

## **The Confederates Evacuate Battery Wagner and Chattanooga**

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The Civil War, in the first week of September of 1863, saw no major battles, though military operations occurred in a number of locations in both the east and west. In Louisiana, Union General Nathaniel P. Banks made preparations to invade East Texas, while in Arkansas, Union forces under Maj. Gen. Frederick Steele were intent on defeating Confederate General Sterling Price's Confederates, and General James G. Blunt was engaged in pursuit of Rebel-allied Creek Indians and the capture and occupation of Fort Smith, Arkansas.

On the coast of South Carolina, concerted attacks by the Union navy and army continued against Charleston. On September 1, Union guns concentrated their cannon and mortar fire at Battery Wagner on Morris Island and at Fort Sumter. Battery Wagner had resisted two large-scale frontal assaults in July but it remained under constant artillery fire. The previous week the Federals had launched an attack that had captured advanced rifle pits located about 240 yards to the front of the fort. The Union Army then managed to dig entrenchments to within eighty yards of its walls. Recognizing that another assault was imminent and with Battery Wagner's garrison increasingly isolated and suffering from a lack of fresh water, Confederate General P.G.T. Beauregard ordered the fort's abandonment on the night of September 6, thus tightening the Union lines around Charleston.

The campaign for East Tennessee had also been underway since July. By September 2, General Ambrose Burnside's command had occupied Knoxville, Tennessee. The occupation succeeded in cutting the Virginia-Tennessee railroad, effectively hindering Confederate supply to Atlanta and the lower south. This was detrimental for the Confederate Army of Tennessee under the Command of Gen. Braxton Bragg near Chattanooga.

In late August, Union General William Rosecrans led the Army of the Cumberland in an advance towards Chattanooga, having previously driven Bragg's army out of its positions near Tullahoma. On approaching Chattanooga from the west, Rosecrans found his advance covered by strong Confederate defenses on Lookout Mountain. In late August Rosecrans turned south and began crossing the Tennessee River at Bridgeport Alabama and moving into northwest Georgia. Bragg initially believed these movements to be a ruse. He soon realized he had miscalculated and sent for reinforcements, but it was too late. Rosecrans was south of him and Bragg was forced to abandon Chattanooga without a fight. He concentrated his army in north Georgia, awaiting reinforcements he would use in an effort to retake Chattanooga. The stage was being set for the battle of Chickamauga.

On September 5, an ocean away from the battlefronts, another aspect to the conflict was being decided at the Laird shipyards in Britain. In June 1861, Captain James D. Bulloch had been commissioned to purchase ships for the Confederate Navy. This was actually a violation of British law, which forbade British companies from selling goods or contracting services to belligerents. Contracts were made binding for unarmed merchant ships, under aliases of other neutral countries, to not attract suspicion. The Confederacy would then purchase the ships at sea from the other country. In September of 1863 two ships were nearing completion, vessels no. 294 and 295. In an attempt to conceal their true purpose, they were designated as if intended for the Egyptian Navy. U.S. Minister Charles Francis Adams reminded British Prime Minister Palmerston that if the vessels were shipped to the Confederacy it could be considered an act of war against the United States. In order to avoid a showdown with America, the British would seize the vessels and ultimately commission them into the Royal Navy.