



*By Jean-Claude Janssens*

*Adapted into English by Gerald Hawkins*

## INTRODUCTION

Located on the boundary between the States of Tennessee and Mississippi, Shiloh is a place in the middle of nowhere. It is neither a city nor a stream or river.<sup>1</sup> It is a Methodist church, actually an improved wooden cabin, isolated in the heart of the forest, far from any town. Shiloh is a word derived from Hebrew and means “place of peace”!

Yet, it is around this peaceful place that was fought on April 6 and 7, 1862, the first major action of the western theater of the Civil War, one of the toughest and bloodiest battles of the American Civil War.

## ALBERT SIDNEY JOHNSTON

On June 25, 1861, the government of Richmond created the Department of the West - also referred as Department No. 2. The defense of this vast but sparsely populated territory was entrusted to General Albert Sidney Johnston, said *Sidney*, probably the

---

<sup>1</sup> Traditionally, the battles of the Civil War are named after a town or location in the South and a river in the North.

most promising officer of the Confederacy. However, his untimely death in his first engagement never gave him the opportunity to demonstrate his proficiency.

Albert Sidney Johnston was an old hand when the Civil War broke out in 1861. In fact, born in 1803 in Kentucky, he was already 58 years old. At the age of 23, he left the Military Academy of West Point in New York, ranking 8 out of 41, and was assigned to the 2nd Infantry Regiment. In 1832, Johnston participated in the war against the Black Hawk Sauk Indians in Illinois.<sup>2</sup> Two years later, following the death of his wife, he resigned from the army and tried his hand at agriculture, without much success.

Eager for action, he enlisted as a private in the insurgent army of Texas in April 1836 and was appointed colonel in August. In 1837, he was promoted to the rank of brigadier general and commander of the Texan army. From 1838 to 1840, he became Secretary of War of the young Republic of Texas. In 1846-48, he participated in the war with Mexico at the head of the 1st Texas Volunteers Infantry Regiment.<sup>3</sup>

In 1849, he reenlisted in the US army. He was promoted colonel in 1855 and commanded the newly created 2nd US Cavalry Regiment. The following year, after another promotion, he headed of the Department of Texas. Between 1858 and 1860, he was responsible for subduing the insurgent Mormon militia in Utah and in January 1861, he was promoted at the head of the Department of the Pacific. However, on April 10, 1861, his evident sympathies for the Confederate cause forced him to resign from this prestigious post.

Johnson thus had an impressive resume! This did not go unnoticed by President Abraham Lincoln who then offered Johnston the position of second in command of the Union Army. This proposal remained unanswered.

On April 28, 1861, Johnston was back in Los Angeles in civilian clothes. On June 16, fearing an arrest for treason, he left a now dangerous California and on July 28, after an epic journey through the deserts of the American Southwest, he arrived at Mesilla, the short-lived capital of the Confederate Territory of Arizona. On August 30, the Confederate government appointed Albert Sidney Johnston army general. He reported for duty in Richmond on September 1, 1861.

Two days later, General Leonidas Polk<sup>4</sup> inadvertently captured Columbus, Kentucky. This minor incident caused an unsuspected chain reaction. On September 6, in tit for tat retaliation, Union General Ulysses Grant occupied Paducah, on the Tennessee River in Kentucky. On the 11th, the status of this State turned from neutral to unionist.

The day before, Sidney Johnston was given command of the vast Department No. 2. On December 31, 1861, it consisted of Arkansas, Tennessee and of half of Mississippi west of the Mississippi Central railroad. Johnston also had the upper hand on the operations in Missouri and Indian Territory<sup>5</sup>.

The Tennessee front was 430 miles long. To defend it, Johnston had ridiculous forces consisting of 18,000 men. Empowered with the necessary authority, he intensified recruitment in Arkansas, Tennessee and Mississippi, calling for 50,000 men who would

---

<sup>2</sup> Lieutenant Jefferson Davis and Abraham Lincoln, captain of the Illinois militia also participated.

<sup>3</sup> This regiment was never engaged against the Mexicans!

<sup>4</sup> Leonidas Polk (1806-1864) graduated from the Academy in 1827, 8/38. In 1830, he resigned from the army and returned to his religious order. In 1840, he was appointed Protestant bishop in Louisiana. He had no military experience. However, President Jefferson Davis believed that his classmate Leonidas would be a good symbol for the young and very religious nation. Polk was promoted major general as of June 25, 1861.

<sup>5</sup> Today the State of Oklahoma.

prove sluggish in enlisting. Among these was one John Rowland, a volunteer from Arkansas, later known as Henry Morton Stanley.<sup>6</sup>

On September 13, General Felix Zollicoffer moved to Cumberland Gap, Kentucky. On the 18th, the Army of Kentucky was created and General Simon Bolivar Buckner established his headquarters in Bowling Green, Kentucky. On December 10, the State joined the Confederacy and its government also moved to Bowling Green. Its authority would, however, never exceed the range of Buckner's infantry rifles!

## **BAD START FOR THE WESTERN SOUTHERNERS IN 1862**

In early 1862, the pace of operations accelerates. In January, General Johnston succeeds, not without difficulty, in mobilizing some 45,000 soldiers from Kentucky and Tennessee. On January 19, the 4,000 men of Zollicoffer are defeated at Mill Springs or Logan Cross Roads, Kentucky, on the Cumberland River, by an equivalent force under the orders of George Thomas<sup>7</sup>. General Felix Zollicoffer was killed in the engagement.

A much more serious event occurs between February 6 and 16, 1862, when Ulysses Grant and his 27,000 men capture Fort Henry on the Tennessee River and Fort Donelson on the Cumberland River. This is a disaster. The Confederates lose 17,000 men of which 15,000 surrender, including their commander, General Simon Buckner<sup>8</sup>. Grant deplores only 3,000 casualties. The door of the Deep South has been easily forced at little cost! Johnston, fearing a Federal bypass on his left flank, has no option but to retreat south. Meanwhile, General Don Carlos Buell has also taken the offensive with 55,000 men of the Army of the Ohio.

On February 11, 1862, Johnston evacuates Bowling Green. Arriving in Nashville on the 18th, he has to abandon the capital of Tennessee as of the 23d. Buell enters the town two days later, on February 25. Johnston then flees to Murfreesboro. Under pressure from Buell, he is unable to hold his position and leaves the town on March 1.

Between February 29 and March 2, Leonidas Polk evacuates Columbus, leaving behind 5,000 men to defend New Madrid, Missouri, along the Mississippi River and Island No. 10 in Tennessee. As of March 3, the US Army of Mississippi under John Pope lays siege to the place with 25,000 men.

On March 7, at Pea Ridge in Arkansas, the 17,000-strong Confederate Army of the West of Earl Van Dorn suffers a severe defeat inflicted by the 11,000 men of Samuel Curtis. Called to the rescue, Van Dorn arrives in Corinth a week later!

On March 14, following a heavy Federal bombardment, the Confederates evacuate New Madrid and take refuge on Island No. 10.

On the same day, General Pierre Beauregard is sent to Jackson, Tennessee, to reorganize the Confederate forces in the area. He is then second in command of the army, which will rapidly prove catastrophic.

On March 19, Buell reaches Columbia, Tennessee. The large bridge over the Duck River has been sabotaged by the Confederate rearguard. In addition, the water level is

---

<sup>6</sup> He served in the 6th Arkansas Infantry. Captured at Shiloh, he joined the Union army and its navy before exploring the Congo, 15 years later.

<sup>7</sup> Although a Virginian, George Thomas remained loyal to the Union.

<sup>8</sup> Only 4,000 men escaped capture, including the cavalry of Colonel Nathan Bedford Forrest.

very high and the launch of a floating bridge proves laborious. Buell remains stuck there for ten days but on the 29th, he finally manages to cross the river.

While this is going on, Johnston arrives in Corinth, Mississippi. The city is an important railway junction and its position all the more strategic. Johnston cannot afford the luxury of retreating further south.

## **GRANT PROGRESSES SOUTH**

Meanwhile, without opposition, the victorious Union Army of Tennessee continues to progress southward along the Tennessee River. It has a transport fleet and is backed by gunboats armed with 8 inch heavy guns. On March 16, 1862, nearly 50,000 men disembark at Pittsburg Landing on the western bank of the Tennessee River. Not a Rebel on the horizon! General William T. Sherman, who is not the highest ranking officer but a good friend of Grant, pro-actively organizes the camps with intensive drilling of the recruits. Lewis Wallace's division is detached to Crump's Landing, a little further north, almost opposite Savannah.

On March 17, Ulysses Grant joins the Army of Tennessee but does not establish his headquarters at Pittsburg Landing. He prefers to settle at Cherry Mansion, a comfortable eight-room house located in Savannah, Tennessee, nine miles further north, on the eastern shore of the Tennessee River. He is waiting for the arrival of Buell and his army, which has left Murfreesboro, Tennessee, at the same time. The orders of General Henry Halleck, commander of the Department of Missouri in St. Louis, are without ambiguity: Grant is forbidden to attack the Confederates in Corinth before his junction with Buell. This reunion must take place exactly at Savannah.

## **CONFEDERATE CONCENTRATION**

Between March 5 and 29, 1862, the Johnston-Beauregard tandem manages to assemble a substantial army at Corinth. General Braxton Bragg transferred 10,000 men from Pensacola and Mobile. General Daniel Ruggles brought 5,000 others from Louisiana. Together with General Albert Sidney Johnston, General William Hardee commands the rest of the Army of Kentucky – 17,000 to 20,000 men, of which one third is sick. Monsignor Polk arrived with 8,000 to 10,000 troops from the neighborhood of Columbus, Kentucky.

Benjamin Cheatham's division halts at Bethel, Tennessee. Its mission is to observe Pittsburg and Crump's Landings, 15 miles to the west, along the Tennessee River. Finally, the Union Army is not as lonely as one might have thought, but no one realizes this at the time.

With the arrival of new recruits, the Confederate army totals 55,000 soldiers, of which 7,500 are ill. "Army" is probably a strong word. It is rather a motley gathering of armed men, without experience or discipline, and lacking everything from uniforms to weapons, ammunition, equipment and means of transport. Some carry flintlock pistols and rifles from another era; others are equipped with hunting rifles, shotguns, pikes and even a rare English Enfield rifle, model 1853. Their specialty? Drinking and looting. George Crittenden, commander of the reserve forces, is charged with drunkenness. He

is not the only one suffering from this evil. He is replaced by John Breckinridge<sup>9</sup> who is no example in this matter! Moreover, Bragg goes as far as accusing General Polk of plunder! At least 80% of the raw recruits have never seen a soldier from the Union or elsewhere - with perhaps the exception of a few Mexicanos during the 1846 Mexican War - and have never taken part in a battle!

## THE OPPOSING FORCES

### *CONFEDERATE ARMY*

Johnston, Beauregard and their generals manage the feat of structuring this shapeless mass into a semblance of field army. Initially, 68 regiments of various sizes are formed. Tennessee provides the largest contingent: 27 regiments.<sup>10</sup> Also included in the order of battle are five regiments of the Orphan Brigade<sup>11</sup> of Kentucky, led by its charismatic leader John Breckinridge; two regiments of Texas, one on foot and the other mounted; the first and only regiment of Missouri<sup>12</sup>; two so-called "Confederate" regiments, the core of a future army that will never see the day, and finally a Florida battalion. The States of Maryland, Virginia, the Carolinas and Georgia do not provide any recruits, nor does the Indian Territory. We are thus in the presence of western country men only.

The regiments are militarily divided into large units. The main one, the 1st corps, is under the orders of General Leonidas Polk and is composed of two divisions comprising four brigades, a total of 9,000 men. The 2nd corps with two divisions of six brigades totaling 16,300 men is commanded by General Braxton Bragg<sup>13</sup>, who is known for his rigid military discipline<sup>14</sup>. The task is arduous for Bragg. Indeed, the first Conscription Act will only be voted on April 16, 1862, ten days too late! The 3rd corps, which does not include the level of a division, comprises 6,800 men in three brigades and is entrusted to General William Hardee<sup>15</sup>. Finally, the reserve corps of 7,200 men, which also includes three brigades, is assigned to John Breckinridge, to whom a command of some importance must be given, according to his status. Six cavalry regiments are spread in the different infantry corps. Two independent regiments are not assigned to any command. The most famous is certainly the 8th Texas Cavalry or Texas Rangers.

Finally, the offensive is to be carried out with 16 brigades - 36,000 infantry and artillerymen - and 4,000 cavalry, supported by 123 guns of all styles, periods and sizes.

---

<sup>9</sup> John C. Breckinridge (1821-1875) fled Kentucky on October 9, 1861, and was promoted brigadier general thirty days later. Veteran of the war against Mexico (1846-1848), Vice President of the United States at the time of James Buchanan (1857-1860), Southern Democrat candidate defeated by Abraham Lincoln in the election of 1860. He was without much military experience. Among others, he will be the last Confederate Secretary of War, appointed on February 4, 1865.

<sup>10</sup> Far behind came Louisiana with 12 regiments, some in blue uniforms. Alabama and Arkansas each raised 10 regiments. After came Mississippi with 9 regiments.

<sup>11</sup> They will not see their mother before the end of the war, in 1865.

<sup>12</sup> The martyrdom of this indestructible regiment will end at the surrender of Fort Blakely in Mobile, Alabama, on April 9, 1865.

<sup>13</sup> Braxton Bragg (1817-1876) graduated in 1837, 5/50, from West Point Military Academy. A career soldier, he was a veteran of the Seminole and Mexican War.

<sup>14</sup> This did not make him particularly popular with local volunteers.

<sup>15</sup> William J. Hardee (1815-1873) graduated from West Point in 1838, 26/45. Professional soldier, he was initially assigned to the cavalry (Dragoons) and became a student at the French Cavalry School at Saumur, France. He later became a prominent infantry tactician. His study published in 1855 was based on European publications and was codified in a manual used by the Southern and Northern armies alike.

## **UNION ARMIES**

### **ARMY OF TENNESSEE**

On the Union side, Ulysses Grant<sup>16</sup> heads the Army of Tennessee<sup>17</sup>. The corps echelon is not yet used. The army is divided into six uneven divisions comprising eighteen brigades led by Major Generals John A. McClernand and Lewis "Lew" Wallace, and Brigadier Generals William H. Wallace, Stephen A. Hurlbut, William T. Sherman and Benjamin M. Prentiss.

The troops originate from Illinois, Ohio, Iowa, Missouri, Indiana<sup>18</sup>, Wisconsin, Kentucky and Michigan. The 1st Nebraska Infantry<sup>19</sup> is the only infantry regiment raised in this sparsely populated area. As with the Confederates, the Eastern States are not represented. There are no Regulars<sup>20</sup> except two cavalry companies. It is thus a western business on both sides.

The Federal army totals 45,000 troops. However, on Sunday April 6, 1862 - the first day of fighting - Grant will be without the valuable 7,500 men of Lew Wallace's infantry division, which reduces his useful force to 37,500 men and 23 artillery batteries, or a hundred guns. As in the enemy ranks, the 2,000 cavalrymen are scattered in the infantry units.

### **ARMY OF THE OHIO**

On Monday, April 7, Grant receives valuable reinforcement from the Army of the Ohio of General Don Carlos Buell<sup>21</sup>: 18,000 to 20,000 men and four artillery batteries, or 20 to 24 guns. Four divisions will participate in the action, including three battalions of regular troops. No cavalry unit will be engaged. Among the many volunteer units is the 77th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry Regiment, which is isolated among the men of the Midwest.

## **PLANS**

Grant has no plan for his Army of Tennessee. He does not think that he needs one because he cannot imagine for a moment that a major battle will take place in the near future. He firmly believes that the bulk of Confederate forces are still in Corinth, 18 miles from his bivouacs. He simply waits for the imminent arrival of General Buell's Army of the Ohio. Once the concentration of both armies has been carried out, his offensive will resume southwards according to General Halleck's instructions.

---

<sup>16</sup> Ulysses Simpson Grant (1822-1885) graduated from the Military Academy at West Point in 1843, 21/39, and was a veteran of the Mexican War of 1846-1848. He already proved very effective at the beginning of the Civil War and was promised to a bright future.

<sup>17</sup> Not to be confused with the Confederate Army of the same name, which will be created on November 20, 1862.

<sup>18</sup> Gray uniforms were common in Indiana. One can imagine the inevitable confusions!

<sup>19</sup> It will become the 1st Nebraska Cavalry on November 6, 1863.

<sup>20</sup> Regular soldiers or professionals. They were well equipped, well trained, very effective but not in great numbers: 16,307 in 1861, 25,463 in 1863 and 21,669 in 1865.

<sup>21</sup> Don Carlos Buell (1818-1898) was of Catalan descent. He graduated from West Point in 1841, 32/52. Second lieutenant in the 3rd US Infantry, he participated in the wars against the Seminoles (1842) and Mexico (1846-1848). In 1861, he worked at organizing the Army of the Potomac. Excellent administrative officer, he was clearly more comfortable behind a desk than on the battlefield.

Johnston has the only strategic vision possible in such a scenario. He must destroy or at least beat Grant's army before the arrival of Buell. He advocates a line attack with his three joined corps, supported by the reserves. This is in any case the substance of his encrypted message wired to President Davis in Richmond, on April 3, 1862, at 3 PM. It is probably the best plan to adopt with inexperienced troops. The effort will focus on the right flank, to isolate the enemy from its base at Pittsburg Landing and force it to surrender in the marshes of Owl Creek.

Unfortunately, Beauregard, the second in command and a specialist in sophisticated combinations<sup>22</sup>, manages to impose a different plan of attack carried out by three successive assault waves, with the help of reserves. This plan is difficult to implement and more suitable for veteran troops engaged in a pitched battle on a plain rather than inexperienced men fighting without any visibility in the woods! Beauregard favors the main thrust on the left, envisaging nothing less than pushing Grant's army in the Tennessee River! The two diametrically opposite plans will eventually paralyze the entire battle.

The departure is set for the morning of April 3, 1862. The fighting will begin at dawn of the following day, April 4th.

## DEPARTURE

The big move scheduled for Thursday, April 3, 1862, begins in a bad way. General William Hardee is difficult and requires written orders. His 3rd corps is in the lead so no others can move. The instructions finally arrive at 3 PM. The Confederate horde can now finally leave Corinth. Direction: Pittsburg Landing, Tennessee. The attack remains scheduled for April 4 at dawn. This would have perhaps been possible with more experienced troops, which was far from being the case.<sup>23</sup>

The roads are mere muddy trails interspersed with streams and swamps. On the evening of April 4, an icy rain begins to fall and continues the next day. The roads then become mudslides where artillery and wagons sink to their axles.

Breckinridge's corps only leaves its base at Burnsville, east of Corinth, in the afternoon of April 4. The same goes for Cheatham's division still isolated in the north, at Bethel. His five brigades will join the main army on the next afternoon. Bragg loses a division in the adventure, which is blocked by the wagon train following Polk's corps. General Johnston has to oversee the traffic himself!<sup>24</sup> In the meantime, a huge bottleneck has formed at the crossroads of Monterey and Mickey farm.

The beginning of the operation turns into a catastrophe! There is now no question of attacking on April 4 or even 5. At the war council held in the evening of the 5th, Beauregard even threatens to return to Corinth. He fears that the surprise factor, essential for the success of his plan, is now lost. General Johnston cuts short the discussion, and exasperated, shouts: *I will fight them [the Yankees], even if they were a million!*

---

<sup>22</sup> Beauregard was apparently and for obscure reasons, inspired by Napoleon's tactic at the battle of Waterloo in 1815! He should have further studied the one developed by the Emperor at Austerlitz in 1805!

<sup>23</sup> For example, Bragg's men from Pensacola, Florida, had never marched for an entire day!

<sup>24</sup> German General Hasso von Manteuffel (1897-1978), commander of the 5th Panzer Army (armored), found himself in exactly the same situation at the beginning of the Battle of the Bulge (December 1944)!

## SURPRISE EFFECT

The primary tactical element of the entire Confederate strategy is clearly the sacrosanct surprise! Will it work? Nothing is less certain. During two days, the starving and still undisciplined southern recruits happily shoot game that populates the peaceful woods, to check if their powder is dry! Beauregard is incapable of containing his legitimate fear for the future, which irritates his boss *Sidney Johnston*.

On April 4, Confederate cavalymen capture six enemy sentries. The soldiers sent to find them stumble on the vanguard of Hardee's corps before running away in the opposite direction. General Sherman is notified of the incident but takes no special measures. He replies with an arrogant tone that the officers are panicking too soon. The next day, the Confederate cavalry even shows itself openly to observe a drill session of the 70th Ohio Infantry Regiment. That same day, some Federal soldiers are driven from a house near Shiloh Church. They claim to have seen artillery maneuvering in the woods!

Panic is at its height in the 53rd Ohio Infantry Regiment. The men assert having seen movements at a short distance. Colonel Appler sends a detachment to reconnoiter. He also stumbles on Hardee's pickets who are ready for the attack since dawn. The Confederates open fire and the Yankees immediately flee. Appler reports this to a somewhat nervous Sherman, who shouts in his face: *Bring your damn regiment back to Ohio! There is no Rebel between here and Corinth!*

During the night, a confident Grant telegraphs to his superior Halleck: *I do not have the slightest impression that a general attack will be launched against us!* Such incomprehensible lightness of the Yankee staff is hard to believe.

## TERRAIN

The future battlefield is for the most part wooded. The undergrowth is particularly dense. The area is interspersed with cultivated fields. The undulating terrain cut by gullies and streams gains in altitude from the river and forms a plateau. It has rained a lot in the last forty-eight hours. The ground is muddy and slippery. Nothing is particularly favorable to the attacker and all benefit to the defense. The officers of both camps have no recent maps or no maps at all. They must therefore rely on the haphazard services of local guides.

The battle line extends from Owl Creek to the west and Lick Creek to the east, both tributaries of the Tennessee River, 8 miles away, front that is far too long!

## APRIL 6, 1862 – FIRST DAY

### *DEPLOYMENT OF THE TROOPS*

William Hardee's corps with its three brigades occupies the first line. This is however insufficient to cover the expected attacking front, far from it. The Gladen brigade of Bragg's corps then moves from the second to the first line and is positioned on Hardee's right. Braxton Bragg's corps with his five remaining brigades aligns five hundred yards to the rear. Eight hundred yards further back, Leonidas Polk's corps deploys its four brigades. John Breckinridge's three reserve brigades are positioned

behind, on Bragg's right flank. The line of battle is exactly what the Napoleonic Beaugard had wanted!

On the opposite side, resting in the comfort of their camps, Grant's men await those of Buell. Most of them are still asleep. Others begin preparing coffee and breakfast. Unfortunately, the campsites are not fortified. Grant, like his foe, believes that fighting behind field defenses is not the suitable way to harden men. However, there are not even outposts or sentries, which is a major blunder. The first tent line is occupied from west to east by three brigades of Sherman's division, Prentiss' division of two brigades and the 4th Sherman brigade commanded by Colonel David Stuart. The men are raw recruits under training. The second line consists of McClelland's and Hurlbut's divisions, comprising more seasoned soldiers. The disposition of the troops is exactly the opposite of what was needed. William Wallace's division is bivouacking alone at the rear, on a third line. At Crump's Landing, five miles further north and far behind is posted Lew Wallace's division. Nice defense in depth, probably unintentional, but the Army of Tennessee has a purely offensive vocation!

### ***SKIRMISHES***

At 3 AM, Colonel Everett Peabody, commanding a brigade of Prentiss' division, is not reassured and takes the personal initiative of organizing a reconnaissance in force. The first contact occurs at exactly 5.14 AM in the Fairley field. The 21st and 25th Missouri Infantry Regiments encounter the 3rd Mississippi Infantry battalion of Wood's brigade, the riflemen of Hardee's corps. Shots ring out and a bullet strikes Lieutenant Frederick Klinger of the 25th Missouri, who has the sad honor of being the first man killed on the opening day of hostilities. There will soon be many more! The battle of Shiloh has just begun.

### ***THE GREAT DISPERSION***

At 6 AM, the four brigades of Hardee's first line fall on Sherman's right brigade and on the two brigades of Prentiss' division with a shattering effect. At 6.40 AM, Sidney Johnston mounts his horse, stating with optimism: *Tonight we will water our horses in the Tennessee River!*

Long before, the Confederate army will be completely disorganized, resulting in a rare blend of all its units! This starts at the beginning of the action when Cleburne's brigade is deployed on the right side of the Confederate lines. Cleburne must cross Shiloh Branch Creek. Without proper scouting and having no maps, he ignores its existence. This is unfortunate since the enemy fire is particularly hot. He divides his brigade in two and then moves away from Wood's brigade. Hardee is unable to stick to Owl Creek. Bragg has to swing around Pond's and Anderson's brigades to reach Cleburne's right. Both are attacking the two remaining Sherman brigades. At 7.30 AM, the 2nd corps is engaged. Three of the four brigades of General Polk manage to fill the gap created between Cleburne and Wood, right in the middle of Hardee's corps.

Hardee has also not reached Lick Creek on his right. Chalmers' and Jackson's brigades of Bragg's corps are moved to the right, joining Gladen's brigade. By chance, the integrity of Withers' division is temporarily restored. Not for long. Indeed, between 7.30 and 10.00 AM, the reserve corps slowly moves into action in dispersed order.

Trabue's brigade is directed to the left to support Hardee and Polk. The other two brigades of Statham and Bowen, together with General Breckinridge are to the far right. They are inserted between Chalmers and Gladen.

At 10.30 AM, the three assault waves are amalgamated into one, with no weight or depth. Johnston's plan now applies *de facto*. The brigades are randomly scattered along the front line. There is no longer corps or divisions and practically no reserves. There still remains Stephens' brigade of Cheatham's division of Polk's corps and Gibson's brigade of Ruggles' division of Bragg's corps. In fact, they seem to have been forgotten. Units are thrown into action as soon as they arrive and where the fighting is the hottest, only to be immediately swallowed up in a whirlwind of fire, lead and blood.

Thousands of hungry men throw themselves on the hot breakfast of their enemies before looting and destroying their camps. They however manage to recover 2,500 modern muskets. Few stragglers can be brought back in line while losses accumulate. The confusion is total on the Confederate side.

At around 10.30 AM, facing such a chaotic situation, Bragg and Polk agree to redistribute the command: the right wing to Bragg, Polk in the center, the left wing to Hardee and Breckinridge with the reserve. Appropriate messages are sent to the interested parties, but not to Johnston or Beauregard.

The situation is no better on the opposite side. The Yankees have been caught without warning. Their camps are overrun, looted and burned. At least 6,000 men have fled to Pittsburg Landing without a fight. Many prisoners are taken but the true fighters manage to reorganize faster than expected.

At 8.30 AM, in Savannah, intrigued by the sound of intense gunfire, Grant interrupts his breakfast. Half an hour later, he arrives at Crump's Landing on the steamer *Tigress*. He then sets off to Pittsburg Landing about five miles to the south to meet Sherman. He finally realizes what is going on. The battle has lasted for three hours and the sight is daunting!

In a first step, McClernand's and Hurlbut's divisions of the second line, and those of William Wallace's third line, each send a brigade, left, center and right. Grant is working feverishly to round up reinforcements from outside: Lew Wallace's division of his own army and that of impressive "Bull" William Nelson<sup>25</sup> of the Army of the Ohio, have arrived at Savannah on April 5, but he cannot count on them immediately.

The last two brigades of McClernand are moved to the left of those of Sherman. Hardee's and Polk's men are stalled and the Yankees hold their position until 10 AM. At 1 PM, Hardee orders Wharton's Texas Rangers to charge into the woods, with the aim of accelerating the retreat of the enemy. Strange use of the cavalry!

Late in the afternoon, eight Confederate brigades irresistibly repel Sherman's and McClernand's troops fighting on the Hamburg-Purdy road, along Tillman Branch Creek, and finally occupy the Hamburg-Savannah road near Pittsburg Landing. On the left, near Lick Creek, Stuart's and Arthur William Wallace's brigades retreat under pressure from the four southern brigades led by Breckinridge and General Johnston himself. These two Federal brigades withdraw to Pittsburg Landing, via Dill Branch Creek.

---

<sup>25</sup> William *Bull* Nelson (1824-1862), the only Federal naval officer known to become major general in the army, was 1.90 meters tall and weighed around 330 pounds.

### ***LEWIS WALLACE'S DIVISION***

But where is Lew Wallace's 3rd division? Early in the action, it is at Crump's Landing, opposite Savannah, on the defensive against a hypothetical attack from the west. Indeed, Cheatham's division stationed in Bethel until April 4 has finally been identified. At 9 AM, Wallace welcomes Grant as he disembarks from his steamer.

At 11.30 AM, Grant's orders arrive: Wallace's division has to move south and position itself to the right of the army to support Sherman who is in big trouble. An hour later, the division moves on muddy trails through woods and swamps. Its artillery and supply train are bogged down and the progression turns into a nightmare. In mid-afternoon, when arriving at the designated location, west of Owl Creek, Wallace finds no sign of Sherman's division because the latter, pressed by Hardee, is in full retreat. Unknowingly, his division is on the rear left of the enemy!

Lew Wallace does not know what to do. He finally decides to turn back. His division does not turn around properly and forms a semi-circle! Additional precious time is lost. After marching more than 14 miles on very difficult terrain without meeting any enemy, Wallace's exhausted division finally unites in the evening with the bulk of the army at its main defensive position of Pittsburg Landing. Grant barely appreciates this mishap and the military career of the unfortunate Wallace will bear the consequences!<sup>26</sup>

### ***THE HORNET'S NEST***

What about the center? The remnants of Prentiss' division continue to resist. Prentiss retreats like the others beyond the Hamburg-Purdy road. He has been joined by Hurlbut's division and two brigades of William Wallace's division. Around 9 AM, 11,000 Northerners supported by 43 guns are entrenched behind the Sunken Road, a path carved out over time by cart ruts. The position is good: it slightly overhangs the opponent's attack line. The action takes place in a wooded area, allowing the infantry to hide and camouflage. In front of the men are cultivated areas: the Duncan Field and Peach Orchard. Attackers who cross uncovered become wonderful targets. The place is baptized Hornet's Nest by the southern infantry.

General Braxton Bragg commands the sector. He has 18,000 survivors of 10 brigades from the four Confederate army corps. In the morning, around 9 PM, Colonel John Marmaduke's<sup>27</sup> 3rd Confederate Infantry Regiment<sup>28</sup> has already been cut to pieces. Rather than outflanking the obstacle, Bragg uses the worst tactic possible: a suicidal frontal bayonet attack on open ground!

Meanwhile, Cheatham's Stephens' brigade is thrown twice in the attack without support. The outcome is particularly bloody. At 0.30 PM, the fresh Louisiana brigade of Colonel Randall Gibson of Bragg's corps begins its first assault. Gibson will launch three others. He begs Bragg to provide him with artillery support, but to no avail. Bragg, frustrated and on the verge of an apoplexy, even goes as far as accusing the brave Colonel Gibson of cowardice!<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Much later, in 1887, Lew Wallace published the best-selling novel *Ben Hur*, poor consolation ...

<sup>27</sup> John Stapleton Marmaduke (1833-1837). Graduated from West Point in 1857, 30/38, and became cavalry general in Missouri.

<sup>28</sup> Some sources cite the 3rd Arkansas Infantry Regiment. Falsely accused!

<sup>29</sup> Rehabilitated, Gibson was promoted general in 1864.

Six or seven attacks of the same type are launched, all with the same results. There is no coordination. A brigade is engaged here, another attacks there. The Union troops stubbornly and successfully resist and using the tactic of internal lines, 4,500 Yankees repel an average of 3,700 Confederates. The local superiority goes to the Federals, while at the global level, they are outgunned. The situation is blocked.

This is when Daniel Ruggles, the long bearded Confederate general and staunch follower of efficient Napoleonic theories, takes an unprecedented initiative. Around 3 PM, he manages to assemble 62 guns in one place, half of the army's artillery. This unique concentration of guns on the North American continent is called "Ruggles Battery". At 4 PM, this great Confederate battery opens fire. For half an hour, it sends three shells or shots per minute and per gun, representing 5,580 projectiles! Under such hail of iron, the Yankees finally waver. Fearing being encircled, some men from Wallace's and Hurlbut's brigade narrowly escape. William Wallace is fatally injured. At 5.30 PM, after six or seven hours of butchery, Prentiss surrenders with his 2,400 remaining men.

### ***DEATH OF SYDNEY JOHNSTON***

Meanwhile, another disaster strikes the Confederate Army of the Mississippi. Albert Johnston, a man of action, fearless to the point of unconsciousness, is examining the front line since morning. This is probably not the best place for a commander in chief. However, he encourages his men and directs brigades and regiments. He is also an adept of the bayonet charge! Around 2 PM, he is on the right flank with Breckinridge's reserves. Like many other units, they are blocked in front of the Hornet's Nest, on the Federal left flank. Bowen's Arkansas troops and the Statham's Tennesseans refuse to move any further. Breckinridge cannot get anything more out of them.

This is when Sidney Johnston personally intervenes.<sup>30</sup> Particularly persuasive and taking command, he finally drives the two reluctant brigades in a mad bayonet charge - one more - which repulses the Yankees out of the Peach Orchard onto the Sunken Road. Bullets are flying in all directions. One of them hits Johnston in the foot. He becomes livid. His boot fills with blood. His personal physician is not at his side, being busy elsewhere. Someone finds a portable tourniquet in a pocket of Johnston's coat, but nobody knows how to use it! Bloodless, General Albert Sidney Johnston passes away on Sunday April 6, 1862 at 2.30 PM, in the arms of his friend and aide-camp Isham Harris, the Confederate Governor of Tennessee in exile. Albert Sidney Johnston has the sad privilege of being the only general commander in chief of an American army ever to have died in combat.

### ***EVENING OF APRIL 6***

Informed around 3 PM of the distressing event, Beauregard takes command and sets up his headquarters near Shiloh Church, in General Sherman's tent to be more precise. His camp is remote from the action and he has no idea of what is happening on the battlefield.

---

<sup>30</sup> He was holding a tin cup that he called his symbolic "share of the booty" during the looting of the Federal camps. See Don Troiani's painting at the beginning of this article.

After the fall of the Hornet's Nest, the Confederates continue their slow and chaotic progress toward Pittsburg Landing. The Yankees fall back in good order, slowing down their opponent's advance during the retreat. Thanks to this unexpected delay, Ulysses Grant is able to reorganize his army. He is assisted by Colonel Webster and his staff, a specialist in artillery and engineering. He assembles more than 50 guns that are directed mainly at the Confederate right flank. Five heavy 24-pounders of battery B of the 8th Illinois Light Artillery Regiment are added to this artillery concentration. All those who can hold a rifle are regrouped to support the artillery. The line of fire is reduced to about three miles and is therefore better manned. The gunboats USS *Lexington* and USS *Tyler* move in support, down river up to the level of the Confederate line.

It is past 6 PM. The fighting has lasted for twelve endless hours. The Confederates have almost run out of ammunition. Hardee's and Polk's men can now only harass the enemy. The much needed Breckinridge's reserves have been decimated and the remaining men mixed with other units.

The indefatigable Bragg still manages to regroup two already weak brigades: three or four thousand men against the entire Union Army! Despite being numerically overwhelmed, Bragg orders a final bayonet charge. The unfortunate soldiers of Jackson's and Chalmers' brigades then storm through the Dill Branch Creek. As soon as they climb the slope of the opposite bank, they are immediately cut to pieces by the Union artillery and musketry as well as the terrible shelling of the 8-inch guns of the two gunboats anchored in the Tennessee River. Beauregard orders a withdrawal and announces a victory. With a crimson face, Bragg asks him what victory he is talking about! In the evening, Beauregard triumphantly telegraphs to President Davis: *Complete Victory!* He is seriously considering finishing the job on the next day.

At 7 PM, Lew Wallace's division finally appears on the battlefield. This is obviously a little late. The first brigade of *Bull* Nelson has crossed the Tennessee River, painfully wading through the flow of the day's fugitives.

### ***NIGHT OF APRIL 6 TO 7, 1862***

Night has fallen. The Confederates seem to rest on their frail laurels. On the opposite side, the night is restless. The Army of the Ohio, gathered in Savannah, crosses the Tennessee River on a large number of steamers: first, the remains of Nelson's division, followed by the divisions of Crittenden and McCook. Wood's division arrives too late to participate in the action. The Federal gunboats continuously fire a shell every fifteen minutes. The already shaken Confederate infantry becomes ever more nervous!

Colonel Nathan Bedford Forrest and his horsemen wearing captured blue coats<sup>31</sup>, approach Pittsburg Landing. They observe the Federals landing during hours. Forrest notifies Chalmers who refers to Hardee who ultimately cannot find Beauregard! The warning is repeated twice with no tangible results. The revelations of the loquacious prisoner, General Prentiss, are not taken into account either!

Meanwhile, General Beauregard has received a report revealing that Buell's army is heading for Decatur, Alabama.<sup>32</sup> There is thus little to fear and he takes no specific measures. Beauregard falls asleep in Sherman's bed, near Shiloh Church, far away from the turmoil of the front!

<sup>31</sup> They risked nothing less than the firing squad if they were captured!

<sup>32</sup> False report, of course.

It starts raining again. The unenviable situation of the 15,000 wounded left on the field becomes catastrophic. The health service is embryonic on each side. There is a lack of stretcher bearers and doctors are amputating like crazy!

East of the Hornet's Nest, a pond turns red with the blood of the wounded of both armies. Since then, it bears the name of Bloody Pond.

## **APRIL 7, 1862 – SECOND DAY**

At dawn on Monday, April 7, 1862, it is still raining. The combined northern armies of Tennessee and Ohio comprise 45,000 soldiers.

The Confederates have suffered 8,500 casualties on the previous day, and taking into account the stragglers and deserters, they are now perhaps 20,000 strong.<sup>33</sup> To find shelter from the heavy artillery and naval guns, they withdraw to the old camps of Sherman and Prentiss. Cheatham's division of Polk's corps even returns to its former bivouac of April 5, four miles south of Pittsburg Landing.

Beauregard intends to resume the offensive aimed at throwing the Yankees in the Tennessee River, according to his own original plan. It is pure folly. The new commander in chief is not even aware of the amalgamation of the two Federal armies. He has not sent any reconnaissance and knows nothing of Forrest's repeated warnings.

To his great surprise, it is the enemy that is now massively attacking. However, there is little coordination between Grant and Buell, who have not seen each other in 48 hours. Both lead their army as if the other does not exist, and this saves the Confederates from total destruction. At 5 AM, on the left, the three divisions of Buell's army, those of Nelson, Crittenden and McCook open the hostilities. At 7 AM, on the right, the fresh division of Lew Wallace crosses the Tillman Branch Creek and easily pushes through Preston Pond's brigade, which is too isolated. The remnants of Sherman's, McClernand's, Hurlbut's and William Wallace's troops follow in the center.

Around 10 AM, the Confederate front stabilizes. Resistance is stubborn. The artillery fights a remarkable defensive action, continuously retreating from position to position while relentlessly pounding the enemy infantry, blocking it most of the way. Nelson's division is particularly hit. From morning until early afternoon, Beauregard launches attack after attack on the entire line to maintain control of the road to Corinth. John Wharton's Texas Rangers are once again sacrificed in a useless and bloody charge through the woods. The men of the 2nd Texas Infantry Regiment now have enough and choose to flee to the rear. The energetic General Hardee treats them as cowards, but the Texans don't really care. Despite all the Confederate laudable efforts, the Federal steamroller advances irresistibly. The rebel army is not completely annihilated; however, but it comes close to a breaking point. At 3.30 PM., Beauregard orders a general retreat.

Until 5 PM, Breckinridge, 2,000 men and a dozen guns still resist along Shiloh Branch Creek. The rear guard withdraws until dark, perfectly covering the retreat of the army to Corinth. Grant must now stop the pursuit. His army is exhausted, that of the Confederates probably more. After a march of two to three mile, the soldiers collapse. Wisely, the general orders to set up camp.

---

<sup>33</sup> General Don Carlos Buell estimated the number at 28,000, which made no difference!

## **APRIL 8, 1862 – THIRD DAY**

On the morning of April 8, 1862, still under the rain, the bloody remains of the Confederate army crawls painfully along the road to Corinth, in a miserable column, 7 to 9 miles long.

The 350 Tennessee cavalymen of Colonel Nathan B. Forrest form the extreme rear. They are caught up at a place called Fallen Timbers, six miles south of Pittsburg Landing. Sherman commands a strong detachment of two infantry brigades headed by the 4th Illinois Cavalry Regiment. Thomas Wood's division of Buell's army approaches as support. The latter has not been engaged in the last days and has not yet had the opportunity to fire a single shot. Coming out of nowhere, the rebel cavalry charges with saber and revolver in hand. The men of Illinois and the sharpshooters are immediately dispersed. However, the bulk of Sherman's infantry deploys quickly and opens fire. The Tennesseans are forced to retreat. Forrest continues to charge and finds himself alone facing 2,000 Yankees. His horse thrusts him into the first enemy line. A bullet hits him in the back but he miraculously manages to escape and join his men who do not believe their eyes. Their colonel is the last casualty of the Battle of Shiloh.

In the process, Sherman captures the Southerner's field hospital. He then comes into contact with Breckinridge covering the retreat. Rightly convinced that the Confederates no longer represent an offensive threat, Sherman falls back on Shiloh. The Homeric, bloody and especially incoherent battle of Shiloh is finally over.

## **LOSSES**

The battle of Shiloh was fought during three days. It was very tough and particularly bloody on both sides. Out of 40,335 soldiers engaged, the Confederates counted 1,723 killed, 8,012 wounded and 959 missing, prisoners or deserters, all together 10,962 men or 26.5% of their forces, an appalling number!

The Union armies aligned 62,682 soldiers. Their losses totaled 1,754 killed, 8,408 wounded and 2,885 missing or together, 13,047 casualties representing 21% of their forces.<sup>34</sup>

The figures are very similar in both camps except for the "prisoners" resulting from the surrender of Prentiss' division on April 6, 1862.

## **NEW MADRID ISLAND No. 10**

On April 7, 1862, the Confederate position of Island No. 10 surrendered to General John Pope, which greatly weakened the defense of the Mississippi River.

## **RETURN TO CORINTH**

On April 10, the 30,000 Confederate survivors of the Shiloh battle joined their 15,000 brothers in arms, which had remained in Corinth, their starting point. The

---

<sup>34</sup> According to scientific calculations made by famous historian Livermore, the Confederate soldiers would have put out of action proportionately more men than their opponents. This relative efficiency, however, did not prevent their indisputable defeat.

campaign lasted eight days. Although ultimately defeated, the Confederates, however, captured five regimental flags, 20 national flags and thousands of muskets, not counting those exchanged on the battlefield. They also took with them thirty-three guns, but lost thirty! The spirited General Earl Van Dorn and the 20,000 men expected from the Army of the West finally reached Corinth during the following week. Too little too late!

\* \* \* \* \*  
\* \* \*

*The illustration at the beginning of this article is a copy of the painting "Men of Arkansas, Battle of Shiloh, April 6, 1862" by American artist Don Troiani. The CHAB is indebted to Mr. Troiani for granting the association the kind permission to reproduce his artwork, courtesy of the art gallery Historical Art Prints - [www.historicalartprints.com](http://www.historicalartprints.com).*

### **Bibliography**

- Arnold J.: *Shiloh 1862*, Osprey Publishing 1998.  
Boatner III M.M.: *Civil War Dictionary*, New York, NY, 1987.  
Internet: Wikipedia.  
Long E.B.: *Civil War Day by Day*, Doubleday, New York, NY, 1971.  
McDonough J.L.: *Shiloh - In Hell before Night*, University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville, TN, 1977.  
Nevin D.: *The Road to Shiloh*, Time-Life Books, Alexandria, VA, 1990.



*Current view of the Sunken Road, center of the Hornet's Nest (Photo Internet)*