

Unconditional Surrender



Long-silent cannon look out upon the Cumberland River at Fort Donelson National Battlefield near Dover, Tennessee.

The next morning, after my visit to Hopkinsville, Kentucky and the Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area the day before, I left the hotel in Oak Grove, Kentucky, crossed the state line into Tennessee and gassed up at a nearby Kroger. I then headed west on US 79. For miles on the right-hand side was nothing but vegetation and fencing as I passed Fort Campbell.

After driving through the small town of Dover, I pulled into my first stop of the day, the Fort Donelson National Battlefield, only to find the visitor center closed for renovation.

I ended up going to the nearby Stewart County Visitor Center, which was serving as a temporary host to the Fort Donaldson Visitor Center. I watched a short video about the battle and perused a few exhibits.

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By Terry M. Thacker

The Battle of Fort Donelson was fought over several days during the middle of February 1862, which was still fairly early in the War Between the States. The Union forces were commanded by Major General Ulysses S. Grant and the Confederates were led by Brigadier General John B. Floyd.

The Confederates had built the fort to help guard the Cumberland River. If the Union were to gain control of the Cumberland, then all of Confederate-held Tennessee would be vulnerable to Union takeover. A week earlier, Grant's army had taken nearby Fort Henry, which was located on the Tennessee River.

As Grant's forces moved in, Floyd, as well as his next-in-command, General Gideon Pillow, saw the handwriting on the wall and skedaddled out while they still had time, leaving it up to Major General Simon Bolivar Buckner to carry out the inevitable surrender that was only a matter of time.



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Dover Hotel, where Confederate General Simon Bolivar Buckner surrendered more than 12,000 soldiers to Union General Ulysses S. Grant.

By Jerry M. Thacker
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Colonel Nathan Bedford Forrest, commander of the Confederate cavalry, was disgusted at Floyd's and Pillow's leadership and was determined that he and his command would not surrender. They managed to escape as well.

On the morning of February 16, Buckner sent a note to Grant asking for terms of surrender. Grant, a friend of Buckner's from before the war, replied, in part, "No terms except unconditional and immediate surrender can be accepted."

Buckner really had no choice in the matter; the impending surrender was a foregone conclusion. A bitter Buckner surrendered not only the fort, but also more than 12,000 soldiers.

It was from this victory that Grant earned his *nom de guerre*, "Unconditional Surrender" Grant, which was based on his initials, "US." Not only did Grant gain a *nom de guerre*, he also gained acclaim and status and was celebrated throughout the North. It was this victory that began his rise in leadership which eventually brought him to overall command of all Union forces a couple of years later.

After leaving the Stewart County Visitor Center, I drove onto the Park Service property and drove down to the end of the driveway, where a series of large, long silent cannon look out menacingly over the Cumberland River. This was my second visit to this site. My first time was way back in 1993, so I do not remember a whole lot about it.

After checking out the place for a good little while, I drove back into the town of Dover to the Dover Hotel, where the formal surrender took place.

As I continued my way southwest on US 79, I passed the southern entrance to the Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area. Since I had visited the area the day before, about which I wrote in last week's article, I saw no reason to stop in again. I then drove to Paris to check out the Eiffel Tower.

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Small-scale replica of the Eiffel Tower in Paris, Tennessee.

Say what !?! How in the world could I possibly drive to Paris to check out the Eiffel Tower without first crossing the Atlantic Ocean by air or by ship? I promise you, it can be done *if* the Paris you are visiting is the small city of Paris, Tennessee and *if* the Eiffel Tower that you are visiting is a much shorter replica of the real McCoy.

I had to get off the main highway for a mile or two to find the 70-foot metal tower, which is located in a municipal park. The real tower, in Paris, France, stands a whopping 1,063 feet tall.

The day was still young and I had several more places to visit before day was done, the next being outside the town of Camden, twenty-some miles south of Paris. Three miles west of town, on Mt. Carmel Road, I paid a visit to the Patsy Cline Plane Crash Memorial.

Cline was a top country and pop singer during the few short years of her career. On March 5, 1963,

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she and fellow country singers Cowboy Copas and Hawkshaw Hawkins were killed when the small plane in which they were flying during a storm crashed in a ravine known locally as Fatty Bottom. By Terry M. Thacker

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After parking, I had to walk down a long, winding path to the bottom of the ravine, where a boulder has been placed, inscribed with the names of Cline, Copas, Hawkins and the pilot, Randy Hughes.



Patsy Cline Plane Crash Memorial, located near Camden, Tennessee. Country singers Patsy Cline, Cowboy Copas, Hawkshaw Hawkins and pilot Randy Hughes were killed in a small plane crash at this spot on March 5, 1963.

Next Installment – Nathan Bedford Forrest