



Introduction - *Lloyd Tilghman: Confederate General in the Western Theatre*

Lloyd Tilghman was brave, heroic, patriotic, loyal, and totally devoted to the cause he believed in. He also has been described as a strict disciplinary military officer, which led many of his subordinate officers in the Confederate army to clash with him. This stemmed from his learning at West Point and his time in the Mexican War. Many of the officers in the Civil War were volunteers and did not know military rules and regulations. Discipline was frequently lax in the ranks. Tilghman would not stand for disrespect for military protocol and he clashed with those officers who did not adhere to rules and regulations.

Tilghman was born on January 26, 1816 near Claiborne, Maryland and came from a family steeped in military tradition. His ancestors also played an important role in the early history of our country. His grandfather was part of the Continental Congress and served in the Senate. Because of Tilghman's family background, he was admitted to West Point. While at West Point, Tilghman would be brevetted Second Lieutenant of the First Dragoons and on September 1836 officially became a Second Lieutenant of the First Dragoons. At West Point, Tilghman would learn the skills to be an engineer, a career that was very highly sought after in the American market. The ever expanding railroads needed skilled engineers. Tilghman graduated from West Point on October 1, 1836, but resigned his commission in the military and decided that he would try his luck in the civilian sector.

From 1837 to 1845 Tilghman worked as an engineer on several different railroads, but in 1845 he decided to join the Army. The Mexican War had broken out and he felt it was his personal duty to fight for his country. Tilghman arrived at Corpus Christi in September 1845 and became a sutler supplying the army. Once the army found out that Tilghman was a Lieutenant in the Dragoons, he immediately became the aide de camp for General David Twiggs, who commanded the 2nd Dragoons.

During the Mexican War, Tilghman made reconnaissances of enemy positions, fought in the battle of Monterrey, and placed in command of a partisan corps of twenty men who fought with the enemy at La Mesa, La Puerta, and Sueesties. By 1847 Tilghman was at Matamoros and helped build the defenses of the defenses and fortifications around the city. Later that year he became a Captain and commanded a light artillery battery of six guns to serve with the Maryland and District of Columbia Volunteer Light Artillery. Tilghman was stationed with his battery at Jalapa. In 1848 he made several expeditions to Montigo, and at Mantoosco he relieved Captain Wheat, who was surrounded by six hundred men, and Wheat only had twenty men. Tilghman's one hundred men came to his rescue. The Mexican War ended on February 2, 1848. Tilghman learned valuable lessons

during the Mexican War. He honed his skills as an engineer. He also became the leader of men.

After the war, Tilghman returned to his civilian life. He became a Chief Engineer for many railroads. In 1852 he moved to Kentucky to help build the Paducah branch of the Mobile and Ohio railroad. Tilghman bought a beautiful ten room antebellum mansion in Paducah and settled into civilian life. He and his wife Augusta Murray Boyd Tilghman had several children. He was making good money and was at the top of his profession. Tilghman officially became a resident of the state in 1852.

In December of 1860 Tilghman decided to join the Kentucky State Guard. The Kentucky State Guard became one of the best militia organizations in the United States. Tilghman became a Major in the Paducah Southwest Battalion. But all this would end when shots were fired at Fort Sumter in April of 1861. The country was now at war. Tilghman was commander of the western division of the Kentucky State Guard, which included the Paducah and Columbus area in Kentucky. Tensions in the state quickly came to a boil. Tilghman had to make his decision: would he stay loyal to the Union or join the Confederacy? The decision could not have been an easy one, but on July 5, 1861, Tilghman and the Third Kentucky Infantry, Company D, joined the Confederacy. His commander of the Kentucky State Guard, Simon Buckner, and Tilghman saw that the government was not following the Constitutionality of State Rights. They saw the Union forces invading their state against the will of the people to remain neutral. That one event would change Tilghman's life forever. His trail would lead to a series of events that would influence the outcome of the Civil War.

After Tilghman resigned from the Kentucky State Guard, he became commander of the 3rd Kentucky Infantry, C. S.. He had the almost impossible task to arm his men with weapons, clothes and accouterments. He was promoted to Brigadier General on October 18, 1861 at Camp Boone, Tennessee. On November 17, 1861 he was sent to take control of Forts Henry and Donelson and their defenses. With Tilghman's military experience and engineering skills, it seemed that he was the perfect man for the task. But the forts were not equipped and were in horrible shape. He also had one thousand unarmed men, but Tilghman was loyal to the Confederacy and made the best of the situation. He worked diligently in building earthworks, rifle pits, and securing the approaches to the forts. By January 1862 He felt that work on the forts had progressed. But still Tilghman had two thousand men who were unarmed and he knew that the Union troops would soon arrive and try to take the forts.

Fate worked against Tilghman. Fort Henry was built on low ground and the fort was quickly filling with water from the river. The lower part of the fort was under water. The mines placed in the river to prevent the Union gunboats from approaching the forts were also underwater. Tilghman knew that an enemy with any common sense could control the entire fort, since most of the fort and the fort's defenses were underwater, but again Tilghman would carry out his orders and defend the fort.

On February 6, 1862 at 10:15 A.M. the attack began. Union Admiral Foote's gunboats and Union General Ulysses S. Grant's infantry approached Fort Henry. At 12:35 A.M. fate intercepted during the battle. Tilghman's twenty-four pounder burst, then he lost his ten inch Columbiad when it was accidentally spiked. Several of the thirty-two pounders were lost. Tilghman knew it was time to fall back to Fort Donelson, but after seeing his courageous men working the batteries at Fort Henry, he decided to stay to the

end. The rest of the Confederate army fell back to Fort Donelson while his one hundred men endured the fire that was falling into Fort Henry from the gunboats. The gunboats soon got to within six hundred yards of the fort. At 1:10 P.M. Tilghman's men were exhausted and only four cannons were left at the fort. At 1:30 P.M. Tilghman himself took charge of one of the thirty-two pounders. Tilghman looked around and saw most of the crews were killed or wounded and that the gunboats were breaching the fort. He decided to stop the useless loss of life and surrender. Tilghman surrendered after a battle of two hours and a half. His plan of saving the Confederate army worked. He had bought enough time for the rest of the Confederate army to fall back to Fort Donelson.

Tilghman was commended by Flag Officer Foote after the Battle of Fort Henry. He said Tilghman was gallant in his defense of the fort. Colonel Heiman said Tilghman was heroic. His decision to send his army to Fort Donelson was correct, but his one major flaw in command was his decision to stay at Fort Henry. As overall commander, Tilghman had the responsibility to take command at Fort Donelson and leave his artillery crew. By staying at Fort Henry and working an artillery piece, Tilghman delegated himself not as a commanding general, but as a regular soldier. Tilghman left a void in the command structure, which contributed to the fall of Fort Donelson.

The fall of Forts Henry and Donelson would have detrimental effects on the Confederacy in the Western Theater. The Tennessee and the Cumberland Rivers were now open to invasion from Union forces. The Confederate earthworks and cannons protecting the Mississippi River from Union invasion at Columbus, Kentucky, were abandoned. Confederate General Albert Sidney Johnston, who was the commander of the Confederate forces, abandoned his defense line in Kentucky, and his headquarters in Bowling Green, Kentucky. He pulled all the way back to Corinth, Mississippi, giving up the valuable city of Nashville, Tennessee, which led to the Battle of Shiloh, in April of 1862. The next city to fall was New Madrid, Missouri on the Mississippi River. After the fall of New Madrid came the surrender of Fort Pillow, the last remaining stronghold between Island Number 10 and Memphis, Tennessee. The fort was abandoned on June 4th, 1862. Memphis surrendered on June 6th. The Mississippi River was slowly being controlled by Union forces.

After the Battle of Fort Henry, Tilghman became a prisoner of war, and was sent to Fort Warren. On August 27, 1862 he was exchanged for Union General John Reynolds. Ten thousand men were also exchanged. Those men were then under the command of Tilghman. Tilghman had to now equip, clothe, and arm them. He also had to form them into artillery, cavalry, and infantry units.

By October 1862 Union General Ulysses Grant began his move toward Vicksburg, Mississippi. Tilghman in December 1862 faced Grant's men once again at the Battle of Coffeeville, Mississippi. During the battle Tilghman pushed back the Yankees for almost three miles and overran the Union position. That battle in some small measure was Tilghman's payback for his surrender at Fort Henry.

The battle of Coffeeville, Mississippi did not stop the relentless pursuit of Grant's forces. Grant came up with several different plans to attempt to take Vicksburg. He built canals. He tried to maneuver his men and gunboats through the swamps, each being a failure. But Grant finally landed his men at Bruinsburg, located below Vicksburg. Confederate General Pemberton had to abandon Grand Gulf and fell back to Vicksburg. Grant gave up his supply base at Grand Gulf and decided to surround Vicksburg.

The last battle for Tilghman occurred at Champion's Hill. General Tilghman was ordered to hold the Yankees back, while the Confederates fell back from a brutal battle. During the battle, Tilghman delegated himself as a common soldier, ignored his role as a commanding general and courageously decided to personally man a cannon; he was killed by an artillery shell fragment. Tilghman's forces fell back to Jackson, Mississippi, and would not participate in the siege of Vicksburg. On July 4, 1863 Vicksburg, Mississippi fell to Grant's forces after a prolonged siege. The end of the Confederacy was then even closer. The surrender of Vicksburg split the Confederacy in two. The Key to the Confederate Heartland was in Lincoln's pocket.

Tilghman was brave, courageous, and loyal to the cause he believed and gave the ultimate sacrifice to his country. History has ignored the sacrifice that Tilghman gave to the government he believed in. For such a brave gentlemen, little has been written on General Tilghman. After the war, the *Confederate Veteran* magazine published a series of articles in which his men spoke of Tilghman, hoping that a biography would be published, which never came to fruition. In 1998, the author wrote a small biography in *The Civil War Battles of the Western Theater*. Three years later in 2001, James Raab wrote a dual biography on Generals Lloyd Tilghman and Francis Shoup. Tilghman was involved in one of the most pivotal battles of the Western Theater: the Battle of Fort Henry, yet little is known of this elusive general. As the years passed and the veterans of the war passed away, history began to overlook the sacrifice that Tilghman gave to the Confederacy that he believed in and the importance of Tilghman's role at Fort Henry and Donelson. Tilghman has been blamed for the loss of Forts Henry and Donelson, when in reality the loss of the fort was inept leadership of Confederate Generals Albert Sidney Johnston and Leonidas Polk, who ignored the importance of the river forts. Instead, they focused on Bowling Green, Kentucky and Columbus, Kentucky. There is no doubt that Tilghman had intelligence and fought well as a general. He would never achieve the rank of Major General, partially because of his loss at Fort Henry. The first purpose of my book is to suggest that Tilghman understood military tactics and strategy, but, like many other Confederate generals, he would risk his life unnecessarily to prove his courage and honor. By manning a cannon at Fort Henry and finally manning a cannon at Champion's Hill, Tilghman decided that at times the role of brigadier general did not matter; what was more important to him was displaying acts of desperate courage and bravery. Bravery, pride, and culture molded Tilghman into the man he was, and in the end he was not able to escape from it.

The second purpose of the book is to show how Tilghman's choice in deciding to stay with his artillerists and defend Fort Henry, more than stay to his original plan and take his role as commanding general at Fort Donelson left a gap in the command structure. General Albert Sidney Johnston was forced to choose a command general at Fort Donelson. John Floyd and Gideon Pillow were probably not the best choices to command the fort. Both generals entered into a power play for control of the fort, but when the escape from Fort Donelson did not happen as they wished, they left command to General Simon Buckner. Both Pillow and Floyd decided to abandon the fort and make their escape. Men, material, and the strategic importance of the forts were lost. If Tilghman had stayed at Fort Donelson and taken command of the fort, he might have had better control of the situation and might have been able to utilize the reinforcements sent to him in the areas where they were needed most. His men, who had known him longer

than Buckner, Pillow, and Floyd, would have stayed by his side. Tilghman probably would not have fled the fort as General Pillow and Floyd, but would have stayed to the end, since he was responsible for Fort Donelson. The result of the loss of Fort Henry and Fort Donelson led to massive changes in the Western Theater. General Albert Sidney Johnston had no choice but to abandon Kentucky and parts of Tennessee after the battles of Mill Springs, Kentucky and the loss of the forts. The resulting situation led to the battle of Shiloh and to the loss of the river forts, such as Fort Pillow, Island No. 10 and the fall of Memphis, along the Mississippi. Vicksburg, Mississippi remained. Once Vicksburg was lost, the Union forces had control of the most important river in the Confederacy, which tore the Confederacy in half. ■

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