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The Ambush at Saint Marys River

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Abstract

At a critical time in the American Civil War, President Lincoln was up for re-election, concerned that he might lose re-election, President Lincoln desired the Union to secure Florida. As Col. Guy Henry led an advancement from Jacksonville, Florida, across the northwest, there came word that the Confederate Army had a significant number of soldiers stationed at Lake City. Col. Henry and his men began to make their way towards Lake City, but on February 10, 1864, they were caught in an ambush as they attempted to cross the St. Marys River. This paper seeks to provide an examination of the events leading up to the ambush of Union soldiers at St. Marys River, as well as the overly aggressive tactics employed by military leadership in the raids throughout the northeast and north-central Florida, leads to the conclusion that the opportunity to cut off the Confederate supply lines failed due to poor leadership, overly aggressive tactics, and a poorly developed plan of attack.

Bellamy: The Ambush at Saint Marys River

Liberty University

The Ambush at Saint Marys River

Submitted to Dr. Steven Woodworth

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Department of History

by

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Longwood, Florida

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Abstract

At a critical time in the American Civil War, President Lincoln was up for re-election, concerned that he might lose re-election, President Lincoln desired the Union to secure Florida. As Col. Guy Henry led an advancement from Jacksonville, Florida, across the northwest, there came word that the Confederate Army had a significant number of soldiers stationed at Lake City. Col. Henry and his men began to make their way towards Lake City, but on February 10, 1964, they were caught in an ambush as they attempted to cross the St. Marys River. This paper seeks to provide an examination of the events leading up to the ambush of Union soldiers at St. Marys River, as well as the overly aggressive tactics employed by military leadership in the raids throughout the northeast and north-central Florida, leads to the conclusion that the opportunity to cut off the Confederate supply lines failed due to poor leadership, overly aggressive tactics, and a poorly developed plan of attack.

Introduction

Amid the American Civil War, a year after President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, Union soldiers were directed by Major-General Quincy A. Gillmore to the east coast of Florida under the leadership of Brigadier General Truman Seymour. Their mission was to follow the St. Johns River down to their landing point and capture the city of Jacksonville, Florida.¹ At the time, President Lincoln was concerned that he might lose re-election and desired for the Union to secure the state of Florida, "in the most speedy way possible."² After securing the city of Jacksonville, Florida, Gen. Seymour began to lead his men throughout northeast Florida with several objectives in mind. First, to "produce an outlet for cotton, lumber, timber, turpentine, and the other products of the State. Second. To cut off one of the enemy's sources of commissary supplies," recognizing that the Confederate Army required beef and planned to transfer the meat from Florida throughout the Confederate Army.³ Third, to "obtain recruits for [Gen. Gillmore's] colored regiment," and lastly, "to inaugurate measures for the speedy restoration of Florida to her allegiance" to the Union.⁴

Around 11:00 a.m. on February 10, 1864, as Col. Guy V. Henry and his men were advancing westward throughout north-central Florida, they suddenly came under musket fire from an in defilade position the other side of the Saint Marys River. As Col. Henry's soldiers began to fall from their horses, they were confronted by Companies B and F of Major Robert Harrison's 2nd Florida Cavalry. Harrison's men had positioned themselves behind a thick cover of bushes and stumps across the river and were able to maintain a constant barrage of fire in the

¹ William H. Nulty, "Surprise and Success - The Landing and Exploitation" in *Confederate Florida The Road to Olustee* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2014), p. 85.

² Abraham Lincoln, report dated January 13, 1864. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series I, vol. XXXI. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1885, p. 278. (Hereafter referred to as ORA)

³ ORA, I:31. p. 279.

⁴ Ibid.

direction of Henry's men. Col. Henry attempted to gain ground against his attackers but was unsuccessful and found himself forced to fall back with his troops and retreat.⁵

The Union Army would continue to fight more battles in Florida. However, they were never successful in securing the Confederate supply lines. An examination of the events leading up to the ambush at St. Marys River, as well as the overly aggressive tactics employed by military leadership in the raids throughout the northeast and north-central Florida, leads to the conclusion that the opportunity to cut off the Confederate supply lines failed due to poor leadership, overly aggressive tactics, and a poorly developed plan of action.

A Fight for Florida

On January 14, 1864, Gen. Gillmore wrote to Maj. Gen. H.W. Halleck of his plans to "occupy the west bank of the Saint Johns River" and "establish small depots there preparatory to an advance west."⁶ It had been three years since Florida had seceded from the Union, and as President Lincoln's term in office began to wind down, he sought to bring Florida back into the Union to secure its vote.⁷ Florida was a valuable resource for the Confederate Army. The winter of 1863-1864 was especially tricky for the confederate army. Lee's army was dependent on food and support from the south, and often the 500 to 1,000-mile supply lines from south-Georgia to South Carolina were barely able to provide more than two- or three-days rations.⁸ Florida farmers would send beef, pork, fish, and fruit across the southern states supplying thousands of

⁵ Samuel Jones, "The Battle of Olustee, or Ocean Pond, Florida," in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War: Being for the Most Part Contributions by Union and Confederate Officers, Condensed and Arranged for Popular Reading* (New York, NY: The Century Co., 1894), pp. 76-77.

⁶ Q.A. Gillmore, report dated January 14, 1864. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series I, vol. XXXI. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1885, p. 278.

⁷ John C. Rives, *The Congressional Globe: Containing the Debates and Proceedings of the First Session of the Thirty-Eighth Congress*, vol. 34 (Washington, DC: Printed at the Congressional Globe Office, 1864).

⁸ William H. Nulty, "The 1864 Florida Federal Expedition: Blundering into Modern Warfare," 1985. p. 206.

heads of cattle throughout the war. Florida was also a major producer of salt, which was an essential resource for the army as it was used to keep meat from spoiling. Beef had become increasingly more challenging to procure during the war, as the economy of the Confederate States depended heavily on agriculture. Gen. Winfield Scott's initial "Anaconda Plan," which set out to cut off the Confederate supply lines, was beginning to be felt by Confederate soldiers all throughout the south, and the Confederate leadership had to depend on heavily on resources from Florida.⁹ An article in *The New York Daily Tribune*, dated February 20, 1864, stated, "It is estimated that there are 2,000,000 [cattle] in the state."¹⁰ It was assessed that Florida would need to ship 1,000 heads of cattle each week just to meet the needs of General Bragg, under the leadership of Gen. P.G.T. Beauregard, in Charleston, South Carolina.¹¹ A requisition that Joseph D. Locke, the chief commissary of Georgia, stated, "is indispensably necessary for the public interest."¹²

On January 15, 1864, with the occupation of Florida on his mind, Gen. Gillmore wrote to the Hon. E. M. Stanton, the Secretary of War, to request "the new colored regiments formed and being formed in the North be sent to [his] department." At the time, Gen. Gillmore had less than 300 effective men in his cavalry and greatly desired the colored regiments be assigned to his department to ensure that his plan to capture Florida would be successful.¹³ General-in-Chief, H.W. Halleck, although unsure of the "advantages or practicality" of Gen. Gillmore's expedition, especially in relation to the greater needs of the Union Army in the Gulf, provided Gen. Gillmore

⁹ Scott's Great Snake. Entered According to Act of Congress in the Year 1861," *The Library of Congress*, accessed March 4, 2020, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3701s.cw0011000/>.

¹⁰ National Endowment for the Humanities, "New-York Daily Tribune. [Volume] (New-York [N.Y.] 1842-1866, February 20, 1864, Page 11, Image 11," *News about Chronicling America RSS* (Greeley & McElrath, n.d.), <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030213/1864-02-20/ed-1/seq-11/>.

¹¹ Robert A. Taylor "Rebel Beef: Florida Cattle and the Confederate Army, 1862-1864." *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (1988): 15-17. www.jstor.org/stable/30147921.

¹² Joseph D. Locke to Pleasant W. White, n.d., Pleasant White Papers, Box 1, Florida Historical Society Collection

¹³ ORA, I:31. p. 278.

with a portion of the colored regiments that he requested, as well placed his proposed operational plans “entirely [in his] judgment and discretion, with the means at [his] command.”¹⁴

Gen. Gillmore placed Brigadier General Truman Seymour in charge of the occupation of Florida. On February 7, 1864, Gen. Seymour set sail from Hilton Head, South Carolina for Jacksonville, Florida with the following regiments and batteries: Colonel Barton's brigade, comprising 7th Connecticut and 7th New Hampshire Regiments Volunteer Infantry and (temporarily) the 8th Regiment U.S. Colored Troops; Montgomery's brigade, comprising of 2nd South Carolina Volunteers (colored), 3rd U.S. Volunteers (colored), 54th Massachusetts Volunteers (colored); Henry's mounted brigade, comprising 40th Regiment Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, and the Independent Battalion Massachusetts Cavalry; Langdon's light brigade (four pieces), Elder's horse batter (four pieces), and one section of James' Rhode Island battery (two pieces) composing roughly 5,500 men.¹⁵

February 7, 1864, the first wave of Gen. Seymour's men began to reach the bar at the mouth of the St. John's River. By noon, only fifteen of the vessels had passed the bar, but as the tide began to rise, the rest were quickly able to follow, and by 1:00 p.m., the entire fleet had passed through and began starting the 50-mile journey upriver towards Jacksonville, Florida. A soldier recounts seeing greybacks of all ages around every building along the bank of the St. John's River, but states that “none of them appeared in the least warlike.”¹⁶ He even goes on to speak of how there were instances of ladies waving their handkerchiefs and blowing kisses, while “men skulked behind trees and old sheds” watching attentively as the proud Union Army

¹⁴ ORA, I:31. p. 279.

¹⁵ ORA, I:31. p. 280.

¹⁶ James H. Clark, “IV. The Campaign in Florida,” in *Iron Hearted Regiment: Being an Account of the Battles, Marches and Gallant Deeds Performed by the 115th Regiment, New York Volunteers* (Albany, NY: J. Munsell, 1865). 70.

made its way towards Jacksonville. A guerrilla soldier who observed the approach of the expedition warned that he would shoot the first man who attempted to step onto the dock. "General Hunter," the first mate of a transporting steamer jumped on the dock first. "The concealed assassin shot him through the right breast. A colored soldier from the 55th Massachusetts was also shot."¹⁷ Apart from this encounter, the Confederate soldiers were surprised, and the city was taken quickly with the loss of only three men.

Before the troops landed in Jacksonville, Gen. Gillmore had written to Col. Guss, ordering him to wait until the train had come into Jacksonville and then tear up portions of the railroad tracks and obstruct others on both sides of the road to allow for a prompt advancement towards Baldwin.¹⁸ At sundown on February 8, 1864, Col. Guy Henry led the advancement of soldiers from 40th Massachusetts Company, the Independent Battalion Massachusetts Cavalry, under the leadership of Major Stephens, and Elder's horse battery (B, First Artillery) towards the rebel camp at Finnegan.¹⁹ The march was arduous, as soldiers forged ahead through "swamps, and woods, fording creeks and scaling piles of logs and brush."²⁰ Col. Henry's men were able to sneak passed the rebel picket line, which extended about three miles, and just before the enemy was completely surrounded, something alarmed the Rebel army, and many of them began to flee, running off in every direction. The Union troops had no difficulty in taking over possession of the camp, and obtained "a large number of prisoners, nine pieces of artillery, a wagon load of

¹⁷ James H. Clark, "IV. The Campaign in Florida," in *Iron Hearted Regiment: Being an Account of the Battles, Marches and Gallant Deeds Performed by the 115th Regiment, New York Volunteers* (Albany, NY: J. Munsell, 1865). 71.

¹⁸ ORA, I:31. p. 281.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ James H. Clark, "IV. The Campaign in Florida," in *Iron Hearted Regiment: Being an Account of the Battles, Marches and Gallant Deeds Performed by the 115th Regiment, New York Volunteers* (Albany, NY: J. Munsell, 1865). 71.

small arms, swords and sabers enough to arm a cavalry company."²¹ Additionally, the soldiers found several turkeys, chickens, ducks, and hogs. In a letter to Gen. H.W. Halleck, Gen. Gallimore stated, "at our approach the enemy abandoned and sunk the steamer *Saint Marys* and burned 270 bales of cotton a few miles above Jacksonville. We have taken, without loss of a man, over 100 prisoners."²² C.M. Duren, Lt. Com. of Company D with the 54th Massachusetts Volunteers wrote in a letter to his father, "We are roughing it -I can tell you, have not anything with us- living under Gods own sky- sleeping on the ground with big fire at our feet- but when we were on duty at *picket line* can not have the last named comfort. Jacksonville is, or was a very pretty place- but War has *ravished* it. It is made desolate and lonely."²³ Brig. Gen. Joseph Hawley, comparing the physical geography west of Jacksonville with that of the people there, stated that "the ground is high and rolling covered with noble pine forests," yet the people are "scrawny, lack-luster dead looking people with little intelligence."²⁴

Col. Henry and his men rested until 4 a.m. Tuesday, February 9, 1864. Company H, 40th Massachusetts Mounted Infantry, was ordered to guard the station as well as the prisoners until the infantry arrived. They were then ordered to catch up with the troop at Baldwin, twelve miles to the west. Col. Henry and his men continued their hard march pushing "forward a mounted force as far as Baldwin, at the junction of the two railroads" as per orders from Gen. Gallimore.²⁵

At Baldwin, the Union troops secured another bloodless victory, obtaining several additional prisoners, artillery, \$25,000 worth of cotton, as well as some turpentine, resin, pitch,

²¹ James H. Clark, "IV. The Campaign in Florida," in *Iron Hearted Regiment: Being an Account of the Battles, Marches and Gallant Deeds Performed by the 115th Regiment, New York Volunteers* (Albany, NY: J. Munsell, 1865). 73.

²² ORA, I:31. p. 281.

²³ C.M. Duren "The Occupation of Jacksonville, February 1864 and the Battle of Olustee: Letters of Lt. C. M. Duren, 54th Massachusetts Regiment, U.S.A." *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (1954): 263. www.jstor.org/stable/30139717. (Emphasis in original)

²⁴ *Ibid.* 74.

²⁵ ORA, I:31. p. 280.

tobacco, salt, and three lines of railroad. Baldwin was a victory for the Union, but the ease of their successes in Florida began to create an unrealistic expectation amongst the soldiers, and a false sense of security. At one point, an old Florida Bushwhacker walked into Baldwin, stating that he was ill. The man claimed he was forced at the edge of a bayonet to serve the Confederate Army, although he said he was a good Union man. Noting everything he saw around town, he quietly began walking along the railroad out of town, towards the rebel lines, when a negro man informed an officer standing by that he recognized the man as a Confederate Captain.²⁶ Immediately the officer sent for his capture, and upon searching his person, he found his commission papers, having almost allowed a rebel spy to escape.

The Ambush at Saint Marys River

Following the Union's invasion of Jacksonville, Florida, Confederate Gen. P.G.T. Beauregard, commander of the Department of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida, ordered Major Harrison to withdraw his forces from Camp Cooper, located thirty miles north of Jacksonville, Florida, and join a more significant Confederate army in Lake City, Florida, to prepare to fight against the Union forces.²⁷ Gen. Beauregard also wrote to General Samuel Cooper, on January 14, 1864, anticipating movement from the Union forces. He had received word from an officer who was responsible for keeping an eye on Union vessels in Port Royal and Broad River, having reported seeing thirty-five Union vessels heading out to sea during a fog in

²⁶ James H. Clark, "IV. The Campaign in Florida," in *Iron Hearted Regiment: Being an Account of the Battles, Marches and Gallant Deeds Performed by the 115th Regiment, New York Volunteers* (Albany, NY: J. Munsell, 1865). 75.

²⁷ ORA, I:31. p. 358.

the afternoon that same day.²⁸ As Confederate troops began marching towards Lake City, Union troops began moving across northeastern and north-central Florida.

On February 10, 1864, around 9 a.m., Col. Henry and his men began to make their way towards Barber's plantation, located on a bluff just east of the St. Marys River. Around 11 a.m., Col. Henry and his men arrived at Barber's, the main body of soldiers came to a stop and formed a defensive hollow square.²⁹ Col. Henry noticed that the plantation to appear to be deserted. Barber was known to be one of the wealthiest men in the state, and it was reported that he owned 25,000 head of cattle and several dozen slaves, yet neither he nor his slaves could be found. The only people located on the plantation was a woman and two children. A soldier asked the woman if she had seen any rebel soldiers passing through, she assured them that she had not seen any rebel soldiers for several days.

A Pickets report came back, to Col. Henry, stating that the road ahead descended in a gentle grade toward the St. Mary's River. Captain Elder placed his guns and battery atop the hill at Barber's Plantation, while the 40th Massachusetts formed a line of battle a short distance ahead.³⁰ The road was just wide enough for two horses to walk side-by-side, so Col. Henry sent a four-person advancement team ahead. They went about three-quarters of a mile, to scope out the land, and determine if the enemy had set up a defensive position at the south fork of the Saint Marys River.³¹ The advancement team found themselves caught in an ambush, one man was killed, and two others were wounded with a brutality that "would cause one's blood to run

²⁸ ORA I:35, Pt., 1 p.280.

²⁹ National Endowment for the Humanities, "New-York Daily Tribune. [Volume] (New-York [N.Y.]) 1842-1866, February 10, 1864, Page 2, Image 2," *News about Chronicling America RSS* (Greeley & McElrath, n.d.), <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030213/1864-02-10/ed-1/seq-2/>.

³⁰ Frank Moore, "Documents," in *The Rebellion Record; a Diary of American Events with Documents Narratives Etc* (New York, NY: D. van Nostrand, 1867), p. 398.

³¹ William H. Nulty, "The 1864 Florida Federal Expedition: Blundering into Modern Warfare," 1985. p. 48.

cold.”³² Col. Henry dismounted a company of the 40th Massachusetts to act as skirmishers, and it was clear that the conformation of the river exposed the right side of the Confederate forces to Union fire. Col. Henry, ordered this single company from the 40th Massachusetts, unmounted, to charge down the road and establish a position on the far side of the river. As they did, they quickly were met with a barrage of fire and had to take cover behind bushes and stumps.

The sound of a bugle, called men from the Independent Battalion to form a column of twos along the road. Charging down the road towards the bridge, quickly realizing the rebel forces had destroyed the bridge, they decided to ford the river. Out of nowhere, like lightning bolts, rifle shots cracked, bullets tore through the ranks of soldiers killing and wounding men along their path.

Captain Webster, under the direction of Col. Henry, led Company E of the 1st Massachusetts Calvary towards the bridge in an attempt to flank the enemy, as he began to pursue his new position his horse was shot out from underneath him, yet he was uninjured. Companies I and K were unmounted and used as skirmishers. Seeking revenge for their fallen brothers, many “dashed into the dark haunt of death, when from every tree, and stump came a cruel bullet, and three brave fellows fell from their horses, and sixteen wounded, without a moment’s notice.”³³ The *Philadelphia Inquirer* described the river as: "...a narrow, deep stream, completely hidden by cypress and palmetto trees... it was approached by a narrow road, through a thicket of pine and cypress trees, and could only be crossed in ordinary seasons, by a bridge

³² James H. Clark, “IV. The Campaign in Florida,” in *Iron Hearted Regiment: Being an Account of the Battles, Marches and Gallant Deeds Performed by the 115th Regiment, New York Volunteers* (Albany, NY: J. Munsell, 1865). 76.

³³ James H. Clark, “IV. The Campaign in Florida,” in *Iron Hearted Regiment: Being an Account of the Battles, Marches and Gallant Deeds Performed by the 115th Regiment, New York Volunteers* (Albany, NY: J. Munsell, 1865). 76.

which spanned it."³⁴ The men continued to push on, fording the river, the narrow defile, and dense woods. By the time the majority of the Independent Battalion had forded the river.³⁵ Although, in the heat of battle, one soldier of the 115th New York remembered seeing a Union Sargent murdered. Clark states that he saw a Union soldier lying on the ground unable to help himself, while a Confederate soldier walked over and shot him six more times, "leaving him struggling in the agonies of death...[he] had a thirty-days furlough in his pocket, and expected to go home in a few days. He did go to his long, long home."³⁶ Thankfully, Capt. Webster's charge enabled Col. Henry to identify the location of the rebel forces, but not before a bullet came flying towards him, hitting the ground between his feet.³⁷ Col. Henry then gave orders for the artillery to move forward and relieve the troops who had been pinned down along the hillside. Captain Elder's battery continued to lay down a battery of cannon fire into the rebel infested brush creating the rush of a steam locomotive heading straight for them.³⁸

Col. Henry examined the hillside and noticed the trees beyond the river and saw shells finding their targets, which held Confederate fire to a minimum. Col. Henry called for concentrated volleys by the 40th Massachusetts as the 1st Massachusetts Cavalry mounted up and prepared to ford the river. The 40th Massachusetts followed on foot. The river was so deep

³⁴ "Department of the South," February 22, 1864, p. 1, <https://www.newspapers.com/newspage/167922611/>.

³⁵ National Endowment for the Humanities, "New-York Daily Tribune. [Volume] (New-York [N.Y.]) 1842-1866, February 10, 1864, Page 2, Image 2," *News about Chronicling America* RSS (Greeley & McElrath, n.d.), <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030213/1864-02-10/ed-1/seq-2/>.

³⁶ James H. Clark, "IV. The Campaign in Florida," in *Iron Hearted Regiment: Being an Account of the Battles, Marches and Gallant Deeds Performed by the 115th Regiment, New York Volunteers* (Albany, NY: J. Munsell, 1865). 76.

³⁷ Frank Moore, "Documents," in *The Rebellion Record; a Diary of American Events with Documents Narratives Etc* (New York, NY: D. van Nostrand, 1867), p. 398.

³⁸ Frank Moore "Documents." Essay. In *The Rebellion Record; a Diary of American Events with Documents Narratives Etc*, 398. New York, NY: D. van Nostrand, 1867.

that the water was chest high, and the infantry had to hold their guns and leather belts containing their ammunition over their heads to keep them dry.

Afraid and taken back by the number of Union troops, the rebel soldiers began to fall back and flee, having initially expecting a force of fewer than 300 soldiers, they believed they would easily prevent the Union forces from fording the river.³⁹ Sargent Clement of the Independent Battalion remarked on how, as he was fording the river, he noticed Confederate soldiers fleeing as Union troops made their way across the river, leaving behind a large number of their horses.⁴⁰ According to George Bowerem, a correspondent from the *New York Tribune* there were fifty horses that were captured along with a large number of sabers, carbines, and pistols. Bowerem did not appear to be impressed by Barber's Plantation as he wrote, "I learn this place is called Barber's from the fact that a man named Barber formerly kept here a sort of hotel. His own house, with five or six outhouses are the only buildings in the vicinity. Baber left the premise the morning of our advance. He owns twenty-thousand head of cattle and is reputed to be the wealthiest man in the state. No one, however, would judge him to be a man of wealth after seeing the miserable hovel in which he dwelt. He is a rebel of the worst sort."⁴¹

Aftermath

Major G. P. Harrison led the two Confederate companies that marched from Camp Cooper to Lake City, Florida. Captain Winston Stephens led Company B in the 2nd Florida Cavalry whose force opposed the Union advancement into the northeast and north-central

³⁹ George Bowerem, "From the Florida Expedition," *New York Tribune* (New York, February 20, 1864), sec. Col 1-3, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Benjamin William Crowninshield, *A History of the First Regiment of Massachusetts Cavalry Volunteers*. (Boston, Ma: Houghton, Mifflin and co., 1891). pp. 260-261.

⁴¹ George Bowerem, "From the Florida Expedition," *New York Tribune* (New York, February 20, 1864), sec. Col 1-3, p. 1

Florida. Major G. P. Harrison and Capt. Stephens had chosen to establish themselves at the fork of the Saint Marys River, believing that they had established the “strong point”, but finding themselves taken back by the actual number of Union troops that were a part of the campaign.⁴² The following day, Capt. Stephens’ feelings regarding the outcome are revealed in a letter that he wrote to his dear wife on February 11, 1864, stating, “I write you these few lines to allay the anxiety you may feel on my account. We have so far been able to elude the enemy, though we have at times been surrounded and from appearances we thought our prospect was fair for a northern prison...I dont know if we will be able to get out without being captured...We are having hard times and plenty of it...Do my dear Wife wait calmly and dont give your self unnecessary trouble... your Devoted Husband Winston.”⁴³

The day after the ambush, it was counted that the Rebel Army had two dead, and two wounded, and seventy men captured by the Union Army. The Union Army had lost five men in the skirmish, with at least twenty more injured and wounded. Barber’s house was utilized as a hospital to help care for the wounded. The Union dead were buried in one grave at the foot of a large pine tree next to the St. Mary's River. One soldier took out his knife and hewn a rude cross to mark the resting place of the heroes buried in that place.⁴⁴

Col. Henry ordered a few men to stay behind to care for the wounded, but the majority of the Union forces marched towards Sanderson. They arrived around 6 p.m. that same day. His army had not lost the ground but suffered far more than the rebels who disappeared into the woods unmolested. The Confederate soldiers who survived the skirmish joined up with the

⁴² ORA I:35, Pt., 1 p. 328.

⁴³ ORA I:35, Pt., 1 p. 328.

⁴⁴ James H. Clark, “IV. The Campaign in Florida,” in *Iron Hearted Regiment: Being an Account of the Battles, Marches and Gallant Deeds Performed by the 115th Regiment, New York Volunteers* (Albany, NY: J. Munsell, 1865). 76-77.

greater rebel force in Lake City, Florida. The Union soldiers fell back to Sanderson to regroup and care for their wounded.

Conclusion

The skirmish at Saint Marys River resulted in the deaths of five Union soldiers and many more wounded. Although the Rebel army was pushed back, fear captivated their hearts and minds causing them to eventually flee; the overall mission in Florida was unsuccessful.

In examining the events leading up to the ambush at St. Marys River, it is clear that the Union's goal first, to "produce an outlet for cotton, lumber, timber, turpentine, and the other products of the State. Second. To cut off one of the enemy's sources of commissary supplies," recognizing that the Confederate Army required beef and planned to transfer the meat from Florida throughout the Confederate Army.⁴⁵ Third, to "obtain recruits for [Gen. Gillmore's] colored regiment," and lastly, "to inaugurate measures for the speedy restoration of Florida to her allegiance" to the Union.⁴⁶

The Florida campaign failed in many ways; first, there were times throughout the campaign into the northeast and north-central Florida where Union soldiers were able to confiscate enemy resources, which included cotton, lumber, timber, etc., but practically it was never a major concern or focus. Secondly, the goal of cutting off the enemy commissary lines was addressed in a few instances where railroads were torn apart, but it too was never a major focus of the objectives of the day. Third, the only colored individuals that made their way into the campaign were those already established in the Union army, who fought in Gen. Gallimore's regiment. There were no specific instances where Union soldiers were attempting to bring in new recruits. Lastly, there were no measures established for the restoration of Florida into the Union.

⁴⁵ ORA, I:31. p. 279.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Instead, the focus of the campaign became a cat and mouse chase where the Union army was chasing after the Rebel forces, searching for a fight without properly preparing for battle.

Brig. Gen. Seymour, in a letter the day following the ambush writes to Maj. Gen. Gillmore stating, "I am convinced that the movement upon Lake City is not, is the present condition of transportation, admissible, and indeed what has been said of the desire of Florida to come back now is a delusion...I would advise that the force be withdrawn from the interior, that Jacksonville alone be held, and that Palatka be also held, which permits as many Union people, &c., to come in as will join us voluntarily."⁴⁷ It appears Gen. Seymour understood that the methods that were being used by the Federal Army were not obtaining the desired results, and he suggests a change in the course of action.

Although the cause of the ambush at Saint Marys River may not have been because of overly aggressive tactics, it appears as though the tactics utilized and the lack of strong leadership to stop and consider various options led to an ambush that could have been avoided. If proper intelligence from scouting parties would have been in place, and if a proper plan of action was established that would keep leadership on track with the four goals of the Florida campaign, the ambush may have been avoided, and the original goals could have been achieved.

⁴⁷ ORA I:35, Pt., 1 p. 282

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