

THE CONFEDERATE HIGH COMMAND AT SHILOH

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degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by

THOMAS K. HALL, MAJ, USA
B.S., Georgia College, Milledgeville, Georgia, 1983

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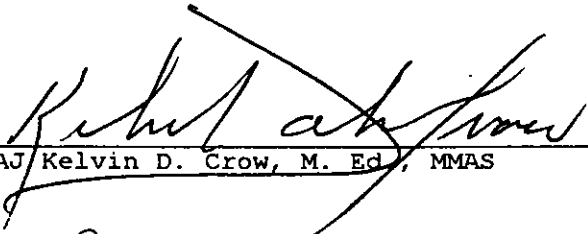
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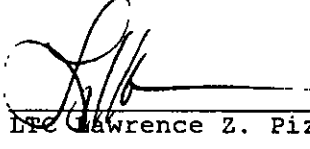
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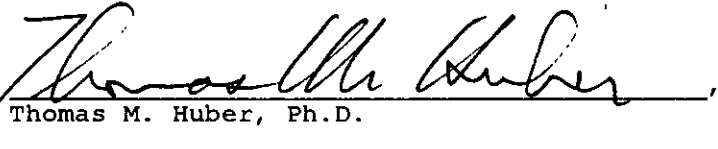
Name of Candidate: MAJ Thomas K. Hall

Thesis Title: The Confederate High Command at Shiloh

Approved by:


_____, Thesis Committee Chairman
MAJ Kelvin D. Crow, M. Ed., MMAS


_____, Member
LTC Lawrence Z. Pizzi, M.A., English


_____, Member
Thomas M. Huber, Ph.D.

Accepted this 6 day of June 1997 by:

_____, Director, Graduate Degree Programs
Phillip J. Brookes, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

THE CONFEDERATE HIGH COMMAND AT SHILOH by MAJ Thomas K. Hall, USA, 93 pages.

This is a study of the actions of the senior Confederate commanders at the battle of Shiloh. The senior commander, General Albert Sidney Johnston and his second in command General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard did not come to a complete agreement on to how to fight the battle. This disconnect between the two generals was the main reason for the South's failure to achieve victory.

The research method consisted of comparing the Official Records to other sources. These sources included books, biographies, telephone interviews, and one unpublished paper from the Shiloh National Military Park library. Official Records sometimes did not survive the test of scrutiny, particularly General Braxton Bragg's assertion of actions at the close of April 6.

The most important lesson that a student of military history can learn from this study is that commanders at all levels must ensure that the commander's intent is clearly understood. Failure to do so almost guarantees confusion up and down the chain of command which will, most likely, result in defeat.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The commander's intent is the single unifying focus for all subordinate elements.

Field Manual 100-5

This will be a study of the Confederate high command at the Battle of Shiloh. With the possible exception of Chickamauga, Shiloh was the most critical battle fought in the western theater. A Confederate victory would have stopped Union General Ulysses' S. Grant's drive in the west. Also, a Confederate victory would have likely ruined the careers of Grant and General William T. Sherman thus depriving the Union of those who would later prove to be their best commanders.

Shiloh resulted in the South's attempt to defeat Grant before his forces could link up with General Don Carlos Buell's forces, moving his down from Nashville, and capture the critical railroad juncture of Corinth, Mississippi. The Confederates, under Albert Sidney Johnston, numbered almost 44,000. Grant's forces at Pittsburgh Landing, Tennessee, only numbered around 40,000.¹ The South, for a change, enjoyed a slight numerical superiority going into a major battle. The Union was completely unaware that an attack was pending. They did not entrench, and worse, they camped with their backs to the Tennessee River. The Union was a perfect target. It should have been a great victory for the South.

It was anything but a victory. A confusing route of march from Corinth, Mississippi to Shiloh, a stubborn Union stand at what would be

labeled the "Hornet's Nest," and, most importantly of all, confusion in the highest levels of the Confederate command doomed the Southern cause.

The confusion centered on the two senior commanders on the Southern side. Albert Sidney Johnston, the overall commander, and his second in command, P. G. T. Beauregard worked at odds with each other from the time that Beauregard entered the western theater. Johnston specified an attack formation that divided the battlefield into sectors among his four corps. He stated in a memorandum dated, April 3, 1862, that his intent was to turn the Union left into the Owl Creek and away from its base of supplies.² The order that Beauregard penned gave the corps commanders a different attack formation and did not mention trying to turn the Union left.¹ The flawed order of battle was the main reason why the South failed at Shiloh. The two senior commanders were working towards different goals: Johnston wanted the main effort on the Confederate right; Beauregard spread the troops out all over the field with no particular main effort. It is safe to assume that any military strategist would agree that confusion in command is a formula for defeat.

When the South did attack on the morning of April 6th, confusion was the order of the day. Beauregard formed the attack with the four corps lined up behind each other. The result was units becoming intermingled with one another resulting in a complete breakdown of any semblance of command and control. Commanders, from regiment all the way to division, wound up commanding whatever troops happened to be closest to them.

The South at Shiloh was its own worst enemy. Compounding the South's problems was Confederate Corps commander Braxton Bragg's conduct of dealing with a Union stronghold known as the Hornet's Nest. Bragg insisted in throwing several bayonet charges at the Union position. All of these charges failed. The time the South wasted in attacking the

Hornet's Nest enabled Grant to establish a strong line of defense near the river.

Albert Sidney Johnston positioned himself on the Confederate right, indicating that he fully intended to make the main effort on the right. Johnston never got the chance to lead his soldiers to victory. He received a fatal wound leading a charge through the Peach Orchard. Beauregard then assumed command of the Confederate forces.

The South finally captured the Hornet's Nest late in the day on April 6th. Beauregard's action after the collapse of the Hornet's Nest is the subject of intense debate. Beauregard called off any further offensive actions and ordered the army to fall back. He thought he could push the Federal army into the river the following day. Others maintain that one final push on April 6th would have done the job.

Don Carlos Buell reinforced Grant that night with fresh troops. Confederate cavalry commander Nathan Bedford Forrest obtained information concerning these reinforcements. He tried, unsuccessfully, to find Beauregard and warn him. Forrest did find General William J. Hardee and told him of the new Union troops. Hardee either refused to take action or simply did not know what action to take. Therefore, some intelligence of monumental importance never reached the senior commander. On April 7th, the combined strength of Grant and Buell's armies attacked and pushed the Confederates back over all the ground they struggled for so much on April 6th. Beauregard ordered a retreat back to Corinth, Mississippi.

Scope

The scope of the thesis will center on Johnston, Beauregard, and Bragg. Johnston and Beauregard will receive much attention for the obvious reason that they were, respectively, first and second in command of the Confederate army at Shiloh. The thesis will analyze why

Beauregard ignored Johnston's intent of turning the Union left, and why Johnston allowed this maneuver. Braxton Bragg is worthy of some study since he commanded the largest corps, and he led the South's efforts against the Hornet's Nest. Also, Nathan Bedford Forrest's critical reconnaissance of the Union position during the evening of April 6th merits some discussion. The thesis will primarily concentrate on these aforementioned individuals. An attempt to cover the actions of all Confederate corps commanders, in addition to Forrest, would broaden the scope too much.

Importance

The importance of Shiloh cannot be understated. From a "lessons learned" standpoint, Shiloh offers several critical teaching points. The supreme commander of any organization must ensure his intent is well understood by all subordinate commanders. Critical intelligence, such as what Forrest gathered the night of April 6th, must be sent to the supreme commander as quickly as possible. The failure of the South at Shiloh can be directly attributed to a lack of understanding of the intent of Albert Sidney Johnston.

The importance of Shiloh as far as the outcome of the war is concerned, is interesting but not critical. The Confederates came extremely close to victory early on the first day of the battle. Had the South been successful, Grant's drive would have been halted for sure. However, the manpower and industrial might of the Union would have overmatched the South eventually. It is a stretch to say that a Confederate victory at Shiloh would have been the difference in the war itself.

Primary/Secondary Questions

The primary question of the thesis is as follows: Why did

Beauregard change Johnston's plan and why did Johnston allow it? Three secondary questions are:

1. Why did Braxton Bragg waste so much time and manpower making futile frontal assaults at the Hornet's Nest?

2. Did Beauregard throw away victory by not ordering one more assault on the end of 6 April?

3. Why was Nathan Bedford Forrest's critical intelligence concerning Union reinforcements ignored?

In James McDonough's book, Shiloh-In Hell Before Night, he points out that the questions about Shiloh are almost endless. His questions concerning the South's efforts at the battle are:

1. Why did it take so long for the rebels to get from Corinth to the battlefield?

2. How much difference, if any, did the loss of time make in the outcome of the battle?

3. Could the rebels have won the battle, or were they doomed from the start?

4. Were Johnston and Beauregard working at cross purposes in planning the strategy and making the attack?

5. Did Beauregard throw away victory when he called off the attack on Sunday evening?

6. Why was virtually no effort made to reorganize the Confederates for the next day's battle?

All of these questions will be discussed to a certain extent. Questions four and five will receive the most attention since they directly relate to the primary and alternate research questions.

An anticipated problem with this type of research is trying to find a consensus among various sources concerning the lost opportunity theory. The writer must analyze the best available research and come to his own conclusions. For example, good arguments are made on both

sides of the question concerning Beauregard's actions at the end of April 6th. The researcher must keep an open mind.

Literature Review

The state of literature covering Shiloh is adequate at the Combined Arms Research Library (CARL). The best primary source is The Official Records of the Confederate Army. The only shortcoming with the Official Records is that some of the reports are not totally objective. Some of the reports go to great length to highlight the accomplishments of the participant and omit any mistakes he may have made.

Two books dedicated to the study of Shiloh are excellent secondary sources. These books are, Shiloh-In Hell Before Night and Shiloh: Bloody April. It is surprising that these are the only two books solely dedicated to Shiloh considering the enormity of the battle and its strategic significance.

Biographies of the senior commanders at Shiloh are plentiful at the CARL. The life of Albert Sidney Johnston, Albert Sidney Johnston-Soldier of Three Republics, P.G.T. Beauregard-Napoleon in Gray, and Braxton Bragg and Confederate Defeat all offer outstanding insights into these individuals. The Life of Albert Sidney Johnston was written with a strong bias toward Johnston. This is not surprising since Johnston's son wrote the book. One particularly interesting source is The Military Operations of General Beauregard. It is unique because Beauregard actually dictated its contents to the author Alfred Roman. Beauregard did not want the credit of writing an autobiography because he felt that would appear arrogant. In a gesture of false modesty, he gave authorship to someone else but carefully controlled its contents.

O. E. Cunningham's dissertation, Shiloh and the Western Campaign of 1862 is very comprehensive. In fact, Cunningham's work was highly recommended to me by the historian at the Shiloh National Military Park.

Two periodicals were excellent sources in the research process. These periodicals were Confederate Veteran and The Southern Historical Society Papers. The Confederate Veteran provided a valuable article concerning the death of Johnston, written by his brother-in-law, Preston Smith. The Southern Historical Society Papers contained an article written by Thomas Jordan, the Adjutant General of the Army of the Mississippi. Jordan's article gives the reader the most objective account of the conflict between Johnston's stated intent and the lack of it in the order of battle.

Endnotes

¹Wiley Sword, Shiloh: Bloody April (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1974), 461. (Hereafter cited as Sword, Shiloh.)

²War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, (Washington DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1880-1891), Volume X, part 1, 397. (Hereafter cited as OR.)

³Ibid., 392.

CHAPTER 2

JANUARY 18-MARCH 5, 1862

The South held the highest confidence in Albert Sidney Johnston when he took command of the Western theater of the Confederacy. The department under his command stretched from the Appalachian Mountains to the east, to the Indian Territory on the west. Included in his theater were the states of Tennessee, Arkansas, Kentucky, Missouri, and parts of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana (see Fig. 1).¹ Johnston held the backing of his West Point roommate, Jefferson Davis. Although Davis' confidence in Johnston never wavered, just about everybody else's did. A series of setbacks in the west caused Johnston to come under intense scrutiny.

In February 1862, the Union Army, under Ulysses S. Grant broke through the Confederate defenses across southern Kentucky. Moving south down the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers, the Union poised itself to capture Forts Henry and Donelson. The South counted on these forts to protect these vital waterways. Capturing Henry and Donelson would allow Grant to take Nashville and move all the way down the Tennessee to Pittsburgh Landing to set up a base of supplies.²

The worsening situation in the west was the source of great concern for the Confederate government. In fairness to Johnston, it is doubtful that anyone could have better defended such a large area against numerically superior forces. Johnston had to spread his forces thin in order to cover such a large area. In and around Bowling Green, Kentucky, he had 14,000 men. At Forts Henry and Donelson there were only 5,500. At Columbus, Kentucky, on the extreme left, there were only

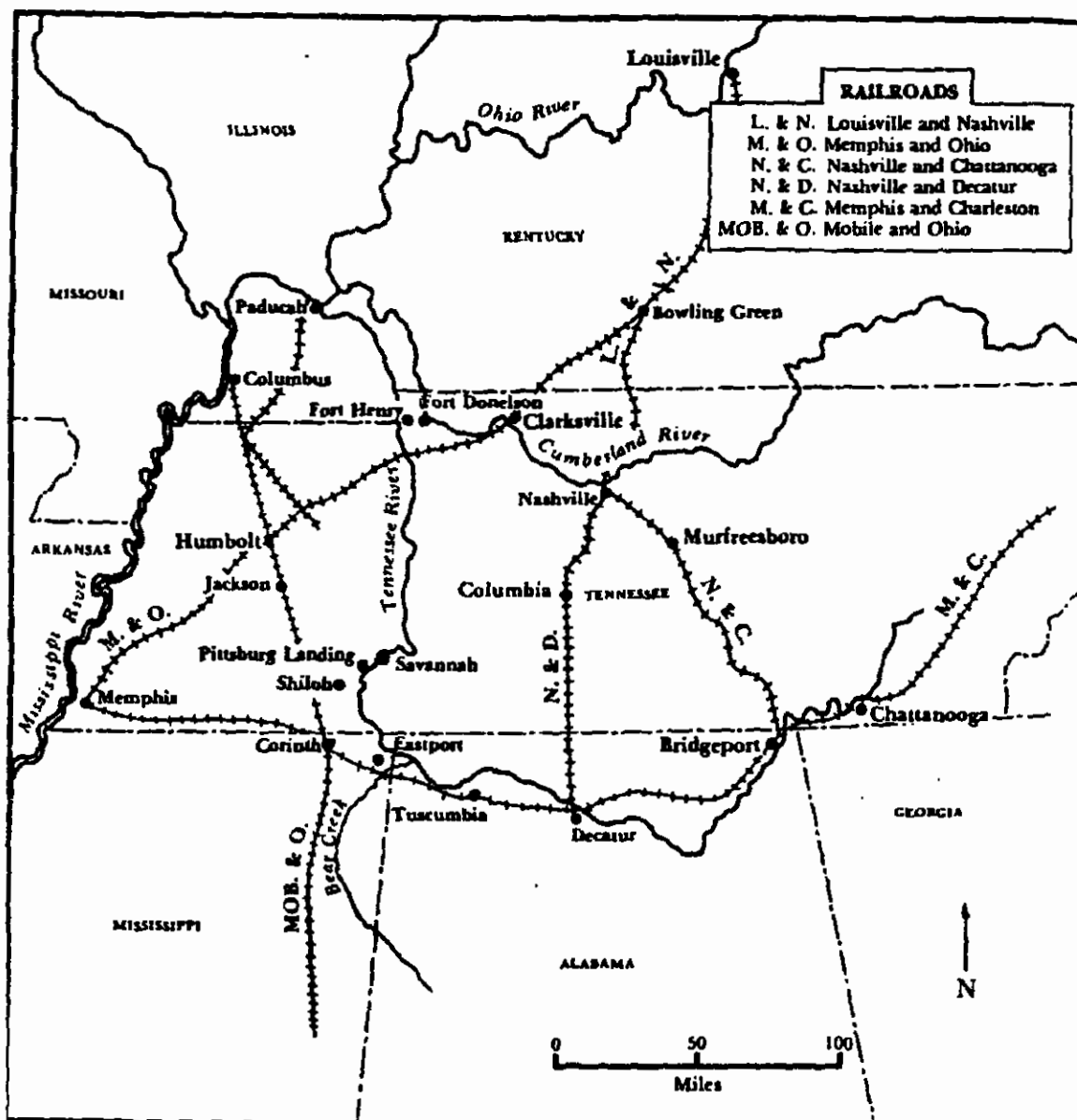


Fig. 1. Western Theater, Spring, 1862. Reprinted, by permission, from James L. McDonough, *Shiloh-In Hell Before Night*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977), 10.

17,000. These forces faced the combined strength of Grant and Buell's armies which numbered almost 70,000. Johnston made it clear to Davis that unless he received reinforcements, his defenses would not last long.

The Confederate War Department ordered Major General George Crittenden to take command of the eastern Kentucky area. Johnston's first order to Crittenden was to take note of the position of Confederate General Zollicoffer, over whom Crittenden would have command. Zollicoffer placed himself with the enemy to his front and the Cumberland river to his back near Beach Grove, Kentucky. Johnston did not specifically tell Crittenden to have Zollicoffer recross the river. In leaving that decision to his subordinate, Johnston revealed his command philosophy in the west. Johnston issued "mission-type" orders to his commanders and expected them to work out the details. This command style would later show itself in Johnston's relationship with Beauregard.

In the absence of any further guidance from Johnston, Crittenden decided to take the offensive. On January 18th, he took 6,000 troops and attacked a Union position near Mill Springs, Kentucky. This attack failed badly and subsequently exposed the eastern defenses at Bowling Green.³ Alarmed senators and representatives from Tennessee went to Jefferson Davis demanding the removal of Johnston.⁴ Davis continued to stand by Johnston saying, "If Sidney Johnston is not a general, then we had better give up the war, for we have no general." The cabinet even discussed the possibility of abandoning Richmond in order to protect the Memphis-Charleston railroad which ran through Corinth.⁵ How seriously they discussed this idea is questionable. However, the fact that it surfaced at all indicates the importance of the rail line.

The situation in the west brought Pierre Gustave Toutant-Beauregard to the mind of Jefferson Davis. Beauregard was one of the South's most popular generals. After successfully commanding Confederate forces at Fort Sumter and Bull Run, he gained the admiration of Southerners everywhere. Beauregard's actions at Fort Sumter made him a hero almost immediately. The press pinned him with the label as one of the greatest soldiers in the world. He received lavish praise from Jefferson Davis and the Confederate Congress. A popular little saying about Beauregard circulated throughout the South which ran, "With cannon and musket, with shell and petard, we salute the North with our Beauregard."⁶

While Jefferson Davis may have publicly praised Beauregard, the two of them really did not get along. Davis rejected a plan submitted by Beauregard on June 12, 1861, concerning the upcoming battle of Bull Run. On July 17, just days prior to Bull Run, Beauregard asked Davis for reinforcements. Davis initially refused but eventually he granted Beauregard's request. As the friction between the two increased, Beauregard even allowed himself to be talked about as a presidential candidate.⁷

Despite any personal differences Davis may have had with Beauregard, he realized that the situation in the west needed some solutions. Near the end of January 1862, the Confederate government, with strong urging from the representatives of the Mississippi valley states, proposed sending Beauregard to help remedy the problems in the west.

Beauregard's inflated ego must have grown larger with this request. While he did not want to leave the army he fought with in Virginia, he agreed to the move if Davis agreed to increase the army in the west enough so that it could go on the offense, allow him to take his staff with him, and approve a return to the east after completing

the mission in the west. Colonel Roger A. Pryor, a member of the Military Committee of the Confederate Congress, told Beauregard that he (Pryor) was sure the president would meet all of his requests.⁸

It is debatable as to whether or not Davis sent Beauregard to the west out of genuine need or to get him out of way. It was probably a combination of both, in addition to the fact that sending a high profile name to the west would appease the members of Congress from the Mississippi valley states. Nevertheless, the stage was set for the first meeting between Beauregard and his new boss, Albert Sidney Johnston.

At this point, it is important to explore the mindset of the two generals at their first meeting. Georgia Congressman Robert Toombs wired Beauregard urging him not to go to the west. Beauregard replied, "Mississippi Valley in danger. I will be back in time for a move forward." Beauregard wrote Joe Johnston that he had to go west, but would be back as soon as he had the situation under control there.⁹ Beauregard was apparently thinking that he was sent West to get Johnston out of the mess he had created. In fact, when he discovered the situation in the west was worse than what the War Department described, Beauregard asked to return to Virginia. Johnston talked him out of this request.¹⁰ While he never publically criticized Johnston, he described his feelings in a letter to a friend when he wrote, "I am taking the helm when the ship is already on the breakers and with but few sailors to man it."¹¹ Beauregard's comment about "taking the helm" only reinforces the impression that Beauregard thought he went west to take control.

Johnston seemed to be overwhelmed by the situation in which he found himself. He therefore welcomed Beauregard's assignment. As far as Johnston was concerned, Beauregard was there to assist, not take over. Johnston never received any information to think otherwise. The

two met for the first time on February 4th. It is from this point on that the relationship between Johnston and Beauregard would range from mild disagreements to Beauregard doing what he wanted and Johnston not doing much to discourage him.

Beauregard recommended the evacuation of Bowling Green, Kentucky, and concentrating the troops around Forts Henry and Donelson. He was sure that one of the forts would be Grant's next target. It did not take long for the two to disagree on strategy. Johnston insisted on holding Bowling Green. He feared that evacuating Bowling Green would open Nashville to Buell. On February 6th, as Beauregard predicted, Grant attacked and took Fort Henry.¹²

After Donelson fell on February 12th, Johnston pulled back to Nashville. Johnston and Beauregard met at Nashville on February 14th. Johnston felt that the Confederate army must withdraw to a line south of the Tennessee River. Johnston also wanted to abandon Columbus, Kentucky. He instructed Beauregard to get approval from the War Department before making such a move. According to Beauregard, these troop movements were the only things discussed at that meeting. However, the pulling back of both wings of the army clearly develops the pattern that the two generals intended to join their forces for the defense of the Mississippi valley.¹³

Two days later on February 16th, Johnston revealed the way in which he chose to deal with Beauregard. He sent Beauregard a dispatch saying, "You must do as your judgement dictates. No orders for your troops have been issued from here." Johnston, on February 18th, again gave Beauregard the green light to act on his own: "You must act now as seems best to you. The separation of our armies is complete."¹⁴ With these messages, Johnston, in essence told Beauregard to do whatever he felt was necessary. This seemed to be just what Beauregard needed in order to begin gathering troops for the eventual Confederate offensive.

It became clear to both Johnston and Beauregard that they would have to concentrate all forces in the West if they were to have any chance at all of regaining control of the Mississippi valley. It is now the question as to whose idea it was to concentrate at Corinth, Mississippi, comes into play. The thought of concentrating the Confederate forces in the west came to Beauregard as early as February 14th. While not mentioning Corinth, he wrote in a letter to friend, "We must give up some minor points, and concentrate our forces, to save the most important ones, or we will lose all of them in succession."¹⁵ Beauregard maintains that on March 2nd, he originated the plan in a message to Johnston, "I think you ought to hurry your troops to Corinth by railroad, as soon as practicable, for there or thereabouts will soon be fought the great battle of this controversy."¹⁶

On the other hand, the argument is made that Corinth was the brainchild of Johnston as early as January. Even at that early stage of the Western campaign, it was obvious to Johnston that unless he received heavy reinforcements, he could not hold for long against Grant and Buell. Johnston is said to have remarked in January while pointing to a map, "Shiloh Church: Here is where the great battle of the Southwest will be fought." Also, Johnston sent a message dated February 12th instructing a brigade of troops under Brigadier General Ruggles to report to Corinth.¹⁷

It did not require a military genius to realize that Corinth would be Grant's next target. The posturing by Johnston and Beauregard loyalists as to whose idea it was to concentrate at Corinth seem almost pointless. A good transportation network was essential in order to concentrate their forces anywhere. With its railroad junction, Corinth was the obvious choice.

On February 21st, General Beauregard wrote the governors of Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, and Tennessee asking them to send what

troops they could to Corinth for the defense of the Mississippi valley. Beauregard also wrote to Braxton Bragg in Pensacola, Florida, asking him to come to Corinth and bring whatever troops he could. The tone of Beauregard's letter to Bragg left no doubt as to what Beauregard thought of concentrating troops at Corinth, "What say you to this brilliant program which I know is fully practicable, if we can get the forces?"¹⁸ In this instance, Beauregard was rightfully patting himself on the back. At this time, Johnston was still tied up getting his troops down from Murfreesboro. Relative to all the troops in the theatre, Johnston was dealing with a small amount of soldiers. He was in no position to orchestrate a major concentration of his Army. Had Beauregard not taken the initiative in asking for troops from the states, the Confederates would not have been able to launch an attack.

Johnston's conduct during this phase of the Western campaign seems to be more like that of a division or corps commander instead of a department commander. Rather than placing himself where he could direct all forces in the west, he personally oversaw the movement of 17,000 troops from Nashville to Corinth.¹⁹ One spin on Johnston's seeming micromanaging of his right wing was that the recent string of bad news, coupled with the harsh criticism hurled against him, caused him to become "stunned and paralyzed" and unable to determine a logical strategic course.²⁰ Other critics claim that Johnston should have been trying to gather forces from other states and General Hardee could have moved the troops from Nashville to Corinth. Johnston had previously attempted a concentration similar to what Beauregard was conducting. However, Johnston's attempts to get reinforcements from the Confederate government fell on deaf ears. So, it is possible that Johnston simply did not think to ask for more reinforcements since the government denied his first request.²¹

Johnston's reasons for remaining with his right wing were perhaps to serve as an inspiration to some dejected soldiers rather than micromanaging. He was determined to restore the confidence of his men. His efforts paid off. He imposed strict march discipline and moved the defeated soldiers with surprising deliberation. So while critics have panned Johnston for this move, he deserves praise for bringing the soldiers to Corinth with relative ease.²² With Johnston, Beauregard, Bragg and troops closing from surrounding states, the stage was set for the concentration of almost 44,000 Confederate soldiers at Corinth, just 21 miles away from Grant's gathering force at Pittsburgh Landing.

Endnotes

¹Sword, Shiloh, 51.

²James Lee McDough, Shiloh-In Hell Before Night (Knoxville, The University of Tennessee Press, 1977), 6. (Hereafter cited as McDough, Shiloh.)

³Charles Roman, Albert Sidney Johnston-Soldier of Three Republics (Austin Texas: University of Texas Press, 1964), 280-282. (Hereafter cited as Roland, Johnston.)

⁴Sword, Shiloh, 59.

⁵Ibid., 9.

⁶T. Harry Williams, P.G.T. Beauregard-Napoleon in Gray, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1955), 62. (Hereafter cited as Williams, Beauregard.)

⁷Gamaliel Bradford, Confederate Portraits, (Boston and New York: Houghton and Mifflin Co., 1914), 103. (Hereafter cited as Bradford, Confederate Portraits.)

⁸Alfred Roman, The Military Operations of General Beauregard (New York: Da Capo Press, 1884), 211-212. (Hereafter cited as Roman, Beauregard.)

⁹Williams, Beauregard, 114.

¹⁰Sword, Shiloh, 64.

¹¹Ibid., 65.

¹²Williams, Beauregard, 118-119.

¹³Roland, Johnston, 300-301.

¹⁴McDough, Shiloh, 64-65.

¹⁵Roman, Beauregard, 120.

¹⁶Ibid., 248.

¹⁷William Johnston, The Life of Albert Sidney Johnston (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1878), 489, 539. (Hereafter cited as Johnston, Johnston.)

¹⁸Roman, Beauregard, 242.

¹⁹Williams, Beauregard, 122-123.

²⁰Roland, Johnston, 303.

²¹Ibid., 302.

²²Ibid., 303-304.

CHAPTER 3
MARCH 5-APRIL 5, 1862

The concentration of troops for the defense of the Mississippi valley finally began gathering steam. In response to Beauregard's request, the governor of Louisiana gathered 90 day units to send to Corinth. Louisiana sent two battalions and one regiment, all infantry, for Beauregard's use. Tragically, the first casualties of Shiloh occurred long before the shooting began. Mississippi sent the 7th Mississippi to Corinth for the upcoming battle. As the 7th's train neared Amite, Louisiana, it rammed head on with a log train. Dismembered bodies littered the accident scene. The accident killed twenty-two men.¹

The troops gathering at Corinth were as raw and undisciplined as any could be. Johnston appointed Braxton Bragg, Chief of Staff, and on his shoulders laid the task to train and discipline the soldiers at Corinth. General Bragg referred to the men as, "the mobs we have miscalled soldiers." He found "disorder and confusion" among the troops at Corinth. While Johnston and Beauregard were still trying to get their troops to Corinth, Bragg tried to bring some order to the chaos he encountered.²

Bragg had a reputation of being a strict disciplinarian. Some of the stories about his method of discipline bordered on fantasy. One soldier claimed that Bragg's name became a "terror to deserters and evil-doers." Another soldier claimed that Bragg hanged sixteen men from a single tree. One incident that has some truth to it concerning Bragg's disciplinary tactics occurred shortly after Shiloh. A drunken

soldier reportedly fired at a chicken and wounded a black child by accident. Bragg tried the soldier by court martial and had him executed. The story that the soldiers circulated was that Bragg had a soldier executed for shooting nothing more than a chicken.³ Bragg's stern disciplinary tactics sometimes clouded his tactical decision making. This flaw would show itself in Bragg's actions against a union position at Shiloh.

Bragg's greatest talents lay in his organizational and administrative capabilities. Bragg and Beauregard would probably have been more useful had they traded jobs. Coordinating movements and communication, gathering stragglers, and sending up reserves and supplies were Bragg's real talents. The role reversal would have allowed Beauregard, a more experienced combat commander, to command the South's largest corps at Shiloh.⁴

As the troops began gathering at Corinth the confusion between Beauregard and Johnston as to who exactly was in charge began to take shape. Officially, Johnston was still the Department commander in the west. Beauregard was second in command. On March 5, while still trying to close on Corinth, Beauregard issued a memorandum assuming command of the Army of the Mississippi, "I assume command of the Army of the Mississippi, for the defense of our homes and liberties and to resist the subjugation, spoliation and dishonor of our people."⁵ There is no evidence to suggest that Johnston approved such an appointment or that Beauregard ever made such a request. It is true that Beauregard was not technically usurping Johnston's authority since he was not assuming command of the department. However, by writing memorandum that assumed command of the soldiers gathering at Corinth, he had to have confused some of them as to who was really in charge. Beauregard's rationale for such a move was that the new arrivals at Corinth and the risk that Grant might strike early dictated the immediate necessity for some kind of

command structure.⁶ It is doubtful that Beauregard would intentionally try to upstage Johnston by writing such a document. His intentions probably were honorable. However, Beauregard's choice of words could have been a little more discreet. But Beauregard was never known for being overly humble or discreet.

Johnston closed on Corinth on March 23. What happened shortly after his arrival was one of the most perplexing moments in the Shiloh drama. Johnston offered command of all troops in the field to Beauregard. Johnston offered to limit his functions to that of Department Commander, his official title. Johnston's reasons for this offer was that the army and the public had lost faith in him and that Beauregard would be better suited for the position. Beauregard declined the offer in what he described as "a spirit of disinterestedness and generosity."⁷ He detailed the scene in a letter he wrote to Johnston's son after the war:

When General Johnston first met me at Corinth, he proposed, after our staff officers had retired, to turn over the command of the united forces to me; but I positively declined, on his account and that of the "cause," telling him that I had come to assist, but not to supersede him, and offering to give him all the assistance in my power. He then concluded to remain in command. It was one of the most affecting scenes of my life.⁸

Another possible reason for the offer was that Beauregard was already on the scene at Corinth and Johnston thought Beauregard would be slighted by taking a back seat now that Johnston arrived. Johnston was willing to give up any laurels won at Shiloh in order to regain control of the Mississippi valley.⁹ On the surface, this was the supreme act of unselfishness.

A more realistic view of the offer to Beauregard was that it resulted in the loss of confidence in Johnston. He was well aware of the attacks made on him in the press, and he knew full well that some of the troops shared this view. A high profile name like Beauregard would, indeed raise confidence in the ranks. Johnston was motivated more by

his concern for the soldiers rather than Beauregard's ego.

One final question regarding this offer to Beauregard is this: Did Johnston ever see the memorandum Beauregard wrote on 5 March in which he took command of the Army of the Mississippi? The assumption has to be made that Johnston never saw the memorandum, or else he would not have made his offer. It is also likely that Beauregard never told Johnston about the memorandum. Had he done so, the situation would have been extremely awkward. Why offer command of an army to someone who already assumed it?

Johnston and Beauregard both knew that time was precious. Johnston allowed Beauregard, as second in command, to organize the army for the upcoming offensive. Beauregard divided the army into three corps. The first was commanded by General Leonidas Polk; the second was under General Braxton Bragg, and the third was commanded by General William Hardee. General John Brekinridge commanded the reserve division.¹⁰ Up to this point, Johnston delegated all important issues to Beauregard. This habit of allowing Beauregard to handle everything would soon backfire on Johnston during the planning phase of the attack on Grant.

Special Order Number 8

The most confusing twist concerning Shiloh reared its ugly head regarding the actual plan of battle. April 3, 1862 has proven to be one of the most controversial days in the entire war. On the evening of April 2nd, Beauregard received information that a Federal division, thought to be that of Lew Wallace, was closing with Grant. He knew that the Rebels could no longer wait for the army to get any better trained. Beauregard had the army's adjutant general Colonel Thomas Jordan, hand

deliver a message to Johnston which read, "Now is the moment to advance and strike the enemy at Pittsburg Landing."

Johnston wired Jefferson Davis on April 3rd informing him that he would attack Grant at Pittsburgh Landing before he could join forces with Buell. Johnston also specified in the same message the attack formation would be Polk on the left, Hardee in the center, Bragg on the right, and Breckinridge in reserve.¹¹ Also, that same day, Johnston wrote a memorandum to all corps commanders regarding his intent for the coming battle: "In the approaching battle every effort should be made to turn the left flank of the enemy so as to cut off his line of retreat to the Tennessee River and throw him back on Owl Creek, where he will be obliged to surrender."¹² Placing Bragg, his largest corps, on the Confederate right is consistent with Johnston's intention of turning the Union left. The actual order of battle, dated April 3 and written by Beauregard, has the army attacking with the three corps in successive lines, instead of in sectors, and makes no mention of turning the enemy left.¹³

How did the disconnect occur between Johnston's stated intention and the actual plan? To find the answer, one has to go back to when Johnston first found out that Grant was receiving reinforcements. He and Colonel Jordan took the information and went to Bragg's quarters. Bragg seconded Beauregard's recommendation of attacking Grant. Johnston, on the other hand, expressed doubts as to the readiness of the army to carry out such a complex operation. Colonel Jordan reminded Johnston that his army was as strong as it would ever get in the foreseeable future and that Grant would only get stronger with each passing day.

Johnston finally agreed and authorized Jordan to give preparatory orders to move. Jordan wrote these orders in Bragg's quarters in the form of a circular to the corps commanders. The

circular ordered each corps to be prepared to move at any time with forty rounds of ammunition and three days cooked rations in each haversack. The commanders received this order at 1:40 A.M. on April 3rd. At 7:00 A.M. that same day, Jordan went to Beauregard's quarters where Beauregard had already written general notes for the upcoming operation. Jordan took these notes and drew up the order of march and battle issued in the name of General Johnston.

As Jordan was writing the order, Johnston and Bragg entered the room. Beauregard explained the order to Johnston and he drew a sketch of the terrain on a table to make it easier to understand. Beauregard, Johnston, and Bragg discussed the plan and decided to make the move as Beauregard recommended. Polk and Hardee entered the room somewhere in the middle of the conversation concerning the plan. The meeting broke up with the understanding that written orders would take some time to write and that the corps commanders would have to move on oral orders.¹⁴

In Johnston's biography, written by his son, a different picture is painted concerning the events of April 3rd. He makes the case that Johnston made his intent clear and Beauregard took it upon himself to change the plan. Johnston's son claims that his father made the difficult strategic decision to attack and trusting Beauregard to write the order was not unusual.¹⁵ In other words, according to his son, Johnston was out of the loop regarding the actual content of the order while Beauregard was writing it.

If this is true, then Johnston's habit of delegating details to subordinate commanders went too far. A lot of things can and should be delegated to subordinate commanders. However, deciding how to conduct an attack which could potentially regain control of the Mississippi Valley is not one of them.

Braxton Bragg somewhat backs up the Johnston version. In a letter to Johnston's son after the war, Bragg claims that it was, in

fact, General Johnston's intent to turn the Union left. Bragg maintains that Beauregard, "muddled the details and Johnston hesitated to rearrange the troops on the eve of the battle."¹⁶

The only thing that is certain is that a meeting did take place in the early morning hours of April 3. Beyond that, its debatable as to what really happened. Johnston probably did make the decision to attack, and he may have made some reference as to the specifics of his intent. The assumption has to be made that he did so because his memorandum to the corps commanders came attached to the order itself.¹⁷ Beauregard would have had a difficult time trying to justify ignoring his superior's plan, especially since there were other officers in the room witnessing the discussion.

While Johnston may have been specific about turning the Union left, he probably did not get specific as to how to array the forces for the battle. He must have left that up to Beauregard's discretion, which would account for the poor attack formation. Why, then did Beauregard choose the attack formation of successive waves instead of three corps abreast? One possible reason is that in some of his studies before the war, Beauregard learned that the British army was fond of attacking in waves.¹⁸

On the morning of the April 4, Johnston did see the published order for battle and did not alter it.¹⁹ One can only speculate as to why he did not then ask about the plan ignoring his intent. It is very important to note that the fact that he did not change it implies that he approved it. Johnston apologists argue that he knew the battle would depend on the "way in which the troops were handled."²⁰ Whether or not Johnston paid any attention to details or Beauregard's huge ego prompted him to ignore his superior, one thing is unmistakably clear: Johnston was the supreme commander, he read the order at least forty eight hours

prior to the battle, and he did not change it. Therefore, on Johnston's shoulders must lie the responsibility for the plan.

Sometime in the middle of the afternoon of April 3, three hours late, the Confederate army moved out toward Pittsburgh Landing. Hardee's corps was supposed to move first but for some unknown reason, he would not move until he had written orders in his hand.²¹ Consequently, Hardee's delay held up the entire army. The plan called for the army to march almost twenty miles and be deployed in line of battle late on the morning of the 4th (see fig. 2). A movement like that was a tall order for seasoned troops. Many of these soldiers had less than two weeks training and had never forced marched before. According to the plan, Hardee should have reached a house known as Mickey's, eight miles from Shiloh, by the night of April 3. Hardee did not make it until the morning of the 4th. Bragg's corps, marching to the east of Hardee, lost even more time. Bragg was supposed to reach Mickey's the afternoon of the third. However, Bragg did not reach Mickey's until the morning of the fourth.

It does not get any less confusing, as the movement progresses. One of Bragg's divisions was to pass in front of Polk's corps at the intersection of the Purdy and Ridge roads. As the march progressed, Bragg thought that since he was moving slower than expected, and since Polk had a shorter distance to cover, he (Polk) would be wasting time waiting for Bragg at the road intersection. In an effort to avoid delaying Polk, Bragg went straight to Mickey's on the Monterey and Savannah roads instead of on the Purdy road. The only problem with this noble gesture was that Polk followed the plan and waited for Bragg's division at the intended road intersection. Polk waited for three hours before one of Bragg's couriers finally reached him and told him of Bragg's move.²² To add to the Confederates problems, the rains came on the afternoon of the fourth slowing down the troops even more.

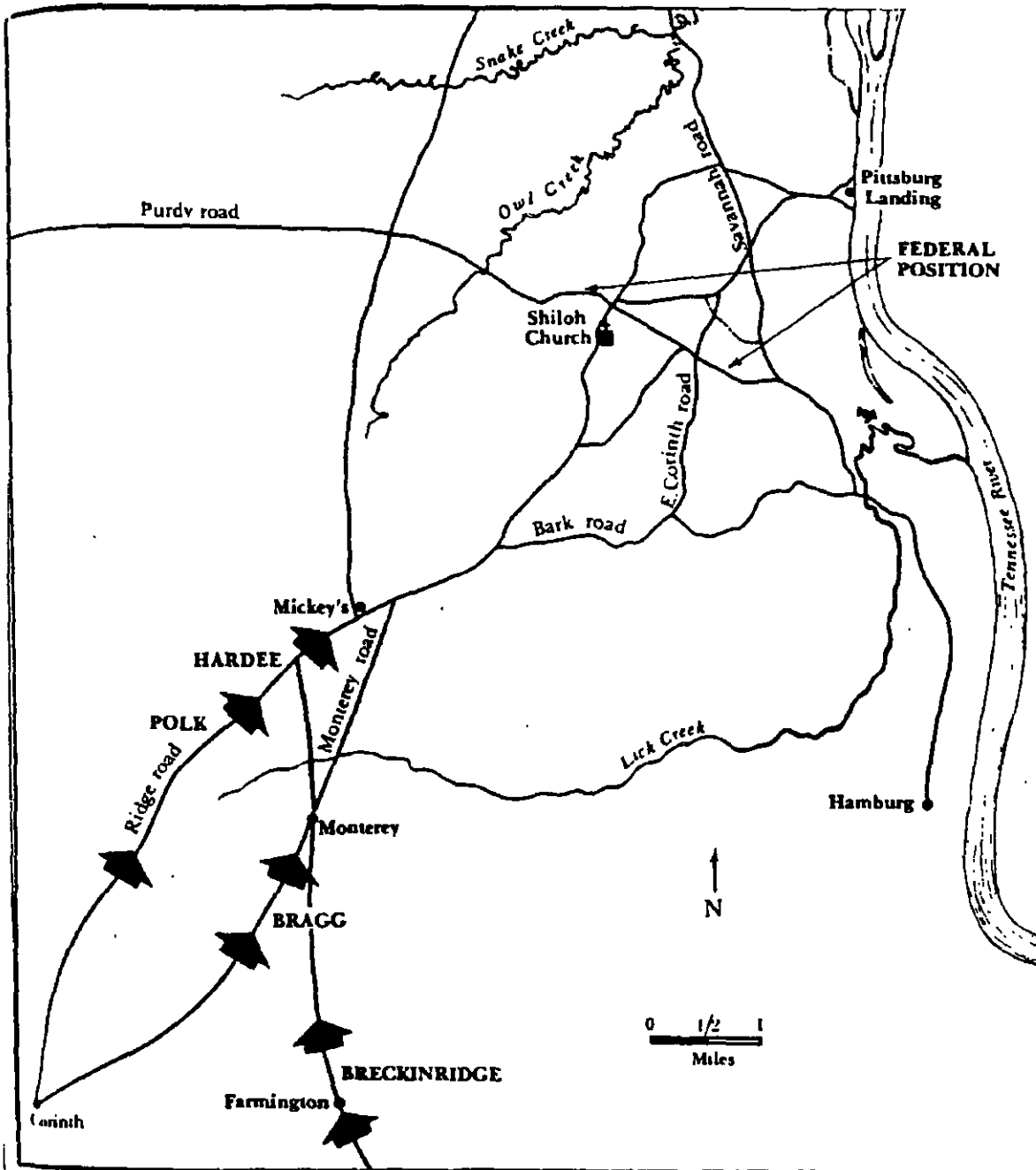


Fig. 2. Route of Confederate Advance on Pittsburg Landing. Reprinted, by permission, from James L. McDonough, *Shiloh-In Hell Before Night*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977), 71.

Johnston departed Corinth on the morning of April 4th. He used Mrs. Inge's "Rose Cottage" as his headquarters while at Corinth. Mrs. Inge recalled years later that Johnston thanked her for her hospitality and started for the door. He then paused at the door, thought for a moment and looked up and said, "Yes, I believe I have overlooked nothing."²¹

Johnston arrived at Monterey about 1:00 P.M. and discovered the delays of his army. That evening, Johnston and his commanders decided to launch the attack at 8:00 A.M. on the morning of the fifth. They learned from captured Union prisoners that the North was not suspecting any attack. So, Johnston was still optimistic about the attack.

After they issued the orders for the attack, Johnston and his corps commanders tried to get some sleep. At about 2:00 on the morning of the fifth, a driving rain began. At 3:00 A.M., Bragg tried to get his soldiers in line for battle. The hard rains turned the roads into pools of mud. The dark of night and impassable roads forced Bragg to wait for first light to attempt any kind of preparations for battle.²⁴ As Bragg waited for first light, he heard intermittent firing of what he assumed were, "undisciplined troops . . . in violation of positive orders."²⁵ He later learned that some of Hardee's men turned back an attack by some Union pickets. The element of surprise, so critical to the South's plan, was in jeopardy.

When there was enough light to see, Bragg deployed his corps about eight hundred yards behind Hardee's. The size of Bragg's corps, mud clogged roads, and wooded terrain made Bragg's deployment slow to a crawl. Polk's troops were blocking one of the roads Bragg needed to get his corps on line, so Polk had to move to let Bragg pass. By this time, it was almost 10:00 A.M. During all this confusion Hardee notified Johnston that his corps was not big enough to cover the entire front. Bragg sent one of his brigades to Hardee's right in order to fill out

the line. The detachment of one of Bragg's brigades to Hardee was the first indication that the attack formation was flawed. One corps was not large enough to cover the entire front. Dividing the front into sectors would have prevented this. One thing did go right for the Confederates in all this chaos; the sun broke through and started drying off the soaked troops.²⁶

During various intervals on the fourth and fifth, Johnston ordered an address read aloud to each regiment. He wanted to impress upon the soldiers the critical part of the survival of their country they were responsible for achieving. It did stir deep emotion in many of the soldiers. The last paragraph of Johnston's heartfelt address reads as follows:

The eyes and hopes of eight million people rest upon you; you are expected to show yourself worthy of your lineage, worthy of the women of the South, whose noble devotion in this war has never been exceeded in any time. With such incentives to brave deeds, and the trust that God is with us, your generals will lead you confidently to the combat-assured of success.²⁷

The Council of War

It was painfully obvious to Johnston that there was no hope of attacking on the fifth. His army did not get fully deployed until late that afternoon. In a road just behind the Confederate lines, Beauregard met with Bragg, and the two began discussing whether or not the attack should still proceed. Beauregard felt that the delays were costly to the South's element of surprise. Polk joined Beauregard and Bragg and said that despite the delays, the attack should proceed.²⁸ The discussion attracted the attention of Johnston. Beauregard strongly recommended calling off the attack. Beauregard claimed that the Federals, "will be entrenched to the eyes." He felt that the delays and the sporadic firing of weapons had compromised the crucial element of surprise.²⁹ Johnston ended all debate on the issue by declaring, "We

shall attack tomorrow at daylight." As the council broke up, Johnston remarked to his aide, "I would fight them if they were a million."³⁰

Researchers and students of the battle have generally panned Beauregard for wanting to call off the attack. Most come to the conclusion that he lost his nerve. Beauregard claims that what he really recommended was a reconnaissance in force to lure the Federals away from Pittsburgh Landing where they could be attacked closer to the Confederate base at Corinth.³¹ Unfortunately for Beauregard, he is the only person who remembers making such a recommendation. In the reports written by the other generals present at that council of war, no mention is made of Beauregard's recommendation.

Beauregard had sound tactical reasons for wanting to call off the attack. He should have been right concerning the loss of surprise. The raw Confederate troops fired their weapons into the air just to see if they worked. It was almost as if they were trying to attract the attention of the Federal army.³² Wanting to call off the attack resulted from sound tactical decision making rather than a loss of nerve. On the other hand, Beauregard must have realized that not attacking would allow Grant and Buell to join forces which was the very thing he and Johnston wanted to prevent.

In other words, tactically, Beauregard was correct; strategically, the situation in the west would only get worse with the passing of time. Johnston's army was as big as it was going to get in the foreseeable future. Johnston realized that this was the only opportunity the South would have for turning the tide in the west.

Another possible reason for Johnston's resolve on the eve of the battle was that perhaps he sensed Grant's overconfidence. After all, everything had gone wrong for Johnston in the Western theater up to that time. It is easy to see why any commander enjoying the string of successes that Grant did in the weeks leading up to Shiloh could have

developed a case of overconfidence.³³ This overconfidence would almost cost Grant his Army the following day.

After the council of war, Johnston retired to his tent alone. His mind must have been cluttered with thoughts of the upcoming battle: Had I forgotten anything? What if Beauregard is right? What exactly are the numbers of Grant's forces? Are they entrenched? As he drifted off to sleep, surely his mind went back to his wife and children in California. Perhaps his thoughts went back to the last letter he wrote to his wife. In January of that same year, he wrote:

The boys must go on in their studies and be encouraged to read history & other proper works of literature and as far as possible be prepared for the station they will be called on to fill when they are old enough to enter the arena of life. Kiss each boy & each girl. I shall love the youngest better if you give her your own name-May God bless you and them & preserve you free from all harm.³⁴

The night of April 5th would be the last night of sleep of Johnston's life.

Endnotes

- ¹Cunningham, Shiloh, 129.
- ²Grady McWhiney, Braxton Bragg and Confederate Defeat, (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1969), 211. (Hereafter cited as McWhiney, Bragg.)
- ³McDonough, Shiloh, 16.
- ⁴McWhiney, Bragg, 224.
- ⁵OR, X, part 2, 297.
- ⁶Roman, Beauregard, 249.
- ⁷Ibid., 266.
- ⁸Johnston, Johnston, 549.
- ⁹Ibid., 550.
- ¹⁰Cunningham, Shiloh, 138.
- ¹¹OR, X, part 2, 387.
- ¹²OR, X, part 1, 397.
- ¹³Ibid., 392-395.
- ¹⁴Southern Historical Society Papers, Vol VIII, 410-412.
- ¹⁵Johnston, Johnston, 554-555.
- ¹⁶McWhiney, Bragg, 223.
- ¹⁷Stacey Allen, Historian, Shiloh National Military Park, Telephone Interview by author, January 28, 1995.
- ¹⁸Charles Roland, Professor of History, University of Kentucky, Telephone Interview by author, January 30, 1995.
- ¹⁹Buell and Johnson, eds., Battles and Leaders, 554.
- ²⁰Ibid., 553.
- ²¹McDonough, Shiloh, 76.
- ²²Ibid., 77.
- ²³Sword, Shiloh, 102-103.
- ²⁴Ibid., 103.
- ²⁵McWhiney, Bragg, 221.

²⁶Ibid., 225.

²⁷Johnston, Johnston, 566.

²⁸OR, X, part 1, 407.

²⁹Roland, Johnston, 323.

³⁰Johnston, Johnston, 569, 571.

³¹Roman, Beauregard, 278.

³²McDonough, Shiloh, 82.

³³Roland, Johnston, 328.

³⁴Ibid., 278.

CHAPTER 4

APRIL 6, 1862, 4:55-11:30 A.M.

The terrain around the Shiloh battlefield consists of randomly scattered fields and winding cowpaths. It is bordered to the north by the Snake Creek and to the northwest by the Owl Creek. The Bark Road and Lick Creek are on the battlefield's southern border and the Tennessee River is to the East. As for elevation, the battlefield is covered with steep ravines which make operations difficult for cavalry and artillery operations. One significant terrain feature to keep in mind is the Dill Branch about 600 yards south of Pittsburgh Landing. Going toward the landing, Dill Branch slopes sharply upwards and is heavily wooded.

The weather on the morning of April sixth was cool and clear. The Confederate army was arrayed in four successive corps (see Fig. 3). At about 3:00 A.M., a reconnaissance party from the 25th Missouri and the 12th Michigan from Peabody's brigade, Prentiss' division, started out along the Corinth-Pittsburgh Road and eventually came into a clearing called Fraley's Field. Major A. B. Hardcastle's 3rd Mississippi Battalion was on picket duty on the northwest corner of Fraley Field.

Just before daybreak Johnston and his staff were drinking coffee and eating a breakfast of cold biscuits. Union prisoners captured the previous evening confirmed that the North did not suspect an attack. Amazingly, Beauregard still argued against the operation. At 4:55 A.M., the Federals and Confederates fired on each other at

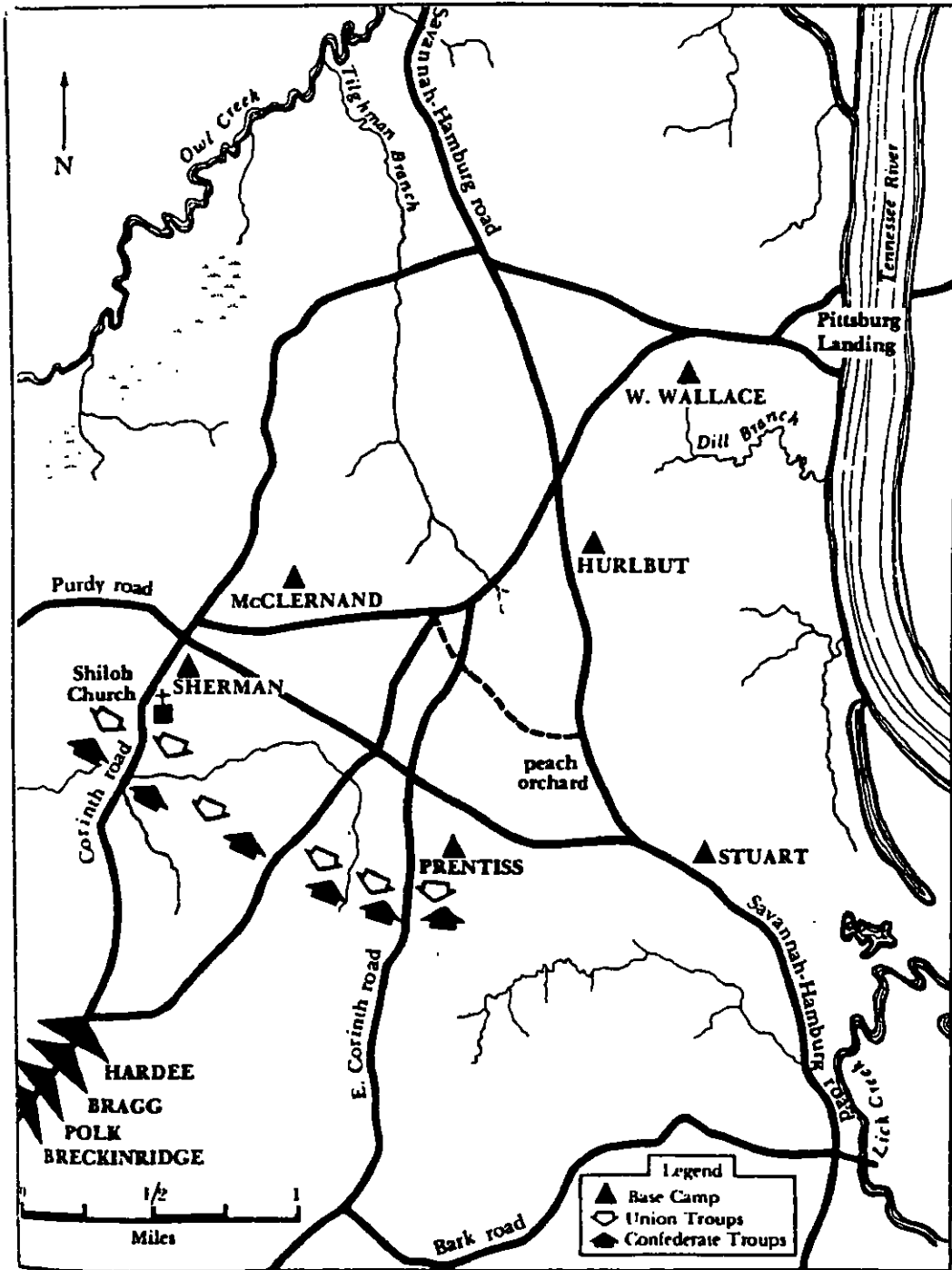


Fig. 3. Confederate Armies Advance on Federal Positions, 5:00 to 8:00 A.M., April 6, 1862. Reprinted by permission from James L. McDonough, *Shiloh-In Hell Before Night*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977), 89.

Fraley Field. Hearing these shots, Johnson said, "The battle has opened, gentlemen, it is too late to change our disposition now."² Johnston then told Beauregard to stay in the rear and oversee the movement of troops and supplies to the front.³

At this point, it is important to get a clear understanding of what exactly Beauregard and Johnston did as the battle opened. Johnston rode to, "where the firing was heaviest."⁴ Johnston's exact instructions to Beauregard are the source of some debate. Beauregard claims that Johnston left the control of the battle up to him, or as Beauregard puts it, "as the exigencies of the battle might arise."⁵

If Beauregard's version of his last with meeting with Johnston is true, then Johnston relegated himself to the role of a cheerleader and left control up to Beauregard. It is doubtful that Johnston intended that. Not only would that leave Johnston with nothing to do, but it would leave control of the battle to someone located in the rear of the army. Most likely, what Johnston had in mind was to press the attack in the front while Beauregard controlled troops in the rear, particularly the corps of Polk and Breckenridge.⁶

At around 7:00 A.M., Beauregard ordered Generals Polk and Breckinridge forward. He told them to maintain a proper distance from Bragg's line and separate from each other. Beauregard told them to commit themselves where needed or to "move upon the sound of the heaviest firing."⁷ Notice that the orders Beauregard gave did not mention Johnston's main effort on the Union left.

Johnston rode forward to the front line. He shouted words of encouragement to the soldiers as he rode. To one of his regimental commanders, he uttered a prophetic sentence, "My son, we must this day conquer or perish!"⁸ Johnston shouted encouragement to an Arkansas regiment saying, "Men of Arkansas, they say you boast of prowess with a bowie knife. Today you wield a nobler weapon-the bayonet. Employ it

well."⁹ While Johnston may be faulted for his organizational and planning skills, his dedication and valor at Shiloh never wavered.

The initial assault of the Confederates consisted of four brigades of infantry in Hardee's corps. On Hardee's left was the brigade of Patrick Cleburne. His unit tried moving through a wooded slope of ground just south of Shiloh Church. As they moved into a clearing, they were met by devastating musket and artillery fire from units of Sherman's division.¹⁰ Cleburne described his unit as being, "under an iron storm that threatened certain destruction to every living thing that dare cross them."¹¹ Major J. T. Harris led his 15th Arkansas regiment to within pistol range before being shot. The 6th Mississippi regiment displayed uncommon bravery. The unit repeatedly charged Sherman's position and only withdrew when it lost 300 of its 425 men.¹²

Johnston briefly visited Cleburne's brigade. Seeing that Cleburne was experiencing great difficulty in breaking Sherman's line, Johnston sent to Beauregard for two more brigades to support Cleburne. Beauregard ordered three brigades from Breckenridge's corps to support Cleburne. However, a courier came from Johnston with news that Sherman began falling back, so Beauregard sent only one brigade to Cleburne. The other two brigades of Breckenridge's division he sent to the Confederate right. The time of Breckenridge's commitment was around 8:30 A.M.¹³ So, by 8:30 A.M. the Confederates had all their troops either engaged or with orders to engage. With only three and one half hours gone into the battle, the Confederates used all their reserves.

The decision to commit the reserves at such an early stage in the battle was confusing to say the least. When Johnston asked for reinforcements to help break Sherman's line, he did not specify Breckenridge's reserves. By that time, units from Polk's corps already received orders to engage in the sector held by Sherman. Beauregard was going to commit the army's last reserves to a sector that just got

reinforced. After seeing that Cleburne received his reinforcements, Johnston rode to the right where the rest of Hardee's corps overran Prentiss' first position. The abandoned enemy camp gave every indication that the South took the Federals by surprise. Breakfast still lay on tables, bags remain unpacked, arms, ammunition, colors and other supplies lay untouched.¹⁴ Johnston sharply reprimanded his troops for pilfering the federal's personal belongings. As he sent the looting soldiers forward, he picked up a small tin cup and said to an officer, "Let this be my share of the spoils today."¹⁵ At about the same time, terrified Union prisoners walking past Johnston threw themselves at his feet begging for mercy. Johnston spoke softly to them saying, "Why men, you don't suppose we kill prisoners do you? Go to the rear and you will be safe there."¹⁶

In a move that would later cost him his life, Johnston sent his surgeon, Dr. D. W. Yandell to care for the wounds of the prisoners. Yandell protested, saying that his proper place was with Johnston. Johnston assured the doctor that he would tell him when he was ready to move. In his haste, Johnston left the doctor. In just a few more hours, Johnston's haste would be fatal.¹⁷

The rest of Hardee's units were on the Confederate right. The gap between Cleburne and Hardee's other units was around 700 yards. The time was between 7:30 A.M. and 8:30 A.M. Already, Confederate units began losing continuity. Beauregard's faulty attack formation forced corps commanders to cover the entire front. The gaps in the line and intermingling of commands would not have been as severe if the corps had to cover only one part on the battlefield.

Deaths from friendly fire also became an unfortunate result of Beauregard's faulty attack formation. One such incident occurred in one of Hardee's other brigades. Brigadier General S.A.M. Wood's brigade was in the process of attacking an enemy position, when they received fire

from the rear. The first volley of friendly fire killed five in Wood's brigade. His troops tried hiding behind logs but their effort was futile as they now received fire from both directions. Wood rode back trying to stop the Confederate troops from firing on his unit. The last volley of friendly fire shot Wood's horse out from under him. Wood's horse dragged him several hundred yards before he could free himself.¹⁸

Meanwhile, Johnston and his staff met with Hardee and his staff near the abandoned camp of the 18th Wisconsin. The two rode forward to scout the next enemy position. The large cluster of mounted officers caught the eye of a Union battery commander. Some well aimed shells forced Johnston and his entourage to move back down the hill.

By now, the time was almost 9:30 AM. A courier arrived at Johnston's location with a critical message, Captain Lockett's report of the situation on the extreme Confederate right. General Bragg sent Lockett, his chief engineer, on a reconnaissance of the Federal left at 4:00 A.M. that morning. Bragg's ordering of this reconnaissance lends more credence to the contention that Johnston did intend to make the Confederate right the main effort. Unfortunately for the South, this was the only serious reconnaissance of the Union positions.

Lockett took a squad of cavalry with him and rode along the Bark road gathering all information about the Union dispositions in the area. Lockett wisely took Lieutenant S. M. Steel with him. Steel surveyed the area before the war and was familiar with it. Lockett managed to sneak past the Federal pickets and observed one lone brigade under Colonel David Stuart. Lockett and Steel twice scouted Stuart's position and saw nothing but the normal camp routine taking place.¹⁹

Lockett tried to view the Union position a third time. By this time, the battle could be heard to the left. Stuart's brigade began taking battle positions as they sounded the long roll. Lockett retreated for fear of being discovered. After Lockett reached the

cavalry squad that accompanied him, he tried to have one last look at the Union position near the river. Lockett found some ground where he could get a good view of Stuart's position. As the firing of the battle drew closer, Lockett, "began to fear that the division in front of me would swing around and take our forces from the flank, as it was manifest that the Federal line extended farther in that direction than ours."⁷⁰

Lockett made a crucial mistake. He reported Stuart's unit as a division instead of a brigade. Fearing that what he thought was a division would flank the Confederates, Lockett went himself to find Johnston to inform him of the situation. Around 11:00 A.M., Lockett found Johnston and begged to make a report of the situation on the right. Johnston told Lockett that he received a report concerning the right earlier that morning. When Johnston discovered he was talking with the man who wrote the report, he asked for an update. Lockett confirmed his earlier report of what he thought was a division under Stuart. Earlier that morning at 9:30 A.M., Johnston sent for Breckenridge's corps based on Lockett's initial report. Since it was after 11:00 A.M. and there was no sign of Breckenridge, Johnston sent Lockett to find him.

The Real Lost Opportunity

If the South lost any opportunity for victory at Shiloh, it occurred during the delay waiting for Breckenridge. Had Lockett's report of 9:30 A.M. been accurate, it is very possible that Johnston would have attacked Stuart's position at least one hour earlier than he actually did. The brigades of Chalmers and Gladden could have overrun the understrength brigade of Stuart. Had this happened, the Federal army would have been flanked, and the chances for victory for the South would have greatly increased. Lockett's reconnaissance and subsequent

inaccurate reports exposed a major flaw in the South's preparation for the battle. Neither Johnston nor Beauregard made any serious attempt at confirming enemy dispositions prior to the battle. They may have feared that a reconnaissance patrol would have compromised the element of surprise. However, as Beauregard correctly pointed out during the council of war, the noise made by the main body should have alerted the Federals of the South's presence. If a reconnaissance had been sent out following the council of war to confirm or deny Beauregard's fears, Johnston would have had the information regarding Stuart as the battle opened instead of 9:30 A.M. He, therefore, had to assume that an entire division was trying to flank him.

One has to wonder about Johnston's planning process in turning the Federal left. By this point, he obviously had every intention of doing so since he committed Breckinridge to that area. Beauregard committed one of Breckinridge's brigades earlier in the morning in Bragg's sector, so Johnston only had two reserve brigades to accomplish his stated intent. Since Breckenridge was in the rear of the army when the battle opened, it would take him that much longer to commit himself anywhere since he would have to go around the rest of the army. Placing him on the right, possibly on the Bark Road, would have allowed him to move to the right much faster. Beauregard's attack formation only slowed the process of moving troops to where they were needed most.

One fact vividly points out the confusion the Confederate commanders displayed in trying to turn the Federal left. When the battle opened, the South had only four brigades on the right. On the Rebel left and center, there were fourteen brigades. By the way they arrayed their forces, it appeared as if the South was trying to do the exact opposite of what Johnston wanted. This resulted in pushing the Federals into Pittsburgh Landing instead of away from it.²¹

While Johnston was trying to turn the Federal left, Beauregard sent Adjutant General, Colonel Thompson, to find Johnston and seek instructions. Thompson found Johnston just as the information regarding Stuart's "division" became known. What Johnston told Thompson only served to increase the confusion between the two senior commanders. Johnston gave Thompson the following message to give to Beauregard:

Say to Gen Beauregard we are sweeping the field before us and in less than half an hour we will be in possession of their camps, and I think we will push them to the river. Say also to a scout, or messenger, that the enemy is moving up in force on our left . . . Do not say to Gen Beauregard that this is an order, but he must act on what additional information he may receive.²²

With these words, Johnston essentially told Beauregard to do whatever he thought was best. It is almost as if Johnston divorced himself from the rest of the battle. Beauregard was now controlling the lion's share of the army while Johnston was commanding five brigades on the Confederate right. Also, Johnston's choice of words in his message to Beauregard are interesting. Did the phrase, "push them into the river," indicate a change in his intent? Was Johnston now saying that he wanted to push Grant into Pittsburg Landing instead of pushing him away from it and into the Snake Creek? Probably not, since Johnston was placing his attention on turning the Union left. However, Johnston should have been clearer as to what he wanted.

The rest of the battle was not going according to plan. The Confederates were successful in pushing back the Federals, but the success was sporadic. Hardee, on the left, was advancing quicker than the rest of the army. The result was that the Federals were being pushed back into Pittsburgh Landing instead of away from it. This problem can be traced back to the manner in which Johnston and Beauregard arrayed the army.

Meanwhile, Braxton Bragg was pressing the Union center. In a letter to his wife, Elise, he claimed that his corps suffered minimal

loss until 11:00 A.M. Bragg's horses were not so lucky. By that time, he had two horses shot out from under him. His first engagements, around 8:30 A.M., were more costly than he admitted in the letter.²³ Colonel Daniel Adams of the First Louisiana Infantry, who was attached to Hardee's corps, painted a different picture. At around 8:30 A.M. his unit receives a heavy dose of musket and artillery fire as it advanced to within 200 yards of the first enemy position. Adam's brigade commander General Gladden received a mortal wound in this engagement and the command passed to Adams.²⁴

Bragg's other units were not faring much better. The rebels did enjoy initial success because of the element of surprise. The faulty attack formation however wasted no time in causing problems. Bragg noted that inexperienced troops coupled with intermingling units slowed the Southern advance, "Such was the ardor of our troops that it was with great difficulty they could be restrained from closing up and mingling with the first line."²⁵

Patton Anderson's brigade was one of Bragg's first units to see action. In his official report, Anderson pointed out the difficulty of maintaining command and control. According to the order of battle, Anderson was to maintain an interval of one-thousand yards from Hardee's line. As he dressed on Colonel Gibson's brigade to his right, he soon found himself only two hundred yards from Hardee's line. At this point the time was not yet 6:00 A. M. To compound Anderson's problem, Colonel Pond's brigade, to Anderson's left, had not come u Bragg ordered a momentary halt to allow Hardee's corps to regain its proper interval.

Anderson's first contact with the enemy was near a ravine called Shiloh Branch. Units from Sherman's division possessed a good field of fire with its artillery into Anderson's avenue of approach. The natural obstacle of the ravine and the artillery initially made it slow going for Anderson. Anderson's artillery, commanded by Captain Hogsdon,

positioned itself so that it could suppress Sherman's guns. As Anderson attempted to move forward, one of Pond's units, probably the 16th Louisiana, retreated back into his brigade. Again, intermingling units caused a slowdown in the advance as the commanders reestablished order.²⁶

Bragg's extreme left unit, commanded by Colonel Preston Pond, was guarding the Confederate left for the first two hours of the battle. Pond's division commander, General Ruggles, finally ordered him forward. After his artillery dispersed some Union soldiers, Pond entered one of McDowell's abandoned camps.²⁷ The fact that one of Bragg's brigades had to guard the left, illustrates the faulty attack formation. Dividing the line of battle among Bragg, Polk, and Hardee would have ensured coverage of the entire line and would have allowed the corps commanders to better maintain command and control.

As Pond advanced, his brigade suffered its first casualties, not at the hands of the enemy. Pond was pursuing one of Sherman's retreating units when he received fire from his right. The friendly fire, most likely from Patton Anderson's brigade, killed and wounded several men from the 18th Louisiana. Pond would wind up being the extreme left of the Confederate forces for the rest of the day.

On the extreme right of the Rebel line was one of Bragg's brigades under General Chalmers. In his report, Chalmers notes that the space between Hardee's right and Lick Creek increased as the army advanced. Bragg ordered Chalmers to close up on the front line and dress on Hardee's left making up for the gap between Hardee's left and Lick Creek. Hardee's corps was not big enough to cover the entire line of battle. The move of Chalmers to Hardee's right, again depicts one of the major flaws in the attack formation.

Chalmers first encountered units from Prentiss' division. After several exchanges of fire between Chalmers and the 18th Wisconsin,

Chalmers ordered a bayonet charge. The 10th Mississippi, about 360 strong, charged the 18th Wisconsin, which numbered almost 1000. Amazingly, the 18th Wisconsin broke and ran under the attack of a unit only one-third its size.

The problem with the charge of Chalmers brigade, was that only one regiment made the charge. Chalmers gave the order to charge while he was on the extreme right of the brigade. Consequently, the two regiments on Chalmers left, the 52nd Tennessee and the 5th Mississippi, got left behind. Chalmers had to slow down his advance so that he could reorganize his line. As he began to move forward, Johnston ordered him to halt. This was the point when Johnston received the aforementioned reports about the Union "division" under Stuart.²⁸

Another one of Bragg's brigades under General John Jackson also wound up on the Confederate right. Jackson moved to the right because he dressed off of Chalmers brigade and naturally when Chalmers began bearing right to support Hardee's line, Jackson went with him. Jackson happened upon the engagement between Gladden's brigade and Prentiss' division. As Jackson moved with Gladden, Johnston ordered him to move further to the right. This order, no doubt, resulted from the mistaken belief that a Union division was going to flank the Rebel army.

The first order that General Polk received for his corps came from Johnston. Johnston ordered Polk to send a brigade forward to support Bragg. Polk sent General Stewart's brigade.²⁹ Johnston led Stewart near the Union center in the middle of Bragg's line and then rode off to the Confederate right. Stewart's troubles began shortly thereafter.

With Johnston gone and with no specific orders for further actions, Stewart went forward through an abandoned Union camp. At that point, a staff officer directed Stewart to move left and forward. Stewart gave the order and moved out. Unfortunately, one of Stewart's

regiments, the 4th Tennessee, did not hear the order and remained in place. Stewart halted his men along the reverse slope of an enemy held hill and went back to retrieve his wayward regiment.³⁰ Shortly after Stewart left, Generals Hardee and Ruggles ordered the three regiments to join in an attack on the 57th Ohio near the crossroads of Shiloh church. When Stewart returned to find his regiments gone, he received orders from one of Bragg's staff officers to attack a Federal battery located on the northwest corner of Review Field. Stewart told his men what Bragg wanted and after asking them if they could do it, they said, "Show us where it is; we will try."³¹

The 4th received 24 pound shells from the battery for several minutes by this time. They would have to cross about four hundred yards of open ground to take the battery. Nevertheless, the 4th got on their feet and double-quickened right into the mouth of the cannons. The cannons fired and tore huge holes in the 4th's ranks. Musket fire from two Union regiments would have cut down the 4th even more, but rebel brigades of Shaver and Wood also charged and diverted much of the Union infantry fire away from the 4th. Regardless, the 4th still suffered the loss of one soldier for every four yards of ground gained. Despite these seemingly insurmountable losses, the 4th charged on. They hesitated near the battery, fired one volley into the gun crews, and then charged. The battery made a hasty retreat and lost one gun and two gunners. Stewart's price for driving off the battery was thirty-one killed and one hundred-sixty wounded.³²

The brigades of Colonel Johnson and Colonel Russell of Polk's corps received orders from Beauregard to support Cleburne's attack on Sherman's division. As Russell prepared to attack Sherman's position, his division commander, General Clarke told him to lead the right of his brigade and Russell would lead the left. Russell's first attack was thrown back with terrible losses from Union artillery. To compound his

problems, his first charge consisted of only seven companies instead of two regiments. After one hour of repeated attacks, Russell finally drove off units of the 57th and 77th Ohio.¹¹

Colonel Johnson's brigade, on Russell's left, was having problems of their own. Johnson was getting his brigade into the line of battle when he noticed that two of his regiments, the 154th Tennessee and Blythe's Mississippi Volunteers, became detached from the rest of his brigade. General Bragg ordered these two regiments to support the attacks on the Union positions on the northeast corner of Rhea Field. Bragg's order proved to be unnecessary because that was the area in which Johnson was leading his brigade anyway. The detachment of the two regiments only broke down command and control in Johnson's brigade.

Johnson's brigade immediately received a volley of artillery as they moved forward. The fire was heavy enough to cause some of the soldiers from the 15th Tennessee to start drifting to the rear. The 15th's commander, Lieutenant Colonel Tyler, drew his pistol and ordered the frightened soldiers back into line. Each time the 2nd Tennessee received fire, they broke and ran to the rear. Johnson pieced together what was left of his brigade and, again, tried attacking the Federal position. Leading this charge, Johnson was shot and had to be carried from the field.¹⁴ The Federals defending this position retreated by this time; not because of attacks from Johnson's brigade, but because units around them were retreating. The time was between 10:30 and 11:00 A.M.

Polk's last brigade to see action was that of Colonel William H. Stephens. Sometime early in the battle, Stephen's brigade received orders from Johnston to link-up with a cavalry regiment commanded by Colonel Nathan Bedford Forrest and guard the extreme right across Lick Creek and report any enemy activity in that area. Johnston left Stephens with the impression that if he was satisfied that the enemy

posed no threat in that area, then he could join the fight.

Around 11:00 A.M., Stephens left Forrest guarding the flank and marched north to the battle. After he had gone about a mile, he received a report from Forrest that enemy had been seen moving in from the direction of Hamburg. Official Reports are unclear as to the nature of the enemy seen by Forrest's cavalry. At almost the same time, Stephens got a message from a courier that Beauregard ordered all troops into the battle. Stephen's unit would, shortly thereafter, be involved in actions directed against the Hornet's Nest.³⁵

Meanwhile, Forrest was in no mood to stay on the flank while the battle raged on just a few miles away. Satisfied that no Union troops would threaten the right, Forrest called his regiment together and sent a courier forward requesting orders to advance. Hearing nothing from the courier, Forrest spoke to his regiment:

Boys, do you hear that rattle of musketry and the roar of artillery? Do you know what it means? It means our friends and brothers are dying by the hundreds at the hands of the enemy and we are here guarding a damn creek. We did not enter the service for such work, and the reputation of this regiment does not justify our commanding officer in leaving us here while we are needed elsewhere. Let's go and help them. What do you say?³⁶

Forrest then lead his regiment against the Hornet's Nest at the Union center.

Despite their uncoordinated attacks, the Confederates were making progress. The shock effect of the initial attack and the element of surprise caused thousands of Union troops to flee to the river. The major problem facing the Confederate senior commanders was the lack of command and control. The extensive intermingling of Confederate units seriously threatened the South's ability to control the battle. Between 11:00 and 11:30 A.M. General Polk found General Bragg to see what further actions Bragg wanted. Bragg told Polk to take command of the troops in the center. Bragg said he would command the right and, "it was understood" that Hardee would command the right.³⁷

Polk and Bragg deserve much credit for trying to restore some semblance of command and control. Their makeshift command arrangement restored some order to the Rebel attack. The progress the Confederates made that day was about to come to a standstill at a Union position called the Hornet's Nest.

Endnotes

¹Cunningham, Shiloh, 204, 206.

²Roland, Johnston, 326.

³Ibid., 326-327.

⁴Johnston, Johnston, 586.

⁵Battles and Leaders, 586.

⁶Williams, Beauregard, 135.

⁷Roman, Beauregard, 285.

⁸Johnston, Johnston, 584.

⁹Ibid., 584.

¹⁰McDonough, Shiloh, 100.

¹¹OR, X, part 1, 581.

¹²OR, X, part 1, 581.

¹³Roman, Beauregard, 286-287.

¹⁴Roland, Johnston, 331.

¹⁵Johnston, Johnston, 612.

¹⁶Roland, Johnston, 332.

¹⁷Sword, Shiloh, 223.

¹⁸OR, X, part 1, 592.

¹⁹Sword, Shiloh, 223-224.

²⁰Battles and Leaders, 604.

²¹McDonough, Shiloh, 107.

²²Johnston, Johnston, 598.

²⁴McWhiney, Bragg, 234.

²⁴OR, X, part 1, 536.

²⁵Ibid, 465.

²⁶Ibid, 496-497.

²⁷Sword, Shiloh, 210.

²⁸OR, X, part 2, 548.

²⁹Ibid., 407.

³⁰Ibid., 427.

³¹Cunningham, Shiloh, 323.

³²OR, X, part 2, 427.

³³Ibid., 416-417.

³⁴OR, X, Part 1, 444-445.

³⁵Ibid., 454.

³⁶Jack Hurst, Nathan Bedford Forrest. (New York: Alfred A. Knoph, 1993), 88-89.

³⁷OR, X, part 2, 410.

CHAPTER 5

APRIL 6, 1862, 11:30-5:30 P.M.

With the makeshift command arrangement complete, Braxton Bragg turned his attention to find out why the Confederate advance lost momentum. The Rebels now found themselves up against the strongest Union position on the field. Remnants of three Union divisions-Stephen A. Hurlburt's, Benjamin Prentiss', and W.H.L. Wallace's-took up defensive positions in a densely wooded area of thick brush bordered on either side by open fields. The Confederates made several futile charges against the Union position known as the Hornet's Nest (see Fig.4).¹

In order to understand Braxton Bragg's tactics in dealing with the Hornet's Nest, one must first understand Bragg's prior military experiences. Bragg, like his peers, was heavily steeped in Napoleonic concepts. Bragg was a strong believer in the strength of a disciplined bayonet assault. Napoleon once wrote, "The bayonet has always been the weapon of the brave and the chief tool of victory." Bragg's experiences in the Mexican War reinforced his belief in the value of the bayonet.²

Disciplined bayonet assaults before the Civil War were successful for one simple reason. The basic firearm before the Civil War was the smoothbore musket. The smoothbore musket was extremely inaccurate. A soldier could fire this weapon at a target from a distance of a few hundred yards and never hit it. A rifled musket did exist in the 1840s. The problem with this rifled musket was that the bullet had to be slightly larger than the bore so that the bullet would

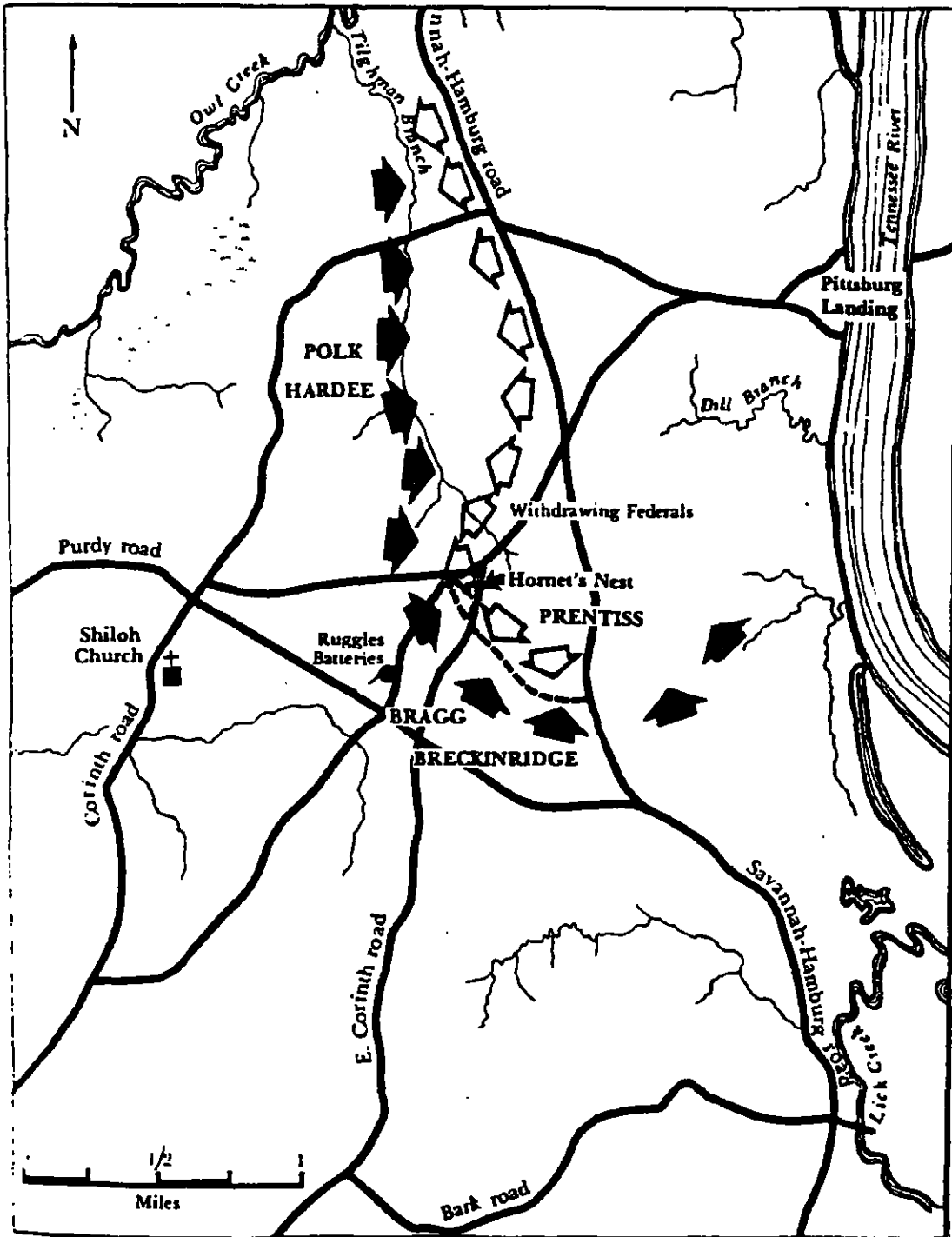


Fig. 4. Hornet's Nest. Reprinted by permission from James L. McDonough, Shiloh-In Hell Before Night (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977), 151.

spin through the barrel along the rifled grooves. The rifled grooves gave the weapon range and accuracy far superior to the smoothbore. The required larger bullet took almost two minutes to load. Therefore, a spirited bayonet assault could overrun soldiers equipped with inaccurate smoothbores or difficult to load rifles.

All this changed in the 1850s. The minie ball became the new standard projectile for the rifle. The minie ball was actually a bullet with a hollow base small enough to easily fit into the rifle's bore. As the rifle was fired, the bullet would expand into the rifle's grooves. The arrival of the minie ball allowed a soldier to fire two to three times a minute, with deadly accuracy. This new projectile made infantry bayonet assaults almost obsolete.

In the spring of 1857, West Point began teaching new infantry tactics to offset the advantage the minie ball gave defenders. The new tactics stressed more dispersal and running instead of moving at double quick, which amounted to trotting. Many senior officers did not care for the new tactics since the dispersal and quick movements made command and control difficult. Bragg and his peers on both sides would employ the same tactics in the Civil War that they used in the Mexican War. The results were almost suicidal.³

The first Confederate unit to come in contact with the Hornet's Nest was the 3rd Confederate Infantry from Arkansas under the command of Colonel John Marmaduke. Marmaduke's unit broke away from its brigade during the pursuit of Prentiss' division. With an ear piercing rebel yell, the 3rd Confederate attacked Prentiss' men and maintained a steady fire on the Federals for about ten minutes. The Yankees were crouched in a low road running through the Hornet's Nest, so most of the Rebel fire passed harmlessly over their heads. When Prentiss' men returned fire, the results were quite different. Although the Federals could not see if they hit their targets, the cries of pain emanating from the

underbrush told them all they wanted to know.⁴

Troops made up of the brigades of Gladden and Shaver made the next major assault on the Hornet's Nest. A hail of musketry drove back Gladden as he neared the Federal line and Shaver's men received a storm of lead as they attacked across Duncan Field. During the failed attacks of Gladden and Shaver, a gap existed in the Union line between the 14th Iowa and Prentiss' command. The Rebels apparently did not know about this gap since it remained unexploited.

William H. Stephens' brigade of about 1,800 men conducted the next attack on the Hornet's Nest. Just before Stephens attacked, the Federals improved their position by adding the 7th and 85th Illinois regiments to its defensive line. As Stephens attacked across the same ground where Gladden and Shaver failed, he was met by fire from the front and the flank. Stephens only got about halfway across Duncan field before the deadly cross fire forced him to fall back.⁵

General Alexander Stewart conducted the next abortive attack on the Union strongpoint. Stewart's brigade was actually that of General Hindman. Just prior to the assault, a cannon-ball struck Hindman's horse and caused the animal to fall on Hindman. Hindman received a concussion and was temporarily out of action. The Federals waited until Stewart got within fifty yards of their position before opening up with cannon and musket fire. Stewart's options were to fall back or have all his men shot. He took the first option.⁶

Bragg arrived on the scene just in time to witness Stewart's failed attack. His next actions almost defy rational thinking. He ordered a brigade under Colonel Randall L. Gibson to storm the Hornet's Nest. Gibson's first casualties at the Hornet's Nest came at the hands of Confederate soldiers. His 4th Louisiana regiment was trying to get in the line of battle when one of General Hardee's aides rode in front of them with the Stars and Stripes around his waist. A unit to Gibson's

rear assumed the Yankees were attacking and fired into the 4th Louisiana's ranks producing 104 casualties.⁷

Gibson's first attack was, predictably, hurled back with heavy losses. Gibson described the Union position as, "The strong and almost inaccessible position of the enemy-his infantry well covered in ambush and his artillery skillfully posted . . . was found to be impregnable to infantry alone."⁸ Gibson's men advanced through a heavy undergrowth of scrub oak and could not see far. Gibson's men got to within about fifty yards of the Union position, before the Yankees opened up on them with deadly results. The firing on Gibson's brigade was so severe that one of his colonels assumed some of it had to be coming from the Confederate unit on his left and mistakenly called for the unit to cease firing.⁹ Captain Edgar Dubroca, commander Company C, 13th Louisiana, provided the most graphic example of the futility of the attack. An exploding shell went off in the midst of his company, killing six men and splattering their blood and brains all over his chest.¹⁰

Bragg was infuriated at the repulse of Gibson's men.. Rather than realizing the strength of the Union position, Bragg blamed the leadership for Gibson's failure. He attributed the failure of the first attack as being, "due entirely to the want of proper handling."¹¹

Gibson knew that infantry alone was useless against the Hornet's Nest. He sent one of his civilian aides, Robert Pugh, to request artillery support from Bragg. The general denied the request and ordered Gibson to charge again. Colonel Hodge, commanding the unit on Gibson's right strongly objected to the new attack orders. He later wrote:

I thought it impossible to force the enemy from this strong position by a charge from front, but that a light battery playing on one flank and a simultaneous charge of infantry on the other position could be carried with but small loss.¹²

Nevertheless, Gibson's men charged for a second time. The union defenders waited until the Rebels got within thirty yards before opening up on their attackers. The first volley killed dozens of Rebels and the brigade began to waver. During the 4th Louisiana's charge, they became so disorganized in thick undergrowth, that they broke up into two lines. Consequently, the second line inadvertently fired into the first. Colonel Hodge's 19th Louisiana found the undergrowth so thick, that they could no longer advance. Hodge had his men halt and fire from their position. He saw that his fire had little effect and grudgingly gave the order to withdraw. Hodge lost fifty men in the second attack.¹³

By now, Bragg witnessed three unsuccessful attacks on the Hornet's Nest. Colonel Allen of the 4th Louisiana asked Bragg for artillery support. Bragg either refused, or was unable to provide it. Bragg's only solution to the Hornet's Nest problem was to order another charge. Gibson reformed and moved out. Predictably, Gibson's men stalled in the heavy undergrowth and took cover wherever they could. They continued to fire on the Federals for about an hour before withdrawing under heavy pressure.¹⁴

Bragg's anger grew with each failed attack. He wrote that Gibson's third repulse was the result of nothing more than enemy sharpshooters.¹⁵ Bragg sent one of his staff officers to take the colors of the 4th Louisiana and carry them forward saying, "These colors must not fall back again." Lockett ran through the 4th's line of battle and took the flag from the color bearer and told him, "General Bragg says these colors must not go back to the rear." A few minutes after that, the color bearer was shot leaving Lockett alone on the field. It did not take the 4th's commander, Colonel Allen, long to notice that a strange figure held his colors. Allen, who by this time was bleeding profusely from a wound in both cheeks, asked Lockett, "What are you doing with my colors, sir?" Lockett said he was just following Bragg's

orders. Taking the colors from Lockett, Allen said what had become obvious to most people on the field, "Tell General Bragg he must attack this position from the flank; we can never carry it alone from the front."¹⁶

Bragg arrived on the scene just after Allen retrieved his colors. Bragg thought the Federals might be advancing from their position and ordered Allen to take two regiments forward to meet them. Allen showed his reluctance and asked if he must charge again. Bragg sternly replied, "Colonel Allen, I want no faltering now." Embarrassed by Bragg's reply, Allen led his regiment forward.¹⁷

By the time Gibson's shattered regiment fell back to Barnes field, he had made four abortive attacks on the Hornet's Nest. Shortly after the battle, Bragg wrote his wife a letter accusing Gibson of being an, "Entre nous", an arrant coward. Bragg also claimed that he personally led Gibson's regiment on one of the assaults.¹⁸

Bragg had, by this time, witnessed five unsuccessful attacks on the Hornet's Nest. For some inexplicable reason he ordered the brigades of Shaver and Anderson to attack. Shaver attacked right into the strongest part of the Federal position. The Yankees waited until Shaver got to within fifty yards away before opening up with artillery and infantry scattering Shaver's men all over the field. Shaver retired what was left of his brigade.¹⁹

Over a year after Shiloh, Gibson challenged Bragg's assertion of his performance at the Hornet's Nest. Gibson felt so strongly about the matter that he requested a formal court of inquiry to investigate Bragg's charges. Neither Gibson nor his fellow officers remembered Bragg rallying the regiment as he claimed. Gibson, along with other officers in his brigade, pointed out the several requests for artillery that Bragg denied. Colonel Allen claimed Bragg retired to the cover of a ravine during one of his assaults, "While I was executing this order,

the enemy opened a powerful battery upon us. General Bragg, staff, and bodyguard retired to a ravine. I saw nothing more of them during that day." The Secretary of War never convened a formal inquiry claiming that the business of conducting the war prevented him from doing so.²⁰

Bragg's conduct at the Hornet's Nest deserves close scrutiny. One could expect Bragg to initially order bayonet assaults since that was the tactic Bragg learned while in the military. However, after the first two failed assaults and repeated requests for artillery support, Bragg should have realized that frontal assaults were not going to carry the position.

Altogether, the Rebels attacked the Hornet's Nest with 18,000 men. The Union position was never manned by more than 4,300 troops at any one time. The most the Confederates ever attacked with on any assault was 3,700.²¹ Bragg's bumbling at the Hornet's Nest accomplished only two things. It produced scores of needless casualties for the Confederates and it gave Grant enough time to establish a strong line of defense near Pittsburgh Landing. Bragg, frustrated by the lack of success at the center, rode to the Confederate right where he would discover some tragic news.

The Death of Albert Sidney Johnston

While the Confederate advance stalled at the Hornet's Nest, Albert Sidney Johnston was pressing the Rebel effort on the Union left. As Johnston was overseeing operations in this vicinity, General Breckinridge found Johnston and made a rather embarrassing report, "General, I have a Tennessee regiment that won't fight." Tennessee Governor, Isham G. Harris was serving as a civilian aide for Johnston when Breckinridge made his report. The report of the reluctant Tennessee regiment enraged Harris, and he exclaimed, "General Breckinridge, show me that regiment!" Johnston and Harris went to find

the regiment in question, the 45th Tennessee.

Johnston directed Breckinridge to get the regiment ready to make another charge. Breckinridge tried, but sheepishly admitted that he could not rally the 45th. "Oh, yes, general; I think you can", Johnston replied. Breckinridge emotionally replied that he tried but was unsuccessful. Johnston, seeing that Breckinridge was quite rattled by the situation, offered some assistance saying, "Then I will help you. We can get them to make the charge." Johnston and Breckinridge rode over to the 45th where Governor Harris had them in line.

Johnston rode up and down the 45th's ranks shouting words of encouragement. Instead of waving his saber, he held the small tin cup that he earlier took from a captured Union camp. The presence of the senior Confederate commander inspired and, to some extent, embarrassed the regiment. Johnston looked down from his horse and tapping their bayonets with the tin cup said, "These must do the work. Men, they are stubborn! We must use the bayonet. I will lead you!"

Johnston wheeled his horse around and charged toward the Union lines. Inspired and somewhat embarrassed by the fact that the commander of the army had to lead them, the 45th Tennessee followed Johnston with a resounding Rebel yell. The Federals wasted no time in firing to the Confederates with it's artillery and infantry. Johnston was still on his horse leading the charge. The Confederate infantry withered and many fell, but the surviving members of the 45th kept charging and did take the Union position.

Initially, it appeared as if Johnston survived the charge in tact. His uniform was cut by fire in places and the heel of his boot was flapping in the breeze, but that seemed to be the only damage done to him. Johnston was soon joined by Governor Harris, who was relieved that his Tennesseans vindicated themselves.²²

A Yankee battery fired on Johnston from the woods to their left. Johnston sent Harris to find Colonel Statham of Breckinridge's corps to move his brigade out to take the battery. Harris found Statham and gave him the order. When Harris returned to Johnston, he found him pale and starting to reel in the saddle. Harris grabbed Johnston by the coat and said, "General, are you hurt?" Johnston slowly replied, "Yes, and I fear seriously." Harris and Johnston were on a small ridge exposed to enemy fire. Harris had his arm around the General and aided by Captain Whickham, led Johnston to a small ravine in the rear. There, Harris and Whickham laid Johnston on the ground.

Not aware of the wound in Johnston's leg, Harris ripped open the general's uniform and searched for a body wound. Not finding one, he lifted Johnston's head and gave him some brandy as a stimulant. By this time, Colonel William Preston and other members of Johnston's staff were on the scene. Preston got off his horse and knelt beside his brother-in-law. Colonel George Baylor had Johnston's head in his lap and was trying to revive him. With his tears falling on Johnston's face, Baylor said, "Johnston, don't you know me?" Johnston opened his eyes but did not respond.²³ Preston asked for some whiskey. A member of Johnston's staff tried to pour some in the commander's mouth, but it just ran down his chin. Colonel Baylor told Preston that he felt no heart beat. Albert Sidney Johnston was dead. The men gathered around him wept openly. The time was about 2:30 P.M. Johnston was the most senior officer to die in the entire war on either side.

Johnston's actual cause of death was from a loss of blood. A minie ball struck him in the back of the right leg below the knee. Johnston may not have initially felt the wound because his right leg sometimes went numb from a previous wound. A tourniquet could have easily stopped the loss of blood. Johnston, earlier in the day, sent his personal surgeon off to care for some Federal prisoners.²⁴

Some students of the war said a costly lull in the fighting of sixty to ninety minutes occurred after Johnston's death. If there was a lull, it was only in the immediate area of Johnston's death. The so-called lull was probably only thirty minutes because that was how long it took a courier to find Beauregard and inform him of Johnston's death.

Long after the battle, some Johnston loyalists, especially his son, claimed that Johnston died while he was on the threshold of achieving victory. The theory was that Johnston was in the process of conducting final push on the Confederate right. However, this theory does not survive the test of scrutiny. The South pushed the Federals from their initial positions, but had struck no decisive blow anywhere on the field at the time of Johnston's death. When he died, Johnston was controlling the part of the battle that he considered most important, the Confederate right. He properly placed himself where he wanted his main effort to be. Unfortunately, there were not enough troops on the Confederate right to support the main effort. This again reflects the major flaw in the initial attack formation. The South's attack formation did not lend itself to forming a main effort any where on the field.

Critics have panned Johnston for unnecessarily exposing himself to enemy fire at the time of his death. Granted, an army commander does not normally lead regimental charges. However, great leaders in all wars have inspired troops with personal deeds of bravery. Alexander, Caesar, and Napoleon in wars of old and Patton and Rommel in modern times all displayed uncommon bravery. Famed Civil War historian, Bruce Catton writes, "Above everything else, the Civil War officer had to be absolutely fearless. From army commander on down, he had to show physical courage."²⁵ Johnston's actions were simply what was required from a leader at that particular time.

Beauregard Takes Command

Beauregard set up his headquarters near Shiloh Church and from there he learned of Johnston's death. Up to that time, Beauregard busied himself with the task of controlling the movements of troops in the rear of the battle. He constantly had staff officers and couriers collecting information from the field and gathering stragglers. At the time of Johnston's death, he was about to send some troops to the center perhaps to aide in the efforts against the Hornet's Nest.

Beauregard was shocked at the news of Johnston's death, but he had little time to mourn. He was now the commander of the Confederate forces at Shiloh. Beauregard ordered the news of Johnston's death to be kept from the men. Beauregard feared that knowledge of the commander's death would hurt morale. He knew that the Federal right was falling back to the landing and that the Federal center was still holding firm. He ordered Bragg to control the effort against the Union left and Brigadier General Ruggles to command the center.²⁶ Under General Ruggles, the Confederates would soon conduct the largest concentration of artillery in the war up to that time.

Collapse of The Hornet's Nest

Although the Hornet's Nest held up the Confederate advance in the center, by about 3:00 P.M., the South was advancing on the flanks of the Union strongpoint. The whole Union line began to bend back around the Hornet's Nest. The Federal position was now becoming more completely surrounded (see Fig. 5).

Bragg's First Division commander, General Ruggles, was charged with breaking the Union center. Ruggles had seen enough of the frontal assaults on the Hornet's Nest to know that they would not work. Sometime between 3:00 and 3:30 P. M., Ruggles directed his staff

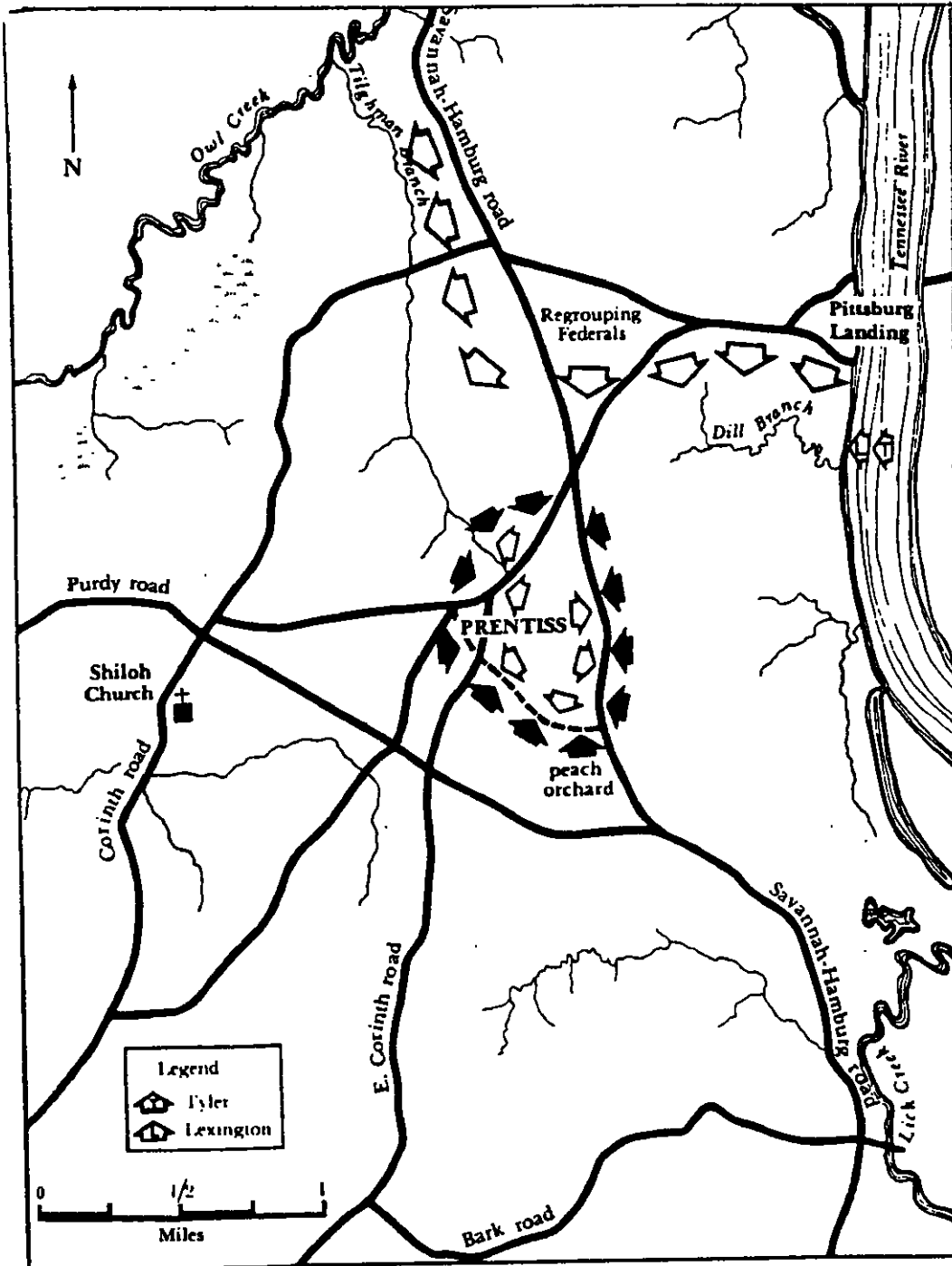


Fig. 5. Collapse of the Hornet's Nest. Reprinted, by permission, from James L. McDonough, *Shiloh-In Hell Before Night* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977); 165.

officers to round up all the artillery pieces they could find and line them up facing the Hornet's Nest.²⁷ Stanford's Mississippi battery, Byrne's Kentucky battery, and a section of Ketchem's battery were already in position lobbing shells piecemeal into the Federal position. Within the next hour, the Confederates collected an additional seven batteries.²⁸

The exact number of guns that Ruggles collected is the subject of some debate. In McDonough's book Shiloh-In Hell Before Night, the number is placed at sixty-two. Cannoneers in Gray, a book devoted to artillery tactics in the west, puts the number at fifty-three. Regardless of the number, sixty-two or fifty-three, the barrage would be the deciding factor in capturing the Hornet's Nest.

At 4:30 P.M. Ruggles batteries, mostly six and twelve pound howitzers, opened up on the Union position. The barrage could be heard for miles and one Union officer thought it sounded like, "a mighty hurricane sweeping everything before it." Another Federal officer remarked that he was relieved when the Rebels finally started advancing on their position. The Southern barrage put about one hundred eighty rounds a minute into the Yankee position.

Confederate gunners did not conduct the bombardment of the Hornet's Nest unscathed. A Yankee battery fired on Robertson's Florida battery and literally blew one of his troops apart. The Federal counterfire became so intense that Robertson had to order a retreat. Robertson had so many horses shot during the bombardment, that he had to leave two guns.²⁹

Ruggles batteries became the subject of controversy after Shiloh. He did not mention the barrage in his initial report on the battle, nor was it mentioned in the letters and diaries of four cannoneers whose batteries were there. Ruggles claimed credit for the actions of the batteries in an amended report submitted a year later.

The amended report came with affidavits, at Ruggles request, claiming that Ruggles was responsible for the concentration of artillery. Not coincidentally, the amended report came at a sagging time in Ruggles career.³⁰

The line in front of the Hornet's Nest presented horrific scenes. Wounded men and animals filled the air with their screams of agony. The atmosphere in the Union position reeked with the smell of blood and smoke. One Iowa private said, "The whole earth seemed in a blaze-the sharp ringing crash of our musketry-our batteries belching forth their shot and shell, and roaring like the deep toned thunder."³¹

Despite the enormous amount of ordnance hurled upon it, the Hornet's Nest still held. The Union flanks were a different story. They now began to bend back around the Hornet's Nest creating an envelopment of the Federal position. After producing hundreds of Confederate casualties, including Albert Sidney Johnston, the Federal left withdrew past the Peach Orchard and attempted to form a line along the Hamburg-Savannah Road. This stand did not last long as Stuart's brigade, with its ammunition gone, fled to the river.³²

Bragg was now on the scene controlling actions on the Confederate right. There he found brigades from his own corps and some from Polk and Breckinridge's command. Bragg claims he found these troops, "without a common head." Bragg took the initiative and assumed command of these troops with the order, "let everything be forward and nothing but forward."³³

By now the time was around 4:00 P.M. Bragg's tactics on the Confederate right were the same as those he used against the Hornet's Nest. Bragg implies that the Rebels overran the Federals with relative ease. He wrote that, "Neither battery nor battalion could withstand their onslaught."³⁴ In reality, it was not that simple. The 12th and 14th Iowa took up positions to the rear of the Hornet's Nest and waited

until the Rebels got to within thirty yards of their position before firing. The blaze of musketry decimated the first Confederate line. The Confederates kept charging and soon occupied positions in the rear of the Hornet's Nest.³⁵

Meanwhile, Polk and Hardee were pressing the Union right. Russel's brigade of Hardee's Corps moved in behind the exposed right flank of the Hornet's Nest. Polk brought up the Crescent Regiment and the 38th Tennessee to join in the envelopment of the Union position. To Russel's left, the 33rd Tennessee and Trabue's brigade completed the circle of Rebels surrounding the commands of Wallace and Prentiss. The Federal troops now found themselves fighting back to back.³⁶

With the Confederate noose tightening around the Federals, General Wallace tried to retreat to the landing. With two Iowa regiments, he started moving to the landing when he and the Iowans were met by heavy infantry fire from the Rebels. General Wallace was mortally wounded. It is difficult to say which Confederate unit was responsible for Wallace's death, since several regiments were within range of the retreating Yankees. The Iowans tried to keep going, but they received fire from all sides. They came to the realization that further resistance meant needless loss of life. The two Iowa regiments surrendered to Chalmers brigade.³⁷

The Confederate circle around the Hornet's Nest got so tight that the Rebels started to inadvertantly fire on each other. To make matters worse for the Union defenders, the Federal gunboats *Tyler* and *Lexington* started lobbing shells in the direction of the fighting hoping to hit the Confederates. Unfortunately, many of the shells struck trees above the Hornet's Nest causing large branches to fall on the Yankees.

At about 5:30 P.M., General Prentiss knew that further resistance meant only more suffering for his men. He raised the white

flag and surrendered what was left of his command. About 2,200 men, primarily from Iowa and Illinois, became Confederate prisoners of war.¹⁸

Prentiss certainly did not shame himself or his men in surrendering. They held up the Confederate advance for six hours and allowed Grant to set up a strong line of infantry and artillery at Pittsburgh Landing. What would happen next is what many Southerners consider the Lost Opportunity.

Endnotes

- ¹McWhiney, Bragg, 236.
- ²Ibid., 231.
- ³Ibid, 231-232.
- ⁴Donald F. Dosch, The Hornet's Nest at Shiloh, 1977, [photocopy], 3-4, Shiloh National Military Park Library.
- ⁵McDonough, Shiloh, 144-145
- ⁶OR, Part 1, 574.
- ⁷Sword, Shiloh, 248.
- ⁸OR, X, Part 1, 480.
- ⁹Sword, Shiloh, 249.
- ¹⁰Cunningham, Shiloh, 353.
- ¹¹OR, X, Part 1, 466.
- ¹²Ibid, 493.
- ¹³Cunningham, Shiloh, 355.
- ¹⁴Ibid., 357.
- ¹⁵OR, X, Part 1, 466.
- ¹⁶Sword, Shiloh, 245-255.
- ¹⁶Ibid., 255.
- ¹⁸Don C. Seitz, Braxton Bragg, General of the Confederacy (Columbia, S.C.: The State Company, 1924), 43.
- ¹⁹OR, X, Part 1, 486.
- ²⁰Ibid., 574.
- ²¹McDonough, Shiloh, 143.
- ²²Johnston, Johnston, 610-613.
- ²³Confederate Veteran, Vol V, 611.
- ²⁴Roland, Johnston, 336-337.
- ²⁵Ibid., 344.
- ²⁶Ibid., 140.

²⁷OR, X, Part 2, 472.

²⁸Larry J. Daniel, Cannoneers In Gray, (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1984), 37.

²⁹Ibid., 38.

³⁰Ibid., 39.

³¹Cunningham, Shiloh, 401.

³²Ibid., 402.

³³McWhiney, Bragg, 241.

³⁴OR, X, Part 2, 466.

³⁵McWhiney, Bragg, 243.

³⁶Cunningham, Shiloh, 406.

³⁷Ibid., 407.

³⁸McDonough, Shiloh, 166.

CHAPTER 6

APRIL 6, 1862, 5:30 P.M.-APRIL 7, 1862, 2:30 A.M.

To understand the actions of the Confederate high command following the surrender of the Hornet's Nest, particularly the actions of Bragg and Beauregard, the answer to one question is critical. Exactly what did the commanders know, and when did they know it? Whether it is the Civil War or Desert Storm, commanders must make decisions based on the most current information available. If proper information is lacking, or if the lack of time dictates an immediate decision, commanders must then make assumptions and take a certain course of action. Lack of firsthand information and a setting sun forced Beauregard into this decision making process.

Confusion now reigned among the victorious Confederates in the vicinity of the Hornet's Nest. While the captured Federals were being organized for the march to the rear, many of the Confederate soldiers pillaged the Union camps. The most sought after supplies were ammunition and food. Many of the Rebels, much to their delight, exchanged their old flintlock rifles for captured Enfield rifles. Beauregard ordered the captured provisions and ammunition sent to the rear for security and distribution.¹

Bragg realized that the entire Union army was not captured or defeated. After the capture of Prentiss' division, Bragg tried to rally all troops in the area for one final push to the landing. Rallying the Confederates proved difficult. Many of the inexperienced soldiers assumed that the whole Federal army surrendered. Assuming the battle

was over, these soldiers began drifting to the rear. Others, fascinated by the fact that they had actually caught some prisoners, became curious onlookers staring at their prisoners.²

Stragglers, pillagers, and the setting sun now became Bragg's biggest enemy. Bragg gave the order to attack at all points. In his Official Report, Bragg wrote that the attack, "commenced with every prospect of success."³ A closer examination of the units involved does not seem to support his assertion.

It is important to understand what obstacles the Confederates faced as they tried to follow Bragg's order. Prentiss' stand at the Hornet's Nest bought enough time for Grant to fortify the Federal position at the Landing. As units fell back to the landing, they formed a defensive line stretching from the river, to a right angle at the Savannah-Hamburg Road (see fig 6). The infantry compressed into such a small area allowed them to easily mass their fires against an attacker.

Grant's biggest assets at the landing were the terrain and his artillery. Grant's line occupied ground at the top of sharply sloping terrain with the Dill Branch stretching from the river to the Savannah-Hamburg Road. Sherman's troops along the road occupied the top of Tilghman Branch which offered any attacker terrain similar to the Dill Branch. To add to the Confederates difficulties heavy rains the previous night made any attack across this already wet terrain extremely difficult. As for artillery, the attacking Confederates faced about fifty cannons along Grant's last line.⁴ Any attacker would have to cross a small swamp, go up a steep and wooded slope, and face the fire of massed infantry and artillery.

Chalmers brigade was closest to the river when Bragg ordered a last push on the Federals. Chalmers, along with Jackson's brigade on his left, started up the steep slopes of Dill Branch to Grant's last

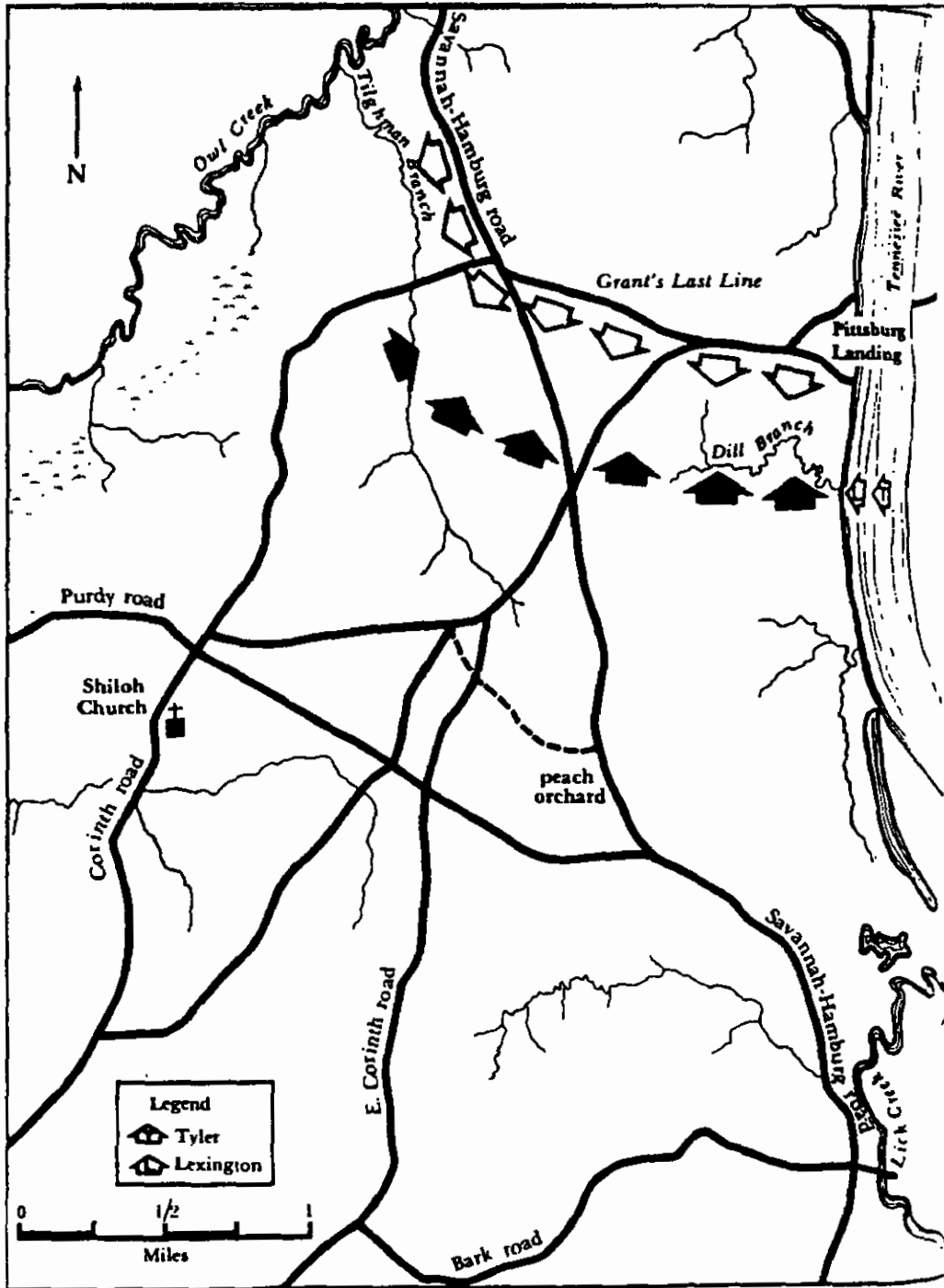


Fig. 6. Grant's Last Line, 6-7:00 P.M. Reprinted by permission from James L. McDonough, *Shiloh-In Hell Before Night*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977), 172.

line of defense. Chalmers was not as successful as Bragg seemed to think, "Our men struggled vainly to ascend the hill . . . making charge after charge without success." Artillery support for Chalmers attack was difficult to provide, to say the least. Gage's battery attempted to support the attack, but received heavy counterfire and soon retired.⁵

General Jackson's brigade was no more successful than that of Chalmers. Jackson was at a special disadvantage because his men had no ammunition. They were going to attack with nothing more than their bayonets. Nevertheless, his men advanced up the slopes of Dill Branch. Upon reaching the crest of the hill, they came under heavy fire of Grant's light batteries and field pieces. Jackson knew that any further attacks without some artillery support would be useless.⁶

As Bragg was trying to rally his soldiers for the pursuit of the Federals, he received word from one of Beauregard's staff officers, Captain Clifton Smith, to call off the attack. Beauregard's courier told Bragg, "The General directs that the pursuit be stopped; the victory is sufficiently complete." Stunned by this order, Bragg replied, "My God, was victory ever sufficiently complete? Have you given this order to anyone else?" The courier said that he had and Bragg saw that troops around him began withdrawing. Seeing this, Bragg reportedly said, "My God, my God, it is too late."⁷

Exactly how vehemently Bragg protested the withdrawal order is questionable. In a letter to his wife dated April 8th, Bragg described his troops as being, "disorganized, demoralized, and exhausted" on Sunday evening. In his Official Report, he did not mention any problem with obeying the order. Captain Smith, who delivered the order to withdraw, said Bragg received the order without comment. Bragg's medical director, Dr. J. C. Nott, does not remember Bragg protesting upon receipt of the order.⁸ In fact, Dr. Nott implies in a letter written to Beauregard after the war that Bragg may have given the order

to withdraw on his own, "My impression at that time was, that General Bragg gave the order on his own responsibility . . . I had seen no messenger from you, and believed it emanated from him."⁹

The first day of the bloodiest battle of the war, so far, came to a close. Was an opportunity for victory really lost at the end of the first day? Not surprisingly, the biggest supporter of the lost opportunity theory is Albert Sidney Johnston's son. The younger Johnston cites letters written to him after the war and some of the Official Reports to support his case. Hardee's report points more to Johnston's death as the reason for the South's failure at Shiloh rather than calling off the attack on the end of the first day, "It is, in my opinion, the candid belief of intelligent men that but for this calamity we would have achieved before sunset a triumph." Polk's report also bolsters the lost opportunity argument, "nothing seemed wanting to complete the most brilliant victory of the war but to press forward and make a vigorous assault on the demoralized remnant of his forces."¹⁰

Polk's report must be viewed with some skepticism when compared to a letter to his wife shortly after the battle. People tend to be a little more straight forward in letters to relatives than they are in official reports. Polk is no exception. Polk writes his wife on the 10th of April, "The enemy was badly whipped the first day, and we ought . . . to have captured his whole force. We would have done so if we had one more hour of daylight." The letter does not criticize Beauregard's decision. Polk pins the failure on the first day to a lack of sunlight instead of Beauregard's decision.¹¹

Bragg went even further in pinning the blame on Beauregard. In a description of the end of the first day's fighting, Bragg makes it very clear as to why he thinks the South lost. Bragg bolsters the assertion that the Federals were on their last leg, "the demoralization of the enemy, and their eagerness to escape . . . left no doubt that a

persistent, energetic assault, would soon have been crowned by a yielding of his whole force." He also clings to the, "If only Johnston had lived," theory when he writes, "Had the fatal shot which struck him down on the 6th not been fired, Grant and his forces would have been destroyed or captured before sunset."¹² Bragg never mentions him by name in his letter to Johnston, but his description of events clearly points the finger of blame at Beauregard.

An honest assertion of Bragg's opinion must be made by asking the question brought up at the beginning of the chapter: What did he know, and when did he know it? The scenes that Bragg witnessed immediately following the surrender of the Hornet's Nest indicated that a rout of the Federal army was in progress. Bragg saw the collapse of the Hornet's Nest and the capture of two Union regiments trying to flee to the river. With these pictures in his mind, it is not difficult to see why Bragg thought the Federals were in disarray and could have been destroyed.

When Bragg saw that the attacks up Dill Branch by two of his units did not come close to succeeding, he then should have realized that the situation was not as rosy as it appeared just a few minutes earlier. However, remember that Bragg ordered several futile assaults on the Hornet's Nest before realizing that it would not succeed. Even then, he blamed the failed attacks leadership instead of the strength of the Union position. Based on his tactics at the Hornet's Nest, it is entirely possible that Bragg thought that more assaults would have captured the Union army.

Years after the war, when he wrote the younger Johnston, Bragg still clung to the Lost Opportunity theory. After the war, it would not have been difficult to find out exactly what the composition of Grant's defenses at the landing were. By sticking to the Lost Opportunity theory after the war, one of two things has to be true: either Bragg

never bothered to find out what the strength of Grant's defenses were or he did find out and chose not to believe it.

So far, in this chapter, Beauregard has borne the brunt of criticism for allegedly throwing away victory. How did Beauregard justify his actions following the collapse of the Hornet's Nest? In his Official Report, Beauregard assumed that the Hornet's Nest was the last Union position, "It was after 6:00 P.M. when the enemy's last position was carried." He also points out the setting sun and the hunger and exhaustion of the men for calling off further attacks.

When he made the decision to retire for the night, Beauregard had in his possession a piece of information that none of the other commanders had. He received a dispatch saying that Buell was being delayed in his march to reinforce Grant. Beauregard therefore assumed that Buell could not join Grant and that the Confederate army could mop up what was left of Grant's army the following day.¹³

The dispatch concerning Buell's movements goes back to the central question concerning a commander's decision making process: what did he know and when did he know it? One can debate as to the extent of the hunger and exhaustion the Rebels experienced at the close of April sixth. However, one thing is not debatable: Beauregard had reason to believe that Grant would not be reinforced. That dispatch weighed heavy in Beauregard's decision to retire for the evening.

Beauregard had only one small indication that Buell might possibly reinforce Grant the following day. One of Beauregard's staff officers brought the Union commander of the Hornet's Nest, General Prentiss, to Beauregard's headquarters. Prentiss foolishly boasted that Buell was going to join Grant and would attack the Rebels with superior numbers the next morning. Beauregard regarded Prentiss' claim as "idle talk" and gave it no credence.¹⁴

Beauregard's decision to call off the attack was the right decision based on the information he had at that time. Beauregard followed up his decision with an incredible error. He ordered no reconnaissance of the Union position at the landing. Whether he forgot or actually gave an order not to reconnoiter the Union position is unclear. The fact that no reconnaissance ordered by Beauregard took place borders on the verge of negligence. Beauregard can be defended for the decision to call off the attack at the end of April sixth. His failure to reconnoiter is inexcusable and would prove costly the following day.

Confederate cavalry commander, Colonel Nathan Bedford Forrest, did not feel the need to wait for orders to scout the Federals at the landing. Soon after the fighting on the 6th Forrest unsuccessfully searched for his fifteen year old son, Willie. After giving up the search for his son, who later turned up guarding Federal prisoners, Forrest redirected his attention to military matters. Forrest ordered some of his men to clothe themselves in captured Union overcoats and ride down to the river to gather information on the Federals. What they saw would greatly alarm Forrest.

Forrest's scouts saw Buell's men arriving at the landing being ferried across the river on steamboats. Realizing the critical nature of this information, Forrest set out to find the commander of the Rebel army. At that point, Forrest might not have known that the command of the army had passed to Beauregard, since the death of Johnston was kept from the men. He may have been looking for a commander who did not exist.¹⁵

Trying to find any senior officer in the middle of the night during a driving rain was a monumental task in and of itself. Forrest eventually stumbled upon the tent of General Chalmers of Bragg's corps. Forrest approached his tent and asked to see the occupant. Chalmers

came out of his tent to find out what Forrest wanted. Not being one to waste words, Forrest said, "I want to know if you could tell me where I could find the commander of the army." Chalmers said he did not know and wanted to know what information Forrest had. Forrest's reply was blunt and to the point:

I have been way down along the river bank, close to the enemy. I could see the lights on the steamboats and hear distinctly the orders given in the disembarkation of troops. They are receiving reinforcements by the thousands--and if this army does not move and attack them between now and daylight, and before other reinforcements arrive, it will be whipped like hell before ten o'clock tomorrow.

Chalmers recollection of this conversation, recorded long after the battle, was not entirely accurate. Forrest did not actually see the landing. His scouting party under Lieutenant Sheridan actually saw Buell's army at the landing. Chalmers also claims that Forrest found Beauregard and told him of the reinforcements.

Actually, Forrest never found Beauregard. He did find General Hardee and shared the news about the reinforcements with him. Hardee told Forrest to find Beauregard and inform him. Forrest could not find Beauregard and returned to his regiment at about 1:00 A.M. He then sent out another scouting party. The scouting party came back about 2:00 A.M. saying that reinforcements were still arriving. Forrest returned to Hardee, who told him to go back to his regiment and maintain a strong picket line and report any hostile movements.¹⁶ Undoubtedly furious by being ignored, Forrest returned to his regiment. Sadly for the Confederates, his prediction would come true the next day.

It is interesting to note that neither Chalmers nor Hardee mentions Forrest's visits in their reports. Chalmers' claim that Forrest found Beauregard, was perhaps an attempt to deflect any blame from himself for not acting upon Forrest's news. Any blame for letting this crucial information go unacted upon can be placed squarely on Hardee's shoulders. One fact which also puts Hardee in a bad light is

that he knew where Beauregard's tent was. Earlier that evening, the commanders, including Hardee, discussed the next day's plan with Beauregard in his tent. When Forrest went to Hardee the second time, after not being able to find Beauregard, Hardee should have escorted him to Beauregard's tent, since he knew where it was. Hardee's inaction amounts to willful neglect of duty.

Endnotes

- ¹Roman, Beauregard, 300.
- ²McWhiney, Bragg, 242.
- ³OR, X, Part 2, 467.
- ⁴McDonough, Shiloh, 171.
- ⁵Ibid., 550-551.
- ⁶Ibid., 555.
- ⁷Battles and Leaders, 605.
- ⁸McDonough, Shiloh, 169-170.
- ⁹Roman, Beauregard, 535.
- ¹⁰Johnston, Johnston, 631.
- ¹¹Joseph H. Parks, General Leonidas Polk, C.S.A.-The Fighting Bishop
(Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1962), 236.
- ¹²Johnston, Johnston, 633.
- ¹³OR, X, Part 2, 387.
- ¹⁴Sword, Shiloh, 365.
- ¹⁵Hurst, Forrest, 90.
- ¹⁶Ibid., 91.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

When one considers how untrained and ill-prepared the soldiers were at Shiloh, it is amazing that the South came as close to victory as they did on April 6th. The fact that the attack was a complete surprise helped immensely in the South's efforts. So, if the South came so close to victory, why did they not achieve it? What went wrong? Answering those questions requires going back to the primary and secondary research questions.

Why Did Beauregard Change Johnston's Plan and Why Did Johnston Allow It?

Beauregard and Johnston discussed the plan on the morning of the 3rd of April. What no source is clear on is which plan did they discuss: Beauregard's version, or Johnston's version which Beauregard later changed. A definitive answer to that question remains as mysterious as how a copy of Lee's orders got lost at Antietam.

What is not a mystery is the fact that Johnston read Beauregard's order forty-eight hours prior to the battle and did not change it. The South went into the battle at Shiloh with an unclear commander's intent. The supreme commander had one idea of how to fight the battle and his subordinate commanders had another. The South violated one of the United States Army's principles of war as outlined in Field Manual 100-5, Operations, "Unity of Command."

"At all levels of war, employment of military forces in a manner that masses combat power toward a common objective requires unity of command and unity of effort."¹ Johnston failed to ensure unity of

command and unity of effort and therein lies the main reason for the South's failure at Shiloh.

Why Did Braxton Bragg Waste So Much Time and Manpower Making Futile Frontal Assaults at the Hornet's Nest?

Bragg had a reputation as being an extremely strict disciplinarian. Once his mind was set on doing something, it was his way or no way at all. He went through his military career believing that a well organized bayonet assault would carry any position. His belief in the power of the bayonet combined with his strict mind-set, led to his failed tactics at the Hornet's Nest. He was unable to see that after failed assaults and repeated requests for artillery, the Hornet's Nest was too strong to take with a bayonet assault alone. Only after Ruggles' batteries pounded the position with artillery did the South capture the Union stronghold. One thing can be said which only slightly justifies Bragg's tactics at the Hornet's Nest. Just prior to going into battle, Beauregard told Bragg, Polk, and Breckinridge to move to the sound of the heaviest firing. The Hornet's Nest was the location at which the Union made a stand and thereby became the center of attention for the South. By default, it became the point at which the firing was heaviest. This justifies Bragg's initial assaults at the Hornet's Nest, but it does not explain his practice of ordering repeated frontal assaults.

Did Beauregard Throw Away Victory By Not Ordering One More Assault on the End of April?

Victory was not lost at the end of April sixth by not ordering another assault on Grant's last line. The Southern troops were too disorganized and too exhausted to carry the line of artillery Grant had set up along Pittsburg Landing. Even well organized and rested troops would have a very difficult time capturing Grant's last position since

they would have to attack through thick underbrush, across soggy ground and uphill.

With the information in his possession at the time, Beauregard made the right decision. Remember, he had a message leading him to believe that Buell was going to Alabama and would not be able to reinforce Grant. Beauregard can be faulted for not better organizing his troops after hostilities ceased on April 6th or for not properly reconnoitering the Union position. However, his decision to end all offensive actions on April 6th did not throw away victory. He did, however, set himself up for disaster the next day by not ordering a reconnaissance of the Union position.

Why Was Nathan Bedford Forrest's Critical Intelligence Concerning Union Reinforcements Ignored?

The only possible explanation for Hardee's failure to act on Forrest's report was that he was too exhausted. Exhaustion is not in any way, shape, or form considered to be an excuse, it is merely a possible explanation. Forrest did what would be reasonably expected of anyone in his position. He passed the information along with a recommended course of action to the most senior officer he could find. In today's army, Hardee's inaction would almost surely result in him being relieved and might possibly result in him being court-martialed for negligence.

Epilogue

As stated before, the Southern high command's actions at Shiloh offer many lessons to a student of military history. However, there is more to Shiloh than lessons learned. Shiloh was the bloodiest war in American history up to that time. The North's numbers of killed and wounded totaled 10,162. The South's numbers of killed and wounded

totaled 19,902.²

Many soldiers in the battle, particularly on the Southern side, had never been in combat before. To them, war was still an exciting unknown adventure. The horror of Shiloh quickly changed their opinions. A Confederate soldier leaving the field on April seventh, summed up the human tragedy best when he later wrote:

I shall never forget the face of a young lieutenant from Louisiana with a smooth face and the bluest blue eyes. He lay with his revolver in his right hand, a most peaceful smile on his face, and a great big Yankee laying across him in cold death, with his musket still firmly grasped in his hand. The Yankee's gun was empty, and the lieutenant's pistol had two empty chambers. The lieutenant had a death wound made by a musket ball and the other man had two pistol holes clear through him; neither face had any expression of pain or anger. I don't know but we should have put them both to sleep in the same grave, but we did not.³

Endnotes

¹Field Manual 100-5, Operations, (Headquarters, Department of the Army, June 1993), 2-4.

²Sword, Shiloh, Appendix C.

³Ibid., 442.

APPENDIX

ORGINIZATION OF THE CONFEDERATE ARMY

ARMY OF THE MISSISSIPPI

Gen Albert Sidney Johnston
Gen P.G.T. Beauregard

FIRST ARMY CORPS
Major General Leonidas K. Polk

First Division
BG Charles Clark

First Brigade
COL R.M. Russell

11th Louisiana
12th Tennessee
13th Tennessee
22nd Tennessee
Bankhead's Battery

Second Brigade
BG A.P. Stewart

13th Arkansas
4th Tennessee
5th Tennessee
33rd Tennessee
Stanford's Battery

Second Division
BG B.F. Cheatham

First Brigade
BG B.R. Johnson

Mississippi Battalion (Blythe's)
2nd Tennessee
15th Tennessee
154th Tennessee
Polk's Battery

Second Brigade
COL W.H. Stephens

7th Kentucky
1st Tennessee
6th Tennessee
9th Tennessee
Smith's Battery

SECOND CORPS
Major General Braxton Bragg

First Division
BG Daniel Ruggles

First Brigade
COL R.L. Gibson

1st Arkansas
4th Louisiana
13th Louisiana
19th Louisiana
Bain's Battery

Second Brigade
BG Patton Anderson

1st Florida
17th Louisiana
20th Louisiana
9th Texas
Confederate Guards
Response Battalion
Hodgson's Battery

Third Brigade
COL Preston Pond Jr.

16th Louisiana
18th Louisiana
Crescent (Louisiana) Regiment
38th Tennessee
Ketchum's Battery

Second Division
BG Jones M. Withers

First Brigade
BG A.H. Gladden

21st Alabama
22nd Alabama
25th Alabama
26th Alabama
1st Louisiana
Robertson's Battery

Second Brigade
BG J.R. Chalmers

5th Mississippi
7th Mississippi
9th Mississippi
10th Mississippi
51st Tennessee
52nd Tennessee
Gage's Battery

Third Brigade
BG J.K. Jackson

17th Alabama
18th Alabama
19th Alabama
Alabama Battalion
Arkansas Battalion
2nd Texas
Girardey's Battery

THIRD CORPS
Major General William J. Hardee

First Brigade
BG T.C. Hindman

2nd Arkansas
5th Arkansas
6th Arkansas
7th Arkansas
3rd Confederate
Miller's Battery
Swett's Battery

Second Brigade
BG P.R. Cleburne

15th Arkansas
6th Mississippi
5th [35th] Tennessee
23rd Tennessee
24th Tennessee
Shoup's Artillery BN
Watson's Battery

Third Brigade
BG S.A.M. Wood

7th Alabama
16th Alabama
8th Arkansas
9th Arkansas Battalion
3rd Mississippi Battalion
27th Tennessee

44th Tennessee
55th Tennessee
Harper's Battery

RESERVE CORPS
Brigider General J.C. Breckinridge

First Brigade
Col Robert P. Trabue, 4th Kentucky

4th Alabama
31st Alabama
3rd Kentucky
4th Kentucky
5th Kentucky
6th Kentucky
Crew's Tennessee Batallion
Cobb's Kentucky Battery
Byrne's Kentucky Battery
Morgan's Squadron, Kentucky Cavalry

Second Brigade
BG John S. Bowen

9th Arkansas
10th Arkansas
2nd Confederate
1st Missouri
Pettus Mississippi
Flying Artillery
Watson Louisiana
Flying Artillery
Thompson's Kentucky
Cavalry

Third Brigade
Col Winfield S. Statham, 15th Mississippi

15th Mississippi
22nd Mississippi
19th Tennessee
20th Tennessee
28th Tennessee
45th Tennessee
Rutledge's Tennessee Battery

Unattached

Forrest's Regiment Tennessee Cavalry
Wharton's Regiment Texas Cavalry
Wirt Adams' Mississippi Cavalry
McClung's Tennessee Battery
Robert's Arkansas Battery

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