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Hampton Dunn

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SITE OF BLOODY DADE MASSACRE NOW A PARK

By HAMPTON DUNN

BUSHNELL --- A block or so off busy U.S. 301 in Bushnell is a quiet and peaceful State Park, designated Dade Battlefield Historic Memorial.

It was under the shady oaks which today provide an umbrella for picnickers that one of the bloodiest battles ever fought in Florida took place a couple days after Christmas in 1836.

This is where a detachment of U.S. soldiers, being transferred from Fort Brooke (Tampa) to Fort King (Ocala) was slaughtered by furious Seminole Indians on rampage, in a surprise attack. The massacre of gallant Maj. Francis L. Dade and his command triggered the Second Seminole War, or Florida War as it is sometimes called.

The white men were first assaulted at 8 A.M.; half of the command fell dead or wounded at the first fire. The Indians were frightened away by fire from a cannon. Then a lull ensued.

During this quiet, some of the soldiers felled pine trees with which they constructed a triangular breastwork. Their crude fortification was only knee-high (see replica in photo) when the Indians attacked again and finished wiping out all but two of the group of 100.

Major Dade's memory was honored by the naming of newly-created Dade County a few weeks later, and again with the naming of the town of Dade City, a few miles south of the park on U.S. 301.