

The duty assigned to the Marines - of keeping communications open, and of escorting convoys of supply wagons, between the camps - proved to be the most hazardous of any service in Florida. A company of Indians and Negroes, under a free Black named Prince, formed an ambushade in Twelve Mile Swamp, about twelve miles from St. John's, for the purpose of destroying a convoy of wagons escorted by a force of Marines and Milledgeville volunteers (under Captain Fort) commanded by Captain Williams. The convoy and escort entered the swamp about dusk on the evening of September 12, 1812. A deadly fire was poured into them, being directed first upon the horses. The horses being killed the wagons blocked the trails and the Americans were forced to stand and fight against heavy odds - being outnumbered four to one and the enemy fighting from ambush, Captain Williams was wounded at the first fire, but continued to command his men until, being wounded in eight different places, he gave way to Captain Fort, who later was also wounded. When the enemy advanced with tomahawks, the Marines charged and the enemy retired giving the Americans an opportunity to withdraw from the ambushade.

Retaining several of his men to guard the wounded, Captain Williams sent the remainder to the Block House on Davis Creek for reinforcements. From there a detachment was sent out the next morning and found Captain Williams, his right

leg broken, his right hand shot through with three balls, his left arm broken, his left leg shot through, a ball in his left thigh near the groin, and another through the bottom of his belly. One Marine was found on the ground, dead and scalped and several more who had been wounded and hidden in the bushes. There was a total of one killed and eight wounded, including Captains Williams and Fort. In a letter to his Commandant, Captain Williams wrote: "You may expect that I am in a dreadful situation, though I yet hope I shall³⁵ recover in a few months."

Commendations and wishes for a speedy recovery were showered upon Captain Williams before news of his death on³⁶ September 29th was received. The Commandant, the Secretary of the Navy, Colonel Smith, and the newspapers were loud in his praises and in those of his Marines. Colonel Smith officially reported to the War Department and to Governor Mitchell on September 22nd, that "Captains Williams and Fort acquitted themselves highly to their honor, and would have been victorious beyond a doubt if either had escaped a few minutes as an order had been given to charge and the enemy began to give ground. The Indians fled the second fire, yelling like devils."

But the courageous and hopeful Williams succumbed to

his wounds on September 29, 1812.³⁷ He died at the camp at Hollingsworth that was later named Camp New Hope about October 12, 1812. It is about five miles south of Jacksonville.³⁸ Lieutenant Colonel Smith wrote General Floyd that: "poor Captain Williams has just expired and will be interred³⁹ with honors of war in the morning." The Corps went into mourning for the second officer killed in action since the⁴⁰ Revolution.

On November 6, 1812, Colonel Wharton wrote to "Lieutenant Colonel Thomas A. Smith, Regiment of Riflemen, near St. Augustine, East Florida," acknowledging receipt of the news of the death "of our late Brother Officer, Captain Williams, whose memory will long remain among us," and that he was "very happy to hear that Sergeant Austin has merited the good opinion of the officers under whom he has served."

The National Intelligencer of October 20, 1812, stated that the loss of Captain Williams "will be regretted by all who know how to value honor, bravery and worth," and that "he will be particularly lamented by all who had the pleasure of his acquaintance, of whom there are many in this city." The same paper of October 24, 1812, carried an announcement that "A Funeral Masonic Procession will move from the Lodge Room of Washington Naval and Union Lodge on Sunday next at ten o'clock to Christ Church, where a sermon will be delivered

by the Revd. Brother M'Cormick, in consequence of the death of the worthy and much esteemed Brother John Williams late a Captain in the Marine Corps, who fell by the hands of Savages and Negroes on the twelfth of September, 1812," and that "all Masons and friends of the deceased in Alexandria,⁴¹ Washington and Georgetown, are invited to attend."

The remains of Captain Williams now rest in the National Cemetery, at Arlington, Virginia.

On October 16th, before the news of Captain Williams' death reached Colonel Wharton, that officer directed Lieutenant Alexander Sevier, who had been on leave from Captain Williams' command, to "immediately proceed by the most direct route to St. Mary's, Ga., and from thence to the Encampment of the Troops of the United States under Colonel Smith, near St. Augustine, East Florida." Lieutenant Sevier was directed that on reaching this camp⁴² to report to Captain Williams or in his absence to report to Colonel Smith "and receive the command of the Marines during the absence of Captain Williams."

Before the arrival of Lieutenant Sevier, the Marines, being without an officer, were mustered on September 30, 1812, by Ensign J. Ryan, 3rd U.S. Inf., and he signed the muster rolls carrying the names of 56 Marines at "Camp New Hope."⁴³ On October 19th, the orders of Lieutenant Sevier

33. Florida Hist. Soc., Qtrly., October, 1930, p. 105.

34. In this letter found in M. C. Arch. Capt. Williams also wrote: "I still enjoy good health myself. Should you see Miss Dulany make my best respects to her & say I will return as soon as the Florida war is over. Remember me to all friends."

35. On Sept. 12, 1812, Lt. Col. Smith wrote Col. Newman that he had "been unable to ascertain the fate of Captains Williams and Fort. They are in all probability both killed. None of the party has come in. I will keep out scouts to discover if they have any intention of continuing on the road. Capt. Woodruff was dispatched as soon as I had information that they were out, but he was a few hours too late. I think if they will venture in the plain they will meet with a warmer reception than their small parties have yet received." (Smith to Newman, Sept. 12, 1812 in Fla. Hist. Soc., Qtrly., Jan., 1931, p. 137); "the escort with the Provision waggons under the command of Capt. Williams was attacked on the 12th Inst by a party of Indians & Negroes from St. Augustine to the number of fifty or sixty. Capt. Williams' command consisted of a Non Commissioned Officer & nineteen privates besides drivers. Capt. Fort of the Milledgeville Volunteers was with the party. The attack was made at the Twelve Mile swamp between eight & 9 o'clock at night & lasted about twenty-five minutes. The result was unfavorable to us, having lost our waggons, had both officers & six privates wounded (Capt. Williams in eight places & I fear mortally) & the Non Commissioned Officer killed. Capts. Williams & Fort acquitted themselves highly to their honor & would have been victorious beyond a doubt if either of them had escaped for a few minutes, as an order had been given to charge & the enemy began to give ground. The Indians fled the second fire yelling like devils. I would have made an effort to take St. Augustine immediately, but my Detachment is so reduced by disease that I cannot furnish the necessary Camp Guards. I expect to remove to a healthy position on the St. John's in a few days & if the Volunteers (gone

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est a brother Officer. The others will I think recover, some of them may be disabled in their limbs." (Smith to Captain Massias in Fla. Hist. Soc., Qtrly., January, 1931, pp. 140-141); Original Letter of Capt. Williams, September 15, 1812, is in M. C. Arch.; Nat. Intell., October 6, 20, 1812; Thompson, "Late War," 43-44, gives a full account of this action, and states "Captain Williams was a brave young man, and noted for his sedulous attention to the duties of his station;" M.C. Gaz., March, 1923 gives full account; Florida Times-Union, March 16, 1930; See also Davis History of Jacksonville; in reading History of Florida by George R. Fairbanks (pp. 253-259) disregard the date given, the account being as follows: While these diplomatic movements were in progress, and just after the appointment of Governor Mitchell, an affair took place which was very disgraceful to the Spanish governor and tended greatly to exasperate the United States military authorities. On the evening of the 12th of May, a detachment of United States troops, mostly made up of invalids, under the command of Lieutenant Williams, of the United States Marine Corps, with a number of wagons, were on their way from Colonel Smith's camp, at Pass Navarro, to Colonel Brigg's camp on the St. John's when they were attacked by a company of negroes, under the command of a fellow by the name of Prince, sent out by the governor of St. Augustine. These negroes, concealing themselves in Twelve-Mile Swamp at a point where the road is lined on both sides by a dense thicket, poured in upon the unsuspecting party a deadly volley. Lieutenant Williams fell, mortally wounded, pierced with six bullets, Captain Fort, of the Milledgeville Volunteers, was wounded, and a non-commissioned officer and six privates were killed. The soldiers immediately charged upon the negroes, who instantly broke and fled. * * * (Fairbanks, Hist. of Florida pp. 253-259)

36. On October 12, 1812, Colonel Wharton wrote Captain Williams, at the "Camp before St. Augustine, E. Florida"; "To me, and to your numerous friends it has been painful in the extreme to hear of the many wounds you have received in an action which was so unequal as to strength, but which by you,

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and your men was so well sustained. The contents of your letter from Davis' Creek, of the 15th Ult. was communicated to the Honourable, the Secretary of the Navy, who has requested his regrets should be made known to you, and his best wishes for a speedy recovery, desiring me to inform you that he would direct Commodore Campbell to send a gun Boat, or other conveyance to carry you to some place, where every attention could be paid to your case."

37. M. C. Size Rolls; Tombstone in Arlington Cemetery bears date of Sept. 29, 1812; Nat. Intell., October 20, 1812; On Sept. 30, 1812 Lt. Col. Smith at "Mr. Hollingsworth's" wrote Gen. Floyd that "poor Captain Williams has just expired and will be interred with the honors of war in the morning." (Florida Hist. Soc. Qtrly., January, 1931. p. 143); "They constructed a block-house on Davis's Creek, for the purpose of provisioning the Army, and it was in maintaining a communication with this place that Captain Williams was killed. * * * Williams was killed fighting bravely." (Testimony of Geo. J. F. Clarke in U.S. vs Ferreira, in Senate Mis. Doc., No. 55, 36th Cong., 1st Sess., p. 20); "In May, 1812, Captain Williams of the Marines kept open a communication between Col. Smith (U.S.A.) at Four Mile Creek, (four miles North of St. Augustine, Florida), and Col. Craig, Commander of the Patriots of Florida at Camp New Hope, (eight miles South of Jacksonville, Florida). Captain Williams, (with Captain Fort, of the Milledgeville Volunteers), a non-commissioned officer, and nineteen privates, while convoying a wagon train from Four Mile Creek to Camp New Hope, were ambushed at Twelve Mile Swamp, (twenty-two miles South of Camp New Hope), by a company of negroes under a free black called Prince. Captain Williams was mortally wounded, having been shot in eight places." (Territory of Florida, by John Lee Williams, 1837.)

38. T. Frederick Davis in Florida Hist. Soc. Qtrly., January, 1931, p. 146; See also Smith to Bourke, Oct. 25, 1812 in Florida Hist. Soc. Qtrly., April, 1931, p. 261.

39. On September 30, 1812, in Florida Hist. Soc. Qtrly., January, 1931, p. 143. *Smith wrote Wharton on Sept. 30 and Mitchell on Oct. 7 that Williams died on Sept. 30. (Fla. Hist. Soc. Arch.)*
40. Lieutenant Bush on Constitution was the first; the first Marine officer to die after the close of the Revolution was Captain George Manning who died on August 31, 1798; on October 19, 1812, Colonel Wharton ordered crepe worn for one month. (Order Book).
41. Captain Williams' remains were interred at St. Mary's and an appropriate stone placed over the grave by his brother officers of the Marine Corps. In 1904 the officers of his Corps caused the remains to be brought to Washington where they arrived on July 4, and were later re-interred at Arlington with appropriate ceremonies. The original stone was brought north and lies over the grave in Arlington. (A. & N. Reg., July 9, 1904, 3-4); About the year 1904 Brigadier-General Charles L. McCawley, while on an inspection trip to Porto Rico and Cuba, learned of the location of the grave of Captain Williams, in an abandoned cemetery at St. Mary's, Ga. Brigadier-General McCawley brought this information to the attention of the Commandant. Proper permission was obtained to remove the remains (just about a cigar-box full) and they and the original grave stone were replaced in Arlington National Cemetery; The Records of the Office of the Arlington National Cemetery contain the information: "Transferred from St. Mary's Ga., August 15, 1904, by the officers of the Marine Corps"; The tombstone of Captain Williams in Arlington Cemetery contains the following: "Here lie the Remains of John Williams Esqr late a Captain in the Corps of U. S. Marines. Was born in Stafford County, Virginia, on the 24th August 1765 and died on the 29th September, 1812 at 'Camp New Hope' in East Florida. On the 11th September 1812, Captain Williams on his march with a command of 20 men to Davis' Creek Block House in East Florida, was attacked towards evening by upwards of 50 Indians and Negroes, who lay concealed in the woods. He instantly gave battle, gallantly supported by his men, who, inspired by his animating example, fought 'as long as they had a cartridge left.' At length bleeding under eight galling wounds and unable to stand, he was carried off the battle ground whilst his heroic little band, pressed by superior numbers,

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was forced to retreat. Eminently characterized by cool intrepidity, Captain Williams evinced during this short but severe contest those military requisites which qualify the officer for command, and if his sphere of action was too limited to attract the admiration of the world it was sufficiently expanded to crown him with the approbation of his country and to afford to his Brethern in arms an example as highly useful as his exit has sealed with honor the life of a Patriot Soldier. The Body of the deceased was removed to this spot over which his Brother officers of the Marine Corps have caused this Pile to be erected in testimony of his worth and of their mournful admiration of his gallant end." John Williams entered the Marine Corps in 1805, Secretary of the Navy Robert Smith forwarding him his commission on August 20th to "Centreville, Va." (Navy Let. Bk., Mar. Off., I, 14); See Letters of Major McClellan to Joseph R. Dunn of Jacksonville, Fla., dated September 8, 1930, Oct. 6, 1930 (File 2185-65, U.S.M.C.) for information regarding marker where Captain Williams was killed, the spot being owned by Mr. Dunn. "Orders. In testimony of respect to the Memory of the late Capt. John Williams, who died at East Florida the 29th from wounds received on the 11th Ult. in an unequal, but gallantly conducted contest against a party of Indians & Negroes. It is ordered that Crape be worn by the Officers of the Corps on the left Arm & Hilt of the Sword for one Month. Officers at distant Commands will execute this order, as to time, from the receipt of it." (Order of Lt-Col. Wharton on October 19, 1812)

42. Wharton to Sevier, M.C. Archives; See Sec. Navy Paul Hamilton to Wharton, October 13, 1812, ordering that officers be sent to succeed Williams. (Navy Let. Bk., Mar. Off., I, 163); Nat. Intell., October 20, 1812.

43. Marine Corps Muster Rolls.

44. M. C. Archives.