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Fort McRee - Pensacola, Florida

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Fort McRee - Pensacola's Lost Fort

When U.S. engineers devised a plan for defending Pensacola Bay, they planned the construction of two forts on opposite sides of the entrance to the bay. One of these, Fort Pickens, still stands on the western end of Santa Rosa Island. The other, Fort McRee, stood on Foster's Bank opposite Fort Pickens, but has long since vanished.

Constructed between 1834 and 1839, Fort McRee (sometimes incorrectly spelled "Fort McRae") was an unusually designed fort mounting numerous pieces of heavy artillery on multiple levels. The fort's design could best be described as almost like a stubby boomerang when viewed from above. The walls were curved and the fort was rounded at both ends, allowing it to bring maximum firepower to bear on the channel leading into Pensacola Bay.

Confederate troops seized the fort in January of 1861 and quickly went to work mounting guns aimed across the channel at Fort Pickens, which remained in the possession of the Union army.

During the Battle of Pensacola Bay in November of 1861, the fort was caught in a crossfire between Fort Pickens on Santa Rosa Island and the ships of the Union navy firing from offshore. The Union artillery inflicted heavy damage on Fort McRee, dismounting guns and collapsing walls. The heaviest Confederate casualties of the battle were suffered when a magazine collapsed, burying soldiers in the rubble.

The fort was further damaged in a second bombardment in January of 1862 and was virtually useless by the time Union troops reoccupied Pensacola in May of that year.

During the years after the war, the tides and waves completed the process that had been started by the Union artillery. Only portions of the fort remained standing by the end of the 19th century and even those were leveled by the hurricane of 1906.

The area around the ruins of the fort continued to serve military purposes up through World War II. New concrete batteries were constructed there, some of which still remain. Fort McRee itself, however, is gone. Some of its ruins are likely buried in the dunes that cover the site, but little remains on the surface to indicate that this was a site of such importance during the Civil War.

The site of Fort McRee is now part of Gulf Islands National Seashore, but can only be reached by boat or on foot. There are no facilities at the site, but it does provide a spectacular view of Pensacola Bay and the Gulf of Mexico.

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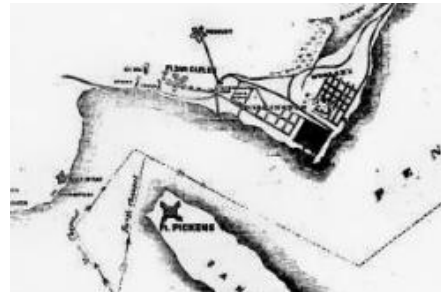
Site of Fort McRee

The sand point visible in the distance in the right of this photograph was the site of Fort McRee, the lost fort of Pensacola Bay.



Fort McRee in 1861

This 1861 photograph shows the interior of Fort McRee before it was heavily damaged in the Pensacola Bay bombardments.



The Forts of Pensacola in 1861

Fort McRee appears here as the small fort symbol opposite the entrance of Pensacola Bay from Fort Pickens on Santa Rosa Island.

