

SOUTHEAST FLORIDA

IN THE

THIRD SEMINOLE WAR:

ROADS, SCOUTS AND EXPEDITIONS

Part I

Edited with Introduction by Joe Knetsch

Major Justin Dimick, 1st United States Artillery, was an outstanding veteran of America's wars by the time he reached his command at Fort Dallas. An 1819 graduate of West Point, he served in the Second Seminole War in Florida and was cited for his "Gallant and Meritorious Conduct" in a battle fought near the plantations of General Joseph Hernandez in May of 1836. Shortly thereafter, he was assigned to the difficult task of patrolling the Canadian border where he distinguished himself at the skirmish at Rouse's Point. During the Mexican War, he saw action at the battles of Palo Alto and Resaca-de-la-Palma. His other actions included the battles of Churubusco, Contreras and the storming of Chapultepec (September 13, 1847) where he was wounded. For his service in these engagements, he was breveted to lieutenant colonel, and then to colo-

nel for his service in the assault and capture of Mexico City. Dimick also saw brief service in the Indian scare of 1849-50 in Florida. By the time he

made his appearance on Biscayne Bay in late 1856, Justin Dimick was a widely respected and decorated veteran of many campaigns, and no

From the Cooley Massacre of 1836 to the establishment of three forts named after Major William Lauderdale and the launching of numerous expeditions into the Everglades, Broward County's part in the Second Seminole War is well known to students of local history. The region's role in the Third Seminole War, however, has been less well-publicized. With most of the military action taking place in central and southwest Florida, the lower east coast found itself on the periphery of the conflict.

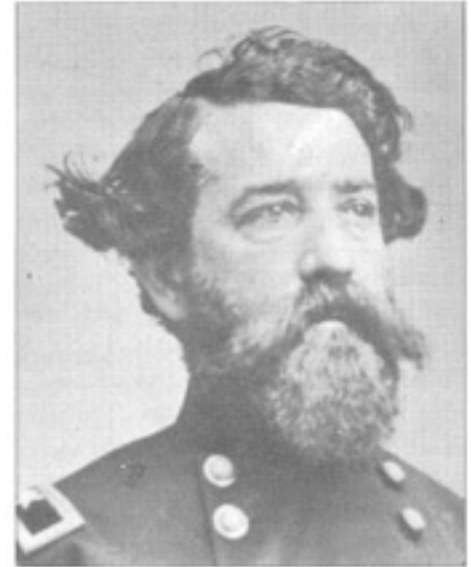
Nevertheless, military authorities recognized the region's strategic significance and its topographical challenges, conducting scouting expeditions and building roads through the wilderness. Dr. Joe Knetsch, historian with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, has assembled and edited reports of these activities from the National Archives' series of "Letters Received by Headquarters, Department of Florida," and written the introduction. One of the most prolific contributors to the Legacy, Dr. Knetsch is a former Broward County Historical Commissioner. This article is the first of two parts, and will conclude in the Summer/Fall 1999 issue of Broward Legacy.



Justin Dimick (courtesy of Massachusetts Commandery Military Order of the Loyal Legion and the U. S. Army Military History Institute).



Abner Doubleday



John M. Brannan

stranger to Florida.¹

Accompanying Dimick at Fort Dallas were two men familiar to many, Captain Abner Doubleday and Captain John M. Brannan. The former, the alleged founder of America's pastime, baseball, has been featured in numerous articles about south Florida and needs little explanation, particularly since his exploits during the Civil War have made him even more widely known and respected. In common with his commanding officer, he served in Mexico, under General Zachary Taylor and saw heavy duty at the Battle of Monterrey.² Captain Brannan is often remembered by Floridians as the man most responsible for maintaining Fort Zachary Taylor for the Union during the War Between the States.³ Brannan, born in 1819 in the District of Columbia, received his appointment from West Point in 1841 and served at a number of posts until the outbreak of the Mexican War, where, like Dimick, he served with distinction, being breveted a captain for his services and wounds. Again, like Dimick, he was transferred to Florida at the beginning of the Third Seminole War. At the commencement of the Civil War, he commanded the tiny garrison at Fort Zachary Taylor in Key West. As with his colleagues, Robert Anderson at Fort Sumter and Adam J. Slemmer at Fort Pickens, he

resolved to hold the post for the Union. In this effort he was successful.⁴

Among the duties assigned to these men were the scouting of the southeast Florida frontier and the construction of roads between posts, some recreated and others relocated from the Second Seminole War. The most important road detail involved that between New River and Fort Dallas. As will be seen in the following letters, this was not always an easy detail. Doubleday's force was responsible for the construction of the road between New River and Arch Creek, which proved to be less arduous than anticipated. Captain Brannan's force, with much less distance to cover between Arch Creek and Fort Dallas, had a severe test ahead of them. Cutting the road through the ridge country south of Arch Creek, forced them to work long and hard to complete a road usable by wagon traffic.

The scouts and reconnaissance missions, which are also recorded below, provide some of the most vivid detail of how Broward County looked in its virginal state. Current residents will not recognize some of the more familiar areas because of their pre-settlement conditions. Additionally, some of the reports indicate a much more populated area than has earlier been assumed. Many Native-

American encampments are noted which do not appear on any maps, charts or archeological indexes. The settlement pattern indicated by these encampments is similar to that followed by later inhabitants, chiefly along rivers and streams. The Native-American population used the abundant waters for transportation purposes. Because road building was a very labor intensive activity, south Florida Indians, lacking the tools, laborers and need to construct roads, chose to use their expertise in canoe making to its best advantage. This fact helps to explain why the United States Army, with its heavy camp equipage and need to transport men, forage, food and materials from fortification to fortification, had to construct their own roads, with little guidance from previously built arteries of internal communication.

All of the following letters were obtained from one primary source: "Letters Sent, Register of Letters Received and Letters Received by Headquarters, Troops in Florida, and Headquarters, Department of Florida: 1850-1858," Roll Number 7, Letters Received by Headquarters, Department of Florida Registered, A-G. 1857 (Washington: National Archives, 1979), Microfilm M1084. The original spelling, punctuation and abbreviations have been retained. The entire set of this correspondence

troops on such kind of duty, & should be increased when they are employed in making roads. Hardly a day passed but I had to issue an additional hard biscuit & increase the allowance of pork nearly 1/4 lb. to each man.

I would also suggest that I think the men employed under me in making this road are entitled to the benefits of the act of March 2nd 1819, entitled "An act to regulate the pay of the Army when employed on fatigue duty" & hope the allowance may be granted.

Accompanying this report is a map of the road.

I am sir, very respectfully
Your obt Sert.
J. M. Brannan
Capt. 1st Artillery
Comg. Co. "B"

To
1st Lieut. P. T. Wyman
Adjt. 1st Artillery
Fort Dallas. Fl.

Fort Dallas, Florida

January 12th, 1856 [57]
Colonel.

In obedience to your instructions, I proceeded with my company, (having a detachment at Fort Dallas) to the natural bridge at Arch Creek to ascertain the practicability of constructing a waggon road from that point to Old Fort Lauderdale. I now have the honor to report the road practicable for the whole distance to New River and to state that a heavily loaded five mule team has passed over the route and returned.

After leaving Arch Creek which is spanned by a natural bridge there remain but two streams to be crossed; the Rio Ratones [Snake Creek] and a small branch which runs into it. Both have been bridged in a firm and substantial manner and the road carefully constructed between the starting point and the

Ratones. From this last stream to New River, a distance I estimate at fifteen miles, the route selected passes through pine barren, deficient in stones, which therefore presents little or no obstacle to the passage of loaded teams. Five miles from New River a hammock intervenes skirted with large palmettos for nearly a third of a mile. The palmetto roots have been cut away and another dry hammock on the border of New River has also been cut through for about the same distance. In this last portion of the route we fell naturally into an old road, now grown up, leading from the houses of some former settlers to a landing upon the River. I was now on the opposite side to Fort Lauderdale but in the opinion of the guide some ways above it. I therefore attempted to continue on beyond the landing, but was soon stopped by coming upon a wet hammock bounded by an immense wet prairie, presenting insuperable obstacles to my further progress.

2d. Lieut. Webber of my company who explored the route from Fort Dallas to Arch Creek and who constructed the road from that point to the Ratones, has undergone great hardship and displayed great zeal and ability in the execution of the duties entrusted to him. I am also very

much indebted to Captain Duke, the guide, for his services, without which I should frequently have been at a loss.

As extensive wet prairies abound both on the right and left of the road the route chosen is the only possible one which could be constructed. We found these prairies furnished good and wholesome water at almost any point by digging a few feet. A train therefore is not necessarily obliged to camp at any particular spot. The course I have taken during each days exploration can be better seen by a glance at the accompanying sketch than by a minute description. I wish to say however in general terms that the company have had much severe and arduous labor to encounter, in building bridges, lifting heavy pieces of timber, fitting abutments together in the water, during the cold of the Northers, wading through swamps, and bivouacing in the rain. Many of these hardships it is true are incident to ordinary service in the field but others are not so. They have also suffered great pecuniary loss nearly all of them having returned with clothes entirely worn out. Their clothes have been torn by the thorny vines of the thickets through which they have had to struggle, and soiled and stained by the swamps and



Artist's depiction of military bridge-building in Florida during the Seminole Wars.

their shoes rendered worthless by the sharp points of the rocks on which they have had to travel. Under these circumstances it appears to me they have a just claim to the compensation referred to in the requisitions given to soldiers engaged in "surveys," "the construction of roads" and "Military bridges". All of which is respectfully submitted.

Abner Doubleday
Capt. 1st Artry
Commanding Company "E"

Head Qrt 3rd District Florida
Fort Dallas

2nd Feby 1857

Sir.

I have to report that on the 31st January I received Orders No. 2 & 3 of this year and 6 of the last, also Special Order No 80 dated 29 December, directing a waggon road to be made to New River and ordering Company L 4th Artillery to take post on that River. No order has been received assigning any Troops to occupy Forts McRae and Jupiter, when these Troops are ordered I would respectfully recommend that for the present, the former be supplied from Fort Center and the latter from Fort Capron, and that small boats may be sent with these troops and also with Company L 4th Artillery, ordered to occupy Fort Lauderdale, for the reason that I have scarcely small boats sufficient for the Troops occupying this post.

I have also to report that the water is too low in the Everglades at the present time for them to be navigated by boats. I had great Difficulty in getting a small boat up the left branch of the Miami, and in the right branch there is not water to float a batteau over the rapids. I walked into the Everglades for over a mile, and could find only about three inches in the deepest channels.

I am Sir very Respectfully
Your most obt servt.

J. Dimick
Bvt Col & Major
Comg 3d District

Major Francis N. Page
Asst. Adj. Gen.
Dept. of Florida

Head Qrt 3d District of Florida
Fort Dallas

5th Feby 1857

Sir.

Since the receipt of Special order No 14, received about 12 O'Clock today, I again went up the left branch of the Miami and taking another slue I found a very narrow channel of 5 or 6 inches which seemed to continue some distance into the everglades, thinking that possibly the water may deepen after 6 or 7 miles, I have, in obedience to the order, directed Captain Brannan with his company, 50 strong to proceed on the 9th into the everglades, taking General Harney's route to Sanders Island, examining Sam Jones' Island and Pine Island and to proceed west as far as Cabbage Island if he found this route practicable, if not to take a more southern one or any route that the water would permit him to take having in view the general object of his scout. Captain Doubleday with his company is cutting the palmettos out of the road from New River to Rio Ratones, he will be back in 5 or 6 days when I will send him out. I have to report that tho' I found this small channel on my second examination which may float the boats, still from the notch on the stake which had been placed at the edge of the everglades, the water seems to have fallen over 1 1/2 inches in the last 4 or 5 days. I have to request, if there be any in depot, that a quantity of Gutta percha bags may be sent to this post for the use of the men in boats to keep their coffee and sugar dry.



Army dress uniforms from the period of the Third Seminole War, 1855-1858.

I am Sir very
Respectfully Your
Obt servt
J Dimick
Bvt Col & Major 1st Arty
Comg 3d District

Major F. N. Page
Asst. Adj. Genl
Head Qrs Dept.
Florida, Tampa Bay

Fort Dallas Fla.

Feb 13th 1857

Colonel:

I have the honor to report that in obedience to your instructions I proceeded with my company to the bridge constructed over the Ratones, and from there cut a road, which I had previously explored, as far as the projected site of Fort Lauderdale. I also built a bridge over a small stream near the site referred to. This stream is called New River on the map published by the War Department but This is evidently a mistake as it would make two New Rivers not specially connected with each other. I have therefore on the accompanying sketch named it Marsh Creek; it being very short and rising out of a small marsh connected with the Everglades.

As the courses on the enclosed map were taken with a small pocket compass it does not claim to be strictly accurate, but is believed to exhibit the general features of the country faithfully so far as I have had an opportunity of examining them.

I also made a reconnaissance as far north as Middle River to ascertain if a road can be made from Fort Lauderdale to the sea shore. The only obstacle in that direction seemed to be Middle River itself which would require to be bridged.

I am sir

Very Respectfully
Your obedient Servant
Abner Doubleday
Capt 1st Arty.
Commanding Company "E"

Bvt Colonel J. Dimick 1st Artillery
Commanding 3d District of Florida

Head Qrs. 3rd District of Florida
Fort Dallas,

Febry. 14th 1857

Sir.

I observe by Department Orders No. 14 that "the Quartermaster at Fort Myers will send sufficient number of boats to Fort Dallas to complete the equipment of Companies 'B' & 'E' 1st Arty. and to supply Company 'E' 4th Artillery." As no mention is made of any boats for Company 'L' to be stationed at Fort Lauderdale, I would respectfully ask if there was not a mistake in the copy of the order sent to me, putting in 'E' instead of 'L' and that the boats ordered here are intended for the latter company instead of the former.

I am sir,

Very Respectfully
Your obedt. Servant
[unsigned]

Major F. N. Page
Ass't Adj. General
Dept. of Florida

Head Quarters 3d District of Florida
Fort Dallas

15 Feby. 1857

Sir.

I enclose herewith a map and report of Captain Doubleday of the road from Rio Ratones to what he calls Snook Creek, but considered during the Florida War as New River and upon which old Fort Lauderdale was established, and is distant about 3 miles from the Fort established on the beach.

I am Sir, Very
Respectfully Your
obt servt
J Dimick
Bvt Col & Major
Comg 3d Dist.

Captain A. Pleasonton
A. A. Adj. General

Head Qtrs 3rd District of Florida
Fort Dallas

3d April 1857

Sir.

In addition to the report made on my arrival at Fort McRae, I have further to state that I left this post on the 13th March, in command of 'B' & 'E' companies of the 1st, and 'F' & 'K' companies of the 4th Artillery, and encamped on the north side of New River on the afternoon of the second day, being enabled to effect this rapid crossing of the river in consequence of the admirable and cheap raft constructed of empty barrels by Lieut. Tillinghast a few days before the commencement of our march.

On the third day's march about three and four miles from New River we found two very marshy creeks not laid down on any map, over the first we crossed by doubling teams and the assistance of the men at the wheels, but over the second we had to make a temporary bridge of brush, poles and sawgrass. After passing these two creeks, the country between them and

New River having been examined the day before, two companies were kept out daily, one on the right and the other on the left of the road; the route it was necessary for them to take, obliged them to make very long marches, and sometimes it would be very late at night before they reached camp, therefore in order to have the country thoroughly examined, I allowed the companies to alternate, the companies of the 1st Arty out one day, and those of the 4th the next, by which means they were enabled to make long marches on the days of their scout and in a condition to follow up a trail of the enemy, had one been discovered. I should also been in a condition to have brought a large force at any point, where either the scouting might have discovered signs of Indians, I was also enabled to rapidly pass the train over boggy places by always having two companies with me and thus be sure of meeting the scouting companies at the point they were required to be; this was effected except in a few instances when they came in late at night, and one case that of Captain Doubleday, who crossed the marsh near this Chi's village and examined the pine country near the borders of Lake Worth, he was out two days. On my return march I mounted five men and an officer on mules and horses, and kept this party generally scouting on the coast side, while one company of my command was on the borders of the everglades daily without seeing any recent signs of Indians. I herewith enclose a general map showing by different colored lines the route of each company, it will be seen by this map that one company was daily in Cypress bordering the everglades and twice in the everglades in going up and once on the return march. I have also enclosed reports of the commanders of the four companies, of the ground scouted by their companies.

I also enclose a report and

sketch of the route made by Lieut. S. D. Lee, 4th Arty, to whom I gave the command of the pioneer party, and to whom I feel very much indebted for his energy and good judgement displayed in the exercise of this command. I differ with him however in opinion with regard to the road, he says it was generally good in his report, I consider it generally a very heavy road, even in this dry season very many places were boggy, the train passed over them without much difficulty. 1800 lbs. including Forage was the heaviest load the best teams had when we commenced our march, and these were lightened every day. In the wet season the road would be

impassable with a loaded team without great labor expended upon it, even when I passed over it, which was in the most favorable season, I made causeways besides those at the second creek near New River, and should have been obliged to have made more, had not the teams been lightly loaded.

I am sir, Very Respectfully
Your obedt. Servant

J. Dimick
Bvt. Col & Major 1 Aty.
Comg. 3rd District.

Captain A. Pleasonton
A. A. A. Gen'l Dept. Fla.
Fort Myers, Fla.

[To be continued]

NOTES

1. George W. Cullum, *Biographical Register of Officers and Graduates of the U. S. Military Academy*, vol. I (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1891), 213. This source also notes that Dimick served as an instructor of artillery at Fort Monroe, Virginia, and after the outbreak of the Civil War commanded a depot for Confederate prisoners at Fort Warren, Massachusetts. He later served as "Governor" of the Soldier's Home near Washington, D.C. until 1868. He died on October 13, 1871, at the age of seventy-one.
2. *Webster's American Military Biographies* (Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam Company, 1978), 106.
3. Vaughn Camp, Jr., "Captain Brannan's Dilemma: Key West 1861," *Tequesta*, 20 (1960), 31-44.
4. *Ibid.*

Head Qrs 3rd District of Florida
Fort Dallas 2^d Feby 1857

Sir,

I have to report that on the 31st January I received orders No. 243 of this year and 6 of the last, also Special order No 80 dated 29th December, directing a wagon road to be made to West Point and to assign Company I 4th Artillery to take post on that Point. No order has been received assigning any troops to occupy Forts McPhee and Dupont, when these posts are ordered I would respectfully recommend that for the present the former be supplied from Fort Center and the latter from Fort Cooper, and that small boats may be sent with these troops and also with Company I 4th Artillery, ordered to occupy Fort Sandhedeck, for the reason that I have scarcely small boats sufficient for the troops occupying this post.

I have also to report that the water is too low in the neighborhood at the present time for them to be navigated by boats. I had great difficulty in getting a small boat up the left hand of the Mackinaw on the right hand the water was not water to float a batteau on the rapids, I pushed into the neighborhood for one a mile and could pass only about 3 miles in the deepest channels.

I am Sir very
Respectfully
Yours
Most Obedt
J. Dimick
Bvt Col & Major 1 Aty
Comg 3rd Dist

Major Francis S. Page
Capt A. A. Pleasonton
3rd Aty
Dept of Florida