

## Civil War Ramblings – Donelson, Shiloh, Corinth, Pillow, Nashville

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The last marksmanship competition of the 2015 shooting season took me to Eva, Tennessee which is between Nashville and Memphis. My wife and I took some time to visit both cities, and stopped at number of Civil War sights along the way. I'm sure we've got members who've spent more time at these places than we did, but I thought I'd write some short notes for those that haven't. This is more a travel log than a history lesson, and I'm listing the sites we visited in the chronological order that they occurred.

The Mississippi River has changed, and both Fort Henry and Island Number 10 are now underwater. There are overlooks at these sights, but neither made our itinerary.



**Fort Donelson:** Our first stop was **Ft. Donelson** and the nearby Dover Hotel where its surrender document was signed. Ft. Donelson was one of Grant's first victories. This earthen fort was built by the Confederates to control the river. The most interesting parts of the park are along the shore where the majority of the construction was done and most of the fighting took place. Don't look for a lot of flat ground here. The soldiers stationed here had a lot of ridges and valleys to cope with, making both attack and defense from land side difficult. The main cantonment area was situated in a large valley near the riverbank. The current visitor center is being replaced with a larger, more accessible one with razing and construction starting in December 2015. The Dover Hotel touts itself as one of the most 'original' CW structures remaining, and has displays and a movie inside.



**Shiloh:** Grant continued his quest for control of the Mississippi by targeting the railroad crossing at Corinth, MS. He used a landing about 30 miles away at a place that would become known as **Shiloh** to stage his forces. Confederate forces unexpectedly attacked him there. Shiloh battlefield impressed me

with both the size and the pristineness of the park. It's large and, except for the monuments, intact. It's a lot of flat topography with heavily wooded areas punctuated by large fields. You can take the driving tour two ways. The first is using the park brochure that takes you to all the stops in one loop, but out of chronological order. The second is by buying a CD that takes you to the same stops, but in the sequence the events occurred. The visitors' center is good, but not great. There's a great animated map of the battle at <http://www.civilwar.org/battlefields/shiloh/maps/battle-of-shiloh-animated.html>



**Corinth:** It took the Union forces weeks to recover from the actions at Shiloh and move onto Corinth. Taking the railroad crossroad there severely hurt the Confederates ability to transport men and supplies. There's not a lot of the original earthworks left from the battle or the occupation, but they have an outstanding modern visitor center. Besides the relics and movies inside the center, there's a fantastic memorial outside that alone is worth the trip. It's basically a timeline of the entire war with red granite blocks representing the War's major battles piled in a waterway. The size of the blocks represents the number of casualties, with the Western theater battle blocks piled on one side, and Eastern theater ones on the other. Black granite stones on the sides of the waterway show the years. For more information on the monument see: <http://www.nps.gov/shil/learn/historyculture/upload/water%20feature%203.pdf>. The Corinth railway crossroad is still active today, and located downtown. If you want a picture of it, you need to encroach on railroad property a couple hundred feet.



**Ft. Pillow** is still there, but the course of the Mississippi has moved away from it, so you need to imagine how things used to be there. Nathan Bedford Forrest's men gave no quarter to the African-American artillerymen, nor the cavalry units made up of men from the Memphis area that sided with the Union. He distained both equally. Forrest's culpability for the massacre is still debated today, but Fort Pillow is significant, because what happened there ended prisoner exchanges, and prompted equal pay for African American soldiers. The ravines and ridges landscape I found at Ft. Donelson is even more pronounced here. It has a small but nice visitor center with a very well done film on the battle. There are not a lot of bridges across the Mississippi in this area, and going there will take you about 30 miles

off the main roads. In route, your only shopping opportunities will be two small 'Grocery and Bait' stores. Don't leave the beaten path if you're low on gas or hungry.



**Nashville:** After the fall of Forts Henry and Donelson, the Confederates determined Nashville was no longer defensible, and abandoned the city. **The Battle of Nashville** did not occur until Sherman was preparing for his march to the sea, and the CSA was trying to distract him by attacking. There is a driving tour of the battle sites in Nashville: <http://www.bonps.org/tour/images/brochure01.pdf> . We passed a number of the stops on the tour while seeing other sights in Nashville. The plaques we saw were in urban areas, describing things that weren't there anymore. With limited time, we skipped doing the whole tour. However, if you stand on the steps of the Capitol building, which is atop the biggest hill in the city, with a copy of this map, you can follow what went on.

We took about two weeks to do this trip, and saw lots of other things along the way, but I'll save recounting the Elvis sightings and BBQ recommendations for later. It was a great trip, but two weeks is about my limit for being on the road these days, and I was glad to come home after our vacation.