

The Battle of Wahoo Swamp

Dates: November 17, 18, and 21, 1836.

Location:

The Withlacoochee River, The Wahoo Swamp

Commanders and Forces:

Governor Richard K. Call - Regular troops: Battalion of U.S. Artillery

Brigadier General Robert Armstrong: Tennessee volunteers

Lieutenant Colonel H. Brown (Captain 4th Artillery): leading a regiment of Friendly Creek Indians warriors

Colonel John Warren: Battalion Mounted Florida Volunteers - with Evans' and Myrick's foot companies, Florida Militia

Summary:

The Battle of Wahoo Swamp stands as an endpoint to an unsuccessful campaign during the summer and fall of 1836 to remove the Seminoles from the forests and swamps between Tampa and Ocala (near the current towns of Bushnell and Floral City). Florida's governor Richard K. Call, along with U.S. Army troops, Tennessee Volunteers, Friendly Creek soldiers, and the Florida Militia, totaling around 1,830 men, trekked south along the Withlacoochee River in search of Seminoles. The battle consisted primarily of three skirmishes that took place on the 17th, 18th, and 21st of November when the U.S. forces engaged and pursued the natives. During the three days of fighting, Call's army suffered approximately eleven soldiers killed in action, including Major David Moniac, and about forty men received wounds.¹ The battle resulted in a Seminole retreat into the forest, which the Army commanders decided not to follow based on their lack of supplies. Call's inability to detain or defeat the Seminoles reflected a failure of the campaign's mission. Due to ineffective results, on December 9th, the Army relieved Richard Call of his command in favor of Thomas S. Jesup.²

Lead-up:

In the summer of 1836, Florida's governor Richard K. Call, in his dual role as brigadier general of the Florida militia, planned an offensive campaign against the Seminoles around the Withlacoochee River in the western part of central Florida. Troop delays, lack of supplies and

¹ "Engagement in the Wahoo Swamp E. F. Nov. 17, 1836," in Returns of the Killed and Wounded of United States Troops Regulars and Volunteers During the War with the Seminole Indians in Florida from June 1835 to August 1842, 26-28.

² John Missall, and Mary Lou Missall, *The Seminole Wars: America's Longest Indian Conflict*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004), 120-121.

rations, as well as natural factors, such as flooding, prevented the offensive from taking place until late fall.³ During this time, Gov. Call was suffering from malaria but continued his command despite his illness.⁴

A mid-October attempt to cross the Withlacoochee River, according to Call, was thwarted by floods that left the river impassable, so the troops marched back to Fort Drane. However other accounts remark that attempts to cross on October 10th were pushed back by Seminole fire.⁵

On November 10, 1836, troops under Gov. Call's command left Fort Drane.⁶ After about a thirty-mile march, the troops crossed the Withlacoochee River on November 13th. Four regular soldiers drowned during the river crossing, including Joseph Sharpe and Jacob Bangs.⁷

Colonel William Trousdale, of the Tennessee militia, moved to attack a known Indian and Negro village; however, the towns had already been abandoned so the soldiers burned the villages and took one hostage. To search for where the Seminoles had gone, Gov. Call split his forces along the two banks of the Withlacoochee River and marched South.⁸

Day One – Nov. 17, 1836

On November 17th, the army discovered the Seminole camp by a hammock, and Colonel Alexander Bradford's 1st Regiment of Tennessee Mounted Volunteers engaged.⁹ The troops dismounted and pushed into the hammock, and within half an hour "the enemy was defeated and driven from the ground."¹⁰ The Seminoles fled, leaving supplies and horses at the battlefield.¹¹

The total number of Seminole warriors is unknown. However, twenty remained dead on the field after the battle, and the official record remarks that "in wounded the enemy must have suffered severely."¹²

³ C. S. Monaco, *The Second Seminole War and the Limits of American Aggression* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2018), 84.

⁴ Monaco, *The Second Seminole War and the Limits of American Aggression*, 84.

⁵ Richard J. Procyk, *Guns Across the Loxahatchee: Remembering the Seminole Wars* (Florida Historical Society Press, 1999), 66.

⁶ John T. Sprague, *The Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of the Florida War* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1848), 162.

⁷ Sprague, *The Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of the Florida War*, 532, 534.

<https://www.fold3.com/image/310835430?rec=299810549>

⁸ Missall and Missall, *The Seminole Wars: America's Longest Indian Conflict*, 120.

⁹ John L. Williams, *The Territory of Florida* (New York: A.T. Goodrich, 1837), 261; "Engagement in the Wahoo Swamp E. F. Nov. 17, 1836," in Returns of the Killed and Wounded of United States Troops Regulars and Volunteers During the War with the Seminole Indians in Florida from June 1835 to August 1842, 26.

¹⁰ Williams, *The Territory of Florida*, 261; "Engagement in the Wahoo Swamp E. F. Nov. 17, 1836," in Returns of the Killed and Wounded of United States Troops Regulars and Volunteers During the War with the Seminole Indians in Florida from June 1835 to August 1842, 26.

¹¹ Williams, *The Territory of Florida*, 261.

¹² "Engagement in the Wahoo Swamp E. F. Nov. 17, 1836," in Returns of the Killed and Wounded of United States Troops Regulars and Volunteers During the War with the Seminole Indians in Florida from June 1835 to August 1842, 26.

For the U.S. Army, the casualties consisted of one killed, and nine or ten wounded, one mortally depending on the account.¹³

Day 2 – Nov. 18

On Nov. 18th, the army gave chase and fought “a short battle... near a hammock outside the cove” on the east side of the swamp.¹⁴ Capt. Trousdale prepared to advance into the hammock with mounted units on the flanks, when the Seminoles opened fire. After moving forward slowly, the order to charge was given and after about half an hour the Seminoles retreated.¹⁵

The 1st and 2nd Regiments of Tennessee Volunteers, from Gen. Armstrong’s brigade, engaged in the fighting. They numbered around 500-550 men, and battled an estimated 600-700 Seminoles.¹⁶

The Seminoles left 25 of their warriors dead on the field, but total casualty estimates vary due to their tendency to carry the wounded and dead from the battlefield. The U.S. Army suffered three killed and between twelve and fifteen wounded depending on the source.¹⁷ The commanders decided to wait until the next day to bring the troops from the west side of the Withlacoochee River before starting their advance on the Wahoo Swamp.

Day 3 – Nov. 21

On the 21st, the united force under Gov. Call’s command marched on the Wahoo Swamp. As Call described, the force consisted of:

A Battalion of U.S. Artillery, acting as Infantry and formed from skeleton companies of the 1st, 2d, 3d and 4th Regts of Artillery, numbering about 250 men, Gen. Armstrong's Brigade of Tenn. Volrs, about 800; the regiment of Friendly Creek Indians, commanded by Lt. Col. H. Brown (Capt. 4 Art.) of 650 warriors, and Col. Warren's Battalion Mounted Fla. Volunteers, with Evans' and Myrick's foot companies, Fla. Militia, about 130 men, amounting in all to 1,830 men.¹⁸

¹³ Williams, *The Territory of Florida*, 261; “Engagement in the Wahoo Swamp E. F. Nov. 17, 1836,” in Returns of the Killed and Wounded of United States Troops Regulars and Volunteers During the War with the Seminole Indians in Florida from June 1835 to August 1842, 26. Wounded numbered 10 on William’s list and 9 on the Returns.

¹⁴ Missall and Missall, *The Seminole Wars: America’s Longest Indian Conflict*, 120.

¹⁵ Williams, *The Territory of Florida*, 261, 262.

¹⁶ “Engagement in the Wahoo Swamp E. F. Nov. 18, 1836,” in Returns of the Killed and Wounded of United States Troops Regulars and Volunteers During the War with the Seminole Indians in Florida from June 1835 to August 1842, 27.

¹⁷ Williams, *The Territory of Florida*, 261; “Engagement in the Wahoo Swamp E. F. Nov. 18, 1836,” in Returns of the Killed and Wounded of United States Troops Regulars and Volunteers During the War with the Seminole Indians in Florida from June 1835 to August 1842, 27.

¹⁸ “Engagement in the Wahoo Swamp E. F. Nov. 21, 1836,” in Returns of the Killed and Wounded of United States Troops Regulars and Volunteers During the War with the Seminole Indians in Florida from June 1835 to August 1842, 28.

The army advanced in columns towards the hammock, received fire, then attacked. The Seminoles were pushed back through the hammock and swamp and across a stream, where they took up a defensive position.¹⁹

To check the depth of the creek for a possible crossing, Maj. David B. Moniac, the commander of the Creek volunteers, waded in the water, and was shot dead. The army commanders determined that casualties would be high if they pressed across the stream. As they did not know if they had the supplies to pursue a long distance, they decided not to continue their offensive.²⁰ The following day, the army began marching for Volusia.²¹

On this day, losses included five regulars, one Tennessean, and three friendly Creeks, including Major Moniac.²²

Aftermath

After the Battle of Wahoo Swamp, the army marched back to the supply depot in Volusia. This marked the end of a rather unsuccessful campaign.²³

On December 9, 1836, Gov. Call was relieved of command and replaced with Maj. Gen. Thomas Sidney Jesup.²⁴

¹⁹ Letter from B.K. Pierce to Call on November 26, 1836.

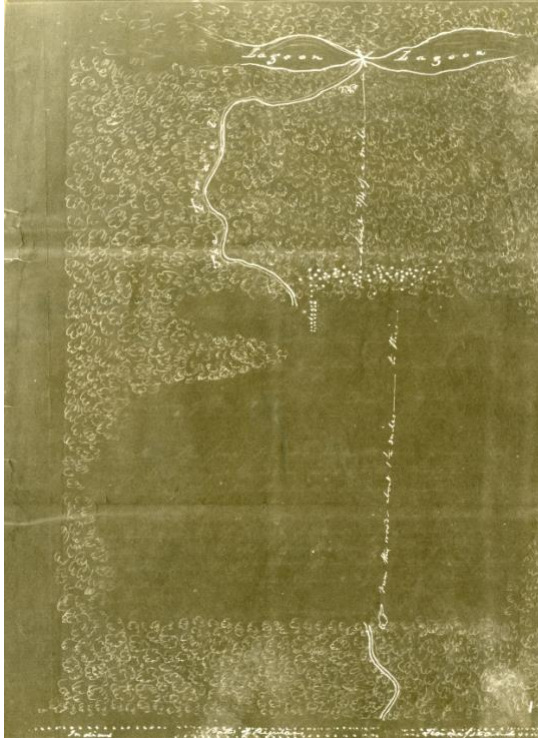
²⁰ Missall and Missall, *The Seminole Wars: America's Longest Indian Conflict*, 120.

²¹ Williams, *The Territory of Florida*, 263.

²² Williams, *The Territory of Florida*, 263.

²³ Williams, *The Territory of Florida*, 264.

²⁴ Missall, and Missall, *The Seminole Wars: America's Longest Indian Conflict*, 120.



November 27, 1836. Letter to Secretary of Navy (Branch) from R.K. Call regarding incident along the Withlacoochee River regarding Indians
<https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/267440?id=21>

Maps - Missall – 110 and Prince Diary – 76, 82, 83, 84

Brevets for services in Florida :

Harvey Brown – Captain 4th Art. N.J. – Major – Nov. 21 1836 – For gallant conduct on several occasions, and general efficiency against the Fla. Ind.

W. G. Freeman – 1st Lieut. 4th Artillery, (July 7, '36) Va. Bt. Capt. Dec. 2, '36 - 1st Lieut. Nov. 21 '36 - For gallantry on several occasions and uniform good conduct in the war against the Fla. Ind.

<https://archive.org/stream/originprogressa03spragoog#page/n576/mode/2up> - - Spragues

Monaco, C. S. *The Second Seminole War and the Limits of American Aggression*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2018. – page 84

Procyk, Richard J. *Guns Across the Loxahatchee: remembering the Seminole Wars*. Florida Historical Society Press, 1999.

Missall, John, and Mary Lou Missall. *The Seminole Wars: America's Longest Indian Conflict*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004.

Laumer, Frank ed. *Amidst a Storm of Bullets: The Diary of Lt. Henry Prince in Florida 1836-1842*. Tampa: University of Tampa Press, 1998.