How we went from Dade to Miami-Dade

et's go back in time to 1835. The Second Seminole War began in December of that year, when U.S. soldiers were ambushed by Seminole warriors, who were resisting removal to a reservation at what has become known as the Dade Battle in Sumter County, near Bushnell, Florida.

Below is an excerpt from www.dadebattlefield.com describing the bloody event.

"Have a good heart; our difficulties and dangers are over now, and as soon as we arrive at Fort King you'll have three days to rest and keep Christmas gaily." Maj. Francis L. Dade spoke these words to 107 cold, tired soldiers in a pine forest on the morning of December 28, 1835. Within eight hours, only three soldiers would survive the battle that marked the beginning of the Second Seminole War.

"Halpatter Tustenuggee (Alligator, as the white man called him): 'We had been preparing for this more than a year. Just as the day was breaking, we moved out of the swamp into the pine-barren. I counted, by direction of Jumper, 180 warriors. Upon approaching the road, each man chose his position on the west side. About nine o'clock in the morning the command approached. So soon as all the soldiers were opposite, Jumper gave the whoop. Micanopy fired the first rifle, the signal agreed upon, when every indian arose and fired, which laid upon the ground, dead, more than half the white men. The cannon was discharged several times, but the men who loaded it were shot down as soon as the smoke cleared away.'

"'As we were returning to the swamp, supposing all were dead, an indian came up and said the white men were building a fort of logs. Jumper and myself, with ten warriors, returned. As we approached, we saw six men behind two logs placed one above another, with the cannon a short distance off. We soon came near, as the balls went over us. They had guns, but no powder. We looked in the boxes afterwards and found they were empty.'"

Two survivors made it to Fort King. One later died from his wounds. It wasn't until the following February that a military unit would return to the scene, finding the men surprisingly well preserved. They buried the dead at the site of the battle. At the end of the war, the soldiers, along with others who died fighting or from disease during the Seminole conflict, were reinterred at the post cemetery at St. Augustine, now the St. Augustine National Cemetery.

In terms of lives lost, the battle was second only to Custer's defeat at the Little Big Horn. Today the site is preserved as the Dade Battlefield Historic State Park.

The commander of this column of 107 soldiers was a young major by the name of Francis Langhorne Dade, born in 1793 in King George County, Virginia. Major Dade was assigned to the U.S. 4th Infantry Regiment of the U.S. Army, and like many soldiers upon whom command falls, he made the ultimate sacrifice. In fact, Dade was the first to fall from the initial rifle fire of Chief Micanopy that fateful day.

Twisting History for Shameless Pride

Written by Frank Rolllason, BT Contributor
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Dade County, Missouri; Dade County, Georgia; Dade City, Florida; and Dade County, Florida were all named in honor of Francis L. Dade. Dade County, Florida, was created January 18, 1836, under the Territorial Act of the United States. At the time, Dade County included the land that now encompasses Palm Beach and Broward counties, together with the Florida Keys from Bahia Honda north, and the land of present-day Miami-Dade County. The county seat was originally at Indian Key. In 1844 the county seat was moved to Miami. The Florida Keys from Key Largo to Bahia Honda became part of Monroe County in 1866.

In 1888 the Dade County seat was moved to Juno, near present-day Juno Beach, returning to Miami in 1899. Palm Beach County was formed in 1909 from the northern portion of what was then Dade County. And in 1915, Palm Beach and Dade counties contributed nearly equal portions of land to create what today is Broward County.

Now let's leap to November 13, 1997, on which day our county commission caused a special election to be held, an election that included a charter amendment to change the name of Dade County to Miami-Dade County. With little fanfare, the electorate, lemmings that we are, accepted the proposal for this historic change. Why? Well, as I recall, the overwhelming push was from county elected officials, primarily Mayor Alex Penelas, who were supposedly tired of having to explain as they traveled just where the hell was Dade County.

They were embarrassed to answer "Miami," which everyone knew was in Florida and well on its way to recognition as an international city. No, it was too complicated to say, "I am mayor of the county that includes one of the true treasures of this great country -- the City of Miami." Not no, but, *hell* no! We can't have people asking who we are, so let's change the name to Miami-Dade County. Then all will know how important we really are!

When you research the county ordinance (No. 97-212) to adopt the name change, you'll find no mention of Major Dade or the sacrifice of his troops. What you'll find is the concern of Commissioner Barbara Carey, who "received numerous calls regarding what the cost to taxpayers would be to change the name." The county manager responded that change would be gradual to ensure it would be of "no additional cost to the county."

Well, there's a huge cost to the county and it comes in the form of destroying its history -- all for the purpose of soothing a few deflated egos.

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I didn't like the change then and I like it less now. We need to take back our original name. Shortly after the death of President Kennedy, there was a rush to express patriotism by naming roads, buildings, schools, even cities after the fallen leader. As time goes by, however, we begin to sort out what is proper and what isn't. Cape Canaveral became Cape Kennedy, and has now become Cape Canaveral again.

I look forward to being Dade County once again, because we *are* Dade County, not Miami-Dade County.

As a footnote, in 2002 the county commission passed a resolution renaming the county courthouse the Maj. Francis Langhorne Dade County Courthouse, noting that "Maj. Francis Langhorne Dade is a person who made a significant contribution to Miami-Dade County." You have to wonder if they had any clue.

This column first appeared in June 2009.

Feedback: *letters@biscaynetimes.com*