

STATEMENT

OF THE

OFFICERS OF THE MISSOURI VOLUNTEERS,

In relation to the action with the Indians on the 25th December, 1837, in Florida, with a correspondence between said officers and Col. Taylor, and with Major Brant, of the Quartermaster's Department.

APRIL 5, 1838.

Ordered to be printed.

BATTLE OF LAKE OKEECHOBEE.

Report of the officers of the Missouri Volunteers.

We, the undersigned, officers of the Missouri volunteers for Florida, have read with unfeigned surprise the report made by Colonel Taylor, of the 1st Regiment United States infantry, of the battle of Lake Okeechobee, in which we participated. We have not been able to obtain, or even to see this report, at an earlier day, and therefore have not had an earlier opportunity of defending ourselves and comrades in arms from the injurious imputations cast upon us in that report. But we are not deterred by that circumstance from repelling the assault upon the reputation of the Missouri troops, and laying before the country a plain, unvarnished statement of the part borne by them in the action of the 25th December. However much we despise the aspersion as regards ourselves, we feel it incumbent on us to speak at least to wipe the foul blot from the memory of those who can no longer be heard for themselves. We cannot separate and depart in peace to our homes, until we have made an effort to vindicate the memory of the dead.

Although our regiment endured on the march recounted in Col. Taylor's report the extremes of fatigue and hardship, not a murmur was heard. Nor do we now or ever mean to complain of it. It was our lot always to be the first to dismount, penetrate and pass a swamp or hammock, to form on the other side, in order to protect the march of the main body of the army, returning afterwards for our horses where we left them, and to occupy the most exposed and dangerous ground of an encampment. We faltered not under the fatigue, nor shrunk from the danger. We had anticipated this in the campaign, and were prepared to meet it. But we were not prepared for the censure cast upon the conduct of our regiment in the battle, and we will state the facts as they occurred, that our fellow-citizens may judge how far it was merited.

The order of battle described by Col. Taylor is correct. The Missouri volunteers marched to the attack in the front line, met and sustained the

first and only deliberate and most effectual fire from the concealed enemy, and returned it with alacrity and determined spirit. This Col. Taylor admits, but proceeds to say: "when their gallant commander, Col. Gentry, fell mortally wounded, they mostly broke, 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 could they again be brought into action as a body, although efforts were repeatedly made by my staff to induce them to do so." Strange and unaccountable misconception, or yet more wonderful and wilful misrepresentation! That of the 180 men composing the Missouri troops in the action, there were a few individuals who followed the example set them by some older soldiers, and quitted the ground before the action was ended, is perhaps true; but that they "mostly broke," or even any considerable number broke, is utterly unfounded. They mostly not only maintained their ground, but continued to push on the enemy. When Col. Thompson's regiment was about to commence firing, that gallant officer shouted to the volunteers not to precede him into the hammock to which they were pushing, as they would receive the fire intended for the enemy if they did; and, in fact, the volunteers were yet ahead of him, and continued there throughout the action, and were obliged to stoop to avoid his fire.

When the Indians had given way and fled, and not till then, the volunteers busied themselves in taking care of their dead and wounded, and assisted in making the footway of which Col. Taylor speaks, to carry the disabled across the swamp.

That the 6th regiment of infantry, under Co'. Thompson, and the 4th, under Col. Foster, acted most gallantly and merited the high encomiums passed upon them by their commanding officers, we most freely and cordially admit. Aye more, if our feeble voices could add another chaplet to their well earned laurels, we would delight to confer it. Men could not have acted more bravely, and so generally did they perform their duty, that it is scarcely possible to distinguish among them. If any one, however, may be justly singled out of those troops for a combination of intrepidity, military tact, readiness to execute the conceptions of his active mind and bold heart, the distinction is due to Col. Foster, of the 4th. He it was who, by one of those dexterous and bold achievements, which displayed a vigor equal to greater exploits, turned the flank of the enemy, drove him from his position, and determined the till then doubtful fate of the day. We were struck with his valor and his prowess, and admired and commended highly that of most of the regular troops in the action. Nor is it necessary to detract from them to do justice to those who shared their dangers and partook their sufferings. We cannot well speak as freely of the Missouri troops, without assuming somewhat the appearance of boasting. But the fearful list of their killed and wounded speaks better than words how well they did their duty; whilst their position in front, which they maintained from the beginning to the ending of the action, will for itself, without our instituting any invidious comparison, who held the post of danger. Our loss, great as it was, must have been much greater, but that we laid down in the grass whilst we loaded, and raised no higher than the top of it to fire, continuing to advance by crawling. Had the regulars used the same precaution, their suffering would have been much less in the position they held. But it was indispensable in our position in front, as by standing erect, we should have been mowed down by friend and foe.

Such was the position and conduct of Gentry's regiment, whilst the

other corps of Missouri troops in the action, a small part of Colonel Morgan's spy battalion, 33 in number, of whose conduct in the action no mention is made by Colonel Taylor, were posted on the extreme right of the attacking force. If the commanding officer had been uniform in the application of his rule of merit, the suffering of the corps, the conduct of this devoted little band, 10 of their 33 being killed and wounded, would seem to merit from him a passing notice. But even this dreadful havoc nothing flouted them. They continued, like their friends in Gentry's regiment, to battle on till the day was won, and if noticed at all by the commanding officer, are included with those volunteers who "mostly broke." Why, then, did Colonel Taylor slight them, or seek to dishonor them, whilst lavishing praise, no doubt deservedly, on every officer and soldier of the regular army within hearing of the battle? For ourselves, although we received no evidences of kindness from those officers generally, but, on the contrary, from the first moment of our joining the army till we left it, the most continual and positive manifestations of their contempt and dislike towards us, we cannot refrain from expressing our admiration of their valor on the day of battle, and we confess our mortification at the fact that they have not shown themselves equally generous to those who shared equally the dangers and sufferings, and are entitled to share equally the glory of that day. It is indeed a deplorable state of things, equally destructive of good feelings and detrimental to the service, that those called from their homes and families to aid the hired troops of the Government, should, after enduring throughout a tedious and harassing campaign the scorn and contumely of those with whom they act, be covered with shame and dishonor for their toil, by this same paltry feeling of jealousy betwixt the different kind of troops in the field. We had confidently believed that the common labors, common dangers, and common sufferings through which we had passed together, would have obliterated every trace of such a feeling. We had hoped that it would have been forever buried on that sad day devoted by the whole army to the interment of the brave men of each corps, who had fallen together in battle with a common enemy. We had hoped, when the commanding officer visited the dying hero, Colonel Gentry, that honor for his valor, and commiseration for his fate, would have buried the little animosity previously felt and expressed towards him and his men. And when at that memorable hour, Colonel Gentry sent for him and said, "Colonel Taylor, I am about to die; will you grant me one request? Do my men justice," and Colonel Taylor replied, "I will, sir; they have done their duty, and more too," we believed that he would have kept faith with a dying soldier. But it seems that he has deceived him; that with a change from the scene of their deeds, and the death of their commander, the impression of their honorable bearing, wrung from him by the sight of the field covered with their dead and dying, his habitual prejudice and injustice have returned, the pledge then so solemnly given been forgotten, and the words then uttered by him, and heard by numbers, that the Missouri volunteers "had done their duty, and more too," given place in his official report to charges which brand them with disgrace and inglorious flight.

We feel sensibly the delicacy of our attitude in making this exposition. We are aware of the unfavorable, and usually just public opinion, which soldiers must contend with in impeaching the official report of their commanding officer, particularly when they arraign him for what he has spoken of themselves, however prejudicial. But as our leader and immediate com-

mander was struck down in the field of battle, and cannot be heard for himself and his regiment, we are left no alternative to do our comrades and ourselves justice, but to state briefly the material facts of the case, on the honor of officers and gentlemen, and leave them to time, the great expositor of truth, for further confirmation. We trust, however, soon to see an official investigation instituted into the conduct of this march, and inquiry made as to the bearing of each and every regiment, and, if possible, as to each and every man in the battle of the 25th of December last. The orders, special and general, in relation to the volunteers, filed in the Department of War, if nothing more, we hope will be made known to the public. They alone, if preserved, will be found monuments of oppression and flagrant wrong seldom equalled, and indicate that overbearing temper, and contemptuous feeling, and unjust spirit, towards volunteers, to which alone we can attribute that part of the commanding officer's report which calumniates the troops from Missouri. We cannot pause here to particularize on the system of petty annoyances, insult, and injustice, which have crowded our campaign with vexations, nor to mention, further than we have, those chivalric officers who put it in operation. There are some instances, however, when a kinder and more liberal spirit has been evinced, and a disposition to aid and facilitate those who have temporarily assumed the soldier's duties, and to relieve, instead of multiplying, as others have done, the embarrassments incident to such a situation; and of these we were unjust to our feelings did we not distinguish Major Clark, quartermaster at New Orleans, General Atkinson, and his aid, Lieutenant Alexander. In them we have found the urbanity of gentlemen, and the honorable bearing becoming officers, united with the efficiency of men of business. We return them our heartfelt thanks for the kindness we received at their hands.

To the honorable Secretary of War, and our Senator, the honorable T. H. Benton, for the prompt manner in which they vindicated the reputation of the Missouri volunteers from the stigma sought to be fixed on them, we shall ever feel the liveliest gratitude. From an examination of Colonel Taylor's report itself they found, as any one who will give it an attentive perusal may find, a refutation of the charge against the volunteers, and they proclaimed it with a promptitude and effect which does equal honor to their ability and love of justice.

Despite of all the troubles we have undergone, and the many causes of dissatisfaction we have experienced, the anticipated return to our homes would well recompense us, could we carry back with us all the gallant spirits with whom we left them. We look with confidence to an investigation and the test of time to prove that the Missouri volunteers "have done their duty, and more too." But what can we look to solace the widowed heart and fatherless children for their irreparable loss? His country lost in the gallant Gentry a most excellent citizen and a tried soldier, for he distinguished himself at the battle of the Thames early in life in her service, and one who was ever ready at the hour of need; and we lost in him a leader and a friend, and there never was better. But how incalculably greater is his loss in that sphere where he was seen best, at his own fireside, to his own bereaved family. But we trust there may be some consolation in the manner of his death, and in that hope we bear witness to it. Man never died more heroically, more gloriously. Some insinuations had been made against the valor or efficiency of his troops which reached his ears; he resolved that

the day of battle should test their truth. Accordingly, he sought and obtained the post of danger for himself and his men. He fell mortally wounded, whilst leading them to the charge, and continued to urge them on, though life was fast ebbing, till taken from the field. Having thus vindicated his men and himself, his last words to the commanding officer before he died, were, "do my men justice." His spirit in truth was for fire at the insinuation, for his was a soul that recked little on life without honor; and "the voice of our brother's blood crieth unto us from the ground," to defend it now that he is gone.

In conclusion, we regret that we have been called thus before the public, but we believe that under the circumstances we could not avoid it.

JAMES CHILES,

Col. Mo. Vol.

JNO SCONCE,

Major.

CORNELIUS GILLIAM,

Capt. 4th co. 1st. reg.

J. B. HENDLY,

Com. 1st. co. Mo. Spies.

F. B. MARTIN,

Act. Capt. Col. Morgan's Spies.

JNO. REED,

1st. Lt. 5th co. 1st. reg. Mo. Vol.

JOS. B. CHILES;

2d. Lt. 5th co. 1st. reg. M. V.

J. L. BALLENGER,

1st. Lt. 3d. co. 1st. reg. M. V.

GEO. W. ALLEN,

2d. Lt. 3d. co. 1st. reg. M. V.

P. M. DORSEY,

2d. Lt. Morgan's Spies.

WM. McDANIEL,

Q. M. Mo. Vol.

H. G. PARKS,

Adj. 1st. reg. Mo. Vol.

JOS. H. REYNOLDS,

Q. M. Sergt. 1st. reg. M. Vol.

JAMES HORNBACK,

Act. Lt. 1st co. Col. Morgan's Spies.

Having examined the official report of Colonel Taylor respecting the battle which was fought on the 25th December last, at Lake Okeechobee, in Florida, I feel it a duty which I owe to my friends and to myself, to say that I was not in that battle, being at the time at Fort Brooke on the sick list. But my gallant little band, who were then under the command of the brave and intrepid Lieutenant Vallindigham, were in the heat of the action. As a proof of this fact, I refer the public to numbers and marks. I only had 16 men in the battle, out of whom one was killed, and Lieutenant Vallindigham and 1st Sergeant Martin and five privates were wounded. I do not pretend to give the particulars of the engagement only as they were

related to me by the officers and men who were actually engaged, and I am bound to believe their statements. I know every man who acted on that important occasion, who belonged to Colonel Gentry's corps, and Morgan's spies, and I believe them to be as brave men as ever lived, Colonel Taylor's report to the contrary notwithstanding. As it regards the treatment of the volunteers in Florida, I will say that the above mentioned report, so far as it speaks on the subject, is substantially true, but the half has not yet been told. I make these remarks in justice to my brother officers and soldiers, who suffered almost every privation in Florida, and that, too, without a murmur.

W. C. POLLARD,

Captain 3d. comp. Mo. Vol.

Correspondence between officers of the Missouri volunteers and Colonel Taylor of the United States army.

FORT BASSINGER,

February 8, 1838.

DEAR SIR: It being understood that the services of the Missouri volunteers are not required longer in Florida, and that it is your intention forthwith to discharge them, those of us whose names are hereunto written cannot think of taking our leave without leaving behind us an humble testimonial of the high regard we entertain for yourself and other officers of your corps with whom we have co-operated, and the deep obligations we are under for the many and continued acts of kindness that we have received at your hands. Whilst we have looked upon your military operations with feelings of decided approbation, which all must feel that are acquainted with the celerity and energy of your movements, we are enabled to subjoin, with great pleasure, that that courtesy and amenity of manners for which gentlemen of the profession of arms have always been eminently distinguished has not, for one moment, been lost sight of, and so broad has been its sphere, that the Missourians have come in for a full share. We cannot close this communication without offering this slight proof of our entire satisfaction with the deportment of our immediate commanding officers, Major Bennet Riley and Major Graham, with whom we have co-operated. In both of these gentlemen we believe we espy qualities that must elevate them to the topmost round of their profession, if opportunities should ever be presented them; and certain we are that, in them both, we have found virtuous and ennobling properties, that have captured our hearts, and imposed obligations upon us that no exertions of ours can ever cancel. We part with them with those kind feelings that we have felt when we have taken leave of our nearest and dearest relatives.

In bidding the army south of the Withlacoochee, in Florida, an adieu, suffer us, through you, to say to Colonel Davenport, Colonel Foster, Majors Wilson, Loomis, and Noel, and indeed to all the officers of the army, that never will we forget our agreeable associations with them, nor the profound obligations we are under to almost every one of them, for some notable favor or kindness, and that in no instance have we a right to murmur.

We beg you to be assured that for yourself, individually, we cherish the liveliest feelings of respect and gratitude, and we are mortified that, at pre-

sent, we can make no other return than to asseverate that we are sincerely grateful, and will associate ever the name of Colonel Taylor with all pleasing reminiscences of Florida.

Very truly,

Your obedient servants,

H. H. HUGHES,

Major Missouri Volunteers.

WM. HENRY RUSSELL,

Captain 7th co. Missouri Vol.

CONGROVE JACKSON,

Capt. 1st Missouri Vol.

J. H. CURD,

Capt. 9th co. 1st reg't Missouri Vol.

P. M. JACKSON,

Lieut. 1st co. Missouri Vol.

JOHN M. WARD,

Lieut. 7th co. Mo. Vol.

JOHN C. BLAKEY,

1st Lieut. 9th co. 1st reg't Mo. Vol.

WM. H. WINLOCK,

2d Lieut. 9th co. 1st reg't Mo. Vol.

Colonel Z. TAYLOR.

HEAD QUARTERS, 1ST BRIGADE,

Army south of the Withlacoochee, Fort Bassinger, Feb. 8, 1838.

GENTLEMEN: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt, this moment, of your too flattering communication of this date, which is more gratifying to me than anything of the kind could be, in relation to my conduct referred to, as it comes unexpected from those who have so largely participated in the difficulties and dangers I have had to contend with.

Let me assure you, gentlemen, that no one could appreciate more highly than myself your approbation of my conduct; and although I may have erred in many instances, in the management of the campaign intrusted to me, yet I can truly say that I have acted for the best, and that my sole object has been to bring the war in which we are engaged to a speedy and honorable termination.

I can sincerely say there is no one who more highly appreciates the sacrifices you have made, in leaving your families and homes to carry on operations against an active enemy in the swamps and hammocks of Florida, in addition to its deleterious climate, as well as the dangers, privations, and difficulties you have so cheerfully encountered on all occasions, and which I flatter myself will be duly appreciated by your country, which, I need not say, will be the case by all who witnessed the same.

Accept, gentlemen, for yourselves collectively and individually, as well as for the officers and soldiers with whom you are now associated, my most grateful acknowledgments of this testimonial of your good opinion, which will long be recollected by me with more pleasure than anything of the kind I have ever received in connexion with my public duties.

Be pleased, also, to accept, through me, the acknowledgments of Majors Riley and Graham, as well as the officers of the regular army with whom

you have been associated, for the handsome manner you have been pleased to speak of them in your communication to me.

Wishing you a safe and speedy return to your homes, and a happy meeting with your families, connexions, and friends,

I am, gentlemen,

Most respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

Z. TAYLOR,

Colonel 1st Reg't U. S. Inf.

To Major H. H. Hughes; Captains W. H. Russell, C. Jackson, and J. H. Ctrd; Lieutenants P. M. Jackson, J. M. Ward, J. H. Blakey, and W. H. Winlock, of the 1st regiment Missouri volunteers.

Letter from officers of Missouri volunteers to Major Brant, of the United States Quartermaster's Department.

From the Argus.

CORRESPONDENCE.

TAMPA BAY, February 16, 1838.

SIR: We, the remaining volunteers from Missouri, brought into the field by our late lamented commander, Col. Gentry, and the spies, by Col. Morgan, cannot think of taking our departure from Florida, which we are about to do, without leaving behind us some testimonial of our profound gratitude to you for the many and repeated evidences you have furnished us of your disposition to administer to all of our comforts, and to all else consistent with your professional duty to serve and befriend us. In the midst of as much business as can devolve upon any individual, and which you have despatched in a manner highly satisfactory to all, and to our utter surprise, you have always been prompt to relieve our many wants, and to make such suggestions as volunteers so much need, and which have contributed to facilitate our services, and render comparatively easy our duties in the arduous campaign that we have made; and which is now about to terminate. We thank you, most sincerely, for the many proofs of the kindness that we have received at your hands, and only regret that it is not in our power to furnish you some more decided mark of our esteem than a mere profession of words.

We are, most respectfully,

Your obedient servants,

A. G. MORGAN,

Of the Spies.

A. H. HUGHES,

Major Missouri Volunteers:

JOHN SCORCE,

Com. Morgan's Spies.

WILLIAM WOLF,

Lieut. Morgan's Spies.

J. HORNBECK,
Lieut.
 CONGRAVE JACKSON,
1st Com. 1st bt. Missouri Vol.
 P. M. JACKSON,
1st Lt. 1st bt. Missouri Vol.
 J. H. CURD,
Capt 9th comp. Mo. Vol.
 J. C. BLAKEY,
1st Lt. 9th comp. Mo. Vol.
 WM. H. WINLOCK,
2d Lt 9th comp. 1st bt. Mo. Vol.
 WM. HENRY RUSSELL,
Capt. 7th comp. Mo. Vol.
 JNO. M. WARD,
2d Lt. 7th comp. Mo. Vol.
 HENRY D. EVANS.

Major J. B. BRANT.

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