

A V I S I T T O H A R D I N C O U N T Y *
by Robert Wells Carton

Southwestern Tennessee today is a peaceful corner of America. It is a country of small farms and a big river. The farmers grow corn and raise livestock. The river is the Tennessee, which here flows north, through Hardin County at the Mississippi/Alabama border, on up to Kentucky. For a few days in the early spring of 1862 Hardin County, Tennessee, bounded on the south by the state line and split in two by the big river, was the center of the world, if that center can be defined as the place where events which determine the course of history are being carried out.

The time, of course, was that of the American Civil War. On the west bank of the Tennessee River in Hardin County was a small docking place called Pittsburg Landing, and a couple of miles behind it, in the rolling partially wooded country, was Shiloh Church. In March 1862 three armies were converging on this area. Two of them, Union armies, had no plans for immediate battle. The larger of the two was the Army of the Tennessee, commanded by Major General Ulysses Simpson Grant. It was moving in boats southward up the Tennessee River from the Kentucky border where, a few weeks before, it had achieved a spectacular victory in the capture of Fort Donelson. By March 17th the first units had already gone ashore and occupied positions in the hills above Pittsburg Landing. The

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smaller Union army, the Army of the Cumberland, under General Don Carlos Buell, was moving slowly from Nashville to join Grant. The third army, that of the Confederate commander Albert Sidney Johnston, was simultaneously assembling in the northern Mississippi town of Corinth, about twenty miles south of Pittsburg Landing. Like Buell's force, it too had come from Nashville, only it had left earlier, rather hurriedly, and had taken a circuitous route south of the Tennessee state line, to its staging area in Corinth. All three armies were responding to the great national forces of their time.

In March 1862 Abraham Lincoln had been in office for a year. The north had made up its mind to fight for the Union. This attitude was by no means to have been taken for granted. Lincoln's original call had been for volunteers for 90 days "to put down rebellion". It soon became apparent that three months would not be enough and that hard fighting over an extended period of time would be required. In an action that represented one of the turning points of the War, most of the 90 day men reenlisted, thereby signifying that they, and the Northern public opinion which they represented, were prepared to sacrifice to preserve the country as one whole.

In the East, in March 1862, the war had reached a geographic stalemate between Washington and Richmond which would last until the closing campaigns in 1865. If there was no movement in the East, then the West became the flank, and both sides tried to turn it. They tried first politically. In

June 1861 Tennessee seceded, last Confederate state to do so. Eastern Tennessee remained Unionist throughout the War. Kentucky and Missouri stayed with the Federal Government. In both states the governors were in favor of succession, and were only restrained by Union sentiment in the legislatures backed by Northern troops. By the fall of 1861 the political situation had hardened into the position it would hold for the remainder of the conflict, and the armies took over.

The West, at the time of the Civil War, really meant the huge territory between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River. Beyond the Mississippi, particularly in Missouri, there were, throughout the War, a series of guerilla engagements, some of a ferocious and bloody character, but none of decisive influence on the outcome of the struggle. The true western flank of the War occupied the states of Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama. Here the armies roamed over vast spaces, aided by the waterways and railroads, which were the keys to control of the area.

The first Confederate line in the West was established in the fall of 1861. It ran from Columbus, Kentucky, on the Mississippi just below Cairo, Illinois, through Bowling Green, to the Cumberland Water Gap in the foothills of the Appalachians. This line was pretty well coterminous with the northern boundary of slave holding culture. The South hoped to hold this line indefinitely until the North tired of the conflict,

perhaps with the ultimate goal of taking Kentucky out of the Union. It didn't turn out that way. In eastern Kentucky Union troops, under a Virginian, George H. Thomas, broke the line at Mill Springs. And further to the west, in February 1862, U. S. Grant, newly appointed a Brigadier General, with 15,000 soldiers and the support of navy gunboats, took first Fort Henry on the Tennessee River and then a week later Fort Donelson on the Cumberland ten miles to the east. These victories by Grant and Thomas and their men blew up the Southern line. Albert Sidney Johnston, the Confederate commander, retreated to Nashville and then further south. Grant was made a major general. H. W. Halleck, the overall Union commander in the West, prepared for an invasion of Tennessee. The stage was set for Shiloh.

Imagine two horizontals connected by a vertical. The horizontals are 140 miles apart. The upper horizontal is the Columbus to Bowling Green line, which had just been breached. The long vertical is the Tennessee River. The lower horizontal is the Memphis to Charleston Railroad, which ran along the lower border of the State of Tennessee from Memphis on the west to Chatanooga on the east and thence across the mountains to the Atlantic seacoast. In 1862 possession of this rail line was vital for the South. Along it, from the Trans-Mississippi, passed food, animals, and men who fueled the engine of the Confederacy. And over it Southern armies could pass west and east as needed. After the capture of Fort

Donelson, the Memphis to Charleston Railroad (the lower horizontal) became the prime target of the Northern command. Grant was appointed to assemble the Army of the Tennessee at some point north of the town of Corinth, a junction point on the Memphis to Charleston Railroad. Buell with the Northern Army of the Cumberland was ordered to join him. And somewhere between Nashville and Corinth, Albert Sidney Johnston, moving to the South and west, sought ways to frustrate their plans.

Grant's army was the first to arrive at Pittsburg Landing. 39,000 Union soldiers of his command came up the Tennessee River by boat and set up camp in the rough country west and south of the landing. Grant repeatedly used boats and the waterways effectively to transport troops and keep them supplied. He had done so before at Donelson and would continue this practice later at Vicksburg and during his final campaign in eastern Virginia. The area at Pittsburg Landing in which his men camped can be thought of as bounded by the letter V. The left arm of the V was made up of the Tennessee River and (further on) Lick Creek. Pittsburg Landing itself was part way up this arm. The right arm was comprised of Snake Creek (a pretty good sized little river) and Owl Creek, a tributary. The V opened to the south, toward Corinth and the railroad, twenty miles away. The V itself enclosed about 10 square miles of low wooded hills and open fields. The woods were and are composed of the kind of deciduous trees (hickories, walnuts, ashes) which give Tennessee a reputation

as a provider of hardwood to the world. It was a strong defensive position and could be supplied beautifully by boats on the river (provided that one controlled the river). It was also a nasty place in which to be caught if a crushing force came in through the open mouth of the V. In the last two weeks of March 1862 the Troops of the Army of the Tennessee set up their camps in this place. On March 16 General Grant came up the Tennessee River. His headquarters were in the Cherry Mansion in Savannah, on the east side of the river and seven miles north of Pittsburg Landing. From there he was able to commute daily by river sidewheeler to the camp.

At that time U. S. Grant was 39 years old. He was a stocky man of middle height with a full brown beard. He was then, and remained throughout his military career, unpretentious - differing in this way from a good many other generals of the Civil War, North and South. He tended to lurch as he walked. He was an outstanding horseman, and in fact had won the prize in that discipline at West Point. Grant had served honorably in the Mexican War as quartermaster of the 4th U.S. Infantry. Sometime in the 1850's he became fed up with life in western army posts and resigned his commission. Loneliness was part of it. Throughout his adult life Grant was dependent on his wife, Julia Dent Grant, whom he had married in 1848, and separation from her tended to make him morose. After leaving the army he tried farming - at Hardscrapple Farm near St. Louis - and failed, real estate - in St. Louis - and fail-

ed, and clerking in his father's tannery in Galena, Illinois. The Civil War found him and his family there. He tried to volunteer for the army. His letter to the War department in Washington was never answered. Finally, in June of 1861, he was appointed a Colonel of Volunteers by Governor Yates of Illinois, based on his army background and the importunities of friendly politicians. When the fighting started, it became apparent that he was good at it. By the time of the campaign for Forts Henry and Donelson, in the winter of 1861/2, he was already the veteran of a series of small actions. He had come out of each one with an enhanced reputation. The capture of Fort Donelson made him a national figure and also excited the jealousy of his superiors.

While Grant and his men were coming in to Hardin County from the north, Albert Sidney Johnston and the Confederate Army of the Mississippi were assembling in Corinth, just a few miles to the south. When Johnston had been forced to abandon the Kentucky Line (the upper horizontal in our illustration) he had led men in retreat to Nashville, then down the railroad lines to Decatur, Alabama, and west to Corinth. From all over the region (Alabama, Mississippi, Kentucky, Tennessee) recruits came in. A company of Texas Rangers rode up to serve as cavalry, and the Washington artillery arrived from Louisiana. Also from Louisiana was Johnston's second in command, Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard, the southern hero of Ft. Sumter and Bull Run. Altogether, the Confederate force

amounted to 44,000 men by the end of March.

Johnston's career had been distinguished. Some time after graduating from West Point he had moved to Texas and had risen from private to Commander in Chief of the army of the Republic of Texas in the space of two years. Later he served as the Texas Secretary of War and as leader of a U.S. army expedition against the Mormons in Utah. At the outbreak of the Civil War he was in command of the U.S. Army Department of the Pacific with the rank of Brigadier General and headquarters in San Francisco.

In 1861 he was 59 years old. He resigned his commission in the U.S. Army and proceeded to Richmond, where President Jefferson Davis of the Confederacy named him one of the five full generals of the South and gave him command of the armies in the area west of the Appalachian Mountains and north of the Gulf Coast. In early 1862 he was forced to abandon the Confederacy's Kentucky line and withdraw to the lower horizontal along the Memphis and Charleston Railroad. In March 1862 he knew that Grant was concentrating just north of him at Pittsburg Landing and that Don Carlos Buell with 20,000 men was on his way to join the Federals. He also knew that he must stop the advance of the Union troops and that this had to be done before Buell came up.

The third army converging on Hardin County, Tennessee, in March of 1862 was the Union Army of the Cumberland under Major

General Don Carlos Buell. Buell was a respected regular army officer who had done good work in eastern Kentucky in the early days of the War and who had moved his men into Nashville shortly after the Confederates left. Two things happened to Buell at about that time which are important to the story:

1. He was promoted to major general in March. Grant had been promoted in February. When they joined, Grant would be in command. Unquestionably Buell regarded himself as senior to Grant. He had been a junior at the Point when Grant was a plebe. He was a member of the class of 1841 and Grant of the class of 1843. William T. Sherman, one of Grant's division commanders, had graduated in 1842. Albert Sidney Johnston had been in the class of 1826 and Beauregard in '38. In that small society they all knew each other or of each other. This uniformity of education of the officers on both sides in the Civil War provides one of its fascinating features. In the contests of generalship they started from the same base.

2. Buell was ordered to join Grant to form one large army, which then would move south and break the railroad. Now Nashville is one hundred and twenty miles north and east of Hardin County. Today one can roll along Highway 31 from Nashville to Columbia (over the same route Buell took) and then by way of Highway 64 past the country music signs and fried chicken stands to Pittsburg Landing and make the whole trip in three hours. Buell and his 20,00 men took three weeks. They left Nashville on the 15th of March, were held up for 4 days by the Duck River at Columbia before they finally

got a bridge built. Now the Duck River is about the size of the DesPlaines west of Winnetka. Ultimately the advance units and Buell himself approached Savannah and the Tennessee River Saturday evening, April 5. One has the impression that Buell wasn't too anxious to become absorbed in Grant's command.

The country between Corinth, Mississippi, and Pittsburg Landing is heavily wooded. Here and there are small clearings where some corn is grown or a few horses or cattle pastured. Except for Highway 22 the roads are small and poorly marked. They tend to run out in the woods. With the exception of the modern highway and the truck stops, the landscape probably looked pretty much the same on Wednesday, April 2, 1862, when General Johnston gave the order to the Confederates to advance. The Prussian Field Marshall Helmuth von Moltke once described the participants in the American Civil War as "two armed mobs chasing each other around the countryside". He may have had Johnston's advance to Pittsburg Landing in mind. Many of the men had the same percussion cap rifles as did the Federals, but a number were armed with flintlocks, shotguns, and even cutlasses. Apparently they made an outlandish noise as they moved northward along the country roads, leading Beauregard to recommend to Johnston that they call off the attack because the Federals must know they were coming. Johnston turned him down and persisted in the advance. Rain, indiscipline, and poor roads impeded their movements. By

Saturday evening, however, they were in position, 44,000 men bivouaced a couple of miles south of the Union outposts.

The Union troops did not know they were coming. On Friday April 4 General Grant had written to army headquarters in St. Louis, "I do not apprehend anything like an attack on our position." Saturday evening Union officers noticed an increase in hostile probes of their outposts; most thought little about it. The bulk of Grant's troops were encamped across the mouth of the V, occupying a line of tents stretching three miles west to east from Owl Creek on the right to Lick Creek and the Tennessee River on the left. One division, under Lew Wallace (later author of Ben Hur) was in Crump, Tennessee, 5 miles down stream and on the same side of the river. The Federal commanders had been casual about scouting the country in front of them, and really knew nothing of what was going on out there. After the battle General Sherman was to complain that he had had no cavalry available that night. However, one of the Union colonels, Everett Peabody, felt uneasy and at 3 AM ordered out a reconnaissance patrol. At 4:55 these men met scattered advancing Confederates in Fraley's Field, a clearing in the woods three quarters of a mile south of the Union encampments. Scattered firing occurred on both sides, and the situation remained uncertain for a time. Then at 6:30 in the morning a long battle line of men in butternut uniforms emerged from the woods at the south side of the field. Soldiers from the Union patrol turned and

ran back to their camp as the troops of the South swept on.

By all accounts the scene along the Union line was one of total confusion. Retreating soldiers from the patrol gave Colonel Peabody's people enough time to sound the long roll and line up to face the assault. In other camps men dashed out of their tents in their underwear to face the Confederate battle line. There seem to have been two types of reaction. Many men and some units fled immediately and didn't stop running until they reached the bluffs along the Tennessee River at Pittsburg Landing. The colonel of the 53rd Ohio yelled "Fall back and save yourselves!" and led a substantial portion of his command off the field.

The majority of the Union troops, however, turned and fought. Somehow or other they were formed into a line in which unit mixed with unit. The camps were abandoned quickly, and by the middle of the morning the Confederates had gained perhaps a mile of the two and a half miles from the outer encampments to the Union Center at Pittsburg Landing. Then some of the Federals dug in along an old sunken road which ran across the center of the V about a mile and a half from the Landing. The road is still visible today. In many places it lies a foot or two below grade with open fields in front. Over on the left side of this line, along the sunken road, was a patch of woods which became known as the "hornet's nest" and beyond that to the east was the "bloody pond" - used by men of both sides as the fight heated up. The Confederate

troops showed enormous courage as they assaulted these positions, and the defenders were equally determined, holding off attacks hour after hour.

General Grant was at his headquarters in Savannah, seven miles down stream, when the assault came. He had been up late the night before socializing with officers aboard his ship the "Tigress" and was having breakfast at the Cherry Mansion when he heard the sound of firing from Upriver. Boarding the Tigress, he steamed across to General Wallace's landing at Crump and told him to be ready to move. He then headed for Pittsburg Landing, arriving there about 9:30 in the morning. He immediately started moving around among his commanders and sought to stabilize the line. There wasn't much he could do in the way of battle tactics. Everybody was engaged except for the thousands of stragglers hiding as best they could under the bluffs of the Tennessee. Grant didn't panic. This was his test. He obviously had been surprised. Most of his troops were raw (as were those of the Confederates). Throughout the day his people kept being pushed back. There was no route of escape, should the Southern forces break through. Advance units of Buell's army had arrived at Savannah and had been ordered to go to the banks of the Tennessee across from Pittsburg Landing, but the poor roads and swamps made this impossible for them until late in the day. Lew Wallace, who was supposed to have joined him from the north with the reserves, failed to understand his

instructions and took a road three miles longer than the direct river road. His 3rd division also took a half an hour out for lunch. They didn't cross Snake Creek and come into the Union lines until late in the day, as darkness was coming on.

In the midst of all of this Grant remained imperturbable. One soldier who saw him ride by was struck by his coolness. As the line along the sunken road started the crumble in the middle of the afternoon and as General Prentiss and two thousand Union troops were surrounded and captured in that position, Grant organized another line of cannon and soldiers within a few hundred yards of the Landing - "Grant's last line". This position ultimately held.

The Southern commander, Albert Sidney Johnston, seems to have been particularly concerned about the right side of his line - the units which were to move on Lick Creek and the Federal left along the Tennessee River. Originally he had planned to roll up the Union left and race for Pittsburg Landing in order to prevent a retreat of the Northern soldiers across the big river. The fire fight along the sunken road and a small unit of Sherman's division near the river held him up until early afternoon, when, in his impatience for progress, he started to lead charges himself. Suddenly he was observed to be pale and ready to fall from his horse. Examination showed a wound in his leg with severance of a major artery. He went into shock, and died shortly

thereafter. The command pass to Beauregard. P. G. T. Beauregard was an honorable man who served the South with distinction throughout the War. He seems, however, not to have had the obsessive desire to win which characterizes a great general. Late in the afternoon of the 6th, when his troops were only a few hundred yards from the Landing and when the first units of Buell's army were starting to cross the Tennessee, he called off the action. Apparently he believed that his men were too exhausted to accomplish more and also that he could finish the job in the morning. He may have been right in the first assumption, but he was wrong in the second.

The night was appalling. It rained. Union gunboats on the Tennessee shelled what they thought to be the Confederate positions at 15 minute intervals and kept troops on both sides from getting sleep. The numbers of casualties were unprecedented. Wounded men occupied all available shelter, so that Grant himself lay down in the rain under a tree. All through the night Union sidewheelers transported units of Buells' Army of the Ohio across the river. They took up position on the left side of the Federal line.

The relationship between Grant and Buell is puzzling. According to Army Regulations and Grant's own memory, Buell was subordinate to him as soon as the two armies merged. Buell, however, seems to have thought that he was in the position both of an ally and a savior. In any event, the two

men, who don't seem to have communicated very much, were able to coordinate in an attack at dawn. This time the South was on the defensive, and as the day progressed they moved slowly back over the same ground which they had taken on Sunday. Occassional sharp counterattacks were made, including one memorable charge in a swampy area - "water oaks pond". But by midafternoon the armies had regained the positions which both had held at the start of the fight. Somewhere in the neighborhood of Shiloh church Beaureguard gave the order to withdraw, and the Confederate army began its slow painful walk to Corinth. The soldiers of the North were unable to follow.

In the days that followed the Battle of Shiloh, Halleck, the Union Commander in Chief in the West, came down from St. Louis, took command, and moved the army forward at a rate of one half mile per day, fortifying himself each night. By the time he reached Corinth in May the Southerners had long since vanished and the campaign was over. Halleck was summoned to Washington and over-all command of the Union Armies, based on the successes in the West. Grant remained in local command in the Memphis District and started those movements which eventually brought him the capture of Vicksburg and control of the entire Mississippi River in 1863. Buell again assumed independent command in eastern Kentucky and was later relieved for lack of aggressiveness. Beaureguard after the Battle of Shiloh took leave by reason of ill health and then served in secondary positions in the East.

Shiloh was the severest battle of the War up to its time and remained the most bitterly contested in the West. It was the great chance the South had to break the momentum which the North had gained at Mill Springs and Fort Donelson. This the South was unable to do. Ultimately the North outflanked the South in the Mississippi Valley and the mountains of northern Georgia. Shiloh brought the Union forces control of the Memphis and Charleston Railroad, thus denying to the Confederacy a major source of mobility and supplies.

It also represented the coming of age of the Union Army in the West. Certainly Federal forces west of the Alleghenies were to suffer reverses from time to time. But never again did they display the amateurism which had prevailed up to April 6, 1862. Prima donna generals like Buell were not tolerated. Lines of command were more clearly drawn. Soldiers who had passed through Shiloh, including many who had spent Sunday under the river bluffs, recognized the need for discipline and ultimately emerged as the tough veterans of Sherman's campaigns of 1864 and 1865.

It also brought together in battle the team which ultimately led the North to victory, U. S. Grant and W. T. Sherman. They had known each other at West Point. They had met again in 1857 in St. Louis, when both were struggling with the uncertainties of civilian life. During Grant's assault on Fort Donelson, Sherman supplied him from a base at Paducah, Kentucky. At Shiloh, Sherman, commanding the right wing of

the Union army, was a rock. He was twice wounded but never lost his grip on events around him. In later years and on into Grant's presidency, when they were both world famous, they never displayed any of that jealousy which was so common among the leaders of this particular conflict.

How about Grant as a general? In the minds of many people the American Civil War was the first of the modern wars. Perhaps we should say "of the modern wars up to the end of World War II". If the Civil War was "modern", then a leading general in it should have had qualities which caused him to free himself from the truisms of the past and enabled him to appreciate the new realities of his time and beyond:

1) Victory at Shiloh was dependent on control of the Tennessee River. Similarly Grant's victories at Donelson and Vicksburg and later in eastern Virginia were made possible by appreciation of the importance of waterways and railroads in the strategy of his campaigns. The coming of steam boats and railroads, which Napoleon did not have, changed the nature of warfare.

2) Grant intuitively understood the linkage between politics and the army. He knew that they do not exist in isolation from each other, but that the army is an expression of the political will of a nation. This is shown by his famous statement after Shiloh to the effect that he now realized that the South would have to be defeated as a whole if the North were truly to prevail.

for a time

In addition, in this regard, he tolerated ^{for a time} political generals like McLernand and Prentiss in his command because of the important constituencies which they represented.

3) He understood that the Northern effort had truly to be directed against the armies of the South and not diverted by its cities or other geographic features. It took the North as a whole until the end of the War to understand this point of view.

4) He realized that materiel as an expression of industrial power is in the industrial age a weapon as important as the bravery of men or the tactics of generals. This insight was at least partly developed at Shiloh as he was impressed by the dash and courage of the South and cast around for the means by which these might be opposed. In this way Grant can be said to be the father of the strategies used by the armies of the United States in World Wars I and II.

5) Finally, I believe that his own life experiences up to the time of Shiloh contributed to his success. In origin he was a new man of the West. After the Mexican War he had separated himself from the Army establishment and the conventional answers to questions. Life had forced him to evaluate facts as he found them.

He also knew from his own personal history that reverses may only be temporary and that victories are won by the commander who is able to give the final push after both armies have exhausted themselves. He had felt this once before at

Donelson and now experienced it again at Shiloh.

Note: Most important of all is that Grant did not lose his nerve during or after Shiloh, even though he had been surprised and lost 11,000 men. The successful Civil War generals were those who could absorb set-backs and keep on moving forward.

One hundred and twenty-two years have passed since the armies assembled in Hardin County and met at Pittsburg Landing. Much has changed. As one flies into Nashville one sees new buildings of banks and insurance companies, signs of the resurgent prosperity of the South. The road south to Franklin, which Buell and his men took in March 1862, is lined with handsome private homes and horse farms. Further to the south and west less has changed. In Savannah, Tennessee, the Cherry Mansion still stands. Across the river there aren't many signs pointing the way to the battlefield. You have to find it for yourself. But it's there, to the left beyond Snake Creek, as you come down Highway 22. As you drive in towards dusk, you move down Grant's last line. You can leave your car. It's late and the tourists have gone. Mists rise from the river. As you walk south beyond the cannon dark begins to fall. Then it's easy to see the butternut fighters of the Confederacy in the woods ahead and watch U. S. Grant ride by on his way to Appomattox.