Me whip' future president - Billy Bowlegs

Hampton Dunn
OKEECHOBEE --- A future President of the United States emerged a hero from the bloodiest, most fiercely fought battle of the Indian War here on Christmas Day in 1837. Zachary Taylor earned a battleground promotion to brigadier general for his role in the important holiday affair and later went on to become civil leader of the nation (1849-50).

But it was a costly victory for the United States, fighting a savage, enraged band of redskins in the wilds the Indians knew best. The site of the Battle of Okeechobee is marked today by a large monument beside U. S. 441 near the town of Okeechobee. The contest that Christmas Day was the beginning of the end for the Seminoles.

Taylor led an army 1032 men plus their officers into the wilderness. Involved were the First, Fourth and Sixth Regiments of Infantry of the regular Army and the First Regiment of Missouri Volunteers. Also included were about 70 Delaware Indians.

In the swamp and wooded area, the soldiers were swarmed by a small but aggressive guerilla band, 380 Indians under the leadership of the colorful chiefs, Billy Bowlegs, Alligator, Coacoochee (Wild Cat) who has starved himself to escape from the fort at St. Augustine after his earlier capture, Aripeka or Sam Jones and a sub-chief called The Prophet. Twenty-eight soldiers were killed, 112 wounded. Only 11 Indians were killed. Several of Taylor’s top officers were victims.

Taylor picked up the nickname of "Rough and Ready" from this incident. Many years later Billy Bowlegs visited the Capitol in Washington, spotted the portrait of President Taylor, and exclaimed: "Me Whip!"