

Historical Marker Program

As the 21st Century approached, the West Point Society of North Florida (WPSNF) decided to plan and complete a project for the upcoming bi-centennial celebration. It was known that the accomplishments of many USMA graduates in North Florida had been significant. Research uncovered a number of major engineering projects led by West Point graduates in the early 19th century. West Pointers constructed lighthouses, initiated a variety of river and harbor projects, as well as constructed coastal fortifications in St. Augustine and a number of other Florida key locations.



The Second Seminole Indian War 1835-1842

After Spain relinquished control to the United States in the early 1800's, the first Army units arrived in St. Augustine and began these works. However, it was readily apparent to the WPSNF that the most significant service and contributions were rendered in North Florida by West Point graduates during a war that has been largely forgotten – the Second Seminole Indian War. A cursory check of the battle streamers on the U. S. Army flag reveals that the Army was indeed engaged with the Seminole Indians in



Florida in a bitter conflict from 1835-1842. It was therefore resolved that the project would focus on that relatively painful period that has been largely obscured by time and the subsequent larger wars known by most Americans.

Research on that war primarily by Lt Col (Ret.) Greg Moore ('74) uncovered the fact that the 2d Seminole Indian War had involved a large number of West Point graduates. This was also true of former Commandants of Cadets. A majority of Commandants participated in the war with the first Commandant (George Gardiner) being killed in the early days of the war in Dade's massacre. In that action Dade (of whom Dade County is named today) was killed in the first volley and Gardiner tried his best to rally the troops before being completely overwhelmed. Dade, Gardiner, et. al. were interred in a military cemetery at St. Augustine at a moving ceremony in August 1842 subsequent to the excavation of the Dade battlefield. Click the image to the left to see larger view of an artist's rendering of Dade's massacre.

With the foregoing history in mind, the WPSNF decided to mark the bi-centennial by erecting a historical marker that would pay tribute to all West Pointers who died in the Second Seminole War. The most suitable place for this marker was the St. Augustine National Cemetery, near today's St. Francis Barracks. Since 1907, St. Francis Barracks and the Post have served as headquarters of the Florida National Guard.



At dedication ceremony. Left to right: COL Gordon Arbogast, LTC Greg Moore, MG Philip Feir



Visitors admiring our marker

The State of Florida was very supportive of the effort to erect the historical marker. Monies were contributed by the State, WPSNF and Association of Graduates. In the summer of 1999, at the Superintendent's Annual Conference for Society and Class Presidents, the President of the WPSNF (Dr. Gordon Arbogast '63) presented the current Commandant of Cadets (BG Olsen) with a picture of the Dade Battle. Gen Olsen placed the painting in his office in Washington Hall. At that time Arbogast shared with the Commandant the unique tie between the Commandant's office and North Florida e.g., in addition to Gardiner and Worth, the majority of the first twelve Commandants saw service in Florida in the Second Seminole Indian Wars, many subsequently rising to General Officer rank. Notable among these Commandants were Ethan Allen Hitchcock (Class of 1817 and grandson of General Ethan Allen); William H.T. Walker (1837 – wounded three times in the Second Seminole Indian War and later killed as a Confederate General in the Battle of Atlanta in July 1864); William Hardee (1838 – who rose to the rank of Lt. Gen. in the Army of the Confederacy) and Robert Garnett (1841). An invitation was extended to BG Olsen to be the guest speaker at the historical marker ceremony, planned for the Spring of 2001. BG Olsen was kind enough to accept the invitation to come to Jacksonville in the Spring of 2001. Thereafter, 21 April was selected for the dual events. Invitations were sent to all living Commandants to attend. Fortunately, MG Philip Feir (Commandant in the early 1970s) was able to attend and he subsequently played a major role in the ceremony.

Due to fortuitous circumstances, on the weekend of April 21, the Florida National Guard at St. Augustine was hosting a meeting with the tribal leaders of a variety of Florida Indian tribes – Chickasaw, Seminoles, and Poarch Creek Indians, including a Tribal Chairman with ties to David Moniac's descendents. Moniac had been the first full-blooded native American to graduate from the Academy; he was killed in the 2d

Seminole War at the Battle of the Wahoo Swamp. Representatives from these tribes were able to participate in the monument ceremony. Due to plane delays out of Fort Riley, General Olsen arrived late in Jacksonville and was unable to take part in the ceremony. However, General Feir was on hand and was agreeable to give the keynote address. The ceremony went off smoothly. Pictures shown here depict the engraving on the plaque and several scenes from the event. BG Olsen and his wife arrived shortly thereafter and he gave a terrific speech at the Founder's Day dinner that evening. That event was attended by more than 110 graduates and their spouses and guests in Jacksonville. The WPSNF found this historical project to be exhilarating and fun. The fact that West Pointers had major impact in North Florida was firmly established and celebrated.

The full text of the marker reads: *On December 28, 1835, during the Second Seminole War, a column of 108 U.S. Army soldiers dispatched from Fort Brooke (Tampa) to relieve the detachment at Fort King (Ocala) was surprised by a strong force of Seminole Indians near Bushnell in Sumter County. Except for three soldiers and an interpreter, the entire column of 108 men, led by Major Francis Langhorne Dade, perished in battle that day. On August 15, 1842, Dade and his command, as well as other casualties of the war, were re-interred here under three coquina stone pyramids in a ceremony marking the end of the conflict. Among those buried with Dade are Captain George W. Gardiner, U.S. Military Academy (U.S.M.A.) 1814, first Commandant of Cadets at West Point, and Major David Moniac, U.S.M.A., 1822, a Creek Indian and first Native-American graduate of the Military Academy.*



St. Augustine Sea Wall Historical Marker



Following the success of placing a State of Florida historical marker at the St. Augustine National Cemetery in 2001, the West Point Society of North Florida chose to sponsor a marker at the sea wall in St. Augustine as its next project.

Together with the refurbishing of the Castillo de San Marcos, renamed Fort Marion by the Army, construction of the sea wall in St. Augustine is one of the earliest examples of the work assigned to

graduates of the United States Military Academy in the early 1820s and 30s. This was also one of the first federally funded projects in the Territory of Florida.

The portion of the wall that today extends from King Street to the south end of St. Francis Barracks is the last remaining section of original construction. Stone for the walls was quarried across the Matanzas River on Anastasia Island. The granite coping came from Pennsylvania and Connecticut.

After years of neglect, the wall has deteriorated noticeably.

Three West Point graduates were responsible for the design of the sea wall and supervised the work from 1833 to 1844. They were 1st Lieutenant Stephen Tuttle (Class of 1820); 1st Lieutenant Francis L. Dancy (Class of 1826), and 1st Lieutenant Henry W. Benham (Class of 1837). Shown below is a picture of the sea wall circa 1880.



Lieutenant Tuttle graduated first in his class at West Point. He initiated the project, but passed away in January 1835. He is buried in the St. Augustine National Cemetery. Francis L. Dancy was serving in Florida as Quartermaster and Commissary in 1836 when he resigned his commission to become a civil engineer in the service of the United States. He took over the project in 1836 and pushed the wall south until he was relieved in 1839.

Dancy not only served as a two-term mayor of St. Augustine while working on the sea wall, but also was elected to the state House of Representatives. He served in the Florida militia during the last portion of the Second Seminole Indian War and helped raise a regiment of volunteers that saw action in the summer and fall of 1840.

Lieutenant Benham assumed responsibility for the project in 1839. His work was essentially completed in 1844, although he returned to do additional repairs in 1845 and 1846.

During the Mexican War, Benham was breveted to captain for gallant and meritorious conduct in the battle of Buena Vista. He is most famous, however, for his work in developing the use of ponton bridges during the Civil War. His efforts in placing the bridges across the Rappahannock River following the battle

of Chancellorsville in 1863 are credited with saving the Army of the Potomac.

The St. Augustine Sea Wall marker: *This portion of the St. Augustine sea wall, extending from King Street to the south end of St. Francis Barracks, was constructed during the period 1833 to 1844. The coquina wall with granite top served as protection for the homes and businesses on the waterfront. Stone for the walls was quarried across the Mantanzas River on Anastasia Island. The granite coping came from Pennsylvania and Connecticut. Together with the refurbishing of the Castillo de San Marcos, renamed Fort Marion by the Army, this project was an early example of the work assigned to graduates of the United States Military Academy at West Point, the first engineering school in the United States. This was one of the earliest federally funded projects in the Territory of Florida. The West Point graduates who designed and supervised the work were: 1st Lieutenant Stephen Tuttle (1797-1833; Class of 1820), 1st Lieutenant Francis L. Dancy (1806-1890; Class of 1826), 1st Lieutenant Henry W. Benham (1818-1884); Class of 1837) and 1st Lieutenant Jeremy F. Gilmer (1818-1883; Class of 1839).*