

155TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CIVIL WAR SKIRMISH AT STATION NO. 4 CEDAR KEYS

By: Bob Wooley

On February 8, 2020 there will be a "Living History" commemoration of this battle in the Cedar Key City Park. Visitors will be able to learn about the battle first hand by interacting with authentic reenactors of the primary participants. Here is a brief overview of the history you will learn.

Background: On March 1, 1861 the Florida Railroad was completed, connecting Fernandina on the Atlantic to the Cedar Keys on the Gulf. Then the Civil War erupted on April 12, 1861. For a little less than a year the Cedar Keys served the Confederacy as a port for blockade runners. In January 1862, the USS *Hatteras* attacked, destroying the military installations, railroad docks and warehouses. For the duration of the war the US Navy blockaded the Cedar Keys.

The fall of Vicksburg cut the Confederacy off from Texas beef, so they looked to Florida to supply cattle. In response the US army organized groups of Union sympathizers and Confederate deserters into the 2nd Florida Cavalry US. These troops knew the interior of Florida and the cattle operations.

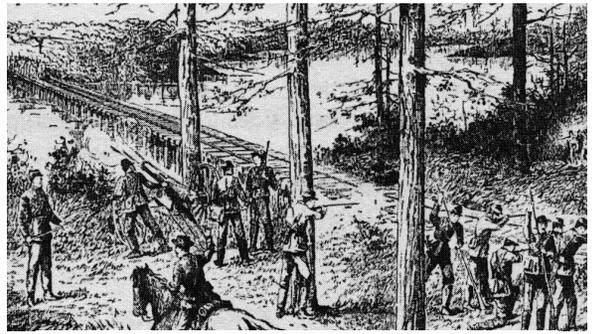
In response the Confederates began training those herding cattle to become members of the Florida Special Cavalry (or "Cow Cavalry"). Capt. E. J. Lutterloh commanded one of these groups in Levy County.

In the summer of 1864 the US Army sent the 2nd Florida Cavalry US and the 2nd US Colored Troops (USCT, African-American troops) under Maj. Edmund Weeks to establish a new Post in the Cedar Keys to further their raids on Florida cattle.

At that time the Confederates had the 2nd Florida Cavalry CS operating around the St. Johns River and the 1st Florida Reserves in Tallahassee, plus various "Cow Cavalry" units.

Campaign: On February 8, 1865 Maj. Weeks with 200 men of the 2nd USCT and 186 men of the 2nd Fla Cav US began their raid inland. Lutterloh immediately notified Florida District Headquarters in Tallahassee. Various Confederates began harassing the raiders losing 4 men captured near Yearty's farm (near current Shiloh and Sumner). A plan was formulated to send the 2nd Fla Cav CS from Palatka to get between the Yankees and the Islands, while the 1st Fla Reserves would travel by train from Tallahassee to Lake City and then march south, trapping the Union raiders.

On February 9th, Capt. Dickison's 2nd Fla Cav CS (90 men) got word of the Yankee movement. Gen. Miller and the 1st Fla Res. prepared to leave Tallahassee with 500 men and 4 artillery pieces. The Yankees, after spending the night at Yearty's continue northward. The next day the 2nd USCT surprised the pickets at



Flight at No. 4 near Cedar Keys (Mary E. Dickison, Dickison and His Men, 1890)

Clay Landing (present day Manatee Springs) and destroyed a large amount of government supplies while all the rebels escape across the Suwannee River. The 2nd Fla Cav US attacked Levyville (6 miles east of current day Chiefland), with militia harassing their rear. Dickison left Palatka and Miller was on his way from Tallahassee.

On February 11th, the 2nd Fla Cav US tried to head toward Bronson, but the road was mostly a swamp. They decided to return to the Cedar Keys. The 2nd USCT does the same. At dusk, Capt. Dickison arrives about 5 miles east of Levyville. General Miller is marching south from Lake City.

The next day the Yankees arrive at Station No. 4 with 100 cattle, 50 slaves, 13 horses, and 5 prisoners. Major Weeks and the prisoners go to Depot Key (Atsena Otie). Capt. Dickison is 4 miles east; he couldn't cut them off before they got to Station No. 4. Gen. Miller is about a day's march behind.

At 7:00 AM on February 13th the 2nd Fla Cav CS and various militia troops totaling 145 men advanced on the Union force occupying a strong position behind the railroad embankment near Station No. 4. At that point Dickison dismounted his troops, fired, and then charged the Union line. In a few minutes the railroad was in the possession of Dickison. Maj. Weeks hears the firing and returns from Depot Key to find his men "flying in all directions". He starts to bring 60 additional men across the railroad bridge from Way Key. In response the southerners turn their artillery on the bridge and begin firing at a furious rate, compelling Week's men to fall back. After a few hours of fighting the Confederates start running low on ammunition. Just as the Confederates were in command of the field they had to withdraw about 600 yards as their ammunition ran out. Gen. Miller with reinforcements arrived after dark.

In the morning, after being resupplied and reinforced, Dickison returns to Station No. 4 to find the Yankees gone. Dickison claims the Union dead, wounded and captured at 70, while his command had no one killed and only 5 wounded none mortally. Maj. Weeks claims 5 killed, 18 wounded, 3 taken prisoner and that the Confederates left 2 killed on the field.

Capt. Dickison returned all of the captured goods to their owners and then proceeded to his headquarters at Waldo.