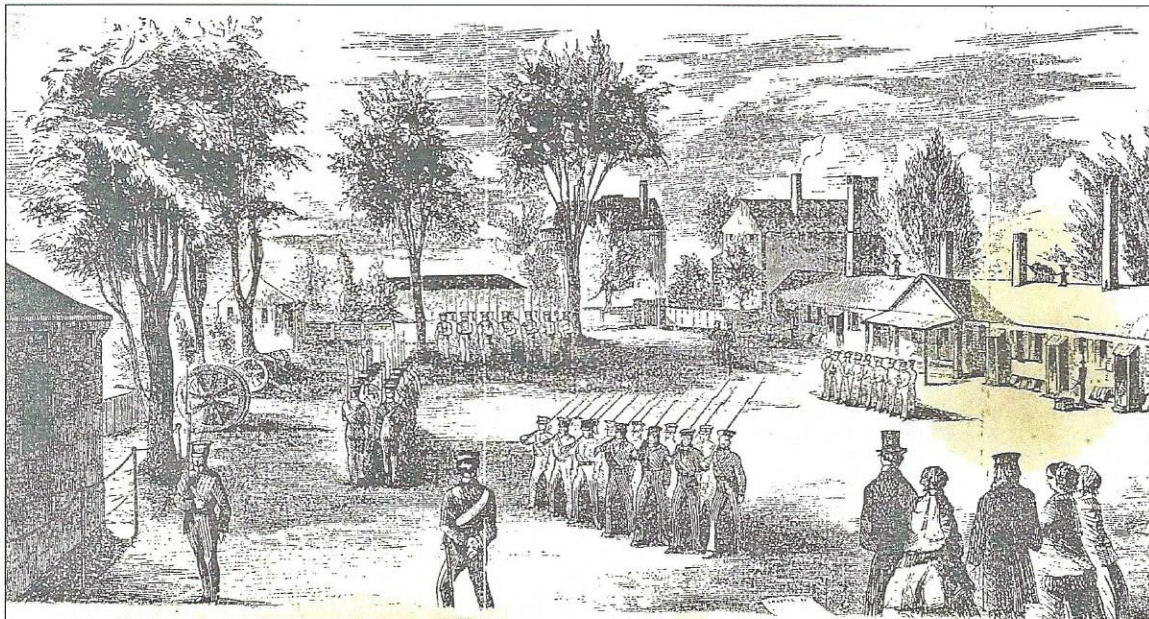
Henderson sent word out to all the Marine detachments at the various Naval Yards to pack their gear and prepare to move south. The total strength of the Marine Corps on active duty at this time was 43 officers and 1,298 enlisted men, including both those at navy yard barracks and at sea. The Commandant would leave his home at 8th & I Streets in Washington to personally lead this consolidated two battalion "Regiment" of Marines against the Creeks and Seminoles. This would be the only time in the Corps' history that a serving Commandant would lead troops in the field. Col. Henderson would allegedly leave a note on his door stating *"Gone to fight the Indians, be back when the war is over."* Each of the commands were quick to mobilize, leaving only a "corporals guard" behind to man each post. This would be the largest mobilization of the Corps since the War of 1812, and the first time Marines moved to war on trains. Henderson's Regiment would constitute more than half the total strength of the Corps.



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In addition to the force that Henderson was assembling, Fleet Marines from the West Indies Squadron were dispatched to reinforce the Army troops at Fort Brooke in Florida against the Seminoles. Colonel Henderson's regiment would first be sent to Georgia and Alabama to assist Gen. Jessup against the Creeks.

Jesup would reorganize his Army of the South into two brigades, with Colonel Henderson commanding the Second Brigade (composed of his Marine regiment, the Army's Fourth Infantry Regiment, a regiment of Georgia volunteers, a battalion of Creek Indians, and an artillery regiment).



Marine Detachment at drill, Marine Barracks Charlestown Navy Yard, Boston, Massachusetts.

This original woodcut from a newspaper article printed during the era shows Marines at the Charlestown Navy Yard in Boston during drill. Detachments like these would be mobilized to join

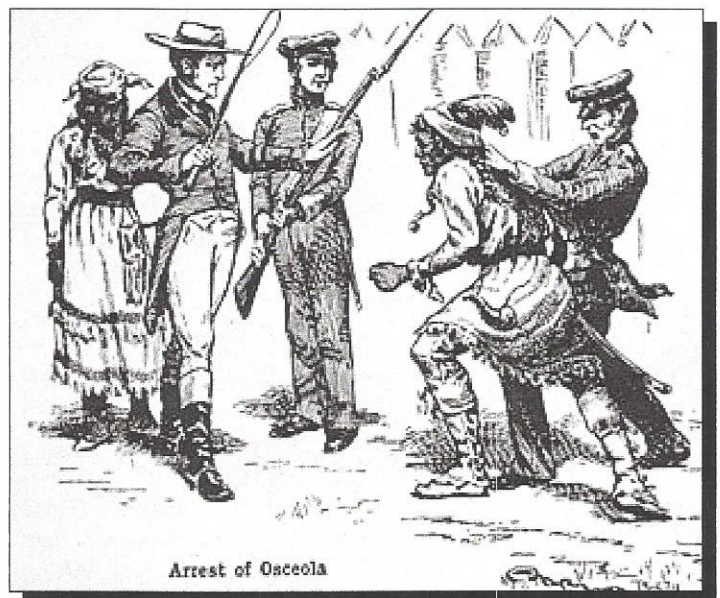
By the end of May Commandant Henderson reported to the War Department in compliance with a General Order directing *"all the disposable force of Marines on shore... to proceed to Alabama"* and link with the Army forces there. On 2 June Commandant Henderson and the 1st Battalion of Marines departed Fort Monroe, Virginia, by steamer for the Georgia coast arriving on 23 June. After a march of 224 miles in 14 days, Col. Henderson's 1st Battalion arrived at Columbus, Georgia. He found that the Creek Indians in that region were also now resisting relocation to the western United States. By 1 July, the 2nd Battalion of Marines under Lieutenant Colonel William Freeman joined Col. Henderson's command near Columbus, Georgia. Over the next few months the combined forces of Army and Marines would subdue the hostile Creeks in the region.

In December 1836, after being victorious in the Creek War, Major General Thomas Jesup with his command, proceeded by Col. Henderson and his Marine regiment that August, were sent south to take over operations against the Seminoles. His predecessors, Brigadier General Edmund P. Gaines, Major Gen. Winfield Scott, and finally Florida Governor Richard Call, had each in turn tried to draw the Indians into a conventional pitched large-scale battle. All had failed to gain satisfactory results. Gen. Jesup would be adaptable in his methods and try new tactics. He sought to grind down the Seminoles and with the addition the forces he brought with him ultimately increased the overall force in Florida to around 9,000 men, including Regular Army troops, volunteer militia from Florida and other states, the Navy, Marines, and Creek warriors fighting for the Americans. In January 1837

Working in conjunction with the US Navy and Marine Corps, and utilizing all the resources that he could, Jesup began to turn American fortunes. When his attempts to use the same tactics as his predecessors failed, he improvised new methods such as using mounted Marines along with other cavalry forces as quick reactionary forces. Jesup employed hammer and anvil operations, sweeps of areas, keeping the Seminoles on the move. He had his troops destroy abandoned villages, burn crops, and confiscate livestock and anything that the Seminoles needed for existence.

Jesup also used negotiations, and going against official policy, allowed those Seminoles that surrendered and agreed to relocate, to take their Negro slaves and tribal members with them to the west rather than surrender them to be returned to slavery or in many cases of those that were born free, be condemned to a life of slavery.

On January 26, 1837, American forces, spearheaded by Henderson's Marines, won a victory at Hatchee-Lustee. Shortly



Arrest of Osceola

This period sketch depicts the capture of Seminole chief Osceola.



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thereafter, the Seminole chiefs approached Jesup regarding a truce. Meeting in March, an agreement was reached which would allow the Seminoles to move west with "their negroes, [and] their 'bona fide' property." As the Seminoles came into camps, they were accosted by slave catchers and debt collectors. With relations again worsening, two Seminole leaders, Osceola and Sam Jones, arrived and led away around 700 Seminoles. Angered by this, Jesup resumed operations and began sending raiding parties into Seminole territory. In the course of these, his men captured the leaders King Philip and Uchee Billy. Jesup also eventually captured several more chiefs including Osceola by luring them in under flags of truce. In all Jesup managed to obtain the surrender of almost 3,000 Seminoles and had them transported to new lands in the west. Many of the Indians being relocated would be escorted by detachments of Marines.

Although thousands of Seminoles had been relocated, several hundred remained and steadfastly continued the fight. General Jesup would be replaced by Brigadier General Zachary Taylor in May of 1838. By that July Colonel Henderson and his regiment of Marines serving with the Army would return to Washington, DC. However the Marines from the West Indies Squadron would continue to serve in Florida primarily as part of the "Mosquito Fleet" of small boats patrolling the interior waterways. They would continue to conduct operations against the Seminoles for the next four years.

Gen. Taylor would militarily divide Florida into districts with a fort built in the middle of each with units constantly patrolling their district. This would include Marines utilizing small boats for river patrols. Taylor also continued negotiations with the Indians. He was able to eventually obtain a cease fire by promising the remaining Indians that they could stay in Florida. Unfortunately this would not last and both Jesup and Taylor would ultimately, be condemned by the public for their actions against the Seminoles and for the unauthorized promises made.

Taylor would be replaced by Brigadier General Walker Armistead in 1840, and he year later by Colonel William Worth. By now the remaining Seminoles had been pushed into the south of Florida below Lake Okeechobee. Worth continued to make effective use of the Marines and sailors of his "Mosquito Fleet" of canoes and small boats under the command of Navy Lt. McLaughlin. They made inroads all through the Everglades, keeping the remaining small bands of Indians constantly on the move and destroying their crops. Whenever Indians were captured they were enticed to lead the Marines to bands still in hiding. In 1842 Col. Worth would finally convince the War Department that there was but a small number of Seminoles left, and got permission to negotiate an end of hostilities and leave them in the Everglades. This ended the longest of the Indian wars. By this time, it was estimated there was less then 300 Seminoles left in southern Florida, and no longer posed a threat. On 20 June 1842 the



Marines and sailors of the "Mosquito Fleet" on patrol along the waterways of the Everglades in 1841.



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Secretary of the Navy disbands the Florida "Mosquito Fleet" Squadron and orders its sailors and Marines to Norfolk, Virginia. By 14 August The Second Seminole War is terminated officially.

This war, like so many others before and after, would see many new innovations. The first use of "India" rubber boats; wagons with extra wide 'tires' to deal with sandy roads, and rubber linings to keep cargo dry. Riverine warfare was also introduced in the Everglades and many rivers in Florida. New weapons technology, such as the breach loading capability of the Hall rifle and Colt's repeating (revolving cylinder) rifle would be tested in combat.



In a painting by Col. Donna Neary a Marine sergeant holds the experimental Hall breach loading rifle.

In the course of the fighting, senior Marine officers would bring their experience from the War of 1812, and other junior officers would gain valuable experience which would serve them well in the Mexican-American War and the Civil War. Colonel Archibald Henderson, veteran of the War of 1812 and Commandant of the Marine Corps for 39 years (1820-1859), led his men through the Creek Campaign in Alabama, and the Seminole Campaign in Florida until it appeared that the Seminoles were defeated. In addition to his Marines he would have the 4th US Infantry Regiment, Artillery, assorted friendly Creek Indian volunteers, and Alabama Militia troops under his command. With Henderson's departure from Florida Lt.Col. Samuel Miller, who had commanded the Marines at the battles of Saint Leonard's Creek and Bladensburg during the War of 1812, would take command of the Marine force and be given the responsibility to oversee Fort Brooke

The Marines were quick to acclimatize to an unconventional enemy and the environment they were placed in. They proved to be versatile and adaptable to many of the varied tasks given to them. The Marines built and manned forts, they made amphibious landings, they patrolled rivers and swamps in specially made canoes, they lead volunteer Creek Indian troops, and even formed a mounted force of 'horse Marines' for use as a quick reactionary force. The tactical doctrine developed and experience gained in the Florida Everglades would be their introduction to the unconventional "Small Wars" operations and tactics that would serve them well in interdiction operations around the world over the next century.

The Second Seminole War proved to be the longest and costliest conflict with a Native American group fought by the United States.



The above Marine is attired in the Fatigue Dress prescribed in 1831. This became the common field uniform in the Everglades.

and the troops and harbor at Tampa Bay, then later the area south of Tampa.

Marine Major John Reynolds would fight with distinction in the Mexican War and would lead a battalion of Marines at the Battle of First Manassas in the Civil War. Captain John Harris, who commanded the Marine mounted detachment against the Seminoles would become the Commandant of the Marine Corps in 1859. Both officers would not only fight against the Creeks and Seminoles but were tasked with escorting many of the Indians to the Arkansas Territory along what became know as the "Trail of Tears".

The Corps' actions during this period would help redefine the role of the Marines, and reestablish their reputation as a professional (and needed) fighting force. The adaptability and accomplishments of those Marines became a keystone in the foundation of the Marine Corps of today.

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