

ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

Fort Pillow

By **John Cimprich**

Resources

If you can read only one book

Author	<i>Title</i> . City: Publisher, Year.
Cimprich, John V.	<i>Fort Pillow, a Civil War Massacre, and Public Memory</i> . Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005.

Books and Articles

Author	<i>Title</i> . City: Publisher, Year.
Glatthaar, Joseph T.	<i>Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers</i> . New York: Free Press (Macmillan), 1990.
Hughes, Jr., Nathaniel C.	<i>Brigadier General Tyree H. Bell, C.S.A.: Forrest's Fighting Lieutenant</i> . Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004, 81-126.
Hughes, Jr., Nathaniel C. and Roy P. Stonesifer, Jr.	<i>The Life and Wars of Gideon J. Pillow</i> . Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993, chap. 1-10.
Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War	<i>Report of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War: Fort Pillow Massacre</i> , H.R. Rep. No. 38-65 (1864).
Slagle, Jay	<i>Ironclad Captain: Seth Ledyard Phelps and the U.S. Navy, 1841-1864</i> . Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1996, chap. 9.
Thomas Jordan & J.P. Pryor	<i>The Campaigns of Lieut. Gen. N.B. Forrest, and of Forrest's Cavalry</i> . New Orleans: Blelock, 1868, 416-55.

Tucker, Spencer C.	<i>Andrew Foote: Civil War Admiral on Western Waters</i> . Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2000, chap. 9-12.
Wills, Brian Steel	<i>The River Was Dyed with Blood: Nathan Bedford Forrest and Fort Pillow</i> Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014, chap. 4-8.
Wyeth, John A.	<i>The Life of General Nathan Bedford Forrest</i> . New York: Harper & Brothers, 1899, chap. 14.

Organizations

Web Resources

Other Sources

Name	Description, Contact information including address, email
Fort Pillow State Historic Park	The Fort Pillow State Historic Park preserves the site of the Fort. The park’s museum offers Civil War artifacts including a canon and interpretive displays relating to the history of Fort Pillow. The park is open from 8:00 a.m. until sunset and the Museum is open from 8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. seven days a week. Both are closed Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day. The park’s address is 3122 Park Road, Henning TN 38041, 731 738 5581. Their website is: http://tnstateparks.com/parks/about/fort-pillow

Scholars

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Précis

Confederates created Fort Pillow, starting in the summer of 1861, on a high bluff above the Mississippi River about fifty miles north of Memphis, Tennessee. After the fall of Island No. 10, Fort Pillow became the front line on the river. On April 13, 1862, a Federal flotilla appeared under the command of Captain Andrew Hull Foote, and hostilities were commenced. Fighting continued on and off until Confederate Brigadier General John B. Villepigue successfully hid withdrawal from the fort on June 4, 1862. The fort was then garrisoned by union soldiers until January 21, 1864, when Major General William Tecumseh Sherman had it closed. Ignoring this, General Stephen H. Hurlbut reopened it on February 8 to protect local unionists and revive trade. He built up a garrison of 600, half black and half white troops. In mid-March Major General Nathan Bedford Forrest launched a raid through Western Tennessee and Kentucky. On April 12, 1864 at dawn 1,500 of Forrest’s men attacked the Fort Pillow garrison. At 2:00 p.m. Forrest called a truce and asked the Federals to surrender. He offered to accept the entire enemy force as prisoners, a generous stand as the Confederacy officially would have black troops either returned to owners or executed as rebellious slaves. He added that “Should my demand be refused, I cannot be responsible for the fate of your command.” The offer was refused and at 3:15 p.m. the Confederates charged and routed the Federals who fled down the bluff and became trapped against the river. Here the massacre began. According to one Confederate, “The slaughter was awful. Words cannot describe the scene. The poor deluded negroes would run up to our men fall upon their knees and with uplifted hands would scream for mercy but they were ordered to their feet and shot down. The white [sic] men fared but little better. Their fort turned out to be a great slaughter pen. Blood, human blood stood about in pools and brains could have been gathered up in any quantity.” Some Confederates claimed Forrest ordered the massacre. If Forrest made such an order in impulsive anger after the charge, he soon changed his mind. After the charge he rode into the inner fort, eventually ordered the massacre stopped, and even shot one soldier who ignored him. Several black artillerymen, like Samuel Green, would state that “If it had not been for General Forrest coming up and ordering the Confederates to stop killing the prisoners, there would not one of us been alive today.” The debate over what happened has continued ever since then, although most current historians writing about it conclude that a massacre occurred, however the extent of the massacre in violation of the rules of war compared to casualties suffered in normal combat remains unresolved. The massacre may have been the largest one during the Civil War and certainly was the most famous one.
