

Frontier in Flames: The Creek War and the Mississippi Territory

by Mike Bunn and Clay Williams

Nothing could have prepared Captain J.P. Kennedy for what he witnessed as he approached the smoldering ruins of Fort Mims on September 8, 1813. He had been ordered by General Ferdinand L. Claiborne of the Mississippi Territorial Militia to inspect the fort that had been attacked by surprise by several hundred Red Stick Creek warriors a little more than a week prior. Although news of a great battle at the fort had slowly trickled in to the surrounding American settlements, few knew the details of the encounter. Kennedy was stunned by what he saw. His unflinching, detailed report of the scene not only informed military authorities about the conflict that had taken place but captured the horrific nature of the brief but brutal war that was about to commence in earnest and radically alter the trajectory of the development of the United States.

“The place presented an awful spectacle,” Kennedy wrote to his superiors, “and the tragic fate of our friends increased the horror of the scene ... At the east gate of the stockade lay Indian, negroes, men, women, and children in one promiscuous ruin.” He went on to note in grisly detail that the dead “were scalped, and the females of every age were most barbarously and savage-like butchered, in a manner which neither decency nor language can convey. Women pregnant, were cut

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open and their children's heads tomahawked ..." Summing up the sentiments of those across the nation who would soon learn about what had happened, he noted that his men's "hearts were torn with contending passions, by turns of grief and burning with revenge."¹

More than two hundred fifty American soldiers, settlers, and slaves and an unknown number of Red Stick Creeks were killed in the Battle of Fort Mims on August 30, 1813. American settlers had constructed the crude stockade fort, located approximately forty miles north of Mobile, as a place of temporary refuge as tensions with the Red Sticks mounted. A faction of the Creek nation hostile to continued American encroachment, the Red Sticks were known as such in reference to the traditional Creek red-painted wooden war club. Although not the first clash in what would become known as the Creek War, the battle proved conclusively that American Indian relations in the Mississippi Territory had taken a fateful turn. Described not as a battle but as the "Fort Mims Massacre" in contemporary newspapers, the affair shocked the nation and plunged the United States into a war that would eventually become entangled with the larger War of 1812. This article provides an overview of the military actions of the Creek War and brings attention to its importance to southern history.²

For decades prior to the outbreak of the Creek War, the United States, Creek Indians, and the Spanish had maintained an uneasy truce as each claimed portions of the contested Old Southwest. America's southern

¹ This essay is based on a presentation given at the annual meeting of the Mississippi Historical Society in Columbus, Mississippi, March 2, 2012. It drawn chiefly from Mike Bunn and Clay Williams, *Battle for the Southern Frontier: The Creek War and the War of 1812* (Charleston: The History Press, 2008). The quotation "frontier in flames" is from a letter from Captain J.P. Kennedy to Brigadier General Ferdinand L. Claiborne, September 9, 1813, Pickett Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama (hereafter ADAH).

² The exact number killed at Fort Mims is unknown and the subject of much misinformation; the figure referenced here is based on information derived from the most current focused study of the battle, Gregory Waselkov's *A Conquering Spirit: Fort Mims and the Redstick War of 1813-1814* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006). The origin of the term "Red Stick" has likewise been the source of much speculation by those who have written about the Creek War. It derives from the red-painted wooden war club traditionally used by the Creek that came to be the most visible symbol of the Red Stick cause. The Creek War has been commonly referred to in histories of the period, especially earlier works, as the "Red Stick War." In modern times the term "Redstick" has come into widespread accepted usage by a number of writers, however. The authors have opted for the more traditional form of the name for this article.

frontier, located literally south and west of the more established settlements on the Atlantic seaboard, included much of what are today the states of Georgia, Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi. Pressure on the shaky arrangement for control of the region steadily mounted during the early nineteenth century. In the first decade of the 1800s the region witnessed unprecedented increased American migration, strained efforts at cultural adaptation on the part of the Creeks, and international intrigue associated with the Spanish in Florida and their newfound allies the British.³

A chief source of tension between Creeks and Americans was the construction of the Federal Road. A government-sponsored route through the heart of Creek territory, the road connected central Georgia with American settlements in the Tensaw region between the lower Tombig-

³ There is a tremendous and growing body of literature devoted to interpreting the complexities of the international diplomacy, trade, and immigration that affected the development of the Old Southwest and its impact on Creek society. Among the principal sources consulted for this study were Robbie Ethridge, *Creek Country: The Creek Indians and Their World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Andrew K. Frank, *Creeks and Southerners: Biculturalism on the Early American Frontier* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005); Angela Pulley Hudson, *Creek Paths and American Roads: Indians, Settlers, and Slaves and the Making of the American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Claudio Saunt, *A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733–1816* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Mark E. Fretwell, *This So Remote Frontier: The Chattahoochee Country of Alabama and Georgia* (Historic Chattahoochee Commission, 1980); Kathryn E. Holland Braund, *Deerskins and Duffels: The Creek Indian Trade with Anglo-America, 1685–1815* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996); Michal D. Green, *The Politics of Removal: Creek Government and Society in Crisis* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982); Verner W. Crane, *The Southern Frontier, 1670–1732* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004); Thomas Foster, *The Collected Works of Benjamin Hawkins, 1796–1810* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003); C.L. Grant, *Letters, Journals and Writings of Benjamin Hawkins* (Savannah, GA: Beehive Press, 1980); H. Thomas Foster II, *Archaeology of the Lower Muskogee Creek Indians, 1715–1836* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007); William S. Coker, *Indian Traders of the Southeastern Spanish Borderlands: Panton, Leslie, and Company and John Forbes and Company, 1783–1847* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1986); Florette Henri, *The Southern Indians and Benjamin Hawkins, 1796–1816* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986); Henry DeLeon Southerland Jr. and Jerry Elijah Brown, *The Federal Road Through Georgia, the Creek Nation, and Alabama, 1806–1836* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989); Thomas D. Clark and John D.W. Guice, *The Old Southwest, 1795–1830* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1989); Amos J. Wright Jr., *McGillivray and McIntosh: Traders on the Old Southwest Frontier 1716–1815* (Montgomery, AL: NewSouth Books, 2001); and Robert V. Haynes, *The Mississippi Territory and the Southwest Frontier, 1795–1817* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010).

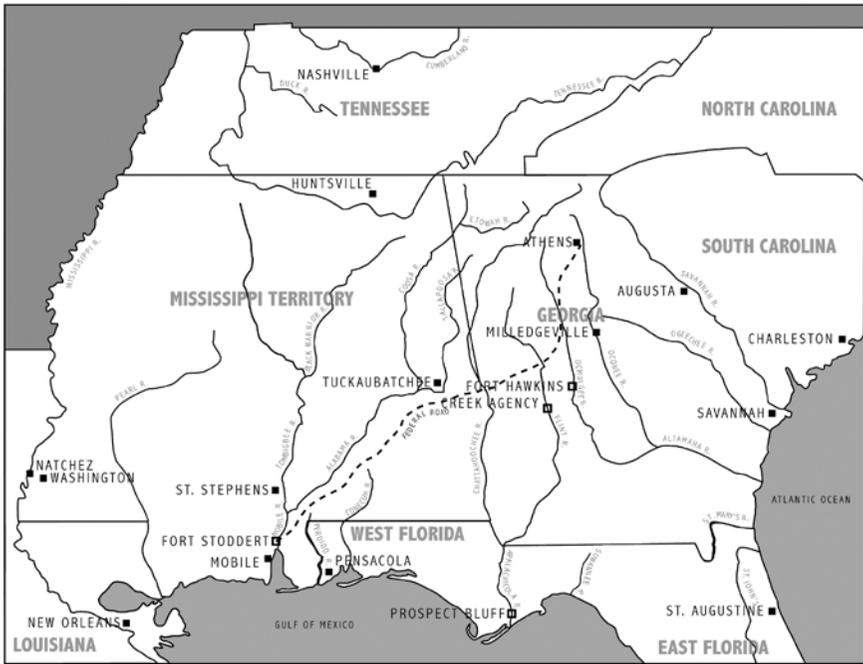
bee and Alabama rivers of the Mississippi Territory. Though they had agreed reluctantly to allow the road with the understanding it was to be primarily a postal route, the Creeks watched in frustration as hundreds of land-hungry settlers made their way through Creek lands to establish communities in some of the most fertile portions of their ancestral lands.⁴

A second point of contention grew out of the fact that as American settlers were advancing over and into Creek lands, the United States government was actively engaged in an organized effort to convince the Creek to adopt tenets of American society in place of traditional ways it viewed as incompatible with modern reality. From the official United States Creek Agency federal agent Benjamin Hawkins spearheaded this “plan of civilization” calling for the undertaking of staple agriculture in place of hunting. The rationale was that the Creeks would need less land to live on, allowing vast expanses of their hunting grounds to be opened to U.S. settlement. The plan, based on cold calculation as much as any altruistic motives, ultimately served to highlight growing divisions in Creek society over the future of their culture and gave clear indication that Americans viewed many important aspects of the traditional Creek way of life with contempt.⁵

Last, the persistent efforts of the Spanish, occupying the Florida parishes just south of the Mississippi Territory, to win the loyalty of the Creeks angered Americans. Many suspected the Spanish of deliberately inciting Indians to violence on their unprotected frontier settlements.

⁴ The most in-depth account of the Federal Road and the role it played in the history of the region through which it cut before, during, and after the war is Southerland Jr. and Brown's *The Federal Road*. See also Hudson, *Creek Paths and Federal Roads* and Green, *Politics of Removal*. The term “Tensaw” has specific reference to the Mobile-Tensaw delta region and has roots in the “Tensaw Settlement” of the mid-eighteenth century that was located just south of the junction of the Alabama and Tombigbee rivers. For purposes of this article, “Tensaw region” refers broadly to the general area of modern-day southwestern Alabama, located immediately north of Mobile, through which the Alabama, Tombigbee, Tensaw, and Mobile rivers flow.

⁵ A number of studies detail to various degrees the U.S. policy of assimilation in bringing about the Creek War. Critical to understanding American-Creek relations are the writings of Creek agent Benjamin Hawkins, made available in edited volumes in Foster, *The Collected Works of Benjamin Hawkins*, and Grant, *Letters, Journals, and Writings of Benjamin Hawkins*. Among the most informative in this regard of the works already cited as used in this study are Ethridge, *The Creek Indians and Their World*; Braund, *Deerskins and Duffels*; Hudson, *Creek Paths and Federal Roads*; and Henri, *The Southern Indians and Benjamin Hawkins*; and Merrit B. Pound, *Benjamin Hawkins, Indian Agent* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1951). See also Frank L. Owsley Jr., “Benjamin Hawkins: The First Modern Indian Agent,” *Alabama Historical Quarterly* 30 (Summer 1968): 7–14.



The Old Southwest, circa 1813. Courtesy the authors.

They viewed as a glaring threat to American safety the continued illegal British trade with the Creeks, much of which was carried on in Spanish territory with colonial officials seemingly unable or unwilling to halt it. With the outbreak of the War of 1812 and the threat of a British–Spanish alliance that would enlist the support of southern tribes, constituting one of the greatest fears of the region’s American residents, concerns grew over alleged covert British attempts to undermine the safety of the American Gulf South frontier.⁶

Into this tense situation in 1811 entered the Shawnee chief Tecumseh, the proverbial spark that would ultimately ignite the smoldering tinderbox that was the Old Southwest. Claiming familial ties to the Creeks, Tecumseh was a native of the Great Lakes Region and a leading figure in Native American resistance to U.S. settlement in the Old

⁶ The most concise and inclusive scholarly account of the interplay of the War of 1812 and the Creek War in bringing underlying tensions in the region to the surface is Frank L. Owsley Jr.’s *Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands: The Creek War and the Battle of New Orleans 1812–1815* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1981); see also his “British and Indian Activities in Spanish West Florida During the War of 1812,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 46 (October 1967): 111–23.

Northwest. Along with his brother Tenskwatawa (The Prophet), Tecumseh believed an Indian Confederacy was the only way to ensure the survival of native tribes in the face of mounting encroachment on their lands. Assisted by prophets who helped transform his political vision into a religious crusade, Tecumseh called for a halt to American colonization and a return to traditional ways of life. In the summer and fall of 1811 he traveled throughout the southeast in an attempt to rally the Chickasaws, Choctaws, and Creeks to his cause. Tecumseh was largely unsuccessful with the Choctaws and Chickasaws due to the efforts of Choctaw chief Pushmataha, who counseled his fellow Indians not to be deceived by Tecumseh's message.⁷

Tecumseh found his only receptive audience with the Upper Creeks, many of whom he addressed at the Creek annual council meeting at Tuckaubatchee, located in present-day central Alabama. These Upper Creeks lived along the northern reaches of the Alabama and Tallapoosa Rivers and represented about half the Creek Nation. Relatively more removed from white society than the Lower Creeks, who occupied more southerly reaches of the Chattahoochee and Flint rivers, the Upper Creeks controlled a number of towns that were growing increasingly disillusioned with the accommodationist stance of many Creek leaders. While no transcript of Tecumseh's speech at the Creek annual council meeting at Tuckaubatchee survives, evidence strongly suggests he urged abandonment of "American" styles of agriculture and a return to traditional folkways, even if to do so might lead to armed conflict with the United States. Regardless of the exact wording, the message was clear and timely for those inclined by circumstances to agree with his call. Pointing to the appearance of a comet that glowed its brightest just as he arrived, those encouraged by what he said became even more supportive when his prophecies regarding the occurrence of an earth-

⁷ The quality of scholarship on Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa's efforts to form a pan-Indian Confederacy is uneven and sometimes conflicting. Sources consulted for this article include John Sugden, *Tecumseh: A Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997); R. David Edmunds, *Tecumseh and the Quest for Indian Leadership* (New York: Little, Brown, 1984); Joel Martin, *Sacred Revolt: The Muskogees' Struggle for a New World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991); Benjamin Drake, *Life of Tecumseh, and His Brother the Prophet: With a Historical Sketch of the Shawnee Indians* (Cincinnati: E. Morgan, 1841); R. David Edmunds, *The Shawnee Prophet* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983); George Stiggins, *Creek Indian History* (Birmingham: Birmingham Public Library Press, 1989), 83–96; and John Sugden, "Early Pan-Indianism: Tecumseh's Tour of the Indian Country, 1811–12," *American Indian Quarterly* (Fall 1986): 273–304.

quake seemed to be fulfilled shortly after his visit. He had warned that he would shake down the houses of those that failed to heed his call to collaboration by stamping his foot when he returned to his home. Just a few weeks after his presentation at Tuckaubatchee, the New Madrid earthquake rattled much of the Midwest and South. Creeks who supported Tecumseh and were swayed by these events became determined to halt further American settlement in their territory and the further adoption of American ways of life among their tribe. In the months after Tecumseh's visit Red Sticks began openly threatening Creek leaders who opposed them. Ultimately, scattered armed conflicts between the two factions took place. With such a state of affairs it was only a matter of time before American frontier settlers became entangled in this internal struggle over the future of the Creek people.⁸

Violence between Red Stick Creeks and U.S. settlers first flared in the spring of 1812 when the Indians launched several attacks on isolated frontier communities or travelers on rural roads. Agent Hawkins took swift action to bring all the killers to justice and quash the rebellion before it gained momentum. Several of the perpetrators of these first attacks were executed by other Creeks who agreed to carry out Hawkins's orders, outraging Red Stick Creeks and deepening the growing divide within Creek society. Steadily growing bolder and more determined in their plans, Red Sticks soon began regular communication with the Spanish in Pensacola in an attempt to obtain arms and ammunition.

⁸ Tecumseh's appearance at Tuckaubatchee is chronicled in dozens of volumes about the era. Among the most detailed accounts of the event and his trip south in general is found in John Sugden, *Tecumseh*, 215–51. An account of Tecumseh's speech "as recorded from eyewitness accounts" that first appeared in J.F.H. Claiborne's *Mississippi as a Province, Territory and State with Biographical Notices of Eminent Citizens* (Jackson: Power and Barksdale, 1880) has been quoted in several histories of the Creek War. While the accuracy of the alleged transcript is highly suspect and refuted by most modern historians who have researched the topic, there is general agreement among scholars of the era that his message contained an implied, if not overt, call for a rejection of Anglo-American culture, return to ancestral ways, and military preparedness. Claiborne was the son of General Ferdinand L. Claiborne. Among the most comprehensive accounts of the remarkable natural phenomena that coincided with Tecumseh's appeal to the Creeks is Jay Feldman's *When the Mississippi Ran Backwards: Empire, Intrigue, Murder, and the New Madrid Earthquakes of 1811–12* (New York: Free Press, 2005). For the escalation of tensions within the Creek Nation, see Griffith Jr., *McIntosh and Weatherford*, 79–89; Braund, *Deerkins and Duffels*, 186–87; and "Creek Indian Letters, Talks, and Treaties 1705–1839 in Four Parts, Compiled, Copied and Bound with Authority of John B. Wilson, Secretary of State, Under Direction of Mrs. J.E. Hays, State Historian, 1939," Georgia Archives.

With open warfare seemingly inevitable, U.S. officials in the Tensaw region began to mobilize forces to respond in case of emergency, and settlers initiated the construction of a series of makeshift stockades as places of temporary protection in case of emergency.⁹

Long-simmering tensions erupted into open conflict between U.S. and Red Stick forces in July of 1813. Around the tenth of that month, a large group of Red Stick warriors headed by Peter McQueen, Josiah Francis, and High-Head Jim traveled to Pensacola, where they hoped to obtain arms and ammunition from the Spanish. Their mission soon became general knowledge among the small American Tensaw area settlements and was viewed by many as the final proof of long-feared Red Stick plans to attack them. Without awaiting instructions from Mississippi Territorial militia commander Ferdinand L. Claiborne, Colonel James Caller, the ranking officer in the local militia, hastily called out his command and set out in search of the group to launch a preemptive strike.¹⁰

⁹ These outbreaks of violence and their repercussions are recorded to varying degrees of inclusivity in most histories of the Creek War. Among the most concise summaries of this activity are found in Hudson, *Creek Paths and Federal Roads*, 97–102, and Owsley Jr., *Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands*, 15–16. See also Woodward, *Reminiscences*, 32–34, and Tom Kanon, “The Kidnapping of Martha Crawley and Settler-Indian Relations Prior to the War of 1812,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 64 (Spring 2005): 3–23. For information on Hawkins’s efforts to bring the culprits of the violence to justice, see Waselkov, *A Conquering Spirit*, 88; Green, *The Politics of Removal*, 41; Griffith Jr., *McIntosh and Weatherford*, 80–88; Saunt, *New Order of Things*, 242; and Woodward, *Reminiscences*, 32–33. Many histories document the Red Sticks communication with Spanish authorities; among the most concise is Owsley Jr., *Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands*, 24–26. The best modern summary of the situation in the Tensaw region in 1813 is found in Waselkov, *A Conquering Spirit*. H.S. Halbert and T.H. Ball’s seminal history *The Creek War of 1813 and 1814* (Chicago: Donohue and Henneberry, 1895), which was informed by interviews with those who lived through the panic of 1813, contains the most detailed study of the numerous settler stockades in the region, 105–19. More than a dozen settler or military forts eventually stood in the Tensaw region. An insightful first-hand perspective of the fear and reactions among Tensaw area settlers is found in Margaret Ervin Austill, “Memories of Journeying through Creek Country and Childhood in Clarke County, 1811–14,” *Alabama Historical Quarterly* 6 (Spring 1944): 92–98.

¹⁰ For information on the Red Sticks’ visit to Pensacola and the ensuing Battle of Burnt Corn Creek and its aftermath, see Owsley Jr., *Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands*, 30–33; Waselkov, *A Conquering Spirit*, 98–102; Elizabeth Howard West, “A Prelude to the Creek War of 1813–14,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 18 (April 1940): 247–66; Stiggins, *Creek Indian History*, 98–103; Halbert and Ball, *The Creek War*, 125–142; Albert James Pickett, *History of Alabama and Incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi From the Earliest Period* (Montgomery, AL: River City Publishing, 2003), 521–27; Thomas S. Woodward, *Woodward’s Reminiscences of the Creek, or Muscogee Indians, Contained in Letters to*

Caller's force of about 180 troops attacked the Red Sticks at an encampment they had made near Burnt Corn Creek in modern southwestern Alabama on July 27, 1813. Although the Americans initially scattered the Red Sticks in disorder across the creek, the Indians soon rallied and counterattacked as the militia stopped to inspect the packhorses they had just captured. The American militia fled in terror. Disorganized, Caller's militia straggled home and disbanded. The troops were in such disarray on their retreat that even Caller himself became lost and was not found until more than two weeks later. The victory gave the Red Sticks a newfound confidence in their martial abilities and—simultaneously embarrassed and humbled the Americans. Once terrified residents became aware of the defeat of Caller's force, many of them fled to the safety of their makeshift forts and awaited the anticipated Red Stick offensive. What happened next at Fort Mims sent shockwaves throughout the nation and seared the volatile situation in the Southwest into the nation's consciousness.¹¹

Fort Mims had been built around several structures on the plantation of planter Samuel Mims. By the end of August of 1813 the fort held approximately two hundred fifty settlers, just over one hundred troops of the Mississippi Territorial Militia, and about forty local militiamen under the overall command of Major Daniel Beasley. The Red Sticks, seeking revenge for the surprise attack at Burnt Corn, targeted the fort in large part because of the many Creeks living there who had either assisted Caller's troops or simply refused to join the Red Sticks' cause. Approximately seven hundred warriors under the command of William Weatherford, Paddy Walsh, Peter McQueen, and others advanced on Fort Mims, bent on its destruction. Though several individuals detected their movement and reported it to Major Beasley, he refused to believe an attack on his post was being planned. Even in his final letter to General Claiborne, written only hours before the Red Stick attack, he expressed no awareness of his dangerous predicament. In the dispatch he coolly

Friends in Georgia and Alabama (Montgomery, AL: Barrett and Wimbush, 1859), 84–85; and Benjamin Hawkins to General John Floyd, September 30, 1813, in Thomas Joseph Peddy, "Creek Letters from United States Government Publications Pertaining to the Creek Indian Nation," Peddy Collection, Columbus State University Archives.

¹¹ Accounts of the battle and its impact on Red Stick morale from Owsley Jr., *Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands*, 30–32; Waselkov, *A Conquering Spirit*, 98–102; Interviews with Colonel G.W. Creagh, General Patrick May, and Doctor Thomas G. Holmes, Pickett Papers, ADAH; and Stiggins, *Creek Indian History*, 101.

stated that although two slaves had told him they had seen “a great number of Indians Painted, running and hallooing ... I now doubt the truth of that report.” As a consequence of his false sense of confidence, the fort lay totally unprepared for the attack.¹²

The Battle of Fort Mims began at noon on August 30, 1813. Hundreds of Red Stick warriors, concealed four hundred yards from the fort, rose and ran silently toward the structure at the command of one of their leaders. They went unnoticed until within a few steps of the stockade and took those inside by complete surprise. Major Beasley became one of the first casualties of the battle, being struck down as he desperately tried to close the fort’s open eastern gate. The occupants of Fort Mims were nearly overwhelmed and had to withdraw to the interior structures of the fort to organize a defense. They finally managed to stem the initial Red Stick onslaught, but the attackers soon launched a second assault that spelled doom for Fort Mims.¹³

In the massacre that followed Fort Mims was destroyed and the majority of its occupants killed. Almost immediately the Red Sticks began to set fire to the structures inside the fort, and the garrison was gradually corralled into one bastion. Red Sticks brutally murdered and scalped hundreds of men, women, and children as the fighting wore on. No more than thirty of those in the fort managed to escape. The fighting ceased around five o’clock in the afternoon. Though unknown at the time, it was both the first and last major Red Stick offensive in the Tensaw region.¹⁴

News of the Red Stick strike stunned the nation. Americans were horrified and indignant at the scale of the atrocity, and many suspected Spanish or British interlopers of masterminding the assault. To the thou-

¹² Waselkov’s *A Conquering Spirit* is the most detailed study of the Battle of Fort Mims yet published. Incorporating the great majority of known primary and secondary sources, the book is also informed by the author’s archaeological investigation of the site. Waselkov’s analysis forms the basis for the summary of the battle presented here. Quote is from Daniel Beasley to General Ferdinand L. Claiborne, August 30, 1813, J.F.H. Claiborne Collection, Book F, “Letters and Papers Relating to the Fort Mims Massacre,” Mississippi Department of Archives and History (hereafter MDAH).

¹³ Waselkov, *A Conquering Spirit*, 116–38.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* The day after the affair at Fort Mims, Red Sticks massacred an entire family near a settler stockade in the vicinity known as Fort Sinquefield. A pitched battle took place there on September 2, 1813, but due to the swift actions of its defenders there were fewer American casualties. See Halbert and Ball, *The Creek War*, 177–89; O’Brien, *In Bitterness and Tears*, 48–49.

expansive region. Though far removed from the scene of the fighting, rumors ran wild that the area was to be a target of Native American attack and that it would suffer the same fate as Fort Mims. During this brief "Mississippi Panic," runners were sent from town to town in the region advising settlers to seek shelter, and many families in rural areas gathered their belongings and headed to the relative safety of towns such as Port Gibson. A small number of temporary stockades, similar to those in the Tensaw region, were hastily thrown up for groups of refugees from the imagined Creek and Choctaw advance. So consuming was the preoccupation with the Red Stick rebellion that in October, Governor David Holmes suspended the Mississippi Territory General Assembly in recognition of "the disastrous events that have happened upon the eastern frontier of our Territory." Closer to the area where actual fighting was taking place, in Wayne County, a mere sixty miles or so from Mims, at least two forts were established around the community of Winchester. Further north near modern-day Columbus, at Plymouth Bluff on the Tombigbee River, Fort Smith was erected shortly after the outbreak of hostilities at the request of U.S. Interpreter for the Choctaws John Pitchlynn to serve as a base of supply for operations in the Black Warrior River area.¹⁵

Almost before the last of the victims of the Fort Mims attack had been buried in early September, official plans for reprisal were put in motion. Secretary of War John Armstrong and Sixth Military District commander Thomas Pinckney devised a plan to crush the Red Sticks utilizing multiple armies. The strategy called for armies from the Mississippi Territory, Tennessee, and Georgia to simultaneously converge on Red Stick territory from different directions. Besides engaging hostile Indian forces, these troops would also burn villages and crops and other supplies, forcing the Creeks to give up the fight.¹⁶

¹⁵ Halbert and Ball, *The Creek War*, 116, 122, 296–300; Claiborne, *Mississippi as a Province, Territory, and State*, 336–37, 356; Letter of E.O.W. Andrews to "Uncle," September 19, 1813, Andrew Family Papers, MDAH. The locations of the forts referenced near Port Gibson have not been documented. For information on Fort Smith, see Jack D. Elliott, "The Plymouth Fort and Creek War: A Mystery Solved," *Journal of Mississippi History* 62 (Fall 2000): 328–70. Holmes quote from Proclamation of Governor David B. Holmes, October 8, 1813, in Clarence Edwin Carter, ed., *The Territorial Papers of the United States*, vol. 6, *The Territory of Mississippi, 1809–1817* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1938), 399–400.

¹⁶ Owsley Jr., *Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands*, 43–46. Pinckney, at the start of the war, commanded the Sixth Military District, which included Georgia and the Carolinas



The Canoe Fight, from Harper's Magazine. Courtesy the authors.

The Mississippi Territorial militia, under the command of Ferdinand L. Claiborne, was the first army to be engaged, portions of the group having already been involved in the fight at Fort Mims. In the fall of 1813 Claiborne's soldiers began to canvass the lower Tombigbee and Alabama river areas to flush bands of hostile Creeks. Some of these soldiers in November of 1813 took part in one of the enduring legends of the Creek War. Aboard canoes in the Alabama River, Captain Sam Dale and two privates rowed by a free black man named Caesar fought a dramatic hand-to-hand battle with a group of Red Stick warriors more than twice their number. In what became known as the "Canoe Fight," Dale and his men used knives, bayonets, gun butts, and oars in a brief but desperate fight to victory that greatly improved the morale of the American army. The audaciousness of the affair made Dale a national hero.¹⁷

but was eventually given overall command of the U.S. war effort. This was due in large part to more reliable communications between his district, headquartered in Charleston, and the nation's capital than those of the Seventh Military District, headquartered in New Orleans, in which most of the war was actually fought.

¹⁷ "Notes furnished by Col. Jeremiah Austill in relation to the Canoe Fight and other engagements in which he was concerned in the memorable years 1813–1814," Pickett Papers, ADAH. Austill related that there were eleven Red Sticks in the canoe that approached them, but that two jumped out and made for the river bank before they came within effective range of each other. One of these was shot and killed and the other

Claiborne's army's ultimate target was the Red Stick stronghold at the Holy Ground. A fortified town of more than two hundred buildings, Holy Ground, which was located on a bluff in a curve of the Alabama River, served as a home for Red Stick prophet leaders as well as a base of supply and place of refuge for warriors. According to the prophet Josiah Francis, the town had been rendered invincible to attack by Americans through a magical ring of defense encircling it. The prophets believed that any enemy who approached the town would instantly drop dead. On December 23, 1813, Claiborne's force of volunteers, militia, and allied Choctaws, approximately one thousand men in all, approached the town in three columns to encircle the town. The Red Sticks, under the command of William Weatherford, had detected their approach and sent the women and children of the village across the river for safety. A small force that included several enslaved Africans defended the town behind a low wall made of stacked wood. A shortage of arms and ammunition forced many Red Sticks to fight with only bows and arrows. In the skirmish Claiborne's forces, including a regiment of the U.S. Infantry and a group of Choctaws under the Mississippi chieftain Pushmataha, steadily drove the Red Sticks back and in short order forced a disorderly retreat that sent the defenders "flying in all directions, many of them casting away their arms." One of the last to retreat, Weatherford made a dramatic escape that has become engrained in myth. While under fire, he rode his trusted horse Arrow off an approximately fifteen-foot-high bluff into the river. In a hail of bullets he disappeared into the forest on the opposite bank of the Alabama. The entire affair lasted only an hour. Suffering only one casualty, U.S. forces had killed about thirty Red Sticks and wounded many more. Within the town, which was soon set ablaze, the victors found a pole on which were hung hundreds of scalps "of every description from the infant to the grey head;" presumably the grisly remains of the victims of Fort Mims.¹⁸

apparently escaped.

¹⁸ Owsley Jr., *Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands*, 47–48; Waselkov, *A Conquering Spirit*, 164–66; Griffith Jr., *McIntosh and Weatherford*, 126–32; Halbert and Ball, *The Creek War*, 241–65; Pickett, *History of Alabama*, 574–77; Stiggins, *Creek Indian History*, 116–21; and Dunbar Rowland, "Military History of Mississippi 1803–1898," in *The Official and Statistical Register of the State of Mississippi, 1908* (Jackson, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1908), 399. Claiborne quote from General Ferdinand Claiborne to Secretary of War John Armstrong, January 1, 1814, in John Brannan, *Official Letters of the Military and Naval Officers of the United States, During the War with Great Britain in the Years 1812, 13, 14, and 15* (Washington, DC: Way and Gideon, 1823). Weatherford's

Though the opposing forces were unaware of it, the Battle of the Holy Ground ended the fighting in this theater of the war. Claiborne's soldiers and regular U.S. troops had disrupted Red Stick communications with Pensacola and scattered any remaining pockets of resistance in the area. With order restored in the region where the war had begun, the focus of attention turned to the north and east.

In the wake of the attack on Fort Mims, the state of Georgia had also mobilized troops to put down the Red Stick rebellion. General John Floyd commanded the main Georgia army raised in response to the threat, composed of more than 2,300 volunteers and militia. Floyd hoped to advance his army into Creek Territory near the Coosa and Tallapoosa rivers and join General Andrew Jackson's Tennessee force, eliminating resistance and constructing a series of fortified supply depots as it marched. Floyd moved quickly from Fort Hawkins in central Georgia toward the Chattahoochee River in the fall of 1813, his first objective being to relieve the allied Creek town of Coweta along the river before moving deeper into Creek territory. Discovering the siege had been lifted upon his arrival, Floyd's men constructed Fort Mitchell on the banks of the Chattahoochee near present-day Phenix City, Alabama, to serve as the main supply base for his upcoming movements. From this outpost Floyd's army would launch two offensives in its attempts to subdue the Red Sticks in this theater of the war that resulted in two major battles.¹⁹

daring escape, known during his lifetime, has become one of the enduring legends of the war, and was first widely promulgated in George Cary Eggleston, *Red Eagle and the Wars with the Creek Indians* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1878), 224. Probably the most accurate modern account of the event is found in Griffith Jr., *McIntosh and Weatherford*, 129–30, which is informed by unpublished testimony from Weatherford's relatives. Woodward, in his *Reminiscences*, 87–88, however, recorded that based on personal conversation with him, he knew Weatherford did not actually jump the horse at all, but rather disappeared into a ravine near the edge of the river. All the details of what happened may never be known. Quote concerning scalps from letter from Dr. Neal Smith to James Smiley, January 8, 1813 (14), ADAH.

¹⁹ The campaigns of the Georgia militia are by far the least studied of those of the Creek War, and there is currently no in-depth study focusing on them solely. Among the sources consulted for this paper are Owsley Jr., *Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands*; Sean Michael O'Brien, *In Bitterness and In Tears: Andrew Jackson's Destruction of the Creeks and Seminoles* (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2003); Gordon Burns Smith, *History of the Georgia Militia, 1783–1861* (Milledgeville, GA: Boyd Publishing, 2000); Griffith Jr., *McIntosh and Weatherford*; Stiggins, *Creek Indian History*; Pickett, *History of Alabama*; Eggleston, *Red Eagle*; Halbert and Ball, *The Creek War*; Robert S. Quimby, *The U.S. Army in the War of 1812: An Operational and Command Study* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1997); Brannan, *Official Letters*; Hugh M. Thomason, "Governor Peter

The first encounter took place at the Red Stick village of Autossee, a significant Red Stick population and military center on the Tallapoosa River that might have been the home of some of the warriors who attacked Fort Mims. Floyd's army reached the town on November 29, 1813. The battle began about daybreak on a bitterly cold, frosty morning in which the fields appeared white as snow. After repulsing an initial charge by the Red Sticks, Floyd's troops countercharged, driving them into Autossee and the nearby woods. An intense and sustained firefight ensued during which the Red Sticks suffered heavy casualties. By nine a.m. the Red Sticks had been "completely driven from the plain," Floyd wrote in his report of the battle. Many were shot as they tried to escape across the Tallapoosa, and many others were burned in their houses as the village and a neighboring settlement became engulfed with flames. About two hundred Red Sticks, possibly more, lay dead when the firing stopped, with the U.S. forces suffering only eleven killed and approximately fifty wounded. General Floyd was among the casualties, however, having been hit by a musket ball in the knee. Though he had destroyed one of the principal Red Stick towns, Floyd could not follow up on his victory due to the continual shortage of supplies. Rather than risk advancing further with a tenuous supply line, he marched his army back to Fort Mitchell.²⁰

After regrouping and assembling a new store of supplies, Floyd's army took the field again in January of 1814. Floyd now targeted Tuckaubatchee, a principal Creek population and political center. During its advance towards the Tallapoosa River, Floyd's army paused to camp near Calabee Creek, a tributary of the river. Unbeknownst to Floyd, the Red Stick leaders were aware of his approach and plotted a surprise attack. In perhaps the best-planned Red Stick attack of the war, more than a thousand warriors fell upon Floyd's army just before dawn on Janu-

Early and the Creek Indian Frontier, 1813–1815," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 45 (Fall 1961): 223–37; and "Notes and Documents: Letters of John Floyd, 1813–1838," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 33 (September 1949): 228–41. For information on the allied Creek attacks and the siege of Coweta, see Owsley Jr., *Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands*, 52; Griffith Jr., *McIntosh and Weatherford*, 117–18; and Peddy, "Creek Letters."

²⁰ Peter A. Brannon, "Fort Mitchell References," *Alabama Historical Quarterly* 21 (1959): 1–13; Owsley Jr., *Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands*, 54–56; Griffith Jr., *McIntosh and Weatherford*, 124–26; O'Brien, *In Bitterness and In Tears*, 69–100; Smith, *History of the Georgia Militia*, 129; Stiggins, *Creek Indian History*, 124–28; Pickett, *History of Alabama*, 557–59; Eggleston, *Red Eagle*, 207–13; and Floyd's quote from John Floyd to General Pinckney, December 4, 1813, in Brannon, *Official Letters*, 283–85.

ary 27. Although the men had built campfires on the perimeter of the camp as a defense mechanism against a surprise attack, the Red Sticks “stole upon the sentinels, fired upon them, and with great impetuosity rushed upon (the American) lines.” The assault nearly overwhelmed the American position. A portion of Floyd’s command even became separated from the main army and might have been destroyed had it not been for the quick action of a band of allied Indian warriors. It took Floyd’s two artillery pieces to slow the Red Stick onslaught. These two cannon were a prime objective of the Red Stick attack, and some of the most vicious fighting in the battle took place in the attempt to capture the guns. After a countercharge by the American troops, the Red Sticks, many of whom were poorly armed or running out of ammunition, withdrew shortly after daybreak. The entire affair lasted forty-five minutes. After the Battle of Calabee Creek, nearly fifty Red Sticks lay dead. Casualties in Floyd’s army included about twenty militiamen and allied Creeks killed and nearly 150 wounded. With his army weakened and his troops’ terms of enlistment about to expire, Floyd marched the majority of his men back to Georgia for discharge.²¹

The third major campaign of the Creek War, involving Tennessee militiamen as well as men from the regular army and valuable Indian allies, ultimately sealed the fate of the Red Stick rebellion. No one was more crucial to orchestrating the final defeat than Andrew Jackson. Hearing the news of the Fort Mims massacre both saddened and pleased the future president. He mourned the deaths of so many soldiers and civilians, but rejoiced that the United States would finally be able to enter the war. The foremost spokesman for the interests of the West, Jackson saw in the massacre of Fort Mims an opportunity to eliminate European influence on the Gulf Coast and to acquire from the Creeks valuable land for the growing country. He gladly complied when Ten-

²¹ Owsley Jr., *Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands*, 56–59; Smith, *History of the Georgia Militia*, 129–30; O’Brien, *In Bitterness and In Tears*, 125–27; Griffith Jr., *McIntosh and Weatherford*, 135–37; Pickett, *History of Alabama*, 584–86; Stiggins, *Creek Indian History*, 128–33; and Peter A. Brannan, ed., “Journal of James Tait for the Year 1813.” Quote is from General John Floyd to General Pinckney, January 27, 1814, in Brannan, *Official Letters*, 296–97. Floyd was later sent to the Savannah area, where he commanded a sizable force that had been assembled to meet an anticipated British advance from the Atlantic designed to prevent U.S. troops from being sent to New Orleans. Although the British occupied Cumberland Island and there was some minor skirmishing along the St. Mary’s River, word of the treaty ending the War of 1812 arrived before any significant campaign took place.

nessee governor Willie Blount asked him to command a force of militia to defeat the hostile Creeks.²²

Jackson had already acquired a military reputation in the War of 1812. In early 1813 he had led a force of Tennesseans to Natchez to take part in the defense of the Gulf Coast against a threatened British attack. His dreams of early glory were dashed when his men were dismissed before seeing action. Jackson swallowed his pride and led his force back to Tennessee via a long, exhausting march up the Natchez Trace to Nashville. Having earned the respect of his men and the acclaim of the citizens of Tennessee, the *Nashville Whig* declared upon Jackson's arrival back home, "Long will the General live in the memory of the volunteers of West Tennessee." His soldiers began calling him "Old Hickory" for his toughness. Jackson would soon have the opportunity to live up to that nickname and more.²³

Jackson was given command of one of two forces of Tennessee militia raised in response to the attack on Fort Mims. His command consisted of an army of 1,000 militia and volunteers and 1,300 cavalymen under the leadership of his friend and confidant John Coffee. An additional force from east Tennessee of 2,500 men was to cooperate with Jackson's command. Similar to the other campaigns, the forces planned to build roads, establish supply depots, and destroy Red Stick resistance as they advanced into Creek territory.²⁴

Almost immediately after leaving Tennessee in October 1813, Jack-

²² The best work on the campaigns of the Tennessee militia and Andrew Jackson is volume 1 of Robert Remini's three-volume masterpiece *Andrew Jackson: The Course of American Empire, 1767–1821* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977). Other valuable sources that cover Jackson and the Creek War are Owsley Jr., *Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands*; O'Brien, *In Bitterness and In Tears*; and Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars* (New York: Viking, 2001). There are several early biographies of Andrew Jackson that provide contemporary accounts of his involvement in these conflicts. These include James Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, 3 vols. (New York: Mason Brothers, 1861) and John Reid and John Henry Eaton, *The Life of Andrew Jackson, Major General in the Service of the United States, Comprising a History of the War in the South from the Commencement of the Creek Campaign to the Termination of Hostilities Before New Orleans* (Philadelphia: M. Carey and Son, 1817). A recent biography that provides detail on the Creek War is H.W. Brands, *Andrew Jackson: His Life and Times* (New York: Doubleday, 2005).

²³ Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Course of American Empire*, 170–80; Brands, *Andrew Jackson*, 179–87; and *Nashville Whig* quote from Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, 1:384.

²⁴ Willie Blount to Jackson, September 24, 1813, in John Spencer Bassett, ed., *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution, 1926), 320–21; Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Course of American Empire*, 191.

son's men faced their first test. After establishing a main supply base at Fort Strother on the Coosa River, Jackson dispatched Coffee to destroy the enemy village of Tallushatchee. On November 3, 1813, Coffee surrounded the town and lured the Red Stick warriors into the Tennesseans' main line. The engagement was more a massacre than a battle. In only thirty minutes Coffee's troops killed almost two hundred Red Sticks, causing Tennessee volunteer David Crockett to remark afterward that "we shot them like dogs." Thrilled with this victory, Jackson informed Governor Blount that "We have retaliated for the destruction of Fort Mims."²⁵

The Battle of Tallushatchee would have a profound impact on Jackson personally as well as professionally. After the fight soldiers found an infant Creek boy and brought him to Jackson. The general felt a kinship to this orphan due to his own scarred childhood and sent him to his wife to be raised in their home. Lyncoya, as he became known, lived with the Jacksons until his death shortly before his seventeenth birthday.²⁶

Jackson received a plea for help from the nearby friendly Creek village of Talladega. Typifying the civil war aspect of the conflict, more than a thousand Red Sticks under the command of William Weatherford had laid siege to about one hundred fifty Creeks huddled there in a small fort. On November 9, 1813, using the same plan that Coffee had used at Tallushatchee, Jackson attempted to encircle the Red Sticks and lure them into a trap with a feint. His plan worked perfectly. Jackson's men shot down the Red Sticks in droves in the battle and won a smashing victory.²⁷

The months following the Battle of Talladega challenged Jackson as

²⁵ Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars*, 62–64; O'Brien, *In Bitterness and In Tears*, 73–74; Crockett quote from Davy Crockett, *Life of Davy Crockett* (New York: 1854), 75; and Jackson quote from Jackson to Blount, November 4, 1813, in Bassett, *Correspondence*, 1:341.

²⁶ Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Course of American Empire*, 193–94; Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, 1:439. Jackson also sent another Creek boy back to Nashville after the battle of Horseshoe Bend, see Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Course of American Empire*, 216.

²⁷ Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars*, 65–66; Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Course of American Empire*, 194–97; O'Brien, *In Bitterness and In Tears*, 76–79; and Jackson to Willie Blount, November 15, 1813, in Bassett, *Correspondence*, 1:348–50. Talladega's aftermath did lead to one regrettable episode. A communication failure led to other Tennessee troops attacking and burning several Red Stick villages who had pledged to surrender following Talladega. Claiming to have been betrayed by Jackson, these particular Red Sticks vowed to fight to the death and were the last to finally make peace. Owsley Jr., *Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands*, 66–67.

he struggled to keep his volunteer army supplied and intact. Several episodes occurred in which either the militia or volunteers attempted to abandon their posts and return home. Only through Jackson's resolve and determination was he able to hold any force together.²⁸

The situation improved in mid January of 1814 when more than eight hundred new troops finally arrived. Jackson decided to move forward immediately. He had heard rumors of an anticipated British landing in Florida and wanted to eliminate the Red Stick threat before they could join forces with the British. Just as important, Jackson wanted to utilize these new volunteers before their brief terms of enlistment expired. With his force of about a thousand he moved southward toward the Tallapoosa River where he hoped to destroy a Red Stick force at the village of Tohopeka.²⁹

As Jackson's men approached Tohopeka they became entangled in two surprise attacks that forced him to abandon this first attempt to reduce the Red Stick stronghold. On January 22, 1814, Red Sticks attacked Jackson at Emuckfau Creek, a few miles from the village. Utilizing trees, brush, and anything else that could provide cover, they poured steady fire into Jackson's men. It took a desperate charge to finally stagger the Creek attack. Two days later the Red Sticks attacked again at Enitachopco Creek as Jackson's men marched back to Fort Strother. The attackers made a concerted effort to capture Jackson's artillery piece during the fight, but Old Hickory himself aided his brave artillerymen as they barely fought off the attacks. Finally driving off the Red Sticks, Jackson's men continued their retreat to Fort Strother. Despite being taken by surprise on two occasions, Jackson's army had suffered fewer than one hundred casualties while inflicting nearly double that number.³⁰

As he began the task of revitalizing his army for another advance on Tohopeka, Jackson learned that his successes and determination had impressed his commanding officer, Major General Thomas Pinckney. Pinckney decided Jackson was the man to win this war and sent him the

²⁸ Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Course of American Empire*, 197–205. Jackson described his difficulties in the following letters: Jackson to Willie Blount, November 14, 1813, Jackson to John Cocke, November 16, 1813, and Jackson to John Cocke, November 18, 1813, in Bassett, *Correspondence*, 1:345–46, 353–54, 354–55.

²⁹ Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Course of American Empire*, 207.

³⁰ Jackson to Mrs. Jackson, January 28, 1813, in Bassett, *Correspondence*, 1:444–47; Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Course of American Empire*, 207–08; and Reid and Eaton, *Life of General Jackson*, 136.

U.S. 39th Regiment, a force of regulars that Jackson had long coveted. Jackson also received new Tennessee volunteers that were rushed to him from Governor Blount, a force of one hundred allied Creeks led by William McIntosh, and nearly five hundred Cherokees. These troops swelled the army to more than five thousand men.³¹

After training for weeks, Jackson's new force marched southward and arrived near Tohopeka on March 27, 1814. Located in a bend of the Tallapoosa, the Creeks called the one-hundred-acre plot of land Cholocco Litabixee, or "the horse's flat foot," but the Americans simply called it Horseshoe Bend. Chief Menawa and one thousand warriors awaited Jackson behind an impressive fortification that spanned 350 yards across the neck of land in the curve of the river. The barricade consisted of logs stacked five to eight feet high and situated in a way that subjected attackers to crossfire. Impressed by the barrier, Jackson complimented "the skill which they manifested in their breast work" in his report to General Pinckney. Though formidable, Jackson saw that the Creeks had trapped themselves behind their fortification. He dispatched Coffee along with his Indian allies to the opposite side of the river to block their only avenue of escape and made plans for his attack.³²

Jackson began the decisive battle at 10:30 a.m. with an artillery bombardment. With the Red Sticks screaming defiance, his artillery ineffectually poured shots into their barricade. During the bombardment, Coffee and his Indian allies entered the fight. Several Cherokees crossed the river and captured the Red Sticks' canoes to prevent them from being used to escape, and then pressed on into the village, eventually setting it on fire.³³

When Jackson saw the smoke from the fires of Tohopeka and realized

³¹ Owsley Jr., *Struggle for Gulf Borderlands*, 76–79; O'Brien, *In Bitterness and In Tears*, 133–35; Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Course of American Empire*, 210; and James W. Holland, *Victory at the Horseshoe: Andrew Jackson and the Creek War* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 20–22. For an interesting account of Cherokees in the war, see Charlotte Hood, *Jackson's White Plumes: An Historical and Genealogical Account of Selected Cherokee Families Who Supported Andrew Jackson during the Creek Indian War of 1813–1814* (Bay Minette, AL: Lavender Publishing, 1995).

³² Holland, *Victory at the Horseshoe*, 20; quote from Jackson to Pinckney, March 31, 1814, in Bassett, *Correspondence*, 1:488–89; and Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Course of American Empire*, 213–14. An excellent discussion of the Battle of Horseshoe Bend can be found in Tom Kanon, "'A Slow, Laborious Slaughter': The Battle of Horseshoe Bend," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 58 (Spring 1999): 2–15.

³³ Holland, *Victory at the Horseshoe*, 23–24; Brands, *Andrew Jackson*, 216–17.

the ineffectiveness of the artillery bombardment, he ordered an all-out frontal assault. Regulars from the Thirty-ninth Regiment spearheaded the attack, joined by one brigade of the Tennessee militia. The soldiers charged energetically and scaled the fortifications in a matter of minutes.³⁴

Once the barricade had been breached, the battle turned into a slaughter in which more Indians would die than in any other battle in United States history. The Red Sticks fought defiantly, but being assailed on both sides by superior numbers sealed their doom. Many tried to escape by swimming the river, but Coffee's men mowed them down. Red Sticks who tried to hide were also quickly found and killed. Three Red Stick prophets were among the casualties, but Menawa managed to escape that night despite being wounded seven times. Jackson's men counted more than 550 Red Stick bodies on the field after the battle, and officers estimated the total killed to be upwards of 900. Jackson's army, on the other hand, had less than fifty killed and about one hundred fifty wounded. Jackson would later write his wife that "The carnage was dreadful."³⁵

In the aftermath of the battle, Jackson allegedly ordered his men to cut off the tips of the noses of the dead Red Sticks to insure an accurate count of their casualties. According to some sources, many soldiers went even further, celebrating the victory by cutting long bands of skin off dead Red Sticks to make trophies such as belts and bridle reins. Though scattered pockets of Red Stick resistance remained to be eliminated, their power had been shattered.³⁶

Jackson did not know the extent of his triumph at the time, however, and next targeted the Hickory Ground at the confluence of the Coosa and Tallapoosa rivers, an area known to be a major gathering spot for hostile Creeks. Jackson marched his force southward on April 5, destroying Red Stick villages and food supplies as he moved. On April 17 he arrived at the site of the old French Fort Toulouse, which had been

³⁴ Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Course of American Empire*, 214–15; O'Brien, *In Bitterness and In Tears*, 146–47.

³⁵ Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Course of American Empire*, 215–16; Holland, *Victory at the Horseshoe*, 26–27; Jackson to Blount, March 31, 1814, in Bassett, *Correspondence*, 1:489–92; and Jackson quote from Jackson to Mrs. Jackson, April 1, 1814, in Bassett, *Correspondence*, 1:492–94.

³⁶ Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Course of American Empire*, 216; Halbert and Ball, *The Creek War*, 276–77.



The Surrender of William Weatherford to General Jackson, from Harper's Magazine. Courtesy the authors.

ing for aid from hopeful European allies. While encamped, William Weatherford, the principal Red Stick leader whose surrender Jackson especially desired, walked into camp alone and surrendered himself to Jackson. "I am in your power," legend has him saying to the general. "Once I could animate my warriors to battle, but I cannot animate the dead their bones are at Talladega, Tallushatchee, Emuckfau, and Tohopeka." Although many called for Jackson to have Weatherford executed, the Red Stick leader's courage impressed Old Hickory. Jackson decided to let Weatherford go on his vow that he would no longer raise arms against the United States and that he would do everything in his power to encourage the remaining Red Sticks to surrender.³⁷

designated as the gathering point for the armies. Soldiers built a new stockade on the site and named it Fort Jackson in his honor.³⁷

Soon hundreds of starving Creek refugees, many of them allies, made their way into the army's encampment. Jackson sent them northward to the rear of his own army to settle, thereby hopefully removing them from any possible British or Spanish influence. The bulk of the remaining Red Sticks had already fled southward, look-

³⁷ Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars*, 80–81.

³⁸ Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Course of American Empire*, 218–19; Reid and Eaton, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, 166–67; and O'Brien, *In Bitterness and In Tears*, 156–58. Other versions of Weatherford's surrender to Jackson are told in Pickett, *History of Alabama*,

As refugees continued to pour into the camp it became obvious to all that the war was indeed over. Colonel John Williams of the 39th U.S. Regiment seemed to know it when he wrote "The Creek War is over. The affair of the 27th of March last cut the sinews of the nation." General Thomas Pinckney soon arrived at Fort Jackson and directed Old Hickory to march his men home. Along the way Jackson stopped several times to address his men, thanking them for their service, declaring they had "annihilated the power of a nation that for twenty years had been the disturber of our peace. Your vengeance has been glutted."³⁹

Tennesseans greeted Jackson as a hero on his return to Nashville. At a time when the War of 1812 was going badly for the country he had destroyed his enemy on the battlefield and earned the respect and admiration of the nation. The War Department acknowledged his hard-earned status as the country's foremost military leader. On June 18, 1814, Jackson became a Major General in the U.S. Army, responsible for the Seventh Military District, comprising Louisiana, Tennessee, the Mississippi Territory, and the Creek Nation.⁴⁰

A daunting task awaited him. Secretary of War John Armstrong ordered Jackson to report to Fort Jackson and assume control of treaty negotiations with the Creek Nation, an assignment that had originally been given to Creek Agent Benjamin Hawkins. An advocate for land-hungry westerners, Jackson expected the Creeks to pay dearly for the war. Since he also wanted to prevent the Creeks from having contact with the Spanish and British, he viewed removing them from the region to be in the vital interests of national security. At the same time, he felt that the Creek way of life was so incompatible with that of whites that removal was the only way for them to survive. In the end he required the cession of 23 million acres of land, one-half of all Creek Territory, to the United States. Jackson also insisted on the Creeks ceasing all interaction with the British and Spanish. If the Creeks refused these terms, then they could take their chances and simply move southward and join the rebels in Florida.⁴¹

593–95, and Eggleston, *Red Eagle*, 329–39.

³⁹ Williams quote from Williams to Flournoy, May 2, 1814, in Peddy, "Creek Letters from United States Government Publications Pertaining to the Creek Indian Nation"; Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Course of American Empire*, 220–21; and Jackson quote from Reid and Eaton, *The Life of Andrew Jackson*, 173–74.

⁴⁰ Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Course of American Empire*, 221–22.

⁴¹ The full text of the Treaty of Fort Jackson can be found in Charles J. Kappler, *Indian*

Jackson's terms shocked the allied Creeks in attendance who expected only the Red Sticks to bear the brunt of the cost of the war. They pleaded with Jackson about the fairness of his terms, but Old Hickory gave the Creeks no real choice in the matter, stating, "Your rejecting the treaty will show you to be enemies of the United States—enemies even to yourself." The cession amounted to almost three-fifths of the future state of Alabama and one-fifth of Georgia. Jackson chastised all the Creeks for allowing the war to occur and proclaimed that they should have arrested Tecumseh and other instigators and prophets immediately. The Creeks had no choice but to sign the Treaty of Fort Jackson on August 9, 1814. Of the nearly three dozen chiefs who signed on behalf of the Creeks, only one is believed to have been a Red Stick.⁴²

With the conclusion of the Creek War, the larger War of 1812 now took center stage in the Gulf South. For more than two years the war had been fought in such faraway places as the Canadian border, the northwestern frontier, and the east coast. The British now directed their energies toward the weak U.S. defenses along the Gulf Coast. The British based their hopes in large part on the presence of Red Stick Creeks in the region who they hoped could become potential allies against the United States. These grandiose hopes failed, due in large part to the continued leadership of Andrew Jackson. Old Hickory stymied the British at Mobile and Pensacola, and eventually won one of the nation's greatest military victories at the Battle of New Orleans on January 8, 1815.⁴³

The Creek War and the subsequent War of 1812 had a tremendous impact on the history of the Gulf South and the United States as a whole. The war resulted in significant territorial expansion, secured large portions of the southeast against European colonial powers, set a precedent for removal of Native Americans from their traditional homelands, and led to the rise of one of the most influential military and political leaders in American history.

Treaties, 1778–1883 (New York: 1972), 107–10; and Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Course of American Empire*, 224–32.

⁴² Jackson quote from Reid and Eaton, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, 190–91; O'Brien, *In Bitterness and In Tears*, 163; and Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Course of American Empire*, 231.

⁴³ For insight on the War of 1812 and its relationship to the Creek War, see Owlsey, *Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands*. The best account of the battle of New Orleans is Robert Remini, *The Battle of New Orleans: Andrew Jackson and America's First Military Victory* (New York: Penguin, 1999).

The most direct impact of the war on the country was the acquisition of territory. The Treaty of Fort Jackson provided the United States government with more than 23 million acres of land, mostly in Georgia and the future state of Alabama, which would be rapidly settled by land-hungry white Americans and their slaves. In this "Great Migration," thousands of people poured into the Mississippi Territory in record numbers. The portion of territory that became the state of Mississippi nearly doubled in population between 1810 and 1820, and the portion that became the state of Alabama grew even more rapidly. In 1810, 9,000 whites and blacks lived in this area; ten years later, nearly 150,000 people called the new state of Alabama home. Introduced to the fertile lands of the Old Southwest, these settlers developed an increased reliance on cotton agriculture that was only accentuated after the development of the cotton gin made the crop more profitable than ever. Ultimately, this development, underpinned by the institution of slavery, led the states of the Gulf South on the road toward secession and Civil War.⁴⁴

More immediately, however, the forced removal of thousands of Creeks who lived in the lands affected by the treaty eliminated the buffer zone that the Spanish had so heavily depended on for the defense of Florida. Within half a decade Florida would officially become a part of the United States. In addition, General James Wilkinson's capture of Mobile in 1813 and Andrew Jackson's victory at New Orleans forever solidified America's long-disputed claim to millions of acres of land in the Gulf Coast region.

Equally important, the Treaty of Fort Jackson set a precedent for the removal of Native Americans from the southeast. Within thirty years of that landmark compact, the Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Cherokees would follow the same path as the Creeks as their land would be taken from them and they were forced westward across the Mississippi River.

Andrew Jackson's rise to national prominence, however, ranks as the most significant outcome of the conflict. His indomitable will and military prowess made him the country's foremost military hero and allowed him to ride a wave of popularity all the way to the presidency.

⁴⁴ For information on immigration into the region after the war, see Charles Lowery, "The Great Migration to the Mississippi Territory, 1798–1819," *Mississippi History Now*, <http://mshistorynow.mdah.state.ms.us/articles/169/the-great-migration-to-the-mississippi-territory-1798-1819>.

In two terms as the nation's chief executive, he exerted incredible influence on the development of the young nation. It is revealing that the time period of his greatest power is known today among historians as the Jacksonian Era.

The bicentennial of the Creek War and the War of 1812 provides an opportunity to not only raise awareness of this crucial, formative era in regional and national history, but should also bring attention to the historic sites where these monumental events took place. Although there are several locations that are well preserved and interpreted, such as Horseshoe Bend National Military Park and Chalmette National Battlefield of the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park, many other sites are not even identified by historic markers or are in danger of being lost forever. If there is one thing that can be learned by observing the very public struggles to preserve portions of the battlefields on which the Civil War was fought, it is that time is not in our favor. The clock is ticking.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ For information on historic sites related to the Creek War and War of 1812, see the website companion to *Battle for the Southern Frontier* at www.creekwarandwarof1812.com.

