



Official Newsletter of the Michigan Company of Military Historians & Collectors
January 12, 2015

"It's only when you see a mosquito landing on your testicles that you realize there is always a way to solve problems without using violence." Anon. Thanks to Jim McCloughan, combat medic

"An Army Corps should be landed in Mindanao at earliest date possible or the loss of the Philippines will mark the end of white prestige." MacArthur communique to War Department 1/7/42

"Battles are sometimes won by generals; wars are nearly always won by sergeants and privates." F.E. Adcock, British classical scholar

"I don't know whether war is an interlude during peace, or peace is an interlude during war."
Georges Clemenceau

"War is delightful to those who have had no experience of it." Desiderius Erasmus

Speaker will be Steve Roersma. He will present on the restoration of a WWII German Sd.Kfz. 251D, an armored half-track. One of 49 left in the world and one of only nine in the United States. Visual presentation is planned.

MEETINGS take place the second Monday of every month at the Riverfront Hotel Grand Rapids 270 Ann St NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49504 (616) 363-9001. Socializing begins at 6:00 (1800), dinner at 7:00 (1900), business meeting 7:15 (1915), and program at 8:00 (2000).

GENERAL STAFF

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Company Notes

- ◆ **Mea Culpa-DUES are not \$45.00 but only \$40.00 a year, Associate \$20.00. Send check to Mike Krushinsky**
- ◆ **Officer Slate 2015: Comm.- R. O'Beshaw{prov); XO-B. Whitman: Adjutant-J. Porter**
- ◆ **Google National Writer Series and view Benjamin Busch presenting and another video where Benjamin interviews Brian Castner and Brian Turner. All three are authors who wrote about their combat experiences. Answers to questions from the audience were excellent. Ben and Brian were both former OPEN MESS Speakers. Both videos total almost 4 hours but well worth the time.**

The editorial opinions and articles in *The Cannon Report* do not represent any official position of the Michigan Company of Military Historians and Collectors (MCMH&C) only the opinions of the editor. The MCMH&C is a non-partisan, non-ideological association. All members are welcome to submit material, letters, "For the good of the Company items", etc. Direct inquiries or comments to kuziaks@me.com

The Perils of Writing History

As I try to present and write interesting articles about events that contain a military/historical element I have come to realize I am so much a product of my own time. Trying to present facts objectively but coming to understand that my knowledge comes from writers who wrote from their own respective historical period. In the light of new information, what was once written and appeared factual may no longer be as accurate as previously assumed. James Loewen writes in The Confederate and Neo-Confederate Reader that “*when* we write about secession (it) influences *what* we write about secession.” The justifications presented in 1858 are not those proclaimed in 1890, and emphasized differently in 1940. Only by going to the source of the original events can one observe how the original motives have morphed into something entirely different.

One example is state’s rights, a term used by the South as one of the justifications for secession which did not appear as a *casus belli* until the 1890’s. In actuality the South criticized and accused the Northern States for invoking this notion of state’s rights when the North refused or appeared reluctant to enforce the Fugitive Slave Law, allowed the Underground Railroad to illegally operate in their states and permitted African Americans to vote. The first two complaints were in direct violation of the Constitution of the United States (Article IV, Section 2). John C. Calhoun, Senator from South Carolina, was apoplectic while accusing the Northern States of fomenting sedition when they allowed their citizens to advocate the abolition of slavery by circulating “incendiary publications throughout the South.” Furthermore, in Texas’ 1861 Declaration of Secession Northerners were castigated for “proclaiming the debasing doctrine of the ‘equality of all men’.” Louisiana looked “to the formation of a Southern confederacy to preserve the blessings of Africa slavery.” They went on to proclaim “that the governments of the various states, and of the confederacy itself, were established exclusively by the white race, for themselves and their posterity. The African race has no place other than as slaves.” The notion of white supremacy and the the efforts expended to keep it in the forefront seem bizarre if not irrational in the 19th century let alone in the 21st. The defense of slavery and the protection of its continuance seems a poor justification for states to engage in mortal combat. When slavery was exposed for the abomination it was and defeated, the passage of time has forced certain parties to perpetuate a charade of rationalizations that somehow make their motives for war honorable and righteous. Woe be to those who not only fail to believe but dare to object to their spurious claims.

A perfect case of the myth exposure can be found in Exodus From the Alamo by Phillip Thomas Tucker, PhD. Exhaustively researched and footnoted and yet the reviews by readers found in Amazon Book Reviews are *littered* with disparaging comments about his account of the battle at that should rightfully be called The 27 Minute Massacre. Men touted as heroes like Sam Houston, the Father of Texas, known to the Cherokees as the “Big Drunk,” should rightfully be remembered as the “Father of the Alamo Disaster.” But history is full fabrications that pass for facts until someone breaks through the crust of deceit and reveals the germ of truth. Hollywood should bear much of the blame for the perpetuation of many misconceptions that have colored our remembrance of historical events. The Alamo with John Wayne and Gone With The Wind are two films that many use as their reference to validate their beliefs. Any attempt to persuade them otherwise is often an impossible task. In this issue, in homage to Eugene Bleil, M.D., a Bataan Survivor, I will confirm his opinions of Douglas MacArthur. Dr. Bleil wrote in Consigned To DEATH Six Times about his experiences. No one wanted to publish his book due to the disparaging remarks he made about MacArthur. A local publisher promised to publish but severely edited his comments. The Mantle of Command by Nigel Hamilton did not suffer such unwarranted censorship. The true man is finally exposed for what he was and his nefarious deals are revealed along with his political enablers.

Dugout Doug

The following ballad was sung by the men trapped on Bataan to the tune of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic:

*Dugout Doug MacArthur lies ashaking on the Rock
Safe from all the bombers and from any sudden shock
Dugout Doug is eating of the best food on Bataan
And his troops go starving on.*

Chorus

*Dugout Doug, come out from hiding
Dugout Doug, come out from hiding
Send to Franklin the glad tidings
That his troops go starving on!*

Excerpted from The Mantle of Command—FDR at War, 1941-1942 by Nigel Hamilton.

This mocking of MacArthur resulted from his most grievous mistake (one of many) in his feeble defense of the Philippines. Food stocks at Cabanatuan, enough to feed U.S. and Filipino troops for over four years, were never transferred to the Bataan peninsula or the island fortress of Corregidor (the Rock) despite being advised by the War Department to do so in August, 1941. Instructions he considered “defeatist.” After FDR restored MacArthur to the U.S. Army’s active list and made him the commanding general of the United States Army Forces in the Far East (USAFFE) the newly appointed Lieutenant General told Admiral Hart, commander of the U.S. Far Eastern Fleet, that he would refuse “to follow, or be in any way bound by whatever war plans have been evolved, agreed upon and approved” by Washington. James Leutze writes in his biography of Thomas Hart, A Different Kind of Victory, that he “long despaired of MacArthur’s contact with reality. The truth of the matter is that Douglas is, I think, no longer altogether sane, he may not have been for a long time.”

MacArthur showed a lack of interest in army-navy cooperation to the extent of refusing the admiral’s request to use the B-17s for long-range reconnaissance or for protection when the ships were at sea. The “field marshal” gloried in his refusal to take orders from Washington. He was going to fight “a glorious land war” in defending the Philippines *without naval support*. Waving off Hart’s proposal for a combined defense, demented Doug stated the “Navy had its plans, the Army had its plans, and we each had our own fields.” Instead the Army’s entire air force was lost in the first day, on the ground, despite a nine hour warning both from Hawaii and General Marshall in Washington. When the Japanese landed at Lingayen, December 22, and contrary to the plan the War Department had laid down in case of attack, MacArthur chose his “Beach Defense.” A scheme devised and ill-rehearsed without naval and air support. The hastily assembled, poorly trained, and shoddily armed Philippine troops had run, and within hours Manila was threatened.

As a battlefield commander, FDR knew that MacArthur was a fraud. In his January 15, 1942 message, “to be read out to all units,” declaring that “help is on the way,” being “criminal” in its mendacity and the raising “of false hopes, hopes that MacArthur knew could not be fulfilled.” It was not the lack of men or weapons but the lack of food that was the single most critical factor in the defense of Bataan. The Japanese could, by blockading it, simply starve out its opponents, and they did. MacArthur belatedly pulled back his forces to the 30 mile long Bataan Peninsula according to the War Departments Plan 3. He moved his headquarters further back to the island of Corregidor, a four mile long island fortress replete with deep tunnels. His own family and the government officials of the Philippines were with him. Only a handful of officers or men of the Army of the Philippines had

seen MacArthur on his one and only visit to the Bataan Peninsula, January 10, 1942. On January 24, orders were given to reduce the limited rations by half on Bataan while doubling the food stocks for the eleven thousand men on Corregidor, who—apart from anti-aircraft and long-range artillery units—were not even fighting.

And yet back in the States there were growing calls for MacArthur to be brought back to Washington in order to make him the U.S. commander in chief. Those in the know could only wince at such media madness trumpeted by an increasing number of Republicans and newspaper magnates. The *Baltimore Sun* proclaimed MacArthur a “military genius”—a general whose skills rose high above the “single field” of battle. Members of Congress proposed to award him the Medal of Honor for bravery in battle. One Philadelphia paper stated that he “is one of the greatest fighting generals of this war or (any) other war.” Bataan “will go down in schoolbooks alongside Valley Forge, Yorktown, Gettysburg and Chateau Thierry.” His countless cables to Washington grew more desperate with pleas and warnings. Eisenhower saw that his histrionics “indicated a refusal on his part to look facts in the face, an old trait of his.” On December 22, 1941 MacArthur signaled that he was confronting “eighty to one hundred thousand” Japanese; in truth his own forces were more than eighty-thousand strong and they faced half that number of Japanese. On January 2, 1942 he revised his numbers claiming to have “only seven thousand American combat troops, the balance of the force being Filipino.” Forces that he had been instructed to train and prepare as an appointed civilian military advisor since 1937! Nigel Hamilton asked “was the Far Eastern general a ‘strategical’ genius, as the press and Republicans increasingly seem to believe? Or was he a charlatan—a Mad Hatter, ensconced in a rabbit hole of a tunnel—driven literally to distraction by his unenviable situation in the Philippines?”

The President had known Douglas MacArthur since before the First World War—a war in which MacArthur had been awarded an unparalleled seven Silver Stars for courage and exemplary combat leadership, becoming the youngest brigadier general in the United States Army. The relationship between the two men had been cordial, but never easy. Both came from somewhat aristocratic backgrounds, and both were the only-surviving sons born of strong, domineering mothers. Mothers who had moved into nearby accommodations while their sons went to college. Douglas was a traditional Republican while Franklin was a compassionate Democrat—a difference that had come to a head in 1932, during the Great Depression. General MacArthur had been charged by President Hoover to evict the veterans who had marched on the capital to demand early payment of their promised war bonuses. Despite Hoover’s express order to halt his thousand troops at the Anacostia River, MacArthur had insisted on taking personal charge of the brutal operation, involving tanks, cavalry, gas, and infantry with bayonets. The general had claimed the war veterans had no cause to claim their promised bonus early. The protest had been planned by the Communist Party, hoping to incite “revolutionary action” in America. Hoover’s attack on former veterans led to his landslide loss to FDR later that year. The veterans returned in 1933 and the new President, FDR, sent his unaccompanied wife down to meet the marchers at a campsite he had designated in Virginia. One veteran commented: “Hoover sent the army, Roosevelt sent his wife.” He also provided them three meals a day and promised that he would relax the requirements for joining the Civilian Conservation Corps so married men and anyone over 25 could now join. He still vetoed the bonus but Congress overrode his veto and passed the Adjusted Compensation Payment Act in 1935, making it a win-win situation for everyone.

FDR found himself in a predicament, placed between his military advisers who wanted to sack the pompous blowhard, politicians who almost wanted him deified, and the British who wanted the United States to concentrate on Germany. The President was a consummate juggler who saw good in everyone and strived to use the best qualities of everyone, MacArthur being no exception. He was potentially a great leader whose flaws were often larger than his strengths. But symbolically he was

very important and an inspiration to so many, most importantly the Filipinos. On February 19, 1942, Singapore with its one hundred and thirty thousand Empire troops surrendered to the Japanese. Forty thousand Indian troops of the forty-five thousand present agreed to fight with the Japanese against Britain in the newly formed Indian National Army. Still more would do so over the following year. Churchill had long denied India self-government, independence, or even Dominion status, such as the Australians enjoyed. This became a serious source of contention between Churchill and FDR. The President wanted to make sure that the Filipinos would not switch sides and join the Japanese. The United States had promised them independence by 1946, but with the capital declared an open city, President Manuel Quezon was seriously considering surrounding his forces to the Japanese who would give them limited autonomy immediately. MacArthur's rantings had seriously given the Filipino president cause for concern in believing America's resolve to help his country. When FDR was informed of this situation he told MacArthur that the U.S could not force the Filipinos to fight, but as the commander of the American forces he was to defend Bataan and Corregidor as long as possible and show the Filipinos that U.S. forces will fight to the death for his country. MacArthur had one trait that FDR desired and appreciated, his willingness and eagerness to fight the Japanese; unlike the numerous British commanders who had surrendered to inferior forces and showed little spunk in combat. FDR could forgive every shortcoming of his general because he possessed the one quality admired most by his commander-in-chief, the strong desire to defeat the Japanese.

He even forgave MacArthur and kept secret his most grievous impropriety, which would stun and disappoint even his most ardent admirers. In 1982, MacArthur's former wartime office secretary on Corregidor, a private, released his diary. It disclosed that on February 13, 1942, the day after President Quezon had agreed to turn down the Japanese offer of independence for the Philippines and for the Philippine government to stand by the United States, General MacArthur persuaded Quezon to award him a backdated bonus or bribe of half a million dollars—the sum to be wired into MacArthur's personal bank in New York. Not only that, but until the general received a cable from Chase National Bank in New York confirming that the money had been credited to his account, Quezon was to give MacArthur half a million dollars in cash (or bonds) as a surety. Private Rodgers was so embarrassed by the transaction and the negotiations for it, in the midst of a significant battle in a world war, that he did not dare set down the true sum—changing it to \$50,000 in his diary.

That MacArthur would take such a huge sum (\$4.7 million in today's dollars) for supposed "past services" to the Philippine president was not only illegal for a serving U.S. officer, but a tremendous risk in terms of stature as an officer and a gentleman. His closest staff were offered and accepted lesser sums. Such an urgent, cabled request from a commanding general in a combat zone would obviously be seen by others—indeed, it would require the authorization of senior Army and cabinet officers as well as directors of Chase National Bank. It could not be and was not hidden from the President (who kept a copy of MacArthur's secret wire in his files), his cabinet secretaries, General Marshall, as chief of staff or General Eisenhower, who was now head of the Far East section of the War Department. Under Article 94 of the Articles of War of 1920, "Frauds Against the Government" could be punished by fine or imprisonment. "If Roosevelt had not approved of the transfer," as Rodgers later wrote, "the entire affair would have been annulled." The question of corruption or insanity was set aside for on February 15, 1942, the war in the Pacific turned a new and darker page, Singapore, the "Gibraltar of the East" fell without more than a token fight. Like a house of cards, Britain's empire in the Far East collapsed, overnight. And General Douglas MacArthur, the man who helped President Quezon and the Filipinos continue to fight with the democracies. Instead of becoming a felon, he became the U.S. Commander in Chief's "indispensable man" in the Pacific.

The Fort Pillow Massacre

Written by Roy Morris, Jr. (adapted and edited from America's Civil War Magazine)

Early April 1864 was cold and bleak in west Tennessee. For Confederate Major General Nathan Bedford Forrest and the 3,000 troopers he led from northern Mississippi that March—mostly Tennesseans who were eager to re-enter their home state—the land seemed devoid of warmth or welcome. Two years of Union occupation, interspersed with Confederate raids and counter-raids, had spawned a poisonous atmosphere of revenge and reprisal that seemed to have sickened the entire region. “The whole of West Tennessee,” Forrest reported angrily, “is overrun by bands and squads of robbers, horse thieves and deserters, whose depredations and unlawful appropriations of private property are rapidly and effectually depleting the country.”

Forrest himself was a native Tennessean, born in 1821 in Bedford County. Although he was raised in the backwoods of northern Mississippi, he had made his fortune in Memphis, and he always considered Tennessee his home. Now he was back, and what he saw did not amuse him. The land was picked over and brown, with burned farmhouses and ruined barns dotting the horizon. Nor was Forrest much amused by the tales he heard from local residents while he was camped at Jackson, Tenn., en route to Kentucky on a horse-gathering mission. A “regiment of renegade Tennesseans,” he noted, led by Colonel Fielding Hurst of the 6th Tennessee (U.S.) Cavalry, had been plundering throughout southwestern Tennessee, perpetrating “wanton destruction of property” and demanding—and getting—a sum of \$5,139.25 from the residents of Jackson in return for not burning the town to the ground. (The sum was exactly, to the penny, the amount of a legal judgment made against Hurst by Federal authorities in Memphis on behalf of a female resident of Jackson whose property had been destroyed by the colonel’s raiders.)

Even worse than Hurst’s extortionate tactics was his treatment of several Forrest subordinates who had returned to their hometowns to recruit new soldiers for the Southern cause. Seven of these men had been murdered by Hurst’s forces in the past two months, including Lieutenant Willis Dodds, who had been killed less than two weeks earlier at his father’s home in Henderson County. Forrest reported that Dodds had been “put to death by torture,” noting that a witness, who had seen the young lieutenant’s body shortly after his death, found the victim “most horribly mutilated, the face having been skinned, the nose cut off, the under jaw disjoined, the privates cut off, and the body otherwise barbarously lacerated and most wantonly injured.”

Jackson residents warned Forrest of another “nest of outlaws” currently holed up in an old abandoned Confederate fortification, Fort Pillow, overlooking the Mississippi River 40 miles north of Memphis. These Unionists, members of the 13th Tennessee Cavalry under the command of Major William F. Bradford, included many former Confederates who had joined forces with the occupying Federals. These “homemade Yankees” were hated by Forrest’s men, many of whose families reportedly had been victims of the turncoats’ threats, abuses and outright thievery. Bradford, an attorney who came from Forrest’s own home county of Bedford, was particularly loathed. Prior to receiving a commission in the Union Army, Bradford had led a band of pro-Northern guerrillas in raids against Confederate sympathizers in middle and west Tennessee. “Under the pretense of scouring the country for arms and rebel soldiers,” Bradford had “traversed the surrounding country with detachments, robbing the people of their horses, mules, beef cattle, beds, plates, wearing apparel, money, and every possible movable article of value, besides venting upon the wives and daughters of Southern soldiers the most opprobrious and obscene epithets, with more than one extreme outrage upon the persons of these victims of their hate and lust.” *This area was rife with animosities as it was a border area where loyalties were almost evenly divided and retributions were deadly. Ed. note*

For the time being, Forrest could do nothing about the alleged atrocities—he was under orders to remount and refit a new division—but he promised the people of Jackson that he would “attend to the Federals at Fort Pillow in a day or two.” In the meantime, he issued a proclamation labeling Hurst and his troopers outlaws and declaring that they were “not entitled to be treated as prisoners of war falling into the hands of the forces of the Confederate states.” Instead, they would be shot down summarily whenever and wherever they were encountered. That was partly bluster on Forrest’s part, designed to strike fear into the hearts of wavering Confederate supporters and would-be deserters, but Union authorities took the threat seriously enough to warn Hurst “against allowing your men to straggle or pillage...as a deviation from this rule may prove fatal to yourself and [your] command.”

In a less than buoyant state of mind, Forrest and his men rode north toward Kentucky in late March. Part of the column, 500 horsemen under the command of Colonel William L. Duckworth, was detached to capture Union City, a crossroads village in northwestern Tennessee. Duckworth carried out his assignment with flair, posing as Forrest and sending a strongly worded surrender demand to the Federal garrison commander, Colonel Issac Hawkins, who had already surrendered to Forrest once before. Now Hawkins demanded to see Forrest in person before capitulating. Duckworth, thinking quickly, responded (as Forrest) that “I am not in the habit of meeting officers inferior to myself in rank...but I will send Col. Duckworth, who is your equal in rank, and who is authorized to arrange terms and conditions with you.” The ruse worked and Hawkins, although holding a strong position, handed over himself and 500 other Union soldiers, as well as 300 horses and \$60,000 in greenbacks that the garrison had recently received in pay. The Confederates joked afterward that they would be happy to parole Hawkins again in order to obtain more horses and equipment.

Forrest was not particularly interested in capturing Fort Pillow or its occupants, he merely wanted to pin them down while his own men made off with the large supply of Union stores, horses, and ammunition in Paducah. But while Forrest was directing the seizure of matériel, one of his newly acquired Kentucky officers, Colonel A.P. Thompson, took it upon himself to attack the fort. Thompson, a native of Paducah, felt honor-bound to free his hometown of Northern aggressors. Against orders, he led an assault force of 400 men from the 3rd and 7th Kentucky cavalry in a wild rush toward the fort. The attack was easily beaten back, and Thompson himself was killed—literally blown apart by a shell from one of the gunboats.

Forrest withdrew from Paducah before midnight on March 25, having gathered 400 horses and mules, 50 prisoners and a large supply of clothing, saddles and supplies—the whole point of his mission. He could have held Paducah indefinitely, Forrest claimed, but he had found the town wracked by an outbreak of smallpox and so withdrew to avoid unnecessarily exposing his men to the disease. Back in Tennessee, Forrest was irritated by reports coming out of the North that labeled his Paducah raid a failure. The *Louisville Journal*, for one, charged that the Rebels had been “gloriously drunk, and but little better than a mob.” The newspaper said Forrest’s men had “commenced an indiscriminate pillage of the houses and then had made several desperate charges...upon the fort. The Federals met them with a withering fire, and in each onset the rebel columns were broken and driven back in confusion.” This was bad enough, but the *Chicago Tribune*, a staunchly abolitionist paper, also reported that the Confederates had “skedaddled, after killing as many negroes as they could, which seems to have been their primary object in coming to Paducah.” Even worse, in Southern eyes, was the newspaper’s provocative claim that Forrest’s men had been “ignominiously beaten back by negro soldiers with clubbed muskets.” The Confederates seethed at the bogus reporting.

Now Forrest turned his attention to Fort Pillow, ordering Brig. Gen. James Chalmers to bring up the rest of the cavalry corps from Mississippi. The first order of business was dealing with the much-hated Colonel Hurst and his command. Colonel James J. Neely struck Hurst’s trail between Somerville and Bolivar, Tenn., on March 29 and, in Chalmers’ retelling, “met the traitor Hurst at

Bolivar, after a short conflict, in which we killed and captured 75 prisoners of the enemy, drove Hurst, hatless into Memphis” and captured “all his wagons, ambulances [and] papers,” as well as “his mistresses, both black and white.” As events at Fort Pillow would soon prove, Hurst had gotten off lightly with the mere loss of his hat and girlfriends.

To check Federal forces in the area while he advanced on Fort Pillow, Forrest sent Colonel Abraham Buford back to Paducah to seize the remaining 140 government horses that Northern newspapers had inadvisably bragged about the Rebels missing. At the same time, he directed Neely to threaten Memphis and pin down the Union garrison there. The Confederate commander, meanwhile, headed west toward Fort Pillow in a driving rainstorm with the main body of troops.

The fort, named after Confederate Brig. Gen. Gideon Pillow, had been constructed in 1861 on the east bank of the Mississippi River immediately below the intersection of the river with Coal Creek. The strongpoint had three lines of earthen entrenchments: a semicircular outer line of earthworks, a shorter second line of works atop a prominent hill and the fort itself, whose earthworks were 6 to 8 feet high and 4 to 6 feet across and were fronted by a 12-foot-wide, 6-foot-deep trench. The fort’s works extended in a 125-yard-wide semicircle, behind which the land rapidly fell away to the river. Deep ravines crisscrossed the landscape in front of the bastion, and four rows of barracks lay on the only open terrace of land, just to the southwest.

The Confederates had abandoned Fort Pillow after the fall of Corinth, Miss., in May 1862, and Union forces had occupied it intermittently ever since. On the morning of April 12, 1864, the fort was garrisoned by approximately 580 soldiers from three separate units: the 13th Tennessee Cavalry, a local unit under Major Bradford, which had been quartering at Fort Pillow for the past two months while recruiting new members and allegedly terrorizing Confederate sympathizers in the vicinity; and two black artillery units, the 6th U.S. Heavy Artillery and the 2nd U.S. Light Artillery, manning six pieces of artillery that had only been at the fort for two weeks. Major Lionel F. Booth, a veteran of the Regular Army, was overall commander of the Union forces. Standing ready to render assistance from offshore was the Union gunboat *New Era*, under the direction of Captain James Marshall.

Booth was either very confident or very careless. Although there had been numerous sightings of Forrest and his men in the area, the Union major airily reported that things were quiet for 30 or 40 miles around Fort Pillow. “I think it perfectly safe,” he assured Maj. Gen. Stephen Hurlburt in Memphis. Furthermore, Booth believed that he could “hold the post against any force for forty-eight hours.” Events would soon prove him wrong on both counts.

On the afternoon of April 11, Forrest met with Chalmers at Brownsville, 38 miles east of Fort Pillow. Forrest wanted the former Mississippi lawyer to head for the fort as early as possible the next morning. Chalmers quickly complied, and at 6 a.m. the next day his two brigades, under Colonels Robert McCulloch and Tyree Bell, made contact with the Federal pickets outside the fort. The advance guard, led by Captain Frank J. Smith of the 2nd Missouri Cavalry, managed to creep around behind the pickets and send them flying. Only a handful of pickets escaped back to the fort with the unwelcome news that the Rebels had suddenly arrived in force.

Forrest wasted no more time. He quickly signaled bugler Jacob Gaus to sound the charge, and retired to a hill 400 yards away to watch the assault. The bugler’s notes had scarcely drifted away before the Confederate sharpshooters opened another devastating fire on the fort’s parapets, making it impossible for the defenders to so much as raise their heads above the works. Booth was shortly killed by a sniper leaving Bradford in command. Meanwhile, other gray-clad troops sprang from their places of concealment in the ravines or behind the barracks huts, tore across the few remaining yards to the ditch surrounding the fort and bubbled into it like a swarm of angry hornets. Within seconds they were boosting one another onto the outer ledge below the fort’s wall. Lieutenant Leaming, who

left behind the only official Union report of the battle, said the Confederates seemed to “rise from out of the very earth.”

Almost unopposed, the Confederates leaped onto the top of the wall and began blazing away at the cowering Federals. Tennessee officer DeWitt Clinton Fort, one of Forrest’s men, was in the forefront of the attack. “As we charged over the ramparts,” said Fort, “the enemy’s garrison of mixed complexion retreated over the bluff down to the water’s edge. Here was assembled one wild promiscuous mass rendered senseless and uncontrollable by the three causes—fright, drunkenness, and desperation.” The Union defenders, black and white, soon broke and ran for the open rear of the fort. One black artilleryman, Private John Kennedy of the 2nd U.S. Colored Light Artillery, heard Bradford shout, “Boys, save your lives!” Kennedy urged Bradford to “let us fight yet,” but the major, seeing the Confederate attackers pouring in from all directions, said despairingly, “It is of no use anymore,” and fled to the rear with the rest of his troops.

Inside the fort was a mass of confusion. Some of the Federals threw down their weapons and attempted to surrender, some continued firing, others simply ran away, spilling over the bluff’s brow and sliding down the vine-choked bank toward the river. Bradford and Marshall had worked out a prearranged signal for *New Era* to steam close to the bank at the first sign of trouble and give the Rebels canister. Instead, Marshall swung the gunboat away from the shore. Meanwhile, Confederate marksmen stationed above and below the fort caught the retreating Federals at point-blank range and enfiladed the frantic fugitives. Marshall later told a congressional committee that he had abandoned the plan because he was afraid the Confederates “might hail in a steamboat from below, capture her, put on four or five hundred men, and come after me.” Pandemonium reigned. The wrathful Confederates—most of whom had marched all night to the outskirts of the fort, run and sniped under enemy fire all morning, and then waited anxiously in the hot afternoon sun for the final assault to begin—were in no mood to be forgiving. To a man they believed that the Federals had been fools to refuse Forrest’s surrender demand. That refusal had cost them another 100 good men, dead or wounded (*Confederate records show only 14 KIA and 24 WIA. Ed. note*). To their minds, the sight of black faces among the defenders was an added insult. The volatile mixture of racial animosity, long-simmering feuds with Tennessee Unionists, reports of atrocities committed against their own women and children, lingering embarrassment from the Paducah raid, physical exhaustion, battle excitement and fear for their own lives produced a brief but deadly spasm of vengefulness.

In the swirling confusion inside the fort the situation rapidly degenerated. Before Forrest could mount up and ride into the fort to restore order, an unknown number of Union troops reportedly were shot down while attempting to surrender. Meanwhile, the fort’s American flag still flew above the ramparts, and Confederates below the bluff had no way of knowing what was going on inside the fort. As DeWitt Clinton Fort noted in his diary after the battle: “The wildest confusion prevailed among those who had run down the bluff. Many of them had thrown down their arms while running and seemed desirous to surrender while many others had carried their guns with them and were loading and firing back up the bluff at us with a desperation which seemed worse than senseless. We could only stand there and fire until the last man of them was ready to surrender.” Forrest himself, in a little-known postwar interview with fellow Confederate general Dabney H. Maury, supported Fort’s contention. “When we got into the fort the white flag was shown at once,” Forrest said in an article published in the *Philadelphia Weekly Times*. “The negroes ran out down to the river; and although the [white] flag was flying, they kept on turning back and shooting at my men, who consequently continued to fire into them crowded on the brink of the river, and they killed a good many of them in spite of my efforts and those of their officers to stop them. But there was no deliberate intention nor effort to massacre the garrison as has been so generally reported by the Northern papers.”

Within half an hour the battle was over. Of the fort's total garrison of 580 men, some 354 apparently were killed or wounded (final figures are still hotly disputed). Of these, a large number drowned, after being shot, while attempting to swim to the Union vessels that were steaming away without them. Another 226 were taken prisoner, including Bradford, who was shot and killed a few days later while attempting to escape. *Witnesses who were in the same prisoner group saw five men under Col. Duckworth's command pull him from the group, marched him into the woods. They then were told to continue marching when they heard shots. Bradford's body was found several days later by escaping prisoners returning to their homes. Ed note*

After the battle, a congressional committee chaired by radical Republican Senator Benjamin F. Wade of Ohio issued a highly charged report accusing Forrest and his men of "an indiscriminate slaughter, sparing neither age nor sex, white or black, soldier or civilian." The fact that no women or children were killed at the fort, and only one civilian (who had taken up arms at the time of the attack), did not deter Wade's committee, whose chief aim was not to determine the truth but to deliver a piece of wartime propaganda intended to incite the restive Northern public on the eve of Ulysses S. Grant's long-awaited spring offensive. The report, virtually useless as an evidentiary document, did succeed in tarring Forrest and his men with the label of murderers, and the capture of Fort Pillow quickly became known as a 'massacre'. It remains today an explosive and imprecise term that sheds much heat—but little light—on one of the murkiest and most controversial episodes of the Civil War.

End of Article

Recent found letters from a Confederate soldier present disclosed that at least two Union officers and an unknown number of Negroes were executed. Only one Union officer out of fourteen survived. After the battle Captain John Woodruff, 113th Illinois accompanied Confederate General Chalmers on the 13th of April to help bury the dead. In his report to Brigadier-General Brayman, Commanding U. S. Forces, Cairo, Ill. he stated "one of the gun-boat officers who accompanied us asked General Chalmers if most of the negroes were not killed after they (the enemy) had taken possession, Chalmers replied that he thought they had been, and that the men of General Forrest's command had such a hatred toward the armed negro that they could not be restrained from killing the negroes after they had captured them. He said they were not killed by General Forrest or his orders, but that both Forrest and he stopped the massacre as soon as they were able to do so. He said *it was nothing better than we could expect so long as we persisted in arming the negro*. Out of the 557 Union soldiers, 262 were colored. Chalmers claimed he took "164 Whites and 40 Negroes prisoner, the remainder of the garrison were killed."

Many of the Union bodies observed had wounds that showed powder burns on their faces, slashing wounds to their heads and torso, and skulls that were shattered. There were also several piles of bodies still smoldering; a sight unknown up to this time so close to the cessation of hostilities. The ratio of KIA v. WIA was so skewed that one can only rightly assume this battle did not reflect the normal distribution of casualties; something was amiss. In Forrest's report to Lieut. Col. Thomas M. Jack, Assistant Adjutant-General dated April 26 he wrote: "In closing my report I desire to acknowledge the prompt and energetic action of Brigadier-General Chalmers, commanding the forces around Fort Pillow. His faithful execution of all movements necessary to the successful accomplishment of the object of the expedition entitles him to special mention. He has reason to be proud of the conduct of the officers and men of his command for their gallantry and courage in assaulting and carrying the enemy's work without the assistance of artillery or bayonets." There was no official condemnation of the killing of surrendering and unarmed soldiers. In the North the Fort Pillow Massacre became a battle cry for union troops. Later that September twenty-four unarmed Union soldiers were captured and executed at Centralia, Missouri by the pro-Confederate guerrilla leader William T. Anderson. Future outlaw Jesse James was among the guerrillas.