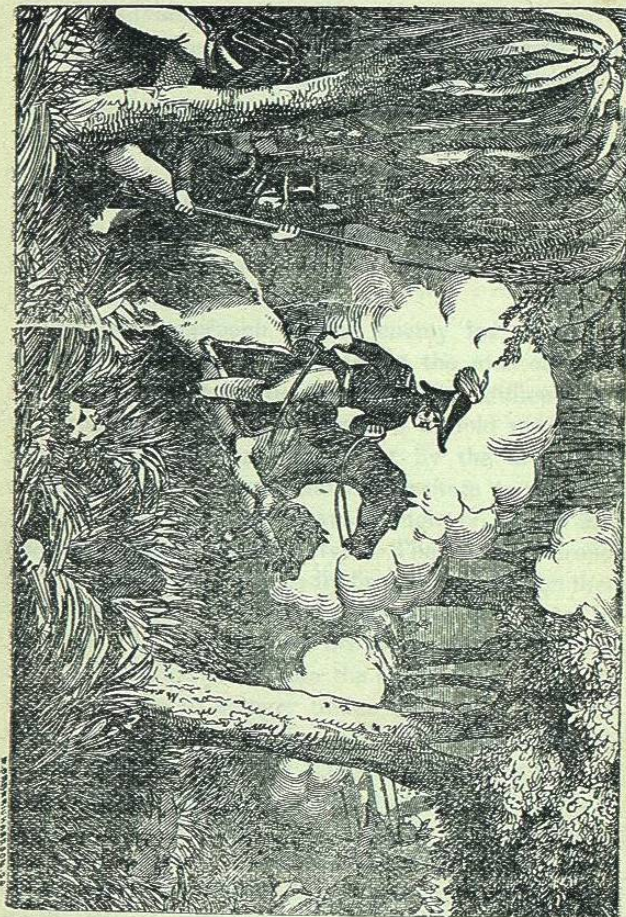


CHAPTER II.

Commencement of the Florida War.—Severe Battle of Okee-cho-bee.—Charge of the Missouri Volunteers.—Brave conduct of the Regular Troops.—Colonel Taylor everywhere in the Fight.—Power of the Indians broken.—Colonel Taylor Brevetted Brigadier General for his brave conduct.—Assigned the Command of the First Department of the Army.—Account of his movements at Fort Bassinger.—An amusing Anecdote.—General Taylor and the Missouri Legislature.—His Agency in the Employment of Bloodhounds in the Florida War.

At the breaking out of the Florida or Seminole war Colonel Taylor was at Fort Crawford, Prairie du Chien, built by him, where he had been stationed for four years. In 1836 he was ordered to Florida, though he was then on furlough. He cheerfully relinquished it, however, to obey the call of his country. He was placed in command of a separate column, composed of the First, Fourth, and Sixth infantry, some artillery, and the Missouri volunteers. But notwithstanding his efforts to meet the enemy, they successfully evaded him until the 25th of December, 1837, when he discovered his vicinity to Alligator, Sam Jones and Co-o-coo-chee, at the head of seven hundred Indians, all well armed, and most skilful marksmen. They had chosen their position with great judgment, in a dense hammock, perfectly concealed and strongly fortified, and were confident of victory. Their front and one flank were protected by a low swamp, almost impassable, and the other flank rested on lake Okee-cho-bee.



by which it was securely protected. They had therefore the advantage of position, if not of numbers on their side, Colonel Taylor's forces amounting to about one thousand men. As soon as he ascertained where they were posted, however, he determined to attack them without delay. No considerations of danger, of numbers, or advantage of position had any power to deter him from attacking an enemy "wherever found, or in whatever numbers." On the contrary, the dangers to be encountered but nerved him the more firmly to meet them.

The only approach to the enemy led through a swamp covered with saw-grass, in the mud of which his troops sunk knee deep. This pass, difficult as it was from this cause, was rendered tenfold more dangerous by being perfectly swept by the fire of the enemy. Colonel Taylor did not hesitate to make the attack. The engagement was brought on by the Mississippi regiment in gallant style. They dashed through a most destructive and deadly fire poured in upon them from every thicket and concealment, and from the tree tops. This murderous fire was accompanied with the most infernal yells from the savage foe. The volunteers began to stagger under the shock, and were finally seized with a panic, and broke and fled in wild disorder. The officers of the Sixth Regiment of regulars promptly and boldly threw themselves in front of their troops, and led them gallantly to the charge. They were nobly seconded by the First Regiment, commanded by Colonel Taylor himself in person, and by the Fourth, who assailed their right flank with terrible effect. The enemy could not long withstand the shock of these veterans. They were quickly thrown into disorder and driven in confusion from their strong

position, after a contest of three hours. The conflict was one of the fiercest and most fatal of the whole war, and so dispirited and weakened the enemy that they were never after able to collect a sufficient force to resist openly the American arms. In the engagement the Americans lost one hundred and twenty-eight officers and men in killed and wounded. Amongst the former were the brave and accomplished Lieutenant-Colonel Thompson, Captain Van Swearingen, Colonel Gentry, of the Missouri volunteers, and Lieutenants Brooke and Carter. Lieutenant Walker, who went into the engagement with twenty men, had only three left—seventeen had been killed or wounded!

Colonel Taylor was everywhere to be found in the thickest of the fight, where the balls flew fastest, and the danger the greatest, encouraging and urging on his men. Nothing could resist his onsets. His coolness and presence of mind reanimated those whose power of endurance had begun to fail, and gave new ardor to others. His presence inspired all with confidence and gave assurance of victory. Never was there a commander who possessed the power of infusing his own indomitable spirit into his troops in a more remarkable degree than Colonel Taylor. Wherever he is found all doubt of victory disappears, and his men fight with a perfect conviction of finally triumphing: such was the case at Okee-cho-bee, and such has been the case in all his engagements since.

The description of the bloody and brilliant battle of Okee-cho-bee, and the incidents preceding and connected with it, have been designedly brief, with a view of introducing Colonel Taylor's own detailed report of the engagement. This is too minute and interesting, and paints too forcibly the terrific scene to be omitted,

or to be supplied by any account drawn by those who did not witness and participate in it. The report of Colonel Taylor also contains a statement in detail of all his operations in the field, from the 19th of December to the 4th of January. On the 4th of January, succeeding the battle, Colonel Taylor thus wrote to Brigadier General Jones:

"On the 19th ultimo, I received at this place a communication from Major General Jesup, informing me 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, Sam Jones, with the Mickasukies, having determined to fight it out to the last, and directing me to proceed with the least possible delay against any portion of the enemy I might hear of within striking distance, and to destroy or capture him.

"After leaving two officers and an adequate force for the protection of my depot, I marched the next morning, with twelve days' rations (my means of transportation not enabling me to carry more,) with the balance of my command, consisting of Captain Munroe's company of the Fourth artillery, total thirty-five men, the First infantry, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Foster, two hundred and seventy-four; the Sixth infantry, under Lieutenant-Colonel Thompson, two hundred and twenty-one; the Missouri volunteers, one hundred and eighty; Morgan's spies, forty-seven; pioneers, thirty; pontoneers, thirteen; and seventy Delaware Indians, making a force, exclusive of officers, of one thousand and thirty-two men; the greater part of the Shawnees having been detached, and the balance refusing to accompany me, under the pretext that a

number of them were sick, and the remainder were without moccasins.

"I moved down the west side of the Kissimmee, in a south-easterly course, towards Lake Istopoga, for the following reasons: 1st. Because I knew a portion of the hostiles were to be found in that direction; 2nd. If General Jesup should fall in with the Mickasukies and drive them, they might attempt to elude him by crossing the Kissimmee, from the east to the west side of the peninsula, between this and its entrance into the Okee-cho-bee, in which case I might be near at hand to intercept them; 3rd. To overawe and induce such of the enemy who had been making propositions to give themselves up, and who appeared very slow, if not to hesitate in complying with their promises on that head, to surrender at once; and lastly, I deemed it advisable to erect block-houses and a small picket work on the Kissimmee, for a third depot, some thirty or forty miles below this, and obtain a knowledge of the intervening country, as I had no guide who could be relied on, and by this means open a communication with Colonel Smith, who was operating up the Caloosehatchee, or Sangbel river, under my orders.

"Late in the evening of the first day's march, I met the Indian chief Jumper, with his family and a part of his band, consisting of fifteen men, a part of them with families, and a few negroes, in all sixty-three souls, on his way to give himself up, in conformity to a previous arrangement I had entered into with him. They were conducted by Captain Parks and a few Shawnees. He (Parks) is an active, intelligent half-breed, who is at the head of the friendly Indians, both Shawnees and Delawares, and who I had employed to arrange and bring in Jumper and as many of his people as he could pre

vail on to come in. We encamped that night near the same spot, and the next morning having ordered Captain Parks to join me and take command of the Delawares, and having dispatched Jumper, in charge of some Shawnees, to this place, and so on to Fort Frazier, I continued my march, after having sent forward three friendly Seminoles to gain intelligence as to the position of the enemy.

"About noon the same day, I sent forward one battalion of Gentry's regiment, under command of Lieutenant-Colonel Price, 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 that might take place in his vicinity important for me to know. About 10, P. M., I received a note from the colonel, stating that the three Seminoles sent forward in the morning had returned; that they had been at or near where Alligator had encamped, twelve or fifteen miles in his advance; that he (Alligator) had left there with a part of his family four days before, under the pretext of separating his relations, &c., 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 we took possession of them, unless they were forcibly carried off that night by the Mickasukies, who were encamped at no great distance from them.

"In consequence of this intelligence, after directing Lieutenant-Colonel Davenport to follow me early in the morning with the infantry, a little after midnight I put myself at the head of the residue of the mounted men and joined Lieutenant-Colonel Price, proceeded

on, crossing Istopoga outlet, and soon after daylight took possession of the encampment referred to, where I found the inmates, who had not been disturbed. They consisted of an old man, and two young ones, and several women and children, amounting in all to twenty-two individuals. The old man informed me that Alligator was very anxious to separate his people from the Mickasukies, who were encamped on the opposite side of the Kissimmee, distant about twenty miles, where they would fight us. I sent him to Alligator to say to him, if he were sincere in his professions, to meet me the next day at the Kissimmee, where the trail I was marching on crossed, and where I should halt.

"As soon as the infantry came up I moved on to the place designated, which I reached late that evening and where I encamped. About 11 p. m., the old Indian returned, bringing a very equivocal message from Alligator, who, he stated, he had met accidentally also, that the Mickasukies were still encamped where they had been for some days, and where they were determined to fight us.

"I determined at once on indulging them as soon as practicable. Accordingly, next morning, after laying out a small stockade work for the protection of a future depot, in order to enable me to move with the greatest celerity, I deposited the whole of my heavy baggage, including artillery, &c., and having provisioned the command to include the 26th, after leaving Captain Munroe with his company, the pioneer, pontoneers, with eighty-five sick and disabled infantry, and a portion of the friendly Indians, who alleged that they were unable to march farther, crossed the Kissimmee, taking the old Indian as a guide who had been captured the day before, and who accompanied us with great apparent re-

luctance, in pursuit of the enemy, and early the next day reached Alligator's encampment, situated on the edge of Cabbage-tree Hammock, in the midst of a large prairie, from the appearance of which, and other encampments in the vicinity, and the many evidences of slaughtered cattle, there must have been several hundred individuals.

"At another small hammock, at no great distance from Alligator's encampment, and surrounded by a swamp impassable for mounted men, the spies surprised an encampment containing one old man, four young men, and some women and children. One of the party immediately raised a white flag, when the men were taken possession of, and brought across the swamp to the main body. I proceeded with an interpreter to meet them. They proved to be Seminoles, and professed to be friendly. They stated that they were preparing to come in; they had just slaughtered a number of cattle, and were employed in drying and jerking the same. They also informed me that the Mickasukies, headed by A-vi-a-ka, (Sam Jones,) were some ten or twelve miles distant, encamped in a swamp, and were prepared to fight.

"Although I placed but little confidence in their professions of friendship, or their intentions of coming in yet I had no time to look up their women and children, who had fled and concealed themselves in the swamp, or to have encumbered myself with them in the situation in which I then was. Accordingly, I released the old man, who promised that he would collect all the women and children and take them in to Captain Munroe, at the Kissimmee, the next day. I also dismissed the old man who had acted as guide thus

far, supplying his place with the four able warriors who had been captured that morning.

"These arrangements being made, I moved under their guidance for the camp of the Mickasukies. Between two and three, P. M., we reached a very dense cypress swamp, through which we were compelled to pass, and in which our guide informed us we might be attacked. After making the necessary dispositions for battle, it was ascertained that there was no enemy to oppose us. The army crossed over and encamped for the night, it being late. During the passage of the rear, Captain Parks, who was in advance with a few friendly Indians, fell in with two of the enemies' spies. Between two and three miles of our camp, one on horseback, the other on foot, and succeeded in capturing the latter. He was an active young warrior, armed with an excellent rifle, fifty balls in his pouch, and an adequate proportion of powder. This Indian confirmed the information which had been previously received from the other Indians, and, in addition, stated that a large body of Seminoles, headed by John Cohua, Co-a-coo-chee, and, no doubt, Alligator, with other chiefs, were encamped five or six miles from us, near the Mickasukies, with a cypress swamp and dense hammock between them and the latter.

"The army moved forward at daylight the next morning, and after marching five or six miles, reached the camp of the Seminoles on the border of another cypress swamp, which must have contained several hundred, and bore evident traces of having been abandoned in a great hurry, as the fires were still burning, and quantities of beef lying on the ground unconsumed.

"Here the troops were again disposed in order of

battle, but we found no enemy to oppose us; and the command was crossed over about 11 A. M., when we entered a large prairie in our front, on which two or three hundred head of cattle were grazing, and a number of Indian ponies. Here another young Indian warrior was captured, armed and equipped as the former. He pointed out a dense hammock on our right, about a mile distant, in which he said the hostiles were situated, and waiting to give us battle.

"At this place the final disposition was made to attack them, which was in two lines, the volunteers under Gentry, and Morgan's spies, to form the first line in extended order, who were instructed to enter the hammock, and in the event of being attacked and hard pressed, were to fall back in rear of the regular troops, out of reach of the enemy's fire. The second was composed of the 4th and 6th infantry, who were instructed to sustain the volunteers, the 1st infantry being held in reserve.

"Moving on in the direction of the hammock, after proceeding about a quarter of a mile, we reached the swamp which separated us from the enemy, three-quarters of a mile in breadth, being totally impassable for horses, and nearly so for foot, covered with a thick growth of saw-grass, five feet high, and about knee-deep in mud and water, which extended to the left as far as the eye could reach, and to the right to a part of the swamp and hammock we had just crossed through, ran a deep creek. At the edge of the swamp the men were dismounted, and the horses and baggage left under a suitable guard. Captain Allen was detached with the two companies of mounted infantry to examine the swamp and hammock to the right, and in case we should not find the enemy in that direction, was to