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## Through the Wilderness: Andrew Jackson's Military Road and the Settlement of the Southern Frontier

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**THROUGH THE WILDERNESS: ANDREW JACKSON'S MILITARY ROAD AND  
THE SETTLEMENT OF AMERICA'S SOUTHERN FRONTIER**

A Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of  
Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts, History

By

Dustin Mitchell Wren

May 2021

# **THROUGH THE WILDERNESS: ANDREW JACKSON'S MILITARY ROAD AND THE SETTLEMENT OF AMERICA'S SOUTHERN FRONTIER**

History Department

Missouri State University, May 2021

Master of Arts

Dustin Mitchell Wren

## **ABSTRACT**

Shortly after the War of 1812, the U.S government attempted to construct a new military road system connecting Nashville, Tennessee to strategic ports at New Orleans and Mobile. The road was intended to grant faster military responses to British, Spanish, and Indian threats within America's southern frontier and to aid in the region's settlement. The American government directed iconic General Andrew Jackson to spearhead the road's construction, believing the construction would be rapid and the expenses minimal. However, the impenetrable thickets and inundating swamps of the Mississippi Territory proved untamable, while shifting geo-political dynamics mitigated the road's necessity. Never used for massive troop deployment and with a negligible impact on the settlement of Mississippi, the Jackson Military Road proved to be a costly, futile endeavor.

**KEYWORDS:** Andrew Jackson, military, road, construction, nature, environment, government, nineteenth century, frontier, settlement

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In the interest of academic freedom and the principle of free speech, approval of this thesis indicates the format is acceptable and meets the academic criteria for the discipline as determined by the faculty that constitute the thesis committee. The content and views expressed in this thesis are those of the student-scholar and are not endorsed by Missouri State University, its Graduate College, or its employees.

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## INTRODUCTION

On February 18, 1815, the United States and Britain signed the Treaty of Ghent, officially ending the War of 1812. For the second time in America's young history, the nation successfully defended itself against the British. However, amongst national leaders, there was still an uneasiness. America rested in a perilous situation. Alexander J. Dallas, acting Secretary of War, believed America's frontier regions to be particularly vulnerable. Britain stood as a constant threat. It was the estimation of then-Secretary of State James Monroe that, had Britain been victorious at the Battle of New Orleans, during peace negotiations British leaders would have demanded all Gulf Coast lands be returned to Spain and would have possibly kept the port of Mobile for themselves. Even with American victory at New Orleans, Britain still refused to acknowledge America's claims along the Gulf Coast, as well as the entirety of the Louisiana Purchase. According to British officials, the land legally belonged to Spain. The British also promised to protect their Creek and Seminole allies even after the war ended and even continued to supply the Indians militarily.<sup>1</sup> (In contrast, in the 1783 Treaty of Paris that ended the first war between Britain and the United States, nothing was mentioned concerning Indian rights or land claims.)<sup>2</sup>

Tensions also remained high with Spain. Like Britain, Spain claimed the United States' possession of the Louisiana Territory was illegal. Napoleon's sale of the Louisiana Territory to the United States had violated his own promise in the Treaty of Ildefonso to offer the land to

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<sup>1</sup> Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Volume One: The Course of American Empire, 1767-1821* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 298-301.

<sup>2</sup> Reginald Horsman, *Expansion and American Indian Policy: 1783-1812*, (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 3.

Spain first.<sup>3</sup> Spain also disputed the border between the Mississippi Territory and its own territory of West Florida. Disagreements on the boundary line between Spanish Florida and the American southlands that eventually became the Mississippi Territory had been a source of contention since the American Revolution ended. Though Spain allied with the United States during the war, postwar agreements and the long, shared border between the two nations led to constant distrust on both sides. As a result of the American Revolution, Britain had returned Florida to Spanish control, and the thirty-first parallel was set as the boundary between Spanish Florida and the American south. However, Spain refused to acknowledge the border, believing its boundaries pushed further north.<sup>4</sup>

In 1806, former-Vice President Aaron Burr met with Jackson in Tennessee. Burr convinced Jackson to have two boats constructed and officers contacted in, what Jackson claimed, would be an attempt invade Mexico to take it from Spain. However, word reached President Jefferson that Burr was possibly working with Spain, attempting to use this force to wrestle New Orleans from the United States. One version of the theory holds that Burr was attempting to create his own empire in the western frontier and that Spain supported this action because Burr's kingdom would provide a buffer between the United States and Spain's colonies. The story was sensational. A former Vice President had been lured by the dastardly Spanish to commit treason. Jefferson ordered Burr's arrest, and he was tried for treason. There was not enough evidence to convict Burr, and historians still debate whether Burr was planning an invasion of Mexico or actually working with Spain.<sup>5</sup> Regardless of Burr's true motives, the fact that so many American citizens and politicians thought the revolt a possibility serves as proof of just how terrifying Spain's presence was for American settlers. In 1817, understanding and

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<sup>3</sup> Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Volume One: The Course of American Empire, 1767-1821*, 298.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 47.

<sup>5</sup> Robert V. Remini, *The Life of Andrew Jackson*, New York: Harper and Row, 1988. 55-60.

playing to Southern fears over the supposed Spanish threat, Andrew Jackson asked Louisiana politician Edward Livingston to, “Tell the people along the Gulf and my Neworleans friends that I am wide awake to their security and defence – and only await the sound of war to be with them.”<sup>6</sup>

Another concern was that peace needed to be negotiated or maintained with various Indian nations.<sup>7</sup> The Creek War ended with the Treaty of Fort Jackson, but afterwards, many Creeks fled to Spanish Florida and refused to sign or acknowledge the agreement. Having foregone the Treaty of Fort Jackson, these Creek tribes were considered to still be at war with the United States and were now lurking in the foreign territory of Spanish Florida.<sup>8</sup> Even as General Jackson was organizing the defense of New Orleans, soldiers that he stationed throughout the Mississippi Territory were still skirmishing with hostile Indians that were imprisoning and scalping white settlers.<sup>9</sup> After the war, Indian Agent Bernard Hawkins reported, “I find the hostile Indians in small parties continue their plundering and murdering on the road.” Hawkins later reported that hostile Indians were attacking from Spanish Florida and had “infested the road . . . and attacked our wagons four times.”<sup>10</sup>

This intrigue led to a combination of fears for America. Along with the fears of direct military threats from Britain and Spain, there was also the belief that the two nations were actively fueling Native American attacks against white settlers.<sup>11</sup> The belief had persisted since

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<sup>6</sup> Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 116.

<sup>7</sup> Alexander James Dallas to Andrew Jackson, May 22, 1815, Manuscript/Mixed Material. Library of Congress, *The Andrew Jackson Papers, 1775-1874*. (hereinafter cited as: LoC:AJP.)

<sup>8</sup> Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Volume One: The Course of American Empire, 1767-1821*, 302.

<sup>9</sup> *An Affecting Narrative of the Captivity and Sufferings of Mrs. Mary Smith*, (Providence, R.I.: Printed by L. Scott, 1815.)

<sup>10</sup> Angela Pulley Hudson, *Creek Paths and Federal Roads: Indians, Settlers, and Slaves and the Making of the American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010) 117-8.

<sup>11</sup> Hudson, *Creek Paths and Federal Roads*, 113.

the American Revolution, when Britain had incited Indians to attack American settlements.<sup>12</sup> Afterwards, Spain had done the same, promising the Creeks supplies and weapons if the Creeks would declare war against the United States. Tecumseh, the Shawnee leader who desired a Pan-Indian alliance, even informed the Creeks of which Spanish ports they could visit to receive weaponry.<sup>13</sup> During the War of 1812, Jackson estimated that nearly 300 British had arrived in Spanish Florida and, along with the Spanish, were arming the Creeks.<sup>14</sup> British Captain Hugh Pigot estimated that he was able to secure an alliance with over 3,000 Creek and Seminole warriors who would launch raids into America's southern frontier.<sup>15</sup> Of particular concern for the American government was Indian attacks on American post riders. During these attacks, the Indians disrupted communications between disparate American posts and captured sensitive information about American military strength and strategies, which they then passed along to the Indians' British collaborators.<sup>16</sup> For Jackson, it became paramount to cleave the Indians from their European allies. Thus, when Red Stick chiefs surrendered to Jackson during the Creek War, he forced them to move their tribes north of his army so they could no longer be supplied by the British or the Spanish. Before the peace negotiations of the Creek War, Jackson advised that the U.S. government force the Creeks to concede all of their lands that bordered Spanish Florida, so as to create a "bulwark against foreign invasion."<sup>17</sup>

After the United States and Britain signed Treaty of Ghent, General Edmund Pendleton Gaines, commander of Fort Jackson in modern-day Alabama and one of Jackson's most trusted soldiers, warned that some of the remaining Creeks were advised by British Lieutenant Colonel

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<sup>12</sup> Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Volume One: The Course of American Empire, 1767-1821*, 35.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 187-8.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 225.

<sup>15</sup> Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars*, 90-1.

<sup>16</sup> Hudson, *Creek Paths and Federal Roads*, 97-8.

<sup>17</sup> Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars* 80-1, 84.

Edward Nicholls, who had remained stationed in Spanish Florida, “to kill any American they find passing through their country, and not to suffer the lands lately ceded to the United States to be taken possession of by us.”<sup>18</sup> In 1815, Jackson warned Gaines that “if the Indians proceed to any acts of hostility or opposition to the running of the line, it will be from the excitement of the British officer [William] Hambly.”<sup>19</sup>

Jackson estimated that the Seminoles in Florida would not launch incursions against American settlements “without great encouragement & support from some other power.”<sup>20</sup> In 1818, during the First Seminole War, Andrew Jackson invaded Spanish Florida and captured two British subjects. Jackson claimed that he found evidence proving both subjects were supplying Indian attacks across the border and ordered the two British men executed. Jackson stated that the British subjects were “two unprincipled villains” who provided “false promises” designed to “delude & excite a Indian tribe to all the horrid deeds of savage war.”<sup>21</sup>

For Jackson, the event served as further proof that America’s southern frontier was in dire need of protection. “So long as the Indians within the territory of Spain are exposed to the delusions of false prophets,” he said, “and poison of foreign intrigue; so long as they can receive ammunition, munitions of war &c from pretend Traders, or Spanish commandants it will be impossible to restrain their outrages.”<sup>22</sup>

James Monroe believed New Orleans was particularly vulnerable. In a letter to Congress, he warned,

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 97.

<sup>19</sup> Andrew Jackson to Edmund Pendleton Gaines, September 30, 1815, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson Digital Edition*. Edited by Daniel Feller. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2015-. (hereinafter cited as *PoAJ-Rotunda*.)

<sup>20</sup> Andrew Jackson to Alexander James Dallas, July 11, 1815, *PoAJ-Rotunda*.

<sup>21</sup> Andrew Jackson to John Caldwell Calhoun, May 5, 1818, *PoAJ-Rotunda*.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*.

“It is known that no part of our Union is more exposed to invasion, by numerous avenues leading to it, or more defenceless, by the thinness of the neighboring population, or offers a greater temptation to invasion, either as a permanent acquisition, or as a prize to the cupidity of grasping invaders, from the immense amount of produce deposited there, than the city of New Orleans. It is known, also, that the seizure of no part of our Union could affect so deeply and vitally the immediate interests of so many States, and of so many of our fellow-citizens, comprising all that extensive territory, and numerous population, which are connected with and dependent on the Mississippi, as the seizure of that city.”

Monroe continued his warning by stating that it was not solely a direct assault against New Orleans that threatened the nation. It was also possible for an enemy to capture Mobile, the Rigolets, the numerous islands near the coast, or lands north of the city. The latter would allow enemies to cut off supplies to New Orleans.<sup>23</sup>

Two wars had been fought almost simultaneously – the Creek War and the War of 1812. The first was a clear American victory and the second was at least celebrated as such. Yet, the American government, military leaders, and thousands of settlers with designs on the southern frontier all felt a sense of unease. More still needed to be done. To secure the region’s (and the nation’s) safety, acting Secretary of War Dallas turned to America’s newest war hero – General Andrew Jackson.

Not long after Americans received news of Jackson’s victorious outcome at the Battle of New Orleans, they also received word that the War of 1812 had ended, and peace negotiations were underway. Jackson’s name became synonymous with victory in the war.<sup>24</sup> During the march from Natchez to Nashville, Jackson’s soldiers bestowed upon him the name “Old Hickory,” in part because he was willing to endure the same hardships they did.<sup>25</sup> For his victory at New Orleans, Congress passed a resolution honoring Jackson for “obtaining a most signal and

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<sup>23</sup> James Monroe, Re-examination of the Positions on Dauphin Island and Mobile Point for Fortification, March 26, 1822, *American State Papers: Military Affairs, Volume 2, No. 223*, 17th Congress, 1st Session, 368.

<sup>24</sup> Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Volume One: The Course of American Empire, 1767-1821*, 294-5.

<sup>25</sup> Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Volume One: The Course of American Empire, 1767-1821*, 179-180.

complete victory over the enemy, with a disparity of loss on his part unexampled in military annals,” and requested that President Madison cast a gold medal for Jackson.<sup>26</sup>

In particular, the South loved Andrew Jackson. Upon his return to Nashville following the Creek War, “hundreds of people lined the streets to get a glimpse of the hero and to shout their appreciation for his noble victory over the “savages.””<sup>27</sup> Publishing in 1819, Gilbert J. Hunt claimed, “The inhabitants of New-Orleans were greatly rejoiced, and carried [Jackson] through the streets of the city above the rest; and the virgins of Columbia strewed his path with roses.”<sup>28</sup> In 1818, Jackson bid on a tract of land near present-day Muscle Shoals, Alabama. Instead of anyone countering his bid, the crowd applauded and allowed Jackson to purchase the land for far less than market value.<sup>29</sup> In an 1820 letter to Jackson, Mississippi Governor George Poindexter informed the general that, “You will live in our affections to the latest period of time.”<sup>30</sup> In 1822, when Mississippi decided to move its capital out of Washington city, the only fitting namesake for the new capital was “Jackson.” As historian John Ray Skates noted, “Jackson’s popularity among Mississippians was unshakable.”<sup>31</sup> General Eleazar Wheelock Ripley once noted that the South was Jackson’s “theatre of glory.”<sup>32</sup>

Fittingly, in the post-war period, the federal government chose Jackson to develop and defend America’s southern frontier. In May of 1815, acting Secretary of War Dallas promoted Jackson to commander of the Division of the South. The jurisdiction was large. According to

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<sup>26</sup> *Resolutions reported by the Military Committee, expressive of the thanks of Congress to Major General Jackson, and the troops under his command, for their gallantry and good conduct, in the defence of New Orleans.* (Washington, D.C.: Printed by Roger C. Weightman, 1815)

<sup>27</sup> Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Volume One: The Course of American Empire, 1767-1821*, 221.

<sup>28</sup> Gilbert J. Hunt, *The Late War, Between the United States and Great Britain From June, 1812, to February, 1815. Written in the Ancient Historical Style.* (New York, self-published, 1819), 220.

<sup>29</sup> Andrew Jackson to Isaac Shelby, November 24, 1818, *LoC-AJP*.

<sup>30</sup> George Poindexter to Andrew Jackson, October 25, 1820, *LoC-AJP*.

<sup>31</sup> John Ray Skates. *Mississippi: A Bicentennial History (States and the Nation)*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1979), 83.

<sup>32</sup> Eleazar Wheelock Ripley to John Caldwell Calhoun, December 30, 1817, *LoC-AJP*.

Dallas, it included not only the Southern states, but most of the Northwest (modern-day lands stretching from Indiana to the Mississippi river and the Missouri Territory) as well. Essentially, Jackson was given jurisdiction over the majority of America's frontier lands. Yet Dallas made sure that the majority of Jackson's attention needed to be centered on the Gulf of Mexico. Dallas informed Jackson that "[t]he defence and security of New Orleans and Mobile are objects of primary interest and importance. The recent events in Europe, and the conflicting claims of the United States and Spain, to a part of the territory of West Florida, recommend every precaution, that can be taken to protect our own rights."<sup>33</sup>

In 1822, President James Monroe reflected on the perilous situation along the Gulf of Mexico. "The policy which induced Congress to decide on and provide for the defence of the coast immediately after the war, was founded on the marked events of that interesting epoch. The vast body of men which it was found necessary to call into the field, through the whole extent of our maritime frontier, and the number who perished by exposure, with the immense expenditure of money and waste of property which followed, were to be traced in an eminent degree to the defenceless condition of the coast. It was to mitigate these evils in future wars and even for the higher purpose of preventing war itself, that the decision was formed to make the coast, so far as might be practicable, impregnable. . ."<sup>34</sup>

By December of 1815, Jackson had assessed the situation on the southern frontier and proposed a series of actions to create a viable defense. More batteries were needed to protect Mobile, and fortifications at the entrance to Lake Pontchartrain needed to be completed. Also, a better supply and transportation chain needed to be established. Existing depots in Georgia needed to have relay points connecting to Mobile, on a route that would run the length of Spain's

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<sup>33</sup> Alexander James Dallas to Andrew Jackson, May 22, 1815, *LoC-AJP*.

<sup>34</sup> James Monroe, Re-examination of the Positions on Dauphin Island and Mobile Point for Fortification, March 26, 1822, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, Volume 2, No. 223, 17th Congress, 1st Session, 368.

Florida border. Finally, Jackson proposed the construction of a new road. If New Orleans were to be truly protected from attack, the military needed the ability to swiftly send reinforcements overland to the city. Jackson suggested that a road from division headquarters in Nashville could be run to New Orleans at little expense and that the road would greatly shorten the current land route (the Natchez Trace) by over 300 miles.<sup>35</sup>

Jackson knew the region well and understood the hardships involved in transporting troops through the area. With the onset of the War of 1812 and the Creek War, General Jackson was assigned to the Mississippi Territory (modern-day Mississippi and Alabama) and charged with quelling Indian rebellions and defending the lands against potential British invasions. Jackson's first action in the War of 1812 was to raise 1,500 volunteer soldiers, organized into two divisions, for what was expected to be a five-to-six-month campaign and assemble them in Nashville. The troops were to be organized in Nashville by December 10, 1812. The challenges of a difficult winter, procuring supplies, and organizing the volunteer army of the over-two-thousand-men who arrived meant that the two divisions were not ready to march until January 7, 1813. The cavalry proceeded on land, but such was the terrible conditions of the Mississippi Territory's roads that the rest of the army decided to navigate the journey on boats. From Nashville, the army loaded boats on the Cumberland River, which flowed into the Ohio River, and eventually the Mississippi. Although the destination of Natchez, Mississippi, was only 500 miles away, the river journey from Nashville to Natchez coursed over 1,000 miles and lasted 39 days. It had been a long journey, and largely one of futility. By March, the War Department changed its mind, believing Jackson would no longer be needed at New Orleans. The Department dismissed Jackson and ordered him to muster out his forces on the spot – they would be responsible for their own journeys home. Jackson was infuriated for many reasons but was

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<sup>35</sup> Andrew Jackson to William Harris Crawford, December 17, 1815, *LoC-AJP*.

particularly irate that the government was essentially abandoning so many men 500 miles from home. He refused to dismiss them and instead decided that he would personally pay to march them back to Nashville. However, the journey to Nashville would not be as simple as the journey from the city. There were no river routes. The entire march would have to take place through the frontier lands of Mississippi and Tennessee. “They carefully followed me to the field;” Jackson scoffed, “I shall carefully march them back to their homes.” On the journey, over 150 men fell sick, a third of which had to be transported by the only eleven wagons Jackson could muster. Officers, including Jackson, offered their horses to the sick who could not fit on the wagons. It took over a month to get the troops through the wilderness and back to Nashville.<sup>36</sup>

Later in 1813, Jackson once again raised an army. This time, Jackson’s call to action was directed against the Creeks in modern-day Alabama. A faction of the Creeks, known as the Red Sticks, had assaulted Fort Mims (near Spanish-Pensacola) and slaughtered almost every white person inside – a death toll of around 250 people. Jackson’s forces, along with three other American armies, marched through what was then the eastern-Mississippi Territory, having to cut roads as they marched. Rations quickly ran low as the expected supplies, including food and medicine, never arrived. The situation became so dire that Jackson ordered his quartermaster back to Nashville to find the missing supplies. He also ordered his troops to forage among friendly Indians.<sup>37</sup> Bad terrain enervated the supply chain, proving the difficulties of troop transport in the Mississippi Territory. Overcoming seemingly endless bouts of dysentery and recovering from a gunshot wound to his shoulder, Jackson also coordinated supply,

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<sup>36</sup> Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Volume One: The Course of American Empire, 1767-1821*, 170-180. The primary reason Jackson’s land trip to Nashville was slightly faster than his water navigation to Natchez is because, before he left Natchez for Nashville, he had been ordered to turn over most of his equipment and non-essential supplies to General Wilkinson, who at the moment was stationed in New Orleans.

<sup>37</sup> Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Volume One: The Course of American Empire, 1767-1821*, 189-191.

communication, and troop-transport lines that stretched from Tennessee to southern Alabama and New Orleans, Louisiana. The lack of reliable roads meant that reinforcements were often delayed, supplies became exhausted, and volunteers revolted.<sup>38</sup> When Jackson's forces were not engaged in combat or drilling, it was common for the general to have them repairing roads.<sup>39</sup> In a letter written during the Creek War, Jackson stated, "The irregularity of supplies has retarded my progress very much."<sup>40</sup>

Despite the difficulties, Jackson successfully led his men to victory. Much has been written of Jackson's ruthless assaults against Indian villages and of his strategic mastery at the Battle of New Orleans. While his military actions garnered national fame and eventually placed Jackson on a political pathway to the White House, his experience in the Mississippi Territory also destined him to be a driving force in the Territory's development – a development he hoped to hasten with the construction of a reliable road.

Jackson, from a position of experience in trudging through the Mississippi wilderness, could passionately defend his desire for a better roadway. During the War of 1812, the primary land route Jackson's military used to return to Tennessee was the Natchez Trace – a postal road connecting Nashville, Tennessee, to Natchez, Mississippi. Even where the Trace and other roads existed, they were often poorly maintained or too narrow to efficiently move a large army. Fallen trees and overgrowth were common problems. In many areas, new roads had to be cut. In the swamplands of Mississippi and Louisiana, soldiers sometimes marched in mosquito-and snake-infested waters while building plank bridges to haul their heavy cannons.

Yet for all of Jackson's desire and good intentions, the Military Road project never truly served any military purpose. No European powers ever threatened Mobile or New Orleans after

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<sup>38</sup> Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Volume One: The Course of American Empire, 1767-1821*, 190-2, 223.

<sup>39</sup> Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars*, 74-5.

<sup>40</sup> Andrew Jackson to Leroy Pope, October 21, 1813, *LoC-AJP*.

the War of 1812, thus there was never a requirement to march troops en masse from Nashville to the Gulf of Mexico. Some historians, such as William A. Love, have posited that the Military Road was used by settlers migrating from the eastern United States to Alabama and Mississippi.<sup>41</sup> However, census data shows that the number of settlers in counties through which the Road ran grew at no significantly higher percentage than the number of settlers in other counties in Mississippi and Alabama. The greatest population growths primarily occurred after the Chickasaw and Choctaw land cessions. Those cessions were a result of the Indian Removal Act of 1830, which occurred more than a decade after the Military Road's completion and after it had already fallen into disrepair. For instance, Adams County, bordering the Mississippi River, grew from a population of 10,002 in 1810 to 12,076 in 1820 (after the Military Road's completion) and to 14,837 in 1830 (long after much of the wilderness had reclaimed the Military Road). Thus, in both decades there was barely a discernable difference in population growth. In Monroe county, near the Military Road's transition from Alabama to Mississippi, the population grew from 2,721 in 1820 to 3,861 by 1830. In this decade after the Military Road's completion, the population growth of just over 1,000 was drastically overshadowed by the growth the following decade to 9,250.<sup>42</sup> That decade, from 1830 to 1840, began with the Indian Removal Act forcing the Chickasaw from present-day Monroe County. Reports from the time prove the road had already fallen into disrepair, thus it is likely other routes were more useful in settling Mississippi.

At best, the Road's construction provided jobs for surveyors, engineers, and soldiers.

However, the labor was intense and, at times, life-threatening. Supplies, particularly along the

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<sup>41</sup> William A. Love, "Andrew Jackson's Military Road." *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society*, Volume 11, (1910), 415.

<sup>42</sup> Richard L Forstall, *Population of States and Counties of the United States: 1790 to 1990*, U.S. Bureau of the Census, Washington, DC, (1996): 88-91.

Road's stretch between Columbus, Mississippi and New Orleans, often ran low. Along with the environmental and logistical challenges, the Road's progress was also delayed by boundary disputes with Indians, insubordination and ineptitude from some of Jackson's subordinates, and military actions in Spanish Florida. Also, despite Jackson's claim that the Military Road could be constructed for "very little expense," Congress's initial appropriation of five-thousand dollars for the Road's construction proved to be woefully insufficient. To make matters worse, despite all of the hardships and expenses invested, the Military Road fell into despair almost immediately upon completion. An examination into the Military Road's construction and legacy reveals the numerous environmental, physical, and political obstacles that delayed its construction, as well as the reasons for the Military Road's rapid decline.

## THE UNTAMABLE FRONTIER

Almost since the nation's conception, leaders such as George Washington held the view that major roadways were key to keeping America's frontier lands fully united with its more settled regions along the Atlantic coast. In 1802, Congress passed the Ohio Statehood Enabling Act, which included a statute designating five percent of the revenue from public land sales be spent for road construction and maintenance. This provision was eventually included in all states that achieved statehood, with the funds being split between each state's internal roadways and roads that connected states to one another.<sup>43</sup> The principle applied to the 1806 U.S. Congressional act, signed by President Thomas Jefferson, that established America's first federally funded national highway. Designed to pass through the Appalachian Mountains and link America's east coast to the Ohio River Valley, it became known as the Cumberland Road.<sup>44</sup> When discussing the importance of federally funded roads, Jefferson's Secretary of the Treasury, Albert Gallatin, declared, "Good Roads and canals will shorten distances, facilitate commercial and personal intercourse and unite, by a still more intimate community of interests, the most remote quarters of the United States. No other single operation, within the power of government, can more effectually tend to strengthen and perpetuate that Union which secures external independence, domestic peace, and internal liberty."<sup>45</sup>

Debate emerged over the constitutionality of the federal government building such roads. James Madison was concerned about the constitutionality of the Cumberland Road, but concluded that Congress could approve roads if they served a specific purpose. Over a decade

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<sup>43</sup> John Williamson, "Federal Aid to Roads and Highways Since the 18th Century: A Legislative History," Congressional Research Service, 2012, 1-2. (hereinafter cited as "Federal Aid to Roads and Highways," CRS.)

<sup>44</sup> Rickie Longfellow, "The National Road," *U.S. Department of Transportation: Federal Highway Administration Back in Time*, 2017.

<sup>45</sup> John Williamson, "Federal Aid to Roads and Highways," CRS, 1-2.

later, in a letter to President James Monroe, former-President Madison noted, “As to the case of post roads & military roads; instead of implying a general power to make roads, the constitutionality of them must be tested by the bona fide object of the particular roads.” He then bluntly stated, “The Post cannot travel, nor troops march without a road. If the necessary roads cannot be found, they must of course be provided.”<sup>46</sup> With the precedent now set, future legislators and presidents could now expand America’s transportation network and link the frontier lands to the rest of the nation.

During the Creek War, Jackson demonstrated his belief in the importance of a dependable transportation network to connect the frontier lands. Historian Angela Pulley Hudson said, “Naturally, the unimpeded movement of troops across enemy lines is of concern during any armed conflict. But given the nature of the ground to be covered in the Creek Nation and the unreliable character of many of the roads, it was quickly deemed necessary to expand and improve the old paths into roadways suitable for the transportation of ordnance and supplies.”<sup>47</sup> As Jackson biographer Robert V. Remini noted, “Jackson planned to slice through the Creek Nation, hewing a road through the wilderness as he marched, until he reached Mobile on the coast. Such a march would provide a magnificent highway across the southwestern heartland for future American settlers . . .”<sup>48</sup> There was simply no individual with greater experience or results in moving troops and conquering foes within America’s southern frontier than Andrew Jackson.

On April 27, 1816, Congress approved the construction of Jackson’s road. Congress allotted ten-thousand dollars to be split between the construction and maintenance of Jackson’s

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<sup>46</sup> James Madison to James Monroe, December 27, 1817. Transcription, Library of Congress, *The Writings of James Madison*, ed. Gaillard Hunt. (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons), 1900-1910.

<sup>47</sup> Hudson, *Creek Paths and Federal Roads*, 113.

<sup>48</sup> Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Volume One: The Course of American Empire, 1767-1821*, 191.

road, as well as another road from Georgia to Fort Stoddert (modern-day Alabama).<sup>49</sup> Assuming multiple bridges would have to be erected to complete Jackson's road, Secretary of War William Harris Crawford knew the amount was probably insufficient.<sup>50</sup> Crawford's financial concerns were well-placed. The Mississippi Territory was notorious for its multiple rivers that continually slowed travelers. Without bridges, travelers had to stop at each river to build rafts, use one of the many ferry services that dotted the state, or wait and hope for the water levels to recede.<sup>51</sup> Each choice proved time-consuming. On top of the extra time it took to build bridges and causeways, the necessary timber was expensive. When the federal government negotiated the right to cut paths through Indian lands, the felled timber still belonged to the Indians. Thus, to use the timber to construct bridges and causeways meant that the lumber had to be purchased from whichever Indian nation owned the land.<sup>52</sup> In the final report on the road, to address passage over the Mississippi Territory's various rivers and swamplands, Jackson's road would consist of over 3,000 feet of bridges and 25,000 feet of causeways.<sup>53</sup>

Congress' initial construction budget of five thousand dollars also ignored recent precedent. In an 1812 report on the Cumberland Road, then-Secretary of Treasury Albert Gallatin stated that the first ten miles of the road had cost 75 and 80 thousand dollars.<sup>54</sup> If it took thousands of dollars to cut ten miles of one road, how could Congress expect Jackson to cut a road connecting New Orleans to Nashville for a mere five-thousand dollars? Also, as substantial as the financial costs were to construct such infrastructure, fears soon emerged that personnel problems would also undermine the project.

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<sup>49</sup> Fourteenth Congress, Session I, Chapter XII, April 27, 1816.

<sup>50</sup> Love, "Andrew Jackson's Military Road." *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society*, 407-8.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas D. Clark and John D.W. Guice, *The Old Southwest, 1795-1830: Frontiers in Conflict*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 5.

<sup>52</sup> Hudson, *Creek Paths and Federal Roads*, 76.

<sup>53</sup> James Scallan to Andrew Jackson, October 2, 1820, *LoC-AJP*.

<sup>54</sup> Albert Gallatin, February 1, 1812, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, Volume 2, No. 311, 17th Congress, 1st Session, 368.

In the spring of 1816, Secretary Crawford transferred General Eleazar Wheelock Ripley from the Northern Division of the army into Andrew Jackson's Southern Division. Ripley had court-martialed a subordinate over a personal dispute, which had upset his superiors. Based on what he had heard of the trial, Jackson did not want Ripley in his division. In fact, Jackson believed Ripley's dishonorable conduct served as grounds for his dismissal from the army.<sup>55</sup> Jackson even claimed that news of Ripley's transfer threatened the morale of Jackson's officers, stating, "I can only say that the officers live in the most perfect Harmony with each other in my Division and I should be sorry that a transfer should be made that would interrupt this good understanding."<sup>56</sup> Despite Jackson's objections, Ripley was transferred to his command and part of his duties eventually included construction of Jackson's Military Road. As time passed, Jackson would become convinced that Ripley's conduct did more to slow the Road's construction than help it.

Secretary of War Crawford, who Jackson came to regard as a "pettifogging politician," was also taking other actions that upset Jackson.<sup>57</sup> General John Coffee was at work surveying the boundary of a recent annexation of Creek land. Coffee had served as the head of Jackson's cavalry during the Creek Wars, commanding over one-thousand men, and was one of Jackson's most-trusted friends.<sup>58</sup> The line Coffee was running, however, was being disputed by other Indian nations. Jackson assured Coffee that "the Choctaws have no claim East of the Tombigby [*sic*]."<sup>59</sup> Though Jackson had already participated and led many treaty negotiations with various Indian groups, he believed all of the negotiations to be foolish and unnecessary. Jackson

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<sup>55</sup> Andrew Jackson to William Harris Crawford, April 24, 1816, *PoAJ-Rotunda*.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars*, 105.

<sup>58</sup> Mike Bunn and Clay Williams, *Frontier in Flames: The Creek War and the Mississippi Territory*, *The Journal of Mississippi History*, Summer 2012, 124.

<sup>59</sup> Andrew Jackson to John Coffee, February 2, 1816, *PoAJ-Rotunda*.

believed the Indians were subjects of the United States and could be removed at the government's insistence.<sup>60</sup> Jackson also sent a letter to a Chickasaw leader George Colbert warning him that the Chickasaws had no claim to the land in question and that "any opposition to Genl [sic] Coffee will meet with prompt and immediate punishment. The President of the United States loves his red children, & will do justice to them; but he will punish his red children when they attempt by force to do wrong."<sup>61</sup> To add visible credibility to his threat, Jackson readied twenty-five mounted gunmen to guard Coffee's party.<sup>62</sup> Despite Jackson's confidence and aggressiveness, Secretary Crawford ordered Coffee to stop the survey until negotiations could be completed with Cherokee, Chickasaw, and Choctaw Indian nations.<sup>63</sup> Trying to ease Jackson's worries, Crawford assured him that "the difficulty with the Cherokees will not interfere with the military road from Tennessee to the gulf of Florida [sic], as they propose to admit of any roads which the President shall direct to be opened."<sup>64</sup> Jackson, however, believed the government would not allow him to continue construction until the negotiations were completed. He was also convinced that Crawford was simply stalling the development of the Mississippi Territory so as to stop emigration from Georgia (Crawford's home state). Jackson claimed that Crawford, "wishes to prevent the population of Georgia to be reduced by the emigration to this new country. . ."<sup>65</sup> This was a fear shared by other southern states on the eastern coast. For instance, in 1809, a single wagon train of nearly 1,000 individuals journeyed from South Carolina to the southern portion of the Mississippi Territory.<sup>66</sup> Virginia, Georgia, and the Carolinas all feared

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<sup>60</sup> Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars*, 118-9.

<sup>61</sup> Andrew Jackson to George Colbert, February 13, 1816, *PoAJ-Rotunda*.

<sup>62</sup> Andrew Jackson to John Coffee, February 14, 1816, *PoAJ-Rotunda*.

<sup>63</sup> Andrew Jackson to John Coffee, February 2, 1816, *PoAJ-Rotunda*.

<sup>64</sup> William Harris Crawford to Andrew Jackson, May 20, 1816, *PoAJ-Rotunda*.

<sup>65</sup> Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars*, 118.

<sup>66</sup> Ronald J. McCall, "Never Quite Settled: Southern Plain Folk on the Move," *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*, (East Tennessee State University: 2013), 19.

“Mississippi Fever” depopulating their states.<sup>67</sup> So many South Carolinians moved to Marion County, Mississippi, that the county’s largest city was named “Columbia.” In 1817, James K. Paulding, traveling through the southern United States, “witnessing the magnitude of this mighty wave which knows no retrograde motion, but rolls over the land, never to recoil again.”<sup>68</sup> Also, Jackson believed Crawford’s actions were also a personal attack, stating, “I know [Crawford] is my enemy” and “[Crawford] opposes [the settlement of the Mississippi Territory] because I have recommended it”<sup>69</sup> However, Crawford’s primary complaint concerning immigration to the Mississippi Territory stemmed from illegal squatter settlements – settlers who did not pay the federal government for the lands they lived upon. He claimed these squatters were “the very worst part of our citizens.”<sup>70</sup>

Entering the summer of 1816, confident that the negotiations with the Indians would end favorably and with Crawford’s assurance that the road could be constructed through Creek lands regardless, Jackson was ready to start making progress on his road. He wanted a surveyor to run an experimental line for the Military Road, but knew the prospect of sending a surveyor into such wilderness would prove expensive. In June of 1816, he inquired of Secretary Crawford whether the loan department would authorize such an expenditure, or whether he would have to wait on the arrival of the army’s own topographic engineers.<sup>71</sup> John Gordon, another of Jackson’s friends and a fellow veteran of the War of 1812, assessed the situation himself. He informed Jackson that he believed the survey of the road would require at minimum seven men: a surveyor, two men to work the chains, a marker, someone to tend to the packhorses, a camp

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<sup>67</sup> Charles Lowery, “The Great Migration to the Mississippi Territory, 1798-1819,” *Mississippi Historical Society: Mississippi History Now*, November 2000.

<sup>68</sup> Hudson, *Creek Paths and Federal Roads*, 121.

<sup>69</sup> Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars*, 118.

<sup>70</sup> Hudson, *Creek Paths and Federal Roads*, 122.

<sup>71</sup> Andrew Jackson to William Harris Crawford, June 24, 1816, *Loc-AJP*.

keeper, and an explorer. If at all possible, he told Jackson that he would feel more comfortable if the budget could allow for a few more men. Aside from manpower, Gordon also stated that the survey would require multiple packhorses, cooking utensils, and surveying tools.<sup>72</sup>

Leading into the fall season, Secretary Crawford informed Jackson that troops would likely be used for the road's construction, as opposed to hiring civilian laborers. This was a common practice in the era. During the same time soldiers were constructing Jackson's Military Road, the government was also building the Federal Road from Georgia to Louisiana. Georgia Governor David B. Mitchell informed Secretary of War Calhoun that military labor would be necessary to construct the Federal Road because the settlers near the road's path were too busy clearing land for their plantations and the government could offer them no reasonable compensation.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, military and government leaders deemed military labor to be more affordable, and also a suitable method to prevent idleness amongst the troops.<sup>74</sup> Jackson agreed with the sentiment, having previously noted that "indolence [of the troops] creates disquiet."<sup>75</sup> During the Jefferson administration, Indian agent Benjamin Hawkins had proposed using paid Indian labor to build the roads through their territory, but Jefferson and others struck down the idea.<sup>76</sup> It would have to be American labor and the federal government believed military labor would be the most efficient.

In August, interim Secretary of War George Graham informed Jackson that Jackson would be allowed to appoint the surveyor of his choice.<sup>77</sup> (Secretary Crawford had been reappointed as Secretary of the Treasury, and President Madison had yet to choose a permanent

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<sup>72</sup> John Gordon to Andrew Jackson, June 4, 1816, *Loc-AJP*.

<sup>73</sup> Henry deLeon Southerland, Jr. and Jerry Elijah Brown, *The Federal Road through Georgia, the Creek Nation, and Alabama, 1806-1836* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989), 979.

<sup>74</sup> Southerland, Jr. and Brown, *The Federal Road through Georgia, the Creek Nation, and Alabama*, 946.

<sup>75</sup> Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Volume One: The Course of American Empire, 1767-1821*, 175.

<sup>76</sup> Hudson, *Creek Paths and Federal Roads*, 76.

<sup>77</sup> George Graham to Andrew Jackson, August 15, 1816, *LoC-AJP*.

replacement). Jackson decided to use two men to survey his road. One would survey the northern portion, and one would survey the southern portion. Jackson selected Captain Hugh Young to survey the road's southern (and most difficult) portion, and William Orlando Butler, a man who served under Jackson during the Battle of New Orleans, to survey the road's northern section.

Just traveling through the Mississippi Territory presented numerous environmental challenges. The 1820 *Emigrant's Directory*, describing the geographical realities of Mississippi, stated that a northern trip from the Pearl or Pascagoula Rivers would lead a traveler "through immense forests of the long-leaved pine, interspersed with cypress swamps and open prairies; the surface generally level, but occasionally swelling into hills of moderate elevation, and receding into vast prairies, inundated marshes, and pestilential swamps."<sup>78</sup> Andrew Ellicott, surveyor of the Mississippi Territory-Spanish Florida border that was agreed upon in the 1795 Treaty of San Lorenzo (Pickney's Treaty), noted the rough terrain. At the beginning of his survey, he noted, "The first twenty miles of country over which the line passed, is perhaps as fertile as any in the United States; and at the same time the most impenetrable, and could only be explored by using the cane knife and hatchet. The whole face of the country being covered with strong canes, which stood almost as close together as hemp stalks, and generally from twenty to thirty-five feet high, and matted together by various species of vines, that connected them with the boughs of the lofty timber, which was very abundant. The hills are numerous, short and steep: from those untoward circumstances, we were scarcely ever able to open one-fourth of a mile per day, and frequently much less." Later in his journal, Ellicott lamented that, "The swamps were numerous, and many of them so deep, that we had to go considerably out of our way either to cross, or go

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<sup>78</sup> Daniel Blowe, *A Geographical, Historical, Commercial, and Agricultural View of the United States of America; Forming a Complete Emigrant's Directory Through Every Part of the Republic*, (London: Edwards and Knibb, 1820), 633.

round them, and others we had to causeway.” And it was not just individually traveling through the terrain that was difficult, but also having to transport the proper equipment and supplies. To carry his survey equipment and supplies, Ellicott’s party had to cut roads along the way. In one such instance, Ellicott noted that “Our instruments, baggage, &cc. were first carted from the Bayou Tunica, to Alston's Lake, into which I had previously taken through the swamp two light skiffs: the articles were then taken by water, up the lake to the point where our road from the hill struck it, and from thence packed on horses to our encampment. The country was so broken, and covered from the tops to the bottoms of the hills, with such high, strong cane, (*arundo gigantea*.) and a variety of lofty timber, that a road from the Bayou Tunica, to our camp, could not be made by our number of hands, in less than a month passable for pack-horses.”<sup>79</sup>

As would be a common case with the men who constructed Jackson’s Road, Ellicott had numerous logistical issues in securing supplies. In one instance, he connected with laborers assigned to resupply his party, only to learn the resources “could not possibly be brought up, till a large quantity of timber was removed, and channels cut through two rafts or floating bridges, which extended from one side to the other; and those rafts or bridges, being in the swamp, the articles could not be carried round them.” As the days continued, so did the hazards. Ellicott noted that the difficulties were “so great, owing to the swamps and morasses which lay-in the way, and were daily filling with water” that he paused the survey and headed back for New Orleans. He and his team had run out of clothing and their supplies still had not reached them. It was determined that upon his return to the survey, it would be easier and more expedient to have his heavier supplies sailed through the Gulf of Mexico and transported up the Mississippi Territory’s various rivers to meet with his survey group.

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<sup>79</sup> Andrew Ellicott, *The Journal of Andrew Ellicott*, (Philadelphia: William Fry, 1814), 181-186, 209.

Yet the Mississippi wilderness made even this compromise difficult, as Ellicott noticed that many of the rivers were “full of logs and lodged trees; which are at present very injurious to its navigation.” Also, one of his supply boats, a schooner, was later stolen by Indians.<sup>80</sup> In 1815, traveler William Richardson journeyed by land from Boston to New Orleans. While his route from Boston to Nashville was largely uneventful, his journey through the wilderness of Alabama and Mississippi was perilous. The vast distances between settlements meant that his supplies often ran low and that he often slept on the bare ground. The lack of bridges meant he often had to wait days to cross rivers and creeks – while hoping for their levels to recede. On March 28, he stated, “I have this day swam my horse five times, bridged one creek, forded several other bad ones besides the swamp we had to wade through.” This was just one day. If spending hours and days wading through the numerous Mississippi swamps were not enough to worry the traveler, the graves of previous travelers were. On the following day, March 29, he, “passed several graves where travelers who had died on the road were buried.”<sup>81</sup> The surveyors assigned to Jackson’s Military Road faced similar tribulations.

Butler started his survey first, but quickly fell behind schedule. On September 6, he reported to Jackson the reasons for his delay, as well as the early progress on the road. Butler’s initial reports demonstrate the numerous settlements present at the road’s beginning stages. Butler reported the line running near farms and plantations, such as a portion “passing through the east corner of John Childris’s farm.” Butler had run a line from Columbia, Tennessee, to the Tennessee River in the Mississippi Territory. One of the reasons for his delay, he informed Jackson, was that he had deviated from some of the lands initially thought fit for the road. Some

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<sup>80</sup> Ellicott, *The Journal of Andrew Ellicott*, 181-186, 222-22.

<sup>81</sup> William Richardson, *Travel Diary of William Richardson from Boston to New Orleans by Land*, 1815. (New York: Valve Pilot Corporation, 1938), 17-19.

places were too rocky, others too narrow. He assured Jackson that upon studying the area, the minor changes he made were necessary.<sup>82</sup>

The inconveniences endured by Butler's team were relatively mundane to the trials the southern survey team faced. In November of 1816, Captain Hugh Young, Assistant Topographical Engineer, led seven men south from Nashville.<sup>83</sup> Under orders from Andrew Jackson to survey the experimental line of the Military Road's southern portion, the crew's planned journey passed through Chickasaw and Choctaw territory in route to New Orleans. The southern portion of the line represented some of the least understood portions of the Mississippi Territory. Young's party knew their venture would lead them ever-farther from the established settlements of central Tennessee and into the relatively primitive woodlands of the central Mississippi Territory. However, any aspirations the crew had of at least beginning the journey effortlessly were quickly dashed. The rainy winter transformed the Tennessee roads into little more than muddy quagmires. Already delayed by what Young described as the worst roads and weather he had ever experienced, sickness and blistered feet began plaguing the party. From the journey's onset, Young complained his crew lacked the manpower to efficiently complete their mission. Now, the winter's onslaught left one crewman too sick to continue. Young's party had barely reached the Tennessee border and was already lacking for manpower. Aside from the elements, supply shortages were also causing delays. The flour Young expected to procure in Columbia, Tennessee was unavailable. He tried to wait for a shipment of wheat that would have to be ground into flour, but even that prospect fell through. With a little luck, Young finally procured enough flour to continue the mission, but supply shortages plagued the team's entire

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<sup>82</sup> William Orlando Butler to Andrew Jackson, September 6, 1816, *LoC-AJP*.

<sup>83</sup> Hugh Young to Andrew Jackson, November 28, 1816, *LoC-AJP*.

journey.<sup>84</sup> As Young's party began heading into Chickasaw territory (modern-day north Mississippi and northwest Alabama), the poor conditions the crew faced in this first leg of their journey served simply as a hard initiation of the perils they would face.

On December 4, Captain Young penned Jackson with the unfortunate news that, despite his efforts, he was unable to find a suitable replacement to join his team. If he lost another member, Young warned, the expedition's completion might prove impossible.<sup>85</sup> A few weeks later, on December 22, Young informed Jackson he had recently surveyed twenty-three miles of land near the Tombigbee River – and it was a toilsome venture. Swamps and thickets comprised fully two-thirds of the land, with the last third consisting of large pine and oak woodlands enveloped in vines and briars. Despite their struggles, Young's team had crossed the Tombigbee River (essentially the dividing line between present-day Mississippi and Alabama). The survey would continue, he promised Jackson, but more delays were to be expected.<sup>86</sup>

Despite learning of Young's tribulations, Jackson began the year 1817 in celebration. On January 8, in Nashville – his home and headquarters – an opulent ball replete with thunderous cannon fire marked the two-year-anniversary of his infamous victory at the Battle of New Orleans.<sup>87</sup> Perhaps fittingly on such an anniversary, Jackson's southern survey team spent the beginning of the year slogging through the same awful Mississippi terrain Jackson had surmounted two-years prior. Young led the team through thickets and swamps that seemed just as tenacious in demoralizing his party, as he was in blazing this new trail. So dense were the thickets that his party often became separated and sometimes even had trouble finding their way back to camp. Procuring horses was difficult – as was keeping them. Some horses went missing

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<sup>84</sup> Hugh Young to Andrew Jackson, November 28, 1816, Manuscripts, Library of Congress, *Loc-AJP*.

<sup>85</sup> Hugh Young to Andrew Jackson, December 4, 1816, Manuscripts, Library of Congress, *Loc-AJP*.

<sup>86</sup> Hugh Young to Andrew Jackson, December 26, 1816, Manuscripts, Library of Congress, *Loc-AJP*.

<sup>87</sup> Andrew Jackson to Joseph McMinn, Library of Congress, 1817, *PoAJ-Rotunda*.

(Indian thieves were suspected), while others drowned in the rivers and swamplands. Young lamented the fast-rising swamp waters that sometimes rose so quickly that the crew became cut-off from land and were forced to swim to safety. Along with nature's fury, Young's team also contended with a continuing lack of supplies. Once after running out of meat, the entire survey halted for three days while a team was sent away to procure and butcher hogs. Flour and corn meal also ran dangerously low. Every time supplies ran low or horses went missing, the survey had to be delayed. In one instance, Young and a crew member walked one-hundred and fifty miles in three days trying to procure horses – all in vain.<sup>88</sup> The struggles that Young's crew faced demonstrated the desperate need for roads to be constructed, while at the same time revealing the sheer difficulty in such tasks. The Mississippi Territory would not easily yield its wilderness.

On March 4, 1817, James Monroe ascended to the office of the presidency. On the same date, Jackson penned President Monroe a long report disclosing the many potential crises afflicting the Southern District, while reminding the new President that his foremost duty was to secure the nation's safety. New Orleans and Mobile stood defenseless; old fortifications had been left to ruin, and the promised new ones had yet to be constructed. Jackson, assuring Monroe that the dire situations necessitated the letter's abrasiveness, proposed a bevy of remedies. The forts promised by the previous administration had to be constructed, and settlement into the Mississippi Territory needed to be encouraged.

Thus far, Congress feared opening up too much Mississippi land would decrease its value, but Jackson contended such an economic argument would prove invalid if the lands were swept away by some foreign power. Instead, settlers would serve as defenders in the militia, create goods to supply military units, and build infrastructure that would hasten military

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<sup>88</sup> Hugh Young to Andrew Jackson, January 19, 1817, *Loc-AJP*.

movements.<sup>89</sup> In an 1816 letter to interim Secretary of War George Graham, Jackson pleaded that, “nothing can promote the welfare of the United States, and particularly the southwestern frontier so much as bringing into market, at an early date, the whole of this fertile country.”<sup>90</sup> Native Americans understand the dangers in white settlement. Through a treaty negotiated with the federal government, the Creeks in the southern Mississippi Territory had agreed to a four-foot-wide postal road connecting Georgia to Fort Stoddard. However, when settlers began widening the road for wagons, the Creeks posted the following message on a sign: “For the benefit of Travelers we state, that it now is, and has been the policy of the Creek Indians to prevent Carriages of any kind from passing through their Territory.”<sup>91</sup> Historian Reginald Horsman noted that the building of roads and settlements into America’s frontier lands increased the rapidity of Native American cessions, expanding America’s territory. Conflicts inevitably arose between settlers and Indians, but eventually militias and the U.S. government intervened and persuaded the Indians to cede their land.<sup>92</sup> The conquest on Indian lands was a brutal and callous reality, but reality none the less. In a letter to James Monroe, Jackson assured the president that “once the defence of the frontier is carried into effect, by completing those fortifications, that have and may be selected . . . then we will have peace, for then we will be prepared for war – every man having a gun in his hand, all Europe combined cannot hurt us – Then all the world will be anxious to be at peace with us – because all will see we wish peace with all – but are prepared for defence against those (all) who may attempt, to infringe on our national rights.”<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Andrew Jackson to James Monroe, March 4, 1817, Library of Congress, *PoAL-Rotunda*.

<sup>90</sup> Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars*, 116.

<sup>91</sup> Ronald J. McCall, “Never Quite Settled: Southern Plain Folk on the Move,” *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*, (East Tennessee State University: 2013), 20-21.

<sup>92</sup> Horsman, *Expansion and American Indian Policy: 1783-1812*, 155, 163-4.

<sup>93</sup> Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars*, 117.

Jackson assured President Monroe that he was already directing actions to bolster the southern frontier. Jackson informed Monroe that he expected Captain Young to complete the experimental line and return to Nashville within the month. Jackson also announced to Monroe that he had selected a site (near modern-day Muscle Shoals and Florence, Alabama) along the Tennessee River upon which to build a foundry and an armory. The site was almost too good to be true. Its location on the Tennessee River meant supplies and communications could more quickly be sent to towns and forts along the Mississippi River. The location could also be used to quickly reach Mobile by land or river, should the U.S. navy be cut off from the Gulf of Mexico. Nearby, there was plenty of ore for the foundry, numerous coal deposits, and an abundance of trees to construct forts, roads, and bridges. Jackson, perhaps with a bit of embellishment to ensure Monroe's attention, deemed it "the most advantageous site in America" and noted that the Military Road would run through this crucial position.<sup>94</sup>

On March 17, Congress promoted Jackson's friend, John Coffee, to Surveyor General of the northern Mississippi Territory.<sup>95</sup> Coffee, previously engaged in surveying Indian land concessions in the region, knew the area well. Coffee, along with Edward Pendleton Gaines, had already constructed a much smaller road in the northern Mississippi Territory. Now known as Gaines Trace, the road created a land-based connection between the Tennessee River (near Muscle Shoals) and the Tombigbee River (near Cotton Gin Port in modern-day Monroe County).<sup>96</sup> The road had been swiftly constructed in 1816, partially owing its rapid completion to the favorable terrain upon which it was built. Jackson's instructions were clear – in order to rapidly settle the region, Coffee's office was to immediately begin surveying townships in the

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<sup>94</sup> Andrew Jackson to James Monroe, March 4, 1817, Library of Congress, *PoAJ-Rotunda*.

<sup>95</sup> Gordon T. Chappell, "The Life and Activities of General John Coffee," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, Volume 1, No. 2 (June, 1942), 135-6.

<sup>96</sup> Hudson, *Creek Paths and Federal Roads*, 123-4.

region between the Tennessee border and the Tennessee River (modern-day northern Alabama).<sup>97</sup> Jackson's road would be constructed along the most favorable portion of Coffee's jurisdiction.

By April, Captain Young had completed his trek to the southern end of the line and began preparing an initial report. The report was hopeful but ominous. "With regard to the physical character of the country," Young warned, "it presents many obstructions, in the way of making a good road – much labour will be necessary, and many wide deviations from the guide line." Yet, Young concluded that despite the obstacles, "with reasonable expectations of time and work, [constructing the road] is by no means impracticable." It was Young's estimation that the construction of the road between Madisonville, Louisiana and Noxubee, Mississippi would be the least difficult section of the Military Road's southern portion. This owed to the region's level terrain. The most pressing concern in the section, according to Young, was near the Leaf River, where "we have to cross three large creeks of the Leaf, two of which, are extremely difficult." However, it was the land between Noxubee and the Tombigbee River that troubled Young the most. The terrain was "almost mountainous" with "singular alterations of steep and difficult ridges." Young hoped that "the broken ground can be either got over or avoided, by a little searching." Young summarized terrain's difficulties, stating "The difficulties in our way, arise from these three causes – the number of streams crossed – and the width and number of the swamps. The evils arising from these impediments, will be two, increase of expense and lengthening the road . . . so that in overcoming all obstruction, the two considerations must be, conjointly, kept in mind." Young informed Jackson that he would return to Nashville to

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<sup>97</sup> Chappell, "The Life and Activities of General John Coffee," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, 135-6.

personally discuss the road and Young's future duties in regards to it.<sup>98</sup> Knowing the initial survey line was complete, however, was all the news Jackson needed to take action.

By May, Andrew Jackson determined that he would not wait for Captain Young's return and ordered road-building operations to commence immediately. One company from Fort Hampton (located along Alabama's Elk River near the Tennessee border and almost directly south of Jackson's Nashville headquarters) would begin construction until more troops could be sent. Jackson expected that two additional companies would soon be added on the northern route. He issued the orders knowing that the engineers lacked quadrants and sextants – vital tools for accurate surveys. He also ordered General Eleazar Ripley to lead two companies to link with Captain Young and immediately begin construction of the road's southern portion. The plan was ambitious. Jackson ordered the road to be thirty feet wide, bridges to be erected across every stream, and causeways built through the swamplands. The causeways were to be built above the high water marks and to be twenty feet wide.<sup>99</sup> For comparison, in 1807, the U.S. Post Office accepted bids for improving the Natchez Trace (also beginning in Nashville, Tennessee and passing through Alabama and Mississippi in a more westward direction) that called for the road to be twelve feet wide.<sup>100</sup> The Natchez Trace itself was wider than many other post roads that traversed through Indian territories, as much of the negotiations settled on limiting the road widths from four to six feet – Indians wanted the paths to be impassable for settlers' wagons.<sup>101</sup> Most of the existing Indian pathways were no wider than two feet, just large enough for a horse to pass through.<sup>102</sup> In an 1801 meeting with the Choctaw at Fort Adams, the chiefs informed Indian agent Benjamin Hawkins and the other commissioners that they would accept travelers

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<sup>98</sup> Hugh Young to Andrew Jackson, April 25, 1817, *Loc-AJP*.

<sup>99</sup> Andrew Jackson to George Graham May 13, 1817, *PoAJ-Rotunda*.

<sup>100</sup> James A. Crutchfield, *The Natchez Trace: A Pictorial History* (Nashville: Rutledge Hill Press, 1985) 102.

<sup>101</sup> Hudson, *Creek Paths and Federal Roads*, 76.

<sup>102</sup> Hudson, *Creek Paths and Federal Roads*, 13.

and merchants passing through agreed upon roadways, but they were adamant that no white settlers were allowed.<sup>103</sup> Military roads served a different purpose than post roads, however, as they needed to allow the passage of supply wagons and heavy artillery. Therefore, width was important, but not the only factor. In 1803, Secretary of War Henry Dearborn ordered that military roads should “not [exceed] sixteen feet in width and not more than eight feet of the sixteen to be cut close to the ground, and smoothed for passengers . . . the great object is to have a comfortable road for horses and foot passengers, and instead of the expense of cutting a wide road, it is more important that the swamps and streams should be causewayed and bridged.”<sup>104</sup> Jackson wanted his road almost twice as wide as Dearborn had advised a decade earlier. By the time the Military Road was complete, Jackson’s ambition looked more like foolhardiness.

By July 1817, Surveyor-General John Coffee had already surveyed one-hundred townships along the Tennessee River in the Mississippi Territory.<sup>105</sup> For Jackson, the news was delightful. Jackson had no doubt of the area’s benefits and assured Coffee that the site Jackson chose for the military depot would “become the Nashville of the Tennessee” River.<sup>106</sup>

News from the southern portion of the Military Road was, initially, not as promising. In June, Hugh Young reported that about 90 men from Ripley’s forces had arrived in Madisonville to begin preparations for cutting their portion of the road. Their preparations consisted of acquiring tools and “waiting the purchase of necessary teams for transporting their baggage and provisions.” According to Young, Ripley’s men would probably would not be ready to cut the road until late in the month.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Benjamin Hawkins, "Letters of Benjamin Hawkins, 1796-1806," (University of Georgia, Libraries: 1916), 397-406.

<sup>104</sup> Southerland, Jr. and Brown, *The Federal Road through Georgia, the Creek Nation, and Alabama*, 755-6.

<sup>105</sup> Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 117.

<sup>106</sup> Andrew Jackson to John Coffee, August 12, 1817. *PoAJ-Rotunda*.

<sup>107</sup> Hugh Young to Andrew Jackson, June 7, 1817, *LoC-AJP*.

One month later, Young wrote again to Jackson. He had been held up in leaving Madisonville due to difficulties in procuring horses. However, on this final survey, he had found a way to make the road's distance shorter, but it meant crossing through more hilly terrain. This improved line had moved about four miles from his original survey and now ran nearly parallel to a Choctaw path he stumbled across. At this point, Young also encountered "the most formidable difficulty in my route" – the waters and land around the Black Creek. This section included four creeks, Bogue Falaya, the East Bogue Falaya, Bogue Loosa, and Pushmitapa, which would require the construction of bridges and three rivers in which troops would have to rely on ferries. In proceeding with the survey past this section, Young estimated he would advance eight miles per day and that he would reach the Tennessee River in no more than fifty days. Young also repeated his desire to be reassigned to the road cutting team once his final survey had been completed. The appointment, he advised Jackson, would allow him a chance to more slowly and thoroughly direct the line's final position.<sup>108</sup>

To help with the Military Road's funding, on March 27, 1818, Congress approved another five-thousand dollars to be used for the road's construction and maintenance.<sup>109</sup> When Jackson initially proposed the road, he had stated that it could be built at "little expense." Whether Jackson was naïve and underestimated the cost or purposely underestimated the money needed in order to get approval, the road's expense was growing. The extra funds were welcomed, but further delays in the southern district threatened to quickly deplete the resources.

When Eleazar Ripley took command in the southern region, he first set about to assess the lands he commanded and determined the region was invaluable to the nation's present and future. Writing to Secretary of War Calhoun, Ripley stated, "The welfare and security of the

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<sup>108</sup> Hugh Young to Andrew Jackson, July 6, 1817, *LoC-AJP*.

<sup>109</sup> Fifteenth Congress, Session I, Chapter XXIV, March 27, 1818.

country on the Gulf of Mexico is indispensably connected with the interest of the states and territories beyond [the] mountains. It is the key to the region which a beneficent providence has formed . . . So magnificent and vast as to be capable of the highest improvements.”<sup>110</sup> Of special note was the region’s role in America’s commerce. “The recent war has convinced us how precious in the view of the nation that portion of the country, thro’ which our western commerce must travel in its passage to and from the Gulf,” Ripley state, “and the efforts made to dispossess us of it are equally instinctive in showing the importance attached to it by other nations.” Ripley connected his views on the region’s importance to his work on the military road. “When completed,” he said, “besides effectually opening the commercial intercourse between the western states . . . It will essentially contribute to the strength of the lower country by affording an avenue along which the military array of Kentucky, Tennessee, and Mississippi can in ease of necessity precipitate itself to the defense of New Orleans. The road will require time for completion, but it is of incalculable importance to the interests of the whole western country.” In view of these challenges and the road’s importance, however, Ripley felt as though the odds were stacked against him.

The most pressing issue was that he was severely understaffed. He reported to Robert Butler that too many of his subordinate officers were absent due to sickness and furloughs. The issue had become so bad that he was having to deny furloughs to his remaining staff.<sup>111</sup> On the same day, in a letter to Jackson, Ripley also sent a request to improve the amount and condition of his soldiers’ barracks, as well as an increase in his department’s recruiting capabilities, especially in northern states. Without more soldiers, Ripley not only feared being unable to complete the Military Road, but he also feared his current forces would be insufficient to repel

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<sup>110</sup> Eleazar Wheelock Ripley to John Caldwell Calhoun, December 30, 1817, *LoC-AJP*.

<sup>111</sup> Eleazar Wheelock Ripley to Robert Butler, December 21, 1816, *LoC-AJP*.

an enemy invasion.<sup>112</sup> Ripley also shared his disappointing view of this command with the Secretary of War. “The present state of things in this department is far from affording the requisite military organization. There are now arranged to it two regiments of infantry and two battalions of artillery; these however are not to their complement.” Besides being understaffed, the infrastructure of the region was also in a dilapidated state. The command’s magazines and arsenals were “deplorable.” The barracks at New Orleans were “entirely useless” and “Fort St. Philips, Pass Christian, Natchitoches, Mobile, Fort St. John, and Petite Coquille . . . are little better than hovels. They cannot even shelter from storms and tempests.” Ripley told the Secretary, “I trust the period has arrived when a just government will no longer tolerate such a state of things.”<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Eleazar Wheelock Ripley to Andrew Jackson, December 21, 1816, *Loc-AJP*.

<sup>113</sup> Eleazar Wheelock Ripley to John Caldwell Calhoun, December 30, 1817, *Loc-AJP*.

## ACROSS THE RIVERS AND INTO THE TREES

Despite Ripley's misgivings about the state of his command, the Military Road's construction needed to proceed in earnest. The most daunting tasks would include constructing the numerous causeways and bridges needed to cross a variety of rivers, creeks, and swamps. Each bridge was assigned unimaginative, but efficient names denoting their numerical order. "Bridge No. 1" was the first bridge, followed by "Bridge No. 2" and so on. To construct the road and bridges, workers first had to clear trees, brush, briars, and other vegetation. Workers cut the trees down as close to ground level as possible. The center path, wide enough for a wagon, had to have all stumps removed to make travel safe for horses. After clearing the timber from the pathway, workers used the logs as construction materials for the bridges and causeways. Workers had to chop all limbs from the trees and mill the logs in the specific manner each bridge and causeway called for.

From the Military Road's southern terminus in Madisonville, Louisiana, it took a northern course to Covington, Louisiana. The distance between the two towns is a mere seven miles, but at Covington the troops already needed to construct their first bridge. The bridge needed to traverse the Bogue Falaya, also referred to simply as the Falaya River, for a distance of 153 feet. To span such a distance, the bridge required four trestles made up of two hewn support posts.<sup>114</sup> The posts were eighteen inches by sixteen inches and of varying lengths depending on the depth of the river. These posts were mortised and riveted into a cap stone of the same dimension and measured twenty-four-feet long. There were abutments erected on both shorelines and diagonal support poles, fastened with iron bolts, were run from each abutment and

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<sup>114</sup> Hewn wood is lumber that workers have flattened with an ax or saw to take out the log's curvature.

capstone into the river bottom.<sup>115</sup> To span the abutments and capstones, workers placed forty-foot-long hewn boards that measured twenty inches square. On top of these boards, workers ran two-and-one-half-inch thick flooring planks that were fastened with nails. Workers then ran four-foot-tall railings across the length of the bridge, containing two parallel lengths of railings between the top rail and the floor planks. After completing the construction, workers tarred the bridge in an attempt to prevent weathering. Bridge No. 1, and all bridges between Madisonville and the Choctaw boundary line, were constructed primarily of pine timber. However, across the Military Road's entire stretch of bridges and causeways, multiple types of timber were used, based on what was available to the workers. Along with pine logs, oak, elm, and hickory were also used frequently.<sup>116</sup> Because the water levels often changed, workers measured the height of the bridges from the floor planks to the riverbed. For Bridge No. 1, this height was seventeen feet, but the numbers varied between seven and twenty-two feet. (Figure 1).

Four miles past the first bridge, troops erected Bridge No. 2 to cross the Little Fayala River, also known as Saw Mill Creek. The bridge spanned 111 feet, but only had one support frame between its two abutments. Troops employed a similar construction method, with the primary difference being extra logs used on one shoreline to dissipate the angle created by the four-foot height difference between the northern and southern shores.

It was only after ten more miles that workers were forced to erect a third bridge across Black Bayou in the Bogue Chitto Swamp. Soldiers ran the bridge 139 feet and constructed it much like the first two bridges, but at an even steeper angle because of the steep differences in the river's banks. (Figure 2).

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<sup>115</sup> Abutments are retaining walls built on the riverbanks that also act as bridge supports.

<sup>116</sup> Description of Causeways on the Military Road, from its crossing of Leaf River, undated, Library of Congress, *The Andrew Jackson Papers, Series V, Military Papers, July 1, 1818 – April 5, 1820*, 282-285, 331-341.

Only one-half mile later, workers erected Bridge No. 4. By the time workers erected Bridge No. 6, they had only traveled thirty-two miles from Madisonville and constructed 569 feet of bridges. It is also at this point that workers began to employ slightly less secure construction methods and also began foregoing important maintenance measures. For Bridge No. 7, the soldiers used wooden pins, rather than iron bolts as fasteners. The workers did not even tar Bridge No. 8, making it more susceptible to weathering. Bridge No. 9 did not have any extra railings between its top rail and its floor planks. Its flooring was only one-inch-square. (Figure 3). Bridge No. 10's joists were only twelve inches square, however, unlike the previous nine bridges, workers placed diagonal supports within each set of joists.<sup>117</sup>

Bridge No. 11, at 189 feet in length, was the longest bridge within the southern route, requiring seven support frames. By the time workers reached the Louisiana-Mississippi border, they had constructed fifteen bridges, totaling almost 1,300 feet in length and the road stretched less than seventy miles from Madisonville. To complete the Military Road's southern portion, workers had to continue the road to the Choctaw boundary line. In all, from Madisonville to the Choctaw boundary, workers erected twenty-two bridges about 1,835 feet in total length. (See Figure 4 and Figure 5 for more examples of how the bridges were designed.) In the entire stretch of the Military Road's southern portion, the greatest distance workers proceeded without having to erect a bridge was only sixteen miles.<sup>118</sup> In most cases, the distance was less than ten. Also, along with erecting bridges, workers also had to build causeways. As with the bridges, workers numbered the causeways based on their position from Madisonville. Causeways, on

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<sup>117</sup> The reports on the bridges do not mention the reasons for these different construction methods. Whether these were cost saving measures, requirements due to different current strengths, experiments in different construction methods, or simply a lack of standardization and communication are all debatable reasons.

<sup>118</sup> Dimensions and Descriptions of Bridges on the south end of the Military Road, undated, Library of Congress, *The Andrew Jackson Papers, 1775-1874, Series V, Military Papers, July 1, 1818 – April 5, 1820*, 287-290.

average, were much longer than the bridges and were called for more frequently. In just one mile from Madisonville, workers built five causeways.

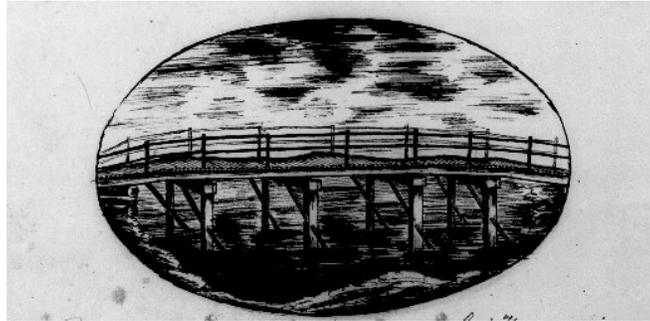


Figure 1. Sketch of Bridge No. 1 at Covington

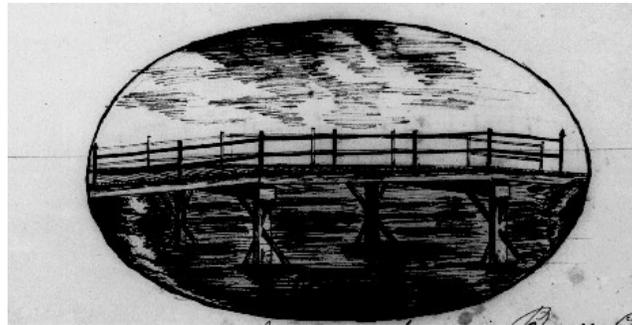


Figure 2. Sketch of Bridge No. 3 across Black Bayou

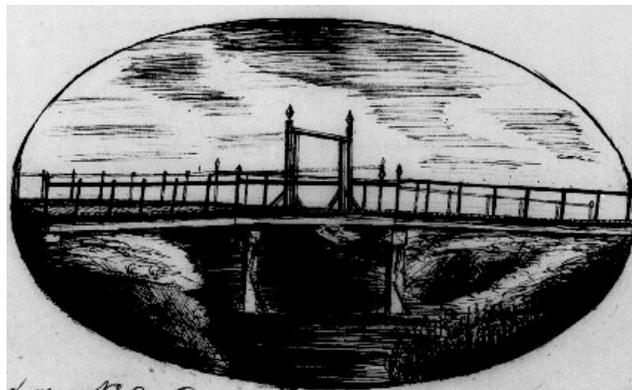


Figure 3. Sketch of Bridge No. 9 across Pushepatapa Creek

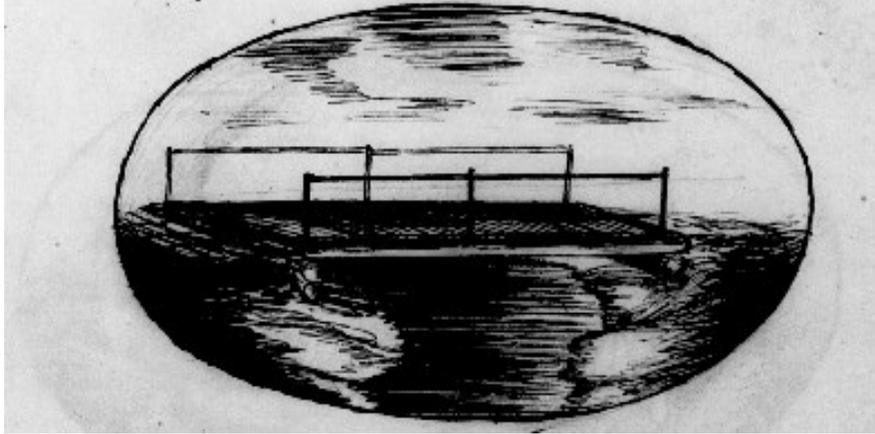


Figure 4. Sketch of Bridge No. 15 across Lees Swamp Creek

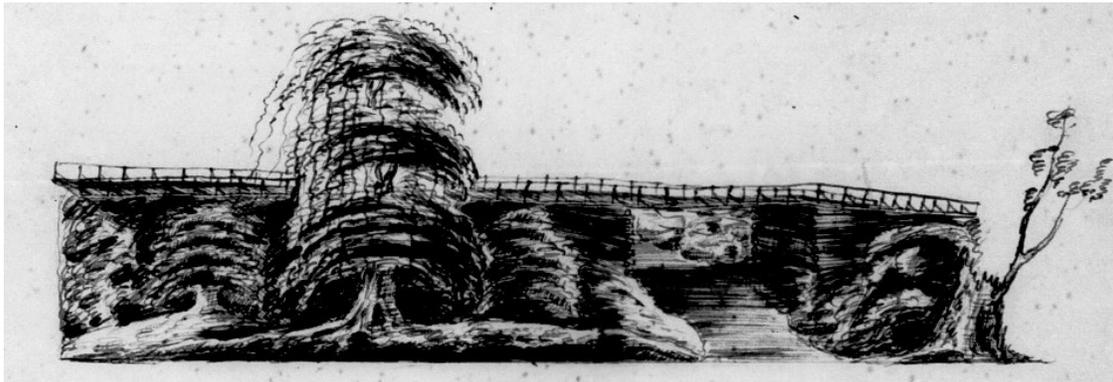


Figure 5. Sketch of Bridge No. 30 across Big Bear Creek

was 639 feet long. For materials, workers had to use logs that were one-and-a-half feet in diameter and twenty-six-feet long. The workers spaced the logs eleven feet apart to create the causeway's foundation, which required almost sixty logs. For the next layer, three logs of the same diameter, but thirty-six feet long were laid perpendicularly across three foundation logs, forming a grid-like pattern. On top of every third foundation log sat a total of six logs, as the second layer of timbers were interlocked for greater stability. For the third layer, workers used timber that was hewn on three sides and notched on the bottom to provide a better connection

with the second layer. The third and final layer consisted of smaller logs with various widths, so long as their thickness was relatively the same (Figure 6).<sup>119</sup>

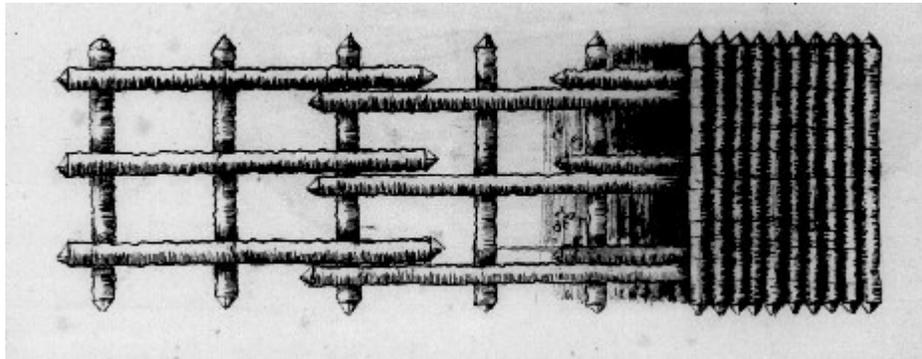


Figure 6. Sketch of the construction of Causeway No. 1

For Causeway No. 2, workers only used a single layer of timbers placed closely together, for a length of over 230 feet. Then, the workers dug ditches on both sides of the road, measuring four-feet-wide and three-feet-deep. The soldiers then took the dirt from the ditches and placed it atop the causeway to create a smoother surface.

By the time the workers reached Covington, where they needed to build their first bridge, they had already built thirteen causeways totaling 1,783 feet. Most of the causeways were built in the same manner as Causeway No. 2, with a few inconsistencies. Causeways No. 5 and No. 24 were only ditched on one side. On Causeway No. 10, which was fifty-feet-long, workers placed hewn timbers across the entire span to act as flooring, rather than dirt.

By the time workers had reached the Choctaw boundary line, they had built 124 causeways a total of 10,389 feet long. The soldiers built most of the causeways to a height of

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<sup>119</sup> Madisonville. Plan of the Bridges on the So. End M. Road. Undated. Manuscript. Library of Congress, *The Andrew Jackson Papers, 1775-1874*. Sketches were made of Causeway No. 1 and most of the bridges on the Military Road's southern end. It is likely the drawings were originally included in James Scallan's February 1, 1820 report to Andrew Jackson. In the report, Scallan mentions that "the accompanying sketches are executed by an ingenious young soldiers of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry who accompanied me . . ."

one-foot and six-inches. However, the causeways that required more layers of timber, such as Causeway No. 1, reached heights of over four feet. At 639 feet, Causeway No. 1 was by far the longest. The second-longest, Causeway No. 76, was 482 feet long. On average, workers built the causeways about eighty-four feet in length.<sup>120</sup>

To build such lengthy structures, many hands were required. At any given time from the moment construction commenced, hundreds of laborers were employed in cutting both roads. A monthly return from September 1819 reveals that 341 men were employed in cutting the Military Road's southern portion, while almost 150 men were cutting the northern section.<sup>121</sup> The soldiers were of varying rank. A monthly report from July 1818, reveals that, among the men cutting the southern portion of the road, were one first lieutenant, one second lieutenant, five sergeants, five corporals, sixty-four privates, and three musicians.<sup>122</sup> An 1819 report from the road's northern section included fifty-three privates, two corporals, and three surgeons. The report also noted that five men were missing from the role. Four had deserted and one had died.<sup>123</sup>

An 1820 report provides a good understanding of the man-hours these workers endured and their labor cost to the government. Divided into two time periods, the report first examined the labor hours, between June 1817 and December 1818. During this time, the 1st Infantry served as the primary labor force. The second time period examined a slightly shorter period, from December 1818 to January 1820. During this stage, the 8th Infantry made up the majority

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<sup>120</sup> Description of Causeways on the south end of the Military Road, undated, Library of Congress, *The Andrew Jackson Papers, Series V, Military Papers, July 1, 1818 – April 5, 1820*, 282-285.

<sup>121</sup> Eleazar Wheelock Ripley, Monthly Return of the 8th Military Department, September 30, 1819, Library of Congress, *The Andrew Jackson Papers, Series V, Military Papers, Volume XI, July 1, 1818 – April 5, 1820*, 182.

<sup>122</sup> Eleazar Wheelock Ripley, Monthly Return of the 8th Military Department, July 31, 1818, Library of Congress, *The Andrew Jackson Papers, Series V, Military Papers, Volume XI, July 1, 1818 – April 5, 1820*, 33.

<sup>123</sup> Monthly Return of the 4th Battalion of Artillery, October 31, 1819, Library of Congress, *The Andrew Jackson Papers, Series V, Military Papers, Volume XI, July 1, 1818 – April 5, 1820*, 212. The report does not elaborate on the nature of the soldier's death or even whether it happened while on duty or furlough. This was apparently standard procedure for monthly returns from this period.

of the labor force. During the first period, the soldiers labored for a total of 37,562 days. During the second period, their labor totaled 36,407 days.<sup>124</sup> Along with the cost of sheer labor and building materials, the government also had to provide these workers with tents, clothing, and food.

The further these men pushed the road away from their original termini, the further they distanced themselves from the necessary supplies needed to build the road and take care of themselves. A November 1819 invoice provides some detail as to how massive just a simple order of clothing supplies could be, especially heading into the winter months. First, the invoice noted that the entire order was placed in twelve large containers. Container one consisted solely of fifty blankets. Container two consisted of thirty more blankets, 160 pairs of stockings, and ten flannel shirts. Container three was filled with 150 more flannel shirts. The fourth container held 152 desperately needed pairs of shoes. Container five held seventy-six coats for infantry privates and twenty-four fatigue frocks. The sixth container held thirty more fatigue frocks seventy-six grey wool overalls. Packed in container 7 was eighty long-sleeved grey jackets and more fatigue frocks. Container eight contained sixteen fatigue trousers, four staff sergeant coats, two musician's coats, and eight cotton shirts for sergeants. Also for sergeants, the package contained four white wool overalls and four green wool overalls. For privates, the container also held seventy-six white wool overalls. The rest of the containers included similar contents, as well as six pounds of thread, 200 black buttons, eighty pairs of gaiters, eighty caps, and eighty canteens. The invoice was created in New Orleans, but the materials were destined for the northern section of Jackson's Road.<sup>125</sup> An estimate of provisions for a company included soap, beef, forty barrels

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<sup>124</sup> Statement of Extra Labor performed on the Military road, 1820, Library of Congress, *The Andrew Jackson Papers, Series V, Military Papers, Volume XI, July 1, 1818 – April 5, 1820*, 292-3.

<sup>125</sup> Maurice Prescott, Invoice, November 13, 1819, Library of Congress, *The Andrew Jackson Papers, Series V, Military Papers, Volume XI, July 1, 1818 – April 5, 1820*, 223.

of flour, and 330 gallons of whiskey.<sup>126</sup> The total cost was estimated at 2,500 dollars. An invoice for larger items included thirty camp kettles, thirty-six common tents, six wall tents, two wall tent flyers, and eighty tin pans.<sup>127</sup>

Yet, too often, adequate supplies did not reach the workers on the Military Road. Military leaders usually blamed the contractors. However, the difficulties in supplying the troops rested in one of the Military Road's great paradoxes. Workers needed to cut the road to create a reliable distribution network, but without such a road there was no reliable way to supply the workers.

To send such massive amounts of supplies, the military employed a distribution system that stretched from New Orleans to the rivers nearest the troops on the Military Road. When workers were still within Louisiana, supplies would be shipped from New Orleans across Lake Pontchartrain to Madisonville. From there, supplies could be moved by wagon across the Military Road. As troops proceeded into the Mississippi Territory, the shipping routes changed. There was no standard shipping method, as it appears debates on the best methods continued throughout the entire construction project. One method was for ships to leave New Orleans, sail into the Gulf of Mexico, and up one of the many rivers that emptied into the Gulf. They would unload at the camp or fortress nearest the particular river and use wagons to transport the goods to their final destination on the road. Even troops cutting the northern section of the road were, at least at times, supplied by this method. An invoice from 1819 reveals that supplies were

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<sup>126</sup> Estimate of Provisions Required, September 1, 1818, Library of Congress, *The Andrew Jackson Papers, 1775-1874, Series V, Military Papers, July 1, 1818 – April 5, 1820*, 50.

<sup>127</sup> Maurice Prescott, August 28, 1819, Library of Congress, *The Andrew Jackson Papers, 1775-1874, Series V, Military Papers, July 1, 1818 – April 5, 1820*, 173.

sailed from New Orleans to Mobile's Fort Charlotte and then to the workers on the Military Road's northern section.<sup>128</sup>

The system of river shipping was also fraught with peril. During dry seasons, the rivers could become too shallow. However, during wet seasons, the rivers could become too swift. Isaac Craig, in a report to General Ripley, mentioned the difficulties his party faced in navigating the Pearl River, as well as other alternatives. The shipment Craig's party transported originated in New Orleans and sailed up the Pearl River with a crew of sixteen men. The sloop, laden with ten large containers, required four weeks just to reach Camp Daingerfeild (Craig's camp on the Pearl). At the camp, more soldiers boarded the ship to help with the difficulties that lay ahead. The boat, now staffed with a crew of nearly seventy men set out to transport their cargo. Craig found peril in almost every section of the river. Some locations were too narrow. Some were too deep to use poles. In one part of the river, the current was too swift. Fallen trees obstructed parts of the river. In one location the obstruction caused by fallen timber caused an entire quarter-mile section to become unnavigable. Some locations were so shallow that the sloop became stuck. When this occurred, the sailors had to unload the vessel, shovel out the river bed to float the ship again, cut away and timber or stumps, and then reload the boat. The sloop was fifty-feet-long and eight-feet wide. "I had her unloaded repeatedly," Craig stated, "and even then it was with the utmost difficulty I succeeded in taking her through, although there was near seventy men hauling her." Craig blamed soot deposited by the Spring thaw for the creation of such shallow spots. Craig lamented, "We seldom moved more than 50 yards before we were again fastened [stuck], and often times, not more than 10 feet. It was in this manner we were near two days in going only 14 miles."

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<sup>128</sup> Report of stores received for Transportation, 1819, Library of Congress, *The Andrew Jackson Papers, Series V, Military Papers, Volume XI, July 1, 1818 – April 5, 1820*, 223. Whether the supplies were transported up the Tombigbee River or aboard wagons on the road is not provided in the report.

When Craig's sloop was unloaded, it drew one foot of water. In his estimation, this was the maximum acceptable draw, and less would be better. Also, he realized his ship was too long for the Pearl. At most, a ship could be no longer than thirty-feet-long. Another problem existed in the multiple streams that branched away from the Pearl. Some narrowed to ten yards. Captains needed to be sure they maintained the correct course, which could become difficult during the wet seasons. As far as Craig was concerned, depending solely on the Pearl to supply troops was "extremely dangerous" and "preposterous, if not impracticable."<sup>129</sup>

The other supply route currently was called ships to leave New Orleans towards Madisonville. There, the vessels entered the Tchefuncte River and sailed to Covington. The ships were then unloaded unto wagons and hauled to the Pearl River by land. At the Pearl River, the wagons were placed on different boats to sail north. Craig believed this route was "extremely expensive and precarious" as it required supplies for 400 men to travel 70 to 100 miles of new road.<sup>130</sup>

Craig devised his own plan, which was also convoluted and slow. Instead of entering the Pearl River, ships would enter Catahoula Creek, east of the Pearl. Craig stated that "should this river be navigable," it would be perfect for boats of six tons or less that drew a maximum of one foot of water. The boats would travel the river to ferries at Perry's Mills. From there, the cargo would be unloaded unto a wagon train and transported approximately fifteen miles to the navigable portion of the Pearl River. At this location would be waiting a "line of boats of 8 or 10 tons." These ships would sail a relatively short distance near the troops and once again have their cargo unloaded unto wagons. As seemingly preposterous as Craig's plan sounds, it displays the obstacles suppliers faced in reaching the troops. It is difficult for a plan to appear sound if

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<sup>129</sup> Isaac E. Craig to Eleazar Wheelock Ripley, July 15, 1819, *LoC-AJP*.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

there are no good solutions. Whether in the difficulty of building dozens of causeways and bridges or in trying to supply the workers, the numerous rivers, streams, swamps, and creeks persistently eroded the military's time, budget, and patience.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Isaac E. Craig to Eleazar Wheelock Ripley, July 15, 1819, *LoC-AJP*.

## THE OBSTACLES OF MEN

Two years into the Military Road's construction, General Ripley had not wavered from his initial estimate of the difficulties of his office. Writing to Jackson, Ripley stated that from the moment of his arrival the state of the command was "deplorable" and the officers terrible. Of the officers on hand, he bemoaned, "there are not more and 3 or 4 in it but what I feel proud of." For instance, Ripley noted, "Gen. Bissell I believe is really an invalid." To drive his point further, he told Jackson, "You may judge the total inefficacy of this command when I state to you one fact – [This department had] no less than 20 vacancies in two regiments of infantry and of 40 officers . . . only about 16 had ever been present, the others were either on furlough or arranged to companies in the Northern Division." Despite all of these difficulties, Ripley bragged that in about one year's time he had advanced the road nearly fifty miles and erected "many excellent bridges."<sup>132</sup>

By November of 1818, Ripley informed Jackson that he was "concentrating corps together as much as possible" because he believed the organizational plan created by Jackson's department too inefficient. Ripley believed there were too many people in charge of different duties on the road. "I hope you will not think me obtrusive," he cautioned, "when I state that the mode to render this labor efficient is to place it all under the control of one person of the Q[uar]ter Masters Department and render him responsible." He also knew the perfect man for the job – Lieutenant Samuel Riddle, whom Ripley emphasized was a mechanic. Ripley assured Jackson that Riddle would "push [the road] faster than any person I know of."<sup>133</sup> Less than four months later, on March 8, 1819, Ripley reassigned Assistant Adjutant-General Perrin Willis to

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<sup>132</sup> Eleazar Wheelock Ripley to Andrew Jackson, August 15, 1818, *Loc-AJP*.

<sup>133</sup> Eleazar Wheelock Ripley to Andrew Jackson November 30, 1818, *Loc-AJP*.

oversee Riddle and to take command of the party working on Ripley's portion of the Military Road.<sup>134</sup> Work on the road had still been progressing too slowly, and Ripley hoped another change in command might accelerate the progress. However, prior to his reassignment, Willis was still completing his monthly returns from the previous year and it would not be long before his tardiness caught the ire of Jackson's headquarters. At times, Butler reprimanded Willis for tardiness, incomplete returns, and reports lacking detail.<sup>135</sup> In such cases, Willis rarely lacked an excuse. However, Willis's field notes and his letters to his superiors demonstrate his concern for his troops and provide insight into the Military Road's troublesome construction.

Problems arose immediately. Willis requested supplies to be sent ahead by way of the Pearl River – they never arrived.<sup>136</sup> Upon reaching camp, Willis expressed pride in the work of acting-commander Lieutenant Samuel Riddle and frustration towards the contractor for “the deficiency of almost all other supplies necessary.”<sup>137</sup> Most of the troops he found barefooted – their naked feet covered in wounds. Of the one-hundred-and-fourteen men now under his command, only an average of fifty were able to perform labor on a given day. Of the few that could work, the numerous briars, roots, and wetlands offered painful reminders of their exposed feet. Willis assured Butler that the difficulties would be “surmounted only with the greatest difficulty.”<sup>138</sup>

During the first sixty-days of Willis's command, his troops constructed a ten-mile section of the road. In those ten-miles, the soldiers cleared a path thirty-five feet wide – cutting down every tree and leveling every stump as low as possible. Large streams necessitated the construction of “two significant bridges” spanning a total of two-hundred and twenty-two feet.

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<sup>134</sup> Eleazar Wheelock Ripley, Department Order, March 8, 1819, *Loc-AJP*.

<sup>135</sup> Robert Butler to Perrin Willis, July 29, 1819, *Loc-AJP*.

<sup>136</sup> Perrin Willis to Robert Butler, April 30, 1819, *Loc-AJP*.

<sup>137</sup> *None of Willis's letters thus far examined provide any further detail about the “contractor.”*

<sup>138</sup> Perrin Willis to Robert Butler, June 14, 1819, *Loc-AJP*.

Causeways were constructed through wetlands with ditches dug out on both sides and dirt piled in the middle sections of the designed path. Where the road included steep descents, Willis ordered logs to be buried in the roadway to prevent the dirt from washing away. The logs also prevented the weight of carriages from causing the road to become unlevelled.<sup>139</sup>

Willis also performed a cost-analysis of his section's construction. Had the labor been performed by private citizens, Willis estimated the cost would have been \$3,800. The soldiers stationed on the road, however, only made 15 cents per day more than their standard salary (along with a quarter-pint of whiskey). Their bonuses' total cost to the government was less than four-hundred and sixty dollars. Willis was at once proud of this money-saving tactic and also aware that the soldiers probably deserved higher wages. He advised their wages be raised to twenty-dollars per month.<sup>140</sup>

For the next stretch of the road, Willis fixated on the River. It would have to be ferried across – but where? Four men (Mr. McLaughlin, Mr. Seale, Mr. Henigan, and General Lee) each contended their ferry was best suited for Jackson's Military Road. Willis crossed each ferry – noting the advantages of each. He also interviewed each ferry owner and found them (not-surprisingly) willing to explain all of the disadvantages of the others' ferries.<sup>141</sup>

However, ferries were not Willis's only concern with the Pearl River. Willis believed the military was not truly exploiting the River's potential use in transporting troops and men. Admitting he was wading past his assigned duties, Willis included an examination of the River's benefit.<sup>142</sup> Instead of lauding Willis's initiative, Andrew Jackson penned a direct rebuke.

Willis's report contained a wealth of information – but not the information headquarters had

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<sup>139</sup> Perrin Willis to Robert Butler, June 14, 1819, *Loc-AJP*.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> Willis's praise of the Pearl River's potential in commercial navigation was refuted heavily one month later, in Isaac Craig's report that was mentioned earlier.

asked for. The letter rebuked both Willis and his commanding officer, Major-General Ripley, for working on extra projects while not even completing the ones Jackson had directly ordered. To the troops' regretful condition, Jackson concluded there was "thoughtful neglect." Jackson also noted that he personally had "explored those rivers and lakes and bays with a view to the defense of the country" and that their proposed routes would be "more expensive than [his] direct route . . . between Madisonville and Tombigbee [River.]"<sup>143</sup> The frustration Jackson expressed to Willis and Ripley would be repeated multiple times throughout the rest of the year.

By the end of July 1819, troops on the Military Road's northern section had already advanced seventy-five miles south of the Tennessee River.<sup>144</sup> The situation on the southern portion, in contrast, was not as promising. General Ripley, a man Jackson never wanted under his command to begin with, kept getting distracted by projects Jackson never approved. In August of 1818, Ripley wrote to Jackson asking for permission to lead a party on the Red River in modern-day Oklahoma and Texas.<sup>145</sup> By October, Ripley informed Jackson that he was preparing troops and erecting stockades against a possible Spanish invasion from Texas and that he had asked the Governor of Louisiana to call up the militia.<sup>146</sup> Later that month, Ripley warned Secretary of War Calhoun that he believed Spain had an invasion force of 500 soldiers ready, which was more men than he currently had on the Louisiana frontier.<sup>147</sup> Ripley believed the Spanish had designs to take back parts of the Louisiana Territory, but Jackson rejected the idea. To Jackson, the only real threat presented by Spain was in Florida.

The distraction that infuriated Jackson the most, however, was closer to home. Ripley had ordered an additional road to be built from Bay of St. Louis (Mississippi) to intersect

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<sup>143</sup> Andrew Jackson to Perrin Willis, July 14, 1819, *LoC-AJP*.

<sup>144</sup> Eleazar Wheelock Ripley to Andrew Jackson, August 19, 1819, *LoC-AJP*.

<sup>145</sup> Eleazar Wheelock Ripley to Andrew Jackson, August 15, 1818. *LoC-AJP*.

<sup>146</sup> Eleazar Wheelock Ripley to Andrew Jackson, October 22, 1818, *LoC-AJP*.

<sup>147</sup> Eleazar Wheelock Ripley to John Caldwell Calhoun, October 31, 1818. *LoC-AJP*.

Jackson's military road. However, Jackson had previously ordered all of Ripley's spare troops to work on the primary military road. Not only was Ripley's road causing delays on the Military Road, but Jackson also believed Ripley's road was unnecessary. Jackson was convinced that Ripley's intersecting road was actually less efficient than using the previously cut trails and river passageways that already existed. Jackson berated Ripley – if Ripley had put the same attention into the construction of Jackson's military road as he had his own, the Military Road would already be near completion. "That every disposable Soldier would have been engaged in completing this Road I had a right to expect," Jackson wrote, "both from my Letters of the 15th and 27th. of November last as well as from your letter of the 1st of May." Why Ripley had diverted resources away from the Military Road was an answer both Jackson and the federal government demanded.

Furthermore, Ripley's diversion had created problems with the supply lines. Troops that should have been stationed along the Military Road were instead working along Ripley's road, meaning it took supplies longer to reach them. Jackson had received reports of soldiers without shoes and low on rations, which was inexcusable considering how close Ripley's troops were to New Orleans' depots. Jackson was also bothered by the lack of detail in Ripley's reports. Ripley, despite Jackson's requests, had not yet sent a report on how many of his troops were actually being used to construct the Military Road. Jackson ordered Ripley to send a detailed report that included his management of men and supplies from the beginning of the road's construction - as well as better justifications for Ripley's road. "When you reflect Sir that this road was commenced in the Summer of 1817 and yet progressed not more than from fifty to Seventy miles," Jackson warned, "You must expect the Government will require a satisfactory report of the cause from which this extraordinary delay has Originated, and for this purpose you

have been called on repeatedly for special report on the Subject.” Jackson also warned Ripley that in the report, “the utility of [Ripley’s] road be plainly manifested, as it appears on the 12th Inst [*sic*] you ordered an additional force for its completion, in direct violation of my repeated orders.”<sup>148</sup>

Jackson’s letter, along with follow-up letters from Ripley’s direct superior, Robert Butler, served as a final straw for Ripley. On August 20, Ripley resigned from Jackson’s command. It would take about three months for Ripley’s duties to be completed and for him to actually leave his post. In his resignation letter, a frustrated Ripley assured Butler that he had sent troops to cut timber near Madisonville, but there was very little progress that could be made. Ripley defended his slow progress by blaming the conflicting orders he had received. According to Ripley, the surveys he received called for construction of different lengths in differing locations. Without clear instructions, Ripley pondered how he could be the one blamed for the lack of progress. Plus, Ripley explained, it had consistently rained for twenty days – further delaying his men. Another issue was a massive storm that had destroyed some of the bridges and causeways already erected. Ripley believed the storm had set the project back at least two months. However, the letter also proves that Ripley was not diligent in procuring the information he needed. Ripley claimed that troops within his own command had given differing reports of the Military Road’s length, and instead of offering evidence that he demanded greater accuracy, Ripley simply just presented the conflicting reports as another inconvenience outside of his control.<sup>149</sup> In viewing one of Ripley’s final reports, it is evident that the general had assigned a large portion of his forces to duties on the Military Road. Not counting the men stationed at Ripley’s headquarters, he had 1,200 men stationed along his command’s fortresses and camps, as

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<sup>148</sup> Andrew Jackson to Eleazar Wheelock Ripley, July 31, 1819, *PoAJ-Rotunda*

<sup>149</sup> Eleazar Wheelock Ripley to Robert Butler, August 20, 1819, *LoC-AJP*.

well as along the Military Road. Of those 1,200 men, Ripley devoted almost 350 to road construction – over one-fourth of the total. This number, at least in 1819, was more than double the 143 men stationed on the northern road.<sup>150</sup> Whether or not Ripley positioned enough men on the road was a point of contention between himself and Jackson. Regardless, it was the slow progress of the road’s construction that met Jackson’s greatest disapproval.

Butler accepted Ripley’s resignation, ordering him to turn over command to his next-in-command and to settle his debts with the military. The man Jackson never wanted was finally gone. Secretary of War Calhoun was equally glad to be rid of Ripley, writing to Jackson that “the disorganized state in which General Ripley left his command is as disrespectful to that office as it was unexpected to this department. I am glad that your prompt interference has restored order and discipline and I hope for the welfare of the Army and country such irregularities may never be repeated.”<sup>151</sup>

Two reports created shortly after Ripley’s resignation give an idea of the disappointing progress Ripley made on the Military Road in 1819. The first report came from James Page, who had traveled the road’s southern portion to draft a report on the progress of the bridges. Page’s report was solely concerned with the bridges workers had erected since January 1819. According to Page, eight bridges had been erected between January and August. Unlike other reports on the bridges, which sometimes included measurements in the inches, Page settled for estimated the lengths of many bridges, rather than trying to measure the correct distance. Whether Page simply lacked the instruments for precise measurements or assumed general figures were acceptable for his report is uncertain. Page, writing just six days after Ripley’s resignation, stated, “The first bridge erected . . . is from 80 to 90 feet in length by 20 in width.

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<sup>150</sup> Eleazar Wheelock Ripley, Monthly Return of the 8th Military Department, September 30, 1819, Library of Congress, *The Andrew Jackson Papers, Series V, Military Papers, Volume XI, July 1, 1818 – April 5, 1820*, 182.

<sup>151</sup> John C. Calhoun to Andrew Jackson, February 5, 1820, *LoC-AJP*.

The second bridge . . . is from 60 to 40 feet in length and 20 in width. The third . . . is 190 feet in length, 20 in width. The fourth over a creek near Pearl River is 30 feet in length by 20 in width. The fifth . . . is 25 or 30 feet in length by 20 in width. The sixth is 80 feet. The seventh bridge is . . . 150 feet in length by 20 in width. The 8th over a stream in the Pearl River swamp is 35 to 40 feet in length by 20 in width.”<sup>152</sup> The bridges, per Jackson’s original orders, were all twenty-feet-wide.<sup>153</sup> However, Page posited that the labor in creating so many bridges was the primary factor in the Military Road’s slow progress. In fact, Page estimated that cutting roads where no bridges were needed was twelve times faster than the time invested in erected bridges. “Taking into consideration the necessary time employed in building the aforementioned bridges and estimating the time thus employed, I have no doubt in saying that for each mile where a bridge was erected that the troops might [have] progressed twelve miles had there been no bridges to erect.” For example, the largest bridge, he believed, took two months to complete and required the labor of nearly 100 men. Other bridges, he believed, required a similar amount of time and labor.<sup>154</sup>

A second, undated report, demonstrates the length, condition, and construction methods of nine causeways Ripley superintended. First, of the nine causeways, the widest were 17 feet in width – not the 20 feet Jackson had ordered. Two were only 13 feet wide. Two causeways were 240 and 245 feet long. Combined, the nine causeways were 935 feet long. One was constructed of thirty-foot-long, unhewed logs, measuring one foot in diameter and was fastened to numerous poles using wooden pins. The others were not made of such strong materials. Most consisted of “small pine poles.” The two longest causeways were already in a dilapidated state. Both were “nearly all washed away and [their] materials scattered.” One causeway was now only forty-

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<sup>152</sup> James Page to Eleazar Wheelock Ripley, August 26, 1819, *LoC-AJP*.

<sup>153</sup> Andrew Jackson to George Graham, May 13, 1817, *PoAJ-Rotunda*.

<sup>154</sup> James Page to Eleazar Wheelock Ripley, August 26, 1819, *LoC-AJP*.

feet-long, because two-thirds of its original 120-foot-length had washed away. Part of the reason for the failure of these causeways owed to poor construction. The unknown author stated, “In no case are [the causeways] ditched, nor is there any earth thrown over them, in consequence, they are of but little real service, as it is with great caution only, that a horse can safely pass them.”<sup>155</sup>

In September, Ripley sent a final report to Jackson. Ripley again defended his command and placed blame for the Military Road’s slow progress on outside forces. Ripley stated that he had ordered Lieutenant Riddle to use 130 men for construction on Jackson’s Road while giving separate orders to Lieutenant Allen to build Ripley’s road connecting the Bay of St. Louis to the Pearl River. Ripley said he gave the order to Allen “about the 13[th of] January last if I mistake not.” Without offering an explanation, Ripley then claimed he had to spend the month of January in town and away from the construction projects. Upon his return, he said he discovered that Allen was using more troops for his road than Ripley intended. Ripley then claimed he ordered Allen to only keep twenty-five to thirty men on the project and release the rest for work on Jackson’s road. As for the lack of shoes and other supplies, Ripley claimed that singular blame lay at the feet of the contractors, who failed to deliver the supplies he had ordered. He then stated that he refused to push his men too hard when they lacked such basic necessities. Furthermore, Ripley claimed he had been ordered to also supply officers in command of troops in Indian Country and that he was not even aware of any troops in Indian Country. Ripley closed his letter by stating his relief to get away from this command. “These various combinations of duty particularly with continual failures on the part of the contractors render the command here very irksome and I most anxiously desire to get away from it.”<sup>156</sup> Ripley and Jackson finally found common ground – their desire to be rid of one another.

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<sup>155</sup> Description of causeways on the road opened by General Ripley, undated, *LoC-AJP*.

<sup>156</sup> Eleazar Wheelock Ripley to Andrew Jackson, September 1, 1819, *LoC-AJP*.

If Ripley did in fact pull too much labor from Jackson's Road, the results did not merit a greater outcome for Ripley's own roadway. For Ripley's road, mother nature acted even more swiftly in thrusting it into obscurity. In a report from February 1820, James Scallan informed Jackson of the sad state of Ripley's road. "After every exertion short of the total loss of the horses I had with me," Scallan stated, "I could explore but about 30 miles of it which approached within 18 miles of the Bay of St. Louis – that space is represented by the inhabitants to be entirely impassable even for footmen; the late hurricane having blocked the road with fallen timber and the rains and floods consequent to the hurricane having destroyed the bridges and floated away the causeways." Scallan believed the original causeways were not built high enough, as about one-third of the land he travelled was fully submerged. He estimated at least ten miles of causeway would be necessary to replace the road at a cost of 6,000 total days labor.<sup>157</sup> Ripley's road had been destroyed just as construction on Jackson's road was in its final stage.

In early 1820, work on the Military Road neared completion. During the same time, a group of white squatters had encroached on Creek lands. It was Andrew Jackson's job to remove the squatters. However, he wrote to the Creek leaders that, for the moment, they would have to deal with the nuisance themselves. It is possible that Jackson simply did not care about the issue, but his excuse was that he could not spare men from work on his road.<sup>158</sup>

Also early in 1820, Duncan L. Clinch assumed command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Infantry and the position of superintendent of the Military Road. He ordered the two men in charge of the road's two sections, Colonel Taylor in the South and Captain Humphrey in the North, to file

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<sup>157</sup> James Scallan to Andrew Jackson, February 1, 1820, Library of Congress, *The Andrew Jackson Papers, 1775-1874, Series V, Military Papers, July 1, 1818 – April 5, 1820*, 308-11.

<sup>158</sup> Steve Inskeep, *Jacksonland: President Andrew Jackson, Cherokee Chief John Ross, and a Great American Land Grab*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), 108-109.

reports on the Military Road's progress. Specifically, Clinch asked for "the distance that has been opened, . . . the distance they have still to complete, & the probable time it will take to complete it: as well as the state of resources." Captain Humphrey reported that his northern section was basically completed. Col. Taylor reported that his southern section would probably be completed by May 20, aside from the portions that would need repairs. Those repairs, however, could be completed on the troops return march to Madisonville.<sup>159</sup> The road neared completion just as the federal government was increasing the pressure to see the expensive road completed.

Entering a new decade, the American people and the federal government were growing weary of funding a large, peacetime military. Congress announced its intentions to reduce military spending and troops numbers.<sup>160</sup> On May 16, 1820 Secretary of War Calhoun wrote to Andrew Jackson. Budget cuts meant further expenditures for the Military Road were unlikely. He warned Jackson that unless the road were completed soon and with little extra expense, it was likely the project would be suspended and the troops ordered away.<sup>161</sup> However, by the time the letter reached Jackson's desk, the threat was outdated because word had also reached Jackson that the road was finally complete.

On May 17, 1820, Andrew Jackson left his Nashville headquarters to travel along and inspect the Military Road. In a letter to Calhoun, Jackson wrote, "Having received information that the Military Road is complete, I have determined to leave this today with a view to examine it, and to take such further measures for its improvement as seem to be necessary on an examin[ation] of its present State." During the inspection, Jackson stated he would link up with

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<sup>159</sup> Duncan L. Clinch to Andrew Jackson, May 20, 1820, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, *General Duncan Lamont Clinch Family Papers*, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida.

<sup>160</sup> Andrew Jackson to John Caldwell Calhoun, August 8, 1820, *PoAJ-Rotunda*.

<sup>161</sup> John Caldwell Calhoun to Andrew Jackson, May 16, 1820, *LoC-AJP*.

troops stationed along the road's northern section and redirect them to areas that needed repair and improvement.<sup>162</sup> Small improvements and repairs aside, Jackson's road had finally reached completion. Beginning in Nashville, the road traveled almost directly south until reaching the Tennessee River near present-day Muscle Shoals, Alabama. After crossing the river, the road began a nearly-straight-line southwesterly course, crossing the Alabama-Mississippi border near Columbus, Mississippi (and near the Tombigbee River).<sup>163</sup> From there, the line continued its trajectory until reaching Madisonville, Louisiana, on Lake Pontchartrain. From there, travelers ferried to New Orleans on the opposite side of the lake. Jackson's war-time heroics, his reputation, and his command of the Gulf's defenses had always kept the general connected to New Orleans. Now, at least in theory, there was a physical connection linking his headquarters to the city.

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<sup>162</sup> Andrew Jackson to John Caldwell Calhoun, May 17, 1820, *PoAJ-Rotunda*.

<sup>163</sup> John Melish, *Map of Alabama constructed from the surveys in the General Land Office and other documents. Improved to. [Philadelphia 1819, 1819]* Map. The Library of Congress.

## **“THE COURSE OF EVENTS HAS CHANGED ENTIRELY”**

On January 1, 1820, General Bissell ordered Lieutenant James Scallan to explore the Military Road “as far as it has been executed” to report on the road’s progress and costs.<sup>164</sup> In a final report, provided by Scallan, Jackson’s Road consisted of a total of thirty-five bridges that totaled 3,213 ½ feet long and 392 causeways that totaled 25,185 feet. The total distance of the road was measured at 483 miles. Over the nearly four years of the road’s construction, manpower days were totaled at 75,801 days.<sup>165</sup> At fifteen-cents-per-day for labor, the federal government expended \$11,370.15 for labor alone. This ignores the salaries of generals, such as Jackson and Ripley. Also absent from the figure is the total cost of construction supplies, such as timber, bolts, tar, nails, saws, and shovels. It also does not include the clothing, food, and whiskey allotted to each soldier.<sup>166</sup>

Work on the Military Road began in 1816 and was completed in 1820. It had taken many hours of military labor and the numerous tribulations suffered by the men who surveyed and built Jackson’s road. Jackson, the defender of New Orleans, had (he thought) created a network that would continue to defend the city, as well as southern Mississippi and Alabama. Surveyors, such as William Orlando Butler and Hugh Young, braved the extremes of the frontier wilderness to design the pathway. Their many uncredited staff members suffered through the same hardships. Soldiers of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Regiment cut trees, cleared roadways, and built bridges and causeways through flooded swamplands. Congressmen provided funding for the road. Various Secretaries of War and two Presidents oversaw the project. The completion of Andrew

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<sup>164</sup> Daniel Bissell, Department Order, January 1, 1820, *LoC-AJP*.

<sup>165</sup> James Scallan to Andrew Jackson, October 2, 1820, *LoC-AJP*.

<sup>166</sup> Documentation of these figures has proven so sparse that even an educated guess of the total cost is almost impossible.

Jackson's Military Road was the culmination of numerous labors. And yet, despite the toils of so many, the road quickly fell into disrepair and obscurity.

In 1820, the year the road was completed, a report from Florence, Alabama published in the *Nashville Whig* ventured that stages would soon dot the road's path and make it "the most important [road] of any on the continent."<sup>167</sup> The report was wrong. Historian William A. Love also falsely believed in the road's success. Writing in 1910, Love stated, "the [governmental road] contributing the largest degree to the development of Mississippi as a State was generally known as General Jackson's Military Road." However, Love was operating on assumptions and did not provide any evidence of the road achieving such success. Perhaps the most easily disputed of Love's claims was his belief that the Military Road's use as a postal route proved how sturdy and efficient the road was. Love argued, "After the completion of General Jackson's road, it, doubtless, received a large share of travel . . . In the absence of any reliable data in this connection, attention is directed to the Post Office Department as a source of information, for mail routes are, as a rule, fair indexes to food roads, thickly-settled communities and business activities."<sup>168</sup> The Post Office, however, felt differently.

In 1819, to give the road more utility, Congress approved the road's use as a postal road. However, by 1825, a report from the Post-Master General's office states that the road was "so much out of repair, as to render the regular transportation of mail impracticable. The bridges and causeways have fallen into decay, and, in many parts, the entire space opened for the road has become filled with young growths of timber."<sup>169</sup> In less than five years after the road's completion, much of it had become impassable for mail service – much less to be used for the

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<sup>167</sup> *Nashville Whig*, September 5, 1820, page 3.

<sup>168</sup> Love, "Andrew Jackson's Military Road." *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society*, 403, 415.

<sup>169</sup> "Report of the Post-Master General on the Subject of the Most Practicable Post Route, from New Orleans to Washington City", *State Journal*, (Jackson, Mississippi), January 29, 1825, 2.

rapid deployment of troops. In 1826, the Post-Master General issued a contract to carry the mail from Washington, D.C. to New Orleans through the Federal Road by way of Georgia.<sup>170</sup>

Even before the close of 1820, parts of the Military Road were already showing signs of disrepair and improper construction. Bridge No. 3, crossing the Black Bayou in Bogue Chitto Swamp, had been erected with such a steep angle that it proved difficult to move heavy artillery and heavy wagons up its slope. Bridge No. 1 had already sunk in some places and warped in others due to the shifting “quicksand” of the riverbed. On one bank, Bridge No. 6 had already sunk to the high-water level. The same happened at Bridge No. 7.<sup>171</sup> The causeways were also in bad shape. The dirt atop Causeways No. 21 and No. 45 had washed away and exposed the timbers. No. 29 had degraded, No. 91 was “in bad condition,” and No. 95 was “in bad order”. Half of Causeway No. 53 had completely washed away.<sup>172</sup> Not only was the road physically being washed away, but it was also disappearing from maps.

On an 1827 map of Monroe County, Jackson’s Military Road is not even denoted. Monroe county, at the time, included the Military Road’s entrance into Mississippi from Alabama. On the map, many important towns, rivers, missions, Indian agencies, and roads are depicted, including the Robinson Road and the Natchez Trace. The absence of any mention of Jackson’s road serves as further proof of just how unimportant the road had become.<sup>173</sup>

In examining why the road fell so quickly into disrepair, a few possibilities emerge. First, tensions between America and Spain had diminished. Since its conception, the primary logic in the creation of the Military Road was to defend the Gulf Coast against foreign invasion -

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<sup>170</sup> Southerland, Jr. and Brown, *The Federal Road through Georgia, the Creek Nation, and Alabama*, 948-949.

<sup>171</sup> Dimensions and Descriptions of Bridges on the south end of the Military Road, undated, Library of Congress, *The Andrew Jackson Papers, 1775-1874, Series V, Military Papers, July 1, 1818 – April 5, 1820*, 287-290.

<sup>172</sup> Descriptions of Causeways on the south end of the Military Road. Undated. Library of Congress, *The Andrew Jackson Papers, 1775-1874: Series V, Military Papers, July 1, 1818 – April 5, 1820*

<sup>173</sup> Lawrence, “Monroe County Under Law, 1829: Schematic.” Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

particularly from Britain and Spain. Aside from a direct military assault, the largest threat posed by Spain's Florida territory was the land's use as a haven for runaway slaves and a staging ground for Indian invasions along its border with the United States. For Americans living within the frontier lands of Georgia and Alabama, there was a constant fear of Indian invasions from Spain's West Florida, as well as the belief that Spain and Britain actively incited these attacks. Jackson biographer Robert V. Remini stated, "There was no question in Jackson's mind that the removal of Spanish and British influence in the area (and British influence was known to exist in the south) was essential to the final solution of the Indian problem."<sup>174</sup> "Resupplied by Spanish Authorities," Jackson warned, "[the Indians] may concentrate, or disperse at will, and keep up a lasting predatory warfare against the frontiers of the U States."<sup>175</sup> The general pressed his point further, warning that as long as Spain controlled Florida, the land would "always prove an asylum to the disaffected and restless savage, as well as to a more dangerous population."<sup>176</sup>

Yet, as Jackson's Military Road neared completion, events transpired in Florida that would end the Spanish threat. And even on this stage, Andrew Jackson played a pivotal role. As Jackson biographer Robert V. Remini noted, "In foreign hands the Floridas posed a constant threat to the peace and safety of the Republic. People living along the southwestern frontier used to say that whoever owned the Floridas held a pistol at the heart of the United States."<sup>177</sup> Remini also noted a standard American belief was that "the southern frontier was unsafe as long as the Spanish occupied Florida and provided a haven for rampaging Indians." Those "rampaging Indians" referred to were primarily the Seminole and the Creek who refused to acknowledge the American land-claims from the Creek War. These Indian nations would launch raids against

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<sup>174</sup> Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Volume One: The Course of American Empire, 1767-1821*, 191.

<sup>175</sup> Andrew Jackson to John Caldwell Calhoun, May 5, 1818, *PoAJ-Rotunda*.

<sup>176</sup> Andrew Jackson to John Caldwell Calhoun, November 28, 1818, *PoAL-Rotunda*.

<sup>177</sup> Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Volume One: The Course of American Empire, 1767-1821*, 166.

American settlements in Georgia and Alabama and swiftly return to the safety of Spanish Florida.<sup>178</sup> These southern American settlements fell under General Jackson's military jurisdiction.

Jackson had first struck against Florida during the War of 1812. Believing his original marching orders to Natchez were the preemption of an American invasion to take all of Spanish Florida, the general was greatly disappointed when his army was ordered back to Tennessee before any hostilities had begun. After achieving victory in the Creek War, but learning of British activities in Pensacola that threatened the Republic, Jackson wasted no time in finally invading Spanish Florida. Within the span of two months, Jackson swept through and captured Pensacola. The U.S. did not try to keep the territory, however. Shortly after his victory, Jackson's destiny took him to defend New Orleans and the U.S. government determined it best to remain on peaceful terms with Spain, whose ally Russia was helping to mediate peace between America and Britain.<sup>179</sup> Pensacola was returned to Spain and Spanish Florida remained a thorn in the side of Jackson and settlers along the border.

After the War of 1812, the first significant military action Jackson's department would direct against Florida, however, was not solely directed at the British, Spanish, or even the Indians. Instead, U.S. military might was aimed at a fortress controlled by runaway slaves. The fortress had been previously constructed by the British to supply their Indian allies and British Lieutenant Colonel Edward Nicholls, who had promised the Indians that Britain would continue to protect them after the War of 1812, was still stationed there. Because of the influx of runaway slaves in the post-war era, the fortress had become known as Negro Fort. By 1816, the

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<sup>178</sup> Remini, *The Life of Andrew Jackson*, New York: Harper and Row, 1988. 116-7.

<sup>179</sup> Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars*, 94-95.

population of runaway slaves numbered nearly 300 and was steadily growing.<sup>180</sup> Along with fears of a slave exodus, the plantation owners must have also felt unnerved by the ever-growing presence of formerly enslaved persons now armed within a fort. Fears of large slave rebellions similar to the Haitian revolution had long-haunted white southerners. Mounting on these fears, Jackson was infuriated that the Spanish had not already acted against the fort. At best, he thought, the Spanish were too inept to rectify the situation. At worst, perhaps the Spanish actually supported the fort's inhabitants. Jackson was certain the British were involved. Nicholls was still stationed there and the runaway slaves proudly wore red coats.<sup>181</sup> Jackson's stance on the fort was clear, "If the fort harbours the Negroes of our citizens or friendly Indians living within our Territory or hold out Inducements to the Slaves of our Citizens to desert from their owner's service, this fort must be destroyed."<sup>182</sup> Jackson gave orders to General Edmund Pendleton Gaines to take any action deemed necessary. Gaines constructed Fort Scott near the Spanish Florida border and in close striking distance to Negro Fort.<sup>183</sup> Naval forces arrived from New Orleans and, on July 27, 1816, bombarded the fort. Over 270 of the fort's inhabitants were killed and over sixty were wounded. With the fort destroyed, the threat of an army of runaway slaves diminished. Yet, Jackson's eyes remained on Florida.

The destruction of Negro Fort should be considered a crucial event for many reasons, but in the scheme of the Jackson Military Road, it could have served as an omen of the shifting political landscape. The assault on the fort required the United States military to launch an invasion into foreign territory. A fortress, constructed by the British and still stationed with a few British subjects, was attacked by the U.S. And the invasion took place in Spanish territory.

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<sup>180</sup> Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars*, 97, 130.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid*, 130. According to Remini, Nichols left Florida early in 1816 after he became convinced that the British government would never offer any real assistance to the Creeks or the Seminoles.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid*, 131.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid*, 131.

That Jackson and other U.S. leaders felt they could undertake these actions with little to no fear of retaliatory action from Britain or Spain should have served as a marker of the extent to which their threat to the southern frontier had already been neutralized.

As commander of the entire Southern District, it was Jackson's duty to do everything in his power to create an insurmountable defense network. With the memory of two wars against Britain so fresh in the minds of military leaders and politicians, it is understandable why the threat of a third war was taken so seriously. With the advantage of hindsight, however, it is easier to see that neither Spain nor Britain were likely to ever again pose a military challenge to America's southern frontier. Had political or military leaders reached this same conclusion, it is possible (and only a possibility) that construction of Jackson's Military Road never would have been seriously considered.

As fate had it, it was the United States (and specifically Jackson) that took the war to Spanish Florida. In 1818, without a congressional declaration of war or even a direct presidential order, Jackson launched an invasion deep into Florida to quell the long-troublesome Seminole attacks against white-settlers. Jackson's force consisted of 3,000 soldiers and militia and 2,000 Creek allies.<sup>184</sup> The military road that Jackson held so much hope for was mostly useless in the conflict, as Jackson's forces traveled far deeper into the Alabama Territory than that which the road crossed. For the incursion into Florida, once again, new roads had to be constructed.

One primary road connected Fort Montgomery (modern-day Montgomery, Alabama) to Hartford, Georgia. Like Jackson's Military Road, it was constructed by troops. Also, a familiar promise was given — Gaines stated that this new road would save travelers 100 miles of

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<sup>184</sup> Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars*, 136-9, 142.

traveling through Creek lands.<sup>185</sup> The road appeared necessary, because as with similar situations across the former Mississippi Territory, the roads were terrible and the supplies limited. It took Jackson forty-six days to march his troops from Nashville to Fort Scott, which rested on Georgia's Flint River, a few miles north of the Florida border.

Once in position, Jackson wanted to ensure this invasion into Florida would be his last. He pleaded with the federal government to keep the lands, as a matter of national security. "The Moment the American Army retires from Florida," he insisted, "The War hatchet will be again raised, & the same scenes of indiscriminate murder with which our frontier settlers have been visited, will be repeated."<sup>186</sup> Jackson also warned that, "without the Floridas our lower country cannot be made secure, and our Navy cannot afford protection to it in time of War."<sup>187</sup> At first, Congress feigned shock and anger at Jackson's invasion, going so far as to censure the general. But by the time the congressmen began their assault on Jackson's reputation, the general was already striking decisive blows across Spanish Florida.<sup>188</sup> By June, Jackson's forces had destroyed many Indian villages, killed many chiefs, and displaced Spanish authorities with a provisional government. While promising the Spanish inhabitants that the United States had no intentions of keeping the land, he also began taxing the citizenry.<sup>189</sup>

In 1819, just one year before the Military Road's completion, the two nations agreed to sign what became known as the Adams-Onís Treaty. In the agreement, Spain ceded its remaining Florida territory to the United States over the course of three years, and both nations

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<sup>185</sup> Hudson, *Creek Paths and Federal Roads*, 122-3.

<sup>186</sup> Andrew Jackson to John Caldwell Calhoun, May 5, 1818, *PoAJ-Rotunda*.

<sup>187</sup> Andrew Jackson to John Caldwell Calhoun, December 21, 1820, *PoAJ-Rotunda*.

<sup>188</sup> Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars*, 139-40.

<sup>189</sup> Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars*, 161-2. In a plea that could have extensively changed American history, Jackson informed President Monroe that, given a frigate and another regiment, he could also conquer Cuba in a matter of days. Monroe ignored the plea and the matter was dropped.

agreed on the specific border between the United States and Mexico.<sup>190</sup> The treaty also cemented Spain's inability to pose a significant military threat to the southern United States and removed the Florida as a potential staging ground for a British military invasion.

The roles of federal versus state governments also factor into the Military Road's demise. For the federal government, it was perfectly acceptable and necessary to build roads through territories. Once those territories gained statehood, however, road building and road maintenance were largely left to the states. The most notable exceptions were the building of roads that connected states to frontier lands. With all of the work Jackson put into his military road, it may be surprising to some that, as President, he was against using federal funds to construct and maintain roads within states. When construction began on Jackson's Military Road, Mississippi and Alabama were still territorial lands. In territorial lands, such actions were considered within the realm of the federal government. However, when Congress passed legislation during his presidency that was designed to repair and lengthen the Cumberland Road, Jackson vetoed the measure. Then-President Jackson asserted that such action was a state affair — not federal. The Cumberland Road's maintenance was then shared between the states of Maryland, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia - just as the responsibility for the sections of Jackson's Military Road were eventually left to Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana.<sup>191</sup> Tennessee had already achieved statehood in 1796 and Louisiana in 1812. The majority of the Military Road traversed through the Mississippi Territory. However, in 1817, the same year that construction began, Mississippi achieved statehood. Alabama had broken from the Mississippi Territory and later achieved its own statehood in December 1819, just before construction of the road ended. The statute in the Ohio Statehood Enabling Act, which was

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<sup>190</sup> Charles I. Bevans, ed., *Treaties and other International Agreements of the United States of America 1776-1949*, vol. 11, *Philippines-United Arab Republic*, (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1974), 528-535.

<sup>191</sup> John Williamson, "Federal Aid to Roads and Highways," CRS, 2.

adopted for all states and required the designation of five percent of public land sales be spent for road construction and maintenance, went into effect in Mississippi in the year the state was created on December 10, 1817.<sup>192</sup> Thus, by the time the road reached its completion in 1820, the federal government expected these states to now maintain the roadway. Yet, there existed further barriers to the road's maintenance.

Another reason Jackson's Military Road fell into disrepair was that, despite the labor of so many U.S. soldiers and financial resources of the federal government, a large portion of the road still passed through Indian lands. The Choctaws retained control of their Mississippi Territory until the enforcement of the Indian Removal Act in 1830. Half of the Military Road's distance through Mississippi ran through Choctaw Territory (from the Alabama border to central Mississippi), which likely discouraged white settlers from flocking into the region. Historian William A. Love, speaking about the Military Road's condition, stated, "But in the Choctaw lands, which did not come under state control until 1830, the exact route in some localities has been obliterated."<sup>193</sup> According to historian John Ray Skates, the Indian cessions tripled the public land available for settlement in Mississippi. Thus, before 1830, there was a massive portion of the Military Road that was not open to white settlement. By that time, that section of the road was in disrepair and the removal of the Indians likely further negated the belief that large troop movements might be necessary in the region.

Also, just as Mississippi's geography made the Military Road's construction so difficult, it also made parts of the road unnecessary – at least for transferring troops and supplies to the coast. Many of Mississippi's rivers, such as the Tombigbee and Pearl, discharge into the Gulf of Mexico. In most cases it was quicker and more efficient to place troops on boats and sail them

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<sup>192</sup> Rickie Longfellow, "The Evolution of Mississippi Highways, *U.S. Department of Transportation: Federal Highway Administration: Highway History*, 2019.

<sup>193</sup> Love, "Andrew Jackson's Military Road." *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society*, 411.

down these rivers to the coast, rather than march them and their supplies across the Mississippi terrain. As mentioned previously, during the War of 1812, Andrew Jackson sent his forces to from Nashville to Natchez by way of the Tennessee, Ohio, and Mississippi Rivers, rather than march them through the Mississippi wilderness. It was only the calvary, owing to its horses, that journeyed by land. Even after the Military Road reached completion, military leaders still believed river passages were more efficient. Duncan L. Clinch, superintendent of the Military Road in 1820, needed to devise the best method for getting troops from east Mississippi back to Madisonville. Instead of having the troops march along the road, Clinch advised Jackson to have the troops march to the Tombigbee River, build flat boats, sail down to the Gulf of Mexico, and then to New Orleans and Madisonville. Clinch concluded that such a route was “the least expensive and most convenient mode of transportation.”<sup>194</sup> With the southern portion providing such tremendous difficulty to build and maintain, it made more sense to have soldiers march, at most, to the Tombigbee River, and sail from there.

In analyzing why the southern portion was even cut if military strategy often dictated the use of water routes, it is important to remember that the Military Road was primarily constructed to defend the nation against Britain and Spain. Worry existed that the British or Spanish navies could capture the Gulf ports and launch in-land invasions. If such a situation were presented, the Road’s southern portion would have become necessary to launch counter-attacks against the foreign invaders, or served as an escape route if U.S. forces on the Gulf needed to retreat away from the coast. The new political realities of the 1820s, the harshness of the Mississippi terrain, and white settlers’ lack of access to Choctaw and Chickasaw lands would have been enough to doom Jackson’s Road into obscurity. Yet, a final factor in the road’s failure also exists in the

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<sup>194</sup> Duncan L. Clinch to Andrew Jackson, May 20, 1820, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, *General Duncan Lamont Clinch Family Papers*, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida.

bureaucratic inefficiency and personal egos of the government and men who oversaw the road's construction.

The road was constructed over the course of two presidential administrations, multiple sessions of the United States Congress, and the administration of multiple Secretaries of State. It would be easy to assume that such turnover could lead to different priorities and a different, yet until 1820 there is no evidence that any part of the federal government waived in supporting Jackson's Military Road. The largest exception to this, at least according to Jackson's estimation, was Secretary of State Crawford. As mentioned previously, Jackson believed Crawford wanted to delay the development of the Mississippi Territory to prevent the citizens of Georgia from fleeing that state for the new frontier. Plus, it was Crawford that forced the transfer of Eleazar Ripley to Jackson's command against Jackson's protest. However, even if Jackson was correct that Crawford wanted to stall the development of the Mississippi Territory, it is still unlikely that travelers from Georgia would have traversed much of the Jackson Military Road. Most settlers from Georgia and South Carolina came to the Mississippi Territory by way of the Federal Road.<sup>195</sup> General Ripley presents an interesting foil to the success of Jackson's Road. He disobeyed or ignored orders directing him to exert more men and time to the road, instead of having those workers build his alternate road. And while he was assigned to the division against Jackson's wishes, it was Jackson who gave him charge over the road's southern portion. In fact, Ripley never asked for the position. Upon learning he had been transferred to Jackson's position, Ripley wrote to Jackson. In the letter, Ripley stated that he had discussed the transfer with Secretary of War Crawford and had advised Crawford that he believed he could be of best use in the Upper Mississippi River region. – the northwest frontier.<sup>196</sup> Jackson ordered

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<sup>195</sup> Southerland, Jr. and Brown, *The Federal Road through Georgia, the Creek Nation, and Alabama*, 949.

<sup>196</sup> Eleazar Wheelock Ripley to Andrew Jackson, June 29, 1816, *LoC-AJP*.

Ripley to the Gulf Coast instead. Whether Jackson thought that was the position that best suited Ripley or if it was simply a petty act designed to irritate Ripley is not an obtainable certainty from the documents examined. Regardless, it is apparent that Jackson shares partial blame in Ripley's failures along the Military Road's southern portion. However, there was certainly plenty of blame to go around and both men relished in passing that blame down the chain of command. Jackson blamed Ripley for disobeying orders and straying from his primary tasks. Ripley blamed bad contractors and his subordinates, such as Lieutenant Allen who took too many laborers off of Jackson's Road. Neither seemed too willing to place much blame on themselves.

Bureaucratically, it is possible Jackson was simply given too many responsibilities. Commanding the entirety of the South and the Northwest frontier, Jackson was tasked with erecting and maintaining forts along the Gulf of Mexico and the southern Atlantic coast, protecting Indian lands from white settlers and white settlers from Indian attacks, protecting trade on the Mississippi River, and protecting all of America's borders with Spain and a portion of her borders with Canada.<sup>197</sup> During the time, he led multiple invasions against Spanish Florida and oversaw numerous military actions against Indians. This simple list ignores the more mundane portions of Jackson's job, such as paperwork, recruiting, discipline, and lobbying government officials. With such a vast territory to defend, it is simple to reason that, at times, the Military Road and other duties were not given as much direct attention from Jackson as he probably would have preferred. Regardless, Jackson's mound of duties and his personal rivalries were still not as significant to the Military Road's failure as was the bad terrain, the large expanse of land still controlled by the Choctaw and the Chickasaw, and the federal government's changing political focus in the early 1820s.

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<sup>197</sup> Alexander James Dallas to Andrew Jackson, May 22, 1815, *LoC-AJP*.

In 1817, General Ripely noted to Secretary of War Calhoun that the defensive infrastructure in the southern frontier was completely outdated. The fortress system in place had mostly been designed during the 18th century and needed updating to meet the requirements of future wars. Proposing a new fortress system and praising the Military Road as a key component to this system, Ripley stated, “The course of events has changed entirely the relation of things.”<sup>198</sup> Yet, by the time the Military Road reached completion in 1820, the course of events had changed America’s defensive situation once again. Entering a new decade, the threats of the past had faded further into obscurity and, with them, so did the Military Road.

Despite the Military Road’s rapid decline, parts of the road still exist. Particularly from Tennessee to Columbus, Mississippi (solely within the northern portion of the road) and from Covington, Louisiana to the Pearl River (the extreme southern section of the road), parts of the old road have been paved and are still in use — going by various names, “Military Road,” “Old Jackson Road,” and “Jackson Road” to list a few. These intermittent portions serve as still reminders of a road less traveled (though not purposely).

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<sup>198</sup> Eleazar Wheelock Ripley to John Caldwell Calhoun, December 30, 1817, *LoC-AJP*.

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