



# Fort Donelson: 150 Years

## Commemorating the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of a Campaign That Changed History.

Fort Donelson National Battlefield joins the Nation in commemorating the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the American Civil War. Throughout the Sesquicentennial, Americans will be revisiting the Civil War, exploring the causes and effects of the struggle and how the Civil War changed the course of American History.

The February, 1862, campaign for Forts Henry and Donelson involved a cast of characters that could not be imagined by the greatest of novelists. Many of these men, including Ulysses Grant of the United States Army, and Gideon Pillow and Simon B. Buckner of the Confederate States Army, had known one another and had developed relationships years before the Civil War. But the creation of the Confederacy tested these friendships, and soon even those with the closest of relationships would find themselves on opposite sides of the conflict.

Many of those who lived in Tennessee found themselves torn between the nation they had known and loved and the creation, and ideals, of the Confederacy. The state would be the last to join the Confederate States of America, and almost every community in the state would be affected by the realities of war. Tennessee and its people would never be the same again. Those who lived and worked in and around Stewart County, Tennessee, found themselves embroiled in a drama they would never forget.



**Artist's impression of Confederate Fort Donelson along the Cumberland River. What happened here in February, 1862, helped change the course of the American Civil War.**

In early 1862, the Civil War was still in its first year, and the realities of this war were becoming clearer. Union Brigadier General Ulysses S. Grant had the unique vision of creating a joint military operation with the United States Navy that would fight to gain control of the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers, opening a way for the Union forces to penetrate the Confederacy.

Warfare changed forever on February 6, 1862, when this unique cooperation between the US Army and Navy led to the quick defeat and surrender of Confederate Forts Heiman and Henry on the Tennessee. Grant and Flag

Officer Andrew Foote of the US Navy hoped for a quick repeat of this success at Fort Donelson, along the Cumberland. This quick repeat was denied Grant and Foote on February 14, 1862, as Confederate guns effectively repelled the Union gunboats.

The Confederates launched a land offensive against Union troops on February 15, trying to create an escape route towards Nashville. Despite early success in this attempt to break out, in what is often called one of the most puzzling decisions of the Civil War, Confederate generals ordered the men back to their original positions.

## The 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

It is the mission of Fort Donelson National Battlefield to protect the historic resources associated with the Civil War battle, to convey the significance of these events in the continuum of history, to provide a setting for contemplation and reverence, and to inspire in the community and nation a commitment to preserve these places for future generations.

The Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War offers the current generation its most important opportunity to know, discuss, and commemorate America's greatest national crisis while at the same time exploring its enduring relevance to America of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The "mystic chords of memory" so often associated with the Civil War in fact go well beyond being either simply mystical or memorial. The wartime struggle over the existence of the Union has transformed into an omnipresent search for a more perfect Union. The issues that stood at the heart of crisis 150 years ago remain current and relevant.

The challenge that faces the National Park Service today is huge: to convey the significance and relevance of the Civil War in all its aspects while at the same time sustaining the Service's invaluable tradition of resource-based interpretation (a concept that is at the very foundation of the National Park Service's mission). Clearly, the physical manifestations of that history are also the most vivid teaching tools. In fact, the sites of the National Park System--from battlefields to antebellum homes to Northern factories to the homes of the renowned--offer an unmatched venue for modern Americans to understand, contemplate, and debate what Robert Penn Warren called "the great single event of our history." The value of NPS sites is both individual and cumulative--each individually embodying drama, pathos, or brilliance while collectively reflecting a struggle that permeated every aspect of American society.

The NPS will use the full range of its sites related to the Civil War as a lens for engaging visitors in discussions about major events, places, and themes associated with the war--many of which have not traditionally fallen within the realm of public history.

My staff and I are dedicated to making your visit to Fort Donelson National Battlefield a safe and enjoyable opportunity to experience America's Civil War. You are our valued guest.

Steven A. McCoy

# A Variety of Programs Planned for the 150<sup>th</sup>!

Fort Donelson National Battlefield will be offering a variety of programs for visitors of all ages throughout the Sesquicentennial year. It is the park's hope that these opportunities strike a chord with visitors, allowing them to make a unique connection to this story and to the park resources, leading to an understanding of why they are worthy of preservation.

The park has launched a monthly Civil War Sesquicentennial film series, intended to introduce visitors to significant events and personalities. The film series features Civil War-related films from other parks, legendary documentary series, such as Ken Burns' legendary "The Civil War," film showing how the War became part of American popular culture, and more.

In addition, a new Sesquicentennial book discussion group explores significant themes and writers. Thus far, the book club has explored the causes and effects of secession, the significance of the election of Abraham Lincoln, the lives of

Ulysses Grant and Nathan Bedford Forrest, and the published works of James McPherson and others.

In February and March of 2012, Fort Donelson will welcome back several true friends of the park who have written definitive works on the campaign. On February 11, Kendall Gott, author of Where the South Lost the War, will speak at the park and share his unique insights. On February 14, Myron J. Smith, author of a new history of the USS Carondelet, will mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the gunboat battle on the Cumberland. On February 25, noted author and former park historian, Benjamin F. Cooling, will share his thoughts on the campaign and the aftermath. On March 24, legendary historian, Ed Bearss, will walk the grounds with visitors and share his gift for storytelling.

**All of these events and more are on the park website's schedule of events, at [www.nps.gov/fodo](http://www.nps.gov/fodo).**



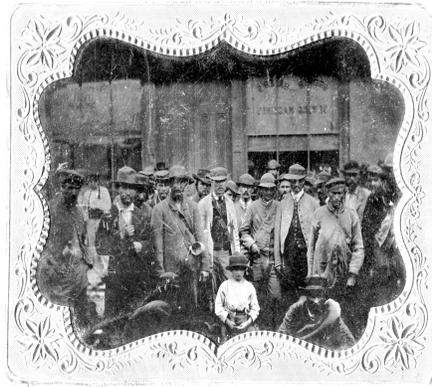
**Artist's interpretation of the famous battle between Confederate guns and US Navy ironclad boats on February 14, 1862. Warfare would never be the same.**

# Bringing the Battle to Life: 150 Years Later

Throughout 2012, a variety of Ranger-led and living history programs will bring the era of the American Civil War to life a century and a half later.

During the weekend of February 4-6, Park Rangers from Fort Donelson National Battlefield will introduce visitors to the unique Fort Heiman story, and from there will interpret the Battle of Fort Henry, which happened 150 years ago on February 6. A unique living history event will commemorate the Confederate evacuation of Fort Henry towards Fort Donelson.

During the weekend of February 11 and 12, a living history encampment will interpret life at Fort Donelson from the Confederate perspective. This encampment will explore why men chose to join the Confederate States Army, how their lives were changed, and how their decisions affected their families. The



**After being surrendered at Fort Donelson, men like these spent months in prison camps in the north. Some never returned.**

encampment, held in much the same weather they experienced 150 years ago, has the potential of exploring the hardships soldiers on both sides faced.

On February 13 and 14, 2012, Park Rangers will offer programs at the River Batteries to share the incredible stories of Confederate guns exchanging fire with

US Navy ironclad boats. On February 15, 2012, Park Rangers will offer programs to explain the daring Confederate attempt to escape from Fort Donelson towards Nashville, and Ulysses Grant's eventual retaking of his demolished line.

On February 16, 2012, the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the surrender of Fort Donelson, a historian portraying Ulysses Grant will be at the Dover Hotel to share his thoughts on this, one of his great personal triumphs. The Civil War Singers will share their talents with us that day, as the community commemorates this important event.

The weekend of February 18 and 19 will witness a Union living history encampment, interpreting Union life inside Fort Donelson and the town of Dover after the Confederate surrender.



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Fort Donelson National Battlefield and National Cemetery preserves, protects and interprets resources associated with the significant Campaign for Fort Heiman, Henry, and Donelson, in February 1862.

## Fort Donelson National Battlefield and National Cemetery

174 National Cemetery Drive (Headquarters)  
PO Box 434  
Dover, Tennessee 37058

### Phone

931-232-5706, visitor inquiries

### Website:

[www.nps.gov/fodo](http://www.nps.gov/fodo)

The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

## February and Beyond...

The commemoration of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Campaign for Forts Heiman, Henry and Donelson will continue beyond February. In addition to the monthly films and book discussions, special programs and Park Ranger tours will be offered throughout the year. For the latest schedule, please consult the park's website, at [www.nps.gov/fodo](http://www.nps.gov/fodo). For more information on how the Civil War is being commemorated at National Parks across the country, please visit [www.nps.gov/civilwar150](http://www.nps.gov/civilwar150). At [www.tnvacation.com/civil-war/](http://www.tnvacation.com/civil-war/) you will find unique opportunities to explore the anniversary of the Civil War in Tennessee.

While in this area, please also consider exploring opportunities at Land Between The Lakes ([www.lbl.org](http://www.lbl.org)), which preserves the outer defense remains of Fort Henry and offers much more. The south entrance to LBL is located just minutes from the park. Please also visit Fort Defiance, in nearby Clarksville.

Educators are encouraged to contact the park to incorporate the themes and stories of the American Civil War into your classroom curriculum. Park staff will be happy to provide you with materials to use in your classroom, and are available for classroom visits for schools within the local driving area. Schools are encouraged to contact the park to arrange an onsite visit to Fort Donelson, to allow students to see these unique resources and hear these incredible stories first hand. Today's students are tomorrow's stewards of our National Parks and Civil War battlefields. All education programs are offered at no charge.

Civic groups may contact the park to schedule a Park Ranger to present and share a Civil War program. The National Parks belong to you, the American people, and we are grateful for the trust you place in us as we preserve them for future generations.



**National Park Service**  
**U.S. Department of the Interior**

**Fort Donelson National Battlefield and National Cemetery**  
 174 National Cemetery Drive  
 PO Box 434  
 Dover, Tennessee 37058

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\*Program schedules subject to change;  
 please consult the park website for the  
 latest schedule.

## The 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

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After learning of this Confederate attack, and after arriving on the scene, Ulysses Grant remobilized his troops and struck back, retaking much of what was lost.

That evening, after much discussion, the Confederate leadership decided to surrender. Confederate General Simon Buckner of Kentucky initiated communications with his old friend Grant, who replied with his infamous message demanding unconditional surrender. Buckner had no choice but to accept. He and Grant met the next day, February 16, at the Dover Hotel. Over 12,000 Confederate soldiers were now prisoners of war.

With Grant’s success at Fort Donelson, the Union now had its first major victory. Ulysses Grant became a media sensation, even gaining a new nickname,

“Unconditional Surrender.” Clarksville and Nashville would fall within days. The course of the Civil War had changed.

Today’s visitors to Fort Donelson National Battlefield can see excellent examples of early Civil War earthworks, and have the same view the Confederate gunners had at the River Batteries. Visitors can stand inside the Dover Hotel and imagine the conversations held inside the building. The park is the home to a wide variety of wildlife, including some Bald Eagles who have called the park home since 2004. Fort Donelson National Cemetery was established by Congressional act in 1866 to serve as a final resting place for United States soldiers. At Fort Donelson National Cemetery, visitors can pay tribute to veterans who have fought to keep our Nation free.