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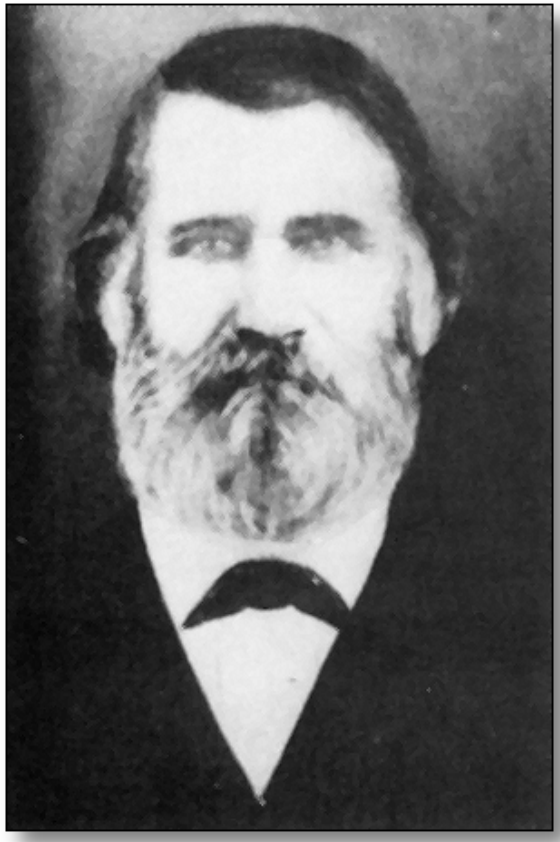
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TAMPA'S FORGOTTEN DEFENDERS THE CONFEDERATE COMMANDERS OF FORT BROOKE

By ZACK C. WATERS



Colonel William I. Turner
20th Regiment Florida Militia

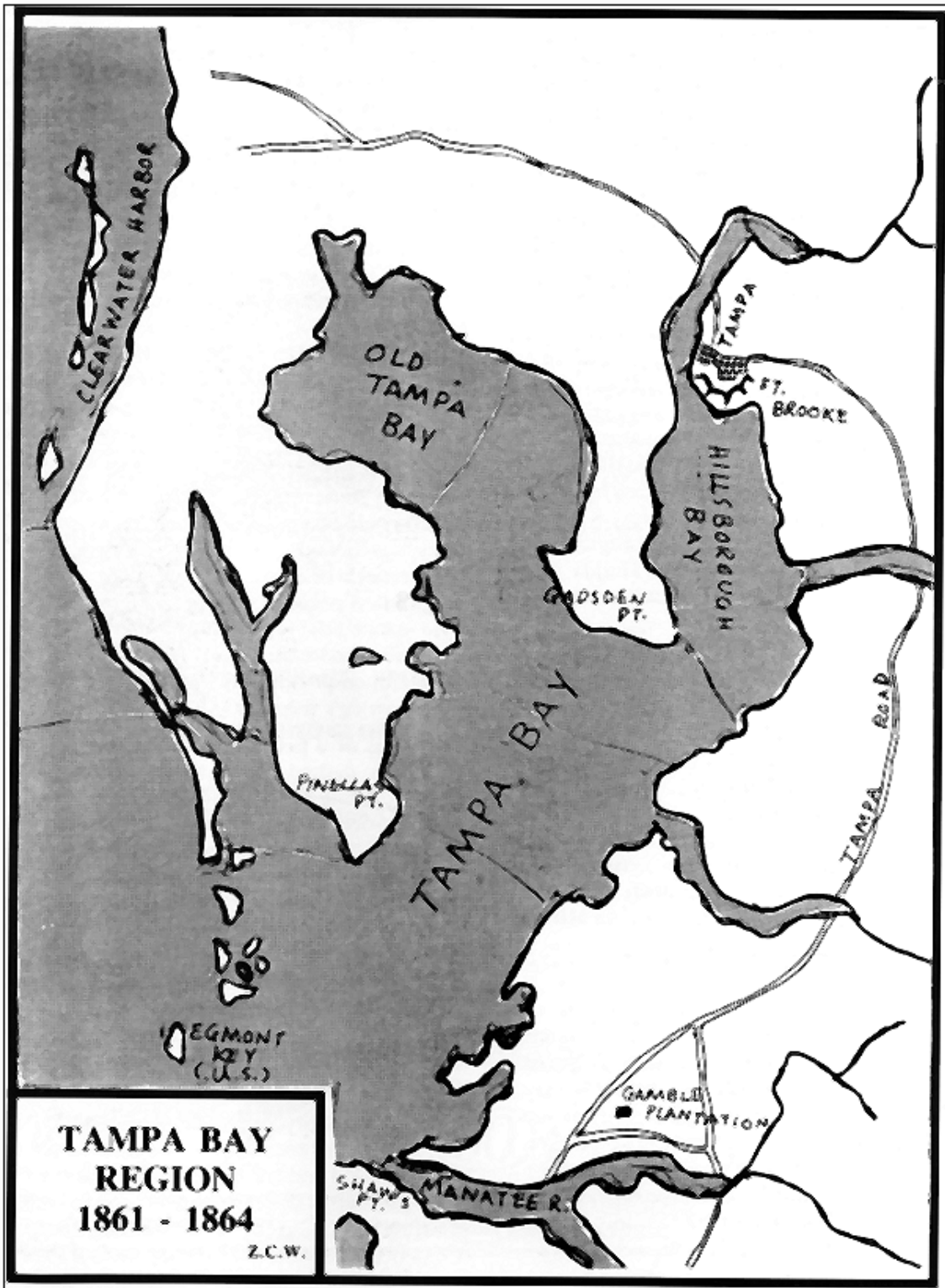
Photo from Edge of Wilderness by
Janet S. Matthews

Fort Brooke was established as a military outpost on the east bank of the Hillsborough River in 1824, and for the next thirty-five years played a vital role in the growth and development of southwest Florida. Tampa had its beginnings with the businesses which sprang up around the fort, and during the

Second and Third Seminole Wars the Tampa garrison provided a haven of safety for the region's pioneer settlers. However, by 1860 the United States Secretary of War determined that Fort Brooke had outlived its usefulness and transferred the fort property to the Department of the Interior. Captain James McKay, a prominent Tampa businessman and politician, unsuccessfully tried to purchase the fort but did manage to lease the property from the United States.¹

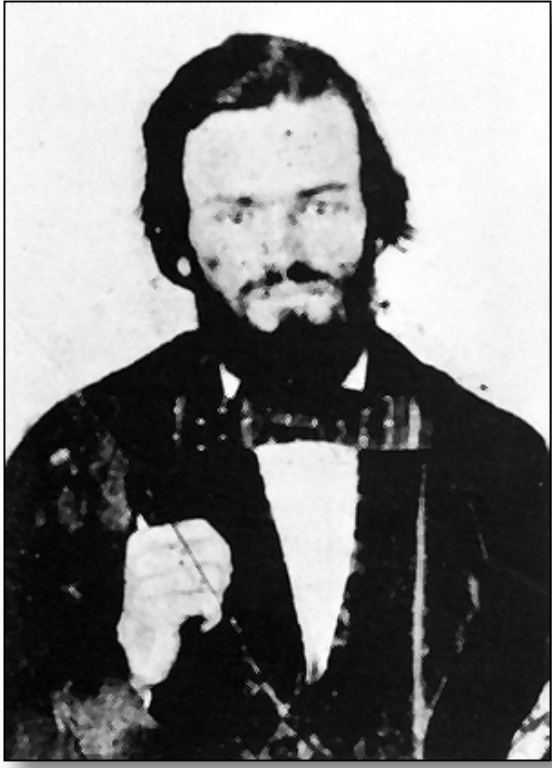
McKay took control of Fort Brooke on 1 January 1861, but his term of possession was shortlived. On 13 January the Gainesville mail carrier brought news of secession and the creation of "the free and independent country of Florida." The town of Tampa went wild in celebration. The quiet Sunday routine was shattered by cheering, parades, speeches by politicians, prayers by the clergy, and the firing of the Fort Brooke cannons. The next day the post was occupied by the Florida State Militia under the command of Colonel William Iredell Turner.²

William I. (often mistakenly listed as "J") Turner, born in Virginia in 1812, had enlisted in the United States Army at age sixteen. He served in Florida during the Second Seminole War, and was wounded in the neck during one of the battles with the Indians. Turner was discharged from the United States Army in 1837, and lived in Alachua County for several years,



accumulating a substantial herd of cattle and several slaves. During the Third Seminole War, Turner served as a Quarter master's

agent at Fort Brooke and Fort Meade, and with the end of hostilities sold his holdings near Gainesville and moved to Hillsborough



Captain John T. Lesley 4th Florida Infantry Regiment

Photo from Tampa Town by Tony Pizzo

County. The 1860 Census shows Turner as the owner of the county's largest plantation and possessor of nineteen slaves. He also took an active interest in local politics. Turner was an early advocate of secession and only a few months previously had lost a bid for a Florida House of Representatives seat by 23 votes. His rank of colonel in the state militia and his ability to raise two companies for Confederate service from Hillsborough County indicate the high esteem he enjoyed in the Tampa Bay region.³

The first troops to occupy Fort Brooke after secession with Turner and his staff were whatever volunteer militia could be assembled on short notice. Military activity was looked upon by many as irrelevant, as most Southerners believed that secession could be accomplished peacefully. Little is

known of the troops who manned the fort during Florida's national period. They were undoubtedly ardent secessionists in civilian dress, armed (if at all) with the weapons used to fight Billy Bowleg's warriors.⁴

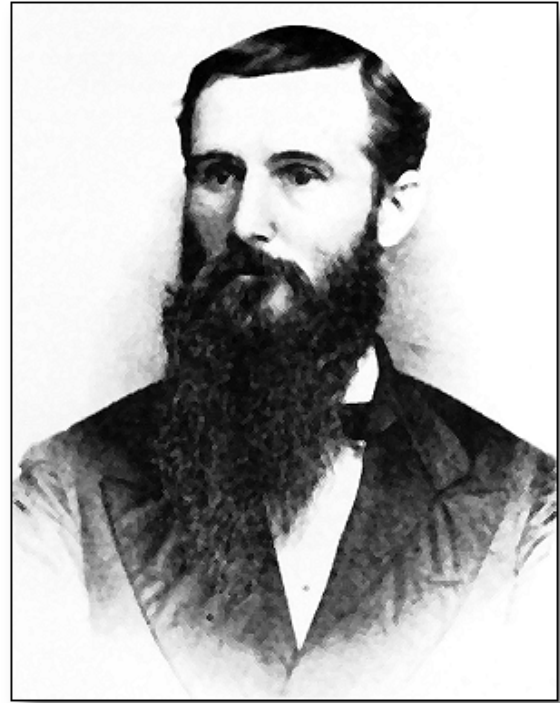
Notions of a peaceful withdrawal from the Union were soon dashed, for on 17 April news reached Tampa of the firing on Fort Sumter. A flurry of military activity ensued throughout the state, and Tampa was no exception. Turner supervised the construction of a series of earthen breastworks during this period, running from Fort Brooke to a nearby Indian mound. "The trench was equipped with carts that were used as ammunition carriers. The waterfront was further protected with the emplacement of five guns." During the first year of the war many of the residents of Tampa gave wholehearted support to the Confederate cause, and the citizens and their slaves probably aided the militia in the construction of the city's defenses.⁵

Turner's military preparations were designed to protect against the Federals, but the first battles at Tampa were political and legal, and Turner was the first casualty. During this time, prominent men in communities throughout the South began forming companies for Confederate service, often arming them at their own expense. One of Tampa's first such units was organized by prominent cattleman, John T. Lesley, and it took the nickname of the "Sunny South Guards." According to post-war accounts: "The names making up this roll (company enlistment roll) were from the best families of the town and vicinity..." These troops had to wait for almost two months to be sworn into Confederate service, and Lesley refused to obey the orders of the post commander, as Turner was a mere Florida militia colonel. Also, the "Sunny South Guards" were the darlings of Tampa, and obeying Turner's orders might have called them from the

parties, parades, and parlors to the digging of earthworks. So acrimonious did this feud become that several of the city's leading citizens (including John Darling, James McKay, and A. DeLaunay) felt compelled to seek assistance from Governor Madison Starke Perry. In a letter dated 27 June 1861 the citizens informed the governor: "A conflict of Authority has arisen between Col. W. I. Turner and Capt. J.T. Lesley as to jurisdiction or right of command in which Lesley denies the authority of Col. Turner and refuses to obey him as commanding officer contrary to and without his orders -- In (unreadable) to this matter the Subscribers state that they believe Col. Turner has acted and is in strict conformity to his instructions from the Commander in chief (Perry): and that he is competent and well devoted to the public interests of his command and ought to be sustained both by the state and confederate authority." Despite this impassioned plea by the citizens of Tampa, Turner's days as commander at Fort Brooke were numbered.⁶

Sometime near the end of July, 1861 Colonel Turner was relieved as commander of troops at the fort and replaced by Florida Militia General Joseph M. Taylor. Taylor was a Hernando County attorney who had replaced Benjamin W. Saxon as Hernando's state assembly representative following Saxon's death. Taylor's appointment was unquestionably an attempt by Governor Perry to halt the Turner-Lesley dispute, but Taylor soon found himself in the middle of a battle involving one of Tampa's most prominent citizens -- Captain James McKay.⁷

At the end of the Third Seminole War, McKay and his business partner Jacob Summerlin began shipping and selling beef at Cuba and Key West. Even after secession and the start of the war McKay continued



Colonel W.L.L. Bowen
4th Florida Infantry Regiment

his lucrative trade with both markets. Key West, however, remained in Union hands throughout the war and became the headquarters for Federal operations in southwest Florida. On 6 June 1861, the Yankees in Key West detained McKay's ship **Salvor** which was on a cattle run to Cuba. Since McKay was on friendly terms with the Federal authorities, they leased his ship (McKay having little choice but to acquiesce to the deal) and let him return to Tampa. Upon his arrival, McKay was arrested on charges of petty treason, and James T. Magbee, the prosecutor and a political opportunist, demanded that the accused be hanged. A trial before two justices of the peace resulted in the defendant being bound over to the grand jury. With Taylor acting as solicitor during the hearing, the grand jury refused to return a true bill (finding of enough evidence for trial) and took the unusual step of having the record reflect that the charges were the

result of "private malice or some not mere laudable motion."⁸

Taylor's actions as commander were not greeted with universal approval. Among those disenchanted were twenty-five citizens of Clearwater Harbor and vicinity. In a letter to Governor Perry outlining a long list of grievances, the citizens were particularly incensed that "he (Taylor) has set at naught the Civil authority and sat himself on the trial of one James McKay for treason against the State of Florida" and further allowed McKay "to go to Key West"(.). They also took the opportunity to complain about the lack of protection provided Clearwater Harbor and stated: "(M)any of the men (Taylor's soldiers) are without arms and nearly all without suitable ammu-nition."⁹

McKay returned to Key West, reclaimed the *Salvor*, and headed for Cuba. On its return trip, the *Salvor* was boarded by Federals off Dry Tortugas, and military supplies were discovered including 600 pistols and a large quantity of percussion caps. McKay was detained in Key West and then transferred to Washington, D.C. He was finally released after President Abraham Lincoln intervened on his behalf and after taking the oath of allegiance to the United States. He soon returned to Tampa and resumed his lucrative blockade running and, in 1863, was named Confederate commissary officer for southwest Florida.¹⁰

The middle of August brought an end to the command of Fort Brooke by the Florida militia. Sometime in the middle of that month General Taylor either resigned or was relieved of his duties. Colonel William I. Turner, as senior militia officer present, turned over command of Fort Brooke to Captain John T. Lesley on August 21, 1861.¹¹

Lesley was a native Floridian who had moved to Hillsborough County in 1848. His father, Leroy G. Lesley, was a Methodist minister at Tampa and a veteran of both the Second and Third Seminole Wars, and John T. Lesley had similarly served in the Billy Bowlegs War. Young Lesley had been a carpenter before the Indian War, but with the end of hostilities he became a cattleman and was quite successful in this endeavor.¹²

Lesley's short tenure as commander of Fort Brooke was Tampa's last tranquil period during the war. The Federal blockade had yet to squeeze off supplies, the citizens had not fled their homes, Union sympathizers were inactive, and Federal forces were still too weak and disorganized to mount an offensive. All of that, however, was about to change.

After less than two weeks as the post commander, Lesley and the "Sunny South Guards" were transferred to Shaw's Point on the south side of the Manatee River. Replacing Lesley at Fort Brooke was Major Wylde Lyde Latham Bowen. Bowen was a young Tennessean who graduated from Mossy Creek Baptist College (forerunner of Carson-Newman College) in 1860 and moved to Lake City, Florida, to read the law in the office of Whit Smith. After Fort Sumter, the twenty-one year old law student joined a Lake City company which became a part of the Fourth Florida Infantry Regiment. He was soon elected major of the Fourth Florida, and was first stationed at Cedar Key.¹³

When transferred to Tampa, Bowen brought with him companies D and E of the Fourth Florida. He also had command of Lesley's company at Shaw's Point, and Bowen was



Lt. Col. John W. Pearson
9th Florida Infantry Regiment
Photo taken from painting at the Orange Springs
Community Church

not at all pleased with the discipline or condition of any of his troops. He took immediate steps to remedy conditions at Fort Brooke. The young commander promptly issued general orders, instituted twice daily drills, required daily and weekly troop inspection reports from company commanders, and prohibited the use of alcoholic beverages by garrison troops, except for medicinal purposes. Bowen also reminded his officers that they would be expected to "observe the Courtesies and Discipline of the C.S. Army"¹⁴

Once again, Lesley's company proved contentious, and apparently refused to recognize Bowen's authority. On 20 November, Bowen wrote to Colonel Edward A. Hopkins, commanding the Fourth Florida Regiment from Apalachicola, requesting

confirmation of his (Bowen's) command status, and reporting: "The Point where the Company (Lesley's command) is stationed is considerably up the River in an unpopulated and Hammock Country(.) The few Citizens that did live anywhere near have most of them moved away & the others taken their property away So that they can leave at Short notice. The Company will have to build Quarters and a Hospital and the Lumber forty miles distant from their Station - while they have no facilities for defending the Country & few for protecting themselves(.) besides there is a Company of Cavalry Serving as "Patrol Guards" for the adjacent Country along the Coast ... There are other points on the Bay that are of more importance to us and more desirable to the the enemy & at the same time accessible to this Post (Fort Brooke) in case of an attack, and I hope that you will instruct me forthwith to remove them to some other Point at which it will be less expense & inconvenience to subsist them and where they will be enabled to render effective Service to the Government." Bowen and the "Sunny South Guards" were ordered to Fernandina the second week of December and his new commander, Colonel William S. Dilworth, eventually brought Lesley and his unit under Bowen's control.¹⁵

Bowen had less success dealing with Hopkins. Shortly after his arrival at Fort Brooke, Bowen received three 24-pounder cannon from the colonel of the Fourth Florida with instructions to mount them at the site best suited for the defense of Tampa. After consultation with his captains and the citizens of Tampa the site selected was a small key near the mouth of the Hillsborough

River. Construction of the battery on the key began immediately. In an outpouring of patriotic spirit, Tampa citizens held meetings and agreed to provide men and

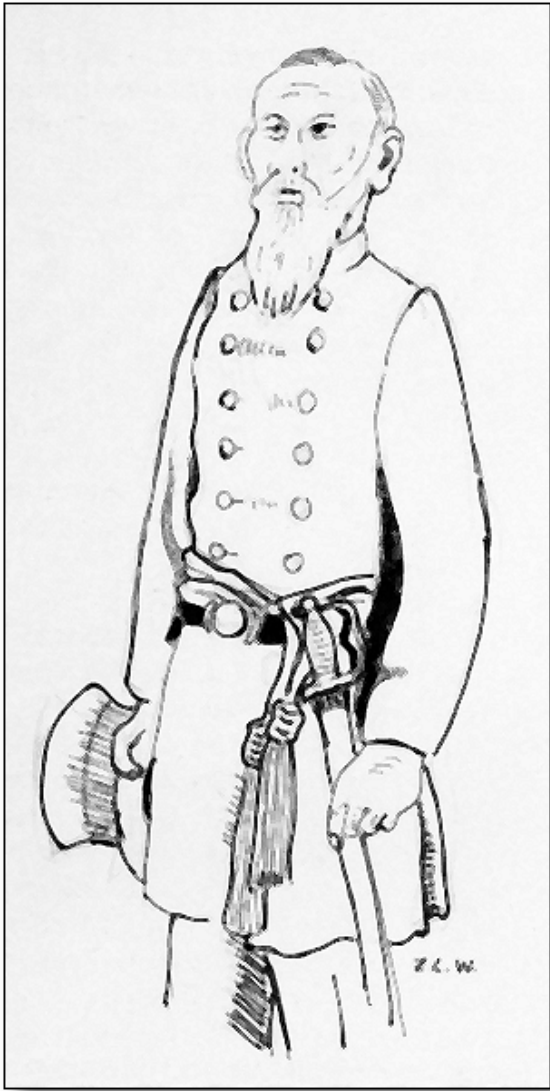
material to aid in their defense, and the citizens and soldiers began mounting the artillery. When Hopkins found that the battery was being erected on an island he ordered the work halted and a secondary site chosen. Bowen attempted to explain by letter that the key was the best location for the emplacement of the artillery, but Hopkins was adamant. As a result, the three 24-pounders were mounted at Fort Brooke. Hopkins' ill-conceived meddling had a far-reaching impact on Tampa. His decision allowed Union gunboats to move much closer to Tampa and Fort Brooke, and later bombardments of the town might have been prevented had the original emplacement of the battery been allowed. Additionally, relations between the citizens of Tampa and the Confederate military would remain strained thereafter.¹⁶

By mid-October, Bowen became increasingly concerned with military activities by the Federals. Early in that month, hostilities in southwest Florida sputtered to life with a skirmish near Fort Myers between Jacob Summerlin and his "Cow Boys" and Unionist wood cutters directed by the notorious "Yankee" agent, Lyman Stickney. Federal naval operations near Tampa Bay also increased, and Bowen and the Confederates soon proved a dangerous foe. On 11 October, troops under Bowen's command captured two fishing sloops out of Key West, the **William Batty** and **Lyman Dudley**, and thirteen prisoners. This minor coup was followed up by still more heroics from the young commander at Tampa as he wreaked havoc with the Union fishing fleet. In his report to Colonel Dilworth, Bowen reported: A accompanied the prisoners to Cedar Keys and on the way there I captured three more vessels and seventeen more prisoners making in total twelve vessels and sixty-nine prisoners." A

large quantity of military hardware was included in the haul.¹⁷

Bowen was ordered, mid-December, to report to Fernandina to help meet a threatened Federal invasion of Florida. He took with him Lesley and the "Sunny South Guards". Left behind were companies "D" and "E" of the Fourth Florida, and Captain Thomas J. McGehee apparently acted as the interim commander. Bowen later became Colonel of the Fourth Regiment, and fought valiantly at the battles of Stones River and Chickamauga, receiving honorable mention (the Confederate equivalent of a Medal of Honor) in the latter. Thereafter, due to illness, he was assigned to several backwater posts and unsuccessfully attempted to be named a Confederate military judge. In March and April of 1865, Bowen carried military dispatches between General Robert E. Lee and General Joseph E. Johnston. The "Sunny South Guards" became company "K" of the Fourth Florida Regiment, and Lesley remained the unit's captain. The company from Tampa fought ably in the early battles of the Army of Tennessee, but Lesley tendered his resignation as a major on March 1, 1863, and returned to Tampa to lead a company of Major Charles J. Munnerlyn's Cattle Guard Battalion.¹⁸

On 10 February 1862, Major Robert Brenham Thomas arrived at Tampa and assumed command at Fort Brooke. Thomas was a Kentuckian and the first West Pointer to serve the Confederacy at Tampa. He attended the United States Military Academy, graduating eighteenth in a class of forty-three in 1852. He was appointed a lieutenant in the United States artillery, and in 1856 was stationed at Fort Brooke. There he met and married one of the daughters of Captain James McKay. Due to his new wife's ill-health he resigned his commission and apparently was associated with McKay's



Sketch of Major John Westcott
(from photograph) by Z.C. Waters

Tampa's mercantile operations. With the outbreak of hostilities, Thomas petitioned Confederate Secretary of War Leroy P Walker for appointment in the Southern army but finally joined the Second Florida Infantry Regiment with the rank of lieutenant. He quickly became a favorite of Brigadier General Joseph Finegan, commander of the Department of East and Middle Florida, and when Bowen was transferred, Finegan recommended Thomas

be made a major and assigned to duty at Tampa.¹⁹

The military conditions which greeted Thomas at Fort Brooke were appalling, and he set about correcting the situation. Beginning with the troops at the fort, he soon issued orders designed to instill discipline, such as re-instituting daily drills. Thomas was blunt in his message to the officers and men. He warned: "In consequence of a dereliction of duty in some of the staff department, notice is hereby given, that any neglect in **any part** of the staff department, the individuals so offending will be immediately relieved." The volunteers were apparently slow in adapting to military regimen, for almost a month later the post commander was reminding the troops of the necessity of wearing uniforms and carrying arms on parade. Despite Thomas' best efforts, the soldiers under his command never adjusted to military discipline. When these troops were finally transferred to Tennessee a visitor stated that "hog pens are cleaner" than their barracks, and reports reached the Union officials in Key West that "the Confederate soldiers plunder the gardens of the neighborhood as fast as any edibles are produced."²⁰

Soon after his arrival, Thomas received orders from Governor John Milton to muster William I. Turner's Independent Cavalry Company and Lieutenant Henry Mulrennan's Coast Guard unit into Confederate service. Turner's company was to be sworn in as infantry, and this was Milton's revenge for a trick Turner had pulled on the governor the previous October. After being relieved at Tampa, Turner and his staff journeyed to Tallahassee to seek a commission for a cavalry company. Brigadier General John B. Grayson was in the final stages of "disease of the lungs" (tuberculosis), and "acted upon suggestion."

Milton kept the dying man a virtual prisoner to keep him from issuing orders, but Turner was not the type of man to be put off easily. Soon after brushing off Turner's request for a cavalry command, the governor received news of a Union invasion of St. Marks. He gathered what troops he could find and hurried south to meet the threat, only to find the supposed attack a ruse. When he returned to the capitol he found that Turner had seen Grayson, received his commission and supplies, and was well on his way back to Tampa. Milton fumed over the incident, but could do little at the time. Turner's cavalry proved to be an asset to the Confederacy in southwest Florida, but Thomas obeyed Milton's order and the new infantry company was soon transferred to the killing fields in Virginia.²¹

Thomas had little time to dwell on Milton's pettiness, for he had other problems to contend with. Milton's orders came on the heels of a petition from citizens of the Clearwater Harbor - Old Tampa Bay area demanding more protection. In the middle of February ships of the Federal blockading squadron flying the Confederate flag, had slipped into Clearwater Harbor and captured the Southern ships **Spitfire**, **Atlanta** and **Caroline**. The Unionists were aided in this venture by Yankee Sympathizers, J.E. Whitehurst and a Mr. Girard. Whitehurst also brought extensive information regarding the town and operations at Fort Brooke, and claimed that there were 38 neighbors and friends of like sentiments within six miles of Tampa. To make matters worse, the blockade was being felt by the soldiers at the fort and the citizens of Tampa. People fleeing the city to the Union outpost of Egmont Key reported: "The state of things (at) Tampa is fearful. They are literally starving. They have no coffee, no tea, no flour, no cloth of any kind, except their common homespun, for which they pay \$1.25 per

yard. They all say they cannot hold out much longer if the blockade is not broken." Finally, as if it were not enough to occupy his mind, Thomas also received word that the Yankess were inciting the Seminoles, to take the warpath against the Confederates. To meet the threat Thomas dispatched George Lewis of Tampa to determine the Indians' intentions, and to placate them if possible.²²

The news that Whitehurst provided the Federals made Fort Brooke appear ripe for the taking, and Acting Volunteer Lieutenant William B. Eaton, commanding the bark **Ethan Allen**, decided he would grab the prize. Whitehurst reported the presence of "two twelve-pounders and two six-pounders mounted in battery there, and a force of 200 or 300 men." The soldiers at the fort Whitehurst classified as cowardly. This was not the first time, nor would it be the last, that Unionists mistook a lack of discipline on the part of Southern troops for lack of courage.²³

On 13 April 1862, Eaton in the **Ethan Allen** and a schooner, the **Beauregard**, arrived off Tampa, and sent a demand for unconditional surrender of the town and fort to Major Thomas. Eaton concluded the message with a promise to allow twenty-four hours "to remove all women and children to a proper distance" before commencing "to bombard the town." Thomas politely refused to surrender the town, but expressed appreciation for the time to evacuate the town and apologized for "this manner of replying to your note." The next day the two vessels bombarded the fort and town in an intense but basically ineffective attack. The attack lasted but a short time, and no citizens or soldiers were injured. One result of this attack was to cause many of Tampa's citizens to seek safer places of residence, and by 1863, the town would (at times)

resemble a ghost town. The assault on Tampa did not meet the approval of Flag Officer W. W. McKean, commanding the United States Eastern Gulf Blockading Squadron, and within a few months Lieutenant Eaton was removed from command of the **Ethan Allen**.²⁴

Major Thomas' days at Tampa were also numbered. In the middle of June, Thomas was ordered to northern Florida where he served as adjutant to General Finegan. Thomas acted as Finegan's artillery commander at the Battle of Olustee, and was recommended for a colonelcy in the Ninth Florida Infantry Regiment. After the Ninth Florida was transferred to General Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, a dispute developed between Thomas and Finegan, and Thomas resigned his commission. He was reassigned to Brigadier General John H. Winder's prisoner commissary department, and spent the last months of the war in that miserable capacity. At least briefly, he was assigned to the prisoner of war camp at Andersonville.²⁵

The new commander at Fort Brooke was Captain John W. Pearson, and he brought a pugnacious attitude that had been lacking in previous commanders. Pearson was born in South Carolina and raised in Tennessee. He had served in Florida during the Second Seminole War, and he moved to the territory shortly thereafter. He and Senator David Levy Yulee purchased a mineral spring in northeastern Marion County, and Pearson prospered in land speculation, cotton cultivation, and as the owner of the famous "watering spa" at Orange Springs. By 1860, he had become convinced that war between the states was inevitable, and raised and outfitted a militia unit which took the name the "Oklawaha Rangers." Pearson and his company had done excellent service as state troops, and had pioneered the use of

guerrilla tactics by Confederates in Florida in a campaign along the St. Johns River a few months earlier.²⁶

Shortly after his arrival in Tampa, Pearson and his Rangers received their baptism of fire. Pearson reported to General Finegan: "On Monday morning June 30 (1862), the gunboat (U.S.S. **Sagamore**) hove into sight in the bay, and after sounding and maneuvering to get a favorable position came to anchor, turned her broadside to us and opened her ports, and then started a launch, with a lieutenant and 20 men, bearing a flag of truce toward the shore." Pearson took a launch and eighteen men and met the Federals in the bay. There he rejected the Unionists' demand for an unconditional surrender. Gone was the courtesy and civility which had marked Major Thomas' encounter with the Yankees in April. Pearson reportedly told the Federals that he "did not understand the meaning of the word surrender"; and when told that such a reply meant that Tampa would be shelled told them to "pitch in."²⁷

The shelling of Tampa began at 6:00 p.m., and lasted about an hour. Pearson's men, joined for the battle by the independent company of Captain John C. Chambers, replied with accurate fire from the fort's batteries. The next day the **Sagamore** backed out of range of the fort's artillery, and resumed shelling the town. Around noon, the Federal guns again fell silent, until Pearson hoisted the Confederate battle flag. This action brought an immediate response from the **Sagamore's** gun crews, but after three or four parting shots, the Federals withdrew, leaving Pearson and the Confederates still in possession of the town.²⁸

Despite two days of intermittent bombardment, damage to Tampa and Fort Brooke was surprisingly light. Pearson's

report of the battle stated: "Nobody hurt on our side." The lack of civilian casualties may be partially explained by the Unionists allowing time for Tampa residents to withdraw to the safety of the interior. Confederate forces at Fort Brooke were similarly unscathed, and, in fact, viewed the proceedings as a lark. A correspondent for the New York *Herald* reported: "Some of the rebels would dodge behind the trees when the shells were fired, and after they had exploded would come out again, evidently much pleased at the exhibition of fireworks." The town itself was also spared from harm. Later reports indicate that a number of unexploded shells were found in the streets and buildings, but W. I. Murphy thanked "a gracious providence" that there was "no damage to man or beast, house or fence."²⁹

The bombardment of Tampa convinced Pearson that the fort's artillery was inadequate to protect the town, but his requisition for additional cannons was denied due to lack of availability and pressing demands at less remote posts. Pearson, however, was not inclined to take no for an answer, and soon hit upon a unique solution to his problem. A member of the Pearson family later recalled: "Capt. Pearson seeing the short range of the cannon at Tampa... detailed two (members) of his company, J. J. Lovinston and _____ Mansel to go to his shop at Orange Springs and manufacture two rifle(d) cannons - six and twelve pounders that were effective at four miles - this being conceded by the engineer to have the greatest penetrating force." The field pieces were nicknamed "Tiger" and "Hornet", and did much to deter Union attacks while Pearson and his "pets" were at Tampa.³⁰

It took Pearson almost a year, but he finally got a measure of revenge for the 30 June -

July 1 attack on Tampa, and the 13 December ramming of a blockade runner in Tampa Bay. Adapting the guerrilla tactics he had successfully used along the St. Johns River to garrison duty, Pearson set a trap at Gadsden Point at the southern end of the Interbay Peninsula. On 27 March 1863, the Union gunboat **Pursuit** appeared in Tampa Bay, and Pearson sent several members of his company disguised as blacks to Gadsden Point to lure the Federal sailors ashore. The Yankees mistook the Confederates for escaping slaves, and sent several sailors in a launch, bearing a flag of truce, to bring in the "blacks". Ignoring the flag of truce, Pearson's men waited until the Union seamen were within easy range, and opened fire on them. Although the Federals were "sitting ducks", only four were wounded, and all escaped back to the **Pursuit**. Outraged by the attack on the white flag, the Federals' sent the ships **Tahoma** and **Beauregard** to once more bombard Tampa and Fort Brooke. As with previous attacks, little damage was done to the fort or the town. Although the firing on the flag of truce was almost unique for the Civil War period, Pearson probably reasoned that the Union seamen were hiding behind the white flag to cover their illegal activities (stealing slaves and obtaining information about his command).³¹

As the South's resources and manpower dwindled, the Confederacy was forced to enact stringent ordinances to continue the war effort. In April, 1862, conscription laws were passed requiring that all white males between the years of 18 and 35 enroll for three years of military service. In November, the age limit was raised to 45. This act was extremely unpopular in south Florida. Coupled with a wave of deserters from the Southern army, area residents with union sentiments or simply wishing to be left alone, and a shortage of basic necessities,

the area became a powderkeg. Pearson provided the spark. As always, he was vigorous and conscientious in performance of his duty, and hunted the deserters relentlessly. He was also heavy-handed in his enforcement of the conscript laws. A Unionist reported: "(E)very man between the ages of 18 and 45 in that section of rebeldom (are) being remorselessly pressed into the rebel army, and if any objections are made they are handcuffed and tied, and then marched off, no matter what the condition of their families." Eventually, these actions led to the creation of a Florida Union cavalry unit which substantially hindered efforts to ship south Florida beef to the starving Confederate armies in Virginia and north Georgia.³²

Pearson's troubles were not confined to Unionists and deserters. Residents of Tampa were soon complaining to Finegan of the lack of discipline among the Southern troops and interference with private property. The exact nature of the charges leveled against the "Oklawaha Rangers" is not revealed in extant records, but they probably involved the taking of food to supplement their meager rations. Finegan castigated Pearson, but there is no record of legal action being taken against the old guerrilla or his men.³³

After eighteen turbulent months at Tampa, in September, 1863, Pearson and his men were ordered to north Florida. As a part of the Sixth Florida Battalion Pearson and the "Oklawaha Rangers" performed ably in the Confederate victory at Olustee. They were then formed into the Ninth Florida Infantry Regiment and ordered to Virginia to reinforce Lee's beleaguered army. On 21 August 1864, Pearson led his troops in a desperate charge against entrenched Yankees on the Weldon Railroad. Pearson was seriously wounded in the attack, and died a few days later in Augusta, Georgia.

Pearson's tour of duty at Tampa had been marred by problems, but he proved to be an excellent combat officer who "never backed away from a fight, nor was afraid to battle when the odds heavily favored the enemy."³⁴

News of the departure of Pearson and his Rangers was relayed to United States naval forces by Union sympathizers in Tampa. Federal authorities were also troubled by the recent return to blockade running by Captain James McKay. Using his fleet ship **Scottish Chief** and the sloop **Kate Dale** and a thorough knowledge of the south Florida coast, McKay resumed his lucrative cattle runs to Cuba and frustrated all attempts by the blockading squadron to capture him. By mid-October, the Unionists received word that McKay's ships were anchored at Tampa, and Pearson's replacement was not yet in place. The Federal's therefore determined that the time was right to strike.³⁵

The new commander at Fort Brooke was Captain John Westcott, and he was one of the little-remembered individuals who contributed much to the development of Florida. A native of New Jersey, Westcott had briefly attended the United States Military Academy, but left West Point to study medicine. He served as a doctor during the Second Seminole War, and thereafter made Florida his home. In his long career Westcott was a doctor, surveyor, devised an innovative plan for public education, founded the first Masonic lodge in Madison County, owned a sawmill, dabbled with mechanical inventions, and served in several state posts including the state Surveyor-General. With secession, Westcott threw his lot with his adopted state, and reported to Tampa as captain of Company "A" of the Second Battalion Florida Volunteers. He was then 56 years old.³⁶

Westcott arrived at Tampa on 12 October 1863 and assumed command of the post two days later. The next day two Federal gunboats, the **Adela** and **Tahoma**, appeared in Tampa Bay, and the following day (15 October) began shelling Tampa and Fort Brooke. The bombardment lasted all day and 126 shells were thrown at the citadel. The Union attack, however, was a diversion and on the night following the bombardment, the gunboat **Tahoma** dropped a landing party of 140 at Ballast Point. The Federals marched overland, guided by what Westcott classed "traitors and negroes." The chief guide appears to have been James H. Thompson, whose illness required that he be carried most of the way on a litter. The landing party reached its destination on the Hillsborough River and burned the **Scottish Chief** and the **Kate Dale**, captured several of the blockade runner's crew, and burned a few bales of cotton. Westcott's report failed to mention the destruction of McKay's vessels, but he did report that nervous Confederates had scuttled the ship **A. B. Noyes**. Alerted to the presence of the landing party by crewmen who escaped McKay's boats, Westcott set out with his troops and some local cavalry to make the raiders pay. Just as the Federals reached the shoreline opposite the **Tahoma**, Westcott's troops exploded from the brush. A running battle ensued with the Yankees scrambling through the surf toward the gunboat and the crew of the **Tahoma** lobbing shells toward the Confederates in the brush. The Confederate horsemen dashed along the shoreline and the infantry sniped at the floundering raiders with their muskets and a couple of light artillery pieces manufactured by boring out engine shafts. After what must have seemed an eternity, most of the raiders reached the safety of the gunboat and the Confederates gathered the weapons abandoned in their flight. Of course, both sides claimed victory, but the

human costs were probably twenty casualties for each side. Westcott concluded his report of the battle with a warning and promise. He stated: "My force here is too small. I may be overpowered, but will fight them to the last." A recent historian has summed up the action thusly: "The Confederates had managed to provide a strong, effective defense and to inflict sharp casualties on the Federals once they were alerted to their presence, but the Union expedition had accomplished its goal - the destruction of the blockade runners."³⁷

Westcott's vow to fight was soon put to the test. On 24 December 1863, the **Tahoma** and a small schooner appeared in the bay, and the next day gave Tampa its Christmas present from Uncle Sam. At about nine o'clock, the gunboat began a bombardment which lasted for two hours. Westcott was fearful that the attack was a diversion and made ready to meet a landing party, but the Federals only shelled the town and withdrew.³⁸

The new year (1864) was a period of impressive gains by the Unionists and their allies in southwest Florida. In January, Yankee troops occupied Fort Myers, which had been abandoned at the end of the Third Seminole War. This post was garrisoned by Federal forces almost until the end of the war despite an 1865 attempt by the Cow Cavalry to take the fort. Also, south Florida's important contribution to the Confederacy was beef, and obtaining and driving the animals became increasingly difficult due to the aggressive actions of a recently formed Florida Union Cavalry troop and large bands of deserters from the Confederate armies. So dangerous had the situation become by April, that Major General James Patton Anderson, the newly appointed commander of the Military District of Florida, ordered the Sixty-fourth

Georgia Infantry Regiment (under command of Floridian, Colonel Theodore W Brevard) to south Florida to "commence a vigorous campaign against the deserters and others, who have been deprecating in that section." However, before the troops reached the area, the Georgia troops were recalled and ordered to South Carolina. At the same time, all infantry in Florida, including Westcott's small force at Tampa, were ordered to Virginia to reinforce Lee's hardpressed army.³⁹

The only Confederate soldiers left at Tampa were Major Charles J. Munnerlyn's Cattle Guard Battalion. These troops used the city as a base of operations but were seldom stationed there. The Federals were quick to take advantage of the situation. A major Union expedition against Tampa was mounted in the first week in May. Several hundred troops, consisting of black infantry, Florida Union cavalry, and seamen, entered the town on 5 May, and the only alarm came from a young lad named Darwin B. Givens, who ran through the streets screaming: "The Devils are coming!" Virtually no Confederate opposition was encountered as the cow cavalry was away on a cattle drive. Several of the leading citizens of the town were arrested, and the artillery at Fort Brooke, including the three twenty-four-pound guns, was removed or destroyed. Minor looting occurred (chiefly by the Florida Union troops) and a Federal officer reported: "It made the Secesh here grind their teeth to see white prisoners brought in here by 'nigger troops' & locked up in the Fort." This Union occupation of Tampa lasted only a few days, but the Confederate occupation of Fort Brooke had ended.⁴⁰

Fort Brooke was re-occupied by Federal troops on 15 May 1864, but was again evacuated a month later. For almost a year

the post was unoccupied, but a Union garrison was established at the fort at end of the war to parole former Confederate soldiers and sympathizers and maintain order. United States troops stationed at Tampa through the early days of Reconstruction, but were finally withdrawn 16 August 1869.⁴¹

The abandonment of Fort Brooke and Tampa by the Confederacy proved a sad end to a story of courage, perseverance, and devotion to duty. The Southern presence at the fort had, for three years, been a thorn in the enemy's side. Though the garrison rarely exceeded 250 men, its influence was felt far beyond the confines of Fort Brooke. Today, its sacrifice is almost forgotten, but they, and the few scattered independent companies in the area, served a valuable function. These neglected troops preserved the vital, beef-rich south Florida region for the Confederacy and enabled the hungry Rebel armies elsewhere to continue the struggle for southern independence.

ENDNOTES

FT. BROOKE CONFEDERATE COMMANDERS

¹ Karl H. Grismer, *Tampa, A History of the City of Tampa and the Tampa Bay Region of Florida*, D.B. McKay, ed. (St. Petersburg, 1950) 135-36.

² Grismer, *Tampa*, 137-38; In a letter to Gov. Perry, 28 Jan. 1861, McKay stated that "during my absence in Havana and upon the news arriving of the state seceding, several indiscreet persons headed by our sheriff, has gone and took possession of the buildings" (of Ft. Brooke). Letter from James McKay to Gov. Madison Perry, 28 Jan. 1861, Governor's correspondence, 1860-61, R.G. 101, series 577, Florida State Archives.

³ 8th United States Census, 1860, Hillsborough County, FL (Slave Schedule); Gussie W. Turner, *Turner and Allied Families*, (Bradenton, 1989) 12-26, 45-53; Election Results, Hillsborough County, 1860,

Florida State Archives, Tallahassee, FL; Fred L. Robertson, comp., *Soldiers of Florida in the Seminole Indian - Civil - and Spanish American Wars* (Live Oak, 1903; reprint ed. Macclenny, 1983) 205, 245.

⁴ Turner, *Turner and Allied Families*, 48-49.

⁵ Anthony P. Pizzo, *Tampa Town, 1824-1886, The Cracker Village With a Latin Accent* (Miami, 1968) 65; Theodore Lesley, "Historical Commission Marks Site of the Confederate Battery," *Tampa Tribune*, 30 Nov. 1958; Grimer, *Tampa*, 138.

⁶ "Sunny South Guards Feted With Poetry, Banner on Departure," *Tampa Tribune*, 17 July 1960; John Darling, et. al. to Governor Madison Starke Perry, 27 June 1861, Governor's Correspondence, 1849 - 71 R.G. 101 series 577 Box 1 Folder 3, Florida State Archives.

⁷ Richard J. Stanaback, *A History of Hernando County, 1840 - 1976* (Brooksville, 1976) 31; Adolphus N. Pacetti affidavit, 1, Pacetti Family File, St. Augustine Historical Society Research Library, St. Augustine, FL.

⁸ Canter Brown, Jr., *Florida's Peace River Frontier* (Orlando, 1991) 146-50; Secretary of State, General Correspondence, 1857-61 R.G. 150, series 24, Box 3, Folder 3, Florida State Archives; *Tampa Florida Peninsular*, 24 Oct. 1868.

⁹ Petition of the Citizens of Clearwater Harbor, 15 August 1861, Governor's Correspondence, 1860-61, R.G. 101, series 577, Florida State Archives.

¹⁰ Brown, *Florida's Peace River Frontier*, 148; United States War Department, *War of Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington, DC, 1880-1901), series 2, 11, 956-82 (hereinafter cited as ORA).

¹¹ Turner, *Turner and Allied Families*, 53 (photocopy of original reproduced at 326). In 1863, Taylor replaced James Magbee in the state senate, and later served as a private in the Confederate army. Leland Hawes, "Former Rebels Saw Error of Their Ways," *Tampa Tribune*, 3 June 1990.

¹² Ernest L. Robinson, *History of Hillsborough County, Florida, Narrative and Biographical* (St. Augustine, 1928) 300-01.

¹³ Robertson, *Soldiers of Florida*, 118-19; W.L.L. Bowen Confederate Military Records of Fourth Florida Regiment, R.G. 109, National Archives, Washington, DC (hereinafter cited as Bowen CMRs); genealogical information provided by Peter Branton, Lookout Mountain, TN, collection of author.

¹⁴ Bowen CMRs; Robertson, *Soldiers of Florida*, 118.

¹⁵ Bowen CMRs.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*; A. DeLaunay, et. al. to Major W.L.L. Bowen, 1 November 1861, Confederate Papers Relating to Citizens or Business Firms, Roll 238, National Archives.

¹⁷ Bowen CMRs; *Savannah Morning News*, 27 Oct. 1861. Lyman D. Stickney was a political opportunist who passed himself off as a Florida Unionist. Historian William W. Davis stated: "Mr. Stickney's reputation was not of the best nor his influence in political circles very high. He was undoubtedly a person who mixed politics and private business indiscriminately and for pecuniary advantage." His political maneuvering led to the 1864 Union invasion of east Florida and the Battle of Olustee. William W. Davis, *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida* (1913; reprint ed. Gainesville, 1964) 273.

¹⁸ Bowen CMRs; Bowen genealogical file, author's collection; *Savannah Republican*, 23 December 1861; Robinson, *History of Hillsborough County*, 300-01; John T. Lesley Confederate Military Records of the Fourth Florida Regiment, R.G. 109, National Archives.

¹⁹ Robert B. Thomas, Compiled Service Records of Confederate Generals and Staff Officers and Non-Regimental Enlisted Men, M-331, National Archives (hereinafter cited as Thomas CSRs).

²⁰ *Ibid.*; Robert Watson Diary, 18 May 1862, transcript at Chickamagua - Chattanooga National Battlefields, Georgia; Boston MA *Daily Journal*, 21 March 1862. See also, Ronald N. Prouty, "War Comes to Tampa Bay: The Civil War Diary of Robert Watson," *Tampa Bay History*, vol. 10, (Fall/Winter 1988) 36-65.

²¹ Thomas CSRs; ORA, series 1, VI, 341. Turner's company became Company "K" of the Eighth Florida Regiment which fought with the Army of Northern Virginia. Mulrennan's unit was finally sworn in as infantry and formed the nucleus of Company "K", Seventh Florida Infantry Regiment, Army of

Tennessee (CSA). After a few months in Virginia, Turner resigned his commission, and returned to Hillsborough County. He raised a second company for Confederate service, but apparently spent the remainder of the war in the Tampa Bay region gathering cattle for the Southern armies. After the war, he helped to found the town of Bradenton and was active in Manatee County politics. Turner, *Turner and Allied Families*, 54-62, 84.

²² Ibid.; New York *Herald*, 24 March 1862; United States War Department, *War of Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, 30 vols. (Washington, DC, 1894-1992), series 1, XVII, 85 (hereinafter cited as ORN).

²³ ORN, series 1, XVII, 85.

²⁴ Ibid.; 215-16. From the tone of Lieutenant Eaton's response to McKean's dispatch, it is apparent that the flag officer believed Eaton had deliberately shelled civilian targets. McKean found such actions reprehensible.

²⁵ Thomas CSRs. Thomas was a popular figure in post-war Tampa. He was described as "(T)he best dancer, the best chess player, the best croquet player, the best shot with rifle or shotgun - he was the social and sporting arbiter in Tampa." Tampa *Tribune*, 4 August 1946.

²⁶ Donald J. Ivey, "John W. Pearson, Founder & Developer of Orange Springs," *Official Program, 5th Annual Confederate Festival of the South Orange Springs, Florida - November 24th & 25th* (n.p., n.d.) John W. Pearson file, Marion County Genealogical Files, General Records, No. P-17, Central Florida Library, Ocala; Eloise Robinson Ott and Louis Hickman Chazal, *Ocala Country, Kingdom of the Sun, A History of Marion County, Florida* (Ocala, 1966) 51; "The Oklawaha Rangers," unpublished mss., Eleanor S. Brockenborough Library, The Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, VA.

²⁷ ORA, series 1, XIV, 111.

²⁸ Ibid.; New York *Herald*, 24 July 1862.

²⁹ ORA, series 1, XIV, 111; New York *Herald*, 24 July 1862; W.I. Murphy to "Mr. Editor", *Southern Christian Advocate* (Augusta, Georgia) 14 August 1862. One near tragedy did occur following the second bombardment of Tampa. A blacksmith, named Addison Mansel, found an unexploded shell near the graveyard, removed the powder, and poked a

hot wire into the opening. In the inevitable flare-up, Mansel's hair, eyebrows, and beard were burned off, and he nearly lost his eyesight. Russell King, "Courthouse Shelled in Bombardment of Tampa," Tampa *Tribune*, 23 April 1939.

³⁰ "The Oklawaha Rangers"; "Wesley Mansel, a Tampa gunsmith, made the field pieces by boring out two engine shafts." They were known as the "Hornet and the Target." Tampa *Tribune*, 5 Feb. 1956.

³¹ ORN, series 1, XVII, 397-399; New York *Tribune*, 29 April 1863.

³² Mark Mayo Boatner III, *The Civil War Dictionary* (New York, 1987) 172; Brown, *Florida's Peace River Frontier*, 150-60; Boston, MA *Daily Journal*, 31 October 1862.

³³ John W. Pearson Confederate Military Records of the Ninth Florida Regiment, R.G. 109, National Archives.

³⁴ "The Oklawaha Rangers;" Robertson, *Soldiers of Florida*, 206-07; Gary Loderhose, 'A History of the 9th Florida Regiment' (master's thesis, University of Richmond, 1988) 27.

³⁵ Rodney Dillon, "The Civil War in South Florida" (master's thesis, University of Florida, 1980) 206-07.

³⁶ Dr. Joe Knetsch, "John Westcott and the Coming of the Third Seminole War: Perspectives from Within," paper presented to the Florida Historical Society Annual Meeting, 12 May 1990, copy provided to author Dr. Knetsch, ORA, series 1, XXVIII, part 1, 735.

³⁷ ORA, series 1, XXVIII, part 1, 735, Rodney Dillon, "The Civil War in South Florida," 215-16.

³⁸ ORA, series 1, XXVIII, part 1, 751.

³⁹ Dillon, "The Civil War in South Florida," 243-264; ORA, series 1, XXXV, part 2, 448-449, 485, 488; series 1, XXXV, part 1, 372. Some sources state that Westcott returned to Tampa on 8 May 1864 for four days, but this seems unlikely. Westcott and his company were at Hanover Junction, Virginia on 28 May, and the South's inadequate transportation system would have made such a trip virtually impossible. Westcott's unit became Company "I", Tenth Florida Infantry Regiment, and Westcott was named the regiment's major. Robertson, *Soldiers of Florida*, 219, 233; Grismer, *Tampa*, 148. See also,

Rodney Dillon, "The Battle of Fort Myers," *Tampa Bay History*, vol. 5 (Fall/Winter 1983) 27-36.

⁴⁰ Dillon, "The Civil War in South Florida," 2 59-265; Captain John Wilder to Mrs. M.W.F. Wilder, 22 May 1864, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT. One Union officer described Tampa as "desolate in the extreme," and described Fort Brooke as consisting of a single parapet facing the water, a magazine, and a few barracks. *ORA*, series 1, XXXV, part 1, 389-90.

⁴¹ Grismer, *Tampa*, chapter XIV, n.p.

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