

# SEMINOLE WAR: THE START OF THE WAR

There is a debate about what counts as the beginning of the Seminole War. Not because there's a lack of information, but because there are so many different events that could qualify. The Seminole War didn't begin with an official declaration of war to mark the start, it was a series of events that eventually led to all out war. The easiest placement from the American perspective would be Andrew Jackson's invasion of "Spanish" Florida where his army assaulted three Indigenous towns, homes to thousands of people, and burned them to the ground. He would then march on the Spanish outpost of San Marcos (Now Saint Marks) where he was welcomed, before seizing it as well. This could be seen as a simple starting point, but the invasion was the culmination of many other events.

The first American invasion of Seminole Florida wasn't by Jackson, but by militia groups from southern Georgia in 1812. Under a congressional resolution kept secret at the time, General George Matthews and Colonel John McKee were given license to recruit a militia to invade Florida and try to seize control from the Spanish at Saint Augustine. This led to the "Patriot War" of Florida, with combat lasting until 1814 before the militias were pushed out. Payne, the micco of Alachua would lose his life in the war, passing leadership to his brother Bolek.

The first official military action in Florida was the assault on the Free African fort at what is now Prospect Bluff. The fort was given to African allies by the British after the War of 1812, and was home to a thriving community surrounded by farms. The existence of the fort was a threat to the American plantation owners, as it served as a beacon for those they'd enslaved to escape to. An American naval force attacked the fort in 1816, striking the gunpowder magazine resulting in an explosion that killed nearly everyone inside.

In 1817, the US Military demanded the Miccosukee town of Fowltown abandon their lands under a treaty enforced on the Creek Confederacy. Neamathla, the micco of Fowltown, refused as his people were not Creek. The American forces drove them from the town after two battles. Neamathla's retaliatory raid on a US Supply boat was used by many American politicians as justification to launch an invasion.

All of these actions have been described as the start of the Seminole War, but each was part of a long sequence. Regardless of when it may have started, Jackson's invasion in 1817 made the reality of war irrefutable, and the war would continue for over forty years.



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Painting "Attack of the Seminoles on the Block House" by T.F. Gray  
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