

## **The Battle of Shiloh**

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Following the defeats at Fort Henry and Fort Donelson in February 1862, Confederate commander General Albert Sidney Johnston pulled his troops south to northern Mississippi and southern Tennessee to regroup. Johnston's force numbered over 40,000 men but they were generally poorly armed, some with only shotguns or pistols. The southern army was centered around Corinth, Mississippi along the Memphis and Charleston Railroad.

Major General Ulysses S. Grant's victorious Union army did not tarry long at the captured Confederate forts, but began to move southward as well. By the first week of April, Grant had moved his men down the Tennessee River to Pittsburg Landing on the west bank of the river. Grant's men were slightly more numerous than Johnston's but better armed and more experienced.

The overall Union commander in the West, Major General Henry Halleck, ordered Major General Don Carlos Buell's Army of the Ohio to march and join Grant at Pittsburg Landing. Halleck then intended to lead both Union forces to attack and crush Johnston. Johnston, receiving news of Buell's march, decided to attack Grant's force before he could be reinforced.

Grant did not anticipate the attack. He did not have his men entrench or build fortifications, but rather had them spend their time drilling and waiting for Buell's arrival. At Pittsburg Landing, his men were spread around Shiloh church a couple of miles in from the river. Shiloh derived from the Hebrew for "place of peace." The first of Buell's men began to trickle in on the evening of April 5, 1862 and began to encamp at Savannah, 10 miles away on the east side of the river.

Meanwhile, Johnston had his men on the move despite the objections of his second-in-command, General P.G.T. Beauregard, who felt that the Confederates were better off hunkering down at Corinth. At 6:00 am the Confederate attack began and was almost a complete surprise to the northern forces. Unfortunately for the men in gray, what could have been an overwhelming victory lost some of its punch due to confusion in the lines. Johnston had decided to be with his men in the front and had ordered Beauregard to remain in the rear and direct regiments where needed. In these early battles, commanders had not grasped the importance of maintaining control of their armies from afar rather than living out the chivalrous ideal of marching into battle with them. Thus, Johnston had essentially given the battle over to Beauregard. While Johnston's plan had been to concentrate on Grant's left, turning his line and keeping him from the river where shelter and gunboats awaited him, Beauregard decided to send all the Confederates in along the entire line. This diluted attack minimized the value of the attack's surprise.

Many of the Union troops, especially those new to battle, fled from the ferocious Confederate assault. Many dropped their weapons as they ran and these were picked up by eager Confederates. Grant, who had been at Savannah, heard the battle and got to the field as quickly as possible, arriving around 8:30 am. Some Union men, especially those under Brigadier General William T. Sherman, did offer stubborn resistance. One particularly tough defensive spot was later dubbed "The Hornet's Nest" as the Confederates charged it numerous times without taking it.

During the course of the afternoon's fighting, the South was struck a terrible blow when Johnston was fatally wounded. Beauregard was now officially in command on the battlefield. Although pockets of Union resistance remained, by early evening the Union army had been

forced back all the way to the river. Beauregard, on the cusp of victory, did not press his exhausted and disorganized men to finish the job.

During the evening, more and more of the Army of the Ohio arrived at the scene of the fighting. By morning on April 7, the Union forces numbered more than twice those of the Confederates. At dawn, Grant and Buell threw a massive assault against the Confederates. To their credit, the outnumbered Confederates held their own in furious fighting throughout the day. By early evening, Beauregard was withdrawing his beaten army to Corinth and this time Grant held back his tired men from pursuing.

Despite the victory, Grant's reputation suffered as many in the North blamed him for being surprised on the first day and credited Buell with saving the day. President Abraham Lincoln was persuaded and answered those who called for Grant's removal: "I can't spare this man; he fights."