



The American Soldier, 1839

Early in 1832 the U.S. Indian Commissioner in Florida negotiated a treaty with the Seminoles whereby the Indians would relinquish their lands in Florida and move to Arkansas by 1 January 1836. Long before the deadline the Seminoles demonstrated that they would not go peaceably. In the afternoon of 28 December 1835 a party of warriors attacked a column of regulars under Major Dade and massacred all but two men who were severely wounded. The Second Seminole War had begun. The War Department sent General Winfield Scott to take command, but he was unable to come to grips with any sizable force of Indians. Over the next six years, other commanders tried and failed to drive the Seminoles out of their dismal bogs and palmetto swamps. In May 1841 Colonel William J. Worth brought about a radical change. He conducted offensive operations in the summer, usually a time when they had been suspended because of the prevalence of fever and dysentery. He thereby prevented the Indians from raising and harvesting crops to sustain themselves during the winter's fighting. By waging stern and unceasing war in all seasons, he was able to end the war officially by May 1842.

Supplying the Regular Army dress uniform coat and cap to the troops in Florida was stopped soon after the beginning of the Second Seminole War. Enlisted men in Florida throughout the conflict were provided with the Army undress or fatigue uniform. The officers, who bought their own clothing, wore whatever they liked.

In the right foreground is a company officer in a fringed leather frock, linen or cotton trousers, and the issue forage cap. His only indication of rank is his red silk sash around his waist. In the left foreground is a friendly Indian scout in typical dress.

In the background, the enlisted men wear the white cotton summer jacket and trousers, or the light blue cloth winter equivalent with its collar laced with white binding, or any combination of the two. These uniforms were worn day and night and soon became ragged and dirty. All of the white leather belting was blackened, and metal trimmings such as cap numbers and buttons were either removed or allowed to tarnish in order to make the wearer inconspicuous. The soft leather forage cap, introduced in 1833, was worn at night with the strap buckled under the chin, in order, as a hospital steward said, "to keep out of our ears, ear-wigs, centipedes, cockroaches, etc."