

The Battle of Paducah

By John Philip Cashon

An Attack may be coming – March 20-24, 1864

After the initial excitement when Confederate General Polk invaded Kentucky to take Hickman and Columbus, General Grant's taking of Paducah, and the Union successes in the battles of Fort Henry and Fort Donelson, the region went through the adjustment of being occupied by the Union Army, and because of this, many sympathizers to the Confederates conducted illegal trade to the Confederate Army.

Both pro-confederate and pro-union groups formed bands of guerrilla fighters, also called bushwhackers over in Missouri, using guerrilla warfare tactics, and these groups became prevalent in the area causing much death and hardship. There were guerrillas that did not

discriminate against confederate sympathizer or unionist, using the war was a means for getting rich off of stolen merchandise. They were all vicious in the way they attacked and robbed the citizens of the Four Rivers, and this was one of the direct causes for much of the animosity in the region, creating hatreds and a reason for revenge attacks as a way of life for many.

On July 31st, 1863, General Ambrose Burnside declared Martial Law in Kentucky "for the purpose only of protecting the rights of loyal citizens and the freedom of election," so if anyone was considered disloyal to the union, they could not vote, and they needed the approval from the military to prove they were good Union citizens to do so. This offended many of the secessionists in the Jackson Purchase region, because there were many Confederate sympathizers, and to add to their insult, Federal officials were given the power to control how much material anyone could have on hand at any given time, if the area was deemed a target for raiders, and Federal treasury agents determined that no one could keep more than two month's supply of goods, which directly affected the profits from many of the wholesale merchants in the area.¹

The importance of Paducah was its proximity to the confluence of the Tennessee and Ohio Rivers, where crucial supply lanes could be blocked and disrupting access to these would stop the military supplies being shipped on the rivers to the front, which could cause considerable damage to the Union war effort if they could not reach their destination. Alternate methods of transportation

would have to be employed, and this would create life-threatening time delays to the Union Army.

In the week before the Battle of Paducah occurred, the rumors were rife about General Nathan Bedford Forrest bringing his large force of cavalry north to attack either Columbus or Paducah, but over the many months of continuous guerrilla activity in the region, the city was accustomed to warnings of a possible attack, and many residents in the city did not believe an attack would occur.²

General Forrest had good reason to head north into western Tennessee and Kentucky; the main objective was to try to slow down the soldiers in General Sherman's planned attack of Atlanta by disrupting the supply lines from the rivers and railroad in Paducah, but another reason was to obtain needed supplies and new recruits for his regiments, because there were many sympathizers in the area to help his army.³

It was a time of much tribulation in the area, with the disruption of trade that was hurting the residents economically, whether they were secessionist or unionist alike, and Confederate guerrillas were a big concern to the Union Commanders in the area for many months before the Battle of Paducah occurred. Colonel Hicks communicated to command on March 23rd, 1864 that "Thirty-five guerrillas met railroad train at Mayfield yesterday; killed one negro man and shot several times at a Union man, who escaped. No Union man can go out of this place with safety in that direction. The interior is full of guerrillas."⁴

In another report that was wired on March 22nd, 1864, Colonel William H. Lawrence, of the 34th New Jersey Infantry and posted in Columbus, Kentucky, described the attacks, vandalism and theft that occurred in Fancy Farm, Kentucky. The report stated, "Julian Sanderson, mail carrier between Columbus and Mayfield, reports that the postmaster at Fancy Farms, 10 miles south of Mayfield, was shot this morning; also the Catholic chapel at that place destroyed; that Willet & Boswell's store was entered, taking all their goods. They number about 50 men, and have taken off some 4 or 5 citizens as prisoners."⁵

The feeling was mutual from the confederate soldiers and sympathizers concerning the 'Home-Guard' guerrilla activity that was used by the Union army for information, and Henry George, a confederate soldier in the 7th Kentucky Mounted Infantry had this to say about the pro-union guerrilla group, "From the middle to the close of the war portions of Kentucky and Tennessee were infested with gangs of robbers and murderers calling themselves "Home Guards," most of whom had some sort of affiliation with the Federal armies, and if they did not act under orders from the Federal commanders they certainly made no effort to restrain them."⁶

Another reason that may have caused General Forrest to want to attack the Union forts was because former slaves were being recruited in Paducah to be soldiers, and he believed they should always be considered as property, and if any African American soldiers were captured, they

would be brought back to their owners or sold in the slave market, but the newly recruited soldiers knew they would probably suffer torture and death if they were captured.⁷

A message was received in Paducah from Colonel Hicks' superior, General Brayman, at Columbus, telling him that Union City fell at 11 am on March 24th, 1864, and it was a possibility that Paducah would be attacked. In the fort, Colonel Hicks had no way of knowing exactly what General Forrest's plan was, but he made his plans and instructed his officers to be ready for any eventuality.⁸



Paducah Riverfront and Owen's Island.

Hospital No. 2 – March 20 - 24, 1864

After the Battle of Shiloh on April 6th, 1862, Paducah became an important area for the creation of many hospitals to help the vast numbers of sick and wounded that were being shipped up the Tennessee River, away from the front lines in the south. Many places in Paducah were used as makeshift hospitals, and they included the Baptist, Christian, Episcopal, Methodist and Presbyterian

Churches, along with the Female Seminary, the Court House and other public and private buildings.⁹

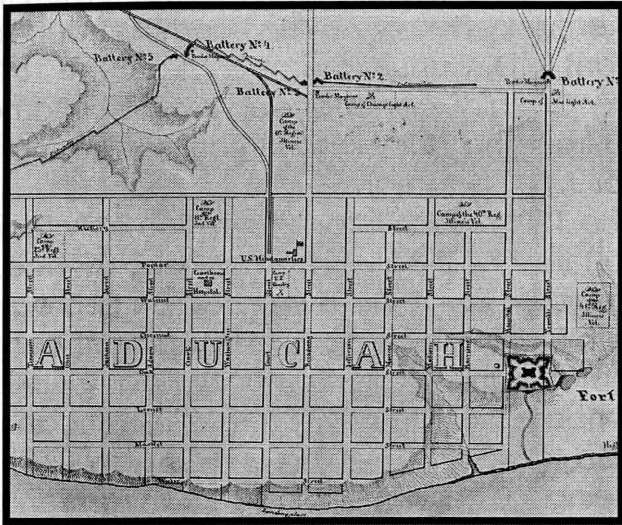
Nurse Jennie Fyfe, from Lansing, Michigan, arrived in the city, on the evening of March 19th, 1864, to work at Paducah Hospital No. 2 by helping the injured in the war, and it is to our good fortune that she wrote letters to her sister Nell Fyfe that have been preserved, detailing the life and conditions of the area during this time of the Civil War. In the morning of March 20th, she noted that Paducah was "a larger place than I had supposed. About ten thousand inhabitants they tell me. Lighted with gas &c, &c. But it is chill here now, very chill. few ladies are seen upon the streets, but a great many soldiers. The place is protected by gunboats & a fort."¹⁰

When she arrived to the hospital, she was told from the nurses that they had a scare the night before about fears that Paducah was going to be attacked from guerrillas, which were said to be in large numbers down in Mayfield, a town to the south that is connected by the railroad in the city. She was told that in case the town was attacked, to be prepared because the union troops had standing orders to fire upon the city to prevent the commissary stores from falling into the hands of the enemy, but she was also told that, since there were so many secessionists in the city, they would use their influence against an assault on the city because they would lose their property as well, just as those that favored the union cause would if an attack were to take place.¹¹

On Thursday, March 24th, a day before the battle, Fyfe saw how rumor of an attack was

growing in the city, but little was heeded to prepare for its eventuality, and she wrote to her sister explaining how the day occurred:

“Thursday, March 24th we were surprised by the ringing of the alarm bell, calling the Union League together. The Enemy were said to be coming upon us yet no one seemed alarmed. & things moved on quietly as usual. Soon after dinner it again sounded & all went immediately to the Hall. A little excitement prevailed for awhile but died away as evening approached. We [?] ladies walked out to the Fort to see something of the stir. The guns were all mounted there, & the gun Boats in readiness for an attack but after all, none among us seemed to think but we were all safe. I could not sleep that night, though I kept very quiet about, the rest seemed so fearless & free from alarm.”¹²



A close up view of the Rziha Map of Paducah Dec 1861. The Town Area, Wikimedia Commons.

Fort Anderson – Early morning of March 25th, 1864

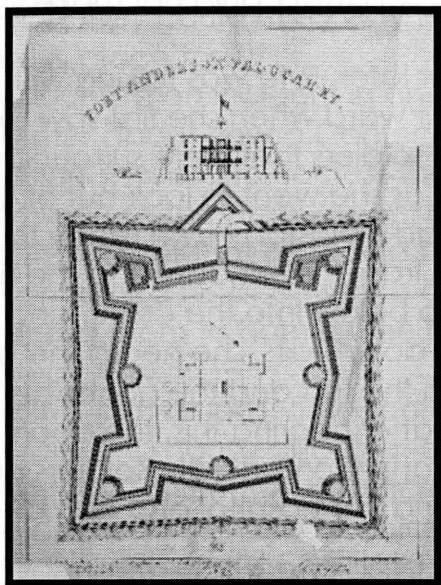
The fort was full of activity early in the morning, sending out scouts to watch for General Forrest's army and gathering everything essential from the posts in the city to bring inside the fort. Major James Chapman received orders to maintain his command in readiness at his post inside the city, and if he were to encounter any trouble, he was to move all of his men immediately to the fort.¹³

The fort was located across from Hospital Street, today's Martin Luther King Jr Drive around 4th Street, and Trimble Street, today's Park Avenue, ended at the west wall of the fort. It was approximately 400 feet long and 400 feet wide, surrounded by a deep ditch filled with water creating a moat, and Colonel Hicks had a total of

665 men in his command at the fort: 274 men from the 1st Kentucky Heavy Artillery, commanded by Lieutenant R. D. Cunningham; 271 from the 16th Kentucky Cavalry, commanded by Major Barnes; and 120 from the 122nd Illinois Infantry, commanded by Major J. F. Chapman.¹⁴

The 122nd Illinois Infantry was the only regiment in the fort that had actual combat experience. The 16th Kentucky Cavalry was created on February 15th, 1864, with Paducah being the recruitment center for the regiment, and the 1st Kentucky Heavy Artillery was composed of the newly recruited African American soldiers, beginning on February 27th, 1864; some being former slaves of Paducah residents that were not too happy with the loss. When a slave enlisted, they were free, along with their families, but this also caused a high amount of resentment from the former slave owners, making them targets for confederate soldiers, and if they were captured, they could expect death or a return to slavery.¹⁵

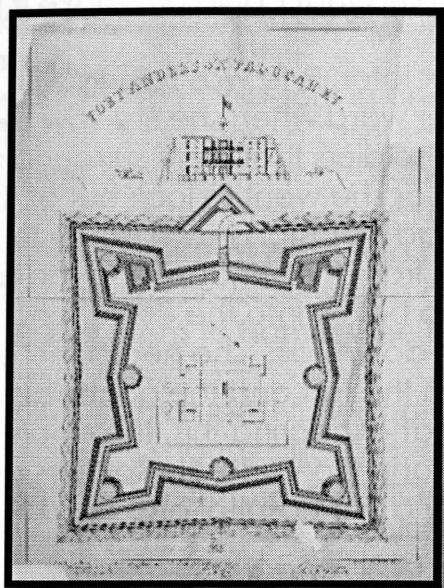
Because the fort was built so close to the properties on the north side of the city, Fort Anderson was ringed closely by many houses on the streets, and this was noticed early in the occupation of Paducah, when the fort was being built. While many homes and buildings near the fort were labeled early on as being hazardous to the soldiers in the fort if occupied by the enemy, nothing was done to eliminate the threat to the fort.¹⁶



LOC Geography and Map Division, Library of Virginia Map Collection.
The Virginia Historical Society cw0219000.

Hospital No. 2 – Between 2:00 to 6:00 pm

At around 2 pm, word reached Hospital No. 2 that a courier was sent to Colonel Hicks telling him that the Confederate army was in fact approaching Paducah, and when Fyfe went to look out of the upstairs window, she saw the horde coming in from the outskirts of town. She, and the other nurses, dressed themselves for an emergency, and then went to their wards. "Our able bodied men save the Steward, druggist & two nurses," Fyfe wrote later, "had gone to the fort immediately on the receipt of the news of the enemy's coming." Fyfe was one of the two nurses that stayed to take care of the



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wounded soldiers that could not make it to the fort.¹⁷

An hour later, Fyfe was talking with one of the men left in her ward when she first saw the Confederate soldiers that were surrounding the hospital, and as she went to look out of the window, one soldier had his pistol drawn ready to fire. She hurried away from the window and the nurses were ordered to go below into the cellar, and while she was heading downstairs, she heard the boom of the cannons from the fort and the gunboats firing. Immediately after hearing this, the doors were kicked open and Confederate soldiers and officers began entering the Hospital and demanding surrender.¹⁸

She and the others surrendered, considering their group consisted of herself, the steward, the druggist, one lame nurse using crutches, and the patients that could not make it to the fort. The Confederates immediately began plundering everything useful, beginning by first entering the office and then taking all of the medicines. They began ordering the Union soldiers, that could walk, to help move the boxes of looted supplies out to the carts, and Fyfe noted later that "it made our blood boil a little to see them perform & hear them command our men – They were exceedingly polite to us ladies, during all of their stay here, but became rough & profane, to the men generally. After they had taken the medicines they proceeded to the closets where the soldiers knapsacks & clothing were, Dressed themselves in our mens clothes, took

what knapsacks they could carry & whatever else they had time & place for."¹⁹

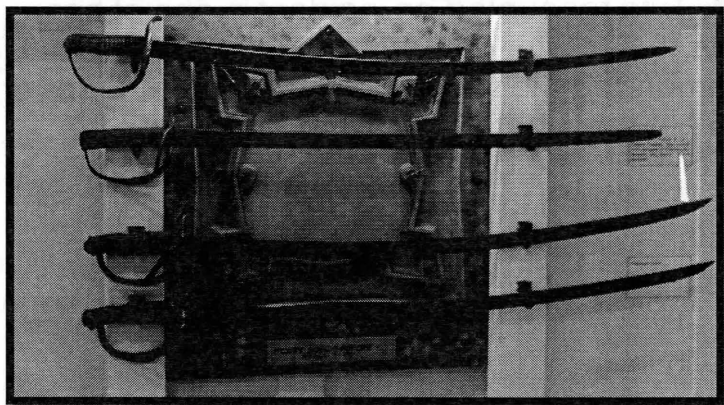
Fyfe recounted an incident in one of her letters to her sister about how a Confederate officer commanded the steward to harness the horses and then put them before the ambulance, but the steward told the officer that he would not do it, and the officer then turned his attention to one of his men and ordered them to harness the horses and drive them away.²⁰

Fyfe noted that at least fifty Confederates were in the ward and house pillaging, and she observed that they "presented a ludicrous appearance dressed in all sorts of colored clothing, their horses laden with cloths of all kind, shawls, silks, &c. &c."²¹

In one anecdote that Fyfe described later, the steward and the druggist had disappeared while the Confederates were still plundering the hospital, most likely due to the earlier encounter between the Confederate officer and the steward, but she and the other nurse knew where they were hiding, which was up in the cupola of the hospital, and she said she had some sport in sending up to them food, candles, matches and cigars wrapped in a sheet.²²

During the hospital's occupation by the Confederates, Fyfe noted that she saw General Forrest standing in the backyard, close to the house, and she described him as being a "fine looking man, but how deceiving his looks." He then gave orders to take all the prisoners that could walk, and had them taken to an officer to be questioned. It was around 6 pm when the Confederates left the

hospital and Nurse Jennie Fyfe was not sure if they would return or not.²³

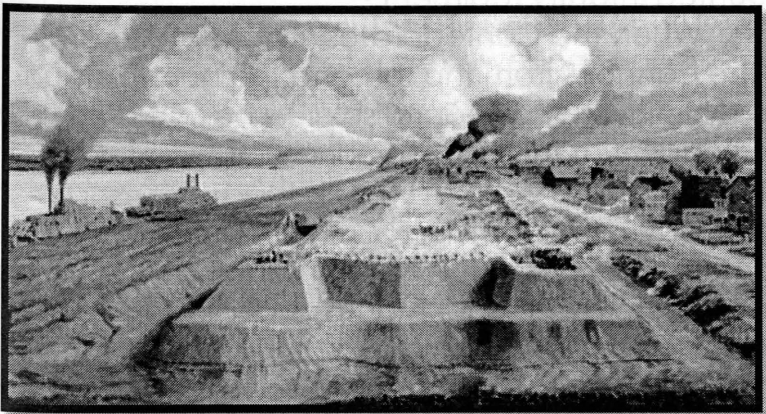


Civil War sabers in the Lloyd Tilghman Museum in Paducah.

The Battle

On Friday morning, Major James Chapman, with members of his 122nd Illinois Infantry, sent some of his scouts to watch the approaches from Mayfield road, outside the city, to watch for any advances from General Forrest's army, and at 2 pm, he got a report saying that the Confederate army was three miles from the city, at which he immediately formed his men and marched them back double-time to the fort, as were his orders. Once back into the fort, Major Chapman had his men take their assigned positions manning the wall. He stated later in his official report that he "formed my command on the west side of the front, with my right and left respectively resting near two 24-pounder siege guns, while in my center was a 24-pounder howitzer. In this position I awaited the approach of the enemy."²⁴

Colonel Hicks had one group of scouts come back to the fort at noon saying the enemy was not seen, but he sent them out again, and also within three miles from town, they encountered the advance guard for Forrest's army that fired upon them. They immediately fell back to town raising the alarms, and within minutes, the Confederates were driving in the Federal pickets and skirmishing fire was being reported, with the Confederates firing into the backs of his retreating men. Hicks immediately ordered everyone back to the fort for the protection of its walls. Earlier, the fort received further protection when the USS Peosta, a tinclad gunboat, arrived at 12 pm, joining the USS Paw Paw that was already stationed at Paducah.²⁵



The Battle around Fort Anderson as depicted on the Battle of Paducah flood wall mural in Paducah.

When the Confederates entered the city, Paducah resident and a soldier in the 3rd Kentucky Mounted Infantry, Company D, Private J. V. Grief stated that the regiment reached the Federal's

picket line at Eden's Hill at 2:10 pm, and they entered the city on Mayfield road where Guthrie and 17th Street meet today, under the command of Lieutenant Jarrett and Colonel A. P. Thompson. Before the war began, Colonel Thompson was a prominent lawyer in Paducah and he served as McCracken County's commonwealth's attorney. It was decided earlier in the morning from Mayfield that Company D, of the 3rd Kentucky, would be allowed to join in the vanguard of the army since they knew the land and the people, because this company consisted mostly of Paducah men that went off to serve as soldiers for the Confederate cause. They were originally the 3rd Kentucky Infantry, but after the Battle of Vicksburg, they were reassigned to General Forrest's Cavalry as a mounted infantry regiment.²⁶

When the Confederates reached the range of the cannons from the fort and the gunboats on the Ohio River, the Federal soldiers began firing all of their artillery at the approaching enemy. At 3 pm, the Kentuckians were at what is today 15th and Broadway, and Captain F. G. Terry, of the Confederate 8th Kentucky Regiment that was at this time serving as Colonel Thompson's ordnance officer, reported that Captain McGoodwin, the acting assistant adjutant-general, was sent to General Buford to report the location of Colonel Thompson and to ask for instructions. The order was returned telling them to "dismount your men and move against that fort, keeping your flanks well protected." Once they were ready, they formed a

line of battle and began marching immediately in the direction of the fort.²⁷

Acting Volunteer Lieutenant Thomas Smith, who was commanding the USS Peosta in the absence of Lieutenant Commander James Shirk, that had just left on a ship to give a report at Cairo, Illinois an hour earlier, reported that when the Confederates entered into firing range, he "steamed to the upper end of the city and opened on them with our starboard bow guns, the U.S.S. Paw Paw also opening at the same time. We then dropped down to the foot of Broadway and fired up the street."²⁸

At this time, Union Major Chapman saw that the Confederate infantry were "forming in my front at a distance of 1,000 yards. They very soon moved forward in three lines, with skirmishers in front. The latter took possession of some dwellings and the general hospital Numbers 1, and commenced firing at us through the windows and around the corners of the houses. From this position they were soon dislodged." Both the Peosta and the Paw Paw gunboats steamed next to the fort and provided aid in firing to help dislodge the Confederates firing from the buildings.²⁹

At what became Forrest's headquarters at 15th and Broadway, six men from Company D were sent with a flag of truce to carry a message for General Forrest to Colonel Hicks at the fort at about 4 pm. In the book *Paducahans in History* by Fred G. Neuman, four names were recorded as the flag bearers: Charles Reed, John Brooks, Rufe Stevens and John Garrett. While the flag of truce was going

up Broadway, the 3rd and 7th Kentucky regiments were advancing closer and began taking up positions to attack the fort, and the 8th Kentucky regiment was in the center of town looting the commissary stores, searching for every horse, mule and wagon, while also burning the quartermaster's supply depot building and the railroad depot, along with other important federal locations.³⁰

When Colonel Hicks heard that a flag of truce was approaching, he immediately ordered the men in the fort and signaled the gunboats to cease firing, and then sent men out to meet the bearers with the flag to receive the message. The message read:

"HEADQUARTERS FORREST'S CAVALRY CORPS,
Paducah, Ky., March 25, 1864.

Colonel HICKS,

Commanding Federal Forces at Paducah:

COLONEL: Having a force amply sufficient to carry your works and reduce the place, and in order to avoid the surrender of the fort and troops, with all public property. If you surrender, you shall be treated as prisoners of war; but if I have to storm your works, you may expect no quarter.

N. B. FORREST,
Major-General, Commanding Confederate Troops."

In response, Colonel Hicks sent this reply to be delivered to the Confederate flag bearers:

"HEADQUARTERS POST OF PADUCAH,
Paducah, Ky., March 25, 1864.

Major General N. B. FORREST,

Commanding Confederate Forces:

SIR: I have this moment received yours of this instant, in which you demand the unconditional surrender of the forces under my command. I can answer that I have been placed here by my Government to defend this post, and in this as well as all other orders from my superiors, I feel it to be my duty as an honorable officer to obey. I must, therefore, respectfully decline surrendering as you may require.

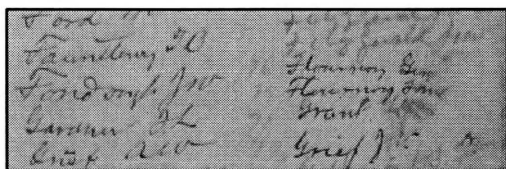
S. G. HICKS

Colonel, Commanding Post."

Colonel Hicks noticed that while the flag of truce was near the fort, the enemy was moving in and taking positions to attack the fort and gunboats, while also trying to setup a small artillery battery. Once the reply message was returned at 4:30 pm, the enemy advanced causing the fort and gunboats to open up fire on them, and it was at this time, the engagement began in earnest. Union Major Chapman saw that once the flag of truce returned, the enemy advanced with a heavy force led by Colonel Thompson, and they "filled all the houses in reach of the fort, and opened a heavy fire from behind every obstacle that would afford them protection."³¹

As soon as the fort and the USS Peosta and USS Paw Paw gunboats began firing, Confederate General Buford, who was on the right flank in the east and south side of the city, reformed the line where the right was on Broadway, which he was

commanding and the left was on Cairo Road, commanded by Colonel Thompson. General Buford left sharpshooters in the buildings next to the river on Front Street to fire on the gunboats in the river in an attempt to draw their fire away from the fort. The line continued to advance to be able to surround the fort, and it was maintained until they came to the more densely built part of the city where the line was unable to be held, forcing the Confederates to form columns by regiments or companies to continue advancing on the fort down the streets. When they were within rifle-shot of the enemy, they were halted for a short time about three hundred feet from the fort, making sure to protect themselves by getting behind houses and hiding in the alleys.³²



Company D roll from 1909 showing T B Fauntleroy and J V Grief. Photo taken at Lloyd Tilghman Museum in Paducah.

Henry George, a confederate soldier in the 7th Kentucky Mounted Infantry and a soldier in the battle stated, "they were moved forward again in the streets, the buildings on either side still preventing an advance in any sort of line until an open space was reached near the fort. While marching through the streets the command was under a constant and withering fire from the fort by both small arms and artillery. When out in open space, the lines were somewhat adjusted before the final charge was made. When within a short

distance of the fort it was discovered that it was surrounded by a deep ditch with such perpendicular banks as to render crossing impossible."³³

During one of the assaults on the fort, Ewell Hord, a young Confederate in Company D that was in the line next to and on the left of Paducahian J. V. Greif, asked if he could have help with loading his gun. Greif told him to load it himself and the boy told him that he could not because he was wounded in the arm and was not able draw his rammer. Greif exclaimed to Hord, "Go to the rear, you fool! What better luck do you want? It gets you out of this!" With this, Hord went to the rear crying that no one would help him continue to fight.³⁴

First Sergeant Thomas B. Fauntleroy, also in Confederate Company D of the 3rd and from Kevil, was with General Buford when the general rush occurred during the battle for the fort, and was within forty yards of the parapet after the third attempted assault against the fort's walls when the attack was halted around 5 pm. The gunboats were effectively firing their cannons directly up the streets to help clear them of the attacking soldiers, and the firing was intense up Trimble Street, where Colonel Thompson was in command. Union Colonel Hicks stated that at this time, "They rallied and tried it again, and met the same fate. They made a third effort, but were forced to abandon their design."³⁵

In a letter that he wrote home after the battle to his mother, Carpenter Mate Herbert Saunders was on the USS Peosta on the day of the battle, and he stated that the ship kept "putting the shell and

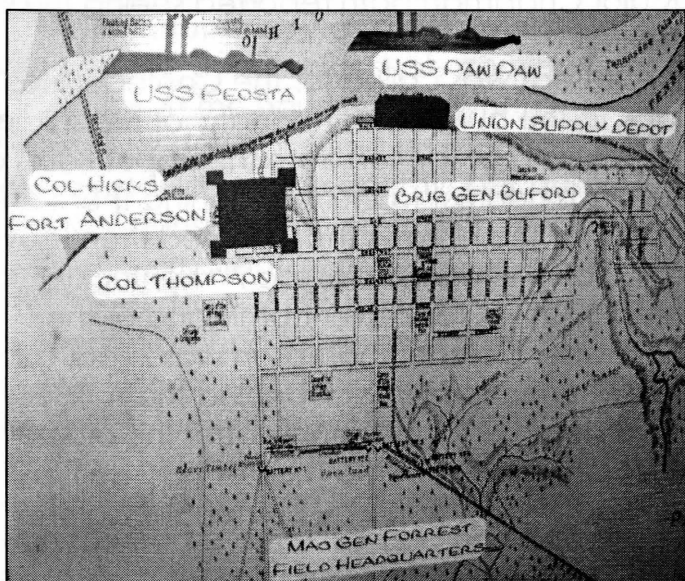
grape into them from all the guns that we could get to bear on them." After about two hours into the battle, Saunders described how their "rifle men and some of the people of the town got into the buildings down by the river and pelted us with musket ball but we soon gave enough of that for we directed our whole fire on them at short range with shell grape and canister and soon fetched the bricks around their eyes."³⁶

In another account that was in the Indianapolis "Journal", George Vance, from Indianapolis, relates his experiences in a letter home of the battle while serving on the USS Peosta. He recalled that the "first time the rebs charged up to the very ditch but fell back, having suffered severely. Our boat lay off abreast of the Fort, and we poured in a steady stream of shells. We worked seven guns, and I tell you we worked with a will. While the fighting was going on the women and children were being ferried across the river. I was really sorry to see the women driven around like so many sheep, but we could not stop to help them any."³⁷

Vance stated that after driving the Confederates back from the fort, they began shelling the town because they were being shot at from "every window, hole, and corner on the levee, and it was just like a hail-storm for about half an hour. We of course could not work the guns on our upper deck, and it was dangerous loading even the guns behind the casemates, as we were so close to the buildings that the sharp-shooters could hit a port almost every time. We directed our shots at the buildings to drive them out; but actually the

buildings would have to begin to crumble and fall before they would slacken their fire. Their fire was so accurate that I am minus a new pair of boots by it, and came near being minus a leg."³⁸

Lieutenant Smith, in command of the USS Peosta, reported later how the musket fire coming from the buildings on Front Street became such a danger to his gunboat saying, "In consequence of a heavy fire of musketry being directed upon us by sharpshooters in the buildings on Front Street, I reluctantly opened upon them, demolishing the City Hotel and brewery and setting several other buildings on fire."³⁹



Positions of troops on a map display at the Lloyd Tilghman Museum in Paducah.

After the last assault on the fort failed, Colonel Thompson was killed. J. V. Greif related "that a

column of the Third Kentucky was entering the alley back of the present Frank Kirchhoff, Sr., property at Fifth and Trimble streets, a two-story brick farm house then occupied by Robert Crow. Colonel Thompson had halted and his horse stood a few feet east of the alley entrance, the horse facing the south with the fore hoofs in the gutter. The colonel was conversing with several officers and had his cap in the right hand held overhead at arm's length, when the cannonball struck him and the animal. The horse ran half a block to Sixth street and fell, and was later buried on the spot where a marker in the sidewalk determines the place where its gallant rider lost his life in sight of his home." In the fort, Colonel Hicks and Major Chapman both reported seeing the Colonel fall.⁴⁰

A retreat was called for the Confederates to fall back to the buildings, and many of the soldiers continued firing at the fort from the upper floors of the buildings nearest to the fort, behind them and also in any of the hollows that allowed them cover to fire. Colonel Crossland, of the 7th Kentucky Mounted Infantry, took over command of the regiment after Colonel Thompson was killed, and he ordered his men to fall back behind the A. R. Lang's tobacco stemmery, and shortly after this order, he was shot in the thigh with a musket ball. He was then succeeded in command by Lieutenant Colonel Holt.⁴¹

With the fighting being so intense, Colonel Hicks began to worry about his ammunition supply in the fort and on the gunboats. Out of 30,000 rounds, he had already expended 27,000, and he ordered,

in this emergency, that the "remainder to be equally distributed; the men to fix their bayonets; to make good use of the ammunition they had, and, when that was exhausted, to receive the enemy on the point of the bayonet feeling fully determined never to surrender while I had a man alive." Writing in his report later, Colonel Hicks wrote, "When this order was repeated by the officers to their respective commands, it was received with loud shouts and cheers," but he also stated in the same report that the Confederate sharpshooters, after gaining possession of the houses around the fort, had killed and injured some of his gunners, many of which being killed by being shot in the head.⁴²

Major Chapman was also having a lot of trouble with the continuous shots coming from the sharpshooters in the houses, and when the fire began to slow down, he told his men to not fire unless they could see the enemy, because of his concern for conserving ammunition.⁴³

Nine sharpshooters from Company D were able to travel down Walnut Street, 6th Street today, maneuvering around to reach a brick cottage, owned by Gus Slusmeyer, located at 515 North Fourth Street. They entered the house to be able to shoot at the fort from one hundred feet away. J. V. Greif said that a cannon ball from the fort went through the house and knocked him down. He stated later, "Our guns were never idle after we got in position until the enemy succeeded in bringing to bear on our position a gun from another part of the fort. I was knocked down when a ball passed through the house and as I fell I heard the order of

Lieutenant Jarrett to get out. When I got up all were gone."⁴⁴

In the fort, Major Chapman saw the Confederates act as if they were going to renew the assault, but instead, they began falling back at about 6 pm, and he reported later, "Thus, after near three hours of hard fighting, the enemy was completely repulsed, leaving on the field 2 of their best generals, 1 captain, and 1 lieutenant, all killed. As they moved all the wounded and most of the dead, it was impossible for me to ascertain what was their loss in my immediate front. As several wagons were employed for near half an hour removing them, I concluded their loss was very heavy. Fifteen dead bodies were left on the ground near the fort."⁴⁵

When the Confederates began withdrawing, the soldiers from the fort and the gunboats raised their guns and began shelling the horses that were left at 15th and Broadway. One of the shells exploded and a piece of shrapnel struck a cavalryman that was holding some of the horses in the hip. J. V. Greif stated that another piece of shrapnel passed between him and his horse, and he said that it ended up "cutting off my stirrup leather and breaking the horse's leg between the hock and the stifle joint. I rode the wounded man's horse out."⁴⁶

After the Confederates withdrew from the fort, the main force moved a short distance outside Paducah in what is now known as the Hendron area to prepare a camp for the night, leaving a covering force of sharpshooters in a few of the buildings to

hold the Federal soldiers within the fort for the night.⁴⁷

At 10:30 pm, Lieutenant Smith received reports that the Confederates were still destroying property, so he moved the USS Peosta up to edge of town and began firing at where he thought they were located, and Colonel Hicks later reported, "Toward dark the enemy took shelter behind houses, in rooms, and hollows, and kept up a scattering fire until 11:30 o'clock, when it entirely ceased, and the rebel general withdrew his command out of the range of my guns and went into camp for the night."⁴⁸

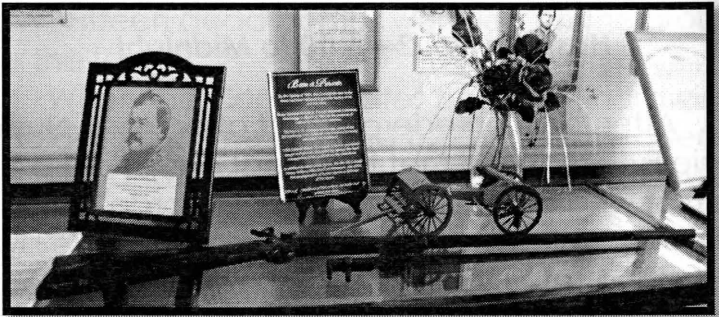
Hospital No. 2 – 6:00 to Midnight

After the Confederates left after 6 pm, Nurse Jennie Fyfe recalled that they kept expecting a return of what she called the 'Rebel Horde', and while they waited, women and children came by asking for a safe place, but they were questioned whether they were loyal or not. Asking this question may seem like a harsh act, but considering that time in Paducah, when there were two distinct groups, unionist and confederate sympathizer, asking those wishing entry if they were loyal or not, may have seemed very important for the U.S. army hospital to ask, because, at this time, no one knew for sure who was going to win the battle.⁴⁹

Two shots came through the windows during the evening, causing many of the alarmed patients to crouch in the corners and under their beds, and later in the evening, a confederate soldier entered

Fyfe's ward and demanded that everyone hand over their money, but before the battle, the nurses were given the money and watches of the patients and hid them.⁵⁰

One of the nurses from Hospital No. 1, which had been taken over early in the battle by the Confederates to fire at the fort from its windows because of its close proximity, made it to Hospital No. 2 in the evening, and she told them that the nurses were taken prisoner but they all escaped during the battle. Considering how the nurses were treated respectfully at her hospital, Fyfe was grateful that she did not receive the same "scandalous treatment of the ladies of No. 1."⁵¹



A Civil War rifle musket on display at the Lloyd Tilghman Museum in Paducah.

The Residents of Paducah – 2:00 to 11:00 pm

When the Confederates began encountering the picket line at Paducah, many of the residents started hearing musket fire in the distance coming toward them, and those that did not believe that the city would be attacked saw that their worst fears were actually coming true. Some residents left what

they were doing and ran home to gather their families to find shelter from the coming battle, while others hid in their cellars or found hiding places to wait out the attack.

On March 25, 1927, Louis Kolb Sr. recounted that day's events in 1864, to the News-Democrat newspaper, by describing how the advance rebel vanguard arrived at Eden's Hill at 2:10 pm and how Forrest's main body of his cavalry reached the area of 15th and Broadway, dismounting his troops at 3 pm. Kolb detailed how he and his wife finally made it to the river bank at 5 pm, and after finding a small boat, he "clung fast to the bottom of the boat while the firing was going on, near a woman with a bad case of smallpox, having less fear of contracting the disease than the shots from in and around the fort." He was able to get across the river at Brookport, Illinois, staying there until Sunday.⁵²

In a Louisville "Journal" account on March 29, 1864, a Paducah resident gave their account of the day of the battle. The witness said the Rebels arrived at 2 pm in the suburbs, and they thought that they have would have some time to get to safety, but within thirty minutes, they heard the first musket fire, while making their way to provide safety for their family. After making it to the river, Quartermaster Captain J. A. Finley, staying cool under fire, remained to help load the scared residents on to a large wharf-boat of J. H. Fowler & Co., with at least a thousand people loaded on board, and after the Owens' ferry-boat, called the Blue Bird, came alongside the wharf-boat to fasten them together. A coal-barge, loaded with more residents, was also

fastened to the ferry-boat, and the trio made their way to the opposite shore, while the USS Peosta was firing over and around them, causing "an awful tremor to seize our vitals."⁵³

Saturday March 26th, 1864

Before 7 a.m. the next morning, General Forrest was preparing to leave the property of George Schmidt, in the Hendron area outside Paducah, for Mayfield, when he sent out his second flag of truce back to Paducah proposing an exchange of soldiers.⁵⁴

The message read as follows: ⁵⁵

"HEADQUARTERS FORREST'S CAVALRY CORPS,
Near Paducah, Ky., March 26, 1864

Col. S. G. HICKS,

Commanding Federal Forces at Paducah Ky.:

Sir: I understand you hold in your possession in the guard-house at Paducah a number of Confederate soldiers as prisoners of war. I have in my possession about 35 or 40 Federal soldiers who were captured here yesterday, and about 500 who were captured at Union City. I propose to exchange man for man, according to rank, so far as you may hold Confederate soldiers.

Respectfully,

N. B. Forrest,
Major-General, Commanding Confederate Forces."

When the army arrived in Mayfield, the Kentucky regiments were granted a furlough for a few days to go spend time to see family and homes, considering that most of the soldiers have not seen them since they enlisted back in 1861. It was noted in several sources that all of the Kentuckians returned to their units at Trenton, Tennessee, where they were to rendezvous, and when they returned, they had good mounts and comfortable clothing, along with many new recruits to join the regiments.⁵⁶

Early in the morning at Fort Anderson, Colonel Hicks still viewed the enemy two and a half miles from the city making a demonstration of a possible attack, so he ordered Major Barnes, of the 16th Kentucky Cavalry, to send out some of his squads to burn all of the houses that surrounded the fort, because the day before, many of his deaths and casualties occurred when the Confederate sharpshooters were occupying the upper stories of those homes and buildings, and Colonel Hicks was going to remove those hazards endangering his troops, at all cost.⁵⁷

While Major Barnes was carrying out his order to burn the homes, General Forrest's flag of truce arrived and Colonel Hicks replied as follows: ⁵⁸

"HEADQUARTERS POST OF PADUCAH,
Paducah, Ky., March 26, 1864

Maj. Gen. N. B. FORREST,

Commanding Confederate Forces:

SIR: I have no power to make the exchange. If I had I would most cheerfully do it.

Very respectfully,

S. G. HICKS,

Colonel Fortieth Illinois Infantry, Commanding Post."

Even though some residents did not return until Sunday, some began being ferried back across the river early in the morning at dawn, and those property owners that had homes near the fort discovered that they were burning or going to be burned, without a chance to remove any of their valuables. Some of the residents that had already returned were told when they asked if they could retrieve some of the furnishings that the order stated the homes must be burned immediately.⁵⁹

In an account recorded by Fred Neuman in his book *Paducahans in History*, he describes the story of how Colonel Thompson's body was removed from Trimble Street at 9 am in the morning:

"Colonel Thompson's mutilated body lay on Trimble street where he fell until the morning after the Battle of Paducah, when shortly before 9 o'clock John McClung and former Mayor D. A. Yeiser went to the site and gathered the remains, engaging a drayman to convey the torn body to the one-story frame building which then stood where the Post office now is located. Mr. McClung was a clerk at L. S. Trimble & Company's wholesale grocery and Mr.

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Yeiser was then with the old Cope & Neel drug store on the north side of lower Broadway. They visited the place where the Colonel's body lay as soon as they heard of its being left in the disorder which for a few minutes followed his fall."⁶⁰

When some of the residents returned the next day, they found that a third of the town was destroyed, and everywhere they looked, many buildings still standing were riddled with holes from the shells of the two gunboats. One resident said that many "business and dwelling-houses have suffered greatly from the shells of the gunboats, prominent among which are the Continental Hotel, City Hotel, and Branch Bank of Louisville. The latter is almost a mass of ruins, with its entire contents. Cashier S. B. Hughes and family resided in the building, but, fortunately, had escaped."⁶¹

Over in Hospital No. 2, Nurse Fyfe wrote home later saying that she saw another one of the nurses that had escaped from Hospital No. 1, which was burned down because of Colonel Hicks' order, due to its close proximity to the fort. The nurse explained that once the fighting started, she hid behind a stump during the fighting, and when the truce flag came down Broadway and the firing ceased, she made her escape to the river and crossed in a boat. Fyfe said that she went out later to view the destruction in town, and she saw the place where Colonel Thompson fell and also the ruins of Hospital No. 1, saying that six skeletons were found inside. Of the damage to the city, she wrote, "Some of the

buildings burned were very fine; beautiful yards about them & every thing betokening wealth."⁶²



Confederate Officer's uniform at the Lloyd Tilghman Museum in Paducah.

The Importance of Paducah

Even though General Forrest succeeded in raiding Paducah of its supplies and horses, while destroying the buildings used by the Federal army, militarily, the assault on the fort was a setback. The Union lost 14 men, 46 men were wounded and 40 were captured, but the Confederate losses are harder to define, because many of the dead were either buried or taken back with the wounded to Mayfield and buried. Colonel Hicks estimated that 300 were killed and 1,000 to 1,200 were wounded from General Forrest's cavalry, but reports, during the Civil War, were often exaggerated, so the numbers are most likely much lower. Whatever the case, General Forrest lost a lot of men for just a raid.⁶³

Confederate soldier Henry George later wrote that General Forrest stated that he "drove the enemy to their gunboats and fort, and held the town for ten hours; captured many stores and

horses; burned sixty bales of cotton, one steamer and a dry dock, bringing out fifty prisoners. My loss, as far as known, is twenty-five killed and wounded, among them Colonel Thompson."⁶⁴

The damage to Paducah was considerable, caused by both the fort's and gunboat's cannons and by the Confederate forces. General Forrest's soldiers burned the Union headquarters, the quartermaster and commissary building with all of its supplies, the railroad depot and a steamboat that was on the ways, the *Dacotah*, but the Union forces burned down all of the buildings and homes near the fort and the artillery burned and damaged many more buildings around the city, especially on the water front.⁶⁵

It seems that General Forrest made a serious error in strategy, when he ordered the attack on the fort, because the ditch, water and the size of the walls should not have been a surprise, and if they had done a little reconnaissance on the fort and its defenses, before entering the city, the outcome may have ended differently, instead of rushing at full speed to assault its walls.⁶⁶

It could be that General Forrest knew strategically that he could not stay long before more gunboats and troops arrived to relieve the fort, explaining why he decided to move his army back to Mayfield, but if he had continued the assault that morning, considering the fort's ammunition was desperately low, they could have possibly been able to overpower the Union soldiers when their ammunition ran out. However, because his force was a cavalry, General Forrest probably knew that

he did not have the necessary equipment and artillery to continue occupying Paducah, especially since he would not have a supply line, needed to stay.

It was questioned later about who ordered the assault on the fort. Forrest's biographers later pushed the narrative that Colonel Thompson assaulted the fort on his own initiative, saying that General Forrest ordered him to just hold the enemy soldiers in the fort, but General Forrest was the kind of general that demanded respect, so many believe that Colonel Thompson was indeed acting on orders to attack. It could be possible that General Forrest allowed the assault to continue, when the ditch and walls were seen for the first time, either because he thought that a lightning strike attack could win the day, or he was affording the chance for Colonel Thompson to take his hometown for the south.⁶⁷

Another reason why the assault on the fort was so intense could also be the fact that former African American slaves, from Paducah, were manning the walls of the fort, and General Forrest and his men wanted to send a message to all slaves that may have been thinking about abandoning their masters to join the Union Army. Evidence to this fact can be shown by General Forrest's attack on Fort Pillow in Tennessee on April 12, 1864, where nearly all of the African American soldiers manning the fort were tortured and killed following the surrender. If Fort Anderson had fallen to the Confederates, it is very possible that the African American soldiers would have had the same fate.⁶⁸

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If the fort was destroyed and the garrison killed or captured, this would have disrupted the supplies getting to Chattanooga, from the Tennessee River, to help the attack on Atlanta that was fought on July 22, 1864. If it was General Forrest's goal to slow down General Sherman's march to Atlanta, it failed because keeping Forrest's forces occupied in the west meant that General Sherman did not have to worry about a cavalry attacking from behind him, or on his flank. General Sherman sent a message to Colonel Hicks, on April 3rd, regarding his defense of Paducah saying, "Your defense of Paducah was exactly right. Keep cool, and give the enemy a second edition if he comes again. I want Forrest to stay just where he is, and the longer the better."⁶⁹

About the Author:

In addition to being a historian, Mr. Cashon is a native of Paducah and loves to document the beauty of Paducah on the *Pleasant Life of Paducah* Facebook page with his photography. As a boy, he played Pony League Baseball in Paducah, and likes to hike and camp in the Land Between the Lakes nearby.

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