



By Richard Procyk

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Military Trail

The history of South Florida's Military Trail began during the Second Seminole Indian War, 1835-1842.

The war was fought to remove the Seminoles west of the Mississippi and return their black allies to the plantations in Georgia and the Carolinas. The U.S. Government expected an easy victory and was surprised by the Seminoles' stiff resistance and the battles they won during the early months of the war.

President Andrew Jackson, frustrated by a floundering army, began replacing inept generals who failed to understand Indian tactics. The process continued until Major General Thomas S. Jesup was finally selected and took command on December 9, 1836.

General Jesup's grand plan and strategy to contain the Seminoles was to send four columns of troops into South East Florida in a multi-pronged assault from all sides hoping to trap the Seminoles and force them to stand and fight. With the largest force of the war including the Army, Navy and the Marines, General Jesup's columns drove into the Lake Okeechobee area and the head waters of the Loxahatchee River where the Army met the Seminoles in the last three standing battles of the Second Seminole War: Battle of Okeechobee-Christmas Day, December 25, 1837, and

the two battles of the Loxahatchee River, January 15 and January 24, 1838 (Jupiter).

After the Battle of the Loxahatchee (January 24, 1838), the Seminoles, badly outnumbered, fled south in the direction of New River. General Jesup's column of fifteen hundred troops: 600 Dragoons, 400 Artillery, and 500 Tennessee Volunteers, marched five miles northeast to establish Old Fort Jupiter on January 28, 1838 (Pennock Point).

The search for the Seminoles and their trails continued south of Ft. Jupiter. When a freshly made trail was discovered, General Jesup ordered Major William Lauderdale and his Tennessee Volunteers to cut a trail south from Ft. Jupiter to New River. On March 2, 1838, Major Lauderdale led 233 Tennessee Volunteers and the "construction pioneers" who cleared roadways through the dense hammocks for the detachment and its wagons.

The construction pioneers were the men of Company D of the United States Third Artillery Regiment, commanded by First Lt. Robert Anderson (Commander at Ft. Sumpter during the Civil War).

To bypass the marshes and lagoons, the men marched

along the three to five mile wide pine ridge which extended south from Indian River Inlet to Ft. Dallas (Miami).

It took four days for Major Lauderdale's command to hew a trail to New River, covering 63 miles. Army topographer, Frederick Searles designated the trail "Lauderdale's Route", and later became the road for all future Indian military operations from Ft. Jupiter to New River and Ft. Dallas.

Continued use for military operations during the next twenty years of this conflict, the road became known as "Military Trail".

While at New River, Major Lauderdale built a fort know later as Ft. Lauderdale. Military Trail reminds us of the dramatic history of the Seminole Wars that took place in our own back yards.