

## **Retreat From Shiloh and Fort Pulaski Captured**

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In the second week of April, 1862, Confederate forces retreated from Tennessee following their defeat at Shiloh, and regrouped at the vital railroad junction of Corinth, Mississippi. Meanwhile, in Georgia an imposing seacoast fort fell to a Federal bombardment, and a colorful event known as the Great Locomotive Chase also occurred. At the beginning of the Civil War a major goal of the U.S. Navy was the blockade of the south and the capture of the various fortifications located along the Atlantic and gulf coasts. These masonry forts, built originally by the United States military to defend against a foreign invasion, guarded the entrance to the most valuable rivers and ports of the Confederacy. Fort Pulaski, located on Cockspur Island at the mouth of the Savannah River, was one such location. Completed in 1847, the fort blocked upriver access to Savannah, Georgia. At the time of its construction it was considered impregnable, with seven and a half foot thick brick walls and an imposing defensive armament of heavy artillery. After South Carolina seceded in December 1860, Georgia governor Joseph E. Brown ordered state troops to seize the fort, and when Georgia seceded in February of 1861, it was promptly occupied by Confederate forces in anticipation of an attack by the north.

In November 1861 the Federals had occupied some of the islands off the South Carolina coast, which they used as bases in subsequent operations against Charleston and Savannah. In February 1862, Captain Quincy A. Gillmore of the Corps of Engineers, was sent to the Georgia coast to prepare siege operations against Fort Pulaski. Despite the lack of firm ground, he established positions for eleven artillery batteries on Tybee Island, located more than one mile from Pulaski. The batteries included heavy smoothbore cannon, but also a number of smaller, rifled guns, which proved invaluable in the coming bombardment.

The Confederate garrison, commanded by Colonel Charles H. Olmstead, did what they could to strengthen the fort's defenses in preparation for the Union assault. After initially asking for the fort's surrender, the Federals commenced a bombardment on April 10, 1862. Gillmore quickly recognized the effectiveness of the rifled artillery on the fort's brick walls. Until the advent of such high-velocity rifled cannon, no long range artillery of the time could have penetrated the fort successfully. Over the next twenty-four hours over 5,000 shells were fired on the fort. Pulaski's southeastern wall, upon which the Federal batteries had concentrated their fire, was in ruins, and projectiles threatened to penetrate the fort's main ammunition magazine. Fearing the loss of his entire command, Colonel Olmstead reluctantly surrendered shortly after 2:00 p.m. on April 11, 1862. Its capture strengthened the Federal blockade along the Atlantic coast, and gave Union forces a base from which to operate against Savannah and the Georgia and South Carolina coast. Most important, it marked the beginning of a new age of weaponry and fortifications, as the reduction of Fort Pulaski foreshadowed the rise of rifled artillery and rendered brick fortifications obsolete.

Another memorable event that occurred this week was the Great Locomotive Chase, or Andrew's Raid. On the morning of April 12, 1862, 22 men in civilian clothes boarded a Western & Atlantic train at Marietta, Georgia en route to Chattanooga. The train had stopped at Big Shanty, Georgia for breakfast when these 22 men, Federal volunteers led by James J. Andrews, detached the engine named the *General*, and three freight cars of the train and took off down the rail line toward Chattanooga. Their plan was to destroy bridges and damage the railroad leading to the city, which was then being threatened by a Union advance. The southern crew of the stolen *General* was soon chasing the raiders in another locomotive named the *Texas*. The *General* eventually ran out of fuel north of Ringgold and the Federals captured by Confederate

troops. Eight men, including Andrews, were executed; another eight escaped; and the final six men were eventually released on parole. The Andrews Raiders would be the first servicemen to receive the newly-established Medal of Honor, and the Great Locomotive Chase has gone down in history as one of the most colorful escapades of the war.