



The Nation Unravels



Tensions were already high before the first shot was even fired in the Civil War. Many of Savannah's residents, shown here parading through the city in November 1860, were already poised to leave the Union.

The seizure of Fort Pulaski

Georgia governor Joseph Brown, fearing that U.S. troops would reinforce lightly held Fort Pulaski, ordered the state militia to seize the fort. On January 3, 1861, state troops marched into the fort and took it without firing a shot. Held by one officer and a custodian, the strategically located fort was peacefully turned over to state control.

Now, the governor could be assured of keeping the vital port of Savannah open to shipping. A

small steamboat began a daily routine of making the 12-mile trip to the fort, bringing food, supplies, and letters from the appreciative city. One lady sent the militia a "fine fruitcake iced beautifully and the word 'Secession' wrought in with sugar."

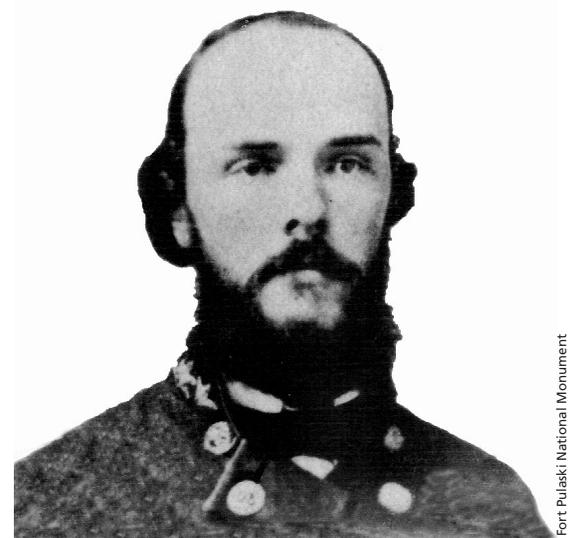
Nearly three weeks later, Georgia voted to secede from the Union, and the nation continued down the path to war. It would be another three months before the war began in April 1861.

"I ...can see it all now"

Charles Olmstead, a Savannah cotton merchant, marched into Fort Pulaski with the militia. Fifty years later, when writing his memoirs, he could still recall that day:

"With the dawn the air was filled with the sound of martial music and by 8 o'clock the commands that had been designated for the service were down at the wharf ready to embark on the little steamer....The balconies of the various stores and counting rooms overlooking the water were filled with people waving their handkerchiefs and cheering....We reached Cockspur Island in due time, the little battalion was formed upon the North Wharf and then with drums beating, colors flying and hearts swelling we marched over the drawbridge, under the portcullis and into the fort. I can shut my eyes and see it all now, the proud step of officers and men, the colors snapping in the strong breeze from the ocean, the bright sunlight of the parade as we emerged from the shadow of the archway, the first glimpse of a gun through an open casemate door. One and all they were photographed on my mind and will never be forgotten."

In the autumn of 1861, Olmstead took charge of Fort Pulaski, and he was the fort commander during the battle in 1862.



Charles Olmstead

A Dark and Dreary January

On almost every day of the month in January 1861, U.S. government facilities somewhere in the South fell to state authorities.

January 3	Georgia state troops seize Fort Pulaski.
January 4	Alabama state troops seize U.S. arsenal at Mount Vernon, Ala.
January 5	Alabama state troops occupy Fort Morgan and Fort Gaines at Mobile, Ala.
January 6	Florida state troops take U.S. Arsenal at Apalachicola, Fla.
January 7	Florida state troops seize Fort Marion at St. Augustine, Fla.
January 9	South Carolina state troops fire on <i>Star of the West</i> trying to re-supply U.S. troops at Fort Sumter, Charleston, S.C.
January 10	Louisiana state troops occupy U.S. Arsenal at Baton Rouge, La., and Fort Jackson and Fort St. Philip on the Mississippi River.
January 11	Alabama secedes from the Union. Louisiana state troops seize U.S. Marine Hospital near New Orleans.
January 12	Florida troops take Fort Barrancas, Fort McRee and the U.S. Navy Yard, all in Pensacola, Fla.
January 14	Louisiana state troops take Fort Pike near New Orleans.
January 19	Georgia secedes from the Union.
January 20	Mississippi state troops seize Fort Massachusetts on nearby Ship Island.
January 24	Georgia troops take U.S. Arsenal at Augusta, Ga.
January 26	Louisiana secedes from the Union. Georgia state troops seize Oglethorpe Barracks and Fort Jackson in Savannah.
January 28	Louisiana state troops seize Fort Macomb near New Orleans.
January 29	U.S. Revenue Cutter <i>Robert McClelland</i> surrendered to state troops in New Orleans.
January 30	U.S. Revenue Cutter <i>Lewis Cass</i> surrendered to state troops in Mobile, Ala.
January 31	Louisiana state troops in New Orleans seize U.S. Mint (with \$536,000), U.S. Custom House and U.S. Revenue Schooner <i>Washington</i> .

Paralysis in Washington

In January 1861, James Buchanan remained in office as a lame duck president until newly elected Abraham Lincoln could be inaugurated in March. A native of Pennsylvania, Buchanan was known to have southern sympathies. His cabinet was racked by division and paralyzed by continual resignations.

Ever since the development of the U.S. Constitution 70 years earlier, the country had

survived the divisions between North and South through compromise. Fearing that strong action would unduly antagonize the South, Buchanan did little, hoping that the country would once again survive through gentle compromise.

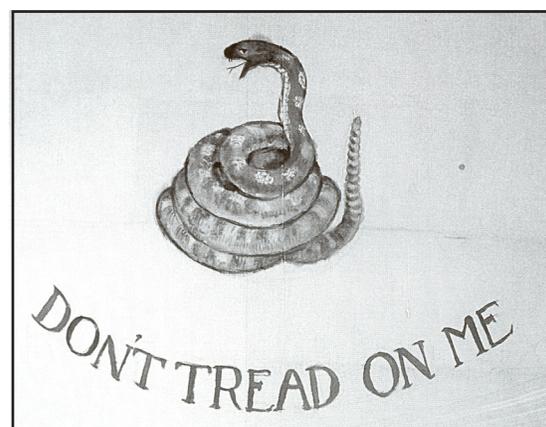
In hindsight, Buchanan's strategy failed miserably. He is perennially ranked by historians as one of the worst presidents in our history.

A Historic Flag

The flag bearing the motto "Don't Tread on Me" harkened back to the American War for Independence against Great Britain.

In the months leading up to the outbreak of Civil War, the citizens of Savannah paraded through the streets bearing such a flag aloft. The "Don't Tread on Me" flag is clearly visible hanging on the monument in the drawing of Savannah on the other side.

One of the original "Don't Tread on Me" flags, pictured to the right, is hanging today in the visitor center at Fort Pulaski National Monument.



Fort Pulaski National Monument