

Just who was “OUR” Captain Mellon?

By: Christine Kinlaw Best

While researching the Second Seminole War and Fort Mellon, I became intrigued with trying to learn more about the life of Captain Charles Mellon. Camp Monroe was established in December of 1836, where Mellonville Avenue dead-ends at Lake Monroe, in present-day Sanford. With Colonel A.C.W. Fanning in command, the camp’s purpose was to be the gateway to the interior of Florida and act as a staging area for the unloading of troops and supplies as the soldiers pushed further south. The camp was set up originally with approximately 300 troops under Colonel Fanning’s command. These forces consisted of three companies of Artillery, four companies of Dragoons under Lt. Colonel Harney, a Battalion of South Carolina Volunteers and thirty friendly Creek Indians under the leadership of Chief Paddy Carr.

Capt. Charles Mellon was in command of the Second Regiment of Artillery at Camp Monroe. In the early morning hours of February 8th, 1837, the Seminoles attacked Camp Monroe. The battle continued for more than three hours. Just minutes after the battle started, Capt. Mellon received a musket ball in his chest and died instantly. There were many troops that were injured, but Capt. Mellon was the only casualty. The next day, Col. Fanning, who had served in the Army with Capt. Mellon since the War of 1812, issued a Proclamation, renaming the camp to “Fort Mellon”. Capt. Mellon left behind a widow, Eliza A. Mellon, with four young children and another child on the way. Eliza gave birth to their fifth child, about a month after Capt. Mellon’s death. Eliza was left with five young children, to raise on a widow’s pension of twenty to twenty-five dollars a month. One of their children was a permanent invalid. They had two boys and three girls. The oldest son’s name was Charles William Mellon. He was just 10 years old when his father was killed at Camp Monroe.

There has been a “Charles Mellon” in every generation since our brave Capt. Mellon lost his life at Camp Monroe. Several months ago, Lois McKay, the fiancée of Charles (Chuck) Mellon, (the 6th), sent an email to Alicia Clarke, here at the Museum. That email coincided perfectly with my research on Fort Mellon! After spending so much time researching Fort Mellon and the life of Capt. Mellon, being able to communicate with direct descendants of Capt. Mellon was too much to ask! I was able to fill in some of the gaps in Capt. Mellon’s fascinating life. I was also “introduced” by email, to Chuck Mellon’s sister, Pat Mellon Hart, another direct descendant of Capt. Mellon. Pat Mellon Hart visited Sanford on January 2, 2003. This was the first visit of a direct descendant of Capt. Mellon in the 165 years, since his death.

Capt. Mellon’s death left a legacy of the fort being named in his honor, along with the town of Mellonville that evolved from the settlers moving into the area of the fort. Even today, we have Mellonville Avenue and our lakefront park, Fort Mellon Park, that carry on his name.

Capt. Charles Mellon was originally from Pennsylvania. There is a copy of his acceptance letter for an appointment as an officer in the Army, First Artillery, on file in the National Archives. Capt. Mellon wrote this letter in 1814, to the Secretary of War, accepting an appointment as a 3rd Lieutenant. He immediately entered action in the War of 1812, and was sent to Michigan, to fight against the British. By 1816, Capt. Mellon

was sent to Baltimore, Maryland and is found in the 1816 City Directory there, as a 2nd Lieutenant, along with his friend, Colonel A.C.W. Fanning. He was later stationed again, at Fort Gratiot, MI and this is where he met his future wife, Eliza A. Scott. Eliza was from Detroit. They were married in Michigan. Their oldest daughter, Mary Ann Mellon, was born in Michigan in 1825. Capt. Mellon and Eliza's son, Charles William Mellon, was born in Baltimore, MD, in 1827, while Capt. Mellon was working in Ordinance. By 1831, they were stationed in Pennsylvania, where their third child, Matilda was born. In 1833, their fourth child, Henry, was born at Fort Monroe, Virginia. This is where the family remained, while Capt. Mellon was sent to Florida to engage in the Second Seminole War, in early 1835. Being in the military today, requires the family to be uprooted and moved from place to place. This also happened in the early 1800's, with all five of the Mellon children born in different states.

After being sent to Florida in early 1835, Capt. Mellon was present at the Battle of the Withlacoochee, which followed just three days after the Dade Massacre. At that time, Mellon was a 1st Lieutenant and due to his bravery and valor, at the Battle of the Withlacoochee, he was promoted to a Captain's rank and put in charge of the Second Regiment of Artillery. He remained in command of this regiment, until his death here at Camp Monroe.

A letter in the possession of the Mellon family tells some of the story of the life of Capt. Mellon's family and his observations of the war in Florida in 1836. This letter, dated February 1836, is from Capt. Mellon, to his "Dear E." (Eliza). It was written from the Fort King area (Ocala), during the Seminole War. Eliza was still living at Fort Monroe, Virginia, with their four children. Even in those times, it seems that Capt. Mellon and Eliza, led a life of a typical "military family", like we see today. Capt. Mellon received a short furlough, from June 1836 to December 1836, to visit Eliza and the children in Virginia. During this time, it is now known that Eliza became pregnant with their fifth child. Capt. Mellon returned to Florida in December of 1836 and was immediately sent on an expedition down the St. Johns River to locate the next camp that would become Camp Monroe on the shores of Lake Monroe. Just three months after establishing Camp Monroe, the Seminoles led by King Philip and his son, Coacoochee, attacked the camp. The battle lasted for three hours. The only casualty was Capt. Charles Mellon. Col. Fanning issued a proclamation at the burial of Capt. Mellon, renaming the camp to Fort Mellon. Just twenty days after Capt. Mellon's death, on February 28th, 1837, Major-General A. Macomb wrote to the "President of the United States" with a list of officers who "highly distinguished themselves in the several affairs in which they were engaged in the course of the war with the Creek and Seminole Indians and for uniformly meritorious services and good conduct during these campaigns. These officers are deemed to be entitled to the special consideration of the President for their gallantry and good conduct, and are respectfully recommended as deserving of being brevetted". 1 Captain Mellon's name was included on this list. General Macomb wrote: "Captain Charles Mellon, 2nd Regiment of Artillery, to be 'Major by brevet', for gallantry and good conduct in the affair of the Withlacoochee and uniform gallantry during the Florida campaigns, to this date from 31st December 1835". On March 2, 1837, this recommendation to the President of the United States was forwarded to Congress for approval. The House of Representatives and the Senate approved it. Andrew Jackson then forwarded the recommendation to B.F. Butler, Secretary of War, and it was finalized. 2

Just a few months after the death of Capt. Mellon, Eliza delivered their fifth child, a daughter named Eliza in the spring of 1837. Eliza then took the five children to Capt. Mellon's home state of Pennsylvania. She lived there for the next twelve years, until 1850 when she returned to her home state of Michigan. Capt. Mellon's sixth great grandson, Charles "Chuck" Mellon is now living in California, where he has recently purchased a sailboat. After searching for a really great name, to give his new boat, he came across a really "different" idea....."Mellonville". Can you imagine the questions they must get, in Alamos Bay, California, as to the name of "Mellonville" on a sailboat? Now, once again, there is a "Captain Mellon" in the family.....Captain Mellon of the Mellonville.

1 Executive Journal – House of
Representatives, March 2, 1837.
Library of Congress.

2 Ibid