



MARINE CORPS HISTORY DIVISION

Creek and Seminole Wars

Following success in protecting American commerce in the Barbary Wars and in defending its sovereignty during the War of 1812, the United States began asserting its influence abroad in the first decades of the 1800s, largely promoting American commercial access to foreign markets. Navy ships sailed across the world, with Marines aboard forming landing parties to protect American interests. Closer to home, Marines also undertook larger and more organized expeditionary campaigns as land forces with the Army. The first major use of Marines as an expeditionary land force occurred when President Andrew Jackson ordered the Marine Corps to support the Second Seminole War (1835–42). After Jackson took office in 1829, he advocated for the Indian Removal Act, which he signed into law in 1830. Congress created the law to forcibly remove nearly all Native American tribes from the American east to lands west of the Mississippi River. The act violated previous treaties the U.S. government made with the Creeks and the Seminoles, starting the Second Seminole War in December 1835.

- For more information, see:
 - [*Semper Fidelis: 250 Years of U.S. Marine Corps Honor, Courage, and Commitment*](#)
 - [*180 Landings of U.S. Marines, 1800–1934*](#)

In response, President Jackson ordered the West India Squadron under Navy Commodore Alexander J. Dallas to cooperate with the Army in suppressing the Seminole uprising. The squadron's Marines soon became engaged in several phases of the war. A detachment of Marines and sailors from USS *Constellation* and sloop-of-war USS *St. Louis* (1828) were put under command of First Lieutenant Nathaniel S. Waldron and sent to garrison Fort Brooke, located at the head of Tampa Bay, Florida, until additional Army forces arrived. First Lieutenant Waldron and his men arrived at the fort on 22 January 1836. Army Brevet Major General Winfield Scott arrived in Florida shortly thereafter to assume overall command of the Florida campaign. During one of Scott's operations along the Withlacoochee River in March 1836, the Marines under First Lieutenant Waldron took part in several fights. During the same year, other Marines aboard

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vessels of the West India Squadron supported the Army and worked to protect settlements along the coast of Florida.



USMC Uniform 1834 by Col Donald L. Dickson.
National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection

To the north, the Creeks in southern Georgia and Alabama resisted U.S. efforts to force them from their homes. President Jackson ordered General Scott from Florida to conduct the war against the Creeks, and the Army shifted its main effort from the Seminoles to the Creeks who occupied territory around present-day Columbus, Georgia. With the Army hard-pressed for men to fight in both areas, Colonel Commandant Archibald Henderson volunteered the services of a regiment of Marines for duty with the Army. On 23 May 1836, Jackson issued orders for all available Marines to

report to the Army. Henderson stripped the barracks and navy yards of Marines and managed to move roughly one-half of the entire Marine Corps into the field, with 38 officers and 424 enlisted men forming a regiment of two battalions. By June 1836, the Marines were in Georgia searching alongside the Army's soldiers for holdouts among the Creeks.

- For more information, see:
 - [*180 Landings of U.S. Marines, 1800–1934*](#)
 - [*Semper Fidelis: 250 Years of U.S. Marine Corps Honor, Courage, and Commitment*](#)

With the assistance of the Marines and state militias, the Army forced the Creeks from their lands and displaced them into what was known as the Indian Territory, later Oklahoma, by late summer 1836. Jackson and the U.S. military subsequently turned their attention to Florida's Atlantic Coast and the Seminoles. The new Army commander, Brevet Major General Thomas S. Jesup, developed a concept of operations designed to wear down the Seminoles rather than defeat them in a single decisive battle. Jesup's operational concept was manpower intensive and required that Henderson's regiment of Marines attach to an Army force of roughly 9,000 troops.



General Jesup gave Colonel Henderson command of a brigade that included Army artillery and infantry regiments, state militia, and the Marines. This was the largest force a Marine had commanded ashore to date. Henderson's brigade pressed the Seminoles until May 1837, when he and all but two companies of Marines returned to home stations. The remaining companies and the vessels of the West India Squadron continued to support the Army. Finally, after years of battling the Seminoles, the Florida naval expedition was disbanded between May and August 1842.



Marines Battle Seminoles by John Clymer.
National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection

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 - [*Semper Fidelis: 250 Years of U.S. Marine Corps Honor, Courage, and Commitment*](#)
 - [*180 Landings of U.S. Marines, 1800–1934*](#)

The war officially ended on 14 August, and all Marines returned to their respective ship detachments and other commands. For his service, Henderson was later brevetted a brigadier general, becoming the first U.S. Marine to attain a general officer rank. While the Creek and Seminole Wars foreshadowed the Corps' later counterinsurgency missions in Latin America, their greater significance lay in demonstrating the Marines' flexibility and their capacity to rapidly augment Army units conducting ground campaigns.