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By T.Frederick Davis

Address at the dedication of memorial at

Ft.Newnan near Gainesville, March 24,1933.

In the early years of the nineteenth century, Florida was a possession of Spain. The Spanish laws in many ways were in constant conflict with the ideas of the Americans, and especially in regard to runaway slaves that made their way into Florida and were protected by the Spaniards. The Georgians were the principal sufferers in this respect. There had also arisen in the United States a general desire for expansion of territory embracing the whole of the southern country from Florida to Texas. This political ambition of the ^{then} young United States grew into a strong sentiment for the acquisition of Florida, and a pretext presented itself in the impending war with Great Britain, it being believed that Spain would be an ally of the latter. So in March, 1812, when war with Great Britain had become almost a certainty, a body of Georgians in co-operation with United States troops entered Florida for the purpose of seizing the province and annexing it as a territory to the United States.

At that time, Spanish settlement of East Florida was confined almost to St.Augustine and Amelia Island, and the lower St.Johns River country. The balance of East Florida was occupied by the Indians, the most powerful of which were the Alachua Indians, whose chief was known as King Payne. Payne was the head chief of the central Florida Seminoles. His town was close to Micanopy.

At the approach of the Americans practically the entire Spanish population fled to St.Augustine. The American troops were entrenched within two miles of the town gates and held St.Augustine closely besieged for several months. Time and again Col. Smith, the commander of the regulars requested reinforcements in order to reduce St.Augustine, but they were held back for service in the war

with Great Britain. Weeks wore on. Malaria developed among the Americans before St. Augustine and their situation was one of great misery.

The Spaniards, being too weak to attack the Americans, finally decided to turn the Seminoles loose upon them. To combat this menace the governor of Georgia ordered Col. Daniel Newnan with a detachment of short term militia to Florida for the purpose of destroying the Alachua Indian towns. This detachment arrived on the St. Johns about the middle of August, 1812, and immediately began preparations for the march into the interior. Much difficulty was experienced in getting together the proper equipment. Finally, when all was ready, a post arrived from Col. Smith saying that the Indians had captured his wagon train twelve miles north of St. Augustine thus cutting his communications with the St. Johns. Col. Newnan without delay marched to the relief of Col. Smith and rescued the American regulars before St. Augustine, who retreated to the St. Johns and fortified a position on the east bank ten miles above the present city of Jacksonville. This they called Camp New Hope.

By this time the term of Col. Newnan's militia had expired and it was necessary for him to call for volunteers for his Indian raid. With a total force ^{of 117,} including officers, Col. Newnan left the St. Johns September 24, 1812, and on the 27th met a band of Indians under King Payne at this place. In the fight that ensued Payne was mortally wounded and died soon after. That night the Indians surrounded Col. Newnan's force and he was compelled to erect a breastwork of earth and logs on the spot where we now stand.

Col. Newnan immediately despatched a note to Col. Smith on the St. Johns for help. Several days passed and relief did not come. Then he sent another note. This second note is still in existence in possession of the Missouri Historical

Society. Picture the circumstances: Deep into an unknown country, surrounded by swamps teeming with hostile Indians, and far removed from succor, this little detachment of Georgia volunteers awaited their unknown fate. Three of their comrades were already dead and some were wounded, while they themselves famished for food. Within the enclosure only the muffled sounds of distress were heard; *outside was that ominous stillness that portended danger.* Another night came on. Silently a messenger left the breastwork; he bore the second message from Col. Newnan to Col. Smith. It said:

2d of October, 1812.

I am now entrenched within six miles of the nation and must sacrifice the sick and wounded or perish for the want of provisions, unless you send me a reinforcement immediately. We commence eating horses tonight.

(Signed) D. Newnan.

As Col. Newnan was a brave man and an experienced Indian fighter, the emotions that were his as he penned those lines must have been tremendous.

Two more days came and passed, yet no word of relief. The Indians remained hidden in the swamps, but Col. Newnan knew they were receiving reinforcements for an overwhelming attack on his little fort. So with the approach of night on October 4th all was in readiness for the final chapter of escape or death.

Quietly they left the earthwork, bearing the wounded on litters, and the distressing retreat to the St. Johns commenced. It seems almost inconceivable that they could elude the Indians, but they did. Weak and hungry they toiled

along the path, with frequent pauses from exhaustion. Their food supply comprised gophers, alligators, and palmetto buds. They walked into an Indian ambuscade, but super-human strength saved them. Finally they reached the St. Johns and crossed over to Camp New Hope, where they received every attention possible. One or two of the wounded died there, but the rest soon recovered their strength and returned to their homes in Georgia.

Col. Smith was not negligent in sending relief. With extreme difficulty he procured horses and sent 25 mounted men to Col. Newnan. These arrived at the breastwork about two hours after it had been abandoned. Being night, they were unable to tell what had become of Newnan's force, which had taken another path, and they returned to the St. Johns without accomplishing their purpose. Col. Smith sent out a second relief, which met Newnan a short distance from the St. Johns and brought the detachment in.

The objective of Payne's war party never became definitely known. There were two surmises: It was either headed for St. Augustine for an attack on Col. Smith; or else Payne had heard of Col. Newnan's march and was on the way to ambush him, when they met at this place. In the latter case, had the Indians reached the selected spot in time, there is no doubt that Florida history today would record a major Indian massacre of uncanny similarity to that of Dade's command.

Accounts of Newnan's expedition were published throughout the country. War had been declared with Great Britain; but even the most conservative of the press gave extended accounts of it along with other important war news. The nature of the expedition impressed the public mind and exactly suited the

temper of the people at the time, especially of the South, where ^{Newnan} ~~he~~ was proclaimed
a hero. Many place names were given to perpetuate his name for posterity. But
none is as fitting as the memorial being unveiled today on the spot where those
hardy American volunteers so miraculously escaped destruction and where the
bones of those who lost their lives here perhaps still rest, unless they have
been scattered by the plow of cultivation.

I congratulate this fine organization of American women, the Gainesville
Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, upon the accomplishment
of this memorial. We salute you, and those associated with you, for this worth-
while act of commemorating an important event in American history. The memorial
you are dedicating here is certain to create added interest in historical
matters in Florida and elsewhere--an interest that is not alone patriotic, but
educational as well.

J. Fredrick Davis