

## United States History - The Seminole Wars

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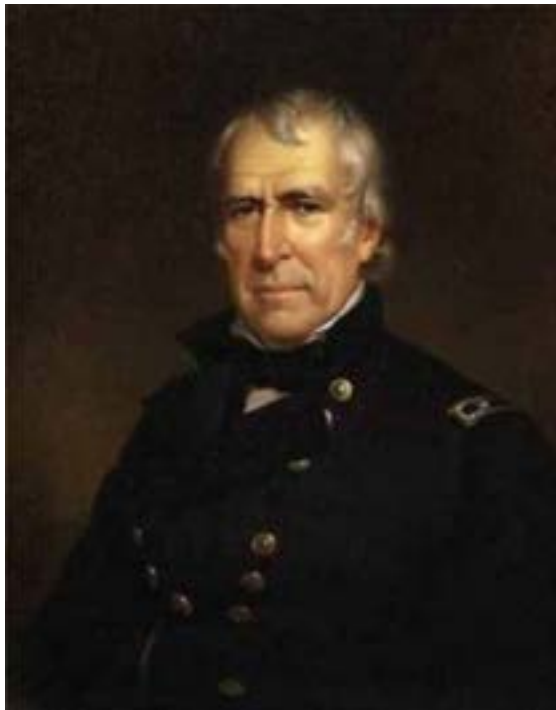
### Background Information: The Dade Battle

On December 23, 1835, two U.S. companies of 110 troops (including soldiers from the 2nd Artillery, 3rd Artillery and 4th Infantry Regiments) under Major Francis Langhorne Dade departed from Fort Brooke (present-day Tampa), heading up the King Highway (military road) on a resupply and reinforce mission to Fort King (present-day Ocala). The Native Americans in Florida had grown increasingly furious at attempts by the U.S. Army to forcefully relocate them to a reservation out west and Dade knew his men might be attacked by the Seminole Indians who were shadowing his regiment, but believed that if an

attack were to occur, it would occur during one of the river crossings or in the thicker woods to the south. Having passed these, he felt safe and recalled his flanking scouts in order that the command could move faster.

Although the terrain he was now in, pines and palmettos, could not have concealed anyone who was standing or walking, it could and did conceal crouched or prone warriors waiting in ambush. The Seminoles did not refrain from attacking in the other places because they thought they could achieve better surprise later, but because they were waiting for Osceola to join them. However, at the time he was busy killing Wiley Thompson. They finally gave up waiting and attacked without him.

Several Seminoles with their warriors assembled secretly at points along the march. Scouts reportedly watched the troops in their sky-blue uniforms at every foot of the route and sent reports back to the Indian chiefs. The troops marched for five quiet days until December 28, when they were just south of the present-day city of Bushnell. They were passing through a high hammock with oaks, pines, cabbage palms, and saw palmetto when a shot rang out. Many sources state that the first storm of bullets brought down Major Dade and half his men. As it would turn out, in the late afternoon of that day, 180 Seminoles lay in wait approximately 25 miles (40 km) south of Fort King. The Seminoles had terrain and the element of surprise in their favor. Major Dade, who was on horseback, was killed in the Seminoles' very first shot fired personally by



**Portrait of Maj. Francis L. Dade**

*Photo courtesy of The United States Daughters of 1812, Washington, D.C*



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**1825 painting of Chief Micanopy**  
by Charles Bird King

Chief Micanopy, which by pre-arranged plan began the attack. Following Dade's death, command passed to Captain George W. Gardiner. Many of the soldiers, in two single file lines, were also quickly killed. Only a few managed to get their flintlock muskets from underneath their heavy winter coats.

The battle began either at 10:00 a.m. (according to Alligator) or at 8 a.m. and ending around 4 p.m. (according to survivor Private Ransom Clark), with the Indians leaving around sunset. After the battle, the Indians stripped and robbed the bodies. The Florida Indians had provided a haven for escaped slaves, whom the Indians employed as translators or joined the tribe. After this, "about 40 or 50 Negroes

rode in on horseback." They stripped and butchered the remaining wounded, according to Ransom's statement.

Only three U.S. soldiers were reported to have survived the attack. Private Edward Decourcey, who had been covered by dead bodies, and Ransom Clark who appeared "dead enough" with five wounds and bleeding cuts on his head. The next day, a Seminole pursued them on horseback and Decourcey was killed after they had split to avoid joint capture. Clarke made it back to Fort Brooke, collapsing within a mile of the Fort and being helped all the way back by a friendly Indian woman. Clarke provided the only narrative from the Army's side of what had occurred. A third soldier, Private Joseph Sprague, also returned to Fort Brooke and continued serving in the Army. He was illiterate and did not leave a report of the battle.

In 1837, Louis Pacheco, the mulatto slave who guided and interpreted for the Dade command resurfaced and gave a third eyewitness account of the battle. Pacheco had been ahead of the column, by his account, and taken prisoner by the Indians. Some thought him to be a turncoat or informer. He was shipped west with the Indians about that time but returned to Florida shortly before his death in early 1895.

After the battle, many large plantations were burned, and settlers killed. By the end of 1836, all but one house in what is now Miami-Dade and Broward counties had been burned by the Indians. The Indians were emboldened

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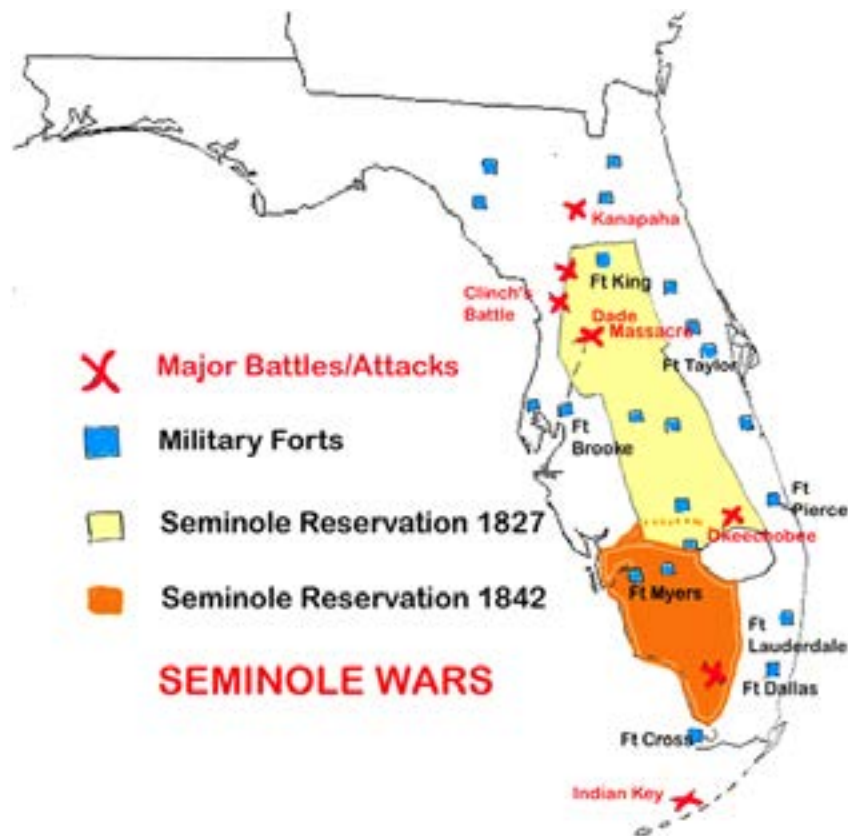
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by their successes against Dade's command, the stalemate at the subsequent Battle of Outhlacoochie and the killing by Osceola of Indian agent Wiley Thompson on the same day of the Massacre, which is what had delayed Osceola. While about half of Dade's men consisted of new American immigrants, the rest of the killed soldiers were from many other states.

The impact of the Florida hostilities dominated the national news until later events that year at the Alamo. Due to these heightened hostilities, President Andrew Jackson called for volunteers from Florida, Georgia and South Carolina. General Winfield Scott was ordered to Florida to assume command of all U.S. forces in the

area. General Edmund P. Gaines and 1100 men reached the Dade Massacre battlefield two months later, on February 20, 1836 - the first U.S. soldiers to do so. There they performed the duty of identifying the bodies for burial.

The dead soldiers were first buried at the site by General Gaines. After the cessation of hostilities in 1842, the remains were disinterred and buried in St. Augustine National Cemetery on the grounds of St. Francis Barracks, the present-day military installation that serves as headquarters for the Florida National Guard. The remains rest under 3 coquina stone pyramids along with the remains of over 1,300 other U.S. soldiers who died in the Second Seminole War.



*Map of the battles of the Seminole Wars Graphic courtesy Florida Insider, FloridaHistory.org*

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## Document and Question #1

Excerpt from the narrative of the escape of Ransom Clark, (of Livingston County, New York,) from the massacre in which Major Dade and his command were cut off by the Seminole Indians, in Florida, on the 28th Dec. 1835; as communicated by himself, while on a visit to Boston in the summer of 1837, to the editor of the Morning Post.

*“Our detachment, consisting of one hundred and seventeen men, under command of Major Dade, started from Fort Brooke, Tampa Bay, on the 23d of December, and arrived at the scene of action about eight o’clock on the morning of the 28th. It was on the edge of a pond, three miles from the spot where we had bivouacked on the night previous. The pond was surrounded by tall grass, brush and small trees. A moment before we were surprised, Major Dade said to us, “We have now got through all danger; keep up good heart, and when we get to Fort King, I’ll give you three days for Christmas.”*

*“At this time we were in a path or trail on the border of the pond, and the first notice that we received of the presence of the enemy was the discharge of a rifle by their chief, as a signal to commence the attack. The pond was on our right, and the Indians were scattered round, in a semicircle, on our left, in the rear and in advance, reaching at the two latter points to the edge of the pond; but*

*leaving an opening for our entrance on the path, and a similar opening on the other extremity for the egress of our advance guard, which was permitted to pass through without being fired on, and of course unconscious of the ambuscade through which they had marched. At the time of the attack this guard was a quarter of a mile in advance, the main body following in column two deep. The chief’s rifle was followed by a general discharge from his men, and Major Dade, Captain Frazier and Lieut. Mudge, together with several non-commissioned officers and privates, were brought down by the first volley. Our rear guard had a six-pounder, which, as soon as possible, was hauled up, and brought to bear upon the ground occupied by the unseen enemy, secreted among the grass, brush, and trees. The discharge of the cannon checked and made them fall back for about half an hour. About twelve of us advanced and brought in our dead. Among the wounded was Lieut. Mudge, who was speechless.”*

1. What does Ransom Clark’s account tell us about the preparedness of Dade’s Regiment and that of the Seminoles?

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### Document and Questions #2

**An eyewitness account by Seminole leader Halpatter Tustenuggee  
(Alligator, as the white man called him) read as follows:**

*"We had been preparing for this more than a year... Just as the day was breaking, we moved out of the swamp into the pine-barren. I counted, by direction of Jumper, one hundred and eighty warriors. Upon approaching the road, each man chose his position on the west side... About nine o'clock in the morning the command approached... So soon as all the soldiers were opposite... Jumper gave the whoop, Micanopy fired the first rifle, the signal agreed upon, when every Indian arose and fired, which laid upon the ground, dead, more than half the white men.*

*The cannon was discharged several times, but the men who loaded it were shot down as soon as the smoke cleared away... As we were returning to the swamp supposing all were dead, an Indian came up and said the white men were building a fort of logs. Jumper and myself, with ten warriors, returned. As we approached, we saw six men behind two logs placed one above another, with the cannon a short distance off... We soon came near, as the balls went over us. They had guns, but no powder, we looked in the boxes afterwards and found they were empty".*

**1. Based on his testimony, how would you describe the predicament of Dade's regiment?**

**2. What can you infer about the U.S. soldiers from the last sentence by Alligator?**



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### Document and Question #3

News of the battle was reported in the Daily National Intelligencer, Washington, D.C.  
in the Wednesday, January 27, 1836 edition as follows:

*“Major Dade, with seven officers and 110 men, started the day before we arrived, for Fort King. We were all prepared to overtake them the next day....when an intervention of circumstances deferred it for one day—and in*

*the course of that day, three soldiers, horribly mangled, came into camp, and brought the melancholy tidings that Major Dade, and every officer and man, except themselves, were murdered and terribly mangled.”*

1. Based on the description of the battle in this passage, what do you think was the intent of the reporter who wrote it?



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### Document and Questions #4

## Statistics of the Dade Battle

**Date:** December 28, 1835

**Location:** Central Florida

**Coordinates:** 28°39'08"N 82°7'36"W

**Result:** Decisive Seminole victory

BELLIGERENTS	UNITED STATES	SEMINOLE INDIANS
<b>COMMANDERS AND LEADERS</b>	Maj. Francis L. Dade Cpt. George W. Gardiner Cpt. Upton Fraser	Micanopy Thlocklo Tustenuggee
<b>STRENGTH</b>	110 1 six-pounder cannon	180
<b>CASUALTIES AND LOSSES</b>	107 killed 2 wounded (1 mortally)	3 killed 5 wounded

1. What is the most significant piece of data from this table?

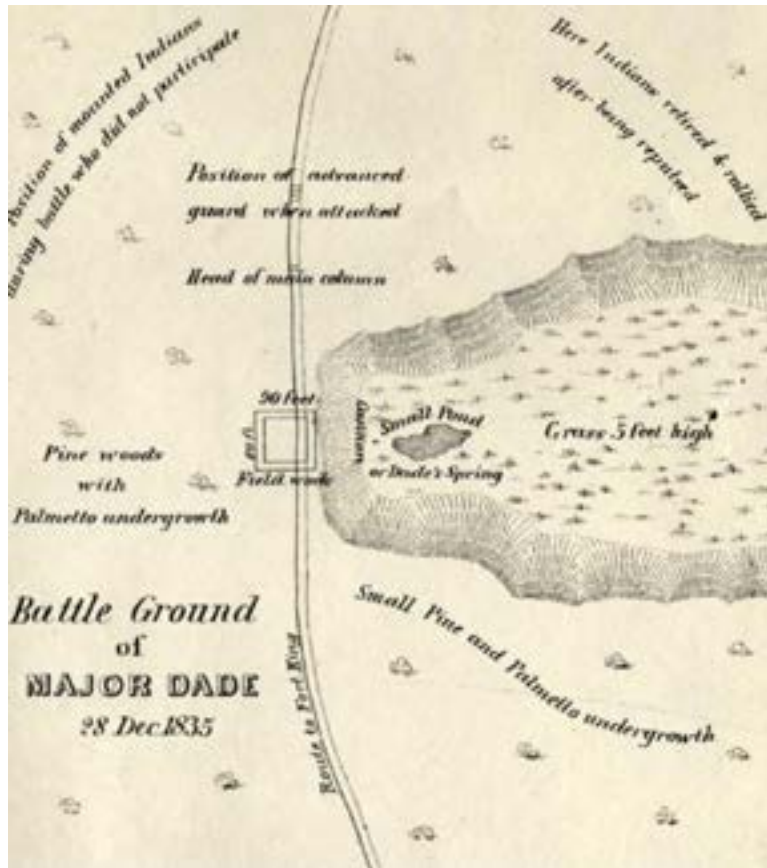
2. What type of data is missing that would be helpful?







Battle Ground of Major Dade, December 28, 1835.



1. What information does this map give us about the battle itself?
2. How can the physical features shown on the map determine the type of battle fought?
3. How might they determine the outcome of the battle?



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### Essay Instructions

**ESSAY QUESTION:** “Of the two sides that fought the Dade Battle, which one was the most justified in their actions?”

**Essay:** Based on your answers to the documents, write an essay that addresses the question above by supporting an argument in favor of the Seminole Indians, or the U.S. Army regiment under Major Francis Dade during the Dade Battle.

- Create a strong thesis (argument) and support that thesis with the aid of the documents provided. Use at least 4 documents to support your argument.
- Analyze sources for characteristics such as author’s point of view, the author’s purpose, the audience, and context
- Make connections between the documents
- Bring in outside knowledge to strengthen the argument
- Your essay should have a clear introduction, body, and conclusion. Your these should be stated in the introduction and the Conclusion, with the body of the essay containing your arguments and supporting evidence.