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The Union Occupations of Tampa, May 6-7, 1864

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On November 24, 1860, 47 days before Florida seceded from the Union, "a large crowd" of Hillsborough Countians gathered in a "Mass Meeting" at Alafia to recommend the State's withdrawal from the Union. Among those attending and signing the petitions were: John Darling, James Gettis, Reason Duke, James E. Bowden, Hamlin V Snell, John T Givens and Henry A. Crane.¹

Several of Florida's major coastal towns were occupied by Union troops in early 1862. Tampa was not ignored. Brigadier General J. M. Brannan, commander of the Key West district, wrote to General Thomas in Washington, April 19, 1862:

Head Quarters Dept. of Key West
Key West Fla April 19, 1862

To:
Brig. Genl. L. Thomas
Adjt. Genl. U. S. A.
Washington
D. C.

Sir

I have been credibly informed by Captain Woodhull U. S. Navy that many Union Citizens, including Women & Children at Tampa, Florida & the Neighborhood are suffering from the outrageous persecutions of the Rebel Troops in that vicinity. He also reports the number of Troops there about 900, with six pieces of Artillery, two being 32 pdrs. Not having any transportation I am unable to send a command there to protect these unfortunate people. Also my instructions from the Genl-in-Chief do not permit me to occupy that point, except for the specific object of obtaining Beef Cattle for the Troops in this Dept; also for Fort Pickens & the Navy. -- I have no doubt that if a sufficient force is sent to Tampa to occupy, hold it, & protect the people in the vicinity, we can obtain at a reasonable price all the Beef required for the entire command in the Gulf; as Captain Woodhull was informed that 30,000 cattle were ready to be sold to the U. S. as soon as it could be done with safety to the owners. -- I would therefore urge upon the Secretary of War the necessity of sending the transportation I asked for in my letter of March 3d & also be furnished with the horses required for my battery of Field-Pieces. The Citizens of Appalachicola also desire protection. -- I am unable to do anything without the Means of transportation for Troops & keeping them provided with subsistence &c., this being the Depot of Supplies. With the proper Means, I can take possession of all points on the Coast & even occupy Tallahassee if the Governor considers it of sufficient importance to hold those points.
Less than a week earlier, on April 13, Tampa was bombarded by Union ships after Major Robert B. Thomas refused to surrender the town. Another bombardment occurred June 30-July 1, 1862. Raiders destroyed the blockade runner Scottish Chief in October 1863 and on Christmas Day, 1863, Tampa was bombarded again. Most residents had moved into "the country" and Tampa was described as a "dead town." Regular Confederate troops had departed by the spring of 1864. By May, only the "home guards" under Captain James McKay, Jr., remained to offer some measure of protection.  

The Federals had established a beachhead on the South Florida mainland in January 1864 when they occupied Fort Myers. With Fort Myers as its base of operations, the newly formed Union Second Florida Cavalry conducted raids into the interior. The unit was made up primarily of southwest Florida refugees, some of whom had deserted from the Confederate army. Former Tampan Henry A. Crane was a captain in the regiment. A major objective was to "break up or check the cattle-driving business" which was at that time supplying beef to the hard-pressed Confederate armies to the north.  

Tampa's brief occupation by Union forces occurred on May 6 and 7, 1864. The official accounts of Gen. Woodbury, Col. Fellows, and Acting Master Van Sice follow:


HDQRS. DISTRICT OF KEY WEST AND TORTUGAS, KEY WEST, FLA, MAY 12, 1864.

GENERAL: I have the honor to report the temporary occupation of Tampa on the 6th and 7th instant; the capture of three 24-pounders, which were disabled by knocking off one trunnion from each, and of two iron 6-pounders, which were brought away. Twenty prisoners were brought away, of whom only 6 were soldiers. Of the little ammunition found the greater part was thrown into the water; the remainder was brought off. Ten good horses were sent by land to Fort Myers, in charge of Captain Green and a few picked men. Some old muskets and some other public property, not worth enumerating here, were brought away. The lens of the Egmont Key light could not be found.

The naval (50 men), landing with the army, forces captured a small sloop and about 50 bales of cotton.

There was no fort, no defenses against a land attack; but a single parapet near the water's edge to prevent approach by water. Behind this the guns were placed. The carriages and the log revetments around the guns were burnt.

We expected to find more public property, as Tampa has been a military post since the beginning of
the rebellion until quite recently. We also expected to find more soldiers. A party of 30 or 40 soldiers detailed for cow-driving had left the place three days before our arrival. The place was completely surprised on the morning of the 6th.

Eighty men under Capt. H. W. Bowers, assistant adjutant-general, landing 12 miles from the town on the west side of the harbor, took position at daylight on the banks of the Hillsborough River to prevent escape by water. About 200 men, under Col. S. Fellows, landing 3 miles from the place on the south side of the harbor, advanced rapidly and formed a line stretching from the Hillsborough to the head of an indentation in the bay, thus preventing an escape by land. The appearance of Tampa is desolate in the extreme. There were very few men in the place, hardly one able-bodied man between eighteen and fifty years of age. Most of the prisoners belonged to the captured sloop as crew and passengers. Many letters taken from a captured mail confirm the reports of Captain Crane that the rebels have abandoned cattle-driving south of Pease Creek.

The troops engaged in this expedition were three companies of the Second Colored Regiment, under Col. S. Fellows, and two companies of the Second Florida Cavalry, under Captain Crane.

Admiral Bailey placed the gun-boat Honduras at my command and issued a general order to all masters of navy vessels in his squadron to assist our military operations in every practicable way.

My orders against pilfering were very stringent. The colored troops on shore behaved remarkably well. The refugee troops having personal wrongs to redress were not so easily controlled.

Colonel Fellows captured in the post-office about $6,000 of Confederate and State money, which will be sent to Washington in accordance with a recent order.

Respectfully,

D. P. WOODBURY
Brigadier-General.

Brig. Gen. William Dwight,
Chief of Staff.


HEADQUARTERS SECOND U. S. COLORED TROOPS,

Fort Taylor, Key West, Fla., May 10, 1864

CAPTAIN: I have the honor to make the following report of operations in the expedition to Tampa, Fla. The particulars of the embarkation from Key West, the delay at the mouth of the Caloosahatchee River and Tampa Bay, as well as the landing of Company E, Second U. S. Colored Troops, with guides, under Captain Bowers, I will omit, as they were under the immediate supervision of Brigadier-General Woodbury:

After the party assigned for the west bank of the Hillsborough River had
been landed at Gadsden’s Point the small boats (nine in number) were filled with the Second Florida Cavalry, about 140, the Second U. S. Colored Troops, 35 in number, and about 30 seamen under Acting Naval Master Fales, of the bark J. L. Davis. This force was designed to operate by way of the neck of land between Hillsborough River and the marsh, so as to enter Tampa from the north. A landing was effected at the head of a small bay near Point Deshow, about 3 miles from the city, at daylight Friday, May 6, 1864. Captain Green, Second Florida Cavalry, was immediately sent forward with a party to arrest all persons whom he could find for the purpose of gaining information. Lieutenant McCullough soon followed with the advance guard, and at the proper distance came the main body. Captain Fales, of the Davis, and the seamen under him joined the land forces. When within a mile of the city, a colored man was secured by Captain Green, who gave information that the place was not occupied in any force by the enemy, though about 20 had left the day before under the command of the post [commander], McKay. When the party arrived at the neck of land between the river on the west and the marsh on the east, pickets were posted to intercept all who might attempt to escape or to enter the town. Captain Crane, Second Florida Cavalry, with a small party, proceeded to the hotel and arrested some of the leading citizens, while the main body double-quicked to the battery at the mouth of the river. The surprise was too complete to allow any opposition to be made. A few who were near the river attempted to escape to the other side; 1 was shot dead, and 2 or 3 wounded, when those who had not escaped surrendered. The party which had landed at Gadsden’s Point was now seen on the west bank of the river. It was judged best not to communicate with them before entering the town, as no opposition was expected, and we should lose time by so doing. That party now joined the main force at the old U. S. barracks.

Making our position secure from surprise by pickets of the Second Florida Cavalry, attention was turned to the public property in Tampa. The naval party under Captain Fales captured a sloop loaded with cotton, and also cotton on shore sufficient to make in all about 50 bales. The Confederate mail was secured and forwarded to General Woodbury. During Friday night a small party was sent to the west bank of the river
to prevent a surprise from that quarter. Saturday the battery, consisting of three 24-pounders mounted on barbette carriages, and two field pieces, 6-pounders, were destroyed. The heavy guns were disabled, and the 6-pounders were brought away with us. The magazine and earthworks were destroyed by burning the timber revetments. The greater part of the ammunition and projectiles was thrown into the water, as well as some old muskets. A part of the property belonging to the lighthouse at Egmont Key was found and brought away. About $6,000 in Confederate money was secured, which I have forwarded to General Woodbury. The prisoners taken numbered 39, but 20 of them were released, for various reasons. Having secured all the property, it was decided to embark again Saturday p.m. One company of the Second U. S. Colored Troops was accordingly sent on board the gun-boat Honduras about noon. The remainder were delayed to wait for the return of the boats from the Honduras. As the leading ones entered the river and I was about to embark the remainder of the troops, a report came from the pickets that the enemy was collecting about 5 miles away to make a dash into Tampa. To provide for such a course the prisoners were put into the first boats and ordered to drop down the river to a proper distance from land. As the other boats came up they were loaded. Just as the last ones arrived a flag of truce came in, ostensibly to receive permission to take away the wife of McKay, the rebel commander. The picket returned in good order at the signal of firing a musket, and all were soon on board the boats. Some difficulty was found in navigating the channel, as it was quite dark before we left the river. We arrived on board the Honduras in Tampa Bay about 9 p.m., Saturday, May 7, 1864.

I have the honor to remain, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

S. FELLOWS,
Colonel Second U. S. Colored Troops.

Capt. H. W. Bowers, A. A. G. 5


U.S.S. SUNFLOWER
Tampa Bay, May 8, 1864

SIR: I have the honor to report that on the arrival of the steamer Honduras on the 4th instant, with General Woodbury and troops on board, for the purpose of making a raid on Tampa, in obedience to your circular, I immediately took steps to cooperate with the naval force here under my command. On the afternoon of the 4th instant I went up to Tampa with Captain Bowers, U. S. Army, to communicate, to ascertain the strength of the place, returning the same night. On the 5th instant, after transferring two companies of the colored troops to the bark J. L. Davis, I took her in tow and towed her up to Gadsden’s Point, the Honduras with the balance of the troops coming up in the afternoon.
then organized a naval party (consisting of 54 men from the three vessels, Acting Ensign J. H. Cox, of the J. L. Davis. Acting Master's Mate W. J. Crosby, of the Honduras, and Acting Master's Mate S. E. Willits, of this vessel, all under command of Acting Master William Fales) to land with the troops and assist in the capture of the place. After getting them all on board the Honduras we proceeded up the bay as far as practicable and succeeded in landing all before daylight. At 7 a.m. the place was taken possession of, capturing some 40 prisoners, the naval force capturing about one-half, which were turned over to the army, and a few minutes after 7 the Stars and Stripes were hoisted in the town by the navy.

I have also to report the capture of the sloop smack Neptune and a quantity of cotton, estimated at about 55 bales, by the naval force. Before closing this report I desire to make mention of the cheerful and assiduous cooperation of Acting Masters Fales and J. H. Platt. Acting Master Fales led his party into the town on the double quick, capturing several prisoners, wounding 2 who were trying to get away.

Acting Master Fales speaks in high terms of praise of the conduct of Acting Master's Mate S. E. Willits, and also says that both officers and men behaved very well.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

EDWD. VAN SICE,
Acting Master Commanding.

Acting Rear-Admiral T Bailey
Comdg. Eastern Gulf Blockdg. Squadron, Key West, Fla.6

Acting Asst. Paymaster Eugene Chapin of the U. S. Navy wrote in his memoirs:

"It was on May 6th, 1864, that some of our men took part in the attack on Tampa. We landed, one night about one o'clock, from our ship [probably James L. Davis], in the small boats, some sixty men under the command of Ensign Cox, at Gadsden Point, in the woods, which is about three miles from Tampa on the south-west side, while the gunboats landed about two hundred and fifty men some two miles below the town on the south side ... Commander William Fales went with the officers and men from the gunboats in the attack on the south side. As we
surprised and took possession of the town at daybreak, one of our gunboats run up the bay, a short distance, and soon shelled out with their guns a small earthwork that was situated in the town at the mouth of a small river called Fort Brooke, and which was destroyed in a very short time.

"After taking the place our pickets were thrown out and our forces held the town until sundown. During the meantime our men captured in the town a small sloop loaded with Sea Island cotton and also a large quantity of cotton they found stored in a barn, and the men took it away in a large scow they found there and put it on board one of the gunboats and had it taken together with the sloop to Key West where it was adjudicated and sold.

"All the small boats belonging to the James L. Davis were taken away by our men who went on the expedition, excepting a small dory, which was left behind ... [Eugene Chapin] got permission from the officer of the deck to use it, so I put on my side-arms and got into the dory and paddled across the bay, some three miles, to the United States Steamer Honduras which lay anchored near the shore, and called on Paymaster Cushing of Boston, and dined with him and several officers. After dinner he had his small boat called away and he and the surgeon and myself got into it, and the men pulled us up into the town where we went ashore and took a look at the place for several hours.

"I found the town pleasantly situated on a small river fronting on the bay and along the mouth of the river. It was a very neat, pretty place with small white painted houses, and beautiful beds of flowers in the front yards with seashell borders very neatly arranged and very attractive, while the atmosphere was redolent with rich odors from the flowers and highly scented magnolias. After walking about some time we strolled down to the fort, where we saw the ruin which the gunboat had made with her guns. The place was completely 'knocked into pie', and there was only to be seen some half dozen iron cannons lying about on the ground, all spiked, with their trunnions broken, and their carriages burning and smoking away.

"I also saw a number of old men, women and children standing about some public building and they were a very poor, dejected looking lot of people and were only about half decently clothed. After seeing all we cared to see, we returned to the small boat, and were pulled back to the Honduras, where I bade my friends good-bye and took my dory and paddled back across the bay to the James L. Davis, which vessel I safely reached about six o’clock p.m. In about an hour afterwards our men returned in the small boats feeling somewhat tired after being up all night."

Early on Saturday (May 7), the James L. Davis "hoisted our anchor and our vessel sailed down the river and anchored off Egmont Key Light-house in the bay."
Darwin Branch Givens, not yet six years of age in May 1864, vividly remembered the Union invasion:

"They landed on the present site of DeSoto Park, being brought in by the late H. A. Crane, a Union sympathizer and father of Judge Henry L. Crane, who fought in the Confederate army. Two companies came down what was then known as the government road from the spring from which the Ybor City Ice factory first obtained its water supply. I, with Jerry Perkins, was playing in the white sand road just above East Street where it intersects with Lafayette [Kennedy Boulevard]. I saw them coming down the road with bayonets fixed and glistening in the noonday sun. Knowing something out of the ordinary was happening, I took to my heels and ran home and told father that the 'devils' were taking the place.

"There was a hotel known as the 'Florida House' standing where the McKay house stands on the same block as the Masonic Temple. My father just had time to call Mr. Duke and Judge James Gettis to come over to him which they did just as the soldiers came around the block to father's back gate. I was holding his hand and Mr. Crane said to the captain, 'Do not take my friend Givens. I'll stand good for him.' But they took the other gentlemen. My father and mother had been kind to Mr. Crane's family while he was in Key West and that was responsible for his attitude toward father. They paroled Mr. Duke and Mr. Gettis..."8

"A detachment of soldiers was sent from the garrison to the old government warehouse, on the east bank of the river, near its mouth. George Washington, Charles Papy, and another young man saw them coming and staged a thrilling escape by swimming alongside a rowboat, keeping the side of the boat between them and the enemy. Several shots were fired at them, hitting the boat but the plucky boys reached the bank of the river unhurt"9

Darwin Givens' older sister, Annie, gave the following account:

"I was a good big girl when the Civil War broke out - nearly ten years old. We were all at breakfast and my younger brother, D. B., came running in and told my father the Yankees were coming, marching into town, fifty thousand of them. Father told him to run over to a hotel ... and tell Judge Gettis and the other gentlemen who were living in the hotel. After warning them my brother ran on to Fort Brooke where there were a few Confederate soldiers. Both the gentlemen who lived in the hotel with Judge Gettis and the soldiers escaped. The Yankee soldiers, Negroes commanded by white officers, didn't give us much trouble. Judge Ossian B. Hart, a prominent citizen at that time, was a Republican. He saw to it that Tampa did not suffer as many other places did. Only a few of the homes were searched for money or valuables. The looters did come to our home, but they only ripped open a feather bed and turned out drawers and such like. No, they didn't get either our money or our silver. Father had only a few days before put the buckskin bag, in which it had
been stored, in a secret place in the chimney.”\textsuperscript{10}

Mary Louisa (Daegenhardt) Archer, who was a child in Tampa during the Civil War, wrote her memoirs in 1929. She recalled an incident during the 1864 occupation:

"In 1864, her sister's husband, Henry Krause, came home on furlough and was out hunting for game "when the Yankees took possession of Tampa...They seemed to know Henry was on furlough (and) they put a guard around the home to watch for him."

When Krause walked in from the woods, the waiting Federals took him into custody and held him prisoner at Fort Brooke, Mrs. Archer said.

But the Union captain and lieutenant in the occupying force "had lived here but had deserted to the other side," she added. So her mother and sister prevailed upon the officers whom they knew to allow Krause to come home for his meals.

"He was guarded by two big Negro men every time," Mrs. Archer noted.\textsuperscript{11}

Kate E Edwards, a relative of the Nunez family of Tampa, left this account:

"The Yankees took possession of Tampa on the morning of May 6th and held it till the night of the 7th. They carried off all the Negroes and horses they could get, robbed all the stores and many of the private houses of everything they wanted. Colonel John Darling and Captain James Gettis were left with nothing but what they had on. Colonel Darling had over $80,000 deposited with him and a large amount of bond certificates which were carried off.”\textsuperscript{12}

Col. John Darling, in his application for a Presidential pardon in 1865, wrote of his own experience:

"On the 6th May 1864, the Town of Tampa was suddenly occupied by Genl. Woodbury with U. S. forces. The Town was partially plundered and one of the principal sufferers from the raid was your Petitioner, who lost on that occasion over $10,000 in money and valuable papers, - was subjected to imprisonment for about thirty six hours - and then held to the close of the war as a hostage for the safety of certain Union men. What-little property he has left will not pay the debts for which he is responsible contracted before the war with merchants in New York.”\textsuperscript{13}

During the brief occupation, the ceremonial tools of the local Masonic and Odd Fellows lodges were stolen by the Union troops:

"They landed forces on each side of the river and the invaders captured the old men and boys in the town, all of whom were too old and decrepit, or too young for military service.

"They ransacked every home, taking or destroying the scant supplies and clothing and everything of value they discovered.

"Among the places raided was the Masonic Lodge, where they seized the jewels, regalia and other
equipment. But when General Woodbury of the United States troops, being a Mason himself, on hearing of the desecration had all the men searched and the Lodge property was returned by the father of John L. Branch [Jr.] who had been taken prisoner and who was also a Mason.

"In the meantime before the jewels were returned, which was almost two years, the Lodge had to have working tools. Brother Givens, father, Brother J. T. Givens, fashioned the necessary working tools in his shop out of zinc, the compasses and trowel of which are still a prized possession of Hillsborough Lodge. The old jewels, however, have disappeared and no one seems to know what became of them."14

John L. Branch "served in Captain McMullen's Company at Clearwater. After being taken prisoner by the Union forces in an amphibious raid on Tampa in 1864, he was paroled by General Woodbury to return the Masonic jewels and emblems that the troops had confiscated in Tampa."15

Minutes of the Odd Fellows Lodge contain the following:

"It was reported to the Lodge that on the 6th and 7th of May last, the U. S. Military and Naval forces captured and plundered the City and Lodge, carrying away or destroying the current minutes and account books and set of the ritual including the Rebekah degree book, as well as a large portion of the implements and furniture of the Lodge.

"It was decided, however, that regalia was not indispensable in the emergency and that the Lodge would go on with the work as here to for."16

James McKay, Jr., Tampa's Confederate commander, writing in 1923, remembered the events of May 1864:

"They again made a raid into Tampa, capturing the town. General Woodbury in command and some 400 deserters and Negro soldiers holding the town for two days, after taking what property suited them hurriedly left, hearing that Dickison and his men were advancing on the place to attack it. I was at Fort Meade with 55 men, organizing some 1,200 head cattle, to forward to the army of Tennessee, when I received the news of the capture of Tampa at 2 o'clock that afternoon. I left with 35 men for that place, reaching within two miles of the town at 11 o'clock the same night, when I obtained information as to the force that occupied the town. Immediately upon receipt of news of the capture of Tampa, couriers were dispatched calling all citizens to report to the Six Mile creek, as quickly as possible, which they did and by noon of the next day we had about 75 men and boys. The morning after my arrival near Tampa, I sent a flag of truce into the town by Gideon Zipperer and another man, two of the bravest and best men I had with me, requesting that my wife and child be permitted to leave the town with these men, as I would attack the town within 24 hours. Mr. Zipperer is now living below Bartow on his magnificent home and orange grove. The Federals declined to permit..."
either the men or my wife to leave the town and held them until they evacuated the place, taking some 60 bales of cotton that my father owned. The two vessels that carried these troops to Tampa, named Honduras and Huzzas, both were purchased by my father and renamed the Governor Marvin, and Southern Star. This was after the war. Many times have I read the log books of these vessels giving an account of this expedition. Captain Van Sice commanded the Honduras at the time of this expedition. I got acquainted with him in Havana after the war, he then being master of the City of Vera Cruz of the Alexander Steamship Line plying between New York and Havana. He discussed with me the capture of Tampa.

"A few years later Captain Van Sice, with the City of Vera Cruz, was lost in a hurricane off St. Augustine.

"I had placed pickets on all roads leading out of Tampa, with orders to halt all passers, no matter who they were. The picket force was composed of six men. At 12 o’clock the night of the day the Federals evacuated Tampa, six men came riding up the road from the direction of Tampa and although the guard heard them talking before getting abreast of their position they were permitted to pass without challenging. I was notified two hours afterwards, when I immediately started six men after them, but it was too late, for they had some 10 or 12 miles the start of our men. The deserters proved to be Jim Green and five of his followers."17

The Gainesville, Florida newspaper, Cotton States, made the following brief mention of the Tampa affair in its issue of May 21, 1864:

"FROM TAMPA. The enemy who took Tampa consist mostly of deserters and Negroes who were persuaded to go with them, and on hearing that 800 of our cavalry were pressing down towards them, they left in a hurry. They carried away Mr. Bowden and Mr. Branch, but left Col. Snell and other citizens."18

The Union raid and brief occupation of Tampa in May 1864 was certainly a blow to "Confederate morale in South Florida." The Confederate Cow Cavalry "re-established ... control" of the area by fall but the war came to an end the following spring.19 Union troops moved in to occupy Tampa on May 27, 1865.20

ENDNOTES

1 Tampa Florida Peninsular, December 1, 1860.
2 J. M. Brannan to General Thomas, April 19, 1862, Department of the South, Letters Received, box 1, record group 393, National Archives.
5 OR, series 1, XXXV, part 1, 389-391.
6 United States War Department, Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies In the Mar of the
Rebellion, 30 vols. (Washington, DC, 1894-1922) series 1, XVII, 694.


9 Mrs. Elizabeth Fry Page, "Tampa During the War," Confederate Veteran XXXV, no. 4, April, 1927,124.


"The invasion was well timed by the Federals. An informer had tipped off the Unionists that the Homeguard was in the woods rounding up cattle for the hard-pressed Confederate Army and that Tampa's guerrilla band, the Beauregard Rangers, was elsewhere in Florida."

13 "Petition of John Darling," August 19, 1865, Case Files of Applications from Former Confederates for Presidential Pardons, 1865-67, record group 94, M-1003, roll 15, National Archives.

14 Hillsborough Lodge No. 25, E & A.M. 1850-1976, 14.


