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The following account is based on two valuable first-hand narratives from Army officers who participated during the Battle of Micanopy: Captain R. B. Lee's detailed battle summary that was published verbatim in newspapers throughout the country (Appendix A, GARI Field Report) and Lieutenant Andrew Humphreys' piece that was written in his personal journal shortly after the battle. Following the journal's discovery many years later, extracts were published in the *Florida Historical Quarterly*, no. 2 (Fall, 2006), 222-25. Both men's accounts concur with one another, but as can be expected, each officer provides more detail concerning their own actions that day. I have merged both versions herein, the first time this has been done. Because the Fort King road closely correlates with the present-day S.E. Tusawilla Road, * and since the location of Fort Defiance (Micanopy) is now known with specificity, the distances provided by the officers offer key insights regarding the battle's first phase. One-half mile east from the fort, for instance, brings us to the present Tusawilla Preserve. This, according to Lee and Humphreys, was the area of a dense hardwood hammock and the site of the first action of the battle. Indeed, as you shall see, the entire one-mile length of this road, and the land immediately surrounding it, should be recognized as an important battlefield site. Additionally, the Battle of Micanopy was a

“running battle.” There were no entrenchments or fixed lines, rather an intense battle on the run. This scenario will undoubtedly present challenges to those archaeologists who do not claim to be seasoned battlefield investigators. But for professional historians, the officers’ written accounts coupled with a much-improved geographical understanding, stand as an excellent basis for demarcating this area as the site of the opening phase of the Battle of Micanopy. I would be more than happy to discuss these findings with anyone who is interested.

*Hand-drawn maps of this area by army officers during the war, all date post 1837, the year that Tusawilla Lake was suddenly drained of water. Afterward the Army, having only a dried lakebed to contend with and wanting to save time, cut a trail across this area to arrive at Micanopy. Subsequently the military maps show this new extension of the Fort King road. Lee and Humphreys, however, are in accordance with “the immense pond” (Tusawilla Lake) blocking their right.

The Battle of Micanopy

During the mid-morning of June 9, 1836, two defiant Seminole warriors suddenly fired their muskets in the air while on the Fort King Road, $\frac{3}{4}$ mile from the gates of Fort Defiance (the barricaded town of Micanopy). Two shots were followed by a one-minute pause and then another brief volley. The night before, an express rider from Micanopy barely escaped gunshots fired at him at this same spot. This transgression prompted a quick but unsuccessful retaliation in the night, an event that was fresh in the minds of the troops. Lieutenant Andrew Humphreys, like others at the post, believed the rifle salvo “was a challenge or a ruse to draw out a small party” with the aim of ambushing them.

The troops were quickly paraded under arms. The commander, Major Julius Heileman, was undeterred despite serious odds against any offensive measure. For one, a rampant malaria epidemic was ravaging the troops—Heileman himself would shortly succumb to the disease. As a result, only 70 men were deemed fit for duty. The major ordered 20 men of the 3rd Artillery under Captain R. B. Lee to march east along the road toward a small hammock, just $\frac{1}{2}$ mile distant, near the shore of Lake Tuscawilla. An estimated 250 Seminoles, led by the renowned Osceola, were concealing themselves there. Staggering his small force, the major waited a few minutes before sending Lieutenant Thompson Wheelock of the 2nd Cavalry, in command of “23 or 24 dragoons” with orders to keep to Lee’s left before heading off in a gallop in the same direction. Meeting with Lee, Wheelock was directed to charge the left of the hammock. Armed with sabers, pistols, and carbines, and firing while riding—instead of dismounting as regulations dictated—the

modest dragoon contingent made good progress as they encountered heavy fire. Finally, Heileman ordered Humphreys to follow the dragoons and support their maneuvers. Marching on the road in single file with about “25 noncoms and privates,” Humphreys heard the gunfire and the distinctive Seminole battle cries grow louder as he drew nearer.

Arriving at the lakeside hammock, Lee directed Humphreys to charge to the left while the captain elected to keep to the right. For a while, Lee and his men were able to penetrate unseen behind the Seminole lines; he gave the order to charge immediately after they were discovered. This action startled their adversaries, including, according to Lee, two unidentified war leaders who were previously engaged in signalling to the warriors. The captain immediately became a target (given his officer’s uniform) and was badly wounded. His men, per Lee’s instructions, were then led by a company sergeant and eventually joined Humphreys’ company.

By this time, the action had become progressively more dispersed. Beyond the narrow oak hammock was an area filled with pine trees and “long grass and scrubby bushes,” terrain that allowed ample opportunity for concealment. The Seminoles began a controlled movement to the south, following the general direction of the Fort King road toward the Tuscawilla Hammock (two miles from the fort). From then on, Humphreys was continually on the alert to prevent the Seminoles from overtaking the left flank—an action they seemed specially focused upon. A “six-pounder” cannon was brought in during the later phase of the battle. Cannisters (shells filled with small pellets or other objects that were designed to disperse like a large shotgun shell) were typically used under these conditions and were expected to take a large toll. Seminoles went to heroic lengths to speedily recover their dead and wounded so we shall never know how many died that day. There were no instances of

hand-to-hand combat, which, in Humphreys' estimation, would have given the army a distinct advantage (perhaps by slowing the Seminole's momentum).

Since Captain Lee was sidelined early in the battle, the final decision whether they should pursue their adversaries into the feared hammock was left to lieutenants Wheelock, Humphreys, and Talcott (the latter having arrived with a cannon crew). Talcott initially voted in the affirmative, allegedly because of the expected acclaim they would receive. But Humphreys easily dissuaded his colleagues from this blatant "folly." The "great hammock" was the Seminole's domain, he emphasized, and the location of any trails within its dark recesses were known only to them. At best they could only expect more of the fighting that took place earlier and at worst any encounter could prove far deadlier.

"After 1 hour and 20 minutes hard fighting under the broiling sun," as Major Heileman phrased it for the press, the battle came to an end. Both sides, we can assume, would have been relieved to have survived a harrowing "running battle" of two miles in the summer heat and humidity. There were no entrenchments or firm lines, only a battle very much in flux, on the run, and exposed to chance, such as the surprise attack on the Seminole rear flank. (As a reward for their disciplined efforts on the battlefield, a newspaper account stated that the troops received a cup of grog—a rare indulgence to be sure.) According to Lee's official summary, "Three of our men were severely wounded, one of whom since died, and another has lost an arm; three others are slightly wounded." Of the officers, Lee was the only one wounded. It was assumed that the Seminoles "suffered severely" but of course there was no way to determine their fatalities or injuries with any accuracy.

The Battle of Micanopy, as it became known, was touted by the administration of President Andrew Jackson as an unqualified success and news of this uncommon “victory,” replete with a heroic narrative by Captain Lee, was promulgated in newspapers throughout the country. Unstated, but essential to any full understanding of the events of June 9, is the fact that two hours after the battle Heileman, in overall command of the interior forts, ordered an express rider to Fort Oakland—John H. McIntosh’s barricaded Orange Lake plantation—directing the commanding officer to abandon his post and “to destroy everything that might be useful to the enemy.” The larger battle front, in other words, included coordinated Seminole strikes on all three of the remaining forts—Oakland, Drane, and Micanopy. Because these raids combined with a malaria epidemic, it was a battle the Army was clearly losing. This fact was not lost on the Seminoles, for they held the upper hand regarding this lethal disease; long term exposure to malaria offered disease resistance for Native people. Escalating debility would soon require the abandonment of Fort Drane in July. In Micanopy, yet another attack by Osceola on July 19th (Battle of Welika Pond), precipitated another closure. With a sick list that continued to grow and a large group of civilian families who took refuge there without adequate food, there was no assurance that this garrison could hold much longer. So, in August, Fort Defiance, including the frontier village contained within it, was ordered to be burned to the ground and all civilians transported to the depot at Black Creek, a tributary of the St. Johns River. In the final analysis, General Winfield Scott’s original plan to maintain the inland garrisons throughout the summer “sickly season” with minimal troop strength, proved to be the final blunder of his Florida campaign. Its aftermath grimly played out during the months after he departed.

