

around six in the evening at Seabrook's Wharf on Skull Creek on the north side of Hilton Head Island. From there they marched to Fort Walker, where they would experience their first taste of war and sustain a significant number of casualties.³⁷

About five miles from Seabrook's Wharf on Hilton Head Island's northeastern shore, Fort Walker faced Port Royal Sound. The brick and concrete fort sported twenty mounted guns of various calibers.³⁸ These guns were manned by 152 men from two companies of Colonel John A. Wagener's 1st Artillery Regiment of the South Carolina Militia. Also manning Fort Walker were 210 men from three companies of Colonel William C. Heyward's 11th Regiment of South Carolina Volunteers and 260 men from four companies of Colonel Richard G. M.

Dunovant's 12th Regiment of South Carolina Volunteers, making a total of 632 men. In addition, 65 men of Captain I. H. Screven's Mounted Guerrillas from Beaufort were stationed on the beach to act as scouts and couriers.³⁹

In the late afternoon of November 6, about four hundred fifty Georgia infantrymen commanded by Captain Berry, along with Captain Read's 50-man battery of two twelve-pounder howitzers, reached Fort Walker. Later that evening General Drayton placed Colonel DeSaussure's 650 men in a low-lying area on the north side of Fort Walker to guard against surprise attack from the direction of Fish Hall Creek and the beach on Port Royal Sound.⁴⁰

To overcome Fort Walker on Hilton Head Island and Fort Beauregard on Bay Point, Admiral DuPont devised a plan to reduce both forts at the same time. DuPont's attack plan called for the Union war ships to sail into Port Royal Sound with the tide, pass midway between the forts and proceed to a point two and a half miles north of Fort Walker, where they could turn to the west and



Private Francis Marion Sease. Private Sease served in Company C of the 15th South Carolina before dying of disease in a Columbia hospital on November 5, 1861. (2) (8)



Brigadier General Thomas Fenwick Drayton, who commanded Confederate forces at the Battle of Port Royal Sound. General Drayton's family owned a large plantation on Hilton Head Island. 6)

south and proceed to attack Fort Walker from the north, its least defended flank. Unfortunately for DeSaussure's infantry, this was the side of the fort on which they were positioned. After passing slowly in front of the fort against the tide while maintaining a rapid rate of fire, the ships were to turn east and north, pass with another attack, and continue making passes until the destruction of Fort Walker was complete. DuPont's flagship, the *Wabash*, was followed by fourteen other Union war ships. Ironically, one of the Union ships, the *Pocahontas*, was commanded by Captain Percival Drayton, brother of Brigadier General Thomas Drayton, commander of the Confederate land forces at Port Royal.⁴¹

At 9:26 a.m. on November 7, DuPont ordered the Federal fleet to open fire on Fort Walker. The day was clear, and the sea was again calm, "without a ripple to disturb the aim of the heavy

guns of the Union fleet." The results of the unrelenting Federal naval bombardment would be devastating to the small force of Confederates on Hilton Head Island.⁴²

General Drayton immediately ordered the guns in the Confederate fort to return the fire. The Union war ships sailed into the harbor, turned around and fired relentlessly on Fort Walker. Drayton reported that by half past ten the Confederate gunners inside Fort Walker had become fatigued. Seeking help for his weary men, Drayton went to Captain Read's battery, about two miles behind the fort, and brought back thirty-five artillerymen to operate the guns in place of the exhausted defenders inside the fort. Meanwhile, the Union fleet attack continued.⁴³

In a low swampy area near the beach north of the fort, Colonel DeSaussure's men could be seen by the Union sailors standing watch on the mastheads of the Federal ships. Consequently, the 15th South Carolina was shelled unmercifully. Responding to this disastrous situation, DeSaussure ordered his regiment to fall back to a less exposed location in the woods behind the fort.

At a quarter past one, one of DuPont's ships, the *Ottawa*, reported that the firing from Fort Walker had ceased. At two o'clock, after withstanding

four and a half hours of bombardment, Drayton's Confederates abandoned the fort. DuPont sent Commander John Rodgers on shore with a flag of truce. Finding Fort Walker abandoned, at 2:20 p.m. on November 7, 1861, Commander Rodgers hoisted the Union flag over Hilton Head Island.⁴⁴

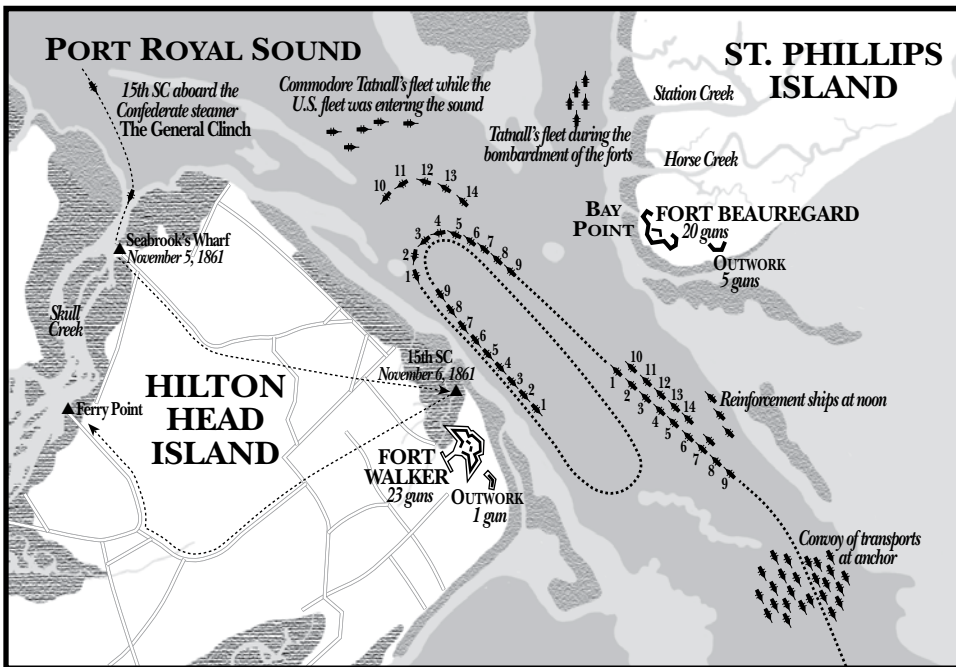
With Fort Walker out of action, Admiral DuPont turned his full attention across the entrance of the sound to Fort Beauregard. He sent a small squadron of ships to assess its condition after it had been shelled by the Union fleet from long range; by sunset, Fort Beauregard was also abandoned by the Southerners.⁴⁵

Later, Captain Thomas Warren of Company D questioned General Drayton's wisdom in ordering a regiment of men armed only with muskets and rifles to defend a shore against a fleet of heavily armed warships. He believed that the regiment's exposure at Port Royal was unnecessary and needless, since no possible good could have resulted. "To be shot at *ab-labitu*, by your enemy, with your hands completely tied, and no means to return the compliment, is a proceeding in practical military experience, which, for one, I never bargained for, and which *experiment* I trust never to see tried again. Our escape from the hand of a merciless foe was indeed wonderful, when all the facts are considered."⁴⁶

Between Fort Walker and the woods beyond was a mile-wide swampy area commanded by the Federal guns, so the Confederates who had manned Fort Walker "were ordered to run for their lives, each man for himself." Drayton's Confederates began to leave the vicinity of Fort Walker around three o'clock and proceeded toward Ferry Point on Skull Creek, about six miles away. Each wounded man was placed in a blanket and carried by four men. DeSaussure's infantry regiment and Captain Read's company of artillery served as the rear guard of the retreating Confederate force. At half past one on the 8th, the steamers *St. John's* and *Edisto* and three large flats



Captain Percival Drayton, brother of Brigadier General Thomas Drayton, commanded the Union warship, Pocahontas, during the battle of Port Royal Sound on November 7, 1861. After the battle, Captain Drayton did an inventory of the Drayton plantation on Hilton Head. 69



The Battle of Port Royal Sound, November 7, 1861. Map by Tim Belshaw, (SCDAH.) (5) (7)

were used to transport the defeated troops to the mainland, leaving most of their equipment on the island. Commodore Tatnall's small fleet also aided the escape of the Confederate land forces. By sunrise on the 8th, the stars and stripes of the United States was flying over both Fort Walker and Fort Beauregard.⁴⁷

Following a reconnaissance of Hilton Head Island on the day after the battle, Union Brigadier General Thomas Sherman reported that the road leading away from Fort Walker was strewn with rebel arms, accouterments and baggage. A large quantity of ammunition and camp equipage had been abandoned, including small arms and ammunition. Two twelve-pounder howitzers were found near Ferry Point.⁴⁸

After Hilton Head, Captain Warren was quoted in the *Camden Confederate*: "Say to our friends that although we were in the battle at Hilton Head, on the 7th, and were shelled to our heart's content, all the Kershaw Guard are safe and well." Unfortunately, this was not true for the other companies of the 15th South Carolina.

First Lieutenant Emanuel Zeddo Swygert was killed in action during the regiment's baptism by fire at the Battle of Port Royal Sound. Two other officers were mortally wounded; First Lieutenant James Norris of Company F died on November 8 and Second Lieutenant Thomas H. Smart of Company