SHILOH
THE DEVIL'S OWN DAY

by Doug Dearth

Nearly a year had passed since the Union disaster at First Bull Run (Manassas). With continued Federal losses at Wilson's Creek, Ball's Bluff, and arguably, the Greenbrier River, Union morale began to wane. However, gains were being made in Kentucky and Tennessee. Under the combined army and navy forces of Major General Ulysses S. Grant and Flag Officer Andrew Hull Foote, Forts Henry and Donelson were taken. The loss of the two forts also meant the loss of the strategic waterways of the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers, putting a stranglehold on Southern commerce. With river trade no longer an option, rail became even more important to the South's sustainability.

Thus, Corinth, Mississippi, became a bustling railroad junction second only to Richmond in military import. The rail lines of the Mobile and Ohio running north/south and the Memphis and Charleston east/west met there with the M&C being the only direct link between the Atlantic Ocean and the Mississippi River. The Battle of Shiloh was fought as an offensive measure to keep the Federal Army from taking control of those railroads.

Again with the aid of the navy, The Union Army of the Tennessee pushed south down the Tennessee River. The 40,000 Federals were ferried by 147 steamboats and deposited at Pittsburg Landing with the intent of taking the critical rail station only 22 miles to the southwest.

The Confederate Army of Mississippi under General Albert Sidney Johnston, P. G. T. Beauregard, second-in-command, moved preemptively before the entire army of the north could assemble. Johnston hoped to defeat Grant's army before the arrival of Major General Don Carlos Buell and the Army of the Ohio. Their intention was to drive the Union forces away from the river and west into the swamps of Owl Creek.

An attack on the Union flank at the Tennessee River, would sever its supply line and avenue of retreat. Johnston rode to the front to lead the men on the battle line while Beauregard was instructed to stay in the rear and direct men and supplies as needed. This effectively ceded command and control to Beauregard, who had a different idea. Perhaps remembering the lesson of Ball's Bluff, he simply wanted to attack the Union line in waves and push them eastward into the river.

The corps of Hardee and Bragg began the assault, their divisions in one column, nearly 3 miles wide and 2 miles from its front to its rear. First contact was made on the Union right, away from the river and into a stupefied General Sherman who did not believe this to be the principal attack. His division was hit hard and Sherman was even shot in the hand, his adjutant killed beside him. The intense fighting here was around a small church that gave the battle its name: Shiloh (ironically, its Hebrew translation is "place of peace").

As the Confederate units advanced around swamps and through dense thickets and forest they became intermingled and difficult to control. Corps commanders attacked in line without reserves, and artillery could not be concentrated to effect a breakthrough. The attack was now a frontal assault in a single linear formation, which lacked both the depth and weight needed for guaranteed success. Still the Union lines were stretched thin and were beginning to waver. All along the front they began to fall back in disarray and many do not stop until they reached Pittsburg Landing. Their camps and provisions abandoned, hungry Rebels began to forage and loot the Yankee treasures of hot coffee and dry blankets. An hour was lost to the petty pilfering, and even Johnston could not get his men to press the attack. After chiding them for the plundering to no avail, he reached down from his horse and took a small tin cup from a table. "This will be my share," he said and then rode on. For the rest of the day he used the cup to direct his men in lieu of his sword. The general rode along the line, tapping the cup on the points of their bayonets. "These will have to do the work, men. Follow me!"

Johnston was about to lead them into the "Hornet's Nest."

Overall, the Confederate forces made steady progress rolling up the Union line causing one unit to flee, then another, then another. The Federal front was now being patched together with whatever forces could be found and positioned. Further back, the Union lines were becoming more compact and easier to defend. The time lost by the Confederates in the abandoned Union camps was now exploited by Sherman and Brigadier General McClernand's reformed troops who launched a viscous counter attack. From noon to 3:00 p.m., the two sides slug it out causing Johnston to commit his final reserves.

In the center of the battle line a peach orchard was in full bloom. Union troops under Major General Stephen Hurlbut held this section under repeated, violent attacks but were forced to fall back past a small pond now turned sanguine from scores of dying men – now forever known as Bloody Pond. The Union positions coalesced on a half mile salient in a slightly sunken road. This is the Hornet's Nest and it was defended by the divisions of Brigadier Generals Benjamin Prentiss and William H. L. Wallace, with 6,200 men and 25 cannon. Repeated frontal assaults could not dislodge the soldiers in blue though their casualties great. Wallace was mortally wounded, shot thought the head and Confederate Commanding General, Albert Sydney Johnston, hit by a Minié ball behind the right knee, severing his femoral artery, bled to death. He obtained his wound an hour earlier during the fighting at the Peach Orchard and died in a small ravine near the Hornet's Nest, purloined cup still in hand.

The Nest held and fought on tenaciously in the sunken road and heavy thicket – repeated Confederate infantry assaults proved fruitless. At about 3:00 p.m. Brigadier General Daniel Ruggles ordered his commanders to "Get every gun you can find."

Every spare piece of artillery was collected and lined up in a row of 62 cannon. "Ruggles's Battery" was the biggest concentration of cannon ever assembled in North America up to that point. It pounded the Hornet's Nest until the Union line broke around 5:30 p.m. Twelve hours after the battle had started Prentiss and Wallace's regiments were eventually surrounded and surrendered. But these two divisions provided time for the remainder of the Union army to fall back and stabilize at Grant's last line of defense.

The Rebel Army lurched forward, up several steep ravines expecting to finally crush the battered Federals – instead they were met with a strong showing of over 50 Union cannon and even 4, 32-pound smoothbore and 8, 8-inch smoothbore navel guns from the USS Lexington and USS Tyler on the Tennessee.

These final engagements made Beauregard realize how tired his army was and decided against any further assaults – he could mop-up tomorrow. So convinced he had won the day, he telegraphed Jefferson Davis and informed the C.S.A. President of his famous victory. Of the fighting Sherman said, "Well Grant, we've had the devil's own day, haven't we?" To

LEFT
A reproduction of the Shiloh Church. The original was used as a makeshift hospital after the battle but was so damaged that it fell down shortly after

RIGHT
Shiloh National Military Park has 226 artillery pieces. The cannons are mounted on reproduction carriages and mark the positions of artillery batteries during the battle. All the cannons seen in the park with the exception of two 32 pounders near the Tennessee River are original Civil War cannon tubes. These examples depict Ruggles's Battery

TOP LEFT
Union Generals U.S. Grant, No.10094 and William Tecumseh Sherman, No.31300

TOP RIGHT
Confederate Generals P.G.T. Beauregard, No.31080 and Albert Sydney Johnston, No.31081

BOTTOM LEFT
The Confederate Memorial, created in 1917 and commissioned by the United Daughters of the Confederacy. The central bronze portrays three women: in front is Victory. Her head is bowed and in her right hand is her laurel wreath. She is relinquishing it to the woman behind her to the right. That woman is Death. The other Woman is Night. She conspired with Death to hand Victory defeat

BOTTOM RIGHT
The sunken road in from of the Hornet's Nest. Many Confederate charges were swept away by the withering Federal fire from this position

which Grant responded, "Yes. Lick 'em tomorrow, though."

On the morning of 7 April, Confederate forces woke to the sound of distant tramping feet. A reinforced Union Army now comprised 45,000 men from Don Carlos Buell's Army of the Ohio and the three brigades of Major General Lew Wallace. Before dawn they were already on the move. The massive counterattack caught Beauregard off guard. No line of battle was formed; few if any commands were resupplied with ammunition; most of the men were hungry, dehydrated, and exhausted. Confederate defenders had little unit cohesion, and confusion reigned the morning. By 10 a.m., Beauregard had stabilized his front but to no avail. His remaining 28,000 men, tired and battle weary, were no match for the fortified Union Blue Jackets, half of them, battle fresh.

Two hours later, Beauregard was pushed back to the Hamburg-Purdy Road, a third of a mile from the Shiloh Church where the battle had begun the previous day. The fighting was so intense there that Sherman described it in his post-battle report as "the severest musketry fire I ever heard." Ultimately, it was all too much for the depleted Confederate forces and by 2:00 p.m. they had to retreat back to Corinth. Grant did not pursue.

The two-day carnage approached 24,000 casualties; each side counted more than 1,700 dead and 8,000 wounded in addition to the missing. With casualties totaling nearly five times those of First Bull Run, Shiloh became the bloodiest battle of the war up to that time. It was early Spring of 1862 and there would be three-and-a-half more years of terrible blood letting.

About Your Visit

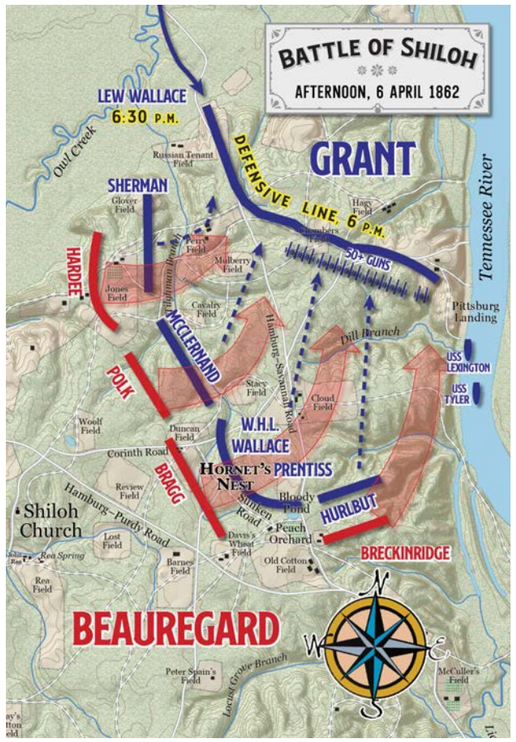
The land in and around the Shiloh battlefield saw little agricultural or industrial development after the war. Because of this, the federal government was able to save just over 2,000 acres by 1897. A total of 3,400 acres have been secured to date with the private preservation organization, The American Battlefield Trust being the strongest agent of conservancy. Much of the battle's main actions were covered in the initial purchase but the engagement was larger that the park's boundaries and more sites and protected areas can be found stretching back to Corinth.

The park offers a printed map of the principle area of conflict for a standard auto tour or an audio driving tour after you download the National Park Service phone app. We strongly suggest the free application as it is the portal to all of the NPS parks and a wellspring of knowledge. Use the QR code provided for your free download.

Both tours present the battle in chronological order which can mean some backtracking and can be a little confusing. In fact at the time of this printing the Park Service provided audio commentary was off by one number, but that was a minor inconvenience and did not detract from the overall experience.

LEFT
Detail of the Mississippi monument seen on the first page. Erected in 2015, it is probably the last monument ever to be placed in Shiloh

LEFT BELOW
Monuments of Indiana and Iowa. Located near the Visitor's Center and Grant's last line, they are just two of the many memorable monuments, plaques and informational markers in the park



BELOW
Battle Map of the afternoon of 6 April. Of note: Hornet's Nest, Peach Orchard, Sunken Road, Bloody Pond, Owl Creek, and Shiloh Church
Original map created by Hal Jespersen, www.cwmaps.com

The auto tour is great but do get out of your car. There are a few hiking trails and feel free to hike across fields (where there are no trails) unless signs specifically prohibit it. A "must walk" starts at auto tour stop 3. Hike up the "sunken road" which leads you by a collection of regimental markers, through the heart of the Hornet's Nest and delivers you at the reconstructed W. Manse George cabin, the Peach Orchard, and Bloody Pond (tour stop 16).

Another simple, yet interesting walk is along the 1.1 mile loop through the Shiloh Indian Mound National Landmark. The interpreted walking trail takes you among the mounds and out to the bluff overlooking the Tennessee River. The tallest mound is on the edge of the bluff and has a walkway to the top with a sensational view of the waterway.

Before you begin any tour or trek, stop by the Visitor's Center. They have a tidy display of artifacts and informational boards but be sure to save time to view the film, *Fiery Trial*. The movie is 45 minutes long and is exceptionally well done.

Lastly, consider a private tour guide. The Visitor's Center can suggest several qualified guides to help you comprehend and enhance your visit.

Corinth

The main objective of the North was the railroad junction of Corinth Mississippi. Near the Tennessee border, 22 miles southwest of Pittsburg Landing (Shiloh battlefield), a 30 minute drive – or a two-day march if you weren't being harassed by the enemy! You'll need a couple of days to see everything so use Corinth as your base-camp. It's not nearly as touristy as Gettysburg nor frozen-in-time as Antietam with some shops, good restaurants (Blazing Noodles with its authentic Thai was my first choice!), and several museums, some not Civil War related. The quaint, little burg is centrally located and highly recommended.

Start your visit at Corinth Civil War Interpretive Center. A branch of the National Park Service, this center features a 15,000 square-foot facility which offers even more information on the battle. There are videos and interactive exhibits that help to enhance your understanding of the conflict. The center stands near the site of Battery Robinett, the Federal fortification that saw some of the bloodiest fighting during the Battle of Corinth.

A driving tour is available with many important and historic stops along the way. One of the most intriguing is the stop at Battery F. Another of the six outer batteries built by the Union army, it is today considered the most pristine fortification still in existence.

The Corinth Contraband Camp

As Union forces occupied major portions of the South, enslaved people escaped their bondage and fled to the safety of Federal troops. Early in the war Major General Benjamin Butler learned that three slaves from Confederate-occupied Norfolk County, Virginia and presented themselves to Union troops. General Butler refused to return the escaped men to slaveholders as he would have been obliged to do under the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act. Butler reasoned, that since Virginia had seceded from the United States and did not consider itself subject to any federal laws, neither were those laws binding between the U.S. and any hostile foreign power. Butler deduced he was under no obligation to return the three men and would hold them as "contraband of war."

When African-American slaves were liberated, the Corinth Contraband Camp marked their first step towards autonomy. It housed over 6,000 former slaves who flocked to the camp when Union forces occupied Corinth in 1862. There, former slaves learned to read, write, and became financially productive.

Today a portion of the historic camp is preserved to commemorate those who began their journey to freedom. An easy and thought-provoking quarter mile walk exhibits six life-size bronze sculptures depicting the men, women, and children who inhabited the camp. This camp is part of Shiloh National Military Park.

TOP LEFT to RIGHT
Corinth town hall; Peaceful fountain at the Interpretive Center; The first bronze statue at the Contraband Camp

BELOW
A partial replica of Battery Robinett attached to the Interpretive Center.

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Congress established five Civil War battlefields as National Military Parks in the 1890s: Chickamauga and Chattanooga (1890); Shiloh (1894); Gettysburg (1895); Vicksburg (1899); and Antietam, which was marked as beginning in 1890 but by 1898 still was not yet a full-fledged national military park.

The War Department maintained stewardship of these battlefields until 1933 when it was transferred to the National Park Service.