

# Fort Donelson

Fort Donelson National Battlefield  
Tennessee

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Official Map and Guide





General Grant at Fort Donelson. From the painting by Paul Philippoteaux. Courtesy Chicago Historical Society.

**“No terms except an unconditional and immediate surrender can be accepted.”**

U. S. Grant

## From Henry to Donelson

Bells rang jubilantly throughout the North at the news, but they were silent in Dixie. The cause: the fall of Fort Donelson in February 1862. It was the North's first major victory of the Civil War, opening the way into the very heart of the Confederacy. Just a month before, the Confederates had seemed invincible. A stalemate had existed since the Southern victories at First Manassas and Wilson's Creek in the summer of 1861. Attempts to break the Confederate defense line, which in the west extended from southwest Missouri and the Indian Territory to the Appalachian Mountains, had achieved little success. A reconnaissance in January convinced the Union command that the most vulnerable places in the Confederacy's western line were Forts Henry and Donelson, earthen works guarding the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers.

A joint navy/army attack upon Fort Henry had been agreed to by Flag Officer Andrew H. Foote and an obscure brigadier general named Ulysses S. Grant. It was to take place in early February, using the Tennessee River for transport and supply. It would be the first test of Foote's ironclad gunboats.

On February 6, 1862, while Grant's men marched overland from their camp downstream, Foote's gunboats slowly approached Fort Henry and opened a hot fire that quickly convinced Lloyd Tilghman, the Confederate commander, that he could not hold out for long. The plan called for the gunboats to engage the fort until the army could surround it. The bombardment raged for more than an hour, with the ironclads taking heavy blows and suffering many casualties. But the fort was no match for the gunboats. To the army's chagrin, the ironclads pounded the fort into submission before the soldiers, plodding over muddy roads, could reach the vicinity. Less than a hundred of the Confederate garrison surrendered, including Tilghman; the rest, almost 2,500 men, escaped to Fort Donelson, Grant's next objective, a dozen miles away on the Cumberland.

At Donelson the Confederates had a far stronger position. Two river batteries, mounting some 12 heavy guns, effectively controlled the Cumberland. An outer defense line, built largely by reinforcements sent in after the fall of Fort Henry, stretched along high ground from Hickman Creek on the right to the

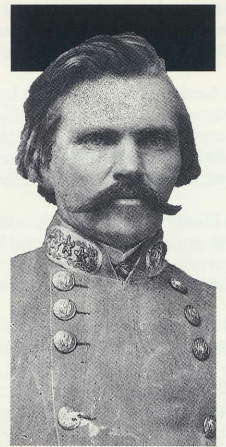
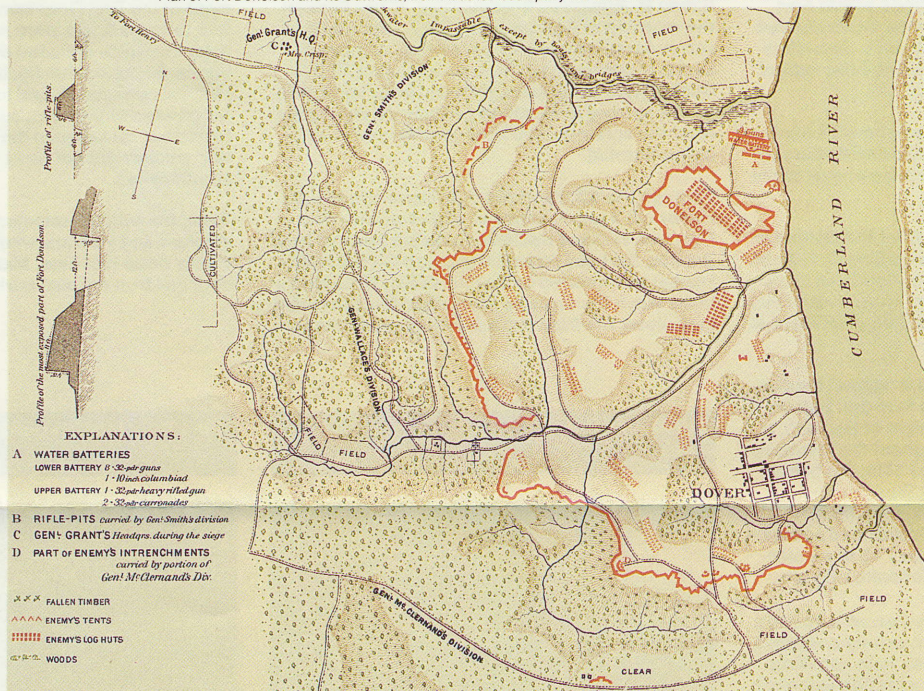
little town of Dover. Within the fort Confederate infantry and artillerymen huddled in log cabins against the winter. Aside from a measles epidemic, they lived "quite comfortably," cooking their own meals, fighting snowball battles, working on the fortifications, drilling, and talking about home—until the grim reality of war descended upon them.

It took Grant longer than expected to start his men toward Donelson. Several days passed before Fort Henry was secure and his troops ready. He finally got underway on February 11, and as his soldiers stepped out briskly over the rolling terrain, the weather had turned unseasonably warm. Believing that the temperature was typical of the South in February, many of the soldiers cast aside their heavy winter gear—an act they would soon regret. By February 13 some 15,000 Union troops nearly encircled the outerworks of Fort Donelson. Sporadic clashes broke out that day without either side gaining ground. Nightfall brought bitter weather—lashing sleet and snow that caused great suffering.



**Brig. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant** commanded the Military District of Southeast Missouri at the time of the Fort Henry and Fort Donelson campaign. Until January 1862, however, when his plan to attack the Confederate river forts was approved, he had fought only one battle, a brief and inconclusive engagement at Belmont, Mo., in November 1861.

Plan of Fort Donelson and Its Outworks, from *Atlas to Accompany the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*.



**Brig. Gen. Simon B. Buckner** initially came to Fort Donelson early in 1862 with reinforcements from Kentucky. When Grant laid siege, the fort's ranking officers, Gens. John B. Floyd and Gideon J. Pillow, saw the hopelessness of the situation and left Buckner in charge to face the inevitable.

## The Battle of Fort Donelson

The morning of February 14 dawned cold and quiet. Early in the afternoon the stillness was broken by a furious roar, and the earth began to shake. The Union gunboats were exchanging "iron valentines" with the 11 big guns in the Southern water batteries. During this one and one-half hour duel the Confederate guns inflicted such extensive damage upon the gunboats that they were forced to retreat. The hills and hollows echoed with cheers from the Southern soldiers.

The Confederate generals—John Floyd, Gideon Pillow, Simon Buckner, and Bushrod Johnson—also rejoiced; but sober reflection revealed another danger. Grant was receiving reinforcements daily and had extended his right flank almost to Lick Creek to complete the encirclement of the Southerners. If

the Confederates did not move quickly, they would be starved into submission. Accordingly, they massed their troops against the Union right, hoping to clear a route to Nashville and safety. The battle on February 15 raged all morning, the Union army grudgingly retreating step by step. Just as it seemed the way was clear, the Southern troops were ordered to return to their entrenchments—a result of confusion and indecision among the Confederate commanders. Grant immediately launched a vigorous counterattack, retaking most of the lost ground and gaining new positions as well. The way of escape was closed once more.

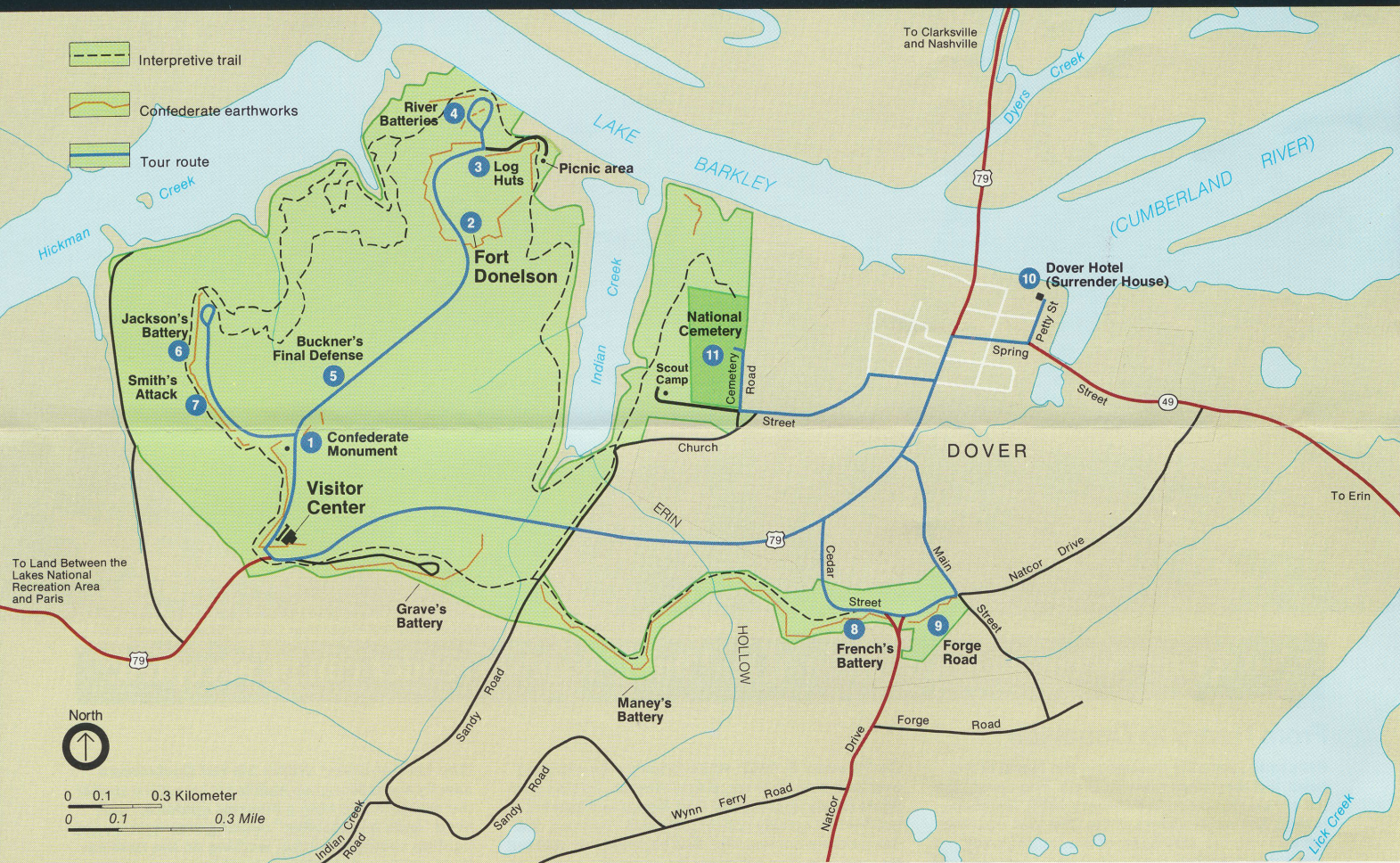
Floyd and Pillow turned over command of Fort Donelson to Buckner and slipped away to Nashville with about 2,000 men. Others followed cavalryman

Col. Nathan Bedford Forrest across swollen Lick Creek. That morning, February 16, Buckner asked Grant for terms. Grant answered, "No terms except an unconditional and immediate surrender can be accepted." Buckner surrendered.

With the capture of Fort Donelson and her sister fort, Henry, the North had won its first great victory and gained a new hero—"Unconditional Surrender" Grant. The South was forced to give up southern Kentucky and much of Middle and West Tennessee. The heartland of the Confederacy was open, and the Federals would press on until the "Union" became a fact once more.

# Fort Donelson

Fort Donelson is a unit of the National Park System, which consists of more than 340 parks representing important examples of our country's natural and cultural inheritance.



## A Guide to the Park

Fort Donelson is one mile west of Dover and three miles east of Land Between the Lakes on U.S. 79. The visitor center is open from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. daily except December 25. The following guide, keyed to the map above, highlights major sites within the park.

**1 Confederate Monument.** Erected by the Tennessee Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy in 1933, this monument commemorates the Southern soldiers who fought and died at Fort Donelson.

**2 Fort Donelson.** Soldiers and slaves built this 15-acre fort over a period of seven months, using axes and shovels to make a wall of logs and earth 10 feet high. The fort's purpose was to protect the Cumberland River batteries from land attack.

**3 Log Huts.** Some 100 huts stood within Fort Donelson at the time of the battle. Confederates constructed them for winter quarters. Sometime after the surrender, Federals burned the cabins because of a measles outbreak.

**4 River Batteries.** Here inexperienced Confederate gunners faced Federal ironclad and timberclad gunboats and defeated them in a land-naval battle that was heard 35 miles away.

**5 Buckner's Final Defense.** After the Confederate breakout attempt, Grant ordered Gen. C. F. Smith to attack the far right flank of the Southern lines. Smith's troops drove the Confederates back to this ridge, where they valiantly held their position until reinforcements arrived.

**6 Jackson's Battery.** Ordered to support the Confederate right wing, Jackson's four-gun battery moved to this position on the night of the 13th. It was held in reserve here throughout the following day. Early on the morning of the 15th, the battery was ordered to the Wynn Ferry Road sector.

**7 Smith's Attack.** Union troops swarmed up these snow-covered slopes on February 15 in a determined assault against the Confederate rifle-pits.

**8 French's Battery.** In conjunction with Maney's Battery to the west, the four-gun battery emplaced here was to prevent Union forces from attacking down Erin Hollow and penetrating the Fort Donelson perimeter.

**9 Forge Road.** The Confederate mass attack on February 15 opened this avenue of escape, only to have it closed again through blunders and indecision on the part of the Southern generals and by a Union counterattack.

**10 Dover Hotel (Surrender House).** Before the Civil War, the small town of Dover, county seat of Stewart County, Tennessee, had showed much promise. The surrounding region was prosperous in producing iron ore. With almost 800 inhabitants in the 1860s, Dover was an important port on the Cumberland River. After the fall of Fort Donelson, Dover was occupied by a Union garrison for the duration of the war. On two occasions, once in mid-1862 and again early in 1863, Confederate cavalry tried to drive the Federal troops from the area. Both attempts failed; the second, led by Gen. Joseph Wheeler, also cost the town its future. That skirmish, known as the Battle of Dover, resulted in the destruction of all but four of the town's buildings.

One of those that survived was the Dover Hotel. This structure, built between 1851 and 1853, had served during the Battle of Fort Donelson as Gen. Simon B. Buckner's headquarters. It was here on the morning of February 16, 1862, that Buckner surrendered his army to Union Gen. Ulysses S. Grant. It was here, too, that an estimated 13,000 Confederate soldiers were loaded onto transports for the journey to Northern prisoner-of-war camps. After the surrender the hotel was converted to a Union hospital.

Through the efforts of the Fort Donelson House Historical Association (not affiliated with Fort Donelson National Battlefield) and the National Park Service, the hotel (sometimes called the Surrender House) was restored in the late 1970s. The exterior looks much the same as it did when the surrender took place; the front room on the ground floor is

representative of a hotel lobby during the 1860s. The building is the only existing original structure in which a major surrender took place during the Civil War.

The Dover Hotel is open daily from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. June through August, and from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. September through May. One room has been furnished with reproduction items to give an idea of how the inside might have looked during the 19th century. A short film deals with the surrender.

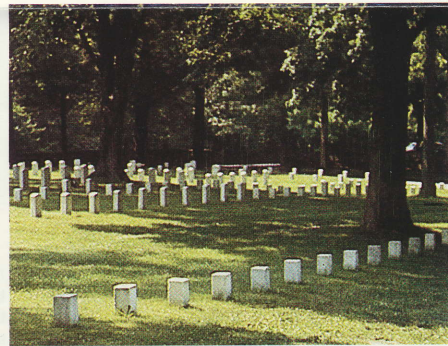
**11 National Cemetery.** In 1863, after the Battle of Dover, the Union garrison built a fortification which became the center of activity for black freemen in the area. A small community grew up around the fort as freemen and their families sought the protection offered by the Union garrison. Four years later this same site was selected for the establishment of the Fort Donelson National Cemetery and 655 Union soldiers were reinterred here. These soldiers (which included 504 unknowns) had been buried on the battlefield, in local cemeteries, in hospital cemeteries, and in nearby towns. The high percentage of unknown soldiers can be attributed to haste in cleaning up the battlefield and that Civil War soldiers did not carry government-issued identification.

Today the national cemetery contains both Civil War veterans and veterans who have served the United States since that time. Many spouses and dependent children are also buried here.

The Dover Hotel



Fort Donelson National Cemetery



## About Your Visit

**For Your Safety.** Hikers should walk facing traffic and bikers should ride in the direction of traffic in single file. Drivers should observe speed limits and park only in pull-offs. Keep close watch over your children. Use caution when near the river. Be alert to uneven ground surfaces. Do not walk or stand on rock walls, cannons, or earthen mounds.

**Regulations.** Build fires only in the picnic area (grills only). Pets must always be physically restrained and are not allowed in buildings. Obey traffic signs. Guns and other weapons must be packed to prevent their use. Hunting is prohibited. Use of metal detectors is prohibited. Picnic in designated areas only. Walking on earthworks is prohibited.

**Administration.** Fort Donelson National Battlefield and Cemetery are administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is P.O. Box 434, Dover, TN 37058, is in immediate charge.