

THE SEMINOLE WAR: THE TOLL OF WAR



The Seminole fight to remain in Florida continued for seven years after the first shot was fired against Dade's forces. "The Florida War," as the newspapers called it at the time, would prove to be longer and costlier than any other war the United States waged against the Indigenous people of America. The war cost the United States as much as \$40 million (more than one and a half billion in 2025 dollars) and deeply divided the nation. Officially the army lost 1,466 men to the war, with most of these deaths coming from diseases and infection.

There are no good counts of the cost for the Seminole people. Three thousand eight hundred and twenty-four Seminole had been taken from Florida according to military records, but there was no reliable tally for those killed in action. The cost was felt far from the front lines. Those living in camps were forced to evacuate, hide, move, and build anew in an unceasing cycle. Stories of the harsh conditions, loss, and hard sacrifices are passed down within the Tribe so that their descendants don't forget the cost of war. By 1842 many had decided this cost was too high, and they agreed to be taken from Florida. On August 14th Colonel William Jenkins Worth, though no peace agreement was ever made and knowing there were still those who would not leave, declared the war over.

Around 600 Seminole, however, remained in Florida. For a time, they had won the battle to remain in their homeland.

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Above: "Storyteller" by Seminole Artist Noah Billie (2209.3.69)
Courtesy Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum.

