

Florida's Role in the Civil War: "Supplier of the Confederacy"

Background Information

Settlers began to move to Florida once it became a United States territory. By the mid 1800s, it was a rural territory with large farms and plantations. In 1845 when Florida became a state, the population was approximately 140,000. Of these, 63,000 were African Americans, most of whom were slaves. The state's economy was based on cattle and crops. Slavery was practiced in Florida but not all African Americans were slaves. Many bought their freedom or were freed by their owners. Some were Creoles, free descendants of Spanish citizens of African ancestry. When Florida became a state, it was considered a slave state. This was an important factor in Florida's part in the Civil War.

Many states in the north did not believe in the practice of owning slaves and began to abolish slavery. By 1860, slavery was only found in the southern states and territories. The Presidential election that year was based on two candidates who debated about slavery. Many southern states were upset because Abraham Lincoln discussed stopping the spread of slavery. He did not want slavery in the west and hoped that it would eventually die out in the south. He was elected President on November 6, 1860. South Carolina decided to secede from the Union on December 20th. That meant that it would not recognize the United States as its government and instead would make its own state laws.



Union troops refused to leave Fort Pickens when Florida seceded from the Union.

On January 10, 1861, Florida seceded as well. It became a separate state from the Union. By February, Florida and six other southern states had formed a new government, the Confederate States of America. Four other states joined a month later. The Confederate states were South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Florida, Louisiana, Tennessee, Texas, and Arkansas. Jefferson Davis, from Mississippi, was elected President and Montgomery, Alabama was selected as the capital, though it was soon moved to Richmond, Virginia.

The Civil War

BOOM! A shot was fired by U.S. troops at Fort Sumter, South Carolina on April 12, 1861 and the Civil War began. The North fought against the South. The two major issues of the Civil War were slavery and state's rights. Many families lost all or most of the men of the family. Sometimes brother fought against brother or cousin against cousin as families differed in their view on slavery and loyalty to the United States. Not all southerners supported slavery, so they fought for the North, and not all northerners supported the war against the South. The border states between the North and the South had the most difficulties during the war.

The majority of the battles were fought in other states, but two major battles and several smaller skirmishes took place in Florida. The Union sent ships to blockade or occupy Florida ports: St. Augustine, Jacksonville, Key West and Pensacola. This blockade left Floridians unable to participate in their normal sea trade. However, the Union navy was unable to guard Florida's entire long coastline. Smaller ships would slip through the blockade at night and continue to supply goods to the Confederate troops.

People in Florida who worked on farms and plantations raised crops and cattle to send to the troops. They sent beef, pork, fish, fruit and salt. Florida was a large producer of salt. Salt work plants would separate salt from the seawater. Two of the biggest salt works (factories) were at Apalachee Bay and St. Andrews. Salt was an important resource to the army. Because refrigeration had not been introduced yet, it was used to keep the meat from spoiling.

An estimated 16,000 Floridians fought in the war. Most were in the Confederacy, but approximately 2,000 joined the Union army. Some Floridians didn't want to fight for either side, so they hid out in the woods and swamps to avoid being drafted. The Floridian soldiers were organized into eleven regiments of infantry, two cavalry, and numerous small units. Almost 5,000 Floridian soldiers were killed during the war.

With most of the Floridian men fighting, it was up to the women, children, and slaves to keep the farms working. Money was very tight and most families, even in the cities, had to grow their own food and make their own clothes. Clothing was collected to send to the troops and iron was collected to make swords, guns, and other arms.

By 1863, the Confederate Army was in trouble. The bigger Union Army was decreasing the Confederate's numbers. President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, which freed all slaves in the southern states. This angered the Confederacy and the war continued. Many freed slaves joined the Union Army and fought to defeat the south and free their brothers and sisters who were still in bondage.

Battles were fought in the North and the South, but most took place in the South. There were two large battles that took place in Florida and both were won by Confederate troops. On February 20, 1864, the largest Civil War battle in Florida occurred near Lake City. It was called the Battle of Olustee. It was a victory for the Confederacy, but did not help win the war.

The war continued but, with the Confederacy becoming weaker and weaker and most of the southern capitals captured, supply lines to the confederate troops were cut off. On April 4, 1865, Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered to Union General Ulysses S. Grant. The war was officially over. Some battles continued for a short period of time, but, once word reached troops who were still fighting, the southern generals surrendered. Florida officially surrendered April 26, 1865. Union troops took over Tallahassee and immediately raised the United States flag. Once again, the states were united.

Civil War Battles and Troops in Florida

Fort Pickens

Early 1861: Some speculate that the Civil War could have begun in Florida instead of Fort Sumter, South Carolina. In early January of 1861 when Florida joined the other Confederate states and seceded from the Union, there were Union (U.S. Army) soldiers stationed at Fort Pickens on Santa Rosa Island, right off Pensacola. Confederate soldiers demanded that the Union soldiers surrender now that Florida was a Confederate state. The Union soldiers refused to leave the fort. The Union quickly moved in more troops to reinforce the number of soldiers in the fort of Pensacola. A battle began and a standoff lasted over several months.

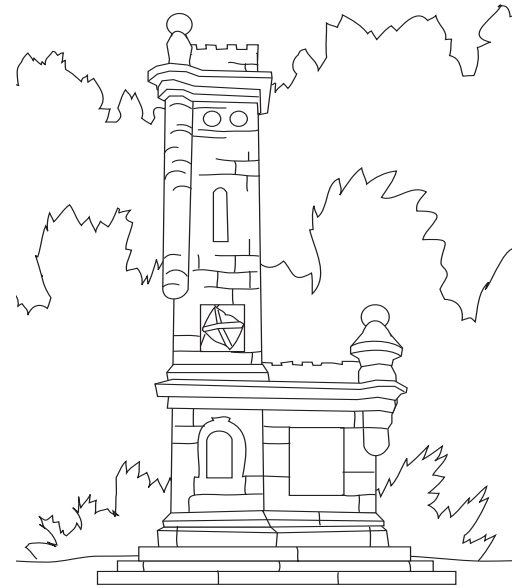
The Confederate army landed 1,000 soldiers on the island on October 9th to raid a small Union army camp outside of the fort. More Union soldiers were sent from the fort to reinforce their camp and they were able to drive the Confederates off the island. Battles continued throughout the early part of 1862. Finally, by May, the Confederate troops withdrew from the area and the yearlong standoff was over. The Union occupied Pensacola for the rest of the war.

The Tampa Incident

June 30, 1862: A small battle took place in the Tampa Bay area over a two-day period early in the Civil War. A Union general sailed into Tampa Bay. Soldiers disembarked, went into town, and demanded Tampa's surrender to the Union. A small Confederate militia group stationed in Tampa called the Osceola Rangers refused to surrender. The Union gunboat then began to open fire. The Union General warned the soldiers that they would fire again beginning at 6 pm in order to get civilians out of the way. The Osceola Rangers remained steadfast in their refusal to surrender. Gunfire began again and shots rang out most of the next day into Tampa. Eventually, in the late afternoon of July 1st, the Union soldiers stopped firing and the gunboat withdrew. Luckily, there were no casualties in this battle.

The Battle of Olustee

February 20, 1864: One year after the Emancipation Proclamation was signed, the largest Civil War battle in Florida occurred near Lake City. The Battle of Olustee lasted for six hours in the woods close to Olustee station. The Union army launched an expedition inward from the coastline in order to cut off supply lines to the Confederates. They also were searching for African Americans to join their side. Brigadier General Truman Seymour marched 5,000 men toward Lake City. Confederate General Joseph Finegan set up 5,200 men at Olustee to block their advance. Three regiments of African American troops fought in this battle on the Union's side and many of these men were lost. The Confederate troops defeated the Union Army and sent them back toward Jacksonville. The Battle of Olustee has been described as one of the bloodiest battles in the Civil War. Almost 3,000 men out of the 11,000 who fought were killed.



This monument marks the location of the Battle of Olustee, one of the bloodiest in the Civil War

The Battle of Natural Bridge

March 4, 1865: Another large battle in Florida took place near Tallahassee. Major General John Newton landed U.S. Navy ships at the mouth of St. Marks River. They had trouble getting up the river, so the soldiers marched northeast to Tallahassee. A small Confederate militia group burned a bridge in their path so that the Union soldiers could not cross the river. The Union soldiers pressed on and the two groups met at the Natural Bridge, a place where the river goes underground for a short distance. The Confederates were able to protect the natural crossing and push the Union soldiers back. The Union soldiers quickly retreated to their ships. Once again, the Confederates were victorious in Florida. Because of this victory, Tallahassee was the only Confederate state capital east of the Mississippi River that was not seized during the war.

The "Cow Cavalry"

Small militia groups were formed to protect the inner part of Florida. These units were mostly made up of ranchers and cowhands. They were called the "Cow Cavalry." Small numbers of Union soldiers would hold cavalry raids in south Florida to capture cattle. The Union Navy would also conduct raids along the coast trying to destroy the salt work plants. It was the mission of the cow cavalry to protect the cattle ranches, salt works, and small towns of south Florida. Numerous small battles occurred as the groups met, but most battles were never documented. Florida's greatest contribution to the war, besides the 5,000 Floridian men who fought, was food supplies. Florida sent beef, pork, fish, and fruit to the Confederate troops. A vital part of the Confederate strategy was to keep Florida's inland roads and rivers protected so that the supplies could get safely northward. The soldiers of the "Cow Cavalry" helped keep the Confederate army supplied with food from Florida.

