

ANDREW H. FOOTE: FROM FORT DONELSON TO FORT PILLOW

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The great victories at Forts Henry and Donelson eliminated the center of the Confederate defensive line in the West. Columbus, the Gibraltar of the West and Bowling Green, Johnston's headquarters, were now outflanked. Thus, General Albert Sidney Johnston had little recourse but to fall back and regroup his forces for another stand that would take place in Bloody April, the fateful Battle of Shiloh. The way was now open for a general advance up the Tennessee River to northern Alabama. Nashville was soon occupied as the Confederates retreated.¹

Johnston and General Pierre G. T. Beauregard, his second in command, made the decision to make a stand further south. The Army of Tennessee was slowly concentrated at Corinth, Mississippi, and vicinity. Also, the Mississippi River had to be defended in order to protect the "all important" Mississippi Valley.² It was decided to make a stand at New Madrid, Madrid Bend, and Island Number Ten, a location some fifty-five miles from Cairo and some forty miles from Columbus.³ This position was located in the extreme northwest part of Tennessee and the extreme southeast part of Missouri. Island Number Ten no longer exists, but it was a very important piece of real estate in 1862. If it could have been defended and held, the Mississippi Valley would have been saved for the Confederacy or at least most of it.

At this location, the river, by an extraordinary twist, resembled an S reverse. It covered twelve miles by its twists and turns, but if measured from north to south only four miles or so were involved. The island was about two miles long but rather narrow, perhaps four to five hundred yards in width. It lay at the bottom of the loop to the right. The island, coupled with the batteries on the Tennessee shore, occupied an admirable defensive position in some respects. The Confederates had the river before them, and behind them to the east was a large impassable swamp.⁴ This made attack by land impossible so long as the defenders could remain in control of the river. As good as this position was, it was still very isolated. The Confederates could only receive supplies by the river from the south and from Tiptonville, Tennessee. If and when their communications were severed, they would be almost helpless. Retreat would be practically impossible.

In St. Louis, General Henry W. Halleck had been busy following the capture of Forts Henry and Donelson. He planned on moving ground forces downriver with Flag Officer Andrew H. Foote's ironclads to take New Madrid and Island Number Ten. Next he would move against Fort Pillow and Memphis. Halleck placed Brigadier General John Pope in charge of the Army of Mississippi to operate against New Madrid and Island Number Ten.⁵ Pope, a graduate of West Point, saw service with the Topographical En-



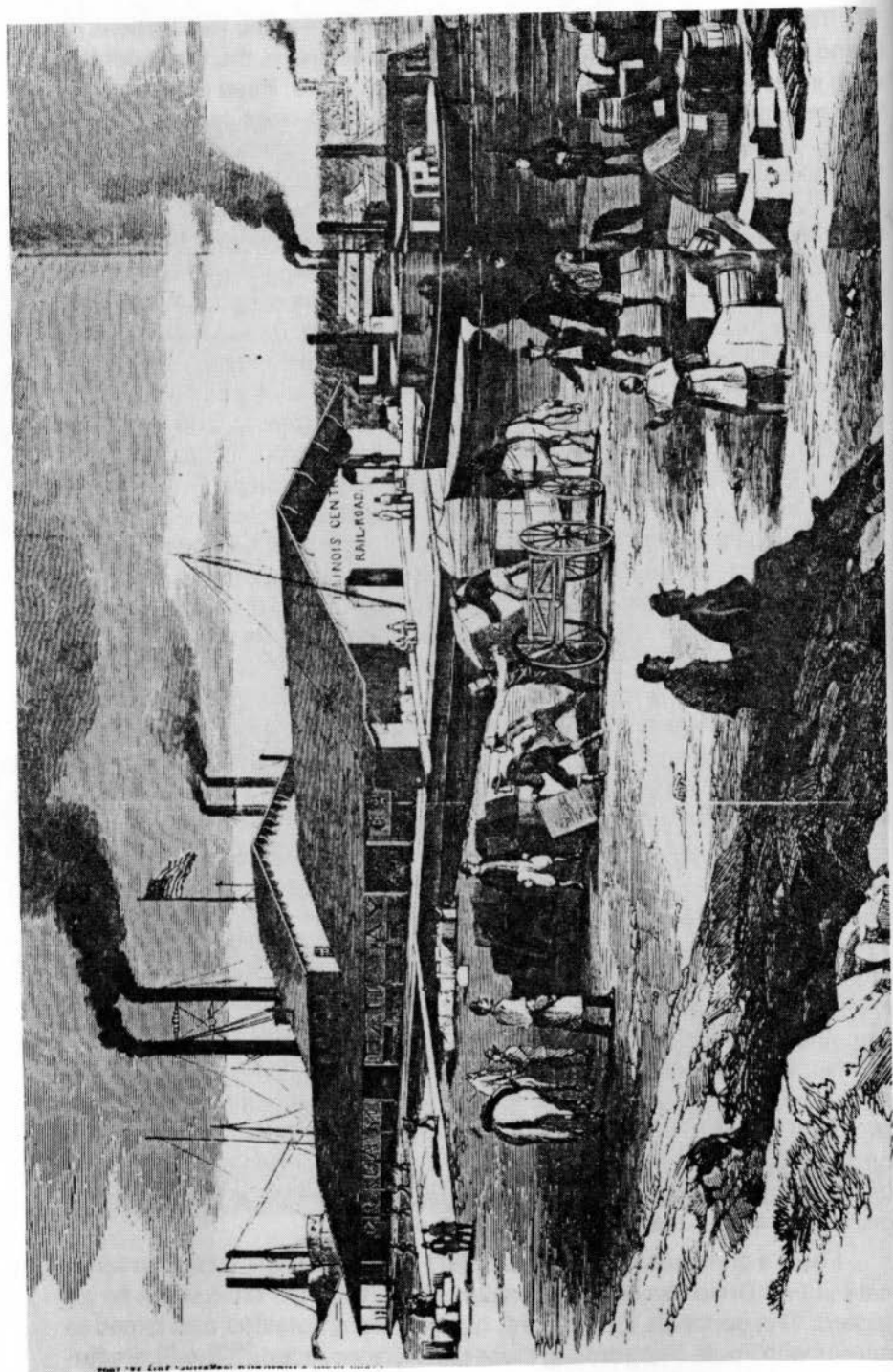
Rear Admiral Andrew Hull Foote

gineers, fought in the Mexico War, and commanded the District of Central Missouri until he received his present command.⁶

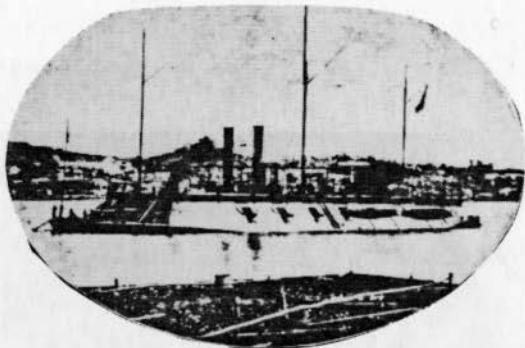
Thus, while the Confederates were strengthening the fortifications on Island Number Ten and the opposite Tennessee shore, the Confederates were in imminent danger of losing the Missouri shore. Pope moved part of his army from Sikeston, Missouri, to a visible point close to New Madrid. He was there by March 2. On March 3 Pope's army rapidly drove the Confederate troops back into Forts Bankhead and Thompson—two earthwork forts that were constructed to defend the river.⁷ The Yankees continued their drive until they came under fire by Confederate gunboats commanded by Commodore George N. Hollins, a former captain in the United States Navy who had served in the War of 1812.⁸ These gunboats contested hotly with Pope's artillery for possession of New Madrid and the Missouri bank. Soon Pope had some eighteen thousand men outside New Madrid, and more were still coming. Pope sent some of these troops and field artillery downriver to distract Confederate transports that were supplying Island Number Ten, forcing Hollins to withdraw his flotilla in order to patrol the river around Point Pleasant. Pope's artillery did a lot of damage. Finally Pope, with some heavy artillery—24-pounders and 8-inch pieces—placed at Point Pleasant, cut up Hollin's gunboats so badly that he moved further down the river. Without the firepower from these gunboats to keep Pope at bay, the Confederates decided to give up New Madrid and Missouri. Late on the night of March 13 Hollins slipped some boats back upriver and began the evacuation. Most of the troops were evacuated during a torrential rainstorm. The troops were angry and insubordinate; discipline almost disappeared, and many of the guns and supplies were left behind as the boats dropped downriver to Tiptonville.⁹ Part of the New Madrid garrison was taken to Island Number Ten. The remainder of the troops moved across the river to the Tennessee side.¹⁰

Pope was unable to cross the river because of the Confederate gunboats and the river batteries. He did plant batteries of artillery on the west bank at a point fifteen miles south of New Madrid and across the river from Tiptonville. Artillery was also located at Point Pleasant. These dispositions made it much more difficult for Confederate transports to supply Island Number Ten. The flow of supplies was cut dramatically.¹¹ At this point something of a stalemate had been reached. Unless Pope could get across the river and outflank the batteries on Island Number Ten and the Tennessee shore, little else could be accomplished. What he needed was one or two gunboats to run past the defending batteries. With the firepower they could furnish, Pope could put troops on the eastern shore of the river and take the defenders in the rear and flank. He, therefore, put a lot of pressure on Foote to furnish the gunboats that were needed.¹²

Foote's gunboats had captured Fort Henry, but Foote wasn't so fortunate at Fort Donelson on the afternoon of February 14, 1862, when he attacked. The gunboats fought hard, but they were defeated and forced to retreat, with Foote being among those that were wounded.¹³ The Confederates attacked on February 15, but the attack was stopped, with Foote's gun-



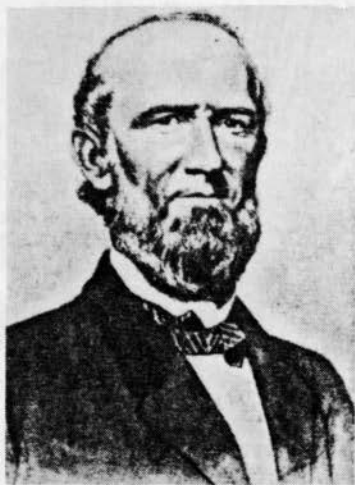
Headquarters of the Mississippi Federal Fleet at Cairo,
Illinois. Evans organized his gunboat flotilla.



USS Benton

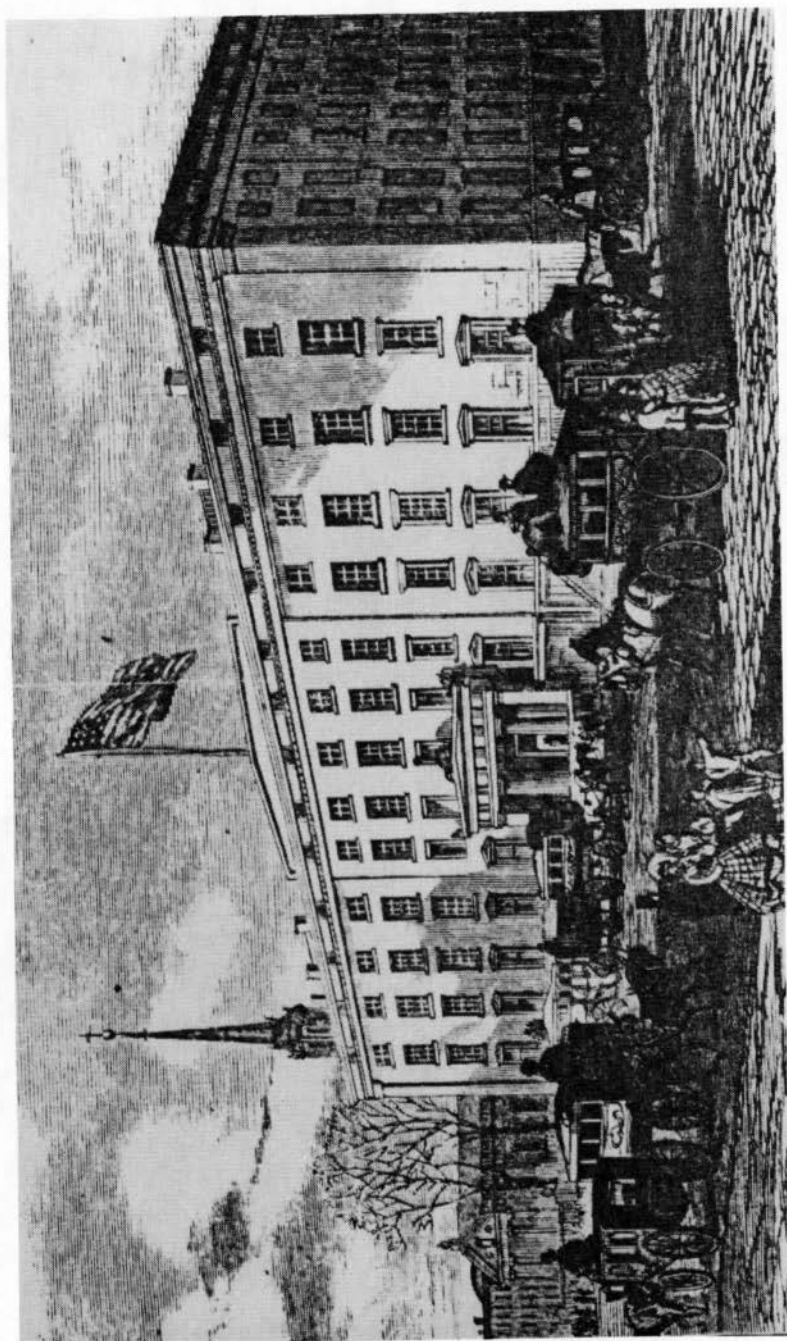


Water Battery on the Tennessee River

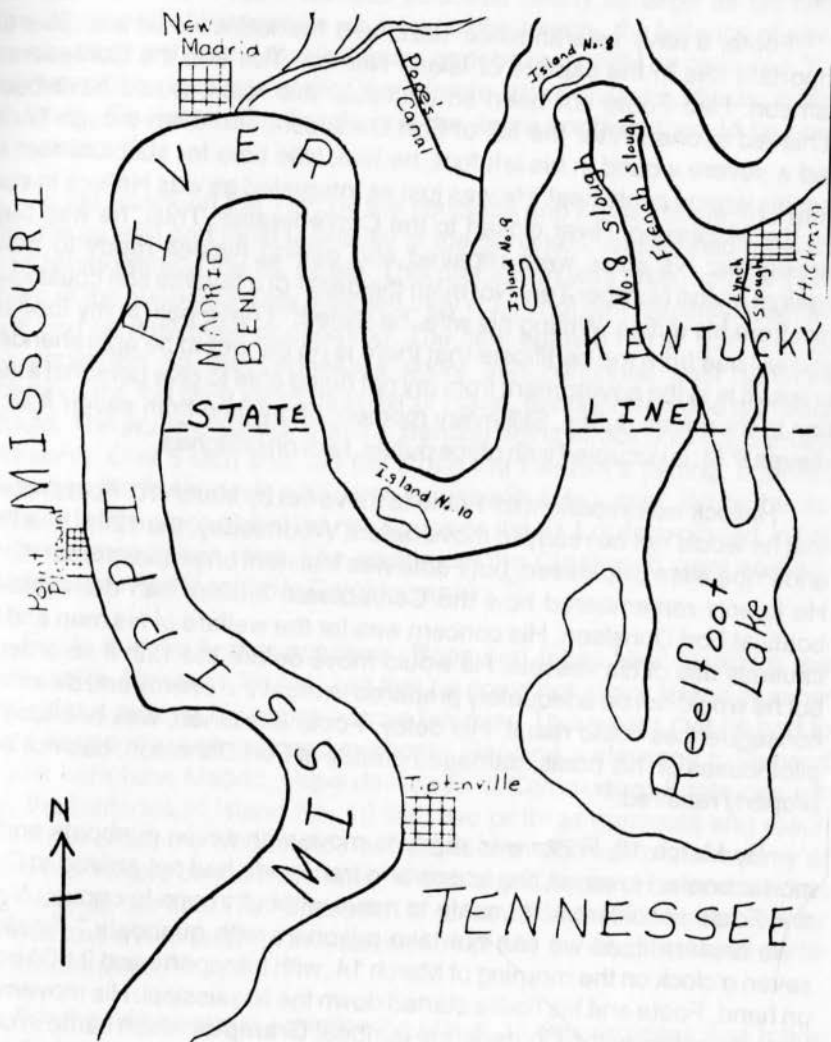


James B. Eads, engineer

**Taken from John D. Milligan, Gunboats Down the Mississippi.
(Annapolis, Maryland: United States Naval Institute, 1965.)**



The old Astor House Hotel, where Foote returned
to die, June 26, 1863.



boats contributing little to this success. Brigadier General Lew Wallace saw the matter in a somewhat different light. "As to whether the attack was of assistance to us," Wallace wrote, "I don't think there is room to question it. It distracted the enemy's attention, and I fully believe it was the gunboats, the awful ironclads especially, that operated to prevent a general movement of the Rebels up the river, or across it, that night."¹⁴

Foote, a navy veteran since 1822, and his flotilla would also play an important role in the capture of Island Number Ten and the Confederate garrison. Had Foote not been so cautious, this result would have been achieved sooner. After the fall of Fort Donelson, and even though Foote had a severe wound in his left foot, he took little time for absolute rest so that his wound could heal. He was just as interested as was Halleck in seeing the Mississippi River closed to the Confederates. Thus, he was busy seeing that his ships were repaired and getting himself ready to move against Island Number Ten. Not even the death of a favorite son could keep him from his duties. Writing his wife, he stated: "I have pain in my foot; but you will see from the certificate that there is no danger to be apprehended, unless it is to the government from my not being able to give personal attention to my varied duties. Still every moment of my time from seven A.M. till eleven P.M. is occupied with office duties. I am on crutches."¹⁵

Halleck was impatient for Foote to move out by March 10. Foote replied that he would not be ready to move before Wednesday, the 12th.¹⁶ Halleck and Pope were displeased, but Foote was insistent on proper preparations. He keenly remembered how the Confederate artillery had damaged his boats at Fort Donelson. His concern was for the welfare of his men and the cautious use of his vessels. He would move before the 12th if so ordered, but he would not be adequately prepared to meet the enemy and disastrous consequences could result. His delay, Foote explained, was because the pilothouses on his boats, damaged greatly at Fort Donelson, had not been properly repaired.¹⁷

By March 12, Foote was ready to move with seven gunboats and ten mortar boats. However, the troops and transports had not arrived at Cairo, and Foote considered "it unsafe to move without troops to occupy No. 10 if we capture it, as we can not take prisoners with gunboats." Finally, at seven o'clock on the morning of March 14, with transports and 2,000 troops on hand, Foote and his flotilla started down the Mississippi. His movements were detected by the Confederate gunboat **Grampus** which came in close, and then dashed off before she could be fired upon. Speeding away, the **Grampus**, was blowing her whistle, thus warning the Confederate defenders, above Island Number Ten that the enemy was coming down the river.¹⁸

On the 16th the mortar boats took position and opened fire on Island Number Ten, a fire that was so intense that it caused several Confederate regiments to change the location of their camps. On the 17th the gunboats joined in the attack on the uppermost fort on the Tennessee shore, but they

kept at a safe distance of at least 2,000 yards.¹⁹ Foote acted with great caution, and with good reason. He knew that if his gunboats were disabled the current would not help him as had been the case at Fort Donelson. Disabled craft would drift downriver with the current right under the heavy guns of the enemy and be either destroyed or captured. Foote also took into account the fact that there was a Confederate fleet stationed below Island Number Ten that reliable sources said was nearly as large as his own. Thus, if several of his vessels were lost to the enemy, the balance of naval power would shift to the Confederates and the rest might be captured. The way would then be open for the Confederate attack on Cairo, Illinois; in fact, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, and the entire northwest would be open to invasion.²⁰

In the attack on the 17th by the ironclads and mortar boats, the **Benton**, the largest and most unwieldy of the gunboats, was lashed between the **Cincinnati** and the **St. Louis**. This precaution was taken so that if one or two of the gunboats were disabled they would not drift helpless down the river and be destroyed or captured. The fleet opened fire at 1:20 p.m. on the upper fort on the Tennessee shore and continued until darkness obscured the fort from view. By order of Foote, the fleet fired one gun each minute. The enemy replied, with the **Benton** being struck but little damage was done. One 8-inch shot did penetrate the **Benton's** plating, bounced around on the lower deck, and came to rest on Foote's desk. While this action was taking place one of the rifled guns on the **St. Louis** exploded, killing and wounding fifteen men. The engines of the **Cincinnati** were so damaged that she had to return to Cairo for repairs.²¹

Foote also had other concerns. Pope had taken New Madrid a few days earlier. However, he realized that he could not attack Island Number Ten without moving his troops across the river. This meant that he had to utilize transports, tugboats and gunboats. Sending a message to General Cullum from New Madrid, Pope declared: "If Commodore Foote can run past the batteries of Island No. 10 with two or three gunboats and reach here I can cross my whole force and capture every man of the enemy at Island No. 10 and on the main-land." Pope urged Foote to co-operate, but to no avail at this time. To Foote such an undertaking would be suicidal for his men and would result in the destruction of any gunboat that tried to run past the batteries.²²

For the two weeks or so following March 17 little progress was made in reducing the Confederate works. The gunboats fired a few shots occasionally but did very little damage. The mortar boats did better service. They daily fired a large number of 13-inch shells that were effective enough at times to drive the enemy from their batteries and forced them to seek safety in caves and other places. However, it soon became evident that very little real damage was being done and that the great objective of the expedition could not be accomplished by the flotilla alone—the capture of the Confederate works and their defenders.²³

If the gunboats could not or would not run past Island Number Ten, perhaps they could go around the island. Brigadier General Schuyler Hamilton of Pope's staff thought so. To Pope he suggested the construction of a canal across the peninsula opposite Island Number Ten to just east of New Madrid. Pope liked the idea and assigned Colonel J.W. Bissell, an engineering officer, and six hundred men of the Engineer Regiment to the task of constructing the canal. In a few days Bissell's men plus barges, steamboats, yawls, rafts, axes, saws, and chains were working on the submerged wagon road and were felling trees to a depth of four feet below the waterline. The canal was completed by April 1. It was fifty feet wide, four feet deep, and six miles long, just large enough for transports and barges to navigate. To Pope's disappointment the canal was not deep enough to accommodate gunboats. On April 4, Pope brought more transports and troops to New Madrid through the canal. He planned on crossing the river and attacking without Foote's assistance.²⁴

Even though Foote had a floating battery of three heavy guns which would be anchored within five hundred yards of the Tennessee bank, what he really needed for the safe crossing of some 10,000 troops at Watson's Landing was one or two gunboats. Halleck urged Foote to render assistance. "One or two gunboats are very necessary to protect his crossing. Assist him in this if you can," Halleck urged.²⁵ Foote was moving in this direction. He held a council of war on March 20, and considered the question of running the island's defenses with part of his squadron. All of the officers with one exception were opposed to the idea. Commander Henry Walke of the **Carondelet** was the lone exception. He realized that the gunboats were needed below New Madrid for joint operations with the army. Walke believed that the stakes were high enough to take the risk. Besides, Walke thought that under cover of darkness a gunboat might safely run past the Confederate batteries even though the enemy had about fifty guns trained on the river. So on March 30, after Foote held another council of war with the same result as March 20, and with Walke's willing consent, Foote ordered him to prepare his gunboat for this most perilous undertaking. Foote hoped for success but he stated to Walke: "Should you meet with disaster you will, as a last resort . . . set fire to your gunboat or sink her and prevent her from falling into the hands of the rebels." The Flag Officer wanted to take no chances on the **Carondelet** falling into Confederate hands. Such an occurrence would probably shift the balance of naval power in favor of Commodore Hollins.²⁶

While the naval preparations were underway for running the batteries the army was not idle. In order to help clear the way for Walke and the **Carondelet** an expedition of some fifty men of the Forty-second Illinois Regiment under Colonel George W. Roberts, on the night of April 1, moved down the river in five boats toward a battery that was known as "Number One Fort" or the upper Confederate battery on the Tennessee shore. Roberts and his men were able to disembark, run the Confederate defenders away, and spike all six guns in the battery. They then escaped without

losing a man.²⁷ On April 3, the **Benton, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh**, and three mortar boats bombarded the Confederate floating battery at Island Number Ten, a bombardment that lasted more than one hour. The battery was struck, cut loose from its moorings, and drifted two or three miles down the river before being secured. The way was being prepared for Walke's daring run.²⁸

The **Carondelet** was being carefully prepared for the dash past Island Number Ten. Walke placed loose iron and heavy timbers around the boilers and engine room. Bales of hay, chain cables and lumber were placed on the sides of the ship for extra protection. On the gunboat's port quarter Walke lashed a coal barge as added protection for the magazine and shell rooms. The upper deck was covered with cordwood, coal bags, hawsers, chain-cables, and lumber. To protect the pilot house Walke coiled cables and ropes that were from twelve to eighteen inches thick. With all of these additions, it was reported that the **Carondelet** "looked like a farmer's team, preparing for market." On April 4, Walke advised Foote that he was ready to run past the island's defenses.²⁹

To assist Walke in his mission, Captain Hottenstein and twenty-three sharpshooters from the Forty-second Illinois were placed on board the gunboat, assistance that was gratefully accepted. This precaution was taken to resist boarding in case the gunboat was to become disabled. The sailors were also well armed with pistols, cutlasses, muskets, and boarding pikes. Hose was even attached to the boilers for the purpose of spraying scalding water on the enemy in case of an attempted boarding. Walke determined to sink his vessel instead of burning it should it be disabled and could not be saved from capture.³⁰

As the sun set on that fateful evening the sky became hazy. At ten o'clock when the **Carondelet** got under way a welcome thunderstorm was about to begin. Conditions could not have been better for Walke. Perhaps he would be able to pass the batteries unnoticed. This was not to be. The gunboat was discovered, but evidently the darkness of the night and the fact that the Confederates could not depress their guns enough, or overestimated the distance, enabled the Union vessel to run past Island Number Ten without serious damage. Walke arrived safely at New Madrid around midnight, April 5.³¹ The passage of the **Carondelet** was an act of courage, especially since so many believed it would lead to destruction. This act proved to be the death blow to the Confederate river defensive positions.³²

Pope was gratified, but he immediately demanded that Foote should send him another gunboat as added insurance. "I am thus urgent, sir," Pope stated, "because the lives of thousands of men and the success of our operations hang upon your decision. With the two boats all is safe; with one, it is uncertain." To make his case stronger Pope stated that even the enemy's inferior gunboats "pass and repass our batteries in the night without injury."³³

Foote resented this message since Pope was intimating that the success of the army movement depended upon his acquiescing in the request.³⁴ However, despite his fears, Foote did acquiesce by sending the **Pittsburgh**, commanded by Lieutenant-Commander Egbert Thompson, past the island batteries on the night of April 6-7. The **Pittsburgh** was also discovered and subjected to a heavy bombardment. However, the gunboat arrived at New Madrid at 5 a.m. without serious injury.³⁵ Pope now had the two gunboats he wanted as well as troop transports, and he began preparing to cross the river. Pope believed that if he took his infantry to the Tennessee side not far from Point Pleasant he could take the Confederate batteries along the Tennessee from the rear. Island Number Ten would then be cut off and surrender would be inevitable.³⁶

The morning of April 7 was dark, and rain was falling heavily. At dawn the **Carondelet**, and shortly thereafter the **Pittsburgh**, steamed toward Tiptonville. They shelled and captured several Confederate batteries. At New Madrid, Pope was putting his troops on transports for the crossing in the vicinity of Point Pleasant. Writing Foote, Pope stated: "I shall cross the river if possible today, and shall probably be prepared to assault the works near Island Number 10 by 2 p.m. tomorrow. May I beg that you will have a careful watch kept for us, that we may suffer no injury from your boats as we approach the rear of the enemy's batteries."³⁷ The river was crossed that afternoon and night. Writing to General Halleck, hours later, Pope stated: "Paine's, Stanley's and Hamilton's divisions are across, together with three batteries of light artillery and a battalion of cavalry. Everything will be over by 12 to-night. The divisions of Paine and Stanley are on the march to Tiptonville. Rebel forces on the bend rapidly retreating on that place." They are "leaving artillery, baggage, supplies, and sick . . . Think we will bag the whole force, though not certain."³⁸

Being outflanked the bulk of the defenders began to abandon their works and retreat toward Tiptonville. On the 7th, Island Number Ten was surrendered to Foote and the gunboats as well as the works on the Tennessee shore. "Four steamers," Foote stated, "have fallen into our hands, and two others, with the rebel gunboat **Grampus**, are sunk, but will be easily raised."³⁹ In the meantime Pope's troops caught up with the retreating Confederates, their retreat was blocked by the gunboats, and the rebels surrendered. Pope reported that 6,976 of the enemy were captured, but his figure is too high. Gilbert W. Cummings of the Fifty-first Illinois brigade, who was put in charge of the prisoners, estimated that they were about 3,000 in number. Lieutenant-Colonel E. D. Blake, Acting Inspector General, inspected Island Number Ten before the Confederate debacle. He reported that there were 2,000 effective troops available for duty, with 1,557 being on the sick report. Also Lieutenant-Colonel W. D. S. Cook of the Twelfth Arkansas, who escaped capture, reported that some 2,000 Confederates were probably taken prisoner. General William W. Mackall, the Confederate commander, places the number of men he had with him for opposing Pope's landing at about 2,500. The truth concerning the number of cap-

tured Confederates no doubt lies somewhere between Pope and Cook's figures, with the weight of evidence from the **Official Records** tending to place Cook closer to the truth. By order of Halleck, the prisoners were soon on their way to northern prisons. The field officers were sent to Fort Warren, Boston Harbor; the other officers were sent to Columbus, Ohio. 1,500 of the rank and file were sent to Chicago, 1,000 to Springfield, Illinois, and the balance went to Madison and Milwaukee, Wisconsin.⁴⁰

The capture of several thousand prisoners plus the great number of artillery pieces and other supplies was a great blow to the Confederates in the West. Another link in the Confederate line of defense in the West was broken. Foote and his gunboats rendered very valuable service in this enterprise. The great "Father of Waters" was being opened for the Union and closed to the Confederacy. Now all that stood between Foote and Memphis was Fort Pillow.

Almost immediately Foote began moving downstream for the next objective. Foote's reputation was rising but less rapidly than his fellow officer at New Orleans, Admiral David G. Farragut. An Illinois soldier that was with Pope's army was dissatisfied with Foote's performance. Writing to his sister before the fall of Island Number Ten, Charles W. Wills stated: "It don't sound like Foote's fighting . . . Don't it look like that, if Grant and company can whip them out at Corinth, we'll have all the forces at Memphis and intermediate points to put Island Number 10 in a bag? If they run it will be into Arkansas, and they can take nothing with them but what their backs will stand under. Seems to me that the plans of the campaign are grand from the glimpses we can get of them and have been planned by at least a Napoleon. Certain it is that we are checking them at every point that's visible. I firmly believe the summer will see the war ended. But it will also see a host of us upended if we have to fight over such ground as this. It is unpleasantly warm already in the sun!"⁴¹

On April 11, Foote arrived at New Madrid. His goal was Fort Pillow and then Memphis. Pope was trying to get his army in shape to move downriver with Foote. This caused some delay. Foote finally decided to proceed, leaving the troop transports to come when ready. Foote knew that Fort Pillow was a strongly defended work. He was right. The fort consisted of a long line of fortifications which stretched out some seven miles along the bank of the river and on cliffs that were high enough to prevent a frontal attack. There were twenty-two 32-pounders, smooth bore; six 32-pounders, rifled, three 8-inch columbiads, and four 10-inch columbiads. Five of the smooth bore 32-pounders were mounted at the entrenchments. Also, downstream was a Confederate fleet of unknown strength, perhaps made even stronger because rumors had it that giant ironclads were under construction at Memphis. The fort was commanded by Brigadier General John B. Villepigue.⁴²

On April 12, the flagship **Benton**, with the **Mound City**, **St. Louis**, **Cairo**, and **Cincinnati**, passed Tiptonville. They signalled the **Carondelet** and **Pittsburgh** to follow. Foote was expecting no opposition in his descent

of the river. However, on the 13th, they were met by five Confederate gunboats that offered battle. After the firing of a few shots the Confederates retired down the river some thirty miles to Fort Pillow, with Foote following them all the way to Craigshead's Point.⁴³

On April 14, Pope's army arrived about six miles above Craigshead's Point where they were disembarked under the protection of the gunboats. Pope was planning on moving against the fort from the land side while Foote's mortar boats bombarded the fortress. Foote also consulted Walke to inquire if he would undertake, with the **Carondelet** and two or three other gunboats, the passage of the fort. Foote wanted his flotilla positioned both to the north and south of Fort Pillow in order to co-operate more effectively with Pope's army. Walke responded that he was ready to make the attempt to run past the fort's defenses at any time. But this was not to be. Some three days later Pope received orders to take his men and move south in order to join forces with Halleck's army that was moving into siege positions around Corinth, Mississippi. Pope left 1,500 men behind to help the navy in its movement against Fort Pillow.⁴⁴

This sudden change in plans was a serious shock to the ailing Flag Officer. With only 1,500 troops to assist the gunboats and mortar boats, Foote had serious misgivings about taking the fort. The available troops were too few to render effective assistance. Joint operations with all of Pope's men, Foote believed, would have resulted in the capture of the fort in several days, and Memphis could have been taken shortly thereafter. Thus, given the changed circumstances, Foote utilized two or three mortar boats, moored near Craigshead's Point and with gunboat protection, to keep up a continuous and harassing fire on the fort by lobbing 13-inch shells into the Confederate fortification. The Confederates returned the fire with vigor, but with little accuracy or effect. Some of their shells did fall near the gunboats and mortar boats.⁴⁵

Foote also believed that the Confederates were increasing their naval power, it being rumored that Hollins was bringing up the heavy gunboat **Louisiana** from New Orleans. The Flag Officer also had other troubles. The commander of the 1,500 Indiana troops, Colonel Graham N. Fitch, informed Foote that he was under the orders of Halleck, was going to operate independently, and was in no way under Foote's command.⁴⁶

The river flotilla accomplished little between April 15 and May 9 even though the bombardment of the fort was continuous. Sergeant Hiram Talbert Holt of the Alabama Grays, who was part of the fort's garrison, gives us some idea of the bombardment in letters that he wrote to his wife, Angeline Caroline Holt. He reported that the shelling was continuous and had killed one man, some mules, but otherwise did little damage in the first seven days of the bombardment. "One shell," Holt stated to his wife, "will blow a hole in the ground large as half your room. Yesterday a shell struck a fellow and literally tore him into fragments, you could find pieces of him scattered all around." On the night of April 28, the Federals did not fire into

the fort. To Holt this was a sign the enemy was up to something. If the enemy should make a determined attack, Holt did not believe the fort could withstand it. Due to the high rate of sickness among the defenders and the shortage of supplies, Holt wrote: "I am satisfied the post will have to be surrendered or evacuated."⁴⁷

Foote was making little progress. During this period it rained almost incessantly. The New York *Herald* published a dispatch from its newsman on the scene. It reported "rain, rain, rain; water everywhere as far as the eye can reach, covering cornfields, filling the woods, surrounding dwellings and flooding the whole country; and still it rains and still the water rises . . . In the midst of this watery chaos the fleet remains quiet . . ." ⁴⁸ Even more disturbing to Foote was information to the effect that the Confederates now had thirteen gunboats nearby. He was also disturbed by the fact that Admiral Farragut was in the process of capturing New Orleans. By April 29, the city was in Union possession, and Foote was stalled before Fort Pillow. The Flag Officer was impatient for some progress. He wanted to push on past Memphis and perhaps meet Farragut before he got beyond New Orleans. Writing to Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles on April 30, Foote stated that he favored taking the initiative and running past Fort Pillow as the **Carondelet** and the **Pittsburgh** had done at Island Number Ten. Becoming more cautious, however, Foote admitted that his position was not good because his slow steamers could not withstand the enemy and at the same time keep the current of the Mississippi from taking his ships right under the very guns of the fort.⁴⁹

The courageous Flag Officer never got his chance to attempt running the batteries. His physical condition had deteriorated greatly; he was in constant pain, not being able to move about at all. His condition was so bad—his misery so great—that he couldn't concentrate on the military situation. Foote finally accepted his doctor's advice and asked to be relieved of command. The wounds received at Fort Donelson had finally disabled the gallant Foote.⁵⁰

The Flag Officer had the privilege of naming his successor, Captain Charles Henry Davis, whose services during the early months of the war, as a member of the Board of Detail helping to plan the best way for the Union to recapture the forts and harbors that were taken over by the Confederate in early 1861. The decisions of this board led to the Hatteras and Port Royal expeditions. Davis, however, did not like desk duty and was detached and made fleet captain of the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron under the veteran Samuel F. De Pont. From this duty station he was transferred to Foote's western flotilla. Davis and Foote were friends of long standing, having known each other from the time they both served as midshipmen aboard the frigate **United States**. Joining Foote on board the **Benton** the night of May 8, Davis has described the situation as he found it. "I came down last night," Davis stated in a letter to his wife, "as I said I should in my note yesterday, and breakfasted with Foote on board this vessel this morning. He was in bed when I came on board, and he was so over-

powered at the sight of me he was unable for some moments to speak. The scene was very touching; the pleasure of meeting was not without a badge of bitterness. We both shed tears. I find Foote very reduced in strength, fallen off in flesh, and depressed in spirits. His foot is painful and requires rest; his digestive organs are deranged by the disease of the climate . . .⁵¹

On May 9, Foote took leave of his officers and men. At four p.m. he went aboard the transport **De Soto**, and as the transport was departing the **Benton** his officers and men gave three cheers in honor of the Flag Officer, an act which visibly shook Foote. Seated on the deck of the **De Soto**, Foote held a large palmetto leaf fan over his face in order to hide the tears he was shedding. A few of his men saw what was happening, and they also shed tears for him. Foote was shortly promoted to the rank of Rear Admiral, saw service as head of the Bureau of Equipment and Recruiting in Washington, and finally was named commander of the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron. Before leaving for this assignment two of his daughters died. He had now lost three children in the space of about one year. If this wasn't enough to shake his resolve, his doctors now told him that he had Bright's disease, meaning that kidney failure and coma were imminent. However, Foote was determined to take up his new command. He went to New York to get his new ship and took a room in the Astor House Hotel on lower Broadway while waiting for the ship's arrival. It was here that his last illness struck, with Foote lapsing into a coma. He died Friday evening, June 26, 1863. In his last moments, a doctor that was standing by Foote's bedside with Foote's brother, remarked that the admiral "had worn himself out."⁵²

Admiral Foote and his gunboats played a very important role in breaking the Confederacy's line of defense in the West. Theirs was the primary role in the taking of Fort Henry. Though Foote suffered a setback at Fort Donelson, the role of his fleet was nevertheless important. He brought Grant the reinforcements he needed in order to take the fort, and even though his gunboats were repulsed their presence may have unnerved the Confederate command and kept them from escaping as they surely could have. His role in the capture of Island Number Ten has been adequately summarized. Indeed, Foot was part of the Union effort that opened the heartland of the deep South in the Western theater, an opening that shortly led to the occupation of most of Middle and West Tennessee. He was a great fighter. As one author has put it, this Christian man "prays like a saint and fights like the devil."⁵³ Foote's record supports this statement.

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