On the same day, General Sherman issued a proclamation to the “Loyal People of East Florida”, confirming and commending the foregoing resolutions and stating that the troops of the United States “had come amongst you to protect loyal citizens and their property from further molestation by the creatures of a rebel and usurped authority, and to enable you to resuscitate a Government which they have ruthlessly endeavored to destroy”, etc. Another meeting of the “loyal citizens” was held on the 24th of March and a committee of five was appointed to take steps toward obtaining the co-operation of other counties in the State in the effort to organize a state government under the jurisdiction of the United States. To this end a convention was called to meet at Jacksonville on April 10, 1862.

In the afternoon of March 24th, General H. G. Wright and the 97th Pennsylvania regiment arrived, General Wright assuming command of the troops in Jacksonville. The Confederates had by this time moved nearer the town and occupied a position at McGirts Creek, about 10 miles west in the direction of Baldwin. On the night of March 24th, a Federal picket of two men that had gone beyond the lines was captured, and at 3 a.m. March 25th, the Confederates attacked a picket at the old brick yard in West LaVilla, killing four and capturing three of them. Lieutenant Strange (C. S. A.) was mortally wounded here. This was the first blood of the war spilled in this vicinity.

On the night of March 27th, a Federal picket fired upon a party approaching them in what they thought a suspicious manner, and of the two in advance, one was killed and the other wounded. They proved to be a party of negroes that had escaped from their masters at Lake City. The next day, General Wright, hearing that the Confederates were contemplating an attack upon Jacksonville, sent to Fernandina for two sections of Hamilton’s battery. Its arrival brought the Federal force in Jacksonville up to 1,400 men. No attack was made, however, and a few days later the evacuation of the town was ordered.

The Evacuation

General Wright, in his official report, describes the evacuation as follows: