

HEADQUARTERS DISTRICT OF EAST FLORIDA

Camp near Jacksonville, March 13, 1863.

I feel it my duty as brigadier-general commanding this district to inform the people of the district and of the State that our unscrupulous enemy has landed a large force of negroes, under command of white officers, at Jacksonville, under cover of gunboats. He is attempting to fortify the place so as to make it secure against attacks. The purpose of this movement is obvious and need not be mentioned in direct terms. It is sufficient to inspire the whole body of the people with a renewed and sterner purpose of resistance. I therefore call on such of the citizens as can possibly leave their homes to arm and organize themselves into companies without delay and report to me. * * *

Jos. Finegan,
Brigadier-General Commanding.

Whether General Finegan was correct in his supposition, hinted at in his proclamation, is answered in the report of General R. Saxton (U. S. A.), dated March 14, 1863, as follows:

The object of this expedition was to occupy Jacksonville and make it the base of operations for the arming of negroes and securing in this way possession of the entire state of Florida. It gives me pleasure to report that so far the objects of the expedition have been fully accomplished. The town is completely in our possession and many prisoners. * * * It is my belief that scarcely an incident in this war has caused a greater panic throughout the whole southern coast than this raid of the colored troops in Florida. The negroes are collecting at Jacksonville from all quarters.

Immediately upon landing the Federals began to erect fortifications as though for permanent occupation. To guard the terminus of the railroad where it entered the town, Colonel Higginson caused two forts to be erected, one on the right of the railroad, named Fort Montgomery, and one on the left, Fort Higginson. The gunboats, being provided with heavy guns of long range, commanded the country for several miles around. The Confederate troops, under General Finegan, were stationed a few miles west of Jacksonville. They consisted principally of cavalry, or mounted infantry, and were poorly provided with artillery.

Skirmishing began on the day following the landing of the Federal troops, and continued more or less until Jacksonville was evacuated. General Finegan made no general attack upon the town, but confined his operations to a system