

# Battle of Fort Henry & Donelson, 1862

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The **Battle of Fort Henry** was fought on February 6, 1862, in western Tennessee, during the American Civil War. It was the first important victory for the Union and Brig. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant in the Western Theater.

On February 4 and February 5, Grant landed two divisions just north of Fort Henry on the Tennessee River. (Although the name was not yet in use, the troops serving under Grant were the nucleus of the Union's successful Army of the Tennessee.) His plan was to advance upon the fort on February 6 while it was being simultaneously attacked by United States Navy gunboats commanded by Flag Officer Andrew Hull Foote. A combination of effective naval gunfire and the poor siting of the fort, almost completely inundated by rising river waters, caused its commander, Brig. Gen. Lloyd Tilghman, to surrender to Foote before the Army arrived.

The surrender of Fort Henry opened the Tennessee River to Union traffic past the Alabama border, which was demonstrated by a "timberclad" raid of wooden ships from February 6 through February 12. They destroyed Confederate shipping and railroad bridges upriver. Grant's army proceeded overland 12 miles (19 km) to the Battle of Fort Donelson.

The **Battle of Fort Donelson** was fought from February 11 to February 16, 1862, in the Western Theater of the American Civil War. The capture of the fort by Union forces opened the Cumberland River as an avenue for the invasion of the South. The success elevated Brig. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant from an obscure and largely unproven leader to the rank of major general, earning him the nickname "Unconditional Surrender" Grant in the process (using his first two initials, "U.S.").

The battle followed the capture of Fort Henry on February 6. Grant moved his army 12 miles overland to Fort Donelson on February 12 and February 13 and conducted several small probing attacks. (Although the name was not yet in use, the troops serving under Grant were the nucleus of the Union's Army of the Tennessee.<sup>[4]</sup>) On February 14, U.S. Navy gunboats under Flag Officer Andrew H. Foote attempted to reduce the fort with naval gunfire, but were forced to withdraw after sustaining heavy damage from Donelson's water batteries.

On February 15, with their fort surrounded, the Confederates, commanded by Brig. Gen. John B. Floyd, launched a surprise attack against Grant's army, attempting to open an avenue of escape. Grant, who was away from the battlefield at the start of the attack, arrived to rally his men and counterattack. Despite achieving a partial success and opening the way for a retreat, Floyd lost his nerve and ordered his men back to the fort.

On the following morning, Floyd and his second-in-command, Brig. Gen. Gideon J. Pillow, panicked and relinquished command to Brig. Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner (later Governor of the Commonwealth of Kentucky), who agreed to accept the unconditional surrender terms offered by Grant.