

4th of September. This was the first brevet ever conferred in the American army.

BATTLE OF OKEE-CHOBEE.

THIS battle was fought on the 25th of December, 1837, between the Americans, under Colonel Taylor, and the Seminoles and Mickasukies, commanded by their chiefs, Alligator and Sam Jones. The United States army had now been in the Florida service for two years, and the colonel commanded the first brigade, stationed at Fort Gardner, south of the Withlacoochee. On the 19th of December he received a communication from Major-General Jesup, informing him that all hopes of bringing the war to a close by negotiation, through the interference or mediation of the Cherokee delegation, were at an end, and that Sam Jones, with the Mickasukies, had determined to "fight to the last." It also directed him to proceed with the least possible delay, against any portion of the enemy he might hear of, and to destroy or capture them.

The next morning after receiving this communication, the colonel left an adequate force under two officers to protect the depot, and marched with the remainder of his command, having with him but twelve days' rations, his means of transportation not enabling him to carry more. His force was composed of Captain Morris's company of the fourth artillery, consisting of thirty-five

men; the first infantry, under Colonel Davenport, one hundred and ninety-seven strong; the fourth infantry, under Lieutenant-Colonel Foster, two hundred and seventy-four; the Missouri volunteers, one hundred and eighty; Morgan's spies, forty-seven; and thirty pioneers, thirteen pontoniers, and seventy Delaware Indians; making in all, exclusive of officers, one thousand and thirty-two men. The greater part of the Shawnees had been detached, and the remainder refused to accompany him, under pretext that many of them were sick, and the rest without moccasins.

The army moved down the west side of the Kissimmee, in a southern course, towards Lake Istopoga. The colonel was induced to take this route for several reasons. He had learned that a portion of the enemy were in that direction, and imagined that if General Jesup should fall in with the Mickasukies, and drive them before him, they might attempt to escape by crossing the Kissimmee, from the east to the west side of the peninsula, between Fort Gardner and its entrance into Okee-Chobee, in which case he might be near at hand to intercept them. He also wished to overawe such of the Indians as had been making propositions to give themselves up, but had been slow to fulfil their promise; to erect block-houses and a small picket-work on the Kissimmee, forty or fifty miles below the fort, for a third depot. By this means he hoped to obtain a knowledge of the country, as he had no guide to rely on, and also to open a communication with Colonel Smith, who was operating by his orders, up the Caloosehatchee or Sanybel river.

In the evening of his first day's march, Colonel Tay-

lor met the Indian chief Jumper, with his family and a part of his band, consisting of fifteen men, some of them with families and a few negroes, on his way to deliver himself up, in conformity to a previous arrangement with the colonel. The whole consisted of sixty-three persons, and were conducted by Captain Parks, a half-breed at the head of the friendly Indians, both Shawnees and Delawares. The army encamped that night near the spot, and the next morning, having sent on Jumper and his party to Fort Frazer, the colonel continued his march, at the same time sending forward three Seminoles to gain intelligence concerning the position of the enemy. About noon of the same day he sent forward one battalion of Gentry's regiment, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Price, who was ordered "to pick up any stragglers that might fall in his way; to encamp two or three miles in advance of the main force; to act with great circumspection, and to communicate promptly any occurrence of importance that might take place in his vicinity."

About ten o'clock in the morning, Taylor received a note from Colonel Price, stating that the three Seminoles sent forward in the morning had returned; that they had been near where Alligator had encamped, twelve or fifteen miles in advance of his present position; that Alligator had left there with a part of his family four days before, under pretext of separating his friends and relatives from the Mickasukies, preparatory to his surrendering with them; that there were several families remaining at the camp referred to, who wished to give themselves up, and would remain there until Colonel Taylor took

possession of them, but who were in great danger of being carried away that night by the Mickasukies, who were encamped at no great distance from them.

In consequence of this intelligence Colonel Taylor put himself at the head of his mounted men a little after midnight, and after directing Lieutenant-Colonel Davenport to follow him early in the morning, he commenced his march, joined Price, crossed Istopoga outlet, and soon after daylight took position at the encampment referred to, and had the satisfaction to find that the inmates, amounting in all to twenty-two individuals, had not been disturbed. One of their number informed him that Alligator was anxious to deliver himself up; and this individual, who was an old man, was subsequently employed on a mission to inform the chief that, if sincere in his professions, he should have a conference next day at a place designated on the Kissimmee.

Upon the arrival of Colonel Davenport with the infantry, Colonel Taylor moved on to the place of meeting with Alligator, near which, as he reached it late in the evening, he encamped. At eleven o'clock the old Indian returned, bringing a very equivocal message from Alligator, whom, according to his report, he met accidentally. He also stated that the Mickasukies were still encamped on the opposite side of the river, where they had remained for some days, with a determination to fight the United States troops. In this humor the colonel determined to indulge them as soon as possible. Accordingly, the next morning he took the old Indian for his guide, crossed the Kissimmee, and reached Alligator's encampment, which was situated on the edge of "Cabbage-Tree Hammock,"

in the midst of a large prairie. From the appearance of this and other encampments in the vicinity, together with the many evidences of slaughtered cattle, it was evident that the population must have numbered several hundreds.

Before Taylor commenced this march he had laid out a small stockade fort for the protection of a future depot, and left the pioneers, pontoniers, eighty-five sick and disabled infantry, and a portion of the friendly Indians, together with all his artillery and heavy baggage, under the protection of Captain Monroe. This enabled him to move much faster than if encumbered by wounded and baggage, and brought him nearly on a level with his wary enemy.

Soon after the arrival, the spies surprised another encampment situated at a small distance from the first, in the midst of a swamp. It contained a small party of young men, one old one, and some women and children, who raised a white flag, and were taken prisoners. They were Seminoles, and informed Colonel Taylor that the Mickasukies, headed by A-vi-a-ka (Sam Jones) were at the distance of about twelve miles, securely encamped in a swamp, and prepared to fight. Upon receiving this information the commander dismissed the old man, and after making provision for those who came in, moved forward under guidance of the Seminoles, toward the camp of the Mickasukies.

Between the hours of two and three in the afternoon, the army reached a very dense cypress swamp, through which they passed with great difficulty, and under continual apprehension of an attack from a concealed foe.

The necessary dispositions for battle were arranged at the same time; but the soldiers crossed without gaining sight of the enemy, and encamped for the night on the opposite side. During the passage of the rear, Captain Parks, who was in advance with a few friendly Indians, encountered two of the enemy's spies, and succeeded in capturing one of them who was on foot. He was a young warrior of great activity, armed with an excellent rifle, fifty balls in his pouch, and an adequate proportion of powder. This Indian confirmed the information previously received from other prisoners, and in addition, stated that a large body of Seminoles, headed by John Cohua, Coacoochee, Alligator, and other chiefs, was encamped five or six miles from the Americans, near the Mickasukies, the latter being separated by a cypress swamp and a dense hammock.

The army moved forward at daylight the next morning, and after marching five or six miles reached another cypress swamp, on the borders of which was a deserted camp of the Seminoles. It had evidently contained several hundred persons, and exhibited very plain manifestations of having been abandoned in a hurry, as several fires were still burning, and quantities of beef lying on the ground unconsumed.

Upon reaching this encampment the troops were again arranged in order of battle, and again disappointed in their expectation of seeing an enemy. After remaining for some time, they crossed the swamp and entered a large prairie in their front, on which two or three hundred cattle and a number of Indian ponies were grazing. Here was captured another young warrior,

armed and equipped like the former. He pointed to a dense hammock on the right, about a mile distant, in which he said the Indians were situated, and waiting to give battle.

In this place the final disposition was made for an attack. The army was drawn up in two lines; Morgan's spies and the volunteers under Gentry, in extended order, formed the first line, with instructions to enter the hammock, and if attacked and hard pressed, to fall back in the rear of the regular troops, out of reach of the enemy's fire; the second line was composed of the fourth and sixth infantry, who were instructed to sustain the volunteers. The first infantry was held in reserve.

These arrangements being completed, the whole force moved on in the direction of the hammock, and after proceeding about a quarter of a mile reached the swamp, on the opposite side of which the enemy were stationed. This was three-quarters of a mile wide, extending on the left as far as the eye could reach, and on the right to a part of the swamp and hammock they had just crossed, through which ran a deep creek. It consisted of an oozy mass of mud and water nearly two feet deep, over which waved a thick growth of coarse "saw-grass," as tall as a man, and was utterly impassable to cavalry, and nearly so to foot. In consequence of this, all the men were dismounted at the edge of the swamp, and the horses and baggage left under a suitable guard. At the same time Captain Allen was detached with the two companies of mounted infantry to examine the swamp and hammock to the right; and in case of not finding



Battle of Okeechobee.

the enemy in that direction, to return to the baggage; but in either case, if he heard a heavy firing, immediately to join Colonel Taylor.

These arrangements being satisfactorily completed, the army crossed the swamp in order of battle. The volunteers and spies had scarcely reached the borders of the swamp, when a heavy fire was opened upon them by a large body of Indians. This was returned for a short time with considerable spirit, but they soon lost their gallant commander, Colonel Gentry, who fell mortally wounded. After this misfortune they fled in disorder, and instead of forming in the rear of the regulars, as had been directed, they retired across the swamp, to their baggage and horses; nor would they again enter into action as a body, although efforts were made by Colonel Taylor's staff to induce them to do so. At this success, the Indians rushed forward upon the second line, at the same time discharging a heavy fire of musketry. They were, however, coolly met and driven back by the fourth and sixth infantry. The heat of battle was principally borne by five companies of the latter; yet they not only sustained it firmly, but continued to advance until their commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Thompson, and his adjutant, Lieutenant Center, were killed; they were then obliged to retire for a short distance, and re-form. So great had been the loss of these companies, that every officer, with a single exception, together with most of the non-commissioned, including the sergeant-major and four of the orderly sergeants, was killed or wounded; and one of them had but *four* members uninjured.

Lieutenant-Colonel Foster, with six companies, amounting in all to one hundred and sixty men, gained the hammock in good order, where he was joined by Captain Noel, with the two remaining companies of the sixth infantry, and Captain Gillam, of Gentry's volunteers, with a few additional men. These, by a change of front, succeeded in separating the enemy's line, and continued to drive them until they reached the Lake Okee-Chobee, which was in the rear of the enemy's position, and bordered their encampment for nearly a mile. As soon as Colonel Taylor was informed that Captain Allen was advancing, he ordered the first infantry to move to the left, gain the enemy's right flank, and turn it. This order was executed with promptness and effect; as soon as the regiment got into position the Indians gave one fire and retreated, being pursued by the first, fourth, and sixth, and some few volunteers, until near night. This chase was a most fatiguing one, as the enemy scattered in all directions, and the troops were obliged to follow over a swampy and rugged surface.

This action was long and severe, continuing from half-past twelve until about three, P. M. The Indians had selected the strongest position of the swamp, and were covered in front by a small stream, whose quicksands rendered it almost impassable. In addition to this, their front was concealed and partly protected by a growth of thickly interwoven hammock, and their flanks were secured by impassable swamps. They numbered about seven hundred warriors, and were led by Alligator, Coacoochee, and Sam Jones.

Colonel Taylor's force amounted to about five hun-

dred men, only part of whom were regulars. In passing the stream they sunk to the middle in mire, and were continually exposed to the fire of the enemy; and for a while during the battle, both parties fought hand to hand. The Americans lost twenty-six killed, and one hundred and twelve wounded. Among the slain were Colonels Gentry and Thompson, Captain Van Swearingen, and Lieutenants Carter and Brook, all of whom fell at the head of their respective commands. The loss of the Indians was never ascertained; they left ten bodies on the field, and doubtless carried away a large number, according to their invariable practice. During the whole engagement the colonel was on horseback, passing from point to point, and cheering his men, though he himself was exposed to the complete range of the Indian rifles.

As soon as the enemy were thoroughly broken, Colonel Taylor turned his attention to the wounded. He had previously ordered an encampment to be formed near his baggage; and to facilitate his operations, he directed Captain Taylor to cross to that spot, and employ every individual whom he might find there, in constructing a small footway across the swamp. By great exertions this was completed a short time after dark, when all the dead and wounded, with the exception of the body of a private, which could not be found, were carried across in litters.

In speaking of this disastrous though successful action, Colonel Taylor, in his official communication to the department, says:—"I trust that I may be permitted to say, that I experienced one of the most trying scenes of my life, and he who could have looked on it with indif-

ference, his nerves must have been very differently organized from my own. Besides the killed there lay one hundred and twelve wounded, officers and soldiers, who had accompanied me one hundred and forty-five miles, most of the way through an unexplored wilderness, without guides, who had so gallantly beat the enemy, under my orders, in his strongest position, and who had to be conveyed back through swamps and hammocks, from whence we set out, without any apparent means of doing it. This service, however, was encountered and overcome, and they have been conveyed thus far, and proceeded on to Tampa Bay, on rude litters, constructed with the axe and knife alone, with poles and dry hides; the latter being found in great abundance at the encampment of the hostiles. The litters were conveyed on the backs of our weak and tottering horses, aided by the residue of the command, with more ease and comfort to the sufferers than I could have supposed; and with as much as they could have been in ambulances of the most improved and modern construction."

The day after the battle Colonel Taylor and his command remained at their encampment, occupied in taking care of the wounded, and in the sad office of interring the dead. They also prepared litters for the removal of the wounded, and detached a portion of the mounted men to collect the horses and cattle which had been left by the enemy. Of the former they found about a hundred, many of which were saddled, and three hundred oxen.

On the morning of the 27th, Colonel Taylor left the encampment, and at about noon next day reached the post on the Kissimmee, where he had left his heavy baggage.

Finding the stockade which he had ordered Captain Monroe to construct, nearly in a state of completion, he left two companies and a few Indians to garrison it, and proceeded towards Fort Gardner. Arriving here, he sent on the wounded to Tampa Bay, with the fourth and sixth infantry; the former to halt at Fort Frazer. He himself remained at Fort Gardner with the first, in order to make preparations to retake the field, designing to do so as soon as his horses could be recruited, and his supplies in a sufficient state of forwardness to justify that measure.

In his despatch, the colonel speaks in high terms of the behavior of the regulars, especially of the sixth infantry, and designates particular actions of the following officers, most of whom had been engaged with him in the campaigns of Florida, and some have since been known in a more conspicuous theatre of action—Lieutenant-Colonel Davenport, Colonel Foster, Major Graham, Captain Allen, Lieutenant Hooper, Captain Noel, Lieutenant Wood, Captain Andrews, Lieutenant Walker, Colonel Gentry, Captain Gillam, Lieutenant Blakely, Captain Childs, Lieutenants Rogers, Flanagan, Hase, Gorden, Hill, Griffin, Harrison, McClure, Major Sconce, Captain Taylor, Lieutenant-Colonel Thompson, Captain Swearingen, Adjutant Center, Lieutenant Brook, Major Brant, and Lieutenant Babbitt. His remarks upon Lieutenant-Colonel Thompson deserve remembrance, as displaying a tenderness of heart and warmth of friendship, which enhances the merit of all his military performances:

"It is due to his rank and talents, as well as to his long and important services, that I particularly mention

Lieutenant-Colonel A. R. Thompson, of the sixth infantry, who fell in the discharge of his duty at the head of his regiment. He was in feeble health, brought on by exposure to this climate during the past summer, refusing to leave the country while his regiment continued in it. Although he received two balls from the fire of the enemy early in the action, which wounded him severely, yet he appeared to disregard them, and continued to give his orders with the same coolness that he would have done had his regiment been under review, or on any parade duty. Advancing, he received a third ball, which at once deprived him of life; his last words were—'Keep steady, men, charge the hammock—remember the regiment to which you belong.' I had known Colonel Thompson personally only for a short time, and the more I knew of him, the more I wished to know; and had his life been spared, our acquaintance, no doubt, would have ripened into the closest friendship. Under such circumstances, there are few, if any other than his bereaved wife, mother and sisters, who more deeply and sincerely lament his loss, or who will longer cherish his memory, than myself."

The battle of Okee-Chobee had a very beneficial influence upon the efforts to subdue the Indians of Florida. An officer writing from Fort Bassinger subsequent to it, says: "The Indian prisoners now admit that they lost twenty killed on the ground, and a great many wounded, in the fight with Colonel Taylor. They had a strong position and fought well, but were terribly whipped, and have never returned near the ground since. Jumper, Alligator, and other warriors afterwards came

in, and were subsequently employed by the colonel in inducing their hostile companions to surrender themselves; by this means large numbers delivered themselves to the Americans. Indeed the general policy pursued by Colonel Taylor while in Florida, together with his industry and perseverance, and the hardy constitution he possessed, rendered his services immensely valuable to the government in subduing the savages and giving peace and safety to the southern frontier. The country was not insensible of his value, and the department at Washington conferred on him the rank of Brigadier-General, by brevet, to take date from the battle of Okee-Chobee.

GALLANT ACTION OF CAPTAIN THORNTON ON THE RIO GRANDE.

WHEN General Taylor was encamped opposite Matamoras, it was reported that the Mexicans were crossing the river to surround him. This made frequent and active reconnoissances necessary.

In consequence of the rumored intentions of the enemy, Captain Thornton was despatched on the 24th of April, 1846, to the crossing, above the fort, and Captain Ker below. Accompanying Thornton were Captain Hardee, Lieutenants Mason and Kane, and sixty-one men. After proceeding about twenty-six miles, they encountered a Mexican, who reported that at a short distance, the enemy were stationed to the number of two