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Sumter Is Avenged!: The Siege and Reduction of Fort Pulaski

Robert J. Schneller Jr.

Herbert M. Schiller

forever; you may bomb it, atomize it, pulverize it and wipe it clean of life—but if you desire to defend it, protect it, and keep it for civilization, you must do it on the ground, the way the Roman legions did, by putting your young men into the mud."

DONALD W. BOOSE, JR.
Colonel, U.S. Army, Ret.
U.S. Army War College

Schiller, Herbert M. *Sumter Is Avenged!: The Siege and Reduction of Fort Pulaski.* Shippensburg, Pa.: White Mane, 1995. 200pp. $29.95

Twenty-five million bricks were used in the construction of Fort Pulaski, built between 1829 and 1847 on Cockspur Island in the Savannah River. In January 1861, Confederate forces seized the fort, which controlled the entrance to the river. Union blockading ships arrived off the mouth of the river in May 1861, and six months later Federal units began to occupy nearby islands. Union army and navy commanders contemplated joint operations to capture Savannah but failed to carry them out before the Confederates strengthened the city's defenses.

Early in 1862, the Union army decided to close Savannah to blockade runners by capturing Fort Pulaski. Working largely at night, soldiers under the direction of Brigadier General Quincy A. Gillmore constructed eleven batteries on Tybee Island. The batteries mounted sixteen mortars and twenty guns, including ten rifled cannon, which Gillmore considered experimental. The artillery opened fire on 10 April 1862. After a thirty-hour bombardment, a breach in the wall enabled projectiles to strike near the entrance of the north magazine, and the Confederate forces surrendered. Colonel Charles H. Olmstead, the Confederate commander, struck his flag because he feared that a direct hit would blow up the entire fort and everyone in it. Although Gillmore had not expected this outcome, he later claimed to have planned it. Union forces occupied Fort Pulaski but made no serious effort to move inland. Savannah remained in Confederate hands until Major General William Tecumseh Sherman's "bummers" reached the sea in December 1864.

Herbert Schiller, a physician with a master's degree in history who has written or edited three other books on the Civil War, based this work on published and unpublished primary documents. It is generously endowed with footnotes, maps, and illustrations.

Unfortunately, the good news ends there. The narrative suffers from lapses in clarity, context, plot, and organization. For example, Schiller states that the first Union blockading ship arrived off the mouth of the Savannah River on 27 May 1861, but he does not discuss the establishment of the blockade or its purpose until several pages later. At one point he says that the Union army and navy commanders abandoned the idea of capturing Savannah, yet he fails to explain their reasons for doing so. In another instance, Schiller describes Yankee ships lying in ambush for Rebel steamers bent on resupplying Fort Pulaski, leading the reader to expect that a detailed account of a battle will follow—but then he simply mentions that the Rebel steamers safely returned to Savannah, without explaining how they escaped the trap. The author declares the

Union navy's reconnaissance efforts during January 1862 in the waters around the islands flanking the Savannah River to have been "dilatory," without explaining why they should be thus considered. Also, he never reveals whether the various Union efforts in the area, including the capture of Fort Pulaski, succeeded in sealing off Savannah from blockade runners. These lapses make Schiller's narrative difficult to follow.

He concludes that "the results of the rifled gun fire [on Pulaski] exceeded all expectations; revolutionized siege warfare; and made masonry forts, previously thought to be impregnable, obsolete." Focused exclusively as it is on Fort Pulaski, the author's narrative simply fails to support these assertions. Just to begin exploring whether rifles revolutionized siege warfare, a study would need a much broader scope. Such an inquiry would reveal that makers of forts and cannon had been engaged in a developmental race since before 1453, when seventy heavy Turkish bombards knocked down the walls of Constantinople. The race went on long after World War I, when the fortress of Verdun held out against rifled artillery much heavier than Gillmore's, if only because the defenders mustered firepower nearly equal to that of the attackers. During the Civil War, from the summer of 1863 until the Confederates evacuated Charleston in February 1865, Fort Sumter (another masonry fort) stood up to greater numbers of rifled cannon than Gillmore had used against Pulaski. In the broader context, then, Fort Pulaski emerges as a step, not a revolution.

Gillmore's contemporaries were less sanguine than Schiller about the advent of rifled ordnance, particularly because so many rifled guns exploded in action during the Civil War. Admiral David Dixon Porter summed up the prevailing view in the U.S. Navy at the end of the war: "Rifled cannon had not at that time made such an advance as to satisfy us that it would be the gun of the future."

All told, this book falls short of its potential.

ROBERT J. SCHNELLER, JR.
Naval Historical Center

Guillen, Michael. *Five Equations That Changed the World*. New York: Hyperion, 1995. 277pp. $22.95

When Stephen Hawking wrote *A Brief History of Time*, his publisher said that each equation in the book would reduce sales by half. Five equations should thus reduce sales by two to the fifth power, or one thirty-second. Fortunately, Michael Guillen's publisher is not of a like mind.

Guillen, a Harvard instructor in physics and mathematics and a science editor for ABC TV, has a nice touch for the history of mathematics and physics and their impact on the world. He has taken five influential equations, each a precise expression of a foundational physical principle, and set the development of each in the intellectual context of its times and of the mind of the mathematician who devised it.

In 1680, Isaac Newton was the most celebrated natural philosopher in England. From his chair at Cambridge, he had done the differential calculus. Now his attention was drawn to the motion of the moon: why did it not fall?

By looking at the balance of forces involved, recognizing that the Earth also pulled on the Moon, and using Johannes