

THE BATTLE OF OLUSTEE*

(Part-of this story is based on Cpl. Megee and the Battle of Olustee by Wilson C. McGee, Orlando Sentinel, Florida Magazine 16 Feb 1964.

This writer, Fannie Priest Kipp, visited Olustee Battle Ground park in 1964. Here we walked the paths under the tall v pines; we heard insects singing and had to skirt the swampy areas. It was quiet and so beautiful with the sun breaking through the trees it seemed like a cathedral--but such was not the scene 20 Feb.1864. Something else was there. The stamp of horses, the rattle of sabers, and the creak of leather could be heard. The men grunted as they shoved the guns of the Chatham Artillery into place. The murmur of the restless 5,200 men in gray was heard as they lounged at rest. These men, some infantry, some cavalry under Gen. J. Finnegan met 5,500 Northerners under Gen. T. Seymour.

"Not a large battle," you say. No, but big for Florida. (A New York editor said of Florida 'the smallest tadpole in the cesspool of Cession.') Seymour's object was to cut the food lines of the dying Confederacy; Finnegan's to push Seymour back to Jacksonville--this was done in the "Second Dade Massacre" fought at Olustee. "Jin'ral" Alfred Colquitt of the Southern side is credited by historians with actually winning this battle.

Two courageous Northern groups, Negro regiments, the 54th of Mass. and the First of N.C. (positions of both are plainly marked in the swamp FPK) charged right into the fire from the Rebel's cannon. Many did not have cartridges for their 7-shot Spencers. They fought with gun butts, litard knots, and bayonets. Their dead littered the ground.

The Southerners fought with litard knots also when the ammunition, ordered by Colquitt, did not arrive on time. When it did arrive the containers were thrown on the ground which burst. The troops had to literally dig the cartridges from the ground, said one soldier who was there! This battle raged for 7 hours.

Then GABRIEL BLEW HIS HORN" to mark the victorious end of the battle. (Sgt. Gabriel Priest, cavalryman, bugler, was a brother to Sarah Leitner's husband, Lum Priest)(The bugle was homemade from a cowls horn.)

*Olustee is beautifully maintained by the State near Lake City, Fla. and well worth your while to visit. It is covered with tall pines and one can understand how the Florida boys could climb the trees and take aim on the enemy as described on the next page.