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Arthur L. Chapman, left, and H.C. Markert, veterans of the 2nd Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, stand beside a marker in 1954 — 56 years after their encampment in Lakeland.

Volunteer Infantries Trained In Scrub Near Lake Morton

By **BILL RUFFY**
The Ledger

Camp life in Lakeland was boring and hot, but it was the most crucial time for the 71st New York and the 2nd Massachusetts volunteer infantries.

The training that the regiments

received here probably saved their lives.

Charles Johnson Post, an artist and volunteer soldier, spent several chapters of his book, "The Little War of Private Post," describing Lakeland. Now out of print, the book was provided by the Henry B. Plant Museum's research section.

"Lakeland, in the far South, was our destination, and it was but a little more than the cross-road-and-tank villages we had sided by so many times," he wrote.

Post described the 71st's arrival at its camp on the northwest side of Lake Morton. "It was just at the edge of the town in a grove of slim, gaunt pine trees that flecked the ground with a lovely spotted shade all day long.

"Into the grove we formed columns of companies. . . . Beyond, not 30 feet away, was a little lake. Even before details could be formed to bring the tentage up from the freight station, a soldier was fishing in the lake.

"He got a bite in a minute and jerked his new-cut pole upward. A baby alligator dangled at the end and — believe it or not — he did not know what it was. Further attempts proved that you

could catch nothing in that lake but little baby alligators and an occasional turtle."

In the sandy scrub land beyond the lake, troops learned drills and lines of attack. For target practice in Lakeland's scrub, Post wrote, the regiment developed a peculiar formation: The entire company would double time through the firing area first, just to ward off the rattlesnakes and coral snakes before lying in the prone position.

On occasional days off, many soldiers sought refreshment that officially wasn't allowed in Lakeland — alcohol. They visited an ice cream parlor near Munn Park, where they were told they could get alcohol. But Post said he and his comrades were disheartened when the proprietor announced loudly that this was a "dry" city.

If they would relax on the benches behind the building, he assured them, he would arrive shortly with a "Robert E. Lee Ice Cream Soda" or a "General Miles Milk Shake."

When the drinks came, Post noted that his General Miles Milk Shake was identical to what they called a bourbon highball in New York City.