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# The Topographical Influences on the Campaigns in Middle and West Tennessee during the First Year of the Civil War

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S. J. Folmsbee, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Ralph W. Haskins, H. C. Amick

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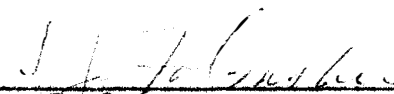
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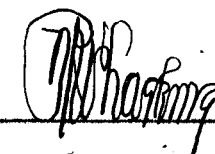
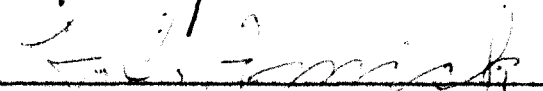
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Major Professor

We have read this thesis  
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

  
Dean of the Graduate School

THE TOPOGRAPHICAL INFLUENCES ON THE CAMPAIGNS  
IN MIDDLE AND WEST TENNESSEE DURING THE  
FIRST YEAR OF THE CIVIL WAR

33

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A THESIS

Submitted to  
The Graduate Council  
of  
The University of Tennessee  
in  
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Arts

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by

William Blair Scott

June 1953



## PREFACE

This study is an attempt to evaluate the role played by topography in the results of the campaign in West and Middle Tennessee during the first year of the War Between the States. In mid-nineteenth century America, roads were poor and communication was extremely slow. The use of the telegraph was not yet widespread; mountains and rivers still presented formidable barriers to travel, and the chief means of movement for troops was by railroad, steamboat, horseback, and on foot.

As the main source for primary materials for this thesis I have relied on the War of the Rebellion, A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies. The Atlas which accompanies these records has also been invaluable for material relating to troop movements and positions as well as for use as a source for portions of the maps included in this project.

It is hoped that the maps will aid the reader in understanding the topography of the localities with which the study is concerned. The maps are not drawn to scale but are used to show troop movements in respect to prominent relief features and political boundaries.

I am deeply indebted to Doctor Stanley J. Folmsbee of the University of Tennessee History Department, who suggested the subject of this thesis and provided inspiration and guidance during its preparation. I would also like to express my appreciation to Doctor Ralph W. Haskins and Doctor H. C. Amick, whose painstaking examination and helpful comments have contributed greatly to the study.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
II. THE FALL OF PORTS HENRY AND DONELSON . . . . .	12
III. THE BATTLE OF SHILOH . . . . .	41
IV. THE EVACUATION OF CORINTH . . . . .	67
V. CONCLUSION . . . . .	75
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	78

LIST OF MAPS

MAPS	FOLLOWING PAGE
I. Confederate Line of Defense, January 1862 . . . . .	10
II. The Area Between Fort Donelson and Fort Henry . . . . .	15
III. Fort Henry . . . . .	19
IV. Fort Donelson . . . . .	32
V. The War in the West After the Fall of Forts Donelson and Henry . . . . .	45
VI. Federal Encampment at Pittsburg Landing . . . . .	50
VII. Shiloh, Early Morning, April 6 . . . . .	55
VIII. Shiloh, Mid-Day, The Hornet's Nest . . . . .	60
IX. Shiloh, Late Afternoon, April 6 . . . . .	62
X. The Area Between Pittsburg Landing and Corinth . . . . .	70
XI. The War in the West After The Retreat from Corinth . . . . .	73

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The attack on Fort Sumter in connection with the secession of the various states which comprised the Confederacy, began the gigantic struggle which was to last four years and claim the lives of thousands of Americans. The great experiment in democracy was threatened by the dissension of a part of the Union's member states. When armed conflict appeared imminent, the Confederacy claimed it would fight only if federal troops threatened her territory. Immediately, it became evident that the North would not see the Union dissolved without a struggle; the hope of some people for peaceful secession was only wishful thinking. The calls to arms were issued by and for Federals and Confederates alike. Those calls were answered by "Johnny Rebs" and "Billy Yanks" in great numbers. The Confederate States of America organized their military forces as best they could, with many valiant men resigning positions in the United States Army to fight in the interest of their homes and states. The Union Army, while already organized and possessing a wealth of the tradition of victory, was certainly in no condition to oppose as formidable a foe as its southern counterpart later came to be. Thus, great preparations were made by both sides in the months immediately following the organization of the provisional government of the Confederate States of America in February, 1861.

The Confederacy was faced with the defense of a frontier which stretched from the Atlantic Ocean to the western extremes of Arkansas. This provided for a defense line upwards of 1200 miles long. In order to

subdue the rebellion, the Union forces were in turn faced with the necessity of breaking the Confederate defense line and invading the South. For both sides, there was also the difficulty involved of crossing the border states of Maryland, Delaware, Kentucky, and Missouri. These states were in many ways friendly to the Confederate cause but refused to secede from the Union, even though tradition and economy linked them to the seceded states. They lay like a wide belt of "no man's land" between the two gladiators. To add to this involved situation, the Confederacy was divided into three separate parts by two outstanding topographic features. The more formidable of these was the Blue Ridge Mountains which in that day defied effective communications and divided the South distinctly into east and west. Later it might be said, with some truth, that there were in many respects two separate wars in progress in the South at the same time. Furthermore, the west was again divided but by a somewhat less formidable barrier, the Mississippi River. The northern border of the Confederacy was not clearly established for several months after the provisional government was organized. This was soon remedied in the east by the secession of Virginia, which in turn provided the Potomac River as a natural and clearly defined boundary, but until May, 1861, when Arkansas seceded and Tennessee formed a military league with the Confederacy, the northern boundaries of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia formed the extent of the Confederacy.

The fact that Kentucky and Missouri did not join the Confederacy caused the loss of such a natural boundary as the Ohio and Upper Mississippi Rivers. As the war progressed it became more and more apparent that the Confederacy's weakest point was its left flank, and

the eventual downfall of the Confederacy was the turning of that flank.

Credit for selecting for attack that vulnerable portion of the Confederate line is usually given to General Winfield Scott. At the beginning of the war he was the most experienced officer in the Union ranks. Although he was advanced in age and was later replaced, he conceived the idea of a Federal occupation of the entire Mississippi Valley by force thereby splitting the Confederacy in half.<sup>1</sup> After accomplishing this, he planned to halt and wait for Union sentiment in the South to force that government to sue for peace. This was known as the Anaconda plan. While it was never followed as planned, it provided the basis for the overall Federal strategy in the west.<sup>2</sup>

The topography of the states of Kentucky and Tennessee are similar in many ways. Both present a wide variety of surface features and are long and comparatively narrow from east to west. The Appalachian Mountains form the eastern extent and highest elevations of both. To the west of these mountains the lower ridges and foothills are in evidence. These serve to isolate East Tennessee somewhat, and at the time of the Civil War presented a formidable barrier to communication. These lower ranges, the Cumberland Mountain Range or Plateau as it is often called, are traversed by high and narrow passes in the vicinity of the East

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<sup>1</sup>War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, 70 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Series I, Vol. 51, 369-370. Cited hereafter as Official Records.

<sup>2</sup>T. Harry Williams, Lincoln and His Generals (New York: Knopf, 1952), 16-18.

Tennessee and Kentucky state line. West of this there is a somewhat lower plateau remnant, the Highland Rim, which completely encircles the rich Nashville Basin in Tennessee. This basin is a fertile agricultural region and forms the hinter-land for Nashville, Tennessee. It is traversed from east to west by the Cumberland River. To the north in Kentucky the surface is rolling and undulating in the now famous blue grass area, as it slopes northward toward the Ohio River. The Tennessee River follows its narrow valley northward, crossing both Tennessee and Kentucky on its western course to the Ohio. On either side of its narrow flood plain, the terrain breaks away rather abruptly, on the east toward the Western Highland Rim and on the west toward the nearby Divide of West Tennessee which separates the drainage to the Tennessee from that to the Mississippi. The area along these banks is somewhat rugged and covered with scrub growth. West of the Divide is the Slope of West Tennessee, part of the Gulf Coastal Plain. This covers almost all of West Tennessee and Western Kentucky. It is either gently rolling or hilly in most places. This area is the most level land in Tennessee and has always been the center of cotton culture in the state. Here between the Tennessee and Mississippi Rivers secession sentiment was very strong in Tennessee.

Examination of a map of the south-central section of the United States will show the importance of the river systems which provide easy transportation from the north, particularly into the states of Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama. These rivers had been used as a means of conveyance since the earliest pioneer days in the West. The

era of the steamboat was at its height in the decades preceding the Civil War, and in 1861, the rivers constituted the major arteries of transportation in their respective states. The Tennessee and Cumberland were virtual highways from the Ohio into the very heart of Tennessee, northern Mississippi, and Alabama. The Mississippi provided a waterway from north to south which completely bisected the Confederacy. Thus, the commanding military positions in the west were on or near these rivers. Both opposing armies were quick to avail themselves of these strategic sites. The professed neutrality of Kentucky held up the occupation of some of these points for a time; however, as soon as it became evident that Kentucky was going to remain in the Union, the scramble was on for choice military positions. Early in September, 1861, Federal troops occupied Louisville and Maysville, Kentucky. They were already established at Cairo, Illinois, and soon afterward, Brigadier General Ulysses S. Grant, who sought to occupy Columbus, Kentucky, on the Mississippi River, was thwarted in this plan by the occupation of that place by a Confederate force under Major General Leonidas Polk. Instead, on September 4, Grant occupied Paducah at the mouth of the Tennessee River. Thus, with the Federals in possession of the mouths of the Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers and with an attack imminent, it became necessary for the Confederates to form a line in preparation for defense.<sup>3</sup>

On September 10, Albert Sidney Johnston was assigned the command

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<sup>3</sup>Stanley F. Horn, The Army of Tennessee (New York: Bobbs Merrill, 1941), 44-45.



of Department Number Two, which comprised the states of Tennessee and Arkansas and, in addition, north Mississippi and the military operations in Kentucky, Missouri, Kansas, and the Indian country immediately west of Missouri and Arkansas. Johnston was accorded the rank of General, highest in the Confederate Army, and it became his task to prepare the Confederate line of defense in the West.<sup>4</sup> This line fell into a rather natural order. On his way west from Richmond, Johnston stopped in Knoxville and ordered General Felix K. Zollicoffer, Confederate commander in East Tennessee with a force of some 3000 to 4000 men, to occupy Cumberland Gap. Upon his arrival in Nashville, Johnston commissioned as Brigadier General, S. B. Buckner, who had resigned his post as commander of the Kentucky State guard in order to serve the Confederacy, sending him to occupy Bowling Green, Kentucky.<sup>5</sup> Work had already begun on Forts Henry and Donelson on the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers, and as previously mentioned, the Confederates had occupied Columbus on the Mississippi River.

The belated movement into Kentucky cost the Confederates the possession of any natural barrier along which they might have arrayed their defense. The Ohio River would have provided such a barrier, but the Federal occupation of Paducah and Louisville on the south bank of the river made its use impossible. Thus, Johnston was faced with defending a frontier of more than 400 miles with a poorly equipped army,

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<sup>4</sup>William Preston Johnston, The Life of General Albert Sidney Johnston (New York: Appleton, 1878), 292.

<sup>5</sup>Horn, The Army of Tennessee, 55.

which never numbered many more than 40,000 men as opposed to Federal forces numbering approximately 70,000. His line stretched from Cumberland Ford near the Virginia line in eastern Kentucky to Columbus, Kentucky, on the east bank of the Mississippi with Bowling Green the center and salient of the line.

Johnston's forces were actually separated into three distinct armies. Polk held the left flank at Columbus with about 10,000 men. With Johnston's aid, Columbus was soon placed in a good state of defense. Earthworks were erected, and Columbus was armed with long range guns in order to command the Mississippi River. As early as November, 1861, it was virtually an impregnable position and its loss was due only to evacuation caused by the later flanking movements of the Federal army on the Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers. Its position was further strengthened by the construction of river defenses at Island Number Ten, New Madrid, and Fort Pillow, all on the Mississippi River below Columbus. The center was commanded by Major General William J. Hardee whose headquarters was at Bowling Green, in the heart of the Kentucky Blue Grass country of rolling hills and beautiful streams. By January, 1862, his total force numbered around 25,000. Part of these were thrown out around Munfordville in advance of Bowling Green. In the east Zollicoffer had approximately 3000 to 4000 men guarding Cumberland Gap and the important road junctions in the rugged, mountainous terrain of southeast Kentucky. There were by this time only skeleton garrisons in the incomplete works at Forts Henry and Donelson under Brigadier General Lloyd Tilghman and two or three regiments at Hopkinsville, Kentucky, between Fort Donelson and Bowling Green. Johnston originally had his head-

quarters at Memphis, but reports of Federal activity in front of Bowling Green in early October caused him to move to that place.<sup>6</sup>

Of all the Confederate defensive positions in this line, Columbus was perhaps the best planned and executed. It was an earthwork defense re-enforced with sandbags and was directed primarily at preventing the passage of Federal gunboats down the Mississippi River. The defense completely surrounded the town of Columbus, which was the northern terminus of the Mobile and Ohio Railroad. It consisted of four redoubts with most of the gun emplacements being in and on a high bluff just north of the town. Ravines and ditches were constructed into an abatis of felled trees with a series of connected rifle pits some five and one half feet deep commanding the landward approaches to the defenses and the town. Guns commanding the river were situated on the bluff. All the positions both landward and toward the river were placed on favorable ground along commanding ridges or hills.<sup>7</sup>

This position was further strengthened by the construction of supporting defenses below Columbus at Island Number Ten and New Madrid, Missouri. The island, situated in the bend of a typical Mississippi River meander, was fortified and armed with fifteen guns in three redoubts. In addition to this, the Confederates had sunk a boat in the channel in

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 61-62.

<sup>7</sup>War of the Rebellion, A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Atlas, 2 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1895), I, Plate 5. Cited hereafter as O. R. Atlas.

order to obstruct navigation and constructed a floating battery of nine guns just below the obstruction. There were also five redoubts, containing twenty guns, placed commandingly on the south bank of the river. About eight miles below Island Number Ten and by the freak of the meander almost due north of it was the town of New Madrid, Missouri. Here, the Confederates constructed a fort containing fourteen 24 and 32-pounder guns bearing on the river. There were nine additional guns of the same size placed similarly on either side of the fort. These positions at Island Number Ten and New Madrid served as support for the advanced base at Columbus, and after the evacuation of the latter, they fell to the Union forces long after the fall of Forts Henry and Donelson.<sup>8</sup>

Fort Henry on the Tennessee River and Fort Donelson on the Cumberland River were pre-designed as the defense of Nashville, one of the most strategic Confederate cities. As it later turned out, they were the key to the entire Confederate line. This will be dealt with more fully in Chapter II.

Bowling Green, Johnston's headquarters, formed the third important point in the Confederate line. It was located at the approximate geographical center of the line and slightly forward of the other strongholds. It was here that the greatest concentration of Confederate troops in 1861 in the west was made. The town itself was a valuable position, being on the railroad from Nashville to Louisville, on the Green River, and at a junction for roads in the area. In addition, it was situated among high hills which provided commanding positions for

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., Plate 10.

troops.<sup>9</sup>

On the right flank in eastern Kentucky, Zollicoffer had advanced beyond Cumberland Gap and occupied a position on it that would protect both the Jamestown and Jacksboro roads. Before doing this, the mountain pass entrances into Tennessee had been fortified. The right flank was never a stationary defense during these early months but wavered back and forth as the troops were moved to guard the various roads. Several skirmishes were fought with the Federal forces under General George H. Thomas, and the culmination of activity in this area was the crushing defeat of the Confederates at Logan's Cross Roads on January 19, 1862, in which Zollicoffer was killed. After this, the Confederate defense line was at Cumberland Gap and various other mountain passes.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to these main elements of the Confederate line, there were detachments at various points across Kentucky. There were two or three regiments at Hopkinsville and some roving cavalry detachments stationed at points along the line. Among these cavalry leaders were two men who later played a great part in the war in the west. These were John H. Morgan and Nathan Bedford Forrest.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, the Confederate line of defense was set. It was poorly manned by troops who were oftentimes armed only with their shotguns or other domestic weapons. It amounted to little more than a long skirmish line. Doubtless, a better line might have been formed under

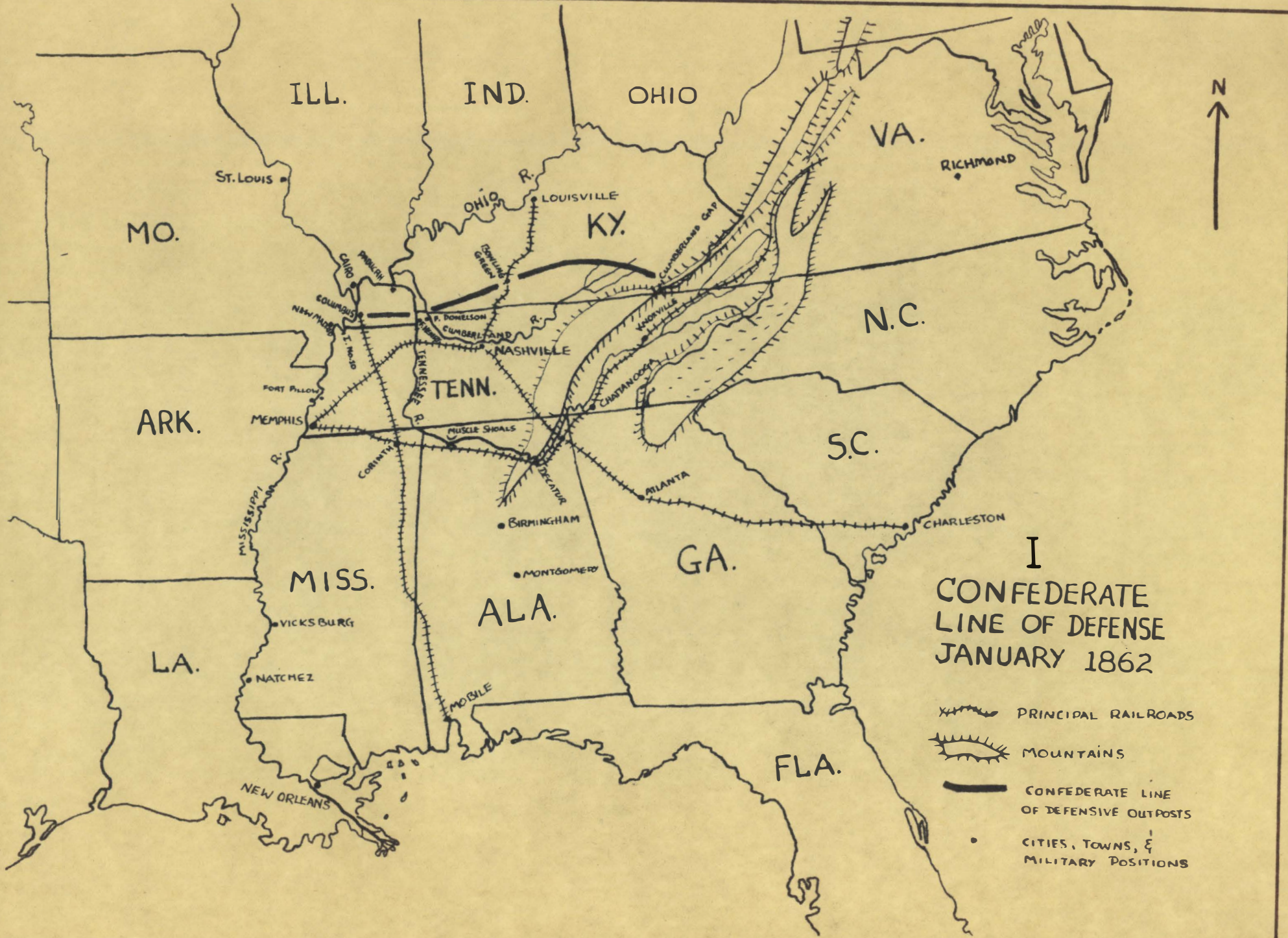
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<sup>9</sup>Johnston, Life of Johnston, 316-317.





<sup>10</sup>Horn, The Army of Tennessee, 66-70.

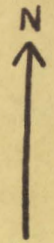
<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 62.





I  
**CONFEDERATE  
 LINE OF DEFENSE  
 JANUARY 1862**

-  PRINCIPAL RAILROADS
-  MOUNTAINS
-  CONFEDERATE LINE OF DEFENSIVE OUTPOSTS
-  CITIES, TOWNS, & MILITARY POSITIONS



more favorable circumstances; but things being as they were, its location was governed by conditions which are well explained by General Johnston's son and biographer, William Preston Johnston:

In determining his line of operations, General Johnston had to consider the geography of the theatre of war, the political complexion of the population, and the strength and disposition of these forces opposed to him. Each of these conditions was of such a character as to put him at a disadvantage....As Columbus and the Cumberland Mountains had become the extremities of the Confederate line by force of natural conditions, so Bowling Green, likewise, became the salient....Any point in advance of Bowling Green [was] unsafe; while Bowling Green itself, situated on the turnpike, railroad and river, was a good position for defense....The line was not all that could be wished; it ran through an unfriendly or lukewarm population, and it was pierced by two great rivers (the Tennessee and Cumberland) whose mouths were in the possession of the enemy; but every other line had equal or greater disadvantages. In war, as elsewhere, we must take things as we find them, not as we would have them.<sup>12</sup>

During the latter months of 1861 and throughout January, 1862, each army vastly overestimated the other. Activity was almost entirely of a preparatory nature on both sides with accelerated recruiting and drilling being common throughout the various camps with the Federal preparations for advance and the Confederate for defense.

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<sup>12</sup>Johnston, Life of Johnston, 312-314.

## CHAPTER II

### THE FALL OF FORTS HENRY AND DONELSON

The portion of the Confederate line of defense which became the key to that entire line was selected and situated more by zealous partisans than by calculating engineers. At this time Nashville was the supply depot of the Confederacy in the west. It was the largest and most important city in the Confederate west with the exception of New Orleans. It was also a center for river, railroad, and turnpike traffic and by the end of 1861 was supplying the Confederate Army with a vast amount of supplies such as percussion caps, sabers, muskets, saddles, harness, knapsacks, uniforms, cannon, and rifled guns. In addition it became the storage point for food and other supplies. Its location on the Cumberland River, while helping the city to flourish in more peaceful times, made it extremely vulnerable to attack from that quarter in time of war. Immediately after Tennessee seceded and before Johnston's line of defense had even begun to take shape, Governor Isham G. Harris of Tennessee realized the danger of invasion of the state, as well as the contributions to this danger made by the presence of the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers as inviting pathways to the heart of the South. In May he ordered that forts be constructed on the rivers for the defense of the state, and commissioned General Daniel S. Donelson, a West Point graduate, to investigate the area and select the best possible sites for such forts.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Horn, Army of Tennessee, 75.



In this selection of sites, it was necessary to remain within the limits of Tennessee because of the professed neutrality of Kentucky, which was not violated until Confederate troops were moved into that state in mid-September. Also, it was desired that the forts be placed as far downstream from Nashville as possible in order to provide maximum protection. Upon examination of the area, General Donelson reported that a high bluff on the west bank a mile below Dover in Stewart County was the best spot on the Cumberland. He also reported that there was no good place for a defensive position on the Tennessee within the limits of the state and advised that a spot be occupied several miles north of the Kentucky state line. He did, however, adopt the site of the later Fort Henry as the best possible position in Tennessee on order of Governor Harris. Dover was situated forty miles from the mouth of the river and seventy-five miles from Nashville, to which it was connected by a road. The site selected on the Tennessee was only about twelve miles almost due west of the proposed site on the Cumberland.<sup>2</sup> The two positions were connected by two roads.<sup>3</sup>

It is interesting to notice that there were several good defensive positions along the rivers in Kentucky. In the vicinity of Grand Rivers, about forty miles below the adopted sites, the Cumberland and Tennessee flow to within two or three miles of each other, before separating toward their respective mouths on the Ohio. A defensive

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 75-76.

<sup>3</sup>O. R. Atlas, I, Plate 11.

work erected here on favorable terrain, with well planned rifle pits and outworks, could have commanded both rivers and maintained excellent communications. However, the neutrality of Kentucky could not be violated. "The governing considerations were evidently political, rather than strategic, and depended more upon geography than topography."<sup>4</sup>

The ground on which the fort on the Tennessee, named Fort Henry in honor of Gustavus A. Henry, Confederate Senator from Tennessee, was built was only a few feet higher than the river.<sup>5</sup> The first site for the fort was chosen by Adna Anderson, an able and widely known engineer; it was selected with specific attention to high water marks.<sup>6</sup> In the surveys, Anderson was assisted by W. F. Foster, later General A. P. Stewart's chief engineer. They began work on May 10, and the site they selected was just opposite the mouth of the Big Sandy River. Later, when Major Bushrod R. Johnson became chief engineer of the Tennessee troops on May 28, he shifted the location of the site five miles downstream. The task of construction was assigned to Colonel A. Heiman and his regiment, the 10th Tennessee. The first gun was mounted in July.<sup>7</sup> Because of its location on low ground, the fort was liable to floods or freshets, during which it was almost surrounded by water. While this was an advantage against land assault, it limited activity within the fort and deprived it of any advantage of elevation. In addition, Fort

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<sup>4</sup>Johnston, Life of Johnston, 408.

<sup>5</sup>Horn, Army of Tennessee, 76.

<sup>6</sup>Bromfield Lewis Ridley, Battles and Sketches of the Army of Tennessee (Mexico: Missouri Printing and Publishing Co., 1906), 65.

<sup>7</sup>Horn, Army of Tennessee, 76.

Henry was commanded by high ground on the opposite side of the river.<sup>8</sup>

While construction was going on at Fort Henry, the site for the fort on the Cumberland was more or less neglected. It was named Fort Donelson in honor of General Donelson, who had selected the site. In October, Colonel R. W. McGavock with three Tennessee companies was sent to Dover. However, little was done of a constructive nature, until Johnston became commander in the west. Realizing the vulnerability of that portion of the line, he sought to push the forts forward to completion. Lloyd Tilghman of Kentucky was made a Brigadier General and placed in charge of both forts, assuming command on November 17.<sup>9</sup>

In September Lieutenant Dixon of the Corps of Engineers was instructed by Johnston to examine the works at Forts Henry and Donelson. He reported that the works at Fort Henry were almost completed. Although the fort was not situated at the most favorable spot, he advised that in view of the circumstances it should be completed, rather than be discontinued in favor of the erection of works at a more favorable place. He proposed however that fortifications be constructed and garrisoned on the high land which commanded the fort from the west bank of the Tennessee. By this time, Kentucky's neutrality was no longer a problem. Measures were taken to carry out these suggestions, and a slave force, contributed by planters in Tennessee and Alabama, was employed in this undertaking.

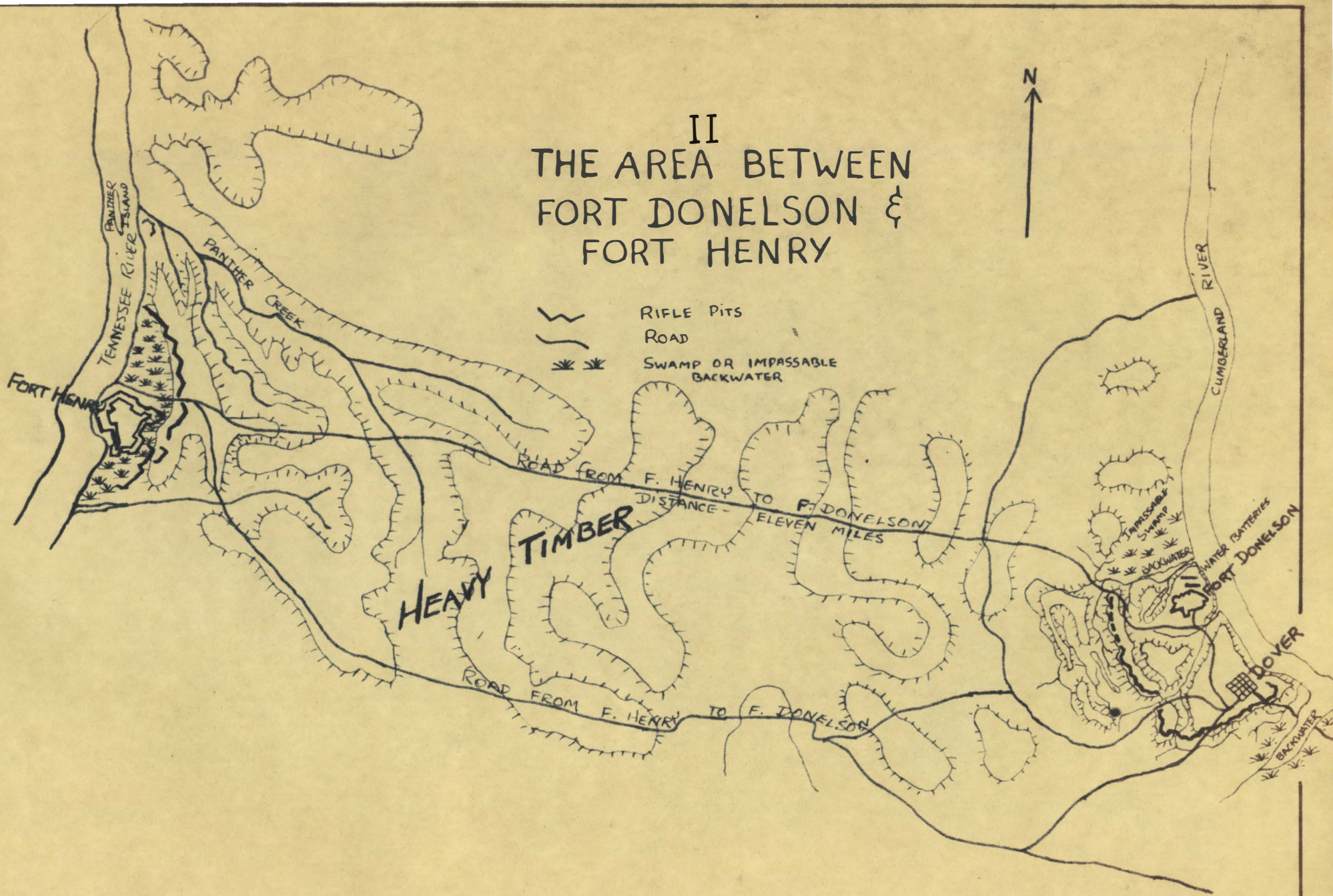
In a similar investigation of Fort Donelson on the Cumberland,

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<sup>8</sup>Johnston, Life of Johnston, 409.

<sup>9</sup>Horn, Army of Tennessee, 76.

## II THE AREA BETWEEN FORT DONELSON & FORT HENRY





Dixon again thought that a better position might have been selected, but that work there should be carried to completion rather than be moved to a more advantageous spot. He considered the water defenses well located but feared the results of an attack from the landward side. In view of this, he made surveys for additional outworks in the form of rifle pits and abatis for defense against attack from this quarter. He remained to supervise the construction of these works, which was again done partially by slave labor. In addition, he advised the placing of obstructions to navigation in the shoal water of the Cumberland below Donelson, and he also supervised this project.<sup>10</sup>

In September Governor Harris appointed Captain Jesse Taylor, a trained naval artillerist, to take command of the guns at Fort Henry. Taylor was immediately impressed by the unfavorable position of the fort. He complained first to state authorities, and when, after much waste of time, he was not heeded, he turned to General Polk at Columbus who referred him to Johnston. Johnston, ever anxious about the insecure river defenses, sent his chief engineer, Major J. F. Gilmer, to investigate.<sup>11</sup>

Gilmer arrived at the forts on January 31, 1862. Speaking of Fort Henry in his report, he termed it a "strong field work of fine bastion front" and stated that it was in a good state of defense with seventeen guns mounted on platforms, twelve of which could be brought

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<sup>10</sup>Polk to Johnston, April 1, 1862, quoted in Johnston, Life of Johnston, 410-411.

<sup>11</sup>Horn, Army of Tennessee, 77-78.

to bear on the river. These included one 10-inch Columbiad, a heavy cannon combining the qualities of the long range gun, howitzer, and mortar, one 24-pound rifled gun, two 42-pounders, and eight 32-pound caronades, medium sized artillery pieces, all arranged to fire between embrasures formed by sandbags. He further stated that there were extensive lines of infantry cover, constructed with a view to holding commanding ground. He described these as "capable of offering a strong resistance to a land attack." In addition, he considered the defenses opposite the fort, which had been named Fort Heiman, almost completed and although no guns had been received to be put in these works, the infantry cover there made them defensible.<sup>12</sup>

Concerning the defenses on the Cumberland, Gilmer had examined them in November and, although he then thought Lineport, Kentucky, fifteen miles downstream from Dover, a better position, advised that under the circumstances it would be better to retain and strengthen the position, and that it was "susceptible to a good defense landward." At this time, there had been very little work done at Fort Donelson, and Gilmer advised the construction of defenses "as rapidly as possible."<sup>13</sup>

From the time the sites for the two forts were first selected until early in January, 1862, work progressed very slowly. Attempts to complete the defenses seem to have met with a long string of half-

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<sup>12</sup>Official Records, I, 7, 131-132.

<sup>13</sup>Report of Major J. F. Gilmer, November 3, 1861, quoted in Johnston, Life of Johnston, 413.

hearted efforts. Moreover, there was always a shortage of troops to garrison the forts as well as of competent artillery officers and men to man the guns. Construction was further slowed by a lack of labor. It has already been mentioned that slave labor was used in the work on both forts. Although the officers in charge were authorized to use this source of labor extensively, the planters and various other slave owners in the region were quite reluctant to have their slaves used in this manner. There were various attempts to bring numerous slaves from Northern Alabama and Mississippi, but these usually resulted in more plans and talk than actual labor. A more adequate supply could have resulted in making Fort Henry at least defensible and Fort Donelson possibly impregnable. Neither was completed at the time of its respective surrender. When Major Gilmer again inspected the defenses around the first of February, he found them almost completed. Although not as originally planned or of a permanent nature, they were completed in the best possible manner considering the time and resources at hand. Such things as shelter for troops and supplies and adequate communications systems had not been and were never completed. Fort Heiman was never armed or fully garrisoned. It fell without a fight, thus giving the Federals a position on a height commanding Fort Henry, although they did not find it necessary to use it. These things were contributing causes of the final surrender of the forts along with their garrisons and stores.

When, about the first of February, Gilmer pronounced the forts defensible, they were just that and no more. Fort Henry was an earthwork of five bastions placed in a slight bend of the Tennessee River,

thus affording miles of visibility downstream and opportunity for direct fire against an attack by gunboats. Infantry entrenchments were constructed on a low rise of ground, which formed somewhat of a semi-circle a little ways back from the fort.<sup>14</sup> These outworks, trenches, and rifle pits extended as far as two miles back on the road from Fort Henry to Dover. The fort was situated so low that during high water, which was the case at the time of the attack, a sheet of water separated the main fort from the outworks. At the time of the attack, a portion of the fort was under two feet of water, this being almost up to the gun platforms.<sup>15</sup>

The works at Fort Heiman, on the west bank of the river, would have been a formidable obstacle to the Federal attack had they been completed, and guns placed there. They occupied a bluff high enough to command the river, Fort Henry on the opposite bank, and the surrounding countryside. Built at the suggestion of Dixon and with the approval of Gilmer, these works were to have mounted guns large enough to be effective against gunboats and were to have been protected by a series of rifle pits for infantry. The trenches were almost completed, but the men and guns with which to defend the position did not arrive before the position fell to the Federal troops.

At first, construction work at Fort Donelson was sacrificed in favor of that at Fort Henry. When Tilghman was assigned to command the forts and arrived at Donelson in mid-December, he found six undis-

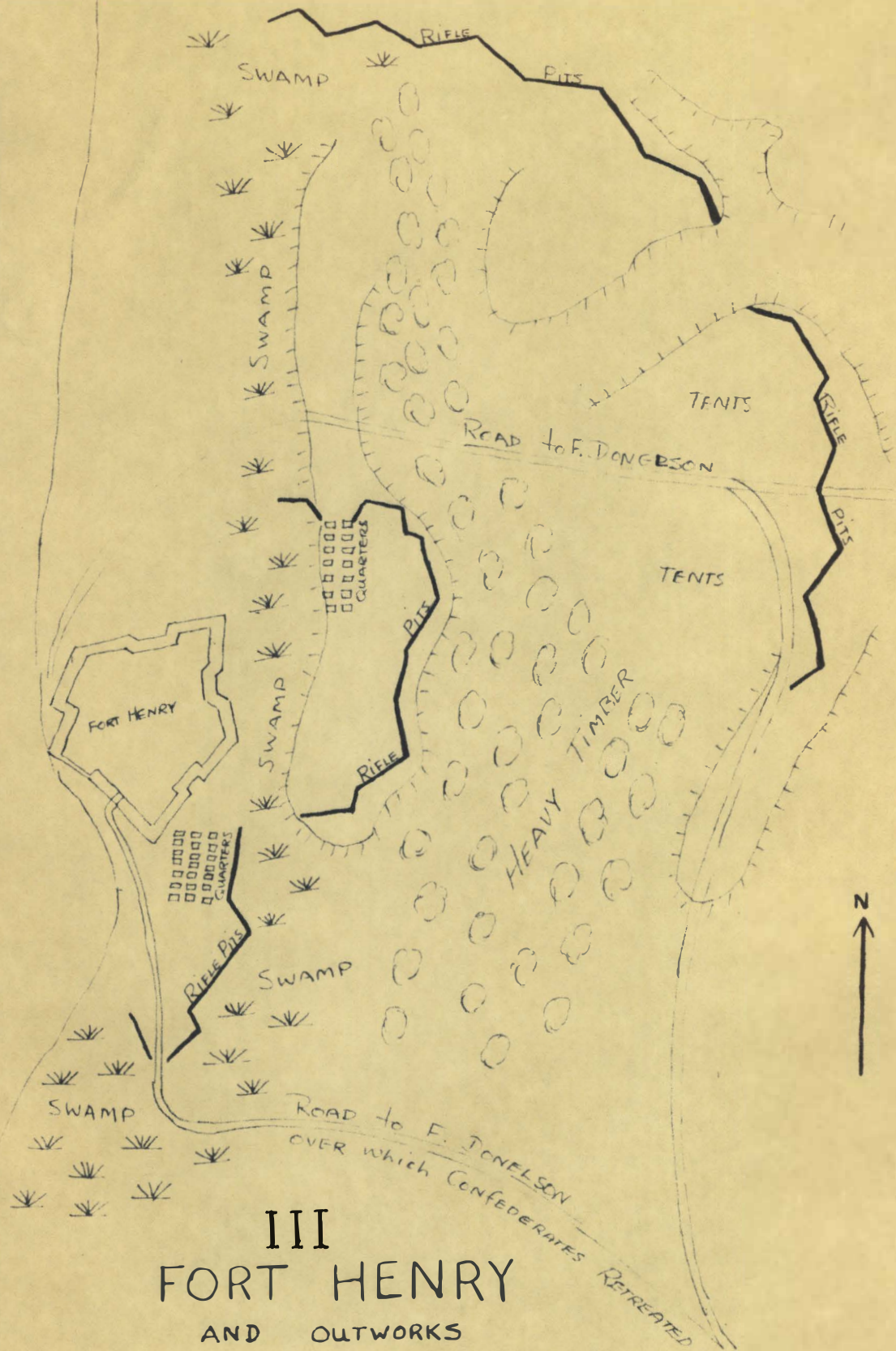
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<sup>14</sup>Horn, Army of Tennessee, 81.

<sup>15</sup>Ulysses S. Grant, Personal Memoirs, 2 vols. (New York: Webster, 1885-1886), I, 291.



TENNESSEE RIVER



III  
FORT HENRY  
AND OUTWORKS

ciplined companies of infantry, an unorganized light battery, and a small water battery of two guns commanding the river to the north. Places had been prepared for four 32-pounder guns, but they had not been received. Work on the fort had been only partially completed, and there were no outer defenses of any description. From this time until the forts were attacked, preparations were carried on with as much haste as possible.<sup>16</sup> In contrast to Fort Henry, the site selected for Fort Donelson was on high ground not liable to floods. The main fort occupied a high ridge in the rear of two water batteries, which when completed commanded the river. On this ridge the fort was situated about one hundred feet above the water, thus providing a view several miles downstream. The fort was located about one mile downstream from the town of Dover where the Confederate commissary supplies were stored. Fort Donelson was an irregular bastioned earthwork, which enclosed about fifteen acres.<sup>17</sup> It was formed by throwing up dirt to a height of about five or six feet and about eleven feet wide, thus leaving a sort of moat in front of the works which was some six feet deep and twelve feet wide. This earthwork followed the summit of the ridge or bluff on the north and west, but toward the southeast, it enclosed a deep ravine and in this quarter was the only entrance to the fort.<sup>18</sup>

Almost at the top of the bluff and at an angle between the fort and the river, the upper water battery was located. It mounted a 32-

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<sup>16</sup>Official Records, Series I, Vol. 7, 114.

<sup>17</sup>Horn, Army of Tennessee, 84.

<sup>18</sup>O. R., Atlas, I, Plate 11.

pound rifled gun and two 32-pound caronades. The lower battery was about halfway down the bluff and mounted one 10-inch Columbiad and eight smooth-bore 32-pounders. The water batteries were earthworks of approximately six feet in depth and twenty feet in width protected by embrasures of sandbags.<sup>19</sup> For each of these two batteries, there was an underground powder magazine.<sup>20</sup>

When the site of the fort was first selected, it was designed only for defense from the water side. The fort itself was built primarily as field support for the water batteries. There was very little early thought given to defense from the landward side. The position was for the most part unapproachable by land from points on the river, either above or below. Hickman Creek, after pursuing its course through a very marshy and in times of high water impassable area, emptied into the Cumberland just below, or north of, the water batteries. This situation was somewhat duplicated just above or south of Dover where Lick Creek entered the river. Indian Creek followed its wide valley and entered the river about half way between Dover and the fort. At the time of the battle, this served to separate the Confederate left and right wings, virtually isolating the latter from the remainder of the garrison.

When he made his inspection in September, Lieutenant Dixon advised the construction of additional field works to protect the fort

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., I, Plate 11.

<sup>20</sup>One of these magazines has been restored and may be seen at the present time. The outline of the other is discernible.

from landward attack. He planned and supervised the construction of a line of rifle pits about two and one half miles long, varying from one-fourth to three-fourths of a mile in distance from the river. The shortage of labor and the delay which characterized the preparations for defense caused these defenses to remain incomplete, even at the time of the battle. These breastworks consisted of logs rolled together and placed end to end and covered with dirt. This provided some protection, although insufficient against field artillery and only a reasonable protection against infantry attack.<sup>21</sup> These breastworks were about four feet high with a two foot trench on both sides of the barrier, thus forming a protective mass approximately six feet in height. They were connected and formed one long trench from the extreme left, southeast of Dover and between the town and the backwaters of Lick Creek, to the point where the broad valley of Indian Creek intersected the lines. Here, they were discontinued and began again where the ridge was resumed on the opposite side of the valley. Artillery was placed on these commanding points, so that the entire gap in the lines was covered. The continuous rifle pit followed the forward crest of the ridge north of Indian Creek to a point almost directly southwest of the main fort and across a small gap in the ridge. From here to the place where the ridge overlooked the marshy backwaters of Hickman Creek, the defenses consisted of irregular and disconnected trenches. These breastworks were only partially completed at the time of the battle, and in-

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<sup>21</sup>Report of Brigadier General S. B. Buckner, February 18, 1862, quoted in Ridley, Battles and Sketches, 54.

stead of being connected as the others, they were separate trenches, ranging from twenty-five to forty feet in length. It is interesting to note that, while this unfinished portion of the works did not command the main approach to Dover and the fort, it did command one approaching road and was the wing of the defense immediately before the water batteries and the main fort.<sup>22</sup>

Immediately in front of these rifle pits, the ridge made a steep descent to a series of almost continuous ravines. The slope from the rifle pits to the ravines was heavily wooded with oak and scrub growth, and the ridge varied in height from fifty to eighty feet averaging about seventy-five feet.<sup>23</sup> On the slope along the front of these outer defenses, the trees had been felled in order that their limbs would point outward toward an attacker. The limbs of the trees had been cleared and sharpened, so that they presented a difficult obstacle to a force attacking in mass formations. Although not completed, this abatis covered the entire front of the landward defenses.<sup>24</sup> On the opposite side of the ravines before the rifle pits, rose another almost parallel ridge along the crest of which ran the Wynn's Ferry Road, which was of great strategical importance in the battle. Spurs and various other elevations along this ridge later afforded commanding positions for Federal artillery.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>R. Atlas, Plate 11.

<sup>23</sup>Official Records, Series I, Vol. 7, 165.

<sup>24</sup>R. Atlas, Plate 11.

<sup>25</sup>Johnston, Life of Johnston, 440.

The area between the rifle pits and the main fort and Dover was cut by various irregular ravines which branched off from the valley of Indian Creek on its way to the Cumberland through the middle of the area to be defended at Fort Donelson. These ravines and consequent ridges were also heavily wooded, and before the Confederates fortified the outer line along the ridge, they had been constructed into an abatis similar to the one described. This later served to hinder Confederate communications and troop movements between different parts of the line.<sup>26</sup>

While the Confederates were thus preparing their defenses, the Union was preparing to move against them. As early as May 11, 1861, steps were taken to provide a fleet of gunboats to operate on western rivers. On August 30, Captain Andrew H. Foote of the United States Navy was placed in charge of naval operations on the western waters. The boats were constructed wide and short, so that they would draw a minimum of water in the shallow rivers. Some of them mounted as many as thirteen heavy guns and were plated with iron. These boats began cruising the Ohio and Mississippi by early September. By the middle of January, 1862, the Federal commanders had developed the plan of moving against the Confederate defense line by way of the Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers. This seemed to be the most logical place for such a movement, since Columbus and Bowling Green on the left and right were much more strongly fortified. From January 23 to 24, General C. F. Smith with a force of Federal troops made a reconnaissance to Fort Henry. A few long-

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 441.



range shots were exchanged between the fort and the gunboats, but no damage was done. On January 28, Grant and Foote at Cairo both telegraphed Major General H. W. Halleck, Federal commander of the Department of the Missouri with headquarters at St. Louis, asking permission to move against Fort Henry. On February 2 Halleck granted this request and gave full authority to Grant.<sup>27</sup>

Grant's plan of attack called for a simultaneous land and water assault on Fort Henry at 11:00 A. M. on February 6. The river had been so low that the boats could not pass, but with the coming of rains in late January, they began to rise and soon rose above the Confederate obstructions as well as natural hazards. Grant's troops were divided into three divisions. The First Division under Brigadier General J. A. McClernand was to move from its point of disembarkation on the east bank to take positions on the roads between Forts Henry and Donelson, thus preventing re-enforcements or retreat. The Second Division was to be landed on the west bank and take and occupy the heights including Fort Helman, opposite Fort Henry. This division was commanded by Brigadier General C. F. Smith. The third division under Grant himself was to be landed on the east bank and invest and assault the fort from the landward side.<sup>28</sup> The flotilla of seven gunboats, four armored and three wooden, was to move on the fort at 11:00 A. M., opening fire at 1700

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 441.

<sup>28</sup>Official Records, Series I, Vol. 7, 125.

yards distance and closing to 600 yards.<sup>29</sup>

The First Division was ferried up the river on February 3 and disembarked according to plan at Itra Landing, eight miles below Fort Henry. The situation as to camping facilities on the land was so poor that they were forced to reembark and make a second disembarkation at Bailey's Landing, three miles below the fort. The Second Division followed two days later and was disembarked on the west bank. The divisions were put in motion on the morning of the sixth. Heavy rain fell throughout the night of the fifth, leaving the ground muddy and the creeks swollen and filled with backwater. McClelland got his troops in motion by 11:00 A. M. on the sixth. Although only three miles from the fort by the river, the route which they were forced to take over back-country roads measured close to eight miles. Only half of this had been covered when the troops heard the sound of the artillery duel between the fort and the flotilla. Hearing a report that the Confederates were evacuating the fort, McClelland made all possible haste, and his advanced cavalry came upon the Confederate's route of retreat just as the last of the column was making good its escape.<sup>30</sup>

Meanwhile, the gunboats under Foote had attacked the fort as planned and exchanged shots with the Confederate gunners in a heated duel from 12:30 until 1:45 P. M. when the Confederate banner was lowered in surrender.<sup>31</sup> During this engagement every gunboat was hit many

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 123.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 126-130.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 122-123.



times, and the Essex was completely disabled when a shot hit her boiler and exploded it.<sup>32</sup>

When the Federal gunboats first tested the range of Fort Henry's guns on February 4, Brigadier General Lloyd H. Tilghman, commander of Confederate defenses on the Cumberland and Tennessee, was inspecting last minute work on the fortifications at Fort Donelson. Upon hearing heavy firing, he, along with Colonel Gilmer, Johnston's head engineer, who was also at Donelson, went immediately to Fort Henry. The remainder of that day and the entire next day were spent in preparing for the approaching attack.<sup>33</sup> The total garrison at Fort Henry on the eve of the attack is given as 2734 men by Tilghman in his report.<sup>34</sup> The investing force under Grant numbered around 17,000 men.<sup>35</sup> Tilghman realized his desperate position. He had only eleven guns in the fort with which to face the fifty-four guns of the seven gunboats. There was water two feet deep in the fort and surrounding it on three sides. All avenues of escape were cut off save one and it was threatened by the investing force. Having only a small garrison hopelessly outnumbered, he decided to allow the garrison to escape to Fort Donelson, keeping only the heavy artillery company to man the guns of the fort. In this manner, he sought to cover the retreat of the main column until such a time as they should be safe-

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<sup>32</sup>Grant, Memoirs, I, 292-293.

<sup>33</sup>Official Records, Series I, Vol. 7, 133.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 137.

<sup>35</sup>Grant, Memoirs, I, 288.

ly away. Tilghman remained in the fort serving at one of the guns to relieve the chief of that piece. Finally, just before two P. M. having only four guns remaining in action and fearful for the lives of his heroic gun crews, he ordered the flag lowered.<sup>36</sup> By this time, the main column had made good its retreat, encountering only the advance guard of the Federal First Division.

Thus, Fort Henry became the first major step in the direction of the eventual defeat of the Confederacy. The fort could not have been held with even a larger garrison than it had. It was badly outmanned and outgunned. In addition, its position has come in for very severe criticism. It does seem to have been badly situated for effective defense even between adversaries of more equal strength. Speaking of the surrender in his report, Lieutenant Colonel Milton A. Haynes, Chief of the Tennessee Corps of Volunteer Artillery had this to say: "Fort Henry was of necessity compelled to surrender, if not to the gunboats, certainly to General Grant's investing army. The fault was in its location, not its defenders."<sup>37</sup> Tilghman, who distrusted the position from the beginning, describes it in his report:

The wretched military position...unfortunate location.... The entire fort together with the entrenched camp spoken of, is enfiladed from three or four points on the opposite shore, while three points on the eastern bank completely command them both, all at easy cannon range. At the same time the entrenched camp arranged as it was in the best possible manner to meet the case, was two thirds of it completely under the control of the fire of the gunboats. The history of military

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<sup>36</sup>Official Records, Series I, Vol. 7, 133.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 147.

engineering records no parallel to this case. Points within a few miles of it, possessing great advantages and few disadvantages, were totally neglected, and a location fixed upon without one redeeming feature or filling one of the many requirements of a site for a work such as Fort Henry.<sup>38</sup>

Immediately following the capture of the fort, Foote sent Lieutenant Commander S. L. Phelps with the three wooden gunboats to ascend the Tennessee and destroy communications and shipping as far as Muscle Shoals at Florence, Alabama. This expedition was speedily carried out with the gunboats capturing two steamers and forcing the Confederates to burn six others, beside the half completed gunboat, Eastport, which was found at the landing at Cerro Gordo. In addition, two hundred stands of arms were captured, and various other military stores were destroyed. Also, the railroad bridge twenty miles above Fort Henry was secured, and part of the track was destroyed.<sup>39</sup>

After the fall of Fort Henry, it was evident to the Confederate leaders that a combined land and water attack on Fort Donelson was imminent. The success of the gunboats at Fort Henry made it obvious that the Federals would not waste time in making a similar attack on Donelson. Late in January, Brigadier General Gideon J. Pillow had been placed in charge of the Confederate forces at Clarksville, between Donelson and Nashville. After Tilghman became a prisoner at Fort Henry, Brigadier General Bushrod Johnson was made commander at Fort Donelson. Almost immediately (the following day) Pillow was ordered to move all his troops from Clarksville to Donelson and assume command.

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 138-139.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 153-154.

Troops were moved from Hopkinsville to Clarksville and Brigadier General John B. Floyd was ordered from his camp at Russellville to Clarksville to assume command there in support of Donelson. Gilmer, who had escaped from Fort Henry just before its surrender, aided in the last-minute preparations for the defense of Donelson. Johnston also ordered Buckner with his division from Bowling Green to Donelson. Although there was considerable disagreement among the ranking Confederate officers as to whether or not an all-out stand should be made at the fort, there were by February 13 about 17,000 men in the garrison. Johnston's plan seems to have been to make a calculated defense of Nashville at Donelson. This idea was also held by Pillow, with Floyd and Buckner feeling that such a stand was not likely to accord success. By virtue of seniority of rank, Floyd became the commander; Pillow was second in command with Buckner in charge of the right wing and B. R. Johnson the left.<sup>40</sup>

After his success at Fort Henry, Grant telegraphed Halleck: "I shall take and destroy Fort Donelson on the 8th and return to Fort Henry."<sup>41</sup> He was unable to fulfill this promise probably because of the bad roads, and the fact that he was waiting for reinforcements. Heavy rain made the roads covering the eleven miles between the two forts virtually impassable, and he wanted to allow time for the gunboats to come up in support. This necessitated their going back down the

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<sup>40</sup>Johnston, Life of Johnston, 433-442.

<sup>41</sup>Official Records, Series I, Vol. 7, 124.

Tennessee to Paducah, thence up the Ohio to the mouth of the Cumberland, and up that river to Fort Donelson. Grant's forces reconnoitered the area between the two forts during the intervening time with Grant himself riding to within a mile of the Confederate works on the day after the fall of Fort Henry.

There were two very good roads between the two forts. One, the direct road, connected the two forts at a distance of twelve miles. The other swung off to the southeast for some distance soon after leaving Fort Henry and then paralleled the other for about twelve miles terminating at the town of Dover.<sup>42</sup> Considering the abundance of rain which had fallen on them, these roads were in good condition. The only portion of them which proved difficult was the first two miles back of Fort Henry, where they traversed the lowland which was flooded and marshy in some places. Because of this, the Federal artillery and much of the infantry was moved back to the high ground on February eleventh. Beyond this difficult stretch, the roads passed through heavy timbered, rolling country which was sparsely populated. The roads were found to be clear and unobstructed when the Federals first came upon them, and their cavalry activity prevented any subsequent work of obstruction by the Confederates, if any was ever attempted.<sup>43</sup> It has since been deemed by some writers unfortunate for the Confederates that the roads were not obstructed, as a delay would have caught the army on the march in very severe weather and might have contributed

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<sup>42</sup>Grant, Memoirs, I, 294-295.

<sup>43</sup>Official Records, Series I, Vol. 7, 161-162.

to breaking up the expedition.<sup>44</sup>

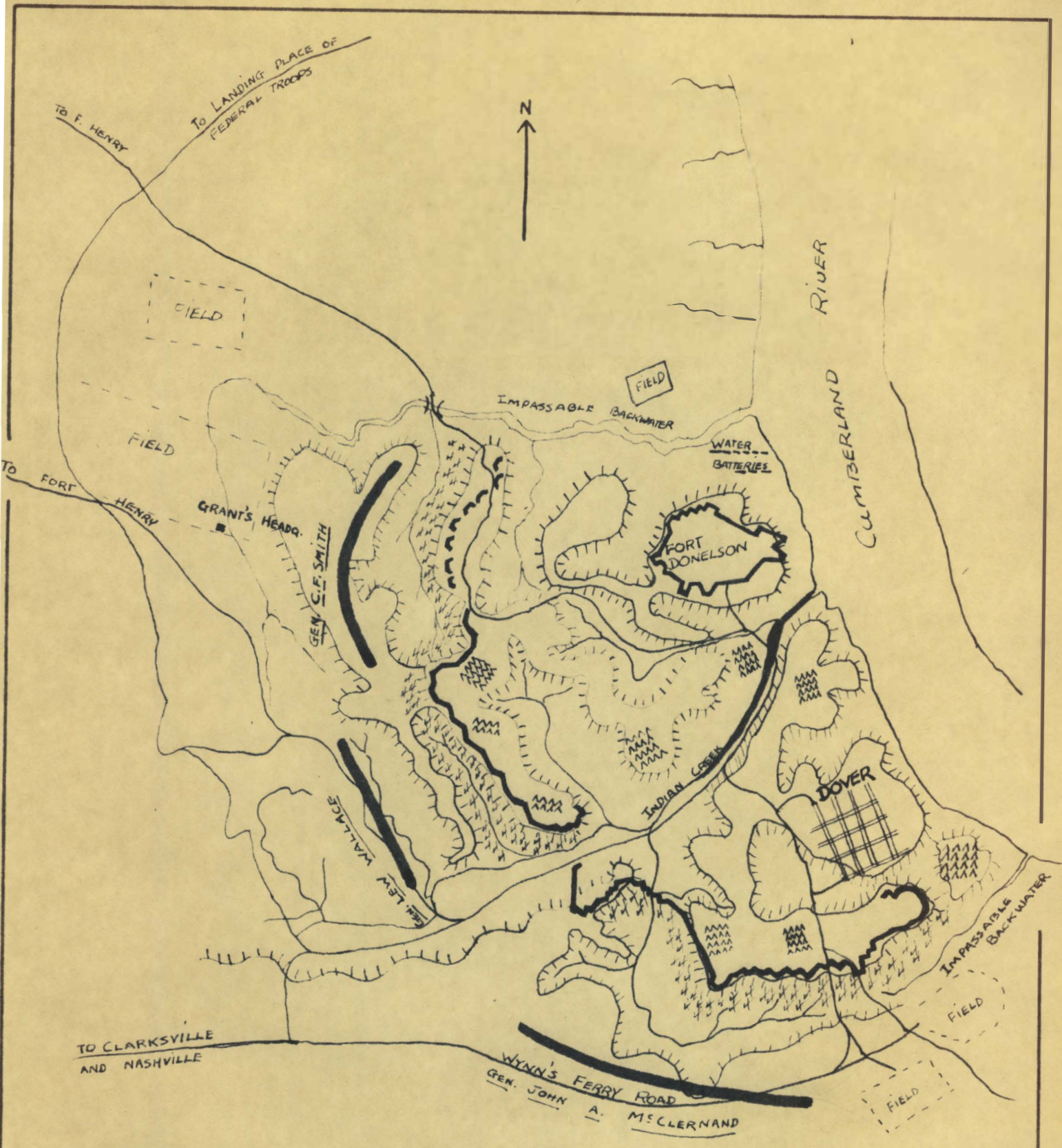
On February twelfth, Grant moved on Fort Donelson with about 15,000 men. His organization remained the same, with McClernand, C. F. Smith, and Brigadier General Lew Wallace as his division commanders. Part of Smith's regiment was left as a garrison at Fort Henry under Wallace's command. The troops were deployed in line of battle that same day with Smith commanding the left, McClernand the right. On the fourteenth, Wallace came up and occupied the center allowing McClernand to more fully invest the Confederate left in front of the town of Dover. When the gunboats and transports arrived on the night of the thirteenth, the 10,000 reinforcements brought with them were assigned to this center sector under Wallace.

The thirteenth was spent by the Federals in drawing their lines closer and placing their artillery in advantageous positions all along the line. Much difficulty was encountered in the latter because of the dense growth of brush and trees which prevented observation for artillery fire. Artillery exchanges and skirmishes were common all that day. The Federal troops had by now established their line on a ridge running roughly parallel and just opposite three unconnected ridges on which the Confederate rifle pits were situated. The Federals did not construct breastworks except for cover for artillery in some places. The






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<sup>44</sup>Johnston, Life of Johnston, 446. The main force of the Federal army moved from Fort Henry on the twelfth. The temperature dipped almost to zero the following evening, and the entire area underwent a severe storm of snow, sleet, and hail. This was sorely felt by both armies, but by this time the Federals were bivouacked in the woods before Fort Donelson.





# IV FORT DONELSON AND OUTWORKS

- RIFLE PITS 
- ABATIS 
- WATER BATTERIES 
- CONFEDERATE TENTS 
- FEDERAL TROOPS 

distance between the two armies was by this time only about five hundred yards.<sup>45</sup>

The most heated action of that day was an attack made by a brigade of McClernand's Division against a Confederate battery in the left center of their line. The battery which had been giving McClernand's investing forces trouble all day was situated in an advantageous position on the crest of the ridge forming the Confederate center. McClernand, seemingly without forethought or justifiable reasons, ordered the position attacked. In order to attack, the brigade had to descend from the ridge on which they had taken position, cross the broad ravine, and advance up the side of the ridge on which the Confederates were fortified; the last portion of this attack was over the almost impassable abatis of felled timber and brush. The ridge from which they descended was one hundred feet high, and the position attacked occupied an even higher point on the opposite ridge. This attempt on the Confederate lines was sheer folly. When the attackers began the ascent through the abatis, they were met with a murderous crossfire from artillery, as well as small arms from the rifle pits. Although they fought bravely, they were beaten back and forced to abandon the attempt.<sup>46</sup> A similar attack was made against the Confederate right by a portion of Smith's Division with similar results. Otherwise, skirmishes were fought fairly generally along the entire line throughout the day.

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<sup>45</sup>Official Records, Series I, Vol. 7, 161-163.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 172-173.



That afternoon and night the weather took a sudden turn from the mild, clear course which it had followed for several days. A slow rain began to fall in the afternoon, and by night this had developed into a heavy downpour. The temperature went down to ten degrees, and hard winds turned the rain into a blizzard of sleet and snow. Both armies suffered terribly as both were forced to weather the storm without shelter or adequate clothing. In addition, many of the day's wounded, who lay in the no man's land between the lines, too far out to be helped, endured the terrible night. Despite the miserable conditions, artillery fire was continued throughout the night by both sides; and during lulls in the storm, flames raged through the brush making the night a veritable hell for the troops of both armies.<sup>47</sup>

The following morning the entire Federal flotilla arrived, and although land action was at a minimum all day, there was far from peace and quiet in the fort. Foote, with four ironclads and two wooden gunboats, attacked at three o'clock in the afternoon. As at Fort Henry, he sought to steam straight up to the fort and silence the batteries and then to pass above the fort and cut off any possible retreat by the Confederates. The gunboats opened fire from a distance of a mile and a half and advanced until they were within 150 yards of the batteries. However, the Confederate guns were effectively manned, and, while the ten light pieces did little damage to the armored gunboats, the gunners poured destructive fire at them with the Columbiad

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<sup>47</sup>Horn, Army of Tennessee, 89.

and long ranged rifled gun. By the end of an hour and a half, all the gunboats had been disabled or damaged, and they were forced to fall back downstream. There were fifty-four casualties aboard the gunboats, while not one man was lost in the Confederate batteries.<sup>48</sup>

That same morning Floyd called a council of war in which all the Confederate commanders agreed to evacuate the position. This decision was caused partially by the exaggerated reports that Grant was receiving 30,000 to 50,000 reinforcements and partially by the condition of the defenders. That night another council was called, and, notwithstanding the victory of the water batteries over the gunboats, Floyd still thought that the army should attempt to cut its way out to Nashville and safety. Thus, the entire night was spent by the Confederates in the realignment of their troops.<sup>49</sup>

With Lick Creek swollen and impassable, the only route which could be forced for a retreat was the Wynn's Ferry Road, which came out of the Confederate defenses on the extreme left and crossed the intervening ground between the two armies. It continued in a southeasterly direction to Charlotte and thence on to Nashville. The Federal First Division was strongly posted across and along this road. Its use would necessitate an attack by the Confederates strong enough to clear the entire road of Federal troops.

The plan of battle called for an attack by Pillow's left wing.

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<sup>48</sup>Horn, Army of Tennessee, 91.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

Buckner would remove his entire force from the trenches on the right, leaving only one regiment of four hundred and fifty men to defend that sector and form to the rear of and in support of Pillow. Everything went according to schedule, and the attack was made at five A. M. When Pillow's advancing columns came upon McClernand's line, they found them in line of battle. For three hours the Confederates were successful as they drove their adversaries back foot by foot. At eight A. M. McClernand appealed to Wallace on his left for aid. It could not be given as Wallace's hands were tied by an order from Grant, who was in conference with Foote aboard his gunboat several miles away. The order was given before Grant's departure and prohibited the bringing on of a general engagement. Continued pressure by Pillow with Buckner aiding now on the right flank pushed McClernand's men back two miles and literally into Wallace's line. Thus, Wallace was brought into the conflict in self-defense. By early afternoon, the entire route of escape was cleared.

At this point, one of the greatest tactical blunders of a war filled with such blunders occurred. Rather than march the army out of the fort in retreat and thus preserve invaluable numbers and experience for the Confederate cause, Pillow reversed the plan of battle and ordered the troops back into the fort. Buckner questioned his authority to do this, and Floyd, who arrived on the scene, agreed with Buckner. A short time later, after he had consulted Pillow, Floyd reversed his decision and recalled the troops to the fort.<sup>50</sup> It is difficult to say

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 92-93.

why this indecision was prevalent among the Confederate leaders. Contributing causes might have been inexperience, inability to evaluate the situation accurately, and possibly fear of failure.

Meanwhile, Grant, returning to his forces as fast as possible after learning of the Confederate attack, came upon the scene. He had been four or five miles north of the lines when conferring with Foote, and with the marshy roads retarding him, he was sometime getting on the field of action. In arriving at the point of the Confederate attack, he passed the left and center of his line, finding all to be in good order there. Sizing up the situation accurately, he guessed just what had happened within the Confederate lines; the right had been left undermanned in order to make the attack from the left. He immediately ordered his own left to attack the Confederate right. This was probably the first evidence of Grant's military genius. General C. F. Smith's Division attacked vigorously and by night had taken the detached and disconnected rifle pits on the Confederate's extreme right and forced Buckner's troops, who had returned from the attempted breakthrough, to take a position on the one remaining ridge which separated the Union forces from the water batteries. The position defended by Buckner was now commanded by the elevation of his previous rifle pits in Federal hands.<sup>51</sup> Consequently, the Federal troops along the entire line were reformed and ordered to advance, thus retaking the ground which had been lost.

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<sup>51</sup>Grant, Memoirs, I, 305-308.

That night at Floyd's headquarters in the Dover Inn, a final meeting of the Confederate commanding officers was held. As in previous councils, disagreement was the rule and not the exception. Buckner saw no alternative but surrender, and Floyd seemed to agree with him. Pillow thought that the fort should be held for one or if possible two more days. Colonel Nathan B. Forrest, whose cavalry had played a brilliant role in the previous day's action, expected only to fight the following day. In lieu of surrender, he proposed that the entire garrison be marched out over the Wynn's Ferry Road, as he had reports that the Federal troops had not re-occupied their former positions. He ventured to promise that his cavalry would protect the retreating army. Finally, however, the decision was made to surrender the fort. Forrest asked for and received permission to march his cavalry out over the river road, which was under three feet of water. Floyd sought also to escape and take his brigade with him.<sup>52</sup> Pillow insisted that he would personally never surrender. Buckner finally agreed that he would remain in the fort and surrender it. Consequently, Floyd passed the command to Pillow, and he, in turn, passed it to Buckner. Thus, Fort Donelson

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<sup>52</sup>Floyd had been Secretary of War prior to the beginning of hostilities. As such he was accused of dispersing Federal troops prior to the war in such a manner that they would be least effective against a rebellion. He was also accused of moving arms and munitions from northern arsenals to those in the South where they could be easily taken by the South should there be a rebellion. His capture probably would have resulted in his trial for fraud, embezzlement, and possibly treason. James Elliott Walmsley, "John Buchanan Floyd," Dictionary of American Biography, ed. by Allan Johnston and Dumas Malone, 21 vols. and index (New York: Scribner's, 1928-1944), VI, 487.

was surrendered early the next morning, Sunday, February 16, 1862.<sup>53</sup>

Many of the Confederates managed to escape from Fort Donelson. Floyd left early Sunday morning with his brigade of Virginia troops aboard two boats which arrived during the night. Others, including Gilmer, were ferried across the river from whence they escaped. Forrest marched his entire cavalry command out through the backwaters carrying all those possible with him. Artillery troops cut loose their horses and rode them out the same way. Others merely set out on foot and in the confusion passed through the Federal lines. Brigadier General B. R. Johnson escaped in this manner. Accompanied by another officer, he simply walked out of the fort. In all, probably only about one half, or 7000 to 8000 men were taken prisoner by the Federals.<sup>54</sup>

Fort Donelson was a great victory for the Union. It was celebrated as such, and Grant and his three division commanders were promoted to the rank of Major General.<sup>55</sup> Throughout the South there was a terrific feeling of depression and defeat. The line of defense was broken, and the South lay open to the Federal invaders. The next step in this invasion will be dealt with in Chapter III.

The elevation of Fort Henry placed it at the mercy of the Federal gunboats. The high water around the fort prevented an effec-

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<sup>53</sup>Horn, Army of Tennessee, 94-96.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 96-97, These figures seem to be the most accurate estimate available.

<sup>55</sup>Grant, Memoirs, I, 316.

tive defense on the landward side. The fort fell after only a short struggle; this might have been prolonged with a larger and more able defending force. Its impossible position was well known to Tilghman as well as others who commented upon it in the reports mentioned. The stiff defense which was later made at Fort Donelson where there were a few topographical advantages shows that the selection of the site of Fort Henry was a grave mistake.

The elevation of the bluff along the river at Fort Donelson was used to such an advantage that the Confederates, with about the same number of guns as they had employed at Fort Henry, were able to defeat decisively the same fleet of gunboats which demolished that fort and forced it to surrender in only a short engagement. The high, steep ridges around Fort Donelson and the town of Dover were made virtually impregnable by the construction of rifle pits along their summits and abatis to their fronts. All the Federal charges were successfully repulsed by the Confederates in these positions with the exception of the final charge against the incompletd works on the defenders' right; the loss of this portion of their line was due to the steep ridges and marshy ravines within the Confederate lines which prevented re-enforcements from arriving in time to relieve the outnumbered troops in that sector.

## CHAPTER III

### THE BATTLE OF SHILOH

The fall of Forts Henry and Donelson resulted in the loss of the entire line of defense for the Confederates. With the Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers controlled by the Federal gunboats, the Confederate positions at Columbus and Bowling Green were outflanked. Realizing the seriousness of his situation, Johnston had ordered Bowling Green evacuated even before Donelson fell. The army there retreated to Nashville to await the outcome of the struggle for possession of the Cumberland. With the Federal victory at Donelson, Nashville became untenable. It seems that Johnston's new plan was to concentrate all his forces south of the Tennessee River and there dispute the Federal advance.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the Confederate stores at Nashville were evacuated, but the utter confusion and chaos in the city which resulted from the approach of the Federals caused much to be left or plundered by the populace. A lack of transportation facilities caused much to be abandoned. First Floyd, after his arrival from Donelson, and then Forrest, was in charge of evacuating the stores and maintaining order.<sup>2</sup> Under the circumstances, these men did an admirable job. Floyd's work in this capacity was highly praised by Basil W. Duke, biographer

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<sup>1</sup>Horn, Army of Tennessee, 99-107.

<sup>2</sup>Johnston, Life of Johnston, 498.



of Colonel John H. Morgan.<sup>3</sup>

After the loss of Nashville and the control of the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers, the most important strategic position in the west was the Memphis and Charleston Railroad. This road connected the Mississippi River with the Atlantic Coast at Charleston. It swung southeast from Memphis through northern Mississippi and across northern Alabama along the southern bank of the Tennessee River. Connections could be made from its main tracks to Chattanooga and the railroad route northward through Knoxville to Virginia. The Memphis and Charleston met the Tennessee River from the west at Sheffield, Alabama, near the Muscle Shoals. This was the extent of low-water navigation on the Tennessee and, thus, the extent of the control of the Federal gunboats over the river. Johnston, realizing that Grant would seek to cut the railroad at the earliest possible time, sought to concentrate every available man in an effort to stem the tide of the Federal advance. The best place for this concentration was at Corinth, Mississippi, where the Memphis and Charleston crossed the Mobile and Ohio Railroad. Corinth was situated only about twenty-two miles from the Tennessee River and offered an excellent position from which to observe the Federal movements on the river. Here, the Confederates accumulated large stores of supplies even before the arrival of the various portions of the army.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Basil W. Duke, History of Morgan's Cavalry (Cincinnati: Miami Printing and Publishing Co., 1867), 117-118.

<sup>4</sup>Horn, Army of Tennessee, 107-108.

Major General P. G. T. Beauregard, who assumed command in the Columbus sector on February 15, elected to evacuate that fortress in order to shorten the Confederate lines of communication. The fact that it was virtually outflanked by the Federals on the Tennessee River further influenced this decision. This withdrawal left Island Number Ten and New Madrid, Missouri, as the most advanced Confederate defenses on the Mississippi. Beauregard then attempted to set up a defense line which ran from these points southeast across Tennessee to its eastern terminus at Corinth. While this line was long, it admitted easy concentration at any one point because of the proximity of the Mobile and Ohio Railroad. He left about 7000 men at Island Number Ten and New Madrid and placed the remainder of the Columbus garrison, 10000 men, at Humboldt, Tennessee, close to the center of this line.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, the Federals began a movement up the Tennessee. The ultimate objective was to sever Confederate communications at such places as Corinth, Jackson, and Humboldt; the immediate objective was to destroy the railroad bridge over Bear Creek near Eastport, Mississippi, on the Memphis and Charleston line. In preparation for this General C. F. Smith began the expedition on March tenth. On the thirteenth he landed his four divisions at Savannah, Tennessee, a town on the east bank in Warren County. Immediately Smith sent Major General William T. Sherman with his division in nineteen steamboats escorted by the gunboat, Tyler, to destroy the bridge.

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 109-111.

This attempt resulted in utter failure. No sooner had the Federal troops landed than a violent storm began, and the water rose in the streams at the rate of six inches per hour. The division was forced to retire to its transports and fall back downstream. With the river so high, the boats could find no suitable place to land until they reached Pittsburg Landing, where high bluffs rise on the west bank and provide dry ground suitable for encampment. The landing is about six miles upstream from Savannah and almost twenty-two miles from the Confederate stronghold at Corinth. In earlier and more peaceful times, it served as the river landing for Corinth and was connected with that place by two good roads.<sup>6</sup>

Grant had been in the bad graces of Halleck and, consequently, was temporarily removed from command on March sixth. On the thirteenth he was restored to command and moved promptly to Savannah where Smith, who had succeeded him, was in charge of the army. When Grant arrived at Savannah, he found about half the army encamped there on the east bank, one division under General Lew Wallace at Crump's Landing on the west bank about two miles upstream, and Sherman still encamped at Pittsburg Landing, where he had retired after the failure of his raid on the Memphis and Charleston Railroad. Grant prepared to march against Corinth, as soon as he could be re-enforced by Major General Don Carlos Buell's Army of the Ohio, which was marching overland from Nashville. In preparation for this advance, Grant ordered the divisions

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<sup>6</sup>Official Records, Series I, Vol. 10, 22-23.

of Brigadier General W. H. L. Wallace and Major General Stephen A. Hurlbut to move from Savannah to Pittsburg Landing and there encamp. General McClelland's division was sent directly there when it came up the river. Thus, Grant had four divisions in the area around Pittsburg, one more four miles downstream, and as re-enforcements were arriving daily, they were organized into brigades and later into what became the Sixth Division commanded by Major General B. M. Prentiss.<sup>7</sup>

When the fall of Fort Donelson and the advance of Buell's army rendered Nashville indefensible, Johnston fell back on Murfreesboro. In order to form a junction with Beauregard at Corinth, he evacuated Middle Tennessee, retreating by way of Shelbyville and Fayetteville to Decatur, Alabama, where he crossed the Tennessee with his army. From here he moved by way of the Memphis and Charleston to Corinth. Thus, he brought some 20,000 troops to add to the Confederate command.<sup>8</sup> The Confederate War Department, realizing the desperate plight of the troops in the west, ordered Major General Braxton Bragg with 10,000 disciplined and fresh men to move from Pensacola, Florida, to join Johnston and Beauregard at Corinth.<sup>9</sup> Thus, with approximately 40,000 men concentrated at Corinth the Confederates, for the first time in the west, found themselves with an army large enough to do battle with the Federals. It was Johnston's plan to do this, before Buell could re-enforce Grant.

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<sup>7</sup>Grant, Memoirs, I, 324-333.

<sup>8</sup>Johnston, Life of Johnston, 505.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 513.





Hardin County, Tennessee, in which the later battle of Shiloh occurred, contains parts of two of the physiographic regions of the state. In the eastern section of the county is the southern part of the Highland Rim, with its rugged terrain of rocks and swift-flowing streams. In the west is the southeast corner of the Slope of West Tennessee, part of the Gulf Coastal Plain. Crossing the middle of the county and following a two hundred and fifty to three hundred foot deep valley is the Tennessee River which serves to divide these two provinces. The flood plain of the river varies from one to four miles in width. In places along the outside of the stream curves, bottoms are entirely absent. Both Savannah and Pittsburg Landing are located in such positions, the former on the east bank and the latter on that of the west. Thus, both places appear as bluffs rising directly from the river and have no immediate high-water problems. The streams flowing into the Tennessee from the west are sluggish and generally have considerable bottoms, which are usually damp and soggy and sometimes marshy.<sup>10</sup> Before the Tennessee Valley Authority harnessed the river for flood control measures, these streams were subject to overflows caused by high water in the Tennessee. This was the case in the early spring of 1862.<sup>11</sup> The topography on the western side of the river is varied, much of it being of a rolling nature. Many kinds of timber abound in

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<sup>10</sup>W. B. Jewell, "Geology and Mineral Resources of Hardin County, Tennessee," in Tennessee Geological Survey Bulletin, No. 37 (Nashville: Ambrose, 1931), 12-14.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 102.

thick groves and scrub forest. The only town in the county of any size at the time in question was Savannah, which became first Smith's and later Grant's headquarters. Its population in 1870 was around five hundred.<sup>12</sup>

Remnants of plateaus are evident in the western part of the county. Usually erosion has been rapid on the plateau slopes because of the soft nature of the rocks. Oftentimes, these remnants are wholly or partially dissected and cut away by streams.<sup>13</sup> The battlefield of Shiloh was one of the better preserved of these plateau remnants.

At Pittsburg Landing, where Grant's army was encamped, a steep bluff rises from the river to a height of about a hundred feet. Thus, with a good road to the foot of the bluff, an excellent steamboat landing was provided, as the channel of the river ran close to the bluff, that being the outside of the stream curve. Here, a mere hamlet of three or four log cabins and a post office were situated. From the landing the land stretched back for five miles in a sort of wrinkled plateau, described by Buell in his report as an "undulating table-land."<sup>14</sup> Its level was from eighty to one hundred feet above the level of the river and toward the east was creased and cut by deep ravines, which opened into the river. While it was cut with ravines and fairly heavily wooded, there was ample open ground for the

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<sup>12</sup>J. B. Killebrew, Introduction to the Resources of Tennessee (Nashville: Tavel, Eastman, and Howell, 1874), 1086-1093.

<sup>13</sup>Jewell, loc. cit., 15-16.

<sup>14</sup>Official Records, Series I, Vol. 10, 293.

camps and drill of an army of a hundred thousand men.<sup>15</sup>

In addition, the area was flanked by streams both to the north and south. In the former direction, Owl Creek rises about four miles west of the river and flows northeast, until it meets Snake Creek flowing east to the Tennessee, where it finds its mouth about a mile below the landing. On the south, Lick Creek rises near the source of Owl Creek but flows generally eastward to its mouth two miles above the landing. Ravines, cut by erosion, open into these various creeks from the sides of the plateau. This is especially true on the north along Owl Creek. Generally, the area was a forest, but occasionally there was a small farm of twenty to eight acres.<sup>16</sup>

There were two good roads from the landing to Corinth. One of these followed a more or less direct route by way of Monterey, thirteen miles from Pittsburg and ten miles from Corinth. The other, known as the Ridge Road or the Bark Road, followed a course more to the north and joined the more direct or Monterey Road some five miles out from the landing. In addition to these, there were two roads from Pittsburg Landing to Crump's Landing, one of which followed close to the river. This road continued southward beyond Pittsburg to Hamburg, a landing four or five miles upstream. Branching off from the Crump's Landing road was a road to Purdy, county seat of McNairy County, sixteen miles to the northwest of Pittsburg. There were two roads which

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 293.



ran northward from Monterey to Purdy and Savannah, both of which crossed the Ridge Road. At one of these crossroads lived a family named Mickey. This became an important landmark for the Confederate troops. Some five miles out from Pittsburg Landing the various roads branched out in a more or less web-like manner. The plateau on which the Federal camps were situated was criss-crossed by several minor roads, giving a map of the area a checkerboard appearance. Shiloh Church, a small, log Methodist church, was situated about two and one half miles from the river on the main road from the landing to both the Bark and Monterey Roads.<sup>17</sup>

Sherman's division commanded the Federal advance. His headquarters was at Shiloh Church on the Corinth Road from which the subsequent battle took its name. A short distance to the rear of this point the Purdy Road crossed the Corinth Road and followed a heavily wooded ridge to Owl Creek, which it crossed by two bridges. Sherman's First Brigade under Colonel John A. McDowell formed the right guarding these bridges. The Fourth Brigade, under Colonel Ralph P. Duckland, was situated along the aforementioned ridge with its left crossing the Corinth Road near Shiloh Church. Similarly, the Third Brigade commanded by Colonel Jesse Hildebrand had its right on the Corinth Road at Shiloh Church, and its camps stretched toward the south. Rounding out the division was the Second Brigade, under Colonel David Stuart, which was some distance away to the south guarding the ford over Lick Creek on

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<sup>17</sup>O. R. Atlas, I, Plates 13-14.

the Hamburg Road. In front of these positions, the ridge fell away to a series of deep ravines. These ravines were thickly set with trees and undergrowth and were flooded or boggy along most of the line.<sup>18</sup>

To Sherman's left, with a considerable interval between and filling the gap between Sherman's First, Third, and Fourth Brigades on the Corinth and Purdy Roads and his Second Brigade on the Hamburg Road, was Prentiss' Sixth Division, with uneven rolling ground to its front. Sherman's and Prentiss' Divisions were the outposts for the Federal camps. They occupied the space between Owl and Lick Creeks at a point near their source, where they were less than three miles apart.<sup>19</sup>

To the rear of Sherman and Prentiss and covering the interval between them, were the camps of McClelland's First Division. Some two miles to the rear of the advanced divisions were Harlbut's Fourth and Smith's, later W. H. L. Wallace's,<sup>20</sup> Second Divisions on the left and right respectively. Lew Wallace's Third Division remained encamped at Crump's Landing guarding the storage point for the Federal supplies.<sup>21</sup>

Although the Federal army did not intrench or otherwise construct defensive positions, the area itself provided good ground for defense.

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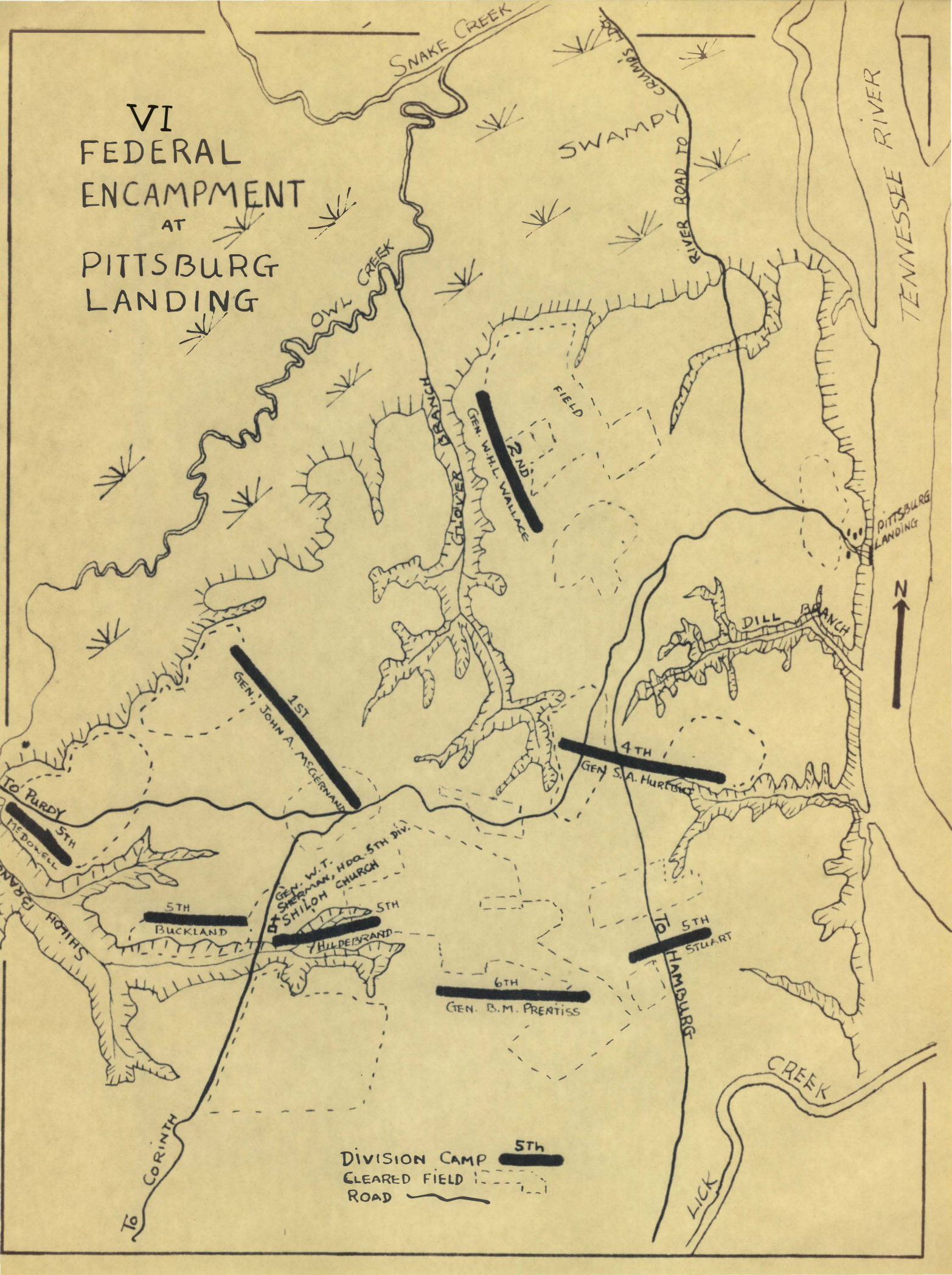
<sup>18</sup>William T. Sherman, Memoirs of General William T. Sherman, 2 vols. (New York: Appleton, 1875), I, 236. Hereafter cited as Memoirs.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Prior to and during the battle General C. F. Smith was incapacitated by an accidental leg injury. He remained in the Cherry Mansion, Grant's headquarters at Savannah, where he died from infection not long after the battle. Brigadier General W. H. L. Wallace commanded in his absence.

<sup>21</sup>Sherman, Memoirs, I, 236.

# VI FEDERAL ENCAMPMENT AT PITTSBURG LANDING





The Federal leaders were later severely criticized for this neglect, but they considered themselves employed in an offensive campaign and hardly expected the Confederates to leave well-built defenses at Corinth and attack them in their camps.<sup>22</sup> Speaking of the Federal position in a report on March 17, Sherman had this to say: "I am strongly impressed with the importance of the position, both for its land advantages and its strategic position. The ground itself admits of easy defense by a small command and yet affords admirable camping ground."<sup>23</sup> The selection of the area around Pittsburg Landing for the Federal camp is generally attributed to Smith, who ordered the first men there. Of the area Johnston says:

It was, in fact, a formidable natural fortification. With few and difficult approaches, guarded on either flank by impassable streams and morasses, protected by a succession of ravines and acclivities, each commanded by eminences to the rear, this quadrilateral seemed a safe fastness against attack—hard to assail, easy to defend. Its selection was the dying gift of the soldierly C. F. Smith to his cause.<sup>24</sup>

During the latter part of March, the Confederates kept a strong detachment at Bethel Springs on the Mobile and Ohio Railroad and at Purdy, four miles east. From this position, they watched the Federals at Crump's and Pittsburg. When it became evident that Buell was nearing Savannah with his army, Johnston elected to follow his previous plan and attack Grant before the two armies could be joined. Thus, on April

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<sup>22</sup>Grant, Memoirs, I, 333.

<sup>23</sup>Official Records, Series I, Vol. 10, 27.

<sup>24</sup>Johnston, Life of Johnston, 531.

3 he issued orders to that effect. The overall plan of battle was to make every effort to turn the Federal's left flank, thus cutting off their line of retreat to the Tennessee River and driving them back on Owl Creek where they would be forced to surrender.<sup>25</sup>

The Confederate forces, known as the Army of Mississippi, was organized into four corps. The First Corps was commanded by Major General Bragg, the Second by Major General Polk, the Third by Major General Hardee, and the Reserve by Brigadier General Breckinridge.

The Third Corps was to move that same day, April third, on the Ridge Road to the Bark Road. If possible, it was to bivouac that night at Mickey's at the intersection of the road from Monterey to Savannah and Purdy. At 3:00 A. M. on the fourth, it was to move forward by the Bark Road until within sight of the Federal outposts and there be deployed in line of battle across the entire front extending from Lick Creek to Owl Creek.

The Second Corps was to assemble on Monterey and move there at once. They were then to move by the Savannah Road to Mickey's, the head of the column reaching there before night. On the following morning, they were to advance by the Bark Road as soon as the rear of the Third Corps should pass and form in line of battle about 1000 yards to the rear of that Corps.

The First Corps, from which the detachments at Bethel and Purdy had been taken, was to follow the line of march of the Third Corps a

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<sup>25</sup>Ridley, Battles and Sketches, 82.

half hour to the rear and bivouac that night in that position at the same interval. The following day, it was to continue on the Bark Road and form a third line with a similar interval. The portion of that command at Bethel and Purdy was to assemble and march to join the rest of the Corps at the junction of the Purdy Road with the Bark Road.

The reserve was to assemble at Monterey by the shortest and best routes and, thus form to march toward the front by either the direct road or the Ridge Road to Pittsburg. Cavalry was to be thrown out in all directions by the various commanders, so that the intention of the Confederates could be disguised as well as possible.<sup>26</sup>

It is of particular interest to notice that contrary to the usual method of attack, whereby detachments are arranged in columns perpendicular to the line of defense, the Army of the Mississippi was arrayed in three parallel lines with its reserve to the rear. This alignment caused considerable confusion during the battle, as detachments from the lines to the rear were thrown forward into various places in the attack line, thus causing a definite lack of coherence in carrying out commands. The reason for such an alignment was probably the fact that the leaders thought these raw, inexperienced troops would fight better in familiar units.

The plan was to attack the Federals early in the morning of April 5. This was not to be, however, as the elements which had played havoc with the war in the west again assumed a prominent role. Showers

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<sup>26</sup>Johnston, Life of Johnston, 555-557.

fell all day Thursday, the fourth, making movement along the dirt roads difficult for artillery and wagons. Then, after midnight, a spring storm broke, making the night miserable for the Confederate troops, who were marching without tents. The night was pitch-dark and mere gullies and ravines became impassable torrents. However, at 3:00 A. M. on the fifth, the hour for attack, the entire army prepared to advance. It was soon apparent, however, that the Reserve Corps was not up and that its artillery and wagons were stuck in the mud. In addition, parts of other columns were delayed in arriving at their appointed positions. Bragg's Corps had found the roads so bad that it was several hours behind schedule, and because of this delay Polk's column had been held up. Bragg's entire command was not in position until 4:00 P. M. on the fifth. Thus, it was too late to attack that day.<sup>27</sup>

About that same time, the now famous "council of war" was held near a crossroads to the rear of the Confederate lines of battle. The meeting seems to have been somewhat casual, and the various commanders who came together were Johnston, Beauregard, Bragg, Polk, Breckinridge, and Gilmer from Hardee's command. In addition, there were several staff officers and other officers present.<sup>28</sup>

Because many of the troops had used up their rations, and much noise had been made on the march, Beauregard thought they no longer held the advantage of surprise. He recommended that the army be withdrawn

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 560-564.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

to Corinth. After listening to the views of the various officers, Johnston announced his decision to attack at daylight the following morning. With this the conference broke up, and as Johnston moved away he remarked to a staff officer, "I would fight them if they were a million. They can present no greater front between these two creeks than we can; and the more men they crowd in there, the worse we can make it for them."<sup>29</sup> Thus, the stage was set for the Battle of Shiloh.

When the Confederates attacked the following morning, they did not know the exact location of the Federal lines. The first clash was between Hardee's advancing line and an early morning reconnaissance party sent out by one of Prentiss' brigade commanders. After a brief skirmish, the Federals retired, and the Confederate line swept into the camps of Prentiss' Sixth Division. By 8:00 A. M., they were in possession of the entire camp.<sup>30</sup>

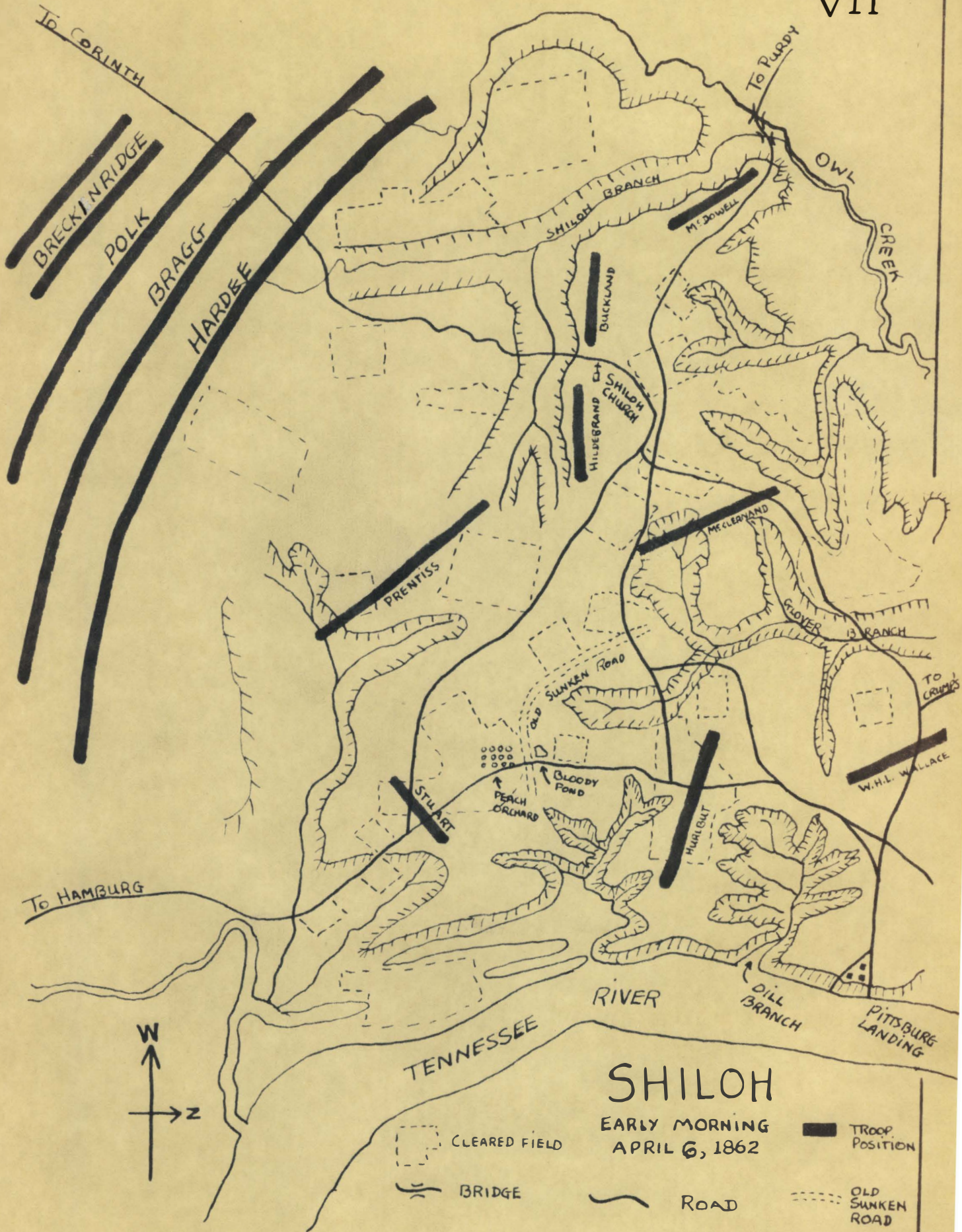
Much has been written and said about the extent to which the Federals were surprised in that first onslaught. Various commanders have claimed or denied that the attack was entirely unexpected. Evidences of surprise were quite evident in the condition in which the attackers found the camps and in the manner in which the attack was met. From all these it must be assumed that the Federals were not

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 566-569.






<sup>30</sup>Horn, Army of Tennessee, 128-130.





# SHILOH

EARLY MORNING  
APRIL 6, 1862

-  CLEARED FIELD
-  BRIDGE
-  ROAD
-  OLD SUNKEN ROAD
-  TROOP POSITION

expecting an attack of a general nature.<sup>31</sup>

Elsewhere, the Federals put up a more determined resistance. Sherman's position, as already mentioned, was along a ridge fronting on a difficult ravine with his headquarters at Shiloh Church. Hearing the first noise of battle, this division was posted along this ridge in position to have a good line of fire at the Confederates as they crossed the ravine, although the thickets there afforded the Confederates some protection. The first assault against this position was repulsed, but Prentiss' retreat left Sherman's left flank unprotected, and he was forced to fall back.<sup>32</sup> Beauregard made Shiloh Church his headquarters following the Confederate occupation of Sherman's camps, and, thus, the small log structure served two opposing armies as headquarters on the same day. In order to follow the original plan of battle, that of turning the Federal left flank, the Confederates, were forced to attack the divisions under Prentiss and Sherman, which were encamped in advance, before they could get at the Federal left. The Confederates accomplished this by simply hurling their army at the enemy in overpowering charges. These were seldom general along the entire front at the same time but were singular and sometimes occurred at various points at the same time.<sup>33</sup> This was a tactic born of necessity as the

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<sup>31</sup>This is one of the great controversial issues of the battle. However, half eaten breakfasts were found in Prentiss' camps, half dressed prisoners were taken, and the Federals organized no effective line in the vicinity of these camps. Johnston, Life of Johnston, 574-591.

<sup>32</sup>Sherman, Memoirs, I, 236.

<sup>33</sup>Grant, Memoirs, I, 365.

broken and wooded character of the field, interspersed with a few clearings and cultivated plots, resisted the formation of any stable Federal defense line. Thus, the Confederates were seldom able to bring pressure upon the entire line at once, as while part of the Federal line was stable, it might be fluctuating in another sector. Although the Confederate attacks had a demoralizing effect on the soldiers in line, they did not have the effect on the entire army which a more concerted and general attack might have had.

Soon after the opening of the battle, most of the Federal troops in the field were engaged. McClelland re-enforced Sherman's left, W. H. L. Wallace moved into the center in support of Prentiss, and Hurlbut's division formed on Prentiss' left. Grant was eating breakfast at his headquarters in Savannah when he heard the first roar of cannons announcing the opening of the battle. He immediately boarded a dispatch boat and set off upstream, stopping at Crump's only long enough to order Lew Wallace to hold his troops in readiness. Soon after arriving on the field, Grant sent orders to Wallace to move at once to join the Federal right.<sup>34</sup> Why this movement was delayed will be discussed more fully in connection with other re-enforcements.

Between 10:00 A. M. and noon, the Confederate advance received its first serious check. Heretofore, the army had moved forward mainly much as the result of the local charges, but the Federal left and center were finally able to effect a uniform line. Wallace's and

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<sup>34</sup>Horn, Army of Tennessee, 131.



Hurlbut's divisions, along with the remnants of Prentiss' shattered forces, had found a natural line on which to rally.

Along the crest of a ridge there was an old, abandoned road which, as is common with dirt roads, had been worn and washed out until it formed a natural rifle pit.<sup>35</sup> In following the ridge, it ran convex to the attacking Confederates, therefore, making it difficult to outflank. The road had long since been abandoned, and underbrush had covered its sides, providing even more protection for the defenders.<sup>36</sup> This position was located about three-fourths of a mile to the rear of Prentiss' camps in the center and left of the entire Federal line and just east of the junction of the Hamburg and Savannah and Hamburg and Purdy Roads. In front of the old road, ran a picket fence which provided additional infantry cover. Moreover, there were logs and other defenses hastily prepared by the Federals. From the depression of this road the Federal infantry could pour a devastating fire upon an attacker with very little danger of exposing themselves. In addition, all the available artillery was posted immediately behind the road in order to add to this weltering fire. It was "shorter, stronger, compacter, and more continuous" than the first Federal line.<sup>37</sup>

Contributing to the strength of this position, the ground in front, over which the Confederates had to attack, was ideal for defense.

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 132.

<sup>36</sup>Duke, History of Morgan's Cavalry, 147.

<sup>37</sup>Johnston, Life of Johnston, 600-606.

Along the right front, a large open plot known as Duncan Field sloped away from the line. In the center was a section of wooded undergrowth which helped prevent organized, massed attack. On the left front was another field of considerable size sloping away in a similar manner to Duncan Field.<sup>38</sup> In part of this field immediately before the Federal left was a small peach orchard and behind this a thicket of black-jack trees, in which there was a small pond. Here two batteries of Federal artillery were placed, one in the peach orchard and one in the thicket.<sup>39</sup> In the defense along this line, W. H. L. Wallace commanded the right, Hurlbut the left, and Prentiss the center.

When the Confederates first came on this position, they attempted to take it in the same manner in which they had forced all the previous Federal positions, by localized attack. At first, a brigade charged the position without success and with dreadful casualties. Then, as the advancing Confederates came upon the position in greater numbers, larger detachments were hurled across the fields and thicket. Charge after charge was made, some of them reaching the natural rifle pit which has come to be called the "Old Sunken Road," but the results were the same, and the Confederates suffered terrible losses. The bullets were flying so thick that the Confederates gave the area the name "Hornet's

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<sup>38</sup>Descriptive information gathered from the restored area of Shiloh National Military Park by field trip, March, 1953.

<sup>39</sup>John Allan Wyeth, Life of General Nathan Bedford Forrest (New York: Harper, 1899), 76. This pond was called "Bloody Pond" because it is said that the wounded of both armies drank there until their blood turned its color red.

Nest."<sup>40</sup>

Action continued in this sector for more than four hours, and the Confederates did not take the position until they had turned both the Federal right and left flanks. Sherman was slowly forced back on the Federal right until the Confederates were virtually in the rear of the "Hornet's Nest." Similarly, the Federal left was turned by repeated assaults in that sector.

After personally leading a successful charge against the Federal right, Johnston was struck by a chance shot and died from loss of blood a few moments later. Undoubtedly, he embodied the spirit of the Confederate attack, and his loss was sorely felt. As second in command, Beauregard assumed the direction of the army.<sup>41</sup>

Meanwhile, Brigadier General Daniel Ruggles, commanding Bragg's First Division, had gathered all the available artillery and placed it opposite the Federal position on the "Old Sunken Road." In all, twelve batteries were formed in a single line from which they poured a devastating fire into the Federals.<sup>42</sup> By four or five o'clock, the Federals had been flanked to such an extent that they were virtually surrounded and fighting back to back. Realizing the danger of capture, W. H. L. Wallace sought to retire his forces toward the landing. In retreating down a shallow ravine, they were caught in a murderous cross-fire in

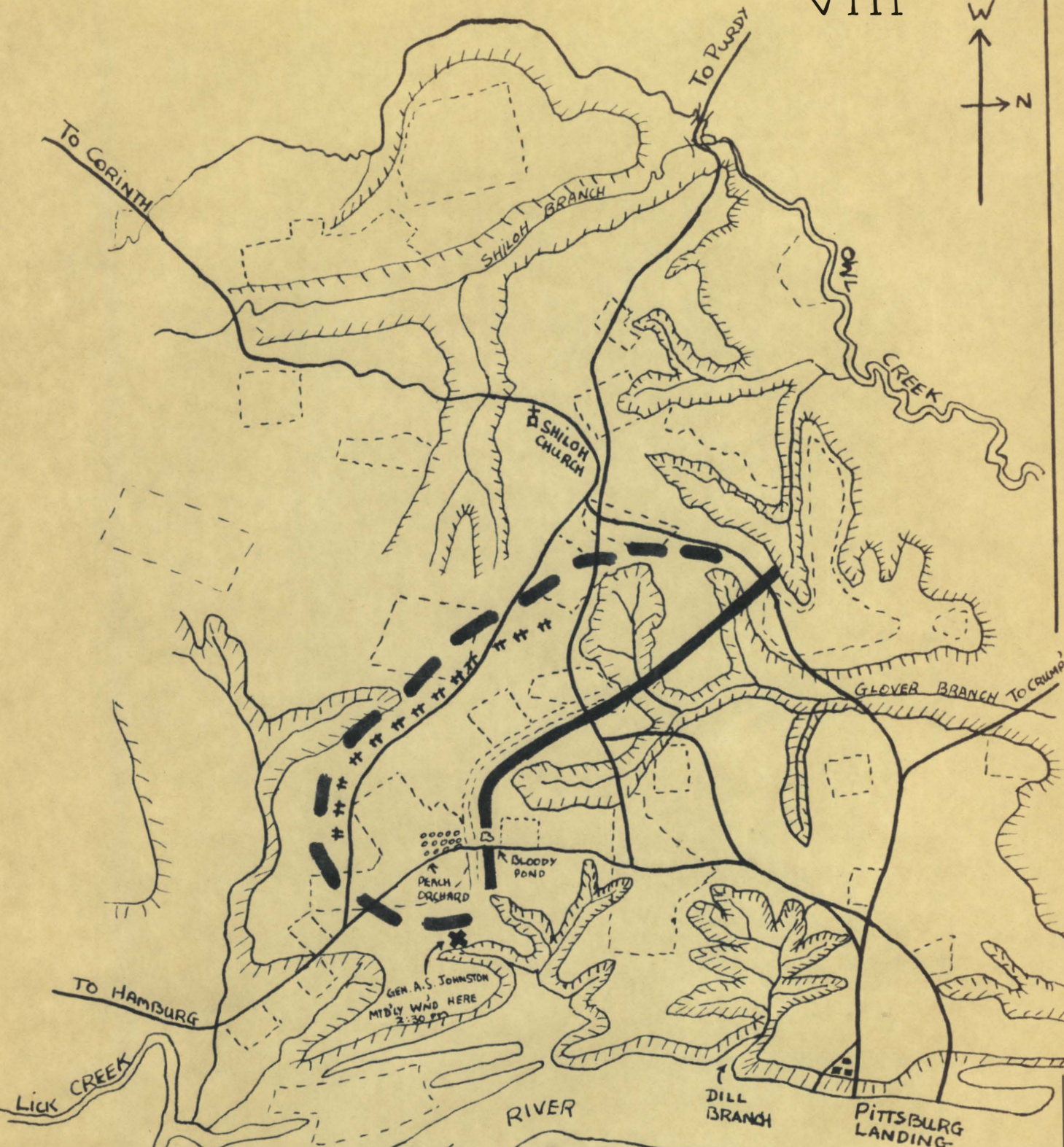
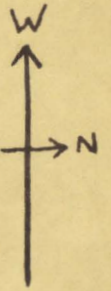
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<sup>40</sup>Johnston, Life of Johnston, 603-606.




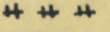


<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 613-616.

<sup>42</sup>Official Records, Series I, Vol. 10, 472.





**SHILOH**  
APRIL 6, MID-DAY, "THE HORNET'S NEST"

-  FEDERAL LINES
-  CONFEDERATE LINES
-  OLD SUNKEN ROAD
-  RUGGLES' BATTERIES
-  ROADS
-  CLEARED FIELDS

which Wallace was mortally wounded. However, much of the remnants of his division escaped capture.<sup>43</sup> Hurlbut also retired on the Federal left, as he was continually outflanked.<sup>44</sup> Prentiss in the center was not so lucky. When his forces were surrounded and capture seemed imminent, he ordered the troops to cut their way out. This was not possible as his command was entirely encircled, so in order to prevent its complete destruction, he surrendered with 2200 men, the remainder of his division. This was about 5:30 P. M.<sup>45</sup>

The Federal line along the abandoned road held from 10:00 A. M. until almost 6:00 P. M. These eight hours completely thwarted the Confederate attempts to turn the Federal left. Had this position been carried three hours earlier, the Confederates probably would have won the entire field and either killed or captured every man in the Federal Army of the Tennessee. There can be little doubt that this one weathered road, following the low ridge, provided the Federals with their most successful position in the battle. It was the key to the conflict. The fact that it held out so long gave them time to arrange another line. This they did, and from behind it they waited for night to arrive and with it the re-enforcements which turned the tide of battle the following day.

Late in the afternoon of the sixth, Colonel J. D. Webster of

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 149

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 203-204.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 279.



Grant's staff arranged some twenty-odd pieces of artillery facing south or up the river. This was the line on which the Federal forces rallied for their last stand. It was on the crest of a bluff which overlooked a long and deep ravine known as Dill Branch, which opened into the river. With the Tennessee at a high stage, there was water to a considerable depth in the ravine.<sup>46</sup> The line followed the Pittsburg and Corinth road almost due west from the river, until it intersected the River Road to Crump's Landing. There the line turned north along the latter road and stretched to the bridge over Snake Creek.<sup>47</sup> Along this line, the Army of the Tennessee prepared to meet the day's final attack.

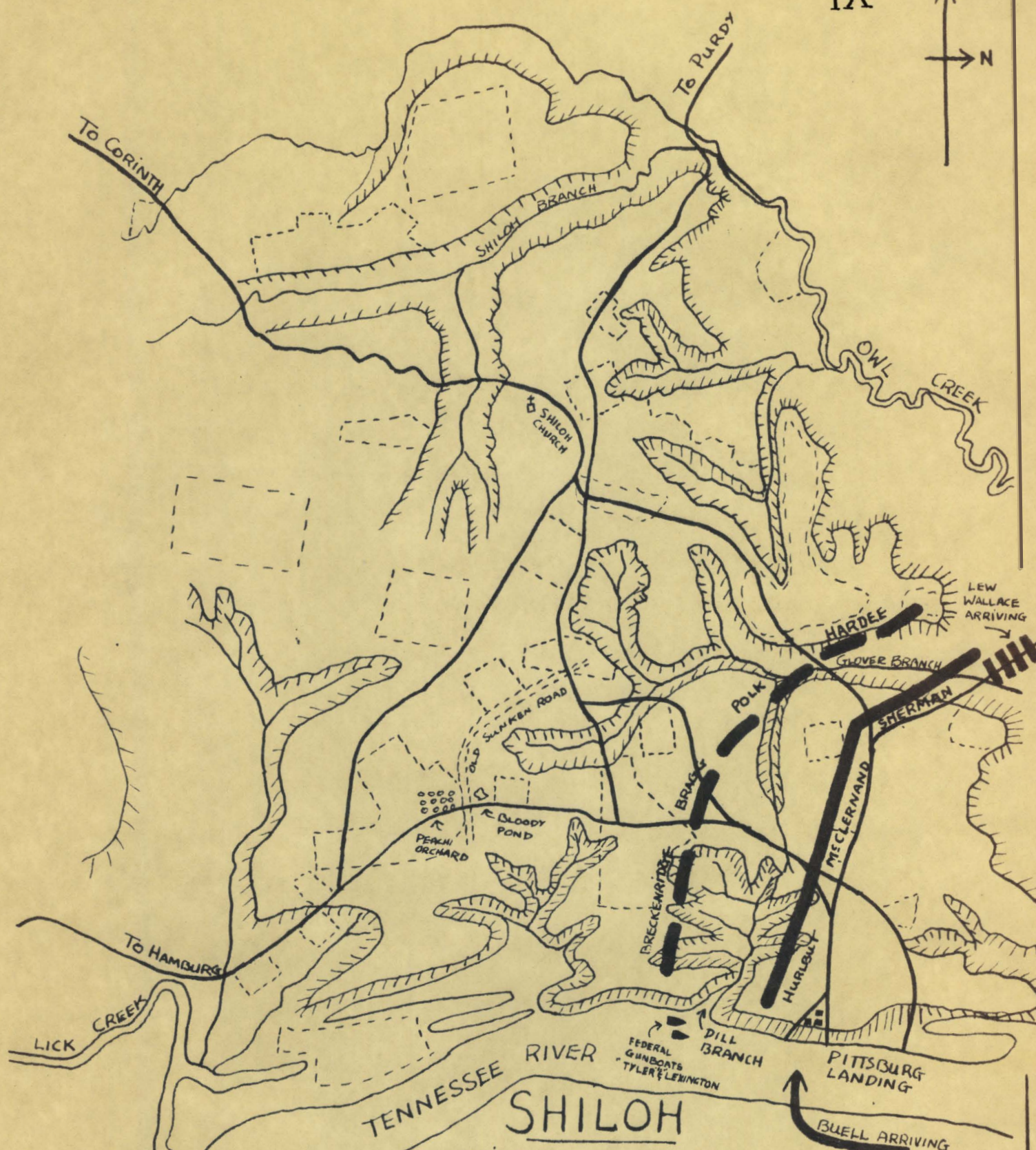
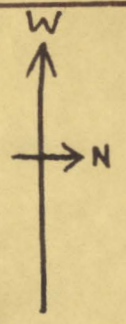
That this attack was never made in force is a matter of history. Beauregard, realizing that his army was exhausted, chose to stop the fight. Whether or not a final surge would have brought complete victory to the Confederates is a question which probably will never be answered. The only attempt at attack on this line was made by the brigades of Brigadier Generals Chalmers and Jackson of Bragg's corps. These brigades on the extreme Confederate right attempted to charge this line. Finding the fire from the artillery very intense and being unable to advance across the waters and up the steep banks of Dill Branch, they fell back and received from Beauregard the order to retire. This ended the battle on Sunday.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Grant, Memoirs, I, 345.

<sup>47</sup>O. R. Atlas, I, Plate 12.

<sup>48</sup>Official Records, Series I, Vol. 10, 547-556.



# SHILOH

APRIL 6, LATE AFTERNOON



- FEDERAL LINES
- CONFEDERATE LINES
- LEW WALLACE ARRIVING FROM CRUMP'S LANDING
- BUELL ARRIVING FROM THE EAST BANK
- FEDERAL GUNBOATS "TYLER" & "LEXINGTON"
- CLEARED FIELDS
- ROADS



As already mentioned, Grant sent orders on Sunday morning for Lew Wallace to move his division on the field from Crump's Landing as fast as possible. This order reached him at 11:30 A. M. Of the two roads to the area of the battle, he selected the westernmost, which would bring him on the field on the right of Sherman's camps at a distance of six miles. As he neared Snake Creek, he learned the Federals had been beaten back and his present course would bring him up in the rear of the Confederates, thus cutting him off from the rest of the army. He immediately countermarched almost to his original point of departure, turned back on the more easterly River Road which followed a more winding route, and crossed Snake Creek by a good bridge near Pittsburg Landing. The distance to be covered, much of it marshy from the high waters, was about the same. By the time he could bring his division on the field, it was after nightfall.<sup>49</sup> The delay may be attributed entirely to the topography, the lack of more definite orders, and the condition of the roads, and not to Wallace's negligence as was charged immediately after the battle.

Buell's Army of the Ohio also figured prominently in the battle. He, personally, had left Columbia, Tennessee, on April 3 with the rear division on his march from Nashville to join Grant at Pittsburg Landing. He arrived in Savannah on the fifth, the same day on which his advanced division arrived. The other five divisions were marching at six-mile intervals. Hearing the sounds of battle on the morning of the sixth,

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 169-190.

he ordered all his divisions to leave their baggage and push forward as fast as possible. He then set out with his one division from Savannah upstream to Pittsburg Landing following the east bank of the stream. Finding the roads impracticable for artillery, he ordered the guns left behind to be forwarded to the battlefield by steamer. The one division was ferried across the river just at nightfall, part of them arriving in time for the repulse of the previously mentioned last assault. By the following morning, four of his six divisions had been placed in position on the field.<sup>50</sup>

During the night the two Federal gunboats, the Tyler and the Lexington, fired shells at regular intervals into the area where the Confederates were bivouacked.<sup>51</sup> Also, about midnight a drenching rain began to fall. Partially because of the shells from the gunboats and partially in order to find shelter from the rain, the Confederates retired to the tents of the abandoned Federal camps during the night and, thus allowed the Federals to re-occupy commanding positions so dearly won in the day's battle.<sup>52</sup>

Wallace brought from five to eight thousand men on the field that night, and Buell's four divisions amounted to more than 20,000 men. By morning the Federals had almost 30,000 fresh troops with which to assume

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 291-292.

<sup>51</sup>Donald Davidson, The Tennessee, The New River, Civil War to TVA (Rivers of America Series, ed. by Hervey Allen and Carl Carner, New York: Rinehart, 1948), 35.

<sup>52</sup>Johnston, Life of Johnston, 639-642.

offensive operations, exclusive of those involved in the first day's fight. To oppose these, the Confederates could muster a scant 20,000, if that many.<sup>53</sup> This comparison of forces is the key to the battle on the second day. There was really never a contest, although the Confederates put up a very stiff fight. They were steadily pushed back, until they left the field in an orderly retreat in mid-afternoon. The Federals made no attempt to follow, although Breckinridge was left with his command to act as a rear guard.<sup>54</sup>

Both sides claimed victory at Shiloh. Certainly it was one of the hardest fought and bloodiest battles of all time. Of 40,335 men who went into battle the total casualties for the Confederates in killed, wounded, and missing were reported by Beauregard as 10,694.<sup>55</sup> Similar casualties of the Federals were listed as 13,047. Their forces had numbered approximately 60,000 including the Army of the Ohio and the division at Crump's Landing. The Federal forces encamped on the field on the morning of the first day numbered 37,331.<sup>56</sup> Although neither army would admit defeat, it was now evident, if it had not been before, that it would take more than Southern fire and patriotism to defeat the Union juggernaut. In addition, the Federals found their enemies to be possessed of the qualities which predicted a long and bloody war.

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 637-642.

<sup>54</sup>Official Records, Series I, Vol. 10, 388.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 395-396.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 108-113.

In many respects the Battle of Shiloh was poorly planned and more poorly executed. The Confederates arrived on the field a day later than they planned. This proved to be a costly error as they were unable to decisively defeat the Federals before they were re-enforced. Contributing to this late arrival was the terrible condition of the roads leading across the ridges and through the swamps and marshes between Corinth and Shiloh. When they did arrive the Federals were surprised although they had every opportunity to discover the Confederates as they advanced.

The manner in which the Confederates were organized and the interspaced fields and thickets of the rugged terrain of the battlefield prevented their attacking in concerted waves. Thus the battle was a series of separate actions along a single line. The "Old Sunken Road," located as it was on a low ridge facing interspaced open fields and dense thickets, provided the Federals with the necessary advantage with which to check the Confederate advance long enough to prevent them from following their plans to turn the Federal flank. Dill Branch, with its steep banks filled with backwater from the river, provided an impassable barrier behind which the Federals formed their last line on April 6. This line kept the Confederates from taking Pittsburg Landing; hence the Federals were able to land re-enforcements which gave them the victory the following day.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE EVACUATION OF CORINTH

When the Confederates retreated from the field at Shiloh, they were a tired and spent army. Similarly, the Federals did not have the strength to pursue their advantage. The casualties of April 6 and 7 had left both the Confederate Army of Mississippi and the Federal Army of the Tennessee unable to continue any sort of a campaign. This was not true of the recently arrived Army of the Ohio under Buell. Only a part of the latter reached the scene of action in time for the fighting on April 7. This entire army was soon brought up; it was a vigorous, victorious force, eager to do battle with the crippled Confederates. If the Federals could have followed them to Corinth and maneuvered them into a battle there immediately after Shiloh, it is possible that the Confederate cause in the west would have been lost. This would have released men to the eastern theater, resulting in conditions similar to those surrounding the capitulation of the Confederacy following the loss of the west in 1864. However, the Federals were unable to strike this blow because of a series of occurrences.

In order to reach Pittsburg Landing in time to save the Army of the Tennessee, Buell's men had made forced marches. The rugged terrain and poor roads east of the Tennessee River had caused them to leave their supply trains and artillery behind. Thus on the night of April 7, with the Confederates retreating toward the comparative safety of Corinth, the Army of the Ohio found itself without rations

and low on ammunition; they were unable to pursue. Hence, the Confederates were able to retire with much of their supplies.<sup>1</sup>

The heavy seasonal rains made roads impassable and washed away bridges. It was several days before part of the supply trains could be brought up and ferried across the river and even weeks before they all arrived. By this time, it was too late for anything other than a cautious siege of Corinth. Had they been able to bring up their supplies they still could not have marched immediately. In order to have advanced on Corinth at once they would have been forced to construct bridges across the numerous streams which lay between their camps and the Confederates. Throughout the remainder of April, the rains made movement on a large scale impossible. During this time, the Federals were encamped on the high ground of the recent battle-field. Finally on May 2, the river began to recede.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, Halleck arrived at Pittsburg Landing on April 11 and assumed active command in the field.<sup>3</sup> Re-enforcements arrived from various quarters to bolster the Federal army. The Confederates had evacuated New Madrid, Missouri, on the Mississippi River, March 13, retiring to Island Number Ten and the Tennessee side of the river. Major General John Pope, commanding the Federals, maneuvered his army so that he encircled the Confederates there, and a siege reduced the

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<sup>1</sup>Official Records, Series I, Vol. 10, 672.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 664-665.

<sup>3</sup>Grant, Memoirs, I, 371.



island to shambles. On April 7, the second day of the Battle of Shiloh, the island was surrendered along with some 7000 men. The Federals there were then free to re-enforce their comrades at Pittsburg Landing.<sup>4</sup> This they did, arriving on April 21. By the first of May, the Federals had 120,000 men assembled in the vicinity of Pittsburg Landing.<sup>5</sup>

To oppose this force, Beauregard had roughly 50,000 troops. These were the veterans of Shiloh, some Mississippi and Alabama regiments which had been recruited, and an army from Arkansas, veterans of the Battle of Pea Ridge, under General Sterling Price and General Earl Van Dorn. With these troops, Corinth was placed in a fair state of defense. A new line was laid out about three miles to the northeast, in front of the town. In general, it followed a low ridge to the rear of a wooded marsh from the Mobile and Ohio Railroad on the left to the Memphis and Charleston Railroad on the right.<sup>6</sup> Two creeks, which ran through low and heavily wooded bottoms, paralleled the front of the Confederate lines. In order to assail the lines, these difficult bottoms would have to be crossed. The lines themselves were mere rifle pits along the crest of the ridge with batteries of artillery posted in protected places to command the roads from the front.<sup>7</sup>

From the position of the Federal center where they encamped near

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<sup>4</sup>Horn, Army of Tennessee, 114-115.

<sup>5</sup>Grant, Memoirs, I, 371-376.

<sup>6</sup>Horn, Army of Tennessee, 115.

<sup>7</sup>Official Records, Series I, Vol. 10, 775.

Pittsburg Landing, two roads led towards Corinth, approaching from the north-east. These were the Ridge Road and the direct road over which the Confederates had moved to the Battle of Shiloh.<sup>8</sup> Other roads leaving Monterey passed into the Purdy and Corinth road to the west and, thus, approached Corinth from the north. Two roads connected Corinth with Hamburg, where Pope's army was encamped. The roads were all narrow, unimproved dirt roads. The direct road from Pittsburg Landing was crossed by several small streams. The largest of these were Chambers Creek and Seven Mile Creek. The former was six miles from the Confederate works, and the latter was only three. These creeks could not be crossed without bridges, which had to be constructed as the army advanced.<sup>9</sup>

The land between Pittsburg Landing and Corinth is rolling, with high hills occurring sometimes along the larger streams. The greater part of this area was covered with forests, with intervening clearings around houses and settlements. Scrub growth was very thick and virtually impassable in the low ground but thinned out considerably along the ridges.<sup>10</sup> Halleck mentions several times in his reports the fact that the country was thickly wooded and marshy.<sup>11</sup>

After the retreat from the field at Shiloh, the Confederates

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<sup>8</sup>Chapter III, page 48.





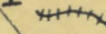
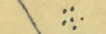
<sup>9</sup>Official Records, Series I, Vol. 10, 673.

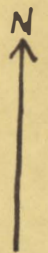
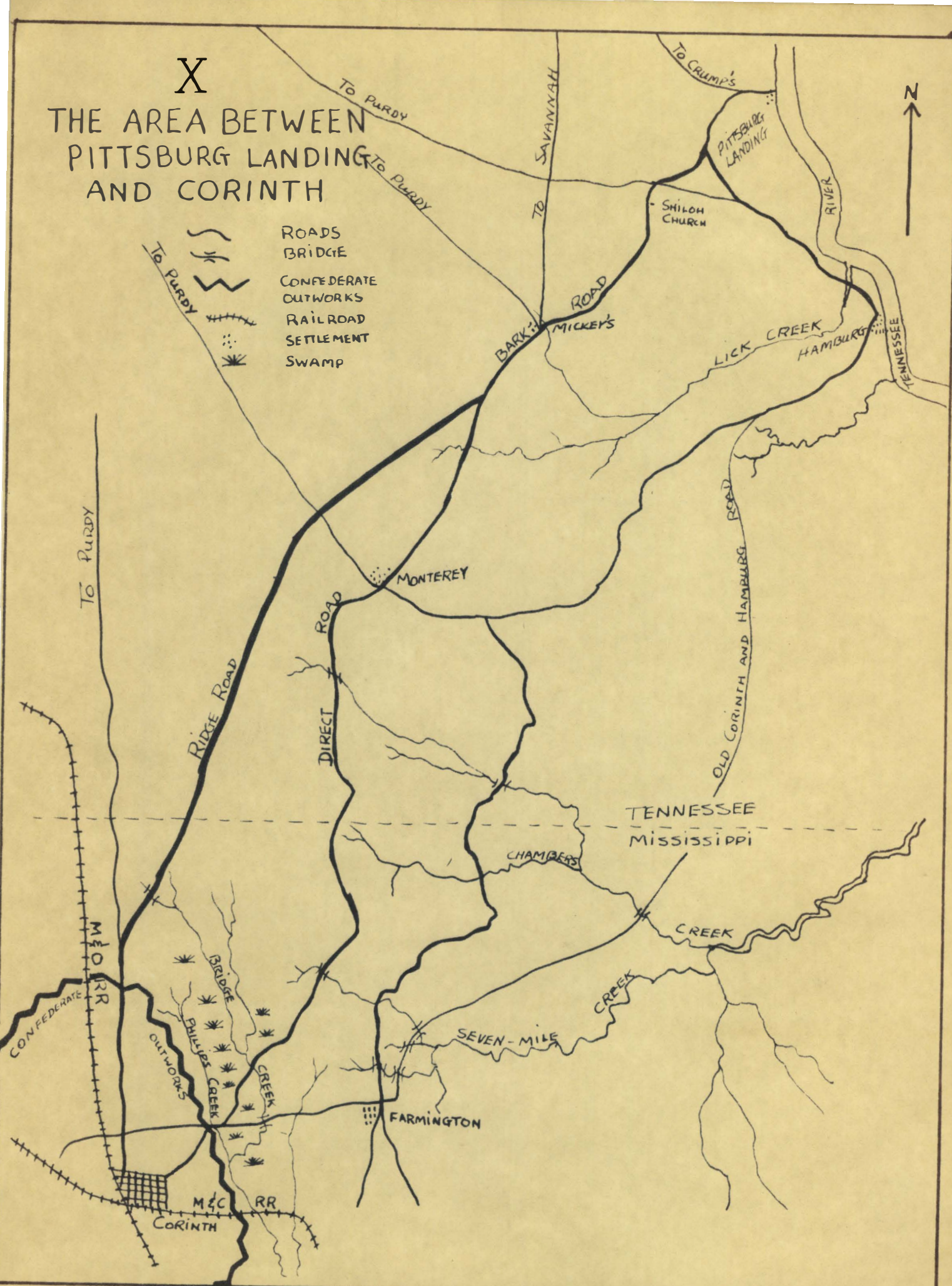
<sup>10</sup>Grant, Memoirs, I, 373.

<sup>11</sup>Official Records, Series I, Vol. 10, 666.

# X

## THE AREA BETWEEN PITTSBURG LANDING AND CORINTH

-  ROADS
-  BRIDGE
-  CONFEDERATE  
OUTWORKS
-  RAILROAD
-  SETTLEMENT
-  SWAMP



took position on Pea Ridge near Monterey, halfway between the landing and Corinth. This ridge was long, although not high, and commanded the approaches across Lick Creek.<sup>12</sup> From here, brisk reconnaissances were made, until the Federals began their advance toward Corinth. At this time, the Confederates began retiring, as they were forced slowly back toward their works at Corinth.

When Halleck took command at Pittsburg Landing, he virtually incapacitated Grant by removing him from command of the Army of the Tennessee and making him second in command with nothing to do. Halleck, along with many others, was not at all pleased with Grant's actions before and during the Battle of Shiloh. There was the suspicion that Grant had not taken proper precautionary measures against a surprise attack. There was also a feeling of professional jealousy between the two generals.<sup>13</sup> The Federal forces were organized into three armies for the march on Corinth. Buell's Army of the Ohio formed the center of the advance. The newly arrived force under Pope was named the Army of the Mississippi and placed on the left. Major General George H. Thomas was taken from Buell's command and placed in charge of the Army of the Tennessee on the right.<sup>14</sup> The main elements of the Federal force began their advance on May 4.<sup>15</sup> They did not completely invest

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 753.

<sup>13</sup>Grant, Memoirs, I, 370.

<sup>14</sup>Official Records, Series I, Vol. 10, 672.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 665.



the Confederate works until May 28,<sup>16</sup> Thus, twenty-four days were taken to march the army over a distance of less than nineteen miles.

This is explained by the cautious approach used by Halleck. In the advance the Federals used all the precautions of siege warfare. In addition to the difficulty of travel over the irregular terrain and poor roads, the Federals were ordered to entrench each position as they advanced. This made the movement extremely slow.<sup>17</sup> Sherman's division on the extreme right constructed seven distinct entrenched camps between Shiloh and Corinth. He seems to think that this was valuable training for his inexperienced troops.<sup>18</sup> Finally, on May 29, the entire Federal army was before Corinth and in close contact with the Confederate lines.<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile, within the Confederate lines all was not well. They had evacuated almost all their wounded from Shiloh, and the small town of Corinth was unable to successfully house and treat them. An urgent call was made for doctors from the surrounding area. Many Confederate women left their homes to come to Corinth and care for the wounded. The town, situated on low ground, did not have an adequate water supply. Soon the wells became contaminated, resulting in an epidemic of typhoid fever. In addition, there was an epidemic of measles, and trouble with supplies brought on malnutrition and hunger. Soon the ailing troops,

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<sup>16</sup>Grant, Memoirs, I, 379.

<sup>17</sup>O. R. Atlas, I, Plate 13.

<sup>18</sup>Official Records, Series I, Vol. 10, 744.

<sup>19</sup>Grant, Memoirs, I, 379.

of which about 5000 had been wounded at Shiloh, numbered around 18,000. Corinth became one large hospital ward. Every available building was used to house these men, and these were often inadequate.<sup>20</sup> As a result of these conditions and the vastly superior Federal force approaching his front, Beauregard began to evacuate Corinth on May 26. The movement was completed on May 29, the day before the Federals entered the works. The Confederates were able to remove almost all their men and supplies southward along the Mobile and Ohio Railroad.<sup>21</sup>

Thus there was no decisive engagement at Corinth. The battle which might have ended the war in the west and greatly hastened the defeat of the Confederacy was not fought. Poor roads, excessive rains, difficult terrain, and poor leadership combined with a lack of knowledge of the whereabouts of the Confederate troops contributed to the slowness of the Federals in following their advantage gained at Shiloh. On the other hand, the location of Corinth, the poor water supply, and the general unhealthfulness of the Confederate army caused it to withdraw rather than make a stand.

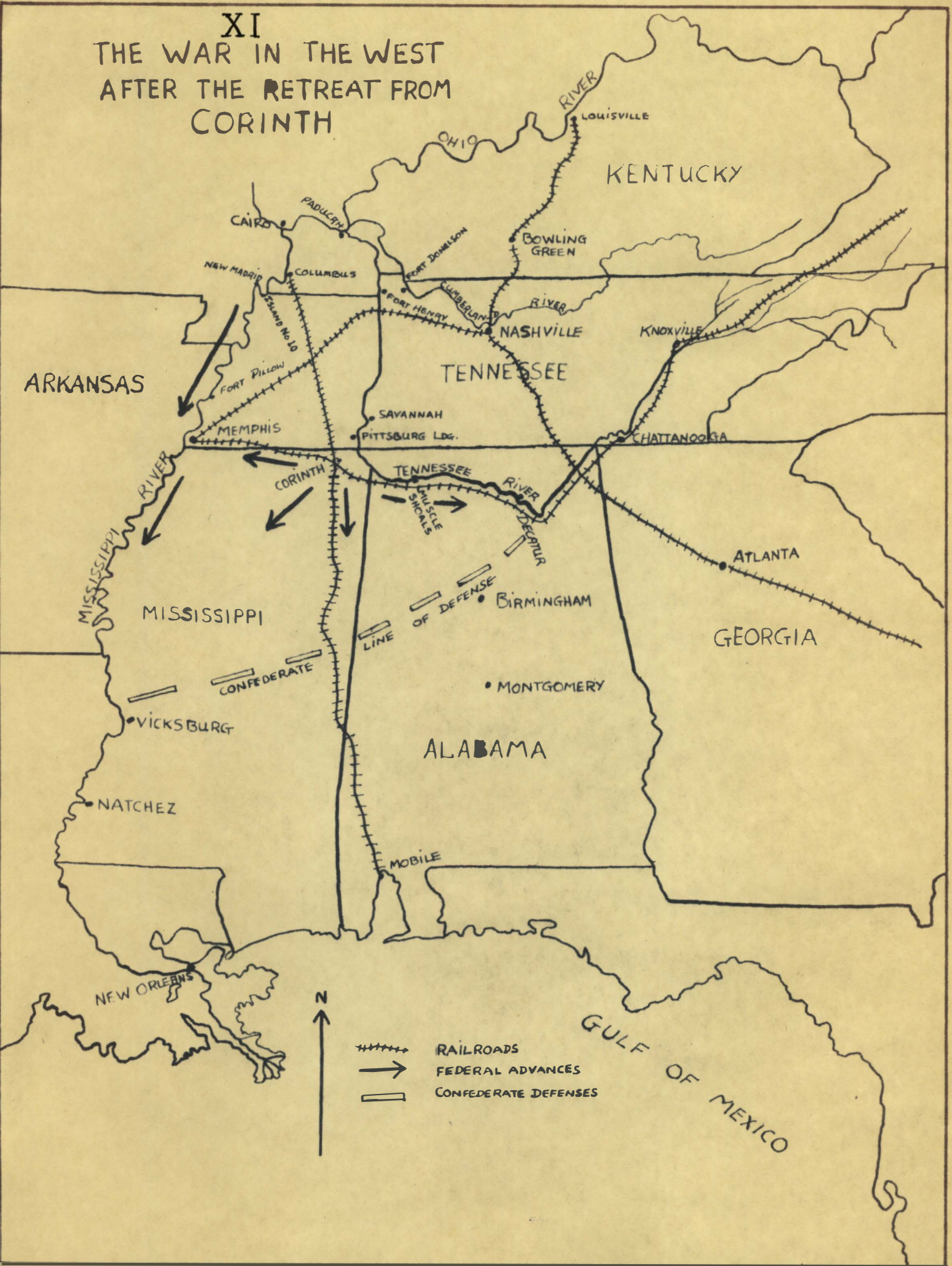
The loss of Corinth forced the Confederates back on a line across central Mississippi. Vicksburg became the most important Confederate city in the Mississippi Valley. First Fort Pillow and then Memphis fell to the Federals. They now controlled all of West Tennessee and the rivers adjacent to it. They also dominated the Memphis and Charleston

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<sup>20</sup>Horn, Army of Tennessee, 146-149.

<sup>21</sup>Official Records, Series I, Vol. 10, 762-764.

# XI THE WAR IN THE WEST AFTER THE RETREAT FROM CORINTH





Railroad, the most vital communications artery in the Confederate west. This provided the Federals with bases from which to invade Mississippi and Alabama. The Confederates were never able to drive the Federals from West Tennessee and again occupy that region. From here the scene shifted to Middle Tennessee and Confederate efforts to retake their lost territory there.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Throughout the campaigns in West Tennessee, the conditions of the topography played a very prominent role. The Civil War was a conflict in which communications were extremely poor in terms of present-day warfare. In the beginning, the Confederates were unable to occupy the banks of the Ohio River as a natural line along which to form their defense. Inability to occupy this line also cost them control of the Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers at their mouths on the Ohio. These rivers formed the fatal pathways used by the Federals to invade the heart of Tennessee.

In providing a defense against the Federal invasions along these water courses, very poor judgment was used in the selection of the site of Fort Henry. Its location subjected it to effective attack from both land troops and gunboats. The high water, which almost surrounded the fort at the time of the attack, made communication slow and the entire position difficult to defend. Fort Donelson, situated in a much more advantageous locality, was nevertheless handicapped by topography which denied the use of any avenue of escape. This resulted in the loss of valuable manpower to the Confederacy. The fort and its outworks were strong for a defensive position, for the ridges provided its garrison with an excellent line of fire on an attacking foe. It is significant that, unlike Fort Henry, the elevated river defenses on the bluff at Donelson successfully repulsed the Federal gunboats. Moreover, the only

part of the outer works which were taken by direct assault were the incompleting and undermanned rifle pits on the extreme right. This, however, led to the surrender of the fort. It may be assumed that with better planned and more complete construction, Fort Donelson might have presented a more serious obstacle to the Federal advance.

Again, topography was a prominent factor in the late arrival of the Confederates in line of battle at Shiloh. Poor roads and marshy ravine bottoms caused the army to delay its attack a whole day, when time was most precious. The rains of the season turned the soft clay soil of the rolling hills into a quagmire and prevented the various detachments from following their schedule. Also, the plateau remnant which formed the battlefield at Shiloh provided the Federal army with a strong natural position. The interspaced woods and fields, cut by ravines filled with undergrowth, gave the Federals points on which to rally; this same irregularity of terrain prevented the Confederates from attacking in concerted strength. The slightly elevated position of the "Old Sunken Road" and the difficulty of assault from its front provided the Federals with a natural fortification which actually saved the day for them.

The rugged terrain east of the Tennessee River in Hardin County caused the Army of the Ohio to leave its supplies and artillery behind in order to get to the field at Shiloh. In turn, this prevented Buell's fresh troops from making an effective pursuit of the Confederates, as they retreated toward Corinth. Slowness in bringing up the supply trains, coupled with the difficulty of the roads through the marshy bottoms between Pittsburg Landing and Corinth, and the timidity with

which the Federals advanced, caused the delay which allowed the Confederates to successfully evacuate Corinth. Finally, the actual location of Corinth itself on low ground surrounded by marshes and creeks contributed to the health problems of the Confederate army to such an extent that it was forced to make that evacuation. As a result the Federals were able to occupy all of West Tennessee, exercise control of much of the Mississippi and Tennessee Rivers, occupy and hold the Memphis and Charleston Railroad, and launch the offensive which eventually split the South with the capture of New Orleans by Federal forces.

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