

# FORT DONELSON.

## Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Great Siege.

### THE STORY TOLD ONCE MORE

#### When, Where and How the Famous Battle Was Fought.

Men Who Afterward Became Distinguished That Took Part in It—Political Leaders, Senators, Governors and Presidents That Were to Be—Either Side Ready to Give Up—From Henry to Donelson—The Sortie That Failed, Blue and Gray.

Once again the young people gather around and listen while veteran lips tell the story of Fort Donelson. That story was made twenty-five years ago this February.

The writers and raconteurs have preserved the history more faithfully than the map makers have. Neither Fort Henry nor Fort Donelson is marked upon the newest atlases. State chases beside each other. The Tennessee forms part of the boundary between the two states for some distance. On the Tennessee side, just opposite where the corner of Kentucky begins, was Fort Henry. Twelve miles across from it, slightly north of east, was Fort Donelson, on the Cumberland. Henry was on the right bank of the Tennessee, while Donelson was on the left bank of the Cumberland.

#### THE PREPARATION.

Turn to your map. You will see that the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers run through the state of Kentucky side and side, like twin sisters. They empty into the Ohio not far apart. They come near together first inside the Tennessee line, and flow through that state close beside each other. The Tennessee forms part of the boundary between the two states for some distance. On the Tennessee side, just opposite where the corner of Kentucky begins, was Fort Henry. Twelve miles across from it, slightly north of east, was Fort Donelson, on the Cumberland. Henry was on the right bank of the Tennessee, while Donelson was on the left bank of the Cumberland.

Henry and Donelson were important Confederate stations. Henry was captured Feb. 6, 1862. A rising young brigadier general, named Ulysses S. Grant, was at the head of the force that took it. The victory called for the first time the attention of the country to this officer. The victory at Fort Henry, too, was, strictly speaking, the beginning of the turning of the tide in favor of the north. A gleam like the fog of a winter's day had been on the country till then. Men in the north were sighing for a hero—a man who should be strong enough to take the lead of affairs and turn heart sickening failure into victory.

The hero was developing, though they knew it not. He who was to lift the cloud was the silent man that, even in the midst of the victory of Fort Donelson, was "too busy to write a word."

A notable point is the shortness of Grant's dispatches at all times. A few messages, of not many lines, to his superior officer tell the story of both Henry and Donelson. Gen. Halleck, then at St. Louis, was in command of the department of the Missouri. Grant dispatched Halleck, Feb. 6, that Fort Henry had fallen. He added these words:

"I shall take and destroy Fort Donelson on the 8th and return to Fort Henry."

But he had undertaken a larger contract than even he could fill in the time he proposed. The freshets and overflows, which always work such mischief in the south and west, prevented, for one thing, the roads leading to Dover, were a sea of mud. By the backwater of creeks on each side of the fort there was a sea of water two miles inland from the fort.

The Cumberland runs north at the point selected for Fort Donelson. About a mile south of the fort, up the river, is the little town of Dover. This hamlet was the headquarters of the Confederate general, Gideon J. Pillow, during the siege. It was in Dover that the last Confederate council of war was between Gens. Floyd, Pillow, Buckner, Col. N. B. Forrest and others took place, previous to the surrender of the fort to Grant. Below Fort Donelson, on the north, Hickman's creek emptied into the Cumberland. It was overflowed for miles, the water up to a horse's breast. Grant could not attack the fort from that side. On the other hand, however, in case the Confederates, being hard pressed, wished to make a sally out from the fort and escape by the Fort Henry road, as, in fact, they did wish to do, this overflowed creek would prevent them. So, on the whole, the backwater of Hickman's creek was an advantage to both besieger and besieged. Above Fort Donelson, and between that and Dover, was another stream of water, Indian creek, also overflowed.

Mud! There was never anything like it. It was "half for deep," as especially mentioned in Confederate official dispatches. Grant's soldiers fairly waded in mud "up to their eyes" when they marched from Fort Henry to besiege Dover and Donelson. It flow from the horses' hoofs like rain and peppered man and beast, when the cavalry splashed hither and thither, in the vain fancy that they were trotting. It rolled from the gun carriage wheels and fell in huge masses at every turn the artillery made.

It must be remembered that it was Grant, brigadier general, who had urged the reduction of Fort Henry and Donelson. The object to be gained by it was the clearing of the Cumberland and Tennessee rivers, and the occupation of Tennessee and its lines of railway. Grant was at Cairo and repeatedly urged Halleck to let him visit St. Louis. Leave was at length given. Grant visited his superior and began to unfold his plan for the capture of the two forts. But Halleck silenced him at once and snubbed him sharply.

Judge Force, in his book, says that Grant "returned to Cairo believing his commander thought him guilty of proposing a military blunder." And yet he persisted, unperturbed again and again. Flag Officer Andrew H. Foote, of the Mississippi squadron, urged the same, and begged Halleck's permission to let him and Grant move on Henry and Donelson. It was at length given, and Feb. 2 Foote and Grant, infantry and cavalry forces united, started up the Tennessee to Fort Henry, with 17,000 men and seven gunboats.

Fort Henry fell on the 6th. The Sunday after Commander Foote took his place in the pulpit of the Presbyterian church at Cairo and preached an eloquent sermon on the text:

"Let not your hearts be troubled. Ye believe in God, believe also in me."

Then he came down from the pulpit and made ready his boats for the expedition against Donelson, which surrendered Feb. 16, just one week from that Sunday morning.

Engineers of the Confederate service agree that the site of Fort Donelson was badly chosen. It stood upon a river bluff. The situation was elevated, to be sure, but there was a ring of hills around it, at from one to five miles distance. These hills were higher than the bluff upon which the fort was, and convenient for the enemy to plant guns upon.

#### THE DEFENSES OF FORT DONELSON.

The bluff upon which Donelson stood was 100 feet high. The fort itself was what was called in military language a bastioned earthwork, with angles like star points projecting from the main inclosure outward, and protected by walls of heavy earthworks. It was so situated that its guns commanded the river as far as they could carry. Two water batteries were erected on the slope of the bluff toward the river. The larger battery was the one nearest the shore. It had for armament a 10-inch Columbiad and nine 32-pound guns. The upper battery was supplied with two 22-pounders and one rifled cannon which carried a conical ball of 138 pounds. The water batteries were built by Lieut. Col. J. F. Gilmer, chief engineer of the western department of the Confederate army. They were constructed after the fall of Fort Henry. As soon as that point was captured the whole available Confederate force in that region was concentrated at Donelson.

The line of batteries was extended so as to take in Dover, where stores of food and ammunition were. In and out, through salient and re-entrant angles, for two miles and a half, the tracery of earthworks and guns went. Besides that, the fortifications were protected with bristling abatis. It was a wooded region, full of "black jack" oak and other woods. The scrub oaks were felled, their branches sharpened at the point and these and the trees were fastened upon the ground, sharpened points outward, in what seemed an impenetrable abatis. To get at Fort Donelson the Union troops were obliged to go up hill over these sharpened points in the face of marksmen whose aim was yet sharper.

On the east, the river protected the works. Such were the defenses of Donelson. Lieut. Col. Gilmer says that the effective fighting force within the fort was 15,000. Up to the time the siege began it was commanded by Gen. Bushrod R. Johnson. He was re-enforced successively by Gens. Pillow, Clarke, Floyd and Buckner, with several thousand men each. Gen. J. B. Floyd was the officer highest in rank and had command.

#### FOOTE'S FLOTILLA.

The Union gunboats had done great service at Henry. At Donelson the fleet did not distinguish itself greatly, except by conveying transports containing troops.

While Grant, with 15,000 men, plowed across the mud sea between Henry and Donelson by land, he sent Foote with six gunboats around by water. They were obliged to go down the Tennessee and up the Ohio a short distance to the mouth of the Cumberland to Fort Donelson. Foote had to make a circuit of 150 miles to go twelve.

The Carondelet is a good illustration of the old-fashioned gunboat. It was the first to arrive on the morning of Thursday, Feb. 13. It opened fire. It may be mentioned that the old Carondelet, with the same commander, Capt. Walke, was also the first to afterward pass down the river under the batteries at Vicksburg.

The rest of Foote's fleet with the transports, containing six regiments of soldiers, arrived Thursday evening. Friday morning the Presbyterian flag officer opened fire from his fleet of six gunboats, four ironclads and two wooden ones. There was a severe fight of an hour and a half, which did not result in a brilliant success for the fleet. The boats engaged were the ironclads St. Louis, Carondelet, Louisville and Pittsburg, and the wooden boats Tyler and Comestoga. Four of the boats were disabled. The first fire from the Carondelet had disabled one of the 32-pounders in the water batteries. The same shot instantly killed Lieut. Joseph Dixon, a brave Confederate officer and the accomplished local engineer who had assisted in preparing the defenses of Donelson. That was about the only damage apparently done by the fleet. Then Commander Foote drew off the remains of it and dropped down out of range.

The mortar boat got its name from the gun it carried. First a heavy wooden float was built. Upon it were erected very thick wooden walls. These sloped inward and were about eight feet high. They were plated with heavy iron. Inside was a single heavy mortar, with ammunition below the water line. There was also a tent for the gunners within the walls.

These mortar boats were considered formidable twenty-five years ago. But such is the improvement made since then in destructive warfare that one shot from even a moderate sized gun of the kind now made would knock an old fashioned mortar boat into splinters.

One youthful Confederate gunner distinguished himself gallantly at the lower water battery at Fort Donelson. While Foote's gunboats were peppering the batteries to the right and left, this youth, John G. Frequa, stood perfectly straight at his gun, taking aim and firing as coolly as if he had been squirrel hunting.

"Now, boys," said he, "see me take a chimney." He aimed at the smokestack of an advancing gunboat. It fell, carrying with it the flag. Frequa threw his cap in the air, yelling defiantly.

Again the nerry boy took aim, clear and straight. Shortly he sent a ball directly through a port-hole, and then the gunboat fell back disabled. The port-holes of the boats were quite large.

#### FOUR DAYS' FIGHTING.

To tell the truth, army officers do not always write the clearest English, not even, always, regular army officers.

It is difficult, therefore, for the historian to gather from the colonel's and brigadier general's reports, just how a battle was fought and how and where the troops stood. Grant's reports and orders, what there are of them, are models of clearness, brevity and simplicity. From them we gain more clear-headed knowledge than from most of the rest.

Immediately on the fall of Fort Henry, Gen. Halleck began forwarding fresh troops and supplies as fast as possible for the reduction of Donelson. Boys, on whose cheeks the rose had not yet given place to tan, regiments, as Judge Force says, "so freshly formed that they had hardly changed their civil garb for soldier's uniform," were hurried to the front to help out Grant at Donelson.

On their part, the Confederate generals inside the fort were quite aware of their peril. The night of the 14th Gens. Floyd, Pillow and Buckner held a council and resolved to cut their way out of the fort through the Federal lines next morning. Ten thousand troops were set apart for this grand sortie. The Confederates too had been re-enforced. Brig. Gen. Floyd was the last to arrive, on the morning of the 13th, with 4,000 men.

In the Confederate council the night of the 14th it was determined that the force in the fort should attempt to cut its way out on the Federal right, through McClernand's division. Driving this division back, it was to be made to roll over upon Wallace's division in the center, thus leaving the Wynn's Ferry road clear. By that road the Confederates were to escape to Charlotte, Tenn. Pillow, with infantry and cavalry, was to make the attack on the Federal extreme right, near the river. Buckner was to follow immediately after, and do for Lew Wallace's division in the center.

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upon a log wrapped in his blanket till 3 o'clock in the morning.

So the Federal soldiers took the night through. At dawn the light began to shine upon a bitterly cold day. Fires were built to relieve one another, went back and thawed their frozen garments and made coffee. But they had no food, not a bite. Their only breakfast was coffee, and thus they made ready to face the day.

For the Confederates in the fort it was not a whit more comfortable. They lay upon their arms all night in the trenches. And yet nobody on either side was disheartened. The Confederate soldiers were full of fight and enthusiasm. At noon the Federal Gen. Lew Wallace and his Third division of mixed veterans and raw recruits arrived into camp in the center with cheers and songs and bugle sounding. Gen. Wallace rode immediately to Grant's headquarters and dined with him on crackers and coffee. The general was nearly as badly off as his men.

It was this day that the interchange of courtesies between the fleet and the fort took place. Meantime there was not much fighting on land. Re-enforcements were arriving for Grant, and were being posted. Grant's troops were distributed over a line nearly four miles long. His own headquarters were at the log house of Mrs. Crisp, two miles from Dover, at the head of Hickman creek. It was a little to the left of the center of his army, and between the divisions of Lew Wallace and Gen. C. F. Smith.

So having arranged matters to suit him, Grant sat down in the midst of his blue crescent of soldiers to stare out Fort Donelson. On their part, the Confederate generals inside the fort were quite aware of their peril. The night of the 14th Gens. Floyd, Pillow and Buckner held a council and resolved to cut their way out of the fort through the Federal lines next morning. Ten thousand troops were set apart for this grand sortie. The Confederates too had been re-enforced. Brig. Gen. Floyd was the last to arrive, on the morning of the 13th, with 4,000 men.

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men, with Forrest's cavalry flitting about the outskirts.

The three Federal batteries had exhausted their ammunition. Taylor's alone had fired that morning 1,700 rounds. Buckner had ordered an advance of three regiments before noon. They had been met with a blinding fire from Col. W. H. L. Wallace's brigade. Snow flying in the air confused them so that they could not see their way besides, and they fell back to their entrenchments in disarray.

But presently Buckner gathered his forces and came gallantly on again. McClernand sent word to Lew Wallace to aid him. In the absence of positive orders from headquarters Wallace declined to move. The place grew hotter and hotter. Col. John A. Logan was wounded. McClernand again sent word to Wallace, and this time Wallace ordered forward Col. Cruft's brigade, the first in his division. Here an unfortunate mistake occurred, and several regiments of Federal soldiers fired into each other, doing serious damage. Cruft's brigade took the place of McArthur's exhausted men. Cruft's men fought gallantly, but at length fell back some distance and took up position near the hospital.

When Logan was wounded he suggested to Col. T. E. G. Ransom, of the Eleventh Illinois, to take his place with the Eleventh. Ransom, too, had been wounded, but had his wound dressed. Both his divisions were attacked, therefore forced to fall back, when his commander went to have his wound dressed. The Thirty-first marched back for ammunition, leaving the Eleventh alone in the fray. But the Eleventh was attacked not only in front, but on both flanks, and finally broke and retreated.

Gen. Wallace still waited, with his division in line, for orders from Grant. McClernand's second message had been that his flanks were turned and his whole command was endangered. It was then that Col. Cruft's brigade was sent to his relief. But the Confederate billows still swept on. Fugitives from the fight scattered down the hill behind Wallace's division. A mounted officer galloped by. He had lost his head completely, and shouted to the general: "We are cut to pieces."

Then Lew Wallace took the responsibility of the order of battle upon his own shoulders. Instantly he ordered up his Third division, Col. Thayer commanding, and threw it across between the broken troops and the advancing Confederates. Other regiments were behind as a reserve. He had barely got them in line when Pillow and Buckner, with several regiments turned and his whole command was endangered. It was then that Col. Cruft's brigade was sent to his relief. But the Confederate billows still swept on. Fugitives from the fight scattered down the hill behind Wallace's division. A mounted officer galloped by. He had lost his head completely, and shouted to the general: "We are cut to pieces."

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ing for his artillery and reserves to follow him out of the entrenchments. Pillow had telegraphed A. S. Johnston: "On the honor of a soldier, the day is ours."

All at once Gen. Pillow sent Buckner word to come back and take up his position within the works. He could only obey. As he fell back with his men he met Gen. Floyd. Floyd was surprised, and asked what he was about. He ordered Buckner to stay where he was till he, Floyd, could see Pillow. Thus there was more waiting. Finally Buckner, the fighting general, was ordered to cross to the extreme Confederate right and stop Gen. Smith, who was storming the works.

But presently Buckner gathered his forces and came gallantly on again. McClernand sent word to Lew Wallace to aid him. In the absence of positive orders from headquarters Wallace declined to move. The place grew hotter and hotter. Col. John A. Logan was wounded. McClernand again sent word to Wallace, and this time Wallace ordered forward Col. Cruft's brigade, the first in his division. Here an unfortunate mistake occurred, and