

CONTENTS

List of Maps	<i>ix</i>
Preface	<i>xi</i>
Prologue	<i>xix</i>
1. "The Keys of the Gate-Way into Her Own Territory"	<i>1</i>
2. "You Have No Idea How Much Work Is Required to Improve"	<i>23</i>
3. "Too Much Haste Will Ruin Everything"	<i>42</i>
4. "We Soon Understood That the Great Western Move Was to Begin"	<i>66</i>
5. "Alternately Mud and Water All the Way Up"	<i>90</i>
6. "A Good Day's Work"	<i>108</i>
7. "The Entering Wedge to All Our Subsequent Successes"	<i>129</i>
8. "I Think We Can Take It; at All Events, We Can Try"	<i>154</i>
9. "Pretty Well Tested the Strength of Our Defensive Line"	<i>205</i>
10. "You Are Not at Fort Henry"	<i>237</i>
11. "Not Generally Having an Idea That a Big Fight Was on Hand"	<i>264</i>
12. "The Whole Line Just Seemed to Melt Away and Scatter"	<i>283</i>
13. "Up to This Period the Success Was Complete"	<i>308</i>
14. "The One Who Attacks First Now Will Be Victorious"	<i>328</i>
15. "We Got the Place"	<i>351</i>
16. "The Trophies of War Are Immense"	<i>376</i>
Epilogue	<i>397</i>
Appendix A: Fort Henry Order of Battle, February 6, 1862	<i>407</i>
Appendix B: Fort Donelson Order of Battle, February 12–16, 1862	<i>411</i>
Notes	<i>417</i>

Bibliography 469

Index 501

Illustrations follow page 180.



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LIST OF MAPS

1. Western Theater 5
2. Western Theater Commands 29
3. January Reconnaissances 59
 4. Move to Fort Henry 73
 5. Fort Henry Defenses 93
 6. Fort Henry Approach 99
 7. Fort Henry 111
 8. Phelps's Raid 136
9. Footprint of Impact 152
10. March to Fort Donelson 172
11. Fort Donelson Defenses 209
 12. Union Assaults 218
 13. Naval Attack 247
 14. Pillow's Assault 271
 15. Oglesby's Defense 288
 16. Cruft's Defense 293
 17. Wallace's Defense 303
 18. Thayer's Defense 313
 19. Federal Advance 333
 20. Smith's Assault 340





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PREFACE

It was quite the scene, as the two old generals sat and enjoyed each other's company. Veterans had reminisced together many times since the Civil War, but this meeting had more multiple layers of meaning than normal as a dying Ulysses S. Grant visited with one of his oldest friends, Simon Bolivar Buckner. The visit was newsworthy if for no other reason than Grant was a former president of the United States, and the most popular American alive at the time. Buckner was no slouch himself, of course, being a former Confederate general and governor of Kentucky, but Grant was clearly the elder statesman of the two and Buckner came to pay what he knew would be his final respects to the living legend.¹

Beyond Grant's presidential credentials, the meeting was also significant in other ways. The two were generals before they were politicians, and on opposite sides of the great Civil War that had torn the nation asunder some two and a half decades before. Their meeting together and discussion (Grant writing on scraps of paper because his throat cancer had ended his ability to talk) of the reconciliation even then taking place were certainly noteworthy. Grant noted, "I have witnessed since my last sickness just what I wished to see ever since the war: harmony and good feeling between the sections. I have always contended that if there had been nobody left but the soldiers we should have had peace in a year." The meeting also illustrated the need for old soldiers to write memoirs, preserve battlefields, and give their recollections about what had happened; this generation, with Grant its standard-bearer, was beginning to pass away. Grant was dying, but Buckner was getting old as well. At one point, Grant wrote of Buckner, "you look very natural except that your hair has whitened and you have grown stouter."²

The 1885 meeting was fraught with other fascinating contexts as well. The scene harked back to earlier relationships these two had shared. Their days

together at West Point had been enjoyable and full of youth, and their service together in Mexico fighting for the United States government was by then a fond memory as well. Grant and Buckner reminisced about those times, Grant even writing a short note to Buckner's new wife: "I knew your husband long before you did. We were at West Point together and served together in the Mexican War."³

Significantly, Grant only mentioned a few parts of their association. Not so glorious, for each of them, were other meetings that one or the other obviously remembered less fondly. In fact, their recorded association in the 1850s was when Grant was out of money and a charitable Buckner bailed him out. Apparently neither mentioned their next meeting either, which was certainly their most famous and significant. The two had met again at Dover, Tennessee, in February 1862. By this time, Grant was an up-and-coming Union general while Buckner was the chivalrous expatriated Kentuckian defending one of the key points in the Confederacy. While the Union victory at Fort Donelson won laurels for Grant, Buckner was not totally humiliated. While he faced numerous months in Federal captivity, some of it in solitary confinement, he emerged from the ordeal beloved by his soldiers, whose fate he had chosen to share. Yet no evidence remains that in 1885 the two talked over the Fort Donelson events. The charitable Grant never brought it up, no doubt fearing it would cause Buckner embarrassment. It had to be in the back of their minds, though, as the two sat and visited for one last time. It was, to be sure, a curious meeting of two friends, made more curious and perplexing by the odd happenings of a civil war decades earlier.⁴

The Forts Henry and Donelson campaign certainly affected the Grant and Buckner relationship, but its significance spread even farther. In a real sense, the battle portended a lethal result for Grant because it was there that he switched from a pipe to cigars. Admiring Americans began to send him boxes of the latter when he was shown in the papers calmly smoking one. Even larger ramifications resulted from the February 1862 events, however; much of the reunification and even reconciliation even then discussed by these two elder statesmen had come from those events decades earlier. Thus for many reasons, the Forts Henry and Donelson campaign is rich in significance and consequence.⁵

For all its importance, few major studies of the February 1862 campaign have surfaced through the century and a half since. While there are certainly many books detailing the operations on the twin rivers in 1862, only two

stand out as major academic studies. A path-breaking publication by Benjamin Franklin Cooling brought the campaign to the forefront in 1987: *Forts Henry and Donelson: The Key to the Confederate Heartland*. Sixteen years later, in 2003, Kendall D. Gott published *Where the South Lost the War: An Analysis of the Fort Henry-Fort Donelson Campaign, February 1862*. Both are serious academic studies worthy of attention.⁶

Yet while both books are very well done, they approach the fighting from completely different angles and neither fully covers the story. Cooling is interested mostly in context, and as a result takes the broadest possible approach in his examination. Everything is seemingly fair game, and as a result he spends nearly the entire first half of the book on background economics, politics, and society. Likewise, much of the latter part of the book (as well as two additional volumes) is contextual material on what happened in the area after the fighting, including commemorative efforts. While there is certainly validity in this approach, it leaves little room for the coverage of tactical military detail.⁷

Gott's exploration also leaves gaps. He is much more interested in the military action than Cooling, but as a former army officer, Gott seeks to explore the leadership and command relationships involved in the campaign. Like Cooling, Gott rarely goes beyond the brigade and at times even the division level. Thus, the coverage is almost entirely on the top tier of the armies, with little inclusion of the common soldiers' viewpoints or actions.

Each author succeeds admirably in their approach, but the fact remains that there has never been a truly comprehensive tactical treatment of the Forts Henry and Donelson campaign. There is consequently a desperate need for an overall, comprehensive, detailed, and balanced book on the topic. Unlike most other Civil War battles, which have numerous tactical studies causing some socially oriented historians to complain about the lack of context, Forts Henry and Donelson have surprisingly never had that depth of treatment.

In providing a detailed tactical examination, this book will obviously differ from the previous volumes. Since neither academic book on the campaign treats the fighting in great detail, this book will illuminate aspects of the battles never before examined. At the same time, it will steer clear of too many minutiae. This book will also rely on the personal accounts of the soldiers: contemporary primary sources, particularly manuscript material. Popular historians and previous overviews almost by definition do not include such research, but even the two academic works are not definitive in that respect.

Another theme regards overall strategic orientation. This book will completely immerse the reader in the larger picture of the Mississippi Valley campaign, discussing how Forts Henry and Donelson were a part of the larger context of the war in the west. This book will examine how the initial Tennessee River campaign was critical to the ultimate Union victory in the Mississippi Valley, and how Henry and Donelson proved decisive. The book's focus will thus be less on the Cumberland River results of Fort Donelson and the capture of Nashville and more on Forts Henry and Heiman and the Tennessee River line's importance. Despite the large surrender and later emphasis on Fort Donelson, Forts Henry and Heiman and the opening of the Tennessee River were actually more important in the larger Union operational and strategic efforts.

The opening of the Tennessee River could not have been a permanent Union achievement without the neutralization of Fort Donelson, which added many degrees of success with the capture of a Confederate army, the taking of Nashville, and the emergence of Ulysses S. Grant. Still, it was the capture of Fort Henry that actually shook the Confederacy to its core from Richmond to New Orleans. The Confederate retreat from Columbus and Bowling Green, Kentucky, and the famous concentration at Corinth, Mississippi, that resulted in Shiloh all began as a result of Fort Henry's and Fort Heiman's fall, not Fort Donelson's. Additionally, the Federal Cumberland River advance ended at Nashville, and as important as that was, it was the ability to move into the cotton states via the Tennessee River that was much more significant. Contemporary correspondence from Grant, Henry Halleck, and others clearly indicates that taking Fort Donelson and even Nashville was only a temporary detour. They each planned for the Union armies to quickly return again to the main axis of advance on the Tennessee River. Subsequent events bore out this strategy, as the armies moved southward along the Tennessee Valley to Shiloh and eventually Corinth, the climax of the Tennessee River campaign.

This recasting of the focus on Fort Henry rather than on Fort Donelson, part of which is preserved as a national park after all while Fort Henry has been under water for the past seventy years, certainly cuts against the grain of modern scholarship. Even some contemporary viewpoints took this Donelson-centric position; many thought Fort Donelson was the dominant achievement at the time. Henry Halleck opined that "the fall of Columbus, the great 'Gibraltar of the West,' and the taking of New Madrid have followed as consequences of the victory of Fort Donelson, just as Bowling Green &

Nashville were abandoned to Gen. Buell in consequence of the same strategic movements.” Similarly, another observer wrote, “in all probability the careful historian will yet decide that in shaping events which step by step wrought the downfall of the Southern coalition, Fort Donelson stands preeminent.”⁸

Recent historians have generally taken the same viewpoint, one Tennessean noting long after the war that “when Fort Donelson fell the strategic military key of the Confederacy was taken which unlocked the door to Southern territory from which the South, in spite of the gallant and courageous struggle of her people to form other lines of defense, was never able to recover.” Even Bruce Catton declared, “Fort Donelson was not only a beginning; it was one of the most decisive engagements of the entire war, and out of it came the slow, inexorable progression that led to Appomattox.”⁹

It is highly likely that each of these writers was including the operations against Fort Henry under the larger title of the Fort Donelson campaign, but it is important to separate the two. Only a few have tried to do so, among them an early biographer of the key Union figure in the all-important Fort Henry victory, Flag Officer Andrew H. Foote. James Mason Hoppin wrote quite correctly in 1874 that

there were far greater battles during the war, both on land and water, than that sharp fight on the narrow river which resulted in the fall of the earth-work of Fort Henry . . . but there were few battles of more vital importance to the Union arms than this earliest success of the Western flotilla. . . . Fort Henry was the key of the rebel position in the West. . . . By it the first strong rebel line of defense—the spinal column, as it were—was broken. The control of the direct line of railroad which connected the great rebel force of Columbus with that at Bowling Green was secured, a point far in the rear of both of these was seized, and the road was opened for the southward advance of our armies. Bowling Green was soon after evacuated. The desperate battles of Pittsburg Landing, Shiloh, and Corinth were the logical consequence of the capture of Fort Henry, being the struggle on the part of the rebels to establish a new line of defense running from Memphis and Island No. Ten to Pittsburg Landing, on the Tennessee, and Chattanooga.¹⁰

Obviously, Hoppin was eager to emphasize Foote’s importance, but in this case he exemplified less hero worship and more truth than most other accounts. It is entirely fitting that the battlefield at Fort Donelson is today partially preserved as a national park, but it is also sad that such an important

piece of tangible history as Fort Henry today lies at the bottom of Kentucky Lake, the victim of the Tennessee Valley Authority's flood-control efforts in the 1930s and 1940s. I hope to restore respect for one of the Civil War's most defining sites in this book.

No author writes a book alone, and numerous people, for whom I am very grateful, have aided me in this process. The archivists and workers at the various repositories were all extremely helpful. I have to single out the great people at the Fort Donelson National Battlefield, where a major portion of the research was conducted. Superintendent Brian McCutchen and his staff were great to work with, accommodating my every request, and they definitely made this a much better book by their cheerful aid and help. In particular, Doug Richardson facilitated my research in the park library and proved to be a great sounding board for ideas. Susan Hawkins, Debbie Austin, Mike Manning, and Bobby Hogan helped facilitate my research visits there as well, and Susan was extremely helpful in scanning photographs and providing documents in the park's archives.

Others were also helpful in sorting out what can at times be confusing battle reports and terrain that unfortunately is not fully preserved. In addition to Doug Richardson at the park, who spent a day with me and my dad on the battlefield, others aided my terrain research during my many on-site visits to the battlefields. One particularly enjoyable day was when Superintendent McCutchen, former park historian Jimmy Jobe, Henry and Donelson campaign authority Jim Vaughan, and I (joined later by Ranger Richardson) spent a rainy day sorting out various aspects that were fuzzy or lacking complete understanding. There are still some of those uncertainties that will probably never be fully known, but the knowledge that these men have between them is amazing and I thank them for their willingness to invest some of that in me.

Once the manuscript was completed, these talented historians also agreed to read the finished product. McCutchen, Richardson, Jobe, and Vaughan all made numerous and productive comments on the manuscript, making it much stronger. In addition, Greg Biggs also agreed to read the manuscript and provided many helpful suggestions as well. As always, John F. Marszalek read the manuscript and made it a much better book by his incisive analysis and editing.

Working with the University Press of Kansas has again been a pure joy.

Mike Briggs is one of the best in the business, and Kelly Chrisman Jacques and Mike Kehoe are first-rate and super easy to work with. Copyeditor Robert Demke worked his magic on the prose, for which I am thankful.

I am especially grateful for a generous faculty research grant provided by the University of Tennessee at Martin. These funds allowed me to research at numerous repositories, including in Washington, DC, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, West Point, New York, and Indianapolis, Indiana.

My family is my special safe haven from the world, and anything I do would be worthless without being able to share it with my wife, Kelly, and daughters, Mary Kate and Leah Grace. Leah Grace even enjoyed a special day of research at Fort Donelson on a day off from kindergarten. She made a special friend in Jimmy Jobe, who eagerly showed his grandfather's heart to this newcomer to Fort Donelson. I am also thankful for my parents, George and Miriam Smith, who started it all, and am especially thankful to have them living closer to us now. My dad and I were even able to spend an enjoyable day (despite his attack of kidney stones) at the park at the very beginning of the research.

As always, the most important thing in my life is my God and the salvation provided through Jesus. I join Flag Officer Andrew H. Foote, after the victories on the Tennessee River, in proclaiming thanks to him for all he has done in my life: "Let us thank God from our heart, and say not unto us alone, but unto Thy name, O Lord, belongs the glory."





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PROLOGUE

Stewart County, Tennessee, is off the beaten path today, bypassed by modern interstates and other transportation routes across the United States. Because of technological advances of the second industrial revolution, aviation and superhighways have left the rural Tennessee county isolated and almost forgotten. But that is the opposite from the situation in the nineteenth century, when the very different technological advancement of the original industrial revolution created a very different result. Then, the advances of steam power made sure the area was a focus of commerce and transportation in the region. Indeed, the county was squarely in the middle of some of the most heavily traveled corridors of the state and even of the nation.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, Stewart County was very much a major commercial player, mainly because it offered access to two of Tennessee's major internal waterways, the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers. The birth of steam power and its use on steamboats on waterways and railroads on land were vital in bringing Stewart County into prominence. The two rivers offered access to the county, and even visitors traveling to larger metropolitan areas such as Nashville often stopped there when their steamboats needed fuel or provisions. Likewise, the county later housed a major railroad that ran through its borders after 1861, the Memphis, Clarksville, and Louisville. The technological advances of the industrial revolution thus had an important impact even on the seemingly isolated Stewart County.

The first settlers into the area arrived about 1795, prior to statehood, when the land in the more western reaches of the state was filled mainly with the Chickasaw, some of whom were initially hostile to the white intruders. Many of the settlers came laterally from North Carolina, having received large tracts of land as partial repayment for their services in the Revolutionary War. The state legislature created the county in November 1803, naming it after one

of the original prominent citizens, Duncan Stewart. Originally it was much larger, but over the next few decades it was whittled down in size by the creation of newer counties.¹

The county's seat emerged around 1805 and was originally named Monroe, but later it was changed to Dover. It sat along the southern edge of the Cumberland River and soon had a log courthouse and jail. Private businesses such as mills and hotels emerged as well as a brick school. A female academy opened its doors in 1840, and numerous religious denominations built churches. Despite newer buildings over the next few years, the town never really took on a cosmopolitan feel. One unimpressed observer noted in the 1860s that it was still "unknown to fame, meager in population, architecturally poor."²

Despite its nearness to two rivers, Stewart County was not a productive agricultural area. There was some cotton farming early on, but it soon became unprofitable. Even so, the county had a respectable cash value of farms, over a million dollars, and contained an assortment of the expected farm animals: horses, mules, oxen, and cattle. There were also many sheep and swine, fostering a good economic trade of wool and bacon. Farmers in 1860 also produced respectable amounts of corn, tobacco, and potatoes, and there was also a lively honey industry. Nevertheless, the county, situated as it was between two large rivers and filled with choppy land in ravines and hills, was not plantation country. The small number of slaves as compared with other Tennessee counties demonstrated that Stewart was not a place of large plantations.³

Instead of being an agriculturally dominant society, Stewart County hosted manufacturing. The 1860 census listed establishments in the county such as a cobbler, mills, and leather, liquor, lumber, harness, and shingle businesses, but by far the most prevalent industry was iron. Located on the edge of the iron belt, the hills and hollows of Stewart County were well endowed with ore. The first forge in the county appeared in 1820, the Dover Furnace, and by 1860 there were fourteen furnaces in existence, one (the Cumberland Iron Works) owned by senator and later Constitutional Union presidential candidate John Bell. Slaves worked these forges, and blacksmiths also made their livings off the production. Several bar iron, bloom, and casting operations produced refined goods, but the major production was pig iron.⁴

Iron was a profitable business, but it took capital from rich owners in middle Tennessee to make it work. In 1860, there was more than \$621,000 invested in the forges and other infrastructure in the county, and it employed 596 laborers, including seventy women. The annual value of the products

produced was \$622,881. The big iron companies also owned subsidiary entities such as thousands of acres of land on which the iron was mined as well as charcoal and trees used as fuel for the furnaces.⁵

The nearness to the river was a large factor in making the county a major iron-producing center; the product could easily be shipped by boat all across the United States. The emergence of steam power on the river significantly added to that ability, making the county a haven for iron production and travel in the nineteenth century. In fact, the rivers were such important thoroughfares of travel in that day that the Army Corps of Engineers took on the task of improving inland river channels on the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers prior to the Civil War. Few realized that the opening of the streams would play a major role in the naval warfare on those very rivers just a few short years later.⁶

By 1860, the county's population was 9,896, which included 7,404 whites, 76 "free colored," 2,415 slaves, and but one Native American. Although it was not a large slave community, Stewart County had racial problems, most notably an 1856 slave rebellion that the locals quashed mercilessly. Stewart County was thus not immune from sectional confrontations over slavery and states' rights, and citizens routinely policed their slaves just like in plantation areas. Vigilance committees emerged in response to rebellion rumors, and many slaves were whipped and at least six hanged in the particularly nasty 1856 episode.⁷

By the 1860s, with such racial issues evident, Stewart County joined other counties in Tennessee in facing the prospects of war. In the first referendum on secession in February 1861, Stewart County citizens voted heavily in favor of calling a convention. The later vote saw that majority rise, and the county soon sent many of its favored sons off to the war. They eventually enlisted in several regiments, most notably the 14th Tennessee and a full five companies in the 50th Tennessee.⁸

Sadly, that was not the extent of Stewart County's participation in the war. Because of its geographic location between two major rivers, the interstate highways of the age, the residents of the county soon found themselves in the thick of war. The Tennessee and Cumberland rivers figured importantly in both Union and Confederate strategies. Both sides vied for possession of the very rivers that had previously given local residents such an economic boost. Now those rivers, positioned as they were as avenues of invasion into the new Confederacy, placed Stewart County early on in the very seat of war.

NOTES

PREFACE

1. Simon B. Buckner, Jr., to W. E. Brooks, February 7, 1936, WS.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
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5. Woodworth, *Nothing but Victory*, 119.
6. Cooling, *Forts Henry and Donelson*; Gott, *Where the South Lost the War*; Magdeburg, “The Capture of Fort Donelson,” 284–295; Bruce, “The Donelson Campaign,” 3–29; Hamilton, *The Battle of Fort Donelson*; Tucker, *Unconditional Surrender*; Hurst, *Men of Fire*.
7. Cooling, *Fort Donelson’s Legacy*; Cooling, *To the Battles of Franklin and Nashville and Beyond*.
8. Force, *From Fort Henry to Corinth*, 64; Henry Halleck to wife, March 5, 1862, Civil War Collection, TSLA; Wallace, *Life and Letters*, 159.
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PROLOGUE

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7. Kennedy, *Population of the United States in 1860*, 459, 461, 463, 465, 467; *The Goodspeed Histories*, 900–901; McClain, “A History of Stewart County, Tennessee,” SCPL, 36.
8. *The Goodspeed Histories*, 910–911; “For the Chronicle,” May 10, 1861, *Clarks-ville Chronicle*; John Franklin Locke Diary, July 16, 1861, SCPL; *OR*, 1, 7:737.

CHAPTER I. “THE KEYS OF THE GATE-WAY INTO HER OWN TERRITORY”

1. Davis, *Jefferson Davis*, 336.
2. For an overview of the east, see Simpson, *The Civil War in the East*.
3. For the west, see Hess, *The Civil War in the West*; Woodworth, *Decision in the Heartland*.