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The Battle of Shiloh: Triumph, Tragedy, and the High Cost of War

Kayla Scott

The Battle of Shiloh, also known as the Battle of Pittsburg Landing, was one of the bloodiest battles in terms of deaths and casualties during the Civil War.¹ Unlike the preconceived notions that the Union and Confederacy had held, the Battle of Shiloh was evidence that the war would be a long, bloody fight filled with errors. The two-day battle was fought on Sunday, April 6 and Monday, April 7, 1862.²

Union General Ulysses S. Grant joined the Army of the Tennessee after they had moved to Savannah, Tennessee.³ The location of the camp at Pittsburg Landing was due to General William Tecumseh Sherman's recommendation of the area. In a letter dated March 18, Sherman referred to the area of Pittsburg Landing as being a

¹ David Goldfield, *America Aflame: How the Civil War Created a Nation*, (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2011), 224.

² G.T. Beauregard, "The Campaign of Shiloh," in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*. Vol. 1. eds. Robert U. Johnson and Clarence C. Buel. (Edison, New Jersey: Castle, n.d.), 583-593.

³ *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant, Selected Letters 1839-1865*, eds. Mary D. McFeely and William S. McFeely (New York: The Library of America, 1990), 219-224.

“magnificent plain for camping and drilling, and a military point of great strength.”⁴

After his arrival, Grant ordered his military engineer to “lay out a line to entrench.”⁵ According to Grant, it was found that fortification of the area was not feasible. In addition, Grant regarded the construction of fortifications as time-consuming and demoralizing. In his memoirs, Grant justified his failure to attempt the construction of fortifications by saying, “The fact is, I regarded the campaign we were engaged in as an offensive one and had no idea that the enemy would leave strong entrenchments to take the initiative when he knew he would be attacked where he was if he remained.” This statement shows that Grant was unprepared for a battle at Pittsburg Landing, despite his many protestations to the contrary. Confederate General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard later wrote that “the absence of all those ordinary precautions that habitually shield an army in the field must forbid the historian from regarding it as other than one of the most surprising surprises ever achieved.”⁶

In the days preceding the battle, Grant had his headquarters in Savannah. Grant would usually spend the day at Pittsburg Landing and return to Savannah in the evening. His excuse for this practice was that he was waiting on General Don Carlos Buell to arrive, and that Buell would approach from Savannah. “I remained at this point, therefore, a few days longer than I otherwise should have done, in order to meet him on his arrival.”⁷ Grant planned to attack Corinth, Mississippi, as

⁴ *Memoirs of W. T. Sherman*, ed. Charles Royster (New York: Library of America, 1990), 252.

⁵ *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, 223-224.

⁶ Beauregard, “The Campaign of Shiloh,” 586.

⁷ *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, 223-224.

soon as Buell joined him. It is interesting to note that Grant was staying at an opulent estate named Cherry Mansion during his time in Savannah.⁸ Had he been on the field with his men, the accommodations would have been miserable in comparison.

Union General William T. Sherman's hyperactive manner led one general to remark that he was "a splendid piece of machinery with all the screws a little loose."⁹ In 1861, Sherman had suffered a nervous breakdown, going so far as to think about taking his own life. Sherman was removed from command in December 1861 after his "insanity" had been publicized in several newspapers. After a rest period, he was reinstated to a command position under Grant toward the end of February 1862.

On April 4, 1862, Captain Mason of the 77th Ohio learned that a large group of Confederate troops were camped a fourth of a mile from his position.¹⁰ Mason sent a sergeant to inform Colonel Hildebrand, and eventually word reached General Sherman. Without investigating the matter, Sherman commanded that the sergeant be arrested for making a fictitious report. Mason persuaded Hildebrand to come out to the field and see for himself that the report was true. After witnessing the group of rebels, Captain Hildebrand went to Sherman and verified the presence of the Confederate troops. Sherman dismissed the group as being nothing more than a scouting party.

⁸ Larry J. Daniel, *Shiloh: The Battle That Changed the Civil War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 104.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 133-138.

The next day on April 5, members of the 53rd Ohio spotted Confederate cavalrymen toward the far edge of Rea Field, south of their position.¹¹ Colonel Jesse J. Appler sent troops to investigate. Shots were exchanged and a message was sent to Sherman to inform him of the situation. Sherman sent back a reply, telling the Colonel to return with his regiment to Ohio, "There is no enemy closer than Corinth."¹² In his memoirs, Sherman mentioned that on the day before he made this statement, a Union "advance picket" had left their assigned point and had become engaged with a small Confederate force.¹³ As the result of this skirmish, eleven Union soldiers were captured and eight were wounded. Ten members of the Confederate Alabama Cavalry were also captured. Beauregard mentioned this in his report as well, and noted that this incident "ought to have given the Federal general full notice that an offensive army was close behind it, and led to immediate preparation for our onset, including entrenchments."¹⁴ However, it is clear that Sherman continued to ignore the size and scope of the enemy that was camped on his doorstep.

In the days leading up to the battle, Confederate forces under the leadership of General Albert Sidney Johnston were preparing for battle. Johnston was commander-in-chief of the Confederate army at this point.¹⁵ Johnston's scouts had notified him of the Union troops' location beside the Tennessee River at Pittsburg Landing.¹⁶ Johnston felt that the Union's choice of a camping spot held several

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ *Memoirs of W. T. Sherman*, 254-255.

¹⁴ Beauregard, "The Campaign of Shiloh," 582-583.

¹⁵ Frank and Reaves, "*Seeing the Elephant*," 12.

¹⁶ Foote, *The Civil War A Narrative*, 324-325.

disadvantages, and all of them were in favor of his attack plans. Johnston knew that the Union army was camped facing away from the Tennessee River and that they were without fortifications. Not only were they practically against the river, but the camps were strewn about in a highly disorganized manner. On the night of April 2, 1862, Johnston's second-in-command, General P.G.T. Beauregard received a telegram stating that Union General Lew Wallace was heading in the direction of Pittsburg Landing. Beauregard sent Johnston a copy of the message with a note added at the end: "Now is the moment to advance, and strike the enemy at Pittsburg Landing."¹⁷ Johnston wanted to wait for General Earl Van Dorn to arrive. However, General Braxton Bragg, who had recently been made chief of staff, agreed with Beauregard that the time to act was at hand. On April 3, 1862, General Albert Sidney Johnston sent a battle order to the Army of the Mississippi in Corinth.¹⁸ The battle order began with the words, "I have put you in motion to offer battle to the invaders of your country."¹⁹ He went on to remind the troops to, "Remember the dependence of your mothers, your wives, your sisters, and your children on the result." Johnston also noted that "The eyes and hopes of 8,000,000 of people rest upon you."²⁰ On the morning of April 3, Beauregard's chief of staff began writing the marching orders using notes from General Beauregard and a copy of Napoleon's Waterloo order for a model. It is remarkable that a copy of the Waterloo order was used when that particular battle had met with such disastrous results.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Bromfield L. Ridley, *Battles and Sketches of the Army of Tennessee* (Dayton, Ohio: Press of Morningside Bookshop, 1978), 82.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ridley, *Battles and Sketches of the Army of Tennessee*, 82.

The Battle of Shiloh was originally planned to begin on the morning of Friday, April 4.²¹ The planning meeting lasted until 10 a.m. on April 3, four hours after the twenty-mile march was supposed to begin. When at last the army began to leave Corinth, a ‘traffic jam’ ensued. In no time, the roads of Corinth were blocked by a tangled mass of men, wagons, artillery, and horses. General Polk was the first to break free of the madness. He might have made some headway, except General William J. Hardee had to leave first for the proper order to be observed. When General Leonidas Polk was finally able to leave, it was past sunset. He and his men managed to travel only nine miles before calling it a night. General Bragg, in the meantime, had met with about equal success. In light of these events, the schedule for battle was moved up an entire day, and planned for the date of Saturday, April 5.

As the march progressed on April 5, so did the rain. After a short time, the mud became “shin deep.”²² Traveling was sporadic at best, with countless setbacks and interruptions. At this point, Bragg was still in trouble. He was late reaching his position at Monterey by about a half a day. Even now, he was missing an entire division that had somehow been left behind. Bragg’s tardiness forced General Polk to call a halt in order for Bragg to catch up. Matters were not helped in the least when things became tangled again on the roads to and from an area called Mickey’s.

General Albert Sidney Johnston arrived on the scene early the next morning expecting to see everything in order and the troops ready

²¹ Foote, *The Civil War A Narrative*, 326.

²² *Ibid.*, 327-328.

for battle.²³ The scene he witnessed held no order, and the only division that was located even remotely close to where it was supposed to be was led by General Hardee. Bragg and his men finally came straggling in, minus the still-missing division. As everyone was getting into position, some of the soldiers became concerned that the powder in their guns might have been affected by the previous night's rain. Several men decided to test their guns, and the shots were close enough to the Union camp to be heard. Add a few "rebel yells" and the fact that ten Confederates had been caught by the Union during the previous night, and the entire element of surprise should have been lost. At 12:30 p.m., Bragg's lost division had yet to be found. Johnston finally located the division behind Polk's men. It was 2 p.m. by the time all of Bragg's troops were in place. By 4 p.m. Polk's men were lined up, but Breckinridge was not yet in position.

There had been so many setbacks and so much trouble, that the question of scrapping the whole mission was raised.²⁴ After finding Generals Beauregard, Bragg, and Polk having a discussion about abandoning the plan to attack, General Johnston held an impromptu council of war. Beauregard was adamantly in favor of abandoning the idea of battle because the element of surprise had been lost. Beauregard later wrote that he felt his recommendation to abandon the plan to attack was "based on sound military principles."²⁵ Breckinridge arrived during the discussion, adding his vote to carry out the plan to attack with those of Bragg and Polk. The battle would take place beginning at daybreak the following day. Orders were given to

²³ Foote, *The Civil War A Narrative*, 328-329.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 329.

²⁵ Beauregard, "The Campaign of Shiloh," 569-593.

finish forming the lines of battle, and to camp in that position for the night.²⁶

Confederate and Union forces held severely exaggerated estimates of the number of troops the other side had. Correspondences and journal records from March 21 through March 29 highlight just how over-inflated the numbers were.²⁷ Confederates estimated that Grant had 100,000 soldiers posted at Pittsburg Landing. Buell was supposed to have 50,000 en route to join Grant. In reality, the troops under Grant numbered 42,682, not 100,000.²⁸ Buell's command was 30,000 strong instead of 50,000. In turn, Union forces also imagined a much larger army than the one that existed. Somewhere between 70,000 and 125,000 Confederate troops were thought to be organizing in Corinth during late March.²⁹ In reality, Johnston had seventy-one regiments and sixteen brigades at his disposal, totaling 40,335 men.³⁰ Without Buell's army, Union and Confederate forces were almost evenly matched in numbers, but neither side knew this.

Before sunrise on the morning of April 6, Colonel Everett Peabody of Brigadier General Prentiss' command sent a group of soldiers out to patrol the area.³¹ As the first rays of sun lit the day, the Union patrol spotted a lone figure on horseback some distance away in Fraley's field. Shortly thereafter, Confederates opened fire on the Union patrol from their position in the woods across this field. The Union patrol returned fire, quickly realized that they were heavily

²⁶ Foote, *The Civil War A Narrative*, 329.

²⁷ Frank and Reaves, "*Seeing the Elephant*," 77.

²⁸ Foote, *The Civil War A Narrative*, 324.

²⁹ Frank and Reaves, "*Seeing the Elephant*," 77.

³⁰ Foote, *The Civil War A Narrative*, 324.

³¹ Frank and Reaves, "*Seeing the Elephant*," 12.

outnumbered, and hastily returned to camp. The element of surprise for a Confederate attack was now completely lost.

General Prentiss arrived in Colonel Peabody's camp in time to see the Colonel readying the regiments of the 25th Missouri and 12th Michigan for battle with the nearby Confederate forces.³² Instead of expressing his horror at Peabody's plight, Prentiss asked Peabody if he had "provoked" an engagement by ordering an unauthorized patrol. Peabody explained that he had tried to contact Prentiss before sending out the patrol. Prentiss replied, "Colonel Peabody, I will hold you personally responsible for bringing on this engagement."³³ This was an incredibly absurd statement. Prentiss should have been thanking Peabody for alerting the Union army to the attack that was going to happen with or without provocation that day. Later that morning Colonel Everett Peabody suffered his fifth wound, resulting in his instant death.³⁴ Peabody's officers found his body on April 7 and buried him. They left a wooden marker at his grave inscribed with the words, "A braver man ne'er died upon the field."³⁵ Peabody had been responsible for alerting Union forces that an enemy attack was coming, stealing the last vestiges of surprise from the Confederate forces. He died without getting the credit he deserved.

Early on the morning of the April 6, Grant heard the sounds of battle as he was eating breakfast.³⁶ He made the trip to Pittsburg Landing, which was nine miles down the Tennessee River from his

³² Wiley Sword. *Shiloh: Bloody April* (Dayton, Ohio: Press of Morningside Bookshop, 1974), 151.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 163.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 421.

³⁶ *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, 225-226.

location in Savannah.³⁷ Grant stopped en route at Crump's Landing to alert General Lew Wallace and his division to be ready to receive orders. He arrived at the landing around 8:00 a.m., approximately three hours after the battle had begun. When Grant witnessed the conflict taking place, he sent an order to Wallace, telling him to come to Pittsburg Landing immediately.³⁸ It is not clear whether the order became confused or was disobeyed. At any rate, Lew Wallace's division didn't see any action during the first day of battle. He and his 5,000 men appeared in the area of Pittsburg Landing after the fighting had ended for the day.

Meanwhile, Sherman, who was present at Pittsburg Landing the entire time, had been in denial. Sherman was aware that fighting was taking place in the area early on the morning of April 6, but it was quite some time before he acknowledged the truth of the situation.³⁹ In Sherman's report of the day's battle, he states that, "About 8 A.M. I saw the glistening bayonets of heavy masses of infantry to our left front in the woods...and became satisfied for the first time that the enemy designed a determined attack on our whole camp." This moment of enlightenment on Sherman's part came after the fighting had been going on for approximately three hours.⁴⁰

Shiloh Church was located around two or three miles away from Pittsburg Landing. This little log meeting house is where one of the battle's names came from. Ironically, the name Shiloh comes from

³⁷ Frank and Reaves, *"Seeing the Elephant,"* 13-14.

³⁸ *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, 226-233.

³⁹ *Memoirs of W. T. Sherman*, 255-256.

⁴⁰ Ridley, *Battles and Sketches of the Army of Tennessee*, 88-89.

the Bible and means “tranquil” or “place of peace.”⁴¹ As the battle began on the morning of April 6, General Sherman held what Grant referred to as the “key” point with his position near the church.⁴² General John McClernand held a position to the left of Sherman. Located to the left of McClernand was General Benjamin Prentiss with his division. On Prentiss’s left was a single brigade of Sherman’s division led by Stuart. General Stephen A. Hurlbut was positioned behind Prentiss as a reserve force. General C. F. Smith’s division, under the leadership of Brigadier General W. H. L. Wallace, was stationed to Hurlbut’s right. The majority of these divisions were made up of raw troops, men who had never experienced battle.

The area of battle around the Union encampment at Pittsburg Landing was approximately three miles long and three miles wide, with ravines along the edges that limited maneuverability.⁴³ Due to the position of the Union army in relation to the Snake, Lick, and Owl Creeks, Confederate forces launched a frontal attack.⁴⁴ Confederate General P.G.T Beauregard described the entire battlefield as being interwoven with ravines and covered with trees and underbrush, “except for a few scattered farm fields of from fifty to seventy-five acres.”⁴⁵ Beauregard wrote that the “recent rains had made all these depressions boggy and difficult for the movement of artillery across them.”⁴⁶

⁴¹ Goldfield, *America Aflame*, 228.

⁴² *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, 226-227.

⁴³ Frank and Reaves, *Seeing the Elephant*, 88.

⁴⁴ *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, 227.

⁴⁵ Beauregard, "The Campaign of Shiloh," 585.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Sometime after 10:00 a.m., Grant came across Prentiss at what later was called the Sunken Road. Prentiss had been pushed back from his original position, but had managed to get a foothold at this worn road that was bordered by dense trees. Grant gave General Prentiss the order to “maintain that position at all hazards.”⁴⁷ As the battle increased in ferocity, the area of the Sunken Road earned a second name: The Hornet’s Nest.

By 12:00 p.m., the soldiers on the field were mixed together to the point that many had lost their commanders and even their regiments.⁴⁸ As the battle raged, all Union positions were being forced back toward Pittsburg Landing. The original plan had been to drive the Union forces up against Snake Creek, but this proved unattainable.

To the extreme edge of the Hornet’s Nest was the peach orchard where Union General Hurlbut and his division were fighting that afternoon.⁴⁹ Breckinridge had just attempted a charge against Hurlbut, without success, when General Albert Sidney Johnston came along. Rallying the men, he led a second charge on Hurlbut’s position that proved successful. The peach orchard, along with the guns in it, was now in the hands of the Confederates.

Isham G. Harris, who was the governor of Tennessee when the war broke out, served with Albert Sidney Johnston at Shiloh.⁵⁰ Upon returning from delivering orders from Johnston to Colonel Winfield Statham, Harris found General Johnston swaying in the saddle of his

⁴⁷ Foote, *The Civil War A Narrative*, 336-339.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Foote, *The Civil War A Narrative*, 336-339.

⁵⁰ Ridley, *Battles and Sketches of the Army of Tennessee*, 92.

horse.⁵¹ When Harris asked if he was wounded, General Johnston answered, “Yes, and I fear seriously.” Johnston had been wounded after approximately ten hours of battle.⁵² Aided by Captain W. L. Wickham, Isham Harris moved Johnston to a nearby ravine in an effort to shield them from gunfire.⁵³ General Albert Sidney Johnston died at 2:30 p.m. on April 6.⁵⁴ A Miniè ball had penetrated his right leg at a point slightly below his knee, damaging the popliteal artery.⁵⁵ Johnston might have been saved if his wound had received proper attention. Confederate private Sam Watkins and his 1st Tennessee regiment passed through the area during the time of Johnston’s death. In his memoirs, Watkins recalled seeing Johnston encircled by his staff. “We saw some little commotion among those who surrounded him, but we did not know at the time he was dead.” According to Watkins, “The fact was kept from the troops.”⁵⁶ Lieutenant George W. Baylor was a part of the group that surrounded Johnston.⁵⁷ “General Johnston was such a lovable man that his staff as well as his soldiers worshipped him; and his staff seemed stupefied with grief at the great calamity,” wrote Baylor. If Johnston had not ordered his staff surgeon, Dr. Yandall, to attend to Union prisoners, the general would have had a doctor with him during the fatal incident. Johnston’s body, covered by a blanket, was carried to Shiloh Church.⁵⁸ Those who asked were told

⁵¹ Charles Pierce Roland, *Albert Sidney Johnston: Soldier of Three Republics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), 336-338.

⁵² Ridley, *Battles and Sketches of the Army of Tennessee*, 85.

⁵³ Roland, *Albert Sidney Johnston*, 336.

⁵⁴ Ridley, *Battles and Sketches of the Army of Tennessee*, 88.

⁵⁵ Roland, *Albert Sidney Johnston*, 336.

⁵⁶ Sam R. Watkins, *Co. Aytch: A Confederate Memoir of the Civil War* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1997), 42.

⁵⁷ Time-Life Books, ed. *Voices of the Civil War: Shiloh*. (Richmond: Time Life, Inc., 1996), 123.

⁵⁸ Roland, *Albert Sidney Johnston*, 336-338.

that the covered body was Colonel Jackson from Texas. Union General William T. Sherman noted in his memoirs that there was “a perceptible lull for a couple of hours” around the time of Johnston’s death.⁵⁹ General P. G. T. Beauregard first heard of General Johnston’s death a short time past 3:00 p.m.⁶⁰ As soon as he learned of the tragic news, Beauregard took command of the Confederate forces.⁶¹

After twelve attempts had been made by the Confederates to overrun the Hornet’s Nest, Beauregard sent in General Daniel Ruggles.⁶² Ruggles posted a battery of sixty-two cannon on the Sunken Road, forcing Union soldiers to retreat toward Pittsburg Landing.⁶³ W. H. L. Wallace received a fatal wound while trying to rally his troops in the area of the Hornet’s Nest.⁶⁴ With the loss of their leader, his command broke and retreated along with Hurlbut’s men. Prentiss held on, even when it would have been advisable to retreat, and was captured at approximately 5:00 p.m. on April 6.⁶⁵ He and his 2,200 men were forced to surrender. Prentiss was a prisoner of war until October 1862.⁶⁶ He resigned in 1863 after holding some rather insignificant command positions.

Many soldiers were saved by the bullet striking some object they were carrying. One soldier told of a bullet striking his gun and penetrating his rifle, only to end up buried in the small Bible that he

⁵⁹ *Memoirs of W. T. Sherman*, 268.

⁶⁰ Beauregard, "The Campaign of Shiloh," 590.

⁶¹ Ridley, *Battles and Sketches of the Army of Tennessee*, 85.

⁶² Foote, *The Civil War A Narrative*, 336-339.

⁶³ Roland, *Albert Sidney Johnston*, 339.

⁶⁴ Foote, *The Civil War A Narrative*, 336-339.

⁶⁵ Roland, *Albert Sidney Johnston*, 339.

⁶⁶ David G. Martin, *The Shiloh Campaign: March-April 1862 Revised Edition* (Pennsylvania: Combined Books, 1996), 93.

had in the pocket of his coat. James Griffin of the 5th Washington Artillery later wrote that he would have been killed, “had it not been for the very large knife I carried in my breast pocket.”⁶⁷ Another soldier was saved by his belt buckle when a musket ball struck it instead of him. When struck by a spent ball, a soldier named Warren Olney thought himself “mortally wounded” and literally began to run for his life. After running for a bit, he “began to suspect a man shot through the body couldn’t make such speed.”⁶⁸ Upon inspection he found the spent ball in the material of his clothes, and realized he suffered from nothing worse than bruised ribs.

The effects of battle were devastating on the nerves of men in the field. Many men, especially the raw troops, ran for cover once the fighting broke out.⁶⁹ After the battle, George McBride of the 15th Michigan recounted his experience of seeing shot from the cannons rolling along the ground. McBride later wrote that the sight “impressed me with a desire to get out of there.”⁷⁰ He went on to say, “The hair now commenced to rise on the back of my head...and I felt sure that a cannon-ball was close behind me, giving me chase as I started for the river. In my mind, it was a race between me and that cannon-ball.” Leander Stillwell summed up the feelings of most of the men engaged at Shiloh with his observations after the battle. “I am not ashamed to say...that I would willingly have given a general quit-claim deed for

⁶⁷ Frank and Reaves, *Seeing the Elephant*, 106-115.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 112-119.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 112-119.

every jot and title of military glory falling to me...if I only could have been miraculously...set down...a thousand miles away.”⁷¹

While most soldiers freely admitted that they experienced fear on the battlefield, they managed to hold their ground without retreating. Some later wrote that they had been energized in the face of battle. Confederate soldier Sam R. Watkins, a private with the 1st Tennessee, felt elated when he was ordered into the battle. “I felt happier than a fellow does when he professes religion at a big Methodist camp-meeting,” wrote Watkins.⁷²

Union forces retreated to the area of Pittsburg Landing after 6:00 p.m.⁷³ According to Beauregard, by the time the battle began to wind down on the first day, Confederate troops were either very low or totally out of ammunition.⁷⁴ Beauregard gave orders for fighting to end for the night at 6:00 p.m. According to him, several regiments had already retreated from the field of battle before they were given the order to cease. He described his commanding officers as being satisfied with the day’s progress. Accounts written by Private Sam Watkins and other soldiers disprove that statement. However, Beauregard claimed that no mention was made about the possibility of accomplishing more if the battle had continued later into the night. The Confederates were victorious at this point. Beauregard sent a message that night to Richmond declaring a “complete victory, driving the

⁷¹ Ibid., 112-119.

⁷² Watkins, *Co. Aytch*, 42.

⁷³ Ibid., 89.

⁷⁴ Beauregard, "The Campaign of Shiloh," 591.

enemy from every position.”⁷⁵ He spent the night in Sherman’s abandoned tent.⁷⁶

During the evening of April 6, Beauregard received word that Union reinforcements under General Buell had been delayed and would not arrive in time to help General Grant.⁷⁷ As the evening wore on, a torrential downpour soaked the men and the area, paving the way for a muddy and uncomfortable night. Conditions for battle the next day were significantly exacerbated by this storm. The wooden gunboats *Tyler* and *Lexington*, commanded by Lieutenant Gwin and Lieutenant Shirk, continuously fired shells directly onto the area of the field where the Confederates were camped for the night.⁷⁸ At 9:00 a.m. the *Tyler* had begun firing every ten minutes. The *Lexington* took over at 1:00 a.m. and continued to fire every seventeen minutes until 5:30 a.m. There were also the cries of the wounded and dying. “Oh, what a night of horrors that was!! It will haunt me to the grave,” wrote a soldier from the 38th Tennessee.⁷⁹ All these factors added up to a miserable and sleepless night for the Army of the Mississippi.

Colonel Nathan Bedford Forrest was not wasting his time with sleep on the night of April 6. He had sent some of his men dressed as Union soldiers down to Pittsburg Landing for reconnaissance.⁸⁰ When the spies returned, they told Forrest of the large number of fresh Union troops arriving at the landing. Colonel Forrest woke Brigadier General James R. Chalmers, who instructed him to tell someone of higher rank.

⁷⁵ Daniel, *Shiloh: The Battle That Changed the Civil War*, 345.

⁷⁶ Beauregard, "The Campaign of Shiloh," 591.

⁷⁷ Ridley, *Battles and Sketches of the Army of Tennessee*, 89.

⁷⁸ Daniel, *Shiloh: The Battle That Changed the Civil War*, 265.

⁷⁹ Frank and Reaves, "*Seeing the Elephant*," 106.

⁸⁰ Daniel, *Shiloh: The Battle That Changed the Civil War*, 263-264.

Forrest then went to General Hardee, who told him to visit Beauregard. Forrest searched for Beauregard for some time, but was unable to find him. Forrest went back to General Hardee, who simply told him to go back to his regiment and maintain his position. Beauregard never received this important information. A rumor later circulated that Beauregard had hidden in a tent at times during the two days of battle.⁸¹

According to Buell, he himself arrived in Savannah on the evening of April 5.⁸² General Nelson of his command had reached Savannah before him and set up camp. The other divisions were on their way, with General Crittenden being closest. Buell later said that he did not see Grant on the 5th, but that Nelson reported a visit from Grant on that day. In his conversation with Nelson, Grant had expressed complete confidence that a battle would not occur at Pittsburg Landing. Grant notes this meeting with Nelson in his memoirs, saying that he put Nelson in position to move to Pittsburg or Crump's Landing, whichever was necessary when the time came.⁸³ Grant claimed that Buell arrived without informing him of his arrival, a point that Buell disputed. Buell later expressed his disgust over Grant's "boastful" comments concerning Buell's part in the battle.⁸⁴ "Victory was assured when Lew Wallace arrived, even if there had been no other support," wrote Grant. "I was glad, however, to see the reinforcements of Buell and credit them with doing all there was for them to do."⁸⁵

⁸¹ Daniel, *Shiloh: The Battle That Changed the Civil War*, 315.

⁸² Don Carlos Buell, "Shiloh Reviewed." in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*. Vol. 1. eds. Robert U. Johnson and Clarence C. Buel. (Edison, New Jersey: Castle, n.d.), 491.

⁸³ *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, 225.

⁸⁴ Buell, "Shiloh Reviewed," 523.

⁸⁵ *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, 234.

This statement was completely at odds with a message that Grant had sent addressed to “The Commanding Officer, Advance Forces” during the first day of battle.⁸⁶ In the message, Grant stated, “If you will get upon the field leaving all your baggage on the East bank of the river it will be a move to our advantage and possibly save the day to us.”

Buell met with General Sherman on the evening of April 6 and asked several questions about the conditions at Shiloh. Sherman later wrote, “Buell seemed to mistrust us, and repeatedly said that he did not like the looks of things, especially about the boat-landing.”⁸⁷ Sherman continued, “I really feared he would not cross over his army that night, lest he become involved in our general disaster.” In reply to Sherman’s doubt, Buell noted, “One would suppose that his fears would have been allayed by the fact that, at that very moment, my troops were arriving and covering his front as fast as legs and steamboats could carry them.”⁸⁸

The fighting began at 5:20 a.m. on April 7 when Nelson’s division advanced on the River Road.⁸⁹ Confederate forces struggled to put together a line of attack. There were, at the very most, 20,000 members of the infantry available on the morning of the April 7.⁹⁰ The Confederate army had received no respite the night before while the Union troops were rested. Buell’s army, along with General Lew Wallace’s reinforcements, equaled approximately 33,000 fresh troops

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 999.

⁸⁷ *Memoirs of W. T. Sherman*, 267.

⁸⁸ Buell, “Shiloh Reviewed,” 520.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 525.

⁹⁰ Beauregard, “The Campaign of Shiloh,” 592.

for the Union side.⁹¹ After several hours of fighting, it became evident to Beauregard that the Union was being continuously reinforced with fresh men. "Accordingly at 1 p.m. I determined to withdraw from so unequal a conflict, securing such of the results of the victory of the day before as was then practicable," wrote Beauregard in his report.⁹²

At 2:00 p.m. the advance lines of the Confederate forces withdrew.⁹³ The Union army made no pursuit. Torrential rains occurred once again on the evening of April 7 and persisted the entire night. Sherman later explained that letting the Confederates get away unimpeded was necessary.⁹⁴ The men were so exhausted from two days of heavy fighting that it was impossible to follow the rebels when they retreated. The battle of Shiloh was over, but the aftermath remained to be dealt with.

There were more soldiers killed and wounded at Shiloh than the total number of men lost during the Revolutionary War, the Mexican War, and the War of 1812 combined.⁹⁵ Sherman gave the number of Union men lost as being 1,700 killed, 7,495 wounded, and 3,022 taken prisoner with 12,217 in all.⁹⁶ Of the total, 2,167 were from Buell's army, with the remaining 10,050 coming from Grant's army. Out of Sherman's corps alone, sixteen officers were killed, forty-five were wounded, and six were missing. From the ranks of the soldiers, 302 were killed, 1,230 were wounded, and 435 were missing. In all,

⁹¹ Ridley, *Battles and Sketches of the Army of Tennessee*, 89-94.

⁹² Beauregard, "The Campaign of Shiloh," 592.

⁹³ Ridley, *Battles and Sketches of the Army of Tennessee*, 90.

⁹⁴ *Memoirs of W. T. Sherman*, 263.

⁹⁵ Frank and Reaves, "*Seeing the Elephant*," 87.

⁹⁶ *Memoirs of W. T. Sherman*, 262-268.

Sherman lost the service of 2,034 men. Beauregard counted the loss from the Army of the Mississippi as being 10,699.⁹⁷

Grant was condemned for being away from Pittsburg Landing and his men when the battle began.⁹⁸ Rumors flew concerning Grant's conduct at Shiloh. Grant was accused of being caught off guard, which was true, whether he ever admitted it or not. Grant was also accused of being drunk before and during the battle, but there was no proof that he was ever inebriated while in the Savannah area. Some thought Grant should hang for his negligence. The general public opinion was that Grant needed to be replaced. President Lincoln refused to remove Grant from the Union army, saying, "I can't spare this man; he fights."⁹⁹ Grant was promoted to second-in-command, a post that one author calls "meaningless." Grant noted himself that the post made him, "little more than an observer." He was eventually given a true leadership position commanding the District of West Tennessee.

After Shiloh, Buell's allegiance was called into question and his actions strongly criticized.¹⁰⁰ Buell's tardiness to Shiloh was a point of severe contention. He had taken twenty-three days to get his army 123 miles from Nashville to Savannah.¹⁰¹ Recent rains had forced Buell to ford two rivers, with one of these, the Duck River, causing a twelve day halt. This information, however, did not seem to be enough to satisfy the Federal government. Buell was removed from

⁹⁷ Beauregard, "The Campaign of Shiloh," 593.

⁹⁸ Daniel, *Shiloh: The Battle That Changed the Civil War*, 304-310.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, 240.

¹⁰¹ Martin, *The Shiloh Campaign*, 93.

commanding the Army of the Ohio on October 24, 1862.¹⁰² Buell was later offered a lesser command, but refused to serve under anyone he had ever outranked in authority.¹⁰³ He handed in his resignation on June 1, 1864.¹⁰⁴

As for the soldiers that had been on the battlefield at Shiloh, those who had survived would always remember the experience. When writing about Shiloh, Sam Watkins stated, "I never realized the "pomp and circumstance" of the thing called glorious war until I saw this."¹⁰⁵ One officer of the 16th Wisconsin wrote after Shiloh, "I had no conception of [war]...no pen can describe, nor imagination conceive, the intensity of horror that has been presented us."¹⁰⁶

The Union soldiers were left the task of burying the Confederate dead. Many of the fallen soldiers were placed in mass trenches. These trenches "were dug about six feet wide and three to four feet deep. Old blankets were thrown over the pile of bodies and the earth thrown on top."¹⁰⁷ Others were dumped into ravines and gullies with, "merely a few shovels of loose dirt upon them." The dead were still being buried a week after the battle.

There were many soldiers who continued to believe that the war would be over soon after the Battle of Shiloh. There were others who believed that Shiloh would not be the last major battle of the war, by far. John V. Mosley of the 16th Wisconsin wrote, "Some of the men

¹⁰² *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, 1180.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 472-473.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 1180.

¹⁰⁵ Watkins, *Co. Aytch*, 40-45.

¹⁰⁶ Frank and Reaves, "*Seeing the Elephant*," 115-120.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 122-123.

think that we will be home by the first of July. I hope so but I think differently. This rebellion is too deeply seated to be soon eradicated.”¹⁰⁸ Confederate surgeon Dr. L. Yandell wrote, “Those persons who reason themselves into the belief that peace will soon come or at least that the war will soon cease, are blinded and misled by their wishes.” Those who believed that the war was far from over were correct. It would be the middle of 1865 before the last battle was fought.¹⁰⁹

The Battle of Shiloh was the bloodiest battle that had ever happened on American soil, and continues to be known as one of the worst battles of the Civil War.¹¹⁰ Many mistakes and errors of judgment were made at Shiloh, and they were not the last to occur during the war. The Union had thought that they could easily put down the Southern rebellion, but Shiloh showed that the South would not be easily taken. In turn, the Confederacy was shown that the cost of freedom from the Union was going to be high. The Battle of Shiloh proved that neither side would be giving up without a fight.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 173.

¹⁰⁹ Watkins, *Co. Aytch*, 40-45.

¹¹⁰ Goldfield, *America Aflame*, 224.