

**THE FALL OF FORT PULASKI**

Georgia and the Confederate States enjoyed possession of Fort Pulaski for little more than 15 months. This is how the stronghold was lost.

- 1861:**
- 1 November 7.** Combined Union naval and military forces seize a beachhead on Hilton Head Island, S.C., 10 miles from Fort Pulaski with orders to recapture the southern forts and blockade the South Atlantic Coast.
  - 2 November 10.** Confederates abandon Tybee Island by order of Gen. Robert E. Lee.
  - 3 November 13.** Union blockade of Savannah River is successful. The British ship *Fingal* was the last vessel to get through to Savannah.
  - 4 November 25.** Federal troops land on Tybee Island. Engineer Captain Q. A. Gillmore is detailed to plan attack of Fort Pulaski, and on December 1 submits plan which recommends use of rifled cannons.
- 1862:**
- 5 February 10.** Federals cut the fort telegraph line.
  - 6 February 10.** Federals place gunboats in waterways leading to Savannah.
  - 7 February 12.** Federals complete Battery Vulcan on north bank of Savannah River above Fort Pulaski. The next morning, the Confederate supply ship, *Ida*, using south channel, runs past this battery and 2 days later returns to Savannah via Lazaretto Creek, Wilmington Narrows, and other small waterways.
  - 8 February 16.** The Federals counter by constructing Battery Hamilton on the Savannah River opposite Battery Vulcan. They also post a gunboat in Wilmington Narrows and a company of artillery on Decent Island commanding Lazaretto Creek. The investment of Fort Pulaski is now complete and construction of siege batteries on the north shore of Tybee Island may begin.
  - 9 April 10-11.** When Confederates refuse to surrender, Federal artillery opens fire on Fort Pulaski. In 30 hours, rifled cannons breach the walls.
  - 10 April 11.** The Confederates surrender unconditionally.

**THE FORT COMMANDER DESCRIBES THE SIEGE**

Colonel Charles H. Olmstead, who commanded the troops at Fort Pulaski during the siege and who surrendered the garrison and the fort unconditionally to the Federal conquerors, gives a vivid account of the battle in this letter to his wife. He was a man with a high sense of honor and duty, but when he realized the hopelessness of continuing the fight, he ended the struggle to save the lives of his men. Persons who did not know him intimately never completely understood this act. The subsequent military career of Colonel Olmstead, however, was faultless. When exchanged in the fall of 1862, he resumed command of his regiment and served with distinction to the end of the war. The letter was presented to the National Park Service by Colonel Olmstead's youngest daughter, Miss Susan Olmstead.

—R. B. L.

Fort Pulaski April 11th 1862

My dear Wife

*I address you under circumstances of the most painful nature. Fort Pulaski has fallen and the whole garrison are prisoners. Early yesterday morning a flag of truce came over from Tybee Island conveying a demand for the surrender of the Fort. Of course I could give but one answer, that I was there to fight not to yield. We instantly made all our preparations, and at eight o'clock precisely, the enemy opened fire upon us. We returned it, slowly at first but increasing in rapidity as we got the range. It soon became evident to my mind that if the enemy continued to fire as they had begun that our walls must yield. Shot after shot . . . hit immediately about our embrasures. Some came through dismounting a gun, wounding one man very severely, and flaking off the bricks in every direction.*

*After fighting for two or three hours, some of our barbette guns were also rendered useless by the piles of masonry thrown upon them from the parapet. Officers and men behaved most gallantly, everyone was cool and collected. There was no shirking. The men when ordered on the parapet, went immediately with the most cheerful alacrity, though the missiles of death were flying about at the most fearful rate. Thirteen inch mortar shells, Columbiad shells, rifle shots were shrieking through the air in every direction, while the ear was deafened by the tremendous explosions that followed each other without cessation. And so the day wore on, until night brought us a little rest, which was much needed, for the men were nearly worn out. On taking a survey of the Fort after the firing had ceased my worst fears were confirmed. The angle immediately opposed to the fire of the enemy was terribly shattered and I was convinced that another day would breach it entirely. . . .*

*At half past eleven the enemy opened fire again and kept it up at intervals of ten or fifteen minutes during the night. We did not answer, however, until six o'clock in the morning when firing became general again and continued until about half past two o'clock in the afternoon when it was reported to me that our magazine was in danger. I*

*found that the breach in our wall had become so alarmingly enlarged that shots from the batteries of the enemy were passing clear through and striking directly on the brickwork of the magazine. It was simply a question of a few hours as to whether we should yield or to be blown into perdition by our own powder. Our position was now as follows. Seven of our barbette guns had been rendered useless, our traverses giving away, the West side of the Fort a complete wreck, and the South East angle so badly breached as to permit free access of every shot to our magazine. I conferred with my officers and they united in advising me to surrender at once to avoid any further and unnecessary bloodshed. Their advice chimed with my own views, and I gave the necessary orders for a Surrender.*

*. . . I cannot write now all the details of our surrender. It pains me too much to think of them now, but I must tell you, darling, of the kind feeling evinced for me by my men. They crowded around me and endeavored by every means in their power to show me that they were willing to share whatever fate might be in store for me.*

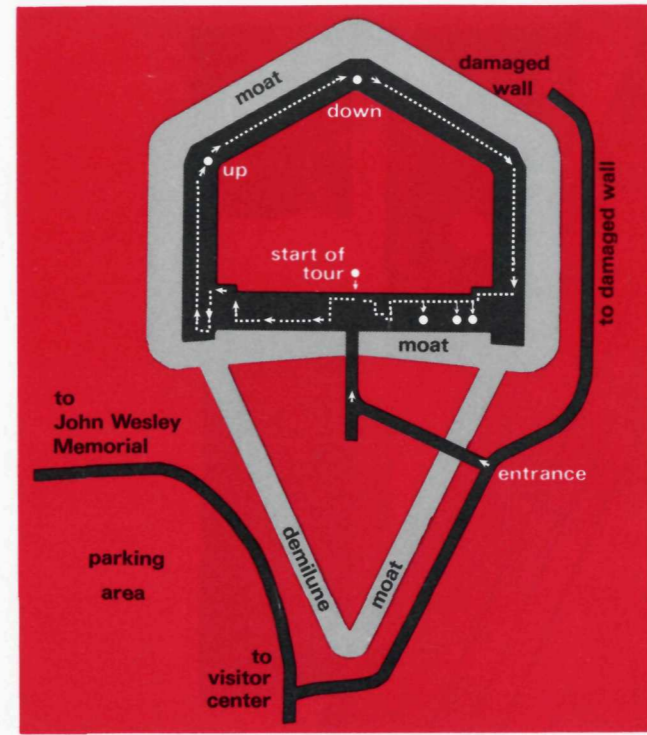
*You can form no idea of the ruin of our South East Angle. Two casemates are completely torn to pieces, the outer wall having fallen out into the moat, while the casemates adjoining are cracked and crumbling from top to bottom. And yet to think in the midst of the severe fire which brought about this devastation, we have had but three men seriously wounded. . . .*

*. . . I have escaped without a scratch, thanks to our ruling Providence. . . .*

*The Federal Officers who have been in the Fort have acted in the most courteous and gentlemanly manner towards me. I am assured that we shall have every privilege granted us consistent with the discharge of their duty, so you must not worry about me. . . . As a part of the Articles of Capitulation all my sick and wounded men are to be sent up to the city in charge of Corporal Landershine, our hospital steward, who will forward this to you. I shall not finish this until tomorrow when I hope to be able to tell you where we are to be sent. I care very little where it be so long as I can carry with me the approval of my own conscience. I feel that I have done my duty, my whole duty, that I have been forced to yield only to superior might of metal. Guns such as have never before been brought to bear against any fortification, have overpowered me, but I trust to history to keep my name untarnished. Good night, God bless you.*

*12th. I am still in the dark as to where we will be sent, though I believe New York is our destination. The money I have with me will be useless at the North, so I enclose it to you. Something like \$90.00. And now, my darling, I must say good bye. Rest assured that I shall lose no opportunity of writing to you, if it is allowed. Try, dear Florie, to keep a cheerful heart in this trial. It might have been worse for us. Give a great deal of love to all the dear ones at home. I do not name them, but they all have places in my heart. Comfort my mother, and give a sweet kiss to our little one for her absent father. That God may ever bless and protect you is the earnest prayer of your affectionate husband.*

Charlie.



**THE NATIONAL MONUMENT**

Fort Pulaski National Monument consists of McQueens and Cockspur Islands. The fort is located on Cockspur Island, where facilities include a visitor center, a system of roads and walks, and a picnic area.

The Wesley Memorial, just north of the fort, stands on the approximate site where John Wesley knelt to give thanks for a safe crossing of the Atlantic. A missionary to the Indians, Wesley landed on Cockspur Island, then called Peeper Island, on February 5, 1736. The memorial cross was erected by the Georgia Society of the Colonial Dames of America.

**ABOUT YOUR VISIT**

Fort Pulaski is 17 miles east of Savannah via U.S. 80, or 15 miles via the Islands Expressway toll road. Transportation can also be arranged with private companies in Savannah.

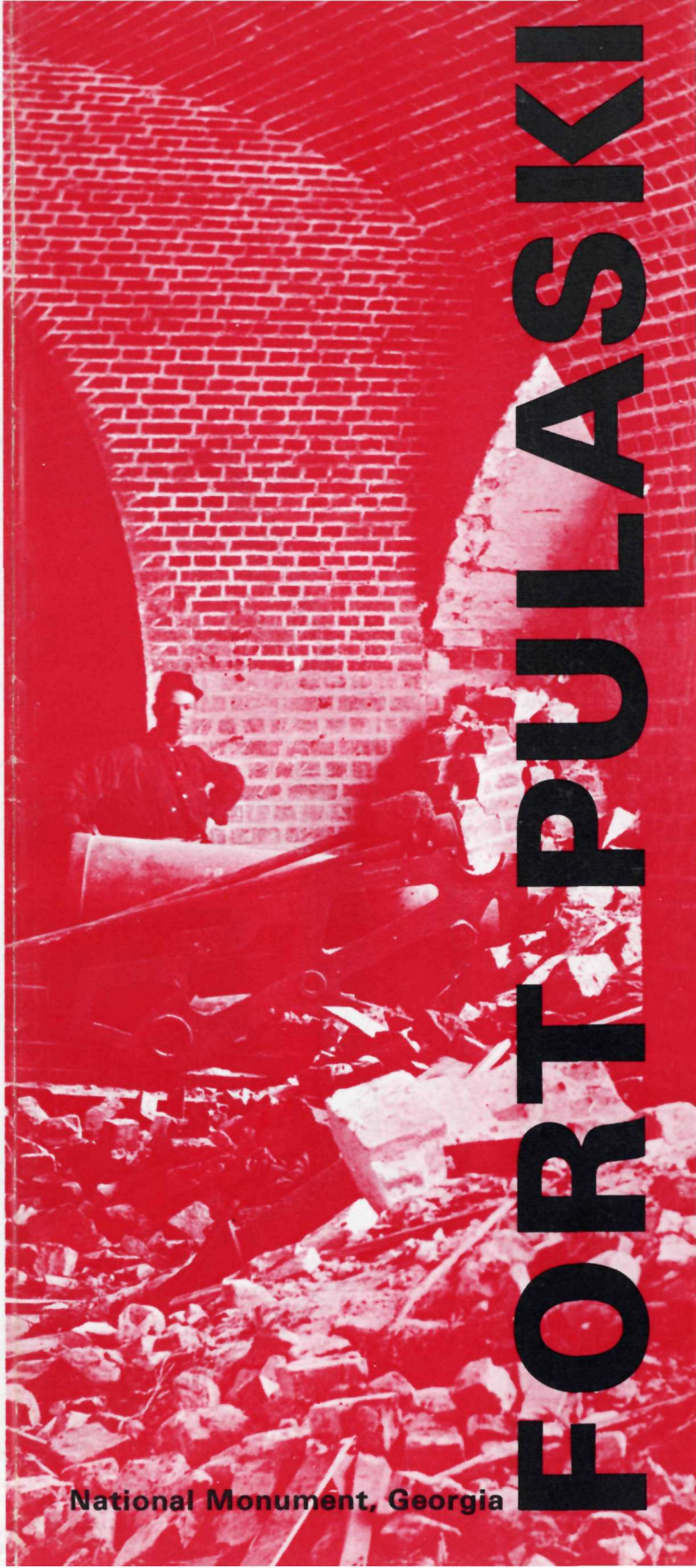
The monument is open daily from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. All persons should enter the fort through the visitor center. Groups desiring special services should make advance arrangements with the superintendent.

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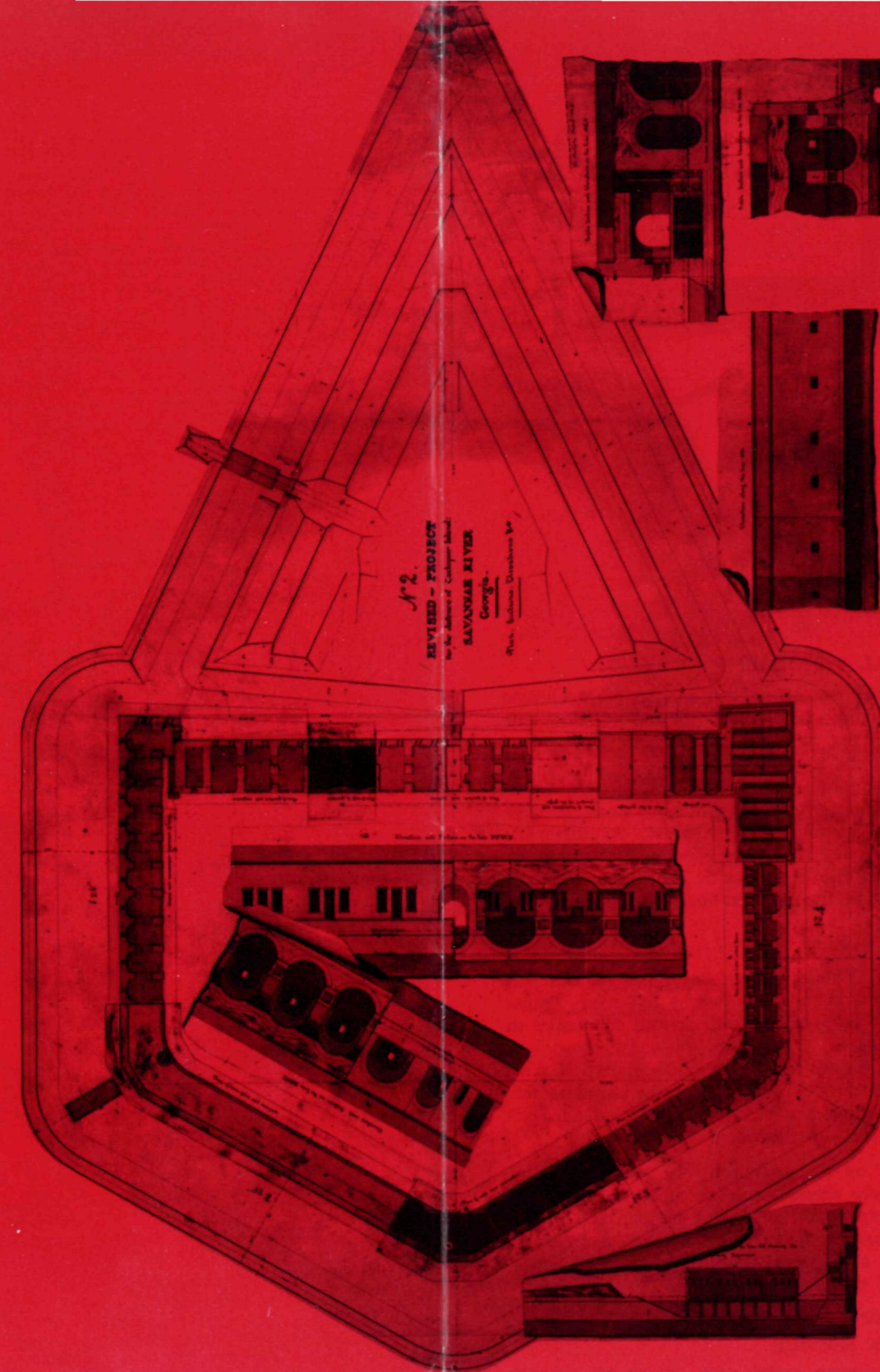
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National Monument, Georgia

**FORT PULASKI**



In the second quarter of the 19th century U.S. military engineers built Fort Pulaski on a low, grassy island to guard the river approaches to Savannah. The latest design in fort construction, it was said at the time to be "as strong as the Rocky Mountains." The fort was the pride of Savannah, and all important visitors were taken to see it. But when tested in battle during the Civil War, it failed to meet the expectations of its admirers. Subjected to bombardment by U.S. troops, the Confederate defenders surrendered in 30 hours.

The quick fall of Fort Pulaski surprised and shocked the world, but it had little effect on the outcome of the war. Federal victory helped to seal the blockade of Savannah, but this was a job the Navy already had well in hand. The Confederate garrison was completely surrounded; there was no hope for relief. In a short time, lack of food would have compelled surrender. Battle merely hastened the inevitable.

There was no mystery in the fall of Fort Pulaski. It was the oft repeated story in which a new and more powerful weapon overcame an obsolete system of defense. The battle, brief and undistinguished though it was, nevertheless proved the superiority of rifled cannons over masonry forts. In 30 hours 10 of these new weapons breached the stout walls of Fort Pulaski and proclaimed to the world that the day of brick forts had ended.

## FORT PULASKI

Today the visitor, strolling through the vaulted casemates or looking seaward from the ramparts, may ask why this great fort was built. Turn back for a moment, to 150 years ago, when the story of Fort Pulaski begins.

In 1815 the United States stood on the threshold of a fabulous century of progress. The country had fought England to a draw in the War of 1812, and the memory of victories on land and sea lingered like strong wine. Yet some people also remembered the disasters.

President James Madison was one who remembered how easily England had penetrated our unguarded shores, ravished farms and hamlets along the Chesapeake, and left the Nation's Capital in smoking ruins. To prevent such humiliation in the future, he employed Simon Bernard, a justly famous French military engineer, to plan an invincible system of defense.

Fort Pulaski was one link in the chain of seacoast forts recommended by Bernard. The fort, named for Count Casimir Pulaski, a Polish soldier of fortune who lost his life in the unsuccessful siege of Savannah in 1779, stands on Cockspar Island at the mouth of the Savannah River in Georgia. Construction began in 1829 and required \$1 million, 25 million bricks, and 18 years of toil. Ironically, before the United States could make use of the fort, it had first to conquer it.

On January 3, 1861, when relations between North and South were strained to the breaking point, Georgia troops seized Fort Pulaski. South Carolina had already seceded from the Union, and it seemed inevitable that Georgia would follow.

At the time of this break Savannah was a city of about 20,000 inhabitants and a rich seaport trading in cotton, naval stores, and timber. Its leaders were people of wealth and culture. Though they divided on the wisdom of seizing the Federal fort, nevertheless people of all classes joined in preparations for its defense after the seizure. Georgia seceded on January 19, 1861, and a few weeks later transferred Fort Pulaski to the Confederate States of America. By the end of April, 11 Southern States had left the Union and were at war with the United States.

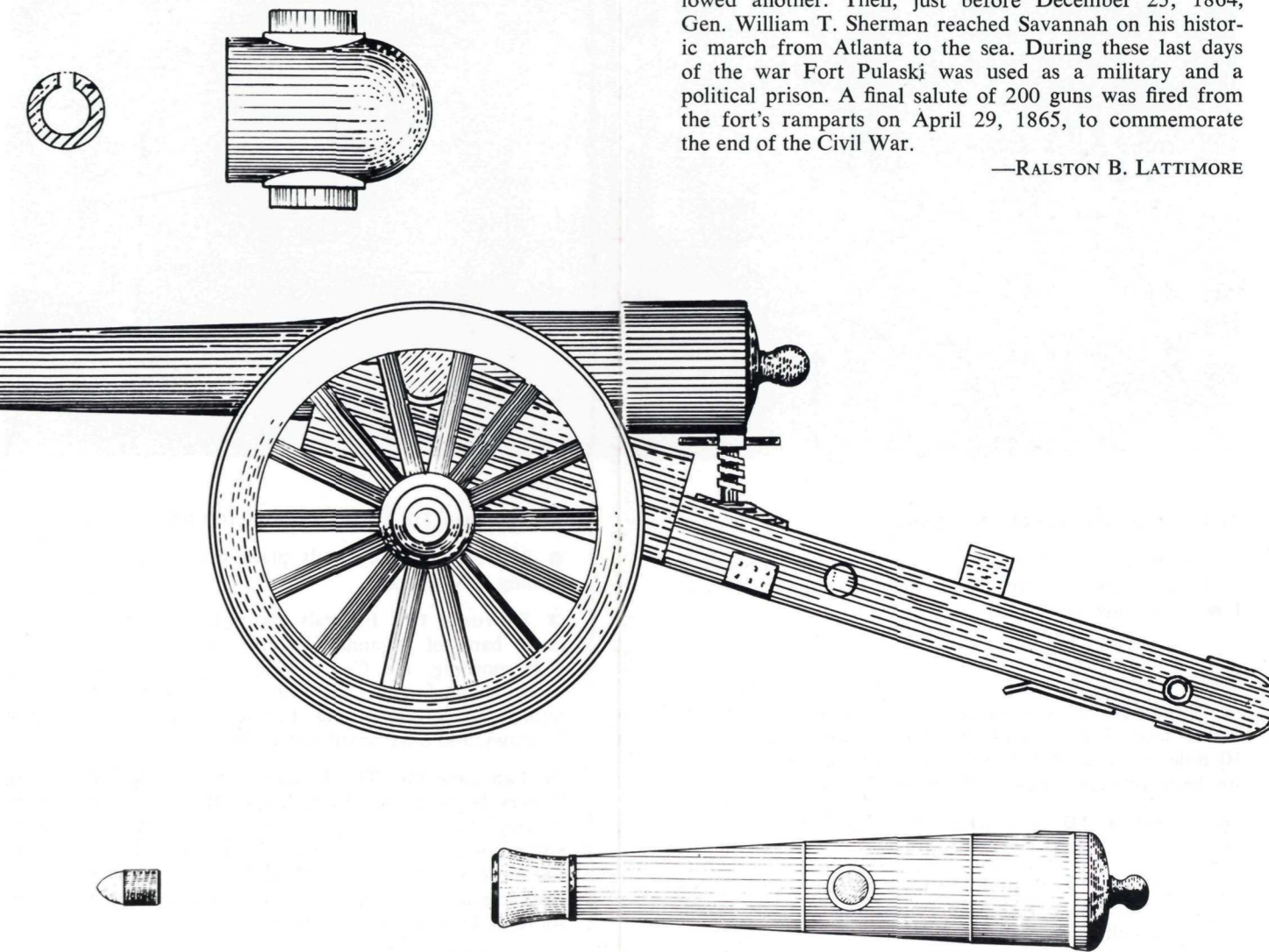
The fortunes of the South rode high during the first year of war, but before the end of the summer, President Abraham Lincoln ordered the Navy to blockade Southern ports. As the blockade tightened it strangled the Confederate economy.

On November 7, 1861, a combined Army and Navy expedition struck at Port Royal Sound, S.C., about 15 miles north of Fort Pulaski. The heavy guns of Federal warships bombarded Forts Walker and Beauregard at the entrance of the sound. Unaccustomed to battle, the Confederates retreated in great disorder, and the Federals

the fort garrison did not know was that the Federal armament included 10 new rifled guns destined to make military history. Soon projectiles from these weapons began to bore through the bricks of Pulaski with shattering effect.

By noon of the second day the bombardment had opened wide gaps in the wall, and explosive shells, passing through the holes, threatened the main powder magazine. Impressed by the hopelessness of the situation and concerned about the lives of his men, Confederate Col. Charles H. Olmstead gave the order for surrender.

Gillmore was the hero of the day. For his boldness in using a new weapon and for the victory won, he was breveted a brigadier general. To the 7th Connecticut and the 3d Rhode Island went the honor of receiving the surrendered fort. Pulaski's captured garrison, 385 officers and men, was sent north to Governor's Island in New York.



The tedious job of repairing the damaged fort was assigned to the 48th New York Volunteers. This Brooklyn regiment, known as "Perry's Saints," spent more than a year on garrison duty, occasionally taking part in forays on the Confederate line. When not at work, the men sought in many ways to banish boredom. They organized a baseball team, a band, and a dramatic society, gave dances in the fort, and held boat races on the river. Once they rescued the crew and the cargo of a sutler's ship washed ashore on Cockspar Island. The ship carried a cargo of wine, whiskey, beer, and rum, and the celebration that followed lasted 3 days. The regimental commander, Col. James H. Perry, was a strict Methodist pastor, who died not long after he discovered that his "saints" had fallen.

Weeks, months, years passed. Other troops took the place of the Brooklyn boys, and one uneventful day followed another. Then, just before December 25, 1864, Gen. William T. Sherman reached Savannah on his historic march from Atlanta to the sea. During these last days of the war Fort Pulaski was used as a military and a political prison. A final salute of 200 guns was fired from the fort's ramparts on April 29, 1865, to commemorate the end of the Civil War.

—RALSTON B. LATTIMORE



landed unopposed on Hilton Head Island. From this beachhead deep in Southern territory, the Federals immediately established a base for operations against Fort Pulaski and the whole South Atlantic coast.

The defeat at Hilton Head convinced the Confederates that it would be impossible to hold a defensive line on the sea islands. On November 10 they abandoned Tybee Island at the mouth of the Savannah, burned the lighthouse, and destroyed their earthworks. This action proved to be a grave error, for it gave the enemy the only site from which Fort Pulaski could be taken. The Federals moved quickly to take advantage of the break. They first cut the fort's communications with the mainland, then moved in force to Tybee Island to prepare for battle.

Engineer Capt. Quincy Adams Gillmore, commander of the siege operations, believed that an overwhelming bombardment would force the Confederates to give up the fort. Thus he erected 11 batteries containing 36 guns and mortars along the northwest shore of Tybee Island. On April 10, 1862, he sent a courier to Fort Pulaski under flag of truce with a formal demand to surrender.

When the Confederates refused, the Federals opened fire. But the Confederates were not particularly alarmed. The enemy's guns were a mile or more away, over twice the effective range for heavy ordnance of that day. What