

## MILITARY RECONSTRUCTION IN FLORIDA

by MERLIN G. COX

THE SOVEREIGN POWER in Florida from March 15, 1867, to July 4, 1868, was the military arm of the United States government. Many interpreters have viewed military reconstruction as an illustration of man's inhumanity to man; it was, they say, a revenge mechanism to punish the vanquished for losing the war. Most members of democratic societies are so vehement in their condemnation of military rule that they admit no shades of difference in assessing the achievements of armies of occupation. If this blanket indictment were valid, Hitler's armies of occupation in Western Europe and American occupation armies in Japan were comparable in their roles as avengers and destroyers. Despite this popular view, historians of the Civil War and Reconstruction era have glimpsed shades of grey in military as well as civilian regimes. Revisionist interpretations of reconstruction have observed great variations in the conduct and exercise of federal military authority in the five districts set up in 1867.

The military government of Florida, a part of the third district, was not, as was once presumed, commanded by fanatics. During the period of fifteen months, properly designated as military reconstruction, power was generally exercised with reason and with proper regard for law and the rights of people. In moments of sober reflection even some contemporary Southerners admitted that Generals John Pope and George C. Meade, commanders of the third military district, and Colonel John T. Sprague, commander of the occupation forces in Florida, could have been far more severe. Even the *St. Augustine Recorder*, a conservative newspaper, admitted that "we in Florida have been fortunate in military appointments, and if we live under a military despotism, we have scarcely felt it's iron heel."<sup>1</sup> Traditional interpretations should be revised to indicate that the military in Florida played a positive role in protecting individual and property rights, in securing the acceptance of the moderate constitution of 1868,

1. *Tallahassee Sentinel*, September 3, 1867, quoting *St. Augustine Recorder*.

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and in early restoration of Florida to her rightful place in the Union. There is convincing evidence that the intervention of federal military authorities ousted the Radical faction from control of the constitutional convention of 1868, and thereby defeated a major conspiracy to overthrow the railroads of the state, wipe out their charters and turn them over to some villains" from outside Florida.<sup>2</sup>

Military reconstruction came to Florida and the South as a consequence of a quarrel between President Andrew Johnson and Congress over reconstruction policies. The congressional majority argued that Johnson's plan for readmission of the southern states with constitutions that denied civil rights and ballots to Negroes would restore political and economic supremacy to the same minority of plantation aristocrats who had led the southern states out of the Union. Congress ordered military rule in the South so as to secure changes in state laws, constitutions, and electorates necessary to protect the rights and privileges of the freedmen. Some congressmen hoped to produce a social revolution in the South through which underprivileged whites and Negroes could gain social and economic opportunities formerly enjoyed by only the large slave owners.

On March 2, 1867, Congress passed the first "military bill" over Johnson's veto. Provisions of this act divided the South into five military districts, with Florida, Alabama, and Georgia comprising the third district. Under military law, the southern states were to write new constitutions, grant universal suffrage to all males over twenty-one years of age, and ratify the fourteenth amendment. After complying with these requirements, the states could then resume their former roles in the Union. These reconstruction acts would seem to give unlimited power to any military commander who wanted to exercise such power. Indeed, it is not surprising that some military commanders subsequently exercised more authority than was needed to carry out the intentions of Congress. It was Florida's good fortune that its military commanders exercised considerable restraint.

General U. S. Grant appointed John Pope commander of the third military district, and President Johnson approved the ap-

2. Harrison Reed to David Levy Yulee, February 16, 1868, David Levy Yulee Papers, Box 8, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, Gainesville, Florida. Hereinafter cited as Yulee Papers.

pointment on March 2, 1867.<sup>3</sup> General Pope understood civil law; his father, Judge Nathaniel Pope, had presided over the first territorial government in Illinois, had served as a representative in Congress, had won the respect of contemporaries for long and honorable service in the federal judiciary, and had managed admission of Illinois to the Union.<sup>4</sup> From his Jeffersonian father, the future Civil War general learned that in a democracy, military law must be subordinated to civil law whenever possible. Judge Pope's friend, Abraham Lincoln, had personally intervened to obtain an army commission for the son, John Pope. After victories and defeats in the Civil War, Pope administered the reconstruction of Missouri and supervised the return of the government to civil authority.<sup>5</sup> One of Lincoln's last official acts had been to commend Pope for his work in Missouri and to request that he inspect the military government in Arkansas and make recommendations. Acting under Lincoln's orders, Pope toured Arkansas where he found military commanders postponing restoration to civil authority. Finding civil government in the hands of able and loyal men, Pope recommended that Arkansas be readmitted to the Union and that the military be confined to military business; he thought several of the provost marshals lacked understanding of the subordinate role of the military in government.<sup>6</sup> Pope had already prepared his report for President Lincoln when he received news "of the awful calamity which had befallen the nation," the assassination of his friend and commander-in-chief.<sup>7</sup> Andrew Johnson approved Pope's proposals, but congressional reconstruction interrupted the President's plans for all the southern states. In presuming, however, that Pope, as commander of the third military district, would follow the Johnsonian reconstruction program, subsequent to congressional limitation of presidential power, the President completely misjudged the general. In his assumption that Pope would not exceed his authority as prescribed by law, Johnson was proved wrong.

3. *Senate Executive Documents*, 40th Cong., 1st Sess., Serial No. 1308, No. 14 (Washington, 1868), 5. Hereinafter cited as *Senate Document 14*.

4. Paul M. Angle, "Nathaniel Pope," *Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society*, No. 43 (Springfield, 1933), 111.

5. *War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, 1880-1901), Series I, Vol. XLVIII, pt. 1, 1243.

6. *Ibid.*, pt. 2, 125-32.

7. *Ibid.*

When advised of his selection as commander of the third military district, Pope appointed Colonel John Sprague of the Seventh United States Infantry to administer Florida. Sprague had two major qualifications: he had been a loyal subordinate and friend to Pope, and he had served in Florida during the Second Seminole War. He had written about his experiences in Florida, and he was acquainted with Floridians and some of their problems.<sup>8</sup> Sprague set up his headquarters in Tallahassee.

On April 1, 1867, Pope arrived in Montgomery, Alabama, to assume command of the third district. Southern newspapers, paying attention to his dress uniform, his long flowing beard, and his princely retinue, greeted this uninvited overlord from the North as "His Royal Highness, King John."<sup>9</sup> Acting under authority vested in him by Congress, Pope issued General Order No. 4 in which he asked the civil officers of Georgia, Alabama, and Florida to retain their posts. He preferred that civil government function whenever it conformed to the intentions of Congress. "It is clearly understood that the civil officers thus retained in office shall confine themselves to performance of their official duties and whilst holding these offices they shall not use any influence to deter or dissuade the people from taking active part in reconstructing their state governments."<sup>10</sup>

The general believed in civil government, but the military was now responsible for carrying out the directives of a higher civil authority vested in Congress. Elections were forbidden until the commanding general could broaden the electorate to conform to the congressional plan; Pope was to fill vacancies in civil offices. Post commanders were under orders to report any failure of civilian officials to render equal justice to all people. The new commander's first complete report singled out Florida for a compliment, noting that "in Florida everything is quiet."<sup>11</sup>

Very seldom did Pope remove civil officials in Florida; he even rejected pressure from radical forces to oust local officeholders. He vetoed the plans of the Republican Club of Jacksonville to

8. John T. Sprague, *The Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of the Florida War* (New York, 1848). See also facsimile edition with introduction by John K. Mahon (Gainesville, 1964).

9. *Tallahassee Sentinel*, April 15, 1867.

10. *Ibid.*, April 5, 1867.

11. General Order No. 4, 3rd military district, April 4, 1867, *Senate Document 14*, 95, 208-09.

replace Democratic Governor David Shelby Walker, who had been elected without opposition in 1865.<sup>12</sup> The governor, a whig and former slaveowner, leaned toward President Johnson's moderate reconstruction policy. The *New York Times*, impatient with Pope's tolerance of ex-slaveowners, thought that northern holders of Georgia and Florida state bonds had organized a lobby to influence Pope in the matter.<sup>13</sup>

Vacancies in Florida's county and state offices did occur, however, from other causes, and the law required the third district commander to fill them. He appointed without opposition a mayor, council, and marshal for Gainesville in July 1867, and the town reportedly was "tranquil and orderly."<sup>14</sup> Pope's military appointments did not always escape criticism, however. In 1867 the judge in the middle circuit of Florida died. Contending that no native Florida judge could qualify under the reconstruction act, Pope appointed a highly qualified member of the Pennsylvania bar. The Florida press objected not only because he had been a resident of the state for only four months and was not a member of the Florida bar, but also because his appointment was contrary to Florida custom.<sup>15</sup> There was one well-publicized exception to the rule that Pope's appointees all performed well. When R. H. Summerville, registrar of public lands for Florida, mysteriously disappeared, the conservative press ran inquiries about the "lost, strayed, or kidnapped" official, but few others seemed concerned whether he was found or not. Even the people of Montgomery, Alabama, his home town, expressed surprise, but did not seem very worried over the disappearance of their distinguished fellow townsman.<sup>16</sup> To answer charges of prejudice against native Union men, Pope dispatched Lieutenant George M. Larson to study the local situation and to recommend loyal residents for vacancies to civil offices. A Florida paper admitted that Pope appointees were generally the best citizens available.<sup>17</sup>

12. William Watson Davis, *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida* (New York, 1913), 464. See also facsimile edition with introduction by Allen Nevins (Gainesville, 1964).

13. *Tallahassee Sentinel*, January 2, 1868.

14. Charles Halsey Hildreth, "History of Gainesville, Florida" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Florida, 1954), 63-75.

15. *Tallahassee Sentinel*, September 2, 1867.

16. *Ibid.*, December 19, 1867.

17. *Ibid.*, July 29, 1867.

When the changes required by congressional reconstruction granted equal rights to Negroes, as yet unaccustomed to liberty under law, there were conflicts between defenders of the old order and the new. In contrast to policies of military commanders in other districts who sometimes incited freedmen to riot and often gave them license to punish their former masters, Pope and Colonel Sprague insisted that law and order must prevail throughout the district. Pope warned police and sheriffs that failure to keep order would result in their removal.<sup>18</sup>

The Florida press found isolated evidences of disorder during the period of military reconstruction. In September 1867 a Negro allegedly raped a white woman in Lake City, and armed Negroes set upon a school house filled with women and children in Jefferson County. The women were frightened and some thefts were reported, but no death or serious injury resulted. Civil authorities admitted they were unable to apprehend the guilty persons and bring them to trial.<sup>19</sup> However, when there were problems of law enforcement, officials often called for and welcomed the support of the federal military. Civil officers asked for military assistance when they received reports that armed Negroes were attending night meetings in central Florida. Pope immediately forbade such meetings in Leon, Jackson, Calhoun, Liberty, Franklin, Jefferson, Madison, and Taylor counties. He also ordered all barrooms in the district to close for the period of July 3-6, 1867.<sup>20</sup>

The federal military intervened when Unionist sheriffs attempted to punish former Confederate leaders and their families. On September 18, 1867, a mob attacked the home of Mrs. David Levy Yulee at Fernandina. The sheriff, a popularity seeker wanted to restore the peace by ousting Mrs. Yulee from her home. She turned to Colonel A. H. Cole, local military commander at Fort Clinch, for help, and he responded promptly to defend her legal and property rights and advised Colonel Sprague of his action. He informed Mrs. Yulee: "I have been compelled to use military interference to preserve the peace. I have no hesitation in saying you shall at all times be protected from insult. As many of the parties as were engaged in the disturbances as I can learn

18. *Ibid.*, June 6, 1867.

19. *Ibid.*, September 16, 1867.

20. Tallahassee *Semi-Weekly Floridian*, June 28, 1867.

the names of, I have ordered to be arrested. Tomorrow I will do myself the honor of calling upon you."<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, these instances of military intervention were the exceptions and not the rule. Colonel Sprague's orders for Florida were quite clear. Addressing himself to Florida post commanders on August 16, Sprague announced that "the statutes of the State, made and provided for the execution of the law, must be complied with, and before any step may be taken by the Federal military authorities all other means must be exhausted. If the sheriff is unable to execute the law, the governor of the state should be applied to, when he will adopt such means as will ensure the execution of the laws of the state."<sup>22</sup>

Military commanders reprimanded their officers for curbing unfriendly newspapers. General Pope's order of June 17, 1867, forbade the military from interfering with the press under any pretext. When his subordinates, Generals Wager Swayne and Isaac Shepard, ordered several opposition newspapers to cease publication, Pope reversed their ruling.<sup>23</sup> However, Pope's interpretation of freedom of the press did not preclude encouragement for papers that were friendly to congressional policies of reconstruction. State advertising went to those journals which supported Congress's plan for conventions to reorganize state laws and frame new constitutions.<sup>24</sup> The conservative press freely assailed this favoritism. A Tallahassee paper reported that a Macon, Georgia paper had offered free advertising to civil officers in conflict with the military authority.<sup>25</sup>

The most significant achievement of military reconstruction in Florida was the registration of voters under the reconstruction acts. By order of April 8, 1867, the work began. Pope grouped counties into registration districts or "divisions," with a registration board of three persons appointed by the general on the advice of the state military commanders in each "division." Whenever possible, civilians received these appointments. In each state, supervisors of registration were to visit the various districts, inspect registration procedures, and ascertain that every man entitled to

21. Mrs. David L. Yulee to A. H. Cole, September 18, 1867; Cole to Mrs. Yulee, September 18, 1867, Yulee Papers.

22. Sprague to Cole, August 16, 1867, Yulee Papers.

23. Tallahassee *Sentinel*, June 17, 1867.

24. *Ibid.*, August 19, 1867.

25. *Ibid.*, quoting Macon (Georgia) *Telegraph*.

vote had received information about his political rights.<sup>26</sup> On June 1, 1867, Pope issued general instructions for registration of voters: all male citizens of the United States, twenty-one years old and upwards, irrespective of color or previous condition, who would subscribe to the required oath were eligible to register and vote. The registrars posted hand-bills in post offices, taverns, stores and at cross roads, advising prospective voters when to expect the registration boards in each precinct. Each person taking the prescribed oath received a signed and numbered registration certificate.<sup>27</sup> Special instructions, issued by Pope on June 17, advised the committees to refuse registration to any present or former federal, state, or city official who had ever given aid or comfort to an enemy of the United States. One purpose of the reconstruction acts was to prevent former Confederate officials from leading the new southern governments.<sup>28</sup> Registration in Florida was from July 15 through September 20, 1867, and was supervised by Colonel Ossian B. Hart, a native Floridian with Union sentiments.<sup>29</sup> In preference to a stipulated salary, each registrar received so much per head for the voters he registered. The object of graduating the registrars' pay was to provide an incentive to encourage the registration of the freedmen and "to make sure that the entire freedmen's vote will be brought out."<sup>30</sup> Assisting the boards in educating Negroes about their right to vote was the Freedmen's Bureau. For example, Lieutenant W. G. Purman, an agent of the bureau, visited three Florida counties and advised the military regarding registration progress. On June 16, 1867, O. H. Howard, the agent at Albany, Georgia, published a circular advising the freedmen of the third military district about their new political status.<sup>31</sup>

Conservatives in Florida charged that Pope was gerrymandering the state to make effective use of Negro majorities. If the general had respected traditional equal representation of counties, twenty-nine of the thirty-nine counties might possibly have elected

26. *Senate Document 14*, 107-10.

27. *Ibid.*, 119-20.

28. *House Executive Documents*, 40th Cong., 2nd Sess., Serial 1346 No. 342 (Washington, 1868), 106-07.

29. *Ibid.*, 122.

30. *House Executive Documents*, 40th Cong., 1st Sess., Serial 1311 No. 20 (Washington, 1867), 40.

31. George R. Bentley, *A History of the Freedmen's Bureau* (Philadelphia 1955), 185.

Conservative white delegates to the 1868 constitutional convention.<sup>32</sup> Pope answered these charges by pointing out that some counties had twenty times the population of others, making a change necessary. His plan was to replace the old principle of equal representation by county with a system in which each delegate would represent 600 registered voters. Broward County had only eight voters, but the Conservatives insisted that it have at least one convention delegate. Research in Florida reconstruction would indicate the Conservative charge of gerrymandering was for the purpose of delaying the convention, and that the evidence did not substantiate this charge. Each new election district was carved from contiguous counties with the areas of greatest population density receiving the largest portion of delegates.<sup>33</sup> If the Conservatives had used the same energies to incorporate Pope's plan into the Florida constitution that they exerted in sending complaints to President Johnson, the state might have been able to avert some of the serious twentieth century conflicts over the reapportionment. Conservatives, who were intractable in their opposition to all plans for carrying out the congressional reconstruction program, urged eligible white voters to register but to refrain from voting on the convention issue. The reconstruction acts stipulated that a majority of registered voters had to approve the convention.

Carpetbaggers, probably more interested in exploiting both whites and Negroes than in orderly restoration of Florida to the Union, became candidates for seats in the constitutional convention. Daniel Richards, from Illinois, and William Saunders, a Negro from Indiana, ran for seats as convention delegates without meeting legal residence requirements. Critics on the political scene complained that one convention candidate, Liberty Billings, invoked the Almighty's blessings on the campaign for ballots for freedmen, went about the state kissing white and black babies indiscriminately, and did his best to stir up strife between the races.<sup>34</sup>

32. *St. Augustine Examiner*, October 29, 1867; *Tallahassee Sentinel*, October 3, 1867.

33. Philip D. Ackerman, Jr., "Florida Reconstruction from Walker through Reed, 1865-1873" (unpublished Master's thesis, University of Florida, 1948), 103-04.

34. *Tallahassee Weekly Floridian*, February 18, 1868; Davis, *Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida*, 470, 489-90. Richards and Saunders were reputed to be representatives of the Republican National Committee sent to Florida to lead the local organization of the party.

Florida became the first state in the third military district to approve Pope's plan for a convention and to draft a state constitution under the reconstruction acts. Florida elections, held on November 14, 15, and 16, 1867, resulted in the selection of eighteen Negroes, thirteen Radical Republicans, thirty-one moderate Republicans, and two Conservatives. The surprising factor was the considerable number of moderate native Unionists wanting to comply with congressional requirements and to restore Florida to her place in the Union at the earliest possible date. General Pope issued General Order No. 110 declaring that the voters had approved the congressional plan for a convention to meet in Tallahassee on January 20, 1868.<sup>35</sup>

The Conservatives, having failed in their attempt to delay the convention, angrily protested the election results to President Johnson. Confident that the President would obstruct the congressional plan with any legal means available, they complained that crowds of Negroes from Alabama had voted in West Florida counties and asked that the election results be nullified. Johnson replied that under the reconstruction acts he lacked this power and that it rested with the military authorities.<sup>36</sup> However, Johnson could and did remove Pope because he was not carrying out his reconstruction program. One of Johnson's weapons in his battle with Congress was the power to remove military commanders, but he had little voice in the choice of a successor. Pope's successor, General George Meade, remembered as the Union commander at Gettysburg, upheld the contention that the election results were valid. Convinced that reports of election frauds were exaggerated, he informed General Grant that "we have little extant evidence of fraud." In Meade's opinion, the Conservative charges served only to delay the convention.<sup>37</sup> When the military dismissed Conservative objections, two factions remained to battle for convention control. The radical Republicans sought to go beyond the letter of reconstruction laws and to reconstruct the class structure of the state before it was readmitted to the Union. Moderate

Richards had been in Florida shortly after the war as a federal treasury agent. Billings was an officer of a Negro regiment that had been stationed in Florida, and after the war he settled in Fernandina.

35. *Tallahassee Sentinel*, December 28, 1867.

36. *Report of the Secretary of War, 1868-69* (Washington, 1869), I, 74.

37. *Ibid.*, 86.

Republicans, on the other hand, wanted to carry out the legal requirements of congressional reconstruction and to return Florida to the Union at the earliest possible date. Both factions looked to the military commanders for support.

Undeterred by the strength of the moderates, the radicals plotted to gain complete control of the Florida convention by electing the officers and committee chairmen from their own ranks. Several days prior to the January 20, 1868, meeting date, the radical delegates began to arrive in Tallahassee. Liberty Billings, Daniel Richards, and William Saunders were among the early arrivals. These delegates included the most radical of the Republicans of Florida, and their followers were mostly Negroes and carpetbaggers. They rented a boarding-house and procured a team of mules. "As the Negro delegates arrived in Tallahassee they were met at the railway station, put into this carry-all, and hauled to the hospitable free boarding-house of the schemers."<sup>38</sup> The radicals, with twenty-eight delegates present, held a preliminary caucus on Saturday, January 18. At least three of those attending knew that moderate control of the convention would challenge their right to sit in the convention. In this caucus the radicals agreed to vote as a body, and Daniel Richards was selected as their candidate for president. On January 20, when the convention was called to order, only twenty-nine of the forty-six elected delegates were present; inclement weather had delayed arrival of the others. The moderates requested a delay, but the radical majority moved hurriedly to organize the convention with their faction in command. Richards was elected president according to plan, and he appointed seventeen committees, making sure that either Saunders or Billings would serve on each one. Both men were named to the important committee on privileges and elections, which would pass on election challenges. Moderates charged that all three members of this committee were ineligible to their seats in the convention.<sup>39</sup>

By the end of the first week, reconciliation between the two convention factions appeared very unlikely. Lobbyists came on the floor to demonstrate for the radical element. The acknowledged leader of the opposition moderate faction was Harrison Reed, federal postoffice agent for Florida and later governor of the state

38. Davis, *Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida*, 500.

39. *Tallahassee Weekly Floridian*, January 21, 1868.

(1869-1873), and the radicals attempted to discredit him with the label of "Johnson's agent."<sup>40</sup> By the close of January the convention was in a constant state of turmoil. "The Hall is more like a gladiatorial arena than a sober convention of delegates to form a constitution," wrote Solon Robinson, correspondent for the *New York Tribune*.<sup>41</sup> The moderates warned that no constitution would be written and no business would be transacted until the convention was properly reorganized, and they caucused day and night in their efforts to oust the radical leadership.

The climate outside the convention hall was almost as stormy as the debates on the inside. It was one of those rare winters when ice and frozen mud made travel on the unpaved streets quite hazardous; flowers and vegetation died from exposure to freezing winds. The many visitors to Tallahassee sought refuge in the warm interiors of hotel corridors and in the parlors of boarding houses. Among these visitors were lobbyists from the North who provided money, liquor, and food for the radical delegates. Toddlers circulated as freely as gossip among the men seated before open fire-places. Apparently, the wenches, decked in finery, circulated almost as freely.<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile, inside the convention hall, the conflict became climactic when some delegates counted as moderates were reported to have gone over to the radicals. The moderate opposition lost hope of control when N. C. Dennett of Jacksonville was called home by a telegram saying that his wife was dying. The radicals took advantage of Dennett's absence to postpone any decision on the dubious credentials of radical delegates.<sup>43</sup> In answer to the radical challenge, the moderate opposition withdrew to Monticello, some thirty miles from Tallahassee, organized a second constitutional convention, drew up their own constitution, and informed the military that the Tallahassee convention was now a rump. Actually, neither body constituted a majority of the delegates elected. Twenty-one moderates participated at Monticello, twenty-two radicals remained at Tallahassee, and three

40. Davis, *Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida*, 503-04.

41. *New York Tribune*, February 8, 1868.

42. Davis, *Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida*, 506.

43. *Ibid.*, 507; *New York Tribune*, February 20, 1868. Dennett had been elected in opposition to what was known as the Hart or moderate Republican ticket in East Florida. In the convention, however, he identified himself with the white or moderate Republicans.

delegates were boycotting both conventions. Forty-six delegates had been elected to the convention. The radical Richards-Saunders-Billings faction petitioned the federal military "to seize fourteen of the leading seceders and bring them back by force if necessary to the state house." The military refused to act, however, thereby permitting the moderates to frame a constitution.<sup>44</sup>

The "seceders" secretly returned in a body from Monticello to Tallahassee on the evening of February 10. They rushed into the convention hall about midnight and elected their own members to places of leadership. To assure a quorum they induced the military to arrest two members of the other faction, drag them from their beds, and bring them to the hall. When the radicals returned, pandemonium reigned inside and outside the hall. General Meade, informed of new civil strife in Tallahassee, rushed from Atlanta to the Florida capitol where he found the radicals holding indignation meetings in the public square. General Grant was inclined to favor the radical faction, but Meade waited upon all the facts. On February 18, Meade ordered Colonel Sprague to act as temporary chairman to ward off an attempt by the radicals to usurp power and to preside over the new election of officers. In this reorganization of the convention, the moderates were victorious and Sprague accepted this decision. Once the convention had legally elected its leadership, Sprague voluntarily relinquished the chairmanship to a moderate, Horatio Jenkins, Jr.<sup>45</sup> The role of the federal military in providing aid and protection for the moderates, while they completed the task of constitution making, was a decisive one.<sup>46</sup> General Meade, according to one historian, was primarily concerned with peace and order and was impressed by the good relations between the moderates and the local leaders.<sup>47</sup>

The Florida convention completed its work by approving the moderate constitution framed at Monticello. Actually, the Florida constitution of 1868 was a step forward in the direction of democracy. It provided for universal manhood suffrage and established intermediate and circuit courts in the state. There was

44. *Tallahassee Weekly Floridian*, February 11, 1868.

45. Davis, *Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida*, 513-14.

46. *House Miscellaneous Documents*, 40th Cong., 2nd Sess., No. 114 (Washington, 1868), 2, 7; No. 109, 2, 3, 4.

47. Jerrell H. Shofner, "Political Reconstruction in Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XLV (October 1966), 152.

administrative integration with most of the state offices to be filled by the governor; provision for free public education as a responsibility of the state and internal improvements; and Indian representation was recognized for the first time in Florida's history. It included all salient demands of the congressional plan of reconstruction. Blacks and whites were granted suffrage on equal terms with no class being proscribed politically or economically for previous condition or "rebellion." No county could have more than four representatives in the assembly; this limitation would prevent the few populous Negro counties from completely dominating the government until Negroes could be educated for such responsibility. Moderate Republicans, with the support of the military, planned deliberately to keep the balance of power in the hands of whites. The radicals from the "rump convention" appeared before General Meade to protest the entire constitution and especially the apportionment section, but Meade summarily dismissed the protest.<sup>48</sup> The completed constitution was subsequently approved, both by the voters of Florida and by Congress. On June 29, General Meade notified Colonel Sprague to prepare to relinquish the administration of affairs to the civil authorities. On July 2, Governor-elect Harrison Reed informed Sprague that all conditions for readmission of Florida to the Union had been complied with. Sprague then issued a proclamation that civil government would be resumed and Florida would be restored to her place in the Union on July 4, 1868.

The defeated radicals in the Florida convention apparently lost more than political office. There is convincing evidence that bribes and money were available from parties in New York. These conspirators had formed a ring to gain possession of the state's railroads.<sup>49</sup> David Yulee had worked closely with Harrison Reed to save the moderate constitution. When victory for the moderates seemed assured, Reed reassured Yulee that "there is a God in Israel and he will not abandon us to the tender mercies of vagabond adventurers." Reed was able to confirm Yulee's suspicions that "the conspirators had a scheme to overthrow the railroads of the state, wipe out their charters and turn them over to some villains in New York." He was thankful to the moderates and

48. *House Miscellaneous Documents*, 40th Cong., 2nd Sess., No. 114, 9.  
49. *Ibid.*, 7.

the military for their cooperation in preserving law, order, and private property rights in Florida.<sup>50</sup>

In the light of evidence presented in this revisionist interpretation of military reconstruction, the old assertions that military government served only to persecute the natives are no longer valid. Actually, the military officials who governed Florida in 1867 and 1868 played a major role in averting the kind of social revolution planned by the Radical Republicans. Although military governors in other districts cooperated with the radical faction, Pope, Meade, and Sprague cooperated with the moderates in preserving law and private property rights. Indeed, it can be added that the military intervention made the adoption of the moderate constitution possible. Approval of this constitution by moderate and even conservative factions resulted in early readmission of Florida to her rightful place in the Union.

50. Reed to Yulee, February 16, 1868, Yulee Papers.