

Lake City, Fla. July 15<sup>th</sup> 1864

Maj. P.W. White  
Chf. Com. Sub [Chief Commissary Officer for Florida]  
Quincy Fla.

Major,

Your communication of the 13<sup>th</sup> inst. inclosing a copy of Capt. Townsend's letter to you on the subject of returning detailed men to their commands, is at hand. The same mail brings me an order from the War Department directing that these detailed men should be permitted to remain in your service till further orders. I had heretofore, on the 13<sup>th</sup> day of July 1864 renewed the detail of certain men represented by you to be necessary for the efficient administration of your Department.

While, of course, I yield implicit obedience to the orders of the Secretary of War on this as well as all other subjects connected with the discharge of my official duties, yet I am not willing that you should suppose that the system as adopted by you in all its particulars, meets the approval of my judgment. I assume that we are both actuated by the same motives – a desire to accomplish the greatest amount of good, to the cause in which our country is engaged. If we differ as to the plan of accomplishing that good, it is a difference of judgment, and not of ulterior purpose.

Before the authority was obtained by you to raise a Battalion of Cattle drivers, I do not remember to have heard any complaint against your department in Florida on account of want of energy of the Army. What your means were, in the way of detailed men, for accomplishing that work I am not entirely prepared to say: for very soon after assuming command of the District I addressed you a communication requesting a "list of all officers and men in your employ that I might not interfere with them in the legitimate discharge of their duties, and that I might know what force you were employing for the purposes of your business within the District. To that communication you promptly replied by sending me a partial list, which you remarked however was wholly unreliable, but promised that you would at an early day send me a correct list embracing all the officers and men in your employ in the State. This latter list I have not yet had the honor of receiving, and am therefore ignorant as to the exact number of men in your employ, and with whom you had, so far as I know, quite satisfactorily discharged the duties devolved upon you of collecting and forwarding beef cattle for the supply of the troops in the field. But from the partial list which you sent me, and from other sources of information, I infer that your force was considerably less than three hundred men. Now by the order of the Secty. of War, authorizing the raising of a battalion of cattle drivers, for the special service heretofore performed by these detailed men, I learn that you now have at your command five companies, fully organized and equipped, whose duty it is to collect and drive up beef cattle for your department, and, incidentally to protect the pastoral regions of the state. By law these five companies cannot consist of less than three hundred and twenty men, and I learn from one of your agents that most if not all of the companies have a number of men greater than the minimum. So that you now have considerably over three hundred men, performing the duty which was heretofore performed very satisfactorily by a much smaller number of detailed men. Not only this, but you retain all of the detailed men beside. I thought the policy of the Secretary of War – of organizing a special force from the class of Reserves for the purpose of driving cattle

was a wise one for several reasons, among which I will only now mention one viz. that it would release a number of able bodied (detailed) men from that service and add them to the active forces confronting the enemy, and substitute for them a class of men equally as efficient as cattle drivers, but by reason of their ages, not so well qualified to bear arms in the field. If this was one of the objects, the just expectations of the Sect. of War in this respect, have been disappointed, for by your policy not a man has been added to the active forces in the field, while your Department has acquired the additional services of from three to four hundred men!! This would be justifiable if there were a corresponding increase in the amount of efficient duty performed, but I do not suppose that you will claim such to be the case.

I lay claim to some knowledge of the importance of supply in our armies in the field with beef. Three years service with one of those armies fully enlightened me on that subject. I hope that those armies may never again suffer the wants and privations in the way of a supply of beef, which it has been my lot to witness: And I assure you Major, that no effort shall be spared on my part to prevent the recurrence of such wants and privations. Unfortunately, I have seen the want too, of more men in the ranks, to stand up in the hour of trial to be shot at, or to pursue the flying for when victory had been obtained, or to defend from rapine and plunder the homes and altars of some of our best citizens: Therefore while I do not underestimate the importance of the beef supply, I think at the same time, that now is the hour for every able-bodied man in the land to march to the front, particularly those who have so long enjoyed, by detail, an exemption from bullets and other casualties of the battlefield.

I see nothing in the copy of Capt. Townsend's letter which you send me, which requires particular notice. It might do very well for interested parties to expatiate extensively to those who have had no experience or knowledge of cattle driving, about the special skill and all that necessary to accomplish anything with "wild" herds in swamps, hammocks, etc. but I know what can be done by men who undertake that business with a proper spirit, perhaps as well as Capt. Townsend does. While I am not a professional cattle driver, I have had some experience in the matter, in the green hills of southern Kentucky – in the cane breaks and swamps of the Mississippi, and on the plains of Oregon: and I can safely assert that any man of sound mind and limb who can ride a horse can in a few days make a cattle driver even in the swamps of Florida, if he is so disposed. I have not, then, as you and Capt. Townsend suppose, made opposition to the retention by you of the detailed men because of my ignorance of the nature of their duties, but because I knew they were not necessary while you had a whole Battalion of cattle drivers at your command.

The guard on the last train from South Florida brought up four of these detailed men who had been for two years on the returns of one of your agents, each of whom had a parole in his pocket from a Yankee Lieutenant and who had been at home for some time defying enrolling officers & everybody else, and swearing that he never intended to serve the Confederate States again etc. unless he was permitted to drive cattle for them, etc., etc. This is perhaps an extreme case, but it is not an uncommon one in that region of the sate and is a sad commentary upon the policy of detailing men to "stay at home."

I have no doubt that much of what you charge, as to the insufficiency of the active forces in West Florida is true. This however, is not the fault of the troops, but of the officers who control them. I am not aware that they have ever remained at any place, or

gone to any other place without orders to do so. I hope hereafter to make them more efficient.

I am Major Very Respectfully  
Yr. Obt. Svt.,  
Patton Anderson

Maj. P.W. White  
Quincy, Fla.

Transcribed by Christopher A. Baker, University of Florida, 2008.