

EXTRACTS

FROM

THE MESSAGE OF GOVERNOR CALL

TO THE

*Territorial Legislature of Florida, January 11, 1839, in relation to the Indian hostilities in that Territory, and the means of terminating them.*

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JANUARY 25, 1839.

Submitted by Mr. BENTON, and ordered to be printed.

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Since the last session of the Legislative Council, our frontier settlements have been greatly harassed by the marauding bands of the enemy. Notwithstanding the formidable and well appointed force employed by the Government in prosecuting the war, and in defending the frontier, the struggle with the Seminoles still continues, with all the appalling incidents of savage warfare. During the last summer, numerous and distressing instances occurred, in which whole families were murdered by the midnight attacks of the enemy. The frontier inhabitants were kept in a state of perpetual danger and alarm, and although the troops of the Government were actively employed in their defence, it became necessary, in the opinion of the Executive, on the urgent application of the people and the officers of the exposed districts, to order a portion of the militia into the service. In Middle Florida these troops have been recognised by the Government, and most of them have been mustered and paid for their services. But in East Florida, where a much larger force was employed, the Commanding General did not consider them necessary for defensive operations; in consequence of which, the troops called out from the counties of Alachua and Columbia have not and perhaps will not be paid by the United States. A correct return of the number of officers and men, or of their term of service, has not been received from the county of Alachua; but the officer commanding the militia of Columbia county reports a whole regiment to have been in service, amounting, in the aggregate, to seven hundred and ninety-three officers and men. Whether so large a force was necessary for the defence of the settlements is a question which the Executive is not prepared to decide, as the scene of operations was too remote to enable him to form a correct opinion on the subject. The laws of the Territory require the Executive, in cases of invasion or insurrection, to order out such portion of the militia as he may deem necessary for the defence of our citizens; but, relying on the protection of the army, it was not until repeated outrages had been committed, and a number of lives

had been sacrificed, that recourse was had to the local militia for defence. In adopting this measure at a time when the Indians in small bands hovered on the skirts of every settlement, and every inhabitant was exposed to massacre, it became necessary to invest the officer in command with discretionary power, in relation to the number of troops to be employed, for the purpose of restoring tranquillity, and to insure the safety of those who were exposed to danger. But he was specially instructed to employ no larger force than in his judgment should be absolutely necessary for defensive operations. The tragical occurrences on that frontier for some time preceding and subsequent to the date of this order demonstrates the propriety of the course pursued. It matters not how numerous may have been the regular force engaged on that frontier, or what may have been its efficiency, gallantry, and enterprise; the unquestionable presence of the enemy, the invasion of the country, and the murder of our citizens at their own threshold; or while engaged in cultivating their fields, without discrimination of age or sex, is the best proof that sufficient protection was not given by the army, and that it was necessary and proper that the militia should be called out in the defence of their families and their homes. Under these circumstances, it appears to me that there should be no hesitation on the part of the General Government in paying the troops thus employed. I am not disposed to encourage an extravagant expenditure of the public treasure, or to ask compensation for services which were never rendered. But the troops in question having been called into service consistently with the laws of the Territory, so far as services have been performed I recommend that their claims for compensation be presented in an appropriate memorial to Congress, and that if they should not be paid by the United States, the Territorial Government provide the necessary compensation.

In compliance with a resolution passed at the last session of the Legislative Council, requiring the Executive to furnish provisions for the suffering inhabitants of the frontier, a quantity of corn was purchased and sent to be distributed among the families of Alachua and Columbia in East Florida, and to those of Walton and Washington in West Florida. For information with regard to the amount of money expended for this purpose, I refer you to the reports of the Treasurer and Auditor of the Territory. It is gratifying to learn that, with few exceptions, the provision crops of the last year are most abundant throughout Florida, and although the frontier inhabitants have lived in the midst of danger and alarm, and were exposed to the utmost peril during the whole season of cultivation, their labor has been rewarded with abundance. With a degree of fortitude and perseverance which reflects on them the greatest credit, they have maintained their positions under every trial and every vicissitude, and still present a formidable barrier to the further encroachments of the enemy.

Convinced by three years' experience in prosecuting the war against the Seminoles that they cannot be subdued by the plan of operations heretofore pursued, the Secretary of War has wisely resolved on a change of policy. The plan which he has judiciously recommended for the protection of the frontier settlers, by encouraging the return of those who have been driven from their homes, and organizing the whole force along our exposed borders into companies and battalions for the defence of the inhabitants, and the energy and activity with which he proposes to prosecute

the war to a successful termination, is calculated to give strength to the frontier, and confidence and security to the people of every portion of the Territory. If this plan is carried into execution, it is confidently believed that the whole country which has been desolated by the ravages of the enemy will, in a short time, be re-occupied; the Indians will be driven, and confined within more narrow limits, and the scenes of rapine and murder with which we have been so frequently harassed will no longer be exhibited on our borders. Connected with this plan of defence, an important measure for the expulsion of the enemy has been recommended to Congress. It is proposed to grant a portion of the public lands to those persons who will obligate themselves to settle and improve them. For more than three years this desolating war has been maintained within our limits. Our most experienced generals and our best appointed armies have been unsuccessful in its prosecution, though all has been done which skill, bravery, and untiring perseverance could accomplish. Many of the Indians have been captured or destroyed; every portion of the enemy's country has been invaded; every village, every hut has been demolished; their fields have been laid waste, their cattle driven off; and the nation, broken and dispersed in small fugitive bands, prowl through the wilderness, or hover on the frontier. But even in flight they are unsubdued, and often turn on their pursuers with furious energy, or fall with fatal desperation on the defenceless inhabitants of the frontier. Experience has proven that it is not by the march and countermarch of armies through the enemy's country that he is to be expelled from the land of his nativity. He has only to avoid battle, to evade pursuit for a few days, and the army, exhausted with fatigue and hunger, retires before him; without the fire of a gun, leaving him again in undisturbed possession of the field. It is not from superior bravery or skill in the use of arms that the Indians have thus long resisted our power, but from their mode of life, the nature of the country they inhabit, the congeniality of the climate to their habits and pursuits, and its often fatal consequences to their pursuers. The spontaneous productions of nature supply them with abundant and nutritious food. The wild arrow root, the wild potato, the brier root, the cabbage tree, and the palmetto every where abound. The waters supply them with fish, and the woods with game. Hence, want and famine, the attendant consequences of invasion in every other country and to every people, present no terrors to the wandering Seminole. He finds security, food, and shelter in every hammock and in every swamp. My observation on the result of the measures heretofore pursued for the removal of the Indians have brought me forcibly to the conclusion that it cannot be done without a change of policy. The forest must be subdued before the enemy can be finally conquered. Every inch of ground taken from him must be firmly held by permanent settlers who will cultivate the soil and make the wilderness their home. Under this system the savage would gradually retire before the approach of the civilized man. He would be compelled to abandon every portion of the country susceptible of improvement, and if he should still retreat before the advancing settlements, and seek shelter in the barren wastes and inhospitable everglades, sufficient forces might, in a short time, be drawn from the settlements, and abundant supplies from the cultivated lands of the interior, to prosecute the war to a final close. In order to carry this plan into execution, and to insure the safety of the settlers against the attacks of the enemy, to which they would otherwise

be fatally exposed, they should, in the first place, be required to assemble at some convenient rendezvous, where, after being armed and equipped for service, they should be organized into companies and regiments, and elect their officers. They should then be marched in advance of the present settlements, and located in a compact form, on every portion of the unappropriated land fit for cultivation, in such manner as to give mutual protection and safety to each other. A portion of them should at all times be required to be under arms, and the residue to be employed in making their improvements and in cultivating the land. They should be subject to the rules and articles of war, and entitled to receive the pay, subsistence, and allowance for clothing generally given to troops in the service of the United States; and at the close of the war, each settler should be entitled in fee simple to one quarter section of arable land, to include his improvements, as near as practicable. A further encouragement should be given to emigration and settlement, by the passage of a prospective pre-emption law, conferring the right of purchasing at the Government price one quarter section of land on every actual settler who shall locate himself before a certain period, and continue to inhabit and cultivate until the close of the war. This would invite the emigration of that portion of citizens who may be unwilling to place themselves under the restraint of martial law, and would add to the number and strength of the settlements. Under this encouragement to emigration, it is confidently believed that 10,000 permanent settlers might in a few months be located in the enemy's country, and in a short time the whole peninsula would be so completely occupied as to leave no lurking place for the enemy. The adoption of this plan, while it would most certainly bring this protracted and harassing war to a successful termination, would save millions of public treasure, and thousands of valuable lives. Another important advantage would result from this policy: it would give us population, wealth, and political influence, and forever put to rest the question of your right to admission into the Federal Union.