

THE SEMINOLE WAR: GRAY CLOUD



In the last year of the Seminole War the United States built a blockhouse fort on Egmont Key, a small island in the mouth of Tampa Bay. The fort was made to hold Seminole prisoners taken from Florida before their forced removal to Oklahoma. Those held there were noncombatants, mostly women, children, and elders who were forcefully taken from their camps in armed raids. Messengers were sent to find the Seminole warriors with a message: Their families had been captured and would be sent west. If they wanted to be with their families, they should turn themselves in.

On May 7, 1858, at the Army encampment at Fort Myers, Billy Bowlegs and his followers turned themselves in so they could return to their families. After decades of struggle, their fight to remain in their homeland was over. They were taken onto the Gray Cloud, a steamer ship that had been used to transport prisoners before, and then to the prison camp on Egmont Key to load the other prisoners. While on the way Colonel Loomis interrogated Billy Bowlegs about Seminoles remaining in Florida. Bowlegs informed him that he was certain that Sam Jones and his people would never agree to leave.

The Gray Cloud took them to Egmont Key to join the prisoners there. The next day the Seminoles boarded the ship that would take them away from their homelands in Florida. When the ship stopped to refuel in Saint Marks, Florida an escape was staged by Emateloys (Polly Parker) and half a dozen other women, all of whom survived to return to Okeechobee. It was the only escape.

The United States inaccurately proclaimed victory and the Seminole War over, but Billy Bowlegs had been right. Sam Jones' band, along with others who would not go, remained in Florida, unconquered, with the gray cloud of war an unforgotten threat

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Above: Billy Bowlegs, (Ca. 1850)

If you'd like to learn more about Egmont Key, Polly Parker, and the end of the Seminole War,, you can read the Seminole Story book at <https://stofthpo.com/egmont-key/> or scan the QR code

