

THE SEIZURE AND REDUCTION OF FORT PULASKI.

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THE SEIZURE AND REDUCTION OF FORT PULASKI

The convention of the people of Georgia which passed an ordinance "To dissolve the union between the state of Georgia and other states united with her under a compact of government entitled 'the Constitution of the United States of America,'" did not assemble in Milledgeville, —then the capital of that commonwealth,—until Wednesday, the 16th of January, 1861. The proclamation of Governor Joseph E. Brown, ordering an election, by the people, of delegates from the several counties to that convention, was issued on the 21st of November, 1860. In the selection of these delegates the deepest interest was manifested, and the public heart was stirred to its inmost depths by the momentous questions which agitated the nation. On the 20th of December, 1860, South Carolina, whose associations with Georgia, from the inception of that colony, had at all times been most intimate and cordial, unanimously adopted an ordinance revoking her delegated powers, and withdrawing from the Union. Profound was the impression created in Georgia by this action on the part of her sister State. The retirement of her representatives from Congress; the events which quickly followed in Charleston Harbor; the failure of all overtures for conciliation, and assurances from trusted friends in Washington that coercive measures had been resolved upon by the general government, added fuel to the flame and encouraged prompt and decided action. So strong was the popular current in favor of the immediate capture of the forts and arsenals within the limits of Georgia, that a resolution was formed by a number of the leading citizens of Savannah to take possession of Fort Pulaski in advance of the assembling of the convention, and even without the formal sanction of the executive. Wiser counsels prevailed, however, and this contemplated movement was delayed until Governor Brown could be definitely advised of the situation. Responding to an urgent telegram from the Mayor of Savannah, he repaired to that city on the evening of the 2d of January. After calm deliberation, his Excellency, at a late hour the same night, issued the following orders to Colonel Alexander R. Lawton,* then commanding the 1st Regiment Georgia Volunteers:

* Afterwards Brigadier-General in Confederate service, and Quartermaster-General of the Confederacy.

Seary 140 Sept 22

“ Headquarters Georgia Militia.

Savannah, January 2, 1861.

Colonel A. R. Lawton,

Commanding 1st Regt: Georgia Vols.

Savannah.

Sir,

In view of the fact that the Government at Washington has, as we are informed upon high authority, decided on the policy of coercing a seceding state back into the Union, and it is believed now has a movement on foot to reinforce Fort Sumter at Charleston, and to occupy with Federal troops the Southern forts, including Fort Pulaski in this state, which, if done, would give the Federal Government, in any contest, great advantages over the people in this state: to the end therefore that this stronghold, which commands also the entrance into Georgia, may not be occupied by any hostile force until the Convention of the State of Georgia, which is to meet on the 16th instant, has decided on the policy which Georgia will adopt in this emergency, you are ordered to take possession of Fort Pulaski as by *public* order herewith, and to hold it against all persons, to be abandoned only under orders from me, or under compulsion by an overpowering hostile force.

Immediately upon occupying the Fort, you will take measures to put it in a thorough state of defense as far as its means and ours will permit.

* * *

* * * * *

I am Sir, very respectfully

Your obedient servant,

Joseph E Brown

Governor and Commander in Chief”

Early on the morning of the 3d of January, 1861, detachments from the Chatham Artillery, Captain Claghorn, the Savannah Volunteer Guards, Captain Screven, and the Oglethorpe Light Infantry, Captain Bartow,* numbering about one hundred and twenty-five men, under the immediate command of Colonel Lawton, embarked on board a steamer and, at twelve o'clock M. the same day, took formal possession of Fort Pulaski in the name of the state of Georgia. No resistance was encountered—the fort being in charge simply of an ordnance sergeant and a few assistants. The battery of the Chatham Artillery, comprising two 12-pounder howitz-

* Afterwards Brigadier General C. S. A., and killed at the first battle of Manassas.

ers and four 6-pounder bronze guns, accompanied this detachment, and was added to the armament of the fort, which then consisted of only twenty 32-pounder guns, the carriages of which were in many instances unserviceable. In the magazines a few hundred pounds of inferior powder were stored. The cartridge-bags were moth-eaten and valueless. Of solid shot there was but a limited supply. Not a shell was ready for service. Implements were scarce. The quarters were destitute of furniture. Not a gun was mounted *en barbette*. Of quartermaster and commissary stores there was no accumulation. The honor and safety of Georgia were at stake. The spirit of the men was admirable, and the troops entered with alacrity and zeal upon the task of placing the fort in as good a state of defense as the limited means at command would justify. The flag of Georgia was unfurled and saluted.* There it continued to wave in beauty until it gracefully yielded place to the national ensign of the Confederate States, within the ampler folds of which were garnered not only the hopes of the Empire State of the South, but the aspirations of her valiant sisters.

On the 18th of January the convention of the people of Georgia, assembled at Milledgeville, unanimously resolved: "That this convention highly approves the energetic and patriotic conduct of Governor Brown in taking possession of Fort Pulaski by Georgia troops, and requests him to hold possession until the relations of Georgia with the Federal Government be determined by this convention." This resolution was adopted at the instance of the Hon. Robert Toombs, who had just vacated his seat in the Senate of the United States.

It may not be denied that this occupation of Fort Pulaski by Georgia state troops, in obedience to the orders of Governor Brown, in advance of

* The first Secession banner, or flag of separate state independence, raised in the South during this eventful period was, it is believed, displayed by the citizens of Savannah, Georgia. It was exhibited from the monument erected in honor of General Greene in Johnson Square. It bore this inscription and device:

"OUR MOTTO;

SOUTHERN RIGHTS

EQUALITY OF THE STATES."

[A rattlesnake in the attitude of striking.]

"DON'T TREAD ON ME."

Its display was accompanied by demonstrations of the wildest enthusiasm, by bonfires, illuminations, fire-works, and soul-stirring utterances from popular orators and prominent citizens.

the withdrawal of Georgia from the Federal Union, exerted a potent influence not only within the limits of that commonwealth, but also among sister Southern states. Thus, prior to the assembling of her convention, was Georgia *de facto* committed to the doctrine of secession.

Mississippi adopted her ordinance of secession on the 9th of January, 1861. She was quickly followed by Florida on the 10th, Alabama on the 11th, Georgia on the 18th, and Louisiana on the 26th.

So intent were the Confederates upon the tenure of Fort Pulaski, and so industriously had they been engaged in strengthening its armament, that at the time of its reduction in April 1862, its battery consisted of forty-eight guns of all calibers. There were five 10-inch and nine 8-inch columbiads unchambered, three 42-pounder and twenty 32-pounder guns, two 24-pounder Blakely rifle guns, one 24-pounder iron howitzer, two 12-pounder bronze howitzers, two 12-inch iron mortars, three 10-inch sea-coast mortars, and one 6-pounder bronze field piece. The investing batteries,—eleven in number and mounting in the aggregate thirty-six pieces—were distributed along a front of 2,550 yards on Tybee Island, and at distances varying from 1,650 to 3,400 yards.

It lies not within the scope of this article to note the incidents of this bombardment, but we cannot refrain from alluding to the important military lesson inculcated on this occasion. By the three thousand shells and solid shot emitted from the 10 and 13-inch mortars, and from the 8 and 10-inch columbiads, admirably served by the United States troops, comparatively little damage was inflicted upon Fort Pulaski. Had these guns only been employed, the probability is that structure would have preserved its integrity for an indefinite period. To the novel and unexpected effect of the conical shot and percussion shells ejected from the James and Parrott rifles must be credited the breaching of the wall, the partial demoralization of the work, and the accomplishment of disastrous results which speedily rendered the fortification untenable. While the arches of the fort resisted the heaviest vertical fire encountered at the mouths of large mortars, and while the impact of solid shot from 8 and 10-inch columbiads proved inadequate for the serious impairment of the masonry walls of the fortress, it was quickly demonstrated that this well-constructed fortification could not long resist the penetration of, and demolition by, rifle projectiles guided with remarkable precision.

The siege and reduction of Fort Pulaski will be remembered as an important event not only in the history of the war between the states, but also in the development of the manufacture of heavy guns and the advancement of the science of artillery. The impulse which the results there

obtained imparted to the fabrication and employment of rifled ordnance and conical projectiles was strikingly illustrated during the subsequent operations of the Federals in Charleston harbor and at other points.

Nor was this lesson heeded only on this side of the Atlantic. The nations of Europe, appreciating its value, have remodeled their permanent fortifications, and have consigned to oblivion, both on shore and at sea, those old-fashioned smooth-bore guns the thunders of which had so long been regarded as most potent in deciding the fortunes of battle. We do not transcend the teachings of history when we affirm that this bombardment of Fort Pulaski, which culminated so disastrously to Confederate hopes, was largely instrumental in revolutionizing former theories with regard to the practicability of breaching admirably constructed brick scarp, and in introducing at home and abroad, on land and afloat, heavy rifle guns which are now the embodiment of martial power and precision.

Charles C. Jones, Jr.

AUGUSTA, Georgia.

MARCH OF THE NEW YORK SEVENTH REGIMENT

THE GREAT UPRISING IN NEW YORK CITY, 1861

“Civil War has begun.”

These four expressive words staring from the morning newspapers as the day dawned on Saturday, April 13, 1861, burned into the New York soul like molten iron. A terrible fight had been twenty-four hours in progress at Fort Sumter. The news with its as yet barren details spread through the city with the rapidity of thought. Whatever the public expectation concerning approaching hostilities between the Northern and Southern states, the reality was stunning, overwhelming. During the early morning hours of that black Saturday it was as if a pall had fallen over the whole Island of Manhattan.

“Fort Sumter is on fire!”



BURNING OF FORT SUMTER, APRIL 13, 1861.

From a photograph made at the time.

