

# BATTLE DIGEST™

Lessons for Today's Leaders

Volume 2 ★ Issue 9

American Civil War:

## Shiloh

DATE:

April 6–7, 1862

LOCATION:

Western Tennessee near Pittsburg Landing



### OPPOSING FORCES

**Confederate Army:** 40,000 troops of the Army of Mississippi, commanded by General Albert Sidney Johnston. Corps commanders were Maj. Gen. Leonidas Polk (I Corps), Maj. Gen. Braxton Bragg (II Corps), Maj. Gen. William Hardee (III Corps), and Brig. Gen. John Breckinridge (Reserve Corps). Maj. Gen. P.G.T. Beauregard commanded the army after Johnston's death.

**Union Army:** 62,000 troops, from both the Army of the Tennessee under Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant and the Army of the Ohio, under Maj. Gen. Don Carlos Buell. Grant's division commanders were Maj. Gen. John McClernand (1st Div.), Brig. Gen. W.H.L. Wallace (2nd Div.), Maj. Gen. Lew Wallace (3rd Div.), Brig. Gen. Stephen Hurlbut (4th Div.), Brig. Gen. William T. Sherman (5th Div.), and Brig. Gen. Benjamin Prentiss (6th Div.). Buell's four divisions took part on the second day.



### HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

After his early success in the Civil War's Western Theater, Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant moved south to capture the key railroad hub at Corinth and further cut into the Confederate hold on the Tennessee and Mississippi River Valleys. But Confederate Gen. Albert S. Johnston wasn't playing by Grant's script. Instead of waiting for Grant to combine armies with Maj. Gen. Don Carlos Buell, Johnston moved north for a surprise attack. It almost worked. But after taking a beating the first day, a resolute Grant rallied his army and pushed the Confederates back, salvaging victory from what appeared to be certain defeat and further opening the Confederacy's vulnerable Western flank. But Shiloh was also a sobering wake-up call for both sides. With carnage on a scale not seen before, all illusions of a short and low-cost war were shattered.



### STRATEGY & MANEUVER

**Actions by the Union** – In early 1862, Union forces operated under three major commands: Maj. Gen. George McClellan commanded in the East, while Maj. Gen. Henry Halleck (Dept. of the Missouri) and Buell (Dept. of the Ohio) commanded in the West. Yet, all three still lacked a comprehensive strategy. After an impatient President Lincoln issued War Order Number One, his generals developed one.



quickly approved a proposal by one of his subordinates, Grant, to subdue two partially completed Confederate forts, Forts Henry and Donelson, guarding these rivers. (*Map 1*) By mid-February, Grant had succeeded – both forts had fallen.



Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant

Grant, an 1843 graduate of West Point, served with distinction in the Mexican War, but was forced to resign in 1854 after a remote posting left him lonely and drinking too much. His fate changed with the outbreak of the Civil War, when the governor of Illinois appointed him a colonel in the militia. After Grant's success taking the two forts, a jealous Halleck removed him from command under the pretense of excessive drinking. But with probable influence from Lincoln himself, Grant was reinstated with orders

to move his army up the Tennessee River and wait for Buell to arrive from Nashville. Once the armies joined, Halleck planned to lead the attack on the key railroad junction at Corinth.

Grant established his headquarters at Savannah, Tennessee, in early March. His divisions, meanwhile, camped further south near Pittsburg Landing and waited for Buell's army to trudge over 122 miles of muddy roads and swollen rivers to join them. Grant's soldiers spent their days engaged in drills, inspections, and considerable boredom. But because Grant was on an offensive campaign and discounted any chance of a Confederate attack, he made no attempt to prepare defensive structures or entrenchments. Despite several picket engagements in the early days of April, he still assumed that no substantial Confederate forces were in the area.

One stubborn brigade commander, however, wasn't going to be surprised. After hearing reports of enemy activity, Col. Everett Peabody (Brig. Gen. Benjamin Prentiss' division) hastily organized a reconnaissance force. At 0300 hrs. on 6 April, Maj. James Powell led five companies from his Missouri and Michigan regiments out from camp. After moving a mile to a cotton field known as Fraley's Field, they ran into the lead elements of Maj. Gen. William Hardee's Confederate corps. At 0455 hrs., under a faint pre-dawn glow, the two sides exchanged fire. The battle had begun.

**Actions by the Confederate Army** – The winter of 1861–62 was difficult for the Confederacy in the Western Theater. Johnston was defending a 300-mile line running from northern Mississippi through Tennessee and into Kentucky. Grant's surprise Union pushes drove