

"AT THE MOMENT OF VICTORY..."  
THE BATTLE OF SHILOH AND  
GENERAL A. S. JOHNSTON'S DEATH  
AS RECOUNTED IN WILLIAM PRESTON'S DIARY

PETER J. SEHLINGER

THE BATTLE OF SHILOH

The battle of Shiloh was one of the most important of the Civil War and continues to attract the interest of both historians and the reading public. The crucial engagement fought in 1862 in southwestern Tennessee foretold the dominance of the Union army in the west. After acrimonious debate between the Confederate commander, General Albert Sidney Johnston, and some members of his staff concerning the timing of the encounter, the southern attack took place on the morning of 6 April. The gray troops finally carried the field that day in one of the most brutal and fiercely-contested struggles in the annals of war. General Johnston's death at the head of his forces in the afternoon and subsequent events turned Shiloh into a pyrrhic victory. The next day the reinforced Union army made a successful counterattack, and the Confederates under the command of General Pierre G. T. Beauregard of Louisiana began their retreat into northern Mississippi. The closeness of the South to complete victory on 6 April and the reversal of fortunes the following day caused immediate controversy among the officers of both the Union and Confederate armies. The northern commander, General Ulysses S. Grant, and General William T. Sherman, whose troops were surprised by the Confederate offensive, were forced to go to great lengths in their attempts to defend their actions at Shiloh and to explain the South's initial success. Confederate officers loyal to Johnston blamed Beauregard for their defeat. Succeeding generations of historians and military enthusiasts have con-

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tinued to debate the decisions made at Shiloh and have made this encounter one of the most controversial of the Civil War.

The disputes which immediately ensued among the contentious southern officers were a continuation of earlier rivalries. Johnston was entrusted with command of Confederate forces west of the Appalachians by his close friend at both Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky, and at West Point, President Jefferson Davis. The Confederates' defeat in January 1862 at Mills Springs in southeastern Kentucky, the Union capture of forts Henry and Donelson on the upper Tennessee and Cumberland rivers the following month, and the retreat of southern troops from Bowling Green and Nashville discouraged Johnston's forces and brought angry calls for his dismissal. The president's refusal to remove Johnston caused the general's enemies to claim he retained his post only through political favoritism. General William J. Hardee, the commander of one of the two divisions in Johnston's army, became convinced that either General Braxton Bragg, in charge of rebel forces in the Department of Alabama and West Florida, or Beauregard should lead the disheartened southern troops. Beauregard was a hero of the South's victory at the battle of Manassas or Bull Run, but he soon became embroiled in a dispute with his military superiors in Virginia, causing Davis to transfer him in February 1862 to the western theater.

Corinth in northern Mississippi was a goal of the Union forces in western Tennessee by the late winter of 1862, for the tracks of the east-west Memphis and Charleston Railroad intersected those of the north-south Mobile and Ohio Railroad in this small town. Based on Sherman's recommendations, Union troops were ferried up the flood-swollen Tennessee River in mid March and disembarked at Pittsburg Landing about twenty-three miles north of Corinth. The Union camp was established on the rolling tableland above the river near a single-room log structure known as Shiloh Church. Sherman set up his headquarters beside this meetinghouse. By late March more than 40,000 men in Grant's Army of the Tennessee were encamped within several miles of

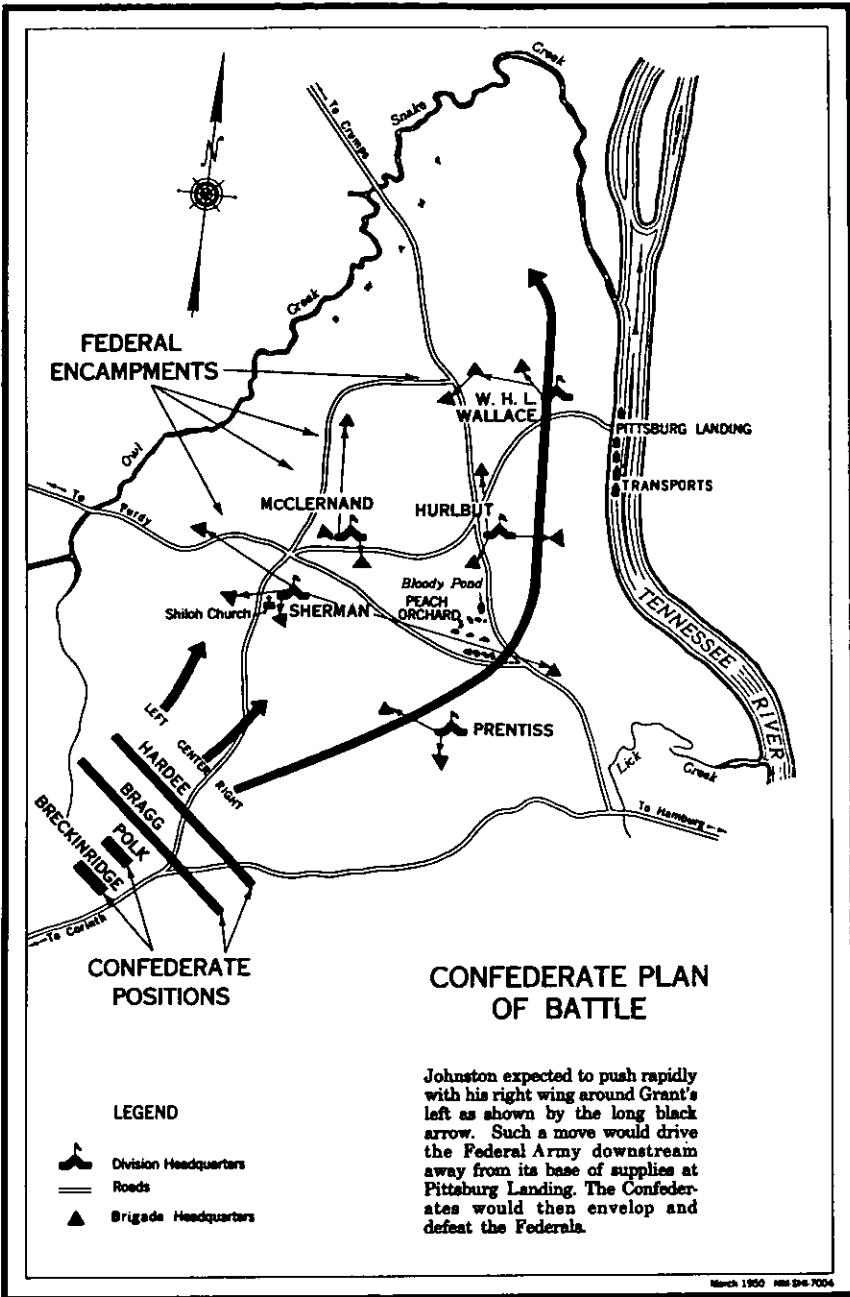
Pittsburg Landing. Although the Union leader believed the growing number of Confederate forces around Corinth could be routed easily, the northern commander of the Department of the West, General Henry W. Halleck, ordered Grant not to attack until General Don Carlos Buell arrived from Nashville with his roughly 30,000-strong Army of the Ohio.

Reacting to the series of northern victories, Confederate troops came together in the vicinity of Corinth in late March to stanch the flow of the Union army up the Tennessee River. A month earlier General Daniel Ruggles had arrived in northern Mississippi with four Louisiana regiments and in early March, Bragg with 10,000 troops from his Gulf Coast command came to the defense of the hard-pressed Confederate forces in southwestern Tennessee. On 2 March, General Leonidas Polk, a roommate of Albert Sidney Johnston at West Point and a friend of Jefferson Davis, under orders from Beauregard reluctantly abandoned the Confederate stronghold of Columbus, Kentucky, on the Mississippi River and brought his 7,000 men to Corinth. On 23 March Johnston and his troops from central Tennessee reached their northern Mississippi rendezvous, uniting the principal Confederate armies in the area. Generals Johnston, Beauregard, Bragg, and Polk agreed to merge their men into the Army of the Mississippi with Johnston in charge and Beauregard next in command. Their forces numbered approximately 40,000 troops, most of whom were unseasoned soldiers; those who had seen battle were discouraged by their series of losses and retreats.

Johnston was acutely aware that his reputation and probably his command in the west rested on the fortunes of his forces in the forthcoming encounter. He was determined to confound his detractors with a victory at Pittsburg Landing. The Confederate officers were aware that Buell was leading his men over the 120-mile route from Nashville to the Tennessee River, and this meant that any southern offensive must take place before the two Union armies met. So well known was Buell's impending arrival that both Davis and Robert E. Lee had written to Johnston

urging him to engage the northern troops before the Army of the Ohio arrived. On 2 April erroneous reports from southern cavalry scouts of a planned Union offensive and the fear of Buell's approach caused Beauregard to warn Johnston that any successful Confederate movement would have to come as soon as possible. Although Johnston's death and the later partisan debate have clouded many of the details of the planning and the execution of the southern attack, Johnston certainly agreed with Beauregard that their troops should be moved rapidly into positions around Pittsburg Landing to begin battle on 4 April.

Because of communications difficulties, rain, and congested, narrow, and muddy roads, the poorly-disciplined Confederate troops did not reach their battle stations twenty-three miles north of Corinth as anticipated. This forced the staff to postpone the attack until the morning of 5 April. Moreover, a torrential rainstorm during the early hours on the appointed day hindered mobilization and flooded portions of the roads. Polk's men were forced that morning to arrest their march to the battle site to allow Bragg's troops to reach their destination. Ruggles's 6,000 men did not arrive at their station until 4:00 p.m., four hours behind schedule. Thirty-six hours later than planned, the southern forces were ready for battle. Johnston was angry over this delay and called his generals together late that afternoon. To the commander's surprise, Beauregard and Bragg proposed that the southern troops avoid any engagement and return to Corinth. They argued that the postponement had alerted the Union forces of their intentions and so depleted their own limited rations that any attack would fail. Polk had earlier differed with Beauregard over the evacuation of Columbus and again opposed his judgment, adamantly insisting on the offensive as planned. General John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky reported that his men had adequate supplies. At this point Johnston decided that the Army of the Mississippi would attack at dawn the next morning. Following this council of war, the commander made his famous assertion to his brother-in-law and aide-de-



*The Confederate Advance at Shiloh*

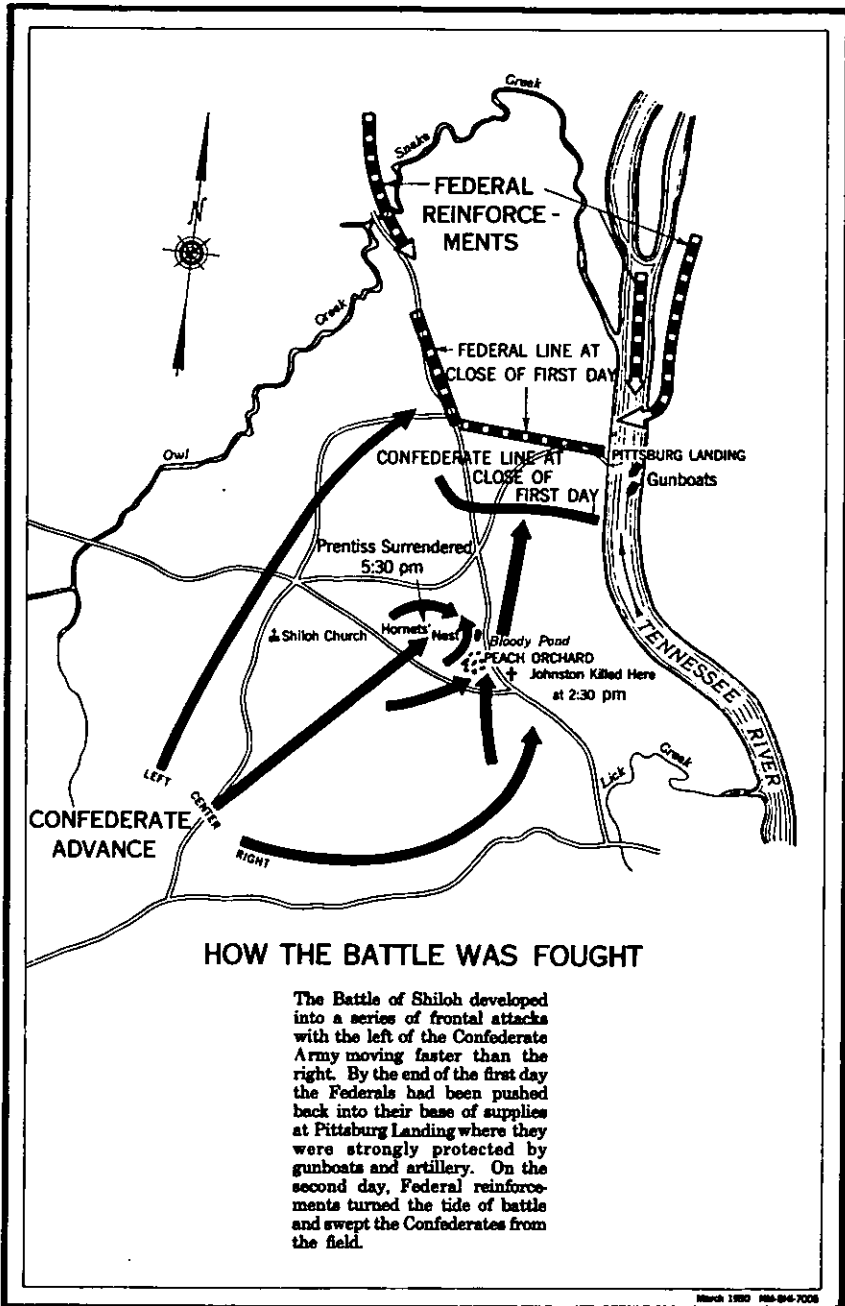
National Park Service

camp, Colonel William Preston, "I would fight them if they were a million," and added, "Polk is a true soldier and a friend."

The Confederate plan of battle depended on surprising the enemy and was designed to separate the Union forces on the fields above Pittsburg Landing from their supply base by the Tennessee River. Johnston assigned the formulation of the details of the actual attack to Beauregard. Aware that the morale of his largely untested troops was crucial to the next day's verdict, the commander spent the eve of the encounter visiting his officers and men, sharing with them his confidence in victory. Before riding off into battle the morning of 6 April, Johnston assured his staff, "Tonight we shall water our horses in the Tennessee River."

At early dawn on Sunday, 6 April, a Union patrol came upon a southern infantry battallion in position to attack, signaling the start of one of the fiercest engagements in American military annals. The southern offensive that morning ranks as one of the most successful surprise attacks carried out during the entire war. General Grant was waiting for the arrival of Buell's army and was convinced there was no danger of a southern offensive. In fact, Grant was having breakfast at Savannah, nine miles down river from Pittsburg Landing, when he became aware of the fighting.

The actual battle charges, counterattacks, and defensive maneuvers at Shiloh have been related in close detail by several authors in lengthy tomes. However, a brief description of the course of the battle can offer a useful overview of this epic struggle. The initial Confederate attack was undertaken by Hardee's men on the left flank of the southern lines. Soon joined by reinforcements, these troops first clashed with soldiers from General Benjamin M. Prentiss's Union division. By 9:00 a.m. gray uniforms had replaced blue around the deserted breakfast tables of the surprised Yankee camp. Along the three-mile front to Hardee's right were the units of Polk, Bragg, and Breckinridge, opposed by the northern troops of William T. Sherman, John A. McClernand, W. H. L. Wallace, and S. A. Hurlbut. More



### The Battle of Shiloh

than 80,000 men were engaged across the fields, ravines, and woods along the Tennessee River by midday. The often deafening sounds of fire joined the shrieks of the wounded and dying and the rush of men and horses.

The anxious officers on both sides tried to discern the course of battle amid confusing and contradictory reports. By noon the southern troops had moved forward, but their foes offered stiff resistance. Bragg's forces were unable to advance against Union soldiers securely entrenched along a sunken wagon trail. The southern charges against this position were thrown back, causing the rebels to dub this position the "Hornets' Nest." Breckinridge's unit came to the aid of Bragg's, but to no avail. About two o'clock, Johnston tried to rally his men to repulse the stubborn enemy, and he began to lead his forces against the "Hornets' Nest," which he believed was the last obstacle to victory.

While mounted on his horse encouraging his troops to advance, Johnston was struck by a Minié ball which pierced an artery in his right leg. Although unaware of this for a brief while in the excitement of battle, Johnston soon began to fall off his mount and was quickly taken to a protected spot by Tennessee Governor Isham G. Harris and Captain W. L. Wickham. Colonel William Preston and other members of the commander's staff arrived to find Johnston dying. Preston knelt by his brother-in-law and spoke to him, but there was no answer. General Johnston had become the highest ranking American officer ever killed in battle. Preston immediately informed Beauregard that the commander had died "at the moment of victory" and told him that "the completion of the victory would devolve on him."

Beauregard assumed command and oversaw the capture of the "Hornets' Nest" around 5:00 p.m. However, the stubborn Union defense there had allowed Grant enough time to position artillery on the bluff above Pittsburg Landing. These arms and the salvos from the Union gunboats frustrated subsequent Confederate attempts to sweep toward the river. At six o'clock

Beauregard stopped the attack by his exhausted and depleted troops.

When the battle began the following day, Grant's forces had been reinforced by the tardy appearance of 7,000 men under General Lew Wallace's command and by the overnight arrival of 17,000 fresh soldiers from Buell's Army of the Ohio. In the morning the blue forces advanced, and by noon Beauregard was forced to withdraw his troops to Corinth. The southern victory at Shiloh on 6 April had led to yet another retreat on 7 April. The south had lost the most important battle of the Civil War for control of the vital Mississippi Valley. However, the casualties were shared almost evenly by both sides, with a total of 3,500 killed and another 16,000 wounded after two days of fierce fighting.

William Preston and other members of Johnston's staff accompanied the body of their fallen commander to New Orleans for burial. Johnston's death at the head of his troops apparently at the moment of a vindictory success, Beauregard's decision to call off further attacks the evening of 6 April, and the closeness of a complete southern victory have made Shiloh a controversial subject for generations of Civil War historians. Partisans of Johnston blame Beauregard for the South's failure above Pittsburg Landing while Beauregard's advocates argue that a lack of additional troops made a Confederate victory impossible on the evening of 6 April. A brief annotated bibliography on the battle of Shiloh is appended to this article.

#### WILLIAM PRESTON

William Preston's appearance as a colonel in the Confederate Army at Shiloh follows logically from his background as a partisan of states' rights and a member of Kentucky's slave-owning aristocracy. Son of a Revolutionary War soldier who was given a vast land grant by President Thomas Jefferson at the Falls of the Ohio, later the site of Louisville, William was reared to assume the mantle of leadership. A graduate of the Yale School of Law, he was an officer in the Mexican War and an outspoken



*General William Preston, C.S.A.*

The Filson Club

pro-slavery delegate to the 1849 convention called to rewrite Kentucky's constitution. His Lexington wife, Margaret Howard Wickliffe, was the daughter of probably the largest slave-holder in Kentucky. Preston's other family ties indicate his standing among southern aristocracy. His brother-in-law Albert Sidney Johnston was secretary of war for the Texas Republic, and in



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their Louisville home William and his wife reared William Preston Johnston, the son of their widower in-law. William's uncle James Patton Preston and cousin James McDowell were governors of Virginia while another uncle, Francis Preston, served as a congressman from Virginia. Cousin William Campbell Preston represented South Carolina in the Senate, and the illustrious Senator Thomas Hart Benton of St. Louis was married to cousin Eliza McDowell. Preston's maternal aunt was the wife of Governor William Clark of Missouri, a younger brother of George Rogers Clark. Among Preston's many socially prominent friends were Basil W. Duke and Simon Bolivar Buckner, who also shared political leadership in Kentucky with others from their ranks and who sided with the Confederacy.

From 1853 to 1861 Preston was both a legislator and a diplomat. He was elected as a Whig to represent the Louisville region in Congress between 1853 and 1855, and he championed the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska bill in order to permit the extension of slavery into these new territories. At the Democratic national convention in 1856 he nominated his fellow Kentuckian and cousin John C. Breckinridge for the vice presidency, a post to which he was elected with President James Buchanan. Preston was appointed Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to the Spanish Court in Madrid by Buchanan in 1858. For three years in Spain, he tried to negotiate the purchase of Cuba, but this mission was frustrated by the opposition of the growing abolitionist movement which saw it as but another attempt by southerners to admit new slave states to the Union. In 1861 Preston resigned his position and left Madrid in May to return to Kentucky. In September Preston bade farewell to his wife in Lexington and rode with his cousin, former Vice President Breckinridge, to Bowling Green to unite with Kentucky Confederates commanded by their friend and future governor, Simon Bolivar Buckner. Preston was commissioned a colonel and made aide-de-camp to Albert Sidney Johnston.

After Shiloh, Preston was promoted to brigadier general. He served under Breckinridge and commanded troops in northern

Mississippi and at Vicksburg. In 1862 Preston and his staff were transferred to Bragg's Army of Tennessee and participated in the invasion of Kentucky that autumn. Following the Confederate retreat to Tennessee, Preston was in charge of a unit at the battle of Stones River outside of Murfreesboro in December-January 1862-1863. In the spring of 1863 Davis ordered him to take charge of 5,000 men guarding a valuable saltworks near Abingdon in southwestern Virginia. In the late summer Preston and his troops were taken to Tennessee to reinforce Bragg's forces intent on stopping a Union offensive from Chattanooga. On 20 September at Chickamauga, about ten miles south of the Tennessee line in Georgia, Preston personally led his forces in a flanking maneuver and surprised a stronghold of entrenched Union troops with a successful bayonet charge. Of the 4,078 men under his command, 1,275 were killed or wounded that day. Davis, Buckner, James Longstreet, and even a war correspondent for the London *Times* showered praise on him for his bravery and leadership at Chickamauga.

In January 1864, Davis appointed Preston minister to the court of the Emperor Maximilian in Mexico City. The Confederacy had seen its hopes of diplomatic recognition by Great Britain and France come to naught, but there was hope that the new Mexican monarch could be persuaded to recognize southern independence. The shared Confederate-Mexican frontier along Texas, southern export of cotton through Mexican gulf ports to avoid the Union blockade, and the weakness of Mexico were thought to be strong factors in encouraging the new government to cooperate with the South. Not only might commerce increase through official relations, but Mexican recognition might serve as a catalyst to bring overt European support. Unfortunately for Preston, Maximilian did not finally arrive in Mexico City to take the throne until July, and he never agreed to see the Confederate minister. A civil war in Mexico against Maximilian's rule and the need to appease the French Emperor Napoleon III whose troops guaranteed his government forced the Mexican monarch to avoid the issue of southern recognition.

Following the war, Preston devoted most of his energies to managing lands around Lexington inherited from his father-in-law. Preston's political activities after 1865 were limited to serving a two-year term in the state legislature as a Democrat, campaigning for the Democratic presidential nominee Samuel J. Tilden in 1876, and being a delegate to the 1880 Democratic national convention. Preston died in 1887, a heroic figure to contemporaries who believed in states' rights and southern nationalism

#### WILLIAM PRESTON'S DIARY

William Preston served Johnston loyally as his aide-de-camp. In this post, Preston was in charge of purchases for the commander's staff and also handled his brother-in-law's accounts as well as his own. Preston kept these financial records from January through June 1862 in a small, two and a half inch by four and a half inch, cloth-bound notebook which fitted in the breast pocket of his uniform. Included in this ledger are ten pages of transactions listing the purchase of such items as horses, books, blankets, tablecloths, and uniform lace and noting bills received and paid, checks deposited, and loans outstanding. No doubt impressed by the importance of the coming days' events, Preston began on 4 April to include a diary in his notebook and continued to do so through 7 April. His twenty-two small pages of handwritten script about the events of these days furnish an exciting and immediate account of the preparations for the Shiloh offensive, the battle and Johnston's death, and the plans to take his remains to New Orleans for burial. Inserted into Preston's account of the battle of Shiloh is a letter of six small pages written by Tennessee Governor Isham Harris in his own hand describing Johnston's fall in battle and the actions of his aides. The entries for 6 April were written in the field and recorded as the battle was in progress. The notebook also includes sixteen pages of maps of the Corinth-Pittsburg Landing area and of the terrain of the battlefield.

I came upon this notebook among a collection of rare docu-

ments in the National Archives in Washington, D.C., while doing research for a biography on William Preston. The inside cover of the work is titled in Preston's hand "Wm. Preston Brigadier General C.S.A. Memoranda of A.S. Johnston's death; Battle of Shiloh &c." In preparing a biography of his father, *The Life of Gen. Albert Sidney Johnston* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1879), William Preston Johnston obviously consulted the Shiloh diary of his uncle William Preston. The account of the departure of Johnston's staff to attend his burial in New Orleans offered on page 688 of the Johnston biography closely paraphrases William Preston's narrative. The donor of Preston's small record book to the National Archives is not known but stamped across its front is "Adjutant General's Office War Department Sep 12 1911." The work is catalogued by the National Archives as RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office; Entry 286: Special File 1790-1946.

The complete diary entries for 4 through 7 April are included below. In order to retain both the flavor and the immediacy of the document, no corrections have been made in Preston's spelling. Obviously, such curiosities as his different ways of writing Shiloh and Pittsburg Landing graphically demonstrate the previous insignificance of these sites. Only one explanatory footnote has been added, but three words have been inserted between brackets to make one sentence intelligible. Appended is an alphabetically arranged glossary which identifies the persons and places mentioned in the document. In the case of persons referred to in the text only by initials, their names have been included wherever necessary between brackets to permit the reader to follow the narrative and at the same time be aware of the editorial additions. The printed text of the diary which follows purposely attempts to retain as closely as possible the irregular margins and the inconsistencies in underlining and punctuation that characterize Preston's handwritten entries for 4-7 April.

MEMORANDA OF A. S. JOHNSTON'S DEATH;  
BATTLE OF SHILOH &C.

Apl. 4, 1862

Move from Corinth, converging by Monterey on Pittsburgh. Deserter from Texas regt. shot. Account of Govn. Harris and Major Munford of it. Order to Genl. Breckinridge to come up. 10.30 A.M. Conference of Beauregard, Bragg & Johnston at Monterey. Lieut. & 15 prisoners brought in. 5.P.M. Battle determined on tomorrow, by Johnston Beauregard & Bragg at Monterey. 5.P.M. Major Leroy Pickett 72 Ohio taken prisoner & brought in. Young Ruggles, Genl Ruggles aid, reports blocking

5.P.M. of Ruggles & Gladden's brigades, firing in front, & that battle is probably engaged at 5PM.

N.B. Handsome manly fellow — paroled as far as Corinth. Colonel of cavalry took him prisoner personally — horse fell.

Genl. Breckinridge reports the head of his column at Monterey at 6 — [now it is] 2 miles south of Monterey

Plan stated to J.C.B. [reckinridge]

Hardee will deploy corps 1st on Lick Creek, next on Owl Creek 5 Apl. 3 miles from Pittsburgh. 2d line Bragg's corps 1000 yds behind Hardee. Movement to begin at 3 A.M. 5 Apl. Lieut Geer 48th bro't prisoner. Hardees report of skirmish recd about 7. PM.

*Mem.*

Jordan Col Jordan's Opinion

8.P.M.

Thinks Grant command in chief. C.F. Smith 1 division; Mc Lernand one; Wallace one; Sherman

one; in all 4 divisions say 32 regts Infr.  
 12 batteries at most; say 20,000 infantry and  
 1000 artillery. in all not over 25,000 men.  
 Conference *Johnston & Beauregard* 7 1/2 P.M. &  
 J.C.B. [reckinridge]  
 On acct. of bad country by Pratt's to march by  
 4 A.M. 5 Apl., by the Ridge road to Mickey's  
 &c — & thence on & form command between Bark  
 Road and Lick Creek.

#### Apl. 5

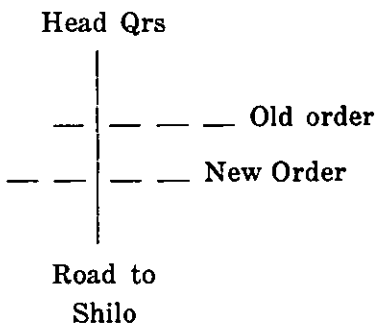
Moved at 6 A.M. Bore order to Bragg at 7.  
 Hardee forms at 9. Reach Hardee's position at 9  
 2 miles from Shilo Church.  
 10.50 Capt Wickliffe directed to order Genl  
 Breckinridge to put brigade at Mickey's to guard  
 Savannah road; & Texas cavalry to cover it in  
 advance.  
 Polk's column slow.  
 5. P.M. Bragg & B.[eauregard] think provisions  
 short, and the delay of 36 hours will cause  
 failure. J.[ohnston] determines to move forward  
 on morning of the 6th  
 Cannon heard at sunset.

#### *Sunday 6th Apl.*

Order given to Genl Breckinridge to move South  
 as a reserve, by road indicated, leaving road next  
 to him on the North open to Genl. Polk. and if it  
 should become clear, from any cause Genl  
 B.[reckinridge] is to cross the woods & hold the  
 road of Polk.

- 5.30 A.M. Sharp volleys of musketry from  
 Hardees front between the roads.  
 6.20. Braggs four brigades were posted one on  
 the right & three on the left; now ordered to

cross one brigade to left, so as to have two on the right and two on the left



- 6.40. Col Maney's regt. moving to the rear to join Cheatham's countermarched & ordered to go in direction of Grier's ford.
- 7.00 Govn. Harris reports Hardee as having advanced  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile. Hindman deployed as skirmishers at close intervals, beating them. Bragg moving forward.
- 7.10 Sharp skirmishing. First cannonade on Hardees left.
- 8.A.M. Genl. Hardee reports a heavy force posted in woods N.E. of 2 cabins  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile N.E. This through Genl. Cleburne (7.15)

*At 2 cabins* 7.20

Loud cheers & handsome advance of our troops 150 acre field — wounded man Dr. Arp — sharp musketry in woods to N.E. Cannon opens same place (7.25)

- 7.45 dozen shots.
- 8 A.M. Camp carried & firing stopping Camp with colors, knapsacks & arms of 13th Wisconsin & 18th — taken.
- 8.45. Enemy Camp Genl Johnston ordered Gladden in to charge with the bayonet.
- 9.30. Capt. Lockett's report of enemy's line of battle on left wing makes an



- 10.30 Ordered Bowen and Breck[inridge] — went over to Bowen. 11.00. Went to Chalmers. Met Wickliffe & Brewster on front & Capt. Morris. 11.20. looking for Genl. J.[ohnston] Genl. Bowen did not know where he had gone.
- 12 M Heavy musketry on right near river.  
With Col Jordan & orderly looking for Genl Johnston
- 1210 Rode with Breckinridges lines to attack camp in advance 1/2 to 3/4 mile in front of 1st camp taken.
1230. By agreement with Jordan put Rutlege's battery in position as reserve, on 1st ridge of camp
- 1.10 2d Camp  
Breckinridge drives them, followed by Bowen, &
- 1.40 followed by Chalmers. 2 batteries right and rear of 2d camp (which is just taken)  
Fire of artillery ceased from there. Ours only random shots.
- 2:30 P.M. Ravine near 2d Camp Captured  
Johnston fell at the head of Bowen's & Breckinridge's brigade. After being wounded by a shell, & his horse wounded, he was shot in the ravine or on its descent. I found him in the arms of Govn. Harris, wounded as I thought, but he did not recognize me, as he was dying & swallowing a little spirits. I tho't he would revive, but Govn. Harris remarked it was all over. I saw it was so, wrote a note to Genl. Beauregard, instantly informing him that at the moment of victory, after routing the enemy at every point, that the completion of the victory would devolve on him.
- From 3 to 5 o'lk Took Genl. Johnston's dead body to his head quarters ; and after arranging it, left it in charge of Capt Wickham & Mr. Throckmorton & returned to Genl. Beauregard's Head Qrs & reported with Col. Benham, Major Haydon & Mr. Jack. Genl. Beauregard at once

offered us places on his staff, which we all accepted. Genl. B. gave me *carte blanche*. I accepted for the *present action* & he remarked that he hoped to have my services soon as he had recommended with Genl. Bragg for a Brigadier.<sup>1</sup> Remained till night and returned to camp. Recd *carte blanche* from Genl Beauregard as to Johnston's remains. He advised that they should be taken to New Orleans with such members of his staff as chose to accompany him. Colonel Gilmer at 9. P.M. reported the battle over & the enemy gone. The staff determine to accompany me.

Shilough Battlefield

Apl. 6th 1862

Col Wm. Preston

Dear Sir

In answer to your verbal enquiry as to the circumstances surrounding Genl Albert Sidney Johnston immediately preceeding his fall. As you are aware, I was acting as volunteer aid to Genl Johnston on the field.

He was upon the right wing where the enemy being strongly posted made an obstinate stand. As you remember, our troops, after a long and desperate struggle, waivered for a moment, when Genl. Johnston rushed in front of the line of battle, rallied the troops, ordered and led the charge. The enemy fell back between a fourth & one half mile, when the firing became very heavy on each side. Our advanced position exposed our troops to a raking fire of a battery of the enemy on our left. The last order the Genl gave was to direct me to "order Col Statham of Mississippi to charge that battery." I immediately delivered the order and rode back to

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<sup>1</sup> General Beauregard recommended the promotion of Colonel Preston to brigadier general and Major General Bragg to general.

the side of the Genl, said to him "Genl your order is delivered and being executed" just at this moment the Genl sank down in his saddle leaning over to the left I instantly put my left arm around him pulling him to me saying "Genl are you wounded?" He said "Yes and I fear seriously." Capt Wickham being on his left & I upon his right we held him upon his horse until we guided his horse from the crest of the hill to the ravine, where we lifted him from his horse, laid him upon the ground. I took his head in my lap. He never spoke after answering my question, though continued to breathe for 25 or 30 minutes. Immediately after dismounting the Genl Capt Wickham went for the Surgeon. I sent a soldier to bring any staff officer he could find to me & in some 10 or 15 minutes yourself and other members of the staff arrived. As to what occurred after this time you are as familiar as myself.

The Country will mourn his death as a National Calamity.

Respectfully

Isham G. Harris

*Apl 7 Monday — 7 AM*

Having consulted with the officers of General Johnston's staff as to who would accompany me, Colonel Gilmore said that he considered the victory as complete as it could be made, as we could not go in reach of the gunboats, and no attack was apprehended. Genl J's volunteer aids, viz myself, Benham, Munford, Haydon & Mr. Jack, Baylor, & Capt. Wickliffe, all agreed to go & Col O'Hara. Left at 6. A.M.

No cannonade. Saw Genl Hindman wounded at tent.

Camp at Mickey's — 1000 or 1500 prisoners. Stampede caused by *five* horsemen galloping through camp. Col Shorter was in command of camp, evidently ignorant of his duties. Reproved him for the disgraceful alarm & instructed him to order his guard to fire on horsemen rushing through his camp and stampeding men.

Stampede continued to Monterey.

Arrived at 1 P.M. at Corinth. Telegraphed to

Prest Davis & to Col Johnston.

Wickliffe arrives as train is starting. Acct. of renewal of battle. No particulars. Acct. of disorder & carelessness of men. Stragglers. Men turning out for *squirrel shooting*, through the woods. Beauregard had fallen back to Monterey. Army wd. fall back to Corinth.

Left at 8 o'clock with escort.

#### GLOSSARY OF NAMES AND PLACES

Arp, Dr. [?]. He was wounded early on the first day of battle; no additional information about him has been discovered.

Bark Road. The route connecting Mickey's farmhouse with Pittsburg Landing about seven miles to the northeast.

Baylor, Lt. Gen. George. He served as an aide-de-camp on Johnston's staff.

Beauregard, Gen. Pierre Gustave Toutant. A West Point graduate from Louisiana, Beauregard was a hero at the battle of Bull Run or Manassas in July 1861. He was second in command of the southern forces at Shiloh, taking charge at Johnston's death.

Benham, Col. Calhoun. He was an aide-de-camp on Johnston's staff. Later Benham saw battle at Stones River and Chickamauga. In August 1864, to recuperate from a wound suffered near Atlanta, he left the war and went to Louisville

where his brother-in-law, George D. Prentice, edited the *Louisville Journal*.

Bowen, Brigadier Gen. John S. He commanded a brigade under Breckinridge and was seriously wounded at Shiloh. He had served previously under Polk at Columbus, Kentucky, and under Johnston at Bowling Green. Promoted to brigadier general after Shiloh, Bowen was made major general in May 1863. He was captured while in command of a division at Vicksburg and died 13 July 1863 of a disease contracted during the Union siege.

Bragg, Major Gen. Braxton. He led a Confederate corps at Shiloh and was promoted from major general to general following the battle. In June 1862 he replaced Beauregard as commander of the Army of Tennessee and led southern forces at Perryville, Stones River, and Chickamauga.

Breckinridge, Brigadier Gen. John C. A Kentuckian and United States vice president under Buchanan, 1857-1861, Breckinridge was the unsuccessful presidential candidate of the southern Democrats in 1860. He commanded the Confederate reserve corps at Shiloh and continued his distinguished military service in the west until appointed secretary of war by the Richmond government in February 1865.

Brewster, Cpt. H.P. At Shiloh he was an assistant adjutant general on Johnston's staff.

Chalmers, Brigadier Gen. James R. Leader of a brigade at Shiloh, Chalmers later served at Stones River where he was wounded.

Cheatham, Brigadier Gen. Benjamin F. A veteran of the Mexican War, Cheatham commanded a division at Shiloh where he was wounded. He was promoted to major general after this battle and commanded a division under Polk.

Cleburne, actually Cleburne, Brigadier Gen. Patrick R. Born in Ireland, Cleburne immigrated to Arkansas. At Shiloh he commanded a brigade and later fought at Chickamauga and Atlanta. He was killed 30 November 1864 at Franklin, Tennessee.

Corinth. After his retreat from Bowling Green and Nashville, Johnston in late March 1862 established his headquarters in the small town of Corinth in northern Mississippi, about twenty-three miles southwest of Pittsburg Landing, Tennessee. Corinth was the important junction of the Mobile and Ohio and the Memphis and Charleston railroads.

Davis, President Jefferson. Born in Kentucky and educated at Transylvania University in Lexington and at West Point, Davis fought in the Black Hawk and Mexican wars. A congressman and senator from Mississippi, he also served as secretary of war under Franklin Pierce. President of the Confederacy, Davis headed the government in Richmond, Virginia. He was imprisoned for two years following the Union victory in 1865 and died in 1889.

Geer, Lt. John James. A Methodist minister from Cincinnati, Geer served the Union in an Ohio unit at Shiloh. Wounded and captured at this battle, he was imprisoned at Montgomery, Alabama, and Macon, Georgia. He escaped, was recaptured, and later released in a prisoner exchange.

Gilmer, Col. Jeremy F. A Mexican War veteran and former engineering instructor at West Point, Gilmer was Johnston's chief engineer and was wounded at Shiloh. In April 1863 Gilmer was made a major general.

Gilmore, Col. Jerome B. A Kentuckian, Gilmore served the Confederacy at Shiloh and later in 1862 was wounded at Iuka, Mississippi.

Gladden, Brigadier Gen. Adley H. A Mexican War veteran, Gladden was literally knocked out of his saddle by Union fire while leading his brigade at Shiloh. Mortally wounded, he died six days later.

Grier's or Greer's Ford. A crossing on Lick Creek, approximately three miles south of Shiloh Church.

Grant, Gen. Ulysses S. A West Point graduate and officer in the Mexican War, Grant's northern forces captured forts Henry and Donelson on the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers in February 1862. The Union commander at Shiloh,

- Grant was later successful at Vicksburg, and in November 1863 his forces defeated Bragg's at Chattanooga. In 1864-65, Grant directed the Union Army of the Potomac in Virginia to victory. A Republican, Grant served as president of the United States, 1869-77.
- Hardee, Major Gen. William J. A West Pointer and veteran of the Mexican War, Hardee led a southern corps at Shiloh. He commanded the Confederate forces retreating before Sherman's Union troops through Georgia and South Carolina, surrendering to Sherman in April 1865.
- Harris, Gov. Isham G. Governor of Tennessee, Harris was a volunteer aide-de-camp to Johnston at Shiloh. Forced from his state by Union victories, Harris served on the staffs of several Confederate generals during the war. From 1877 until his death in 1897, he represented Tennessee as a Democrat in the U.S. Senate.
- Haydon, Maj. Dudley M. He was a volunteer aide-de-camp on Johnston's staff.
- Hindman, Brigadier Gen. Thomas C. He served in the Mexican War and commanded a Confederate division at Shiloh. Promoted to major general in May 1862, he was placed in charge of southern forces west of the Mississippi River.
- Jack, Lt. Thomas M. An aide-de-camp to Johnston, after Shiloh Jack was promoted to colonel and served under Polk in Tennessee.
- Johnston, Gen. Albert Sidney. Born in Mason County, Kentucky, Johnston attended Transylvania University in Lexington and was graduated from West Point. Following the Black Hawk War, he commanded the Texans in their war against Mexico, later serving as secretary of war for the Texas Republic. He also led a regiment in the Mexican War. From 1849 until 1861 Johnston was in charge of U.S. troops in Texas, Utah, and California before becoming a commander of Confederate forces west of the Appalachians in September 1861. In Kentucky and Tennessee in late 1861 and early 1862, Johnston's army was forced to abandon Bowling

Green and Nashville, but in March 1862 he brought Confederate troops together at Corinth, Mississippi, for a major offensive against the Union army. This battle took place at Shiloh where Johnston died leading his troops.

**Johnston, Col. William Preston.** The son of Albert Sidney Johnston, William Preston Johnston was reared in Louisville by his uncle and namesake, William Preston. During the War between the States, W.P. Johnston was a colonel and served President Davis at the Confederate White House in Richmond. After the war, Johnston became the first president of the Tulane University of Louisiana.

**Jordan, Col. Thomas.** The West Point roommate of future Union General W. T. Sherman, Jordan fought in the Seminole and Mexican wars. Earlier Beauregard's chief of staff, at Shiloh Jordan was adjutant general of the Army of the Mississippi.

**Lick Creek.** A stream about twelve miles long which flows into the Tennessee River several miles upstream from Pittsburg Landing and which roughly formed the southern edge of the battlefield at Shiloh.

**Lockett, Capt. Samuel H.** A West Point graduate, Lockett was assistant chief engineer to Confederate Col. Gilmer at Shiloh.

**McClernand, actually McClernand, Brigadier Gen. Alexander.** Born in Kentucky, McClernand moved to Illinois where he was elected to Congress as a Democrat. He led Union troops at Fort Donelson as well as at Shiloh. He participated in the Vicksburg campaign with Grant, but McClernand was relieved of his command in June 1863 for insubordination. Restored as an officer in February 1864, he resigned his commission nine months later.

**Maney, Col. George E.** A veteran of the Mexican War, Maney commanded a southern brigade at Shiloh and soon thereafter was made a brigadier general.

**Mickey's.** A farmhouse about seven miles southwest of Pittsburg Landing where Confederate forces were to camp the

evening of 3 April. However, logistical problems prevented this and caused the southern offensive to be delayed.

Morris, Capt. [?], No information about this Confederate officer has been discovered.

Monterey. A village in Tennessee located approximately half way between Corinth and Pittsburg Landing.

Munford, Maj. Edward W. A close friend of Johnston, Munford was one of the Confederate commanders' aides-de-camp. After Shiloh, Munford served under William Preston and in the autumn of 1862 was made a colonel.

O'Hara, Capt. Theodore. A Kentuckian and a Mexican War veteran, in 1849 O'Hara participated as a southern filibuster in an invasion of Cuba which attempted to annex it to the United States. From 1852 to 1855, he was an editor of the *Louisville Times*. At Shiloh he served as assistant inspector general on Johnston's staff.

Owl Creek. A stream about ten miles long flowing into Snake Creek which enters the Tennessee River downstream from Pittsburg Landing and roughly delineated the northern side of the Union camp around Shiloh Church.

Pickett, actually Crockett, Maj. Leroy. Taken prisoner on 4 April while reconnoitering in front of his company's line, Crockett belonged to an Ohio unit under Sherman's command. After Shiloh, Crockett was returned to the North, promoted to the rank of colonel, and died in December 1863 from disease contracted during the siege of Vicksburg.

Pittsburgh, actually Pittsburg Landing. A hamlet of three or four log buildings on the west bank of the Tennessee River, approximately two and a half miles east of Shiloh Church and twenty-three miles northeast of Corinth.

Polk, Bishop and Major Gen. Leonidas. A West Point graduate, Polk left the army to study for Episcopal orders. As Bishop of Louisiana, he was a principal founder of the University of the South at Sewanee, Tennessee. At Shiloh he commanded a Confederate corps. He was killed at Pine Mountain, Georgia, in June 1864.

Pratt's. A farmhouse near Lick Creek and east of the Ridge Road.

Ridge Road. This route traversed the approximately sixteen miles between Corinth and Mickey's farmhouse, some seven miles southwest of Pittsburg Landing.

Ruggles, Brigadier Gen. Daniel. A Massachusetts native and West Point graduate, Ruggles served in the Mexican War and in 1861 sided with the South. He led four Louisiana regiments which joined Johnston's army at Corinth and commanded a division at Shiloh. Following Johnston's death on 6 April, Ruggles concentrated a battery of cannon against the Hornets' Nest which helped the rebels take this Union stronghold around 5:00 p.m. Later Ruggles was made Commissary General of Prisoners in Richmond.

Ruggles, Maj. E. S. A volunteer aide-de-camp to his father, Gen. Daniel Ruggles, Maj. Ruggles was disabled in the left arm by an exploding shell at Shiloh. Previously he was in the U.S. navy. After Shiloh Maj. Ruggles fought at Baton Rouge and then was transferred to the Confederate navy.

Rutledge, Capt. Arthur M. He commanded a Tennessee battery and assisted Gen. Ruggles's attack on the Hornets' Nest at Shiloh. He was promoted to major after this battle.

Savannah Road. The twenty-five-mile route between Corinth, Mississippi, and Savannah, Tennessee. Until moving northward to attack, Johnston's troops were encamped at Corinth in northern Mississippi. Before the battle, Grant made his headquarters at Savannah on the Tennessee River.

Sherman, Brigadier Gen. William T. An Ohioan, West Point graduate, and officer in the Mexican War, he was a Union commander at Shiloh. Sherman was promoted to major general for his services there, and in 1864 he was placed in charge of northern forces in the west when Grant was transferred to Virginia. Sherman was victorious at Atlanta and marched his troops through Georgia and South Carolina in 1864-65. He remained a commander in the U.S. army after the war, retiring from active service in 1881.

- Shilo or Shilough, actually Shiloh. Shiloh was the name of the church approximately two and a half miles west of Pittsburg Landing and was the site of the battle on 6 and 7 April 1862.
- Shorter, Col. Eli S. An Alabama congressman before the war, he was in charge of a southern infantry unit at Shiloh.
- Smith, Brigadier Gen. Charles F. A Mexican War veteran, Smith had served under Johnston in Utah. In 1861 Smith was the Union commander of the Western District of Kentucky. In mid-March 1862 he chose the site around Pittsburg Landing as the Union assembly point for the planned offensive against the southern forces congregating around Corinth. Smith fell ill in March 1862 and died on 25 April.
- Stratham, Col. W. S. At Shiloh he commanded a brigade of Tennessee and Mississippi troops in Breckinridge's corps.
- Throckmorton, Maj. James W. A Confederate major at Shiloh, Throckmorton became a brigadier general in 1864. After the war, he was governor of Texas as well as an eight-term Democratic congressman from that state.
- Wallace, Gen. W. H. L. The commander of a Union division in Grant's Army of Tennessee, Wallace was killed at Shiloh.
- Wickham, Capt. W. L. An assistant quartermaster general on Johnston's staff, Wickham helped Isham G. Harris care for Johnston after he was wounded at Shiloh.
- Wickliffe, Capt. Nathaniel. A Kentuckian, Wickliffe was a member of Johnston's staff at Shiloh, serving as an assistant adjutant general.

#### A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY ON THE BATTLE OF SHILOH

The battle of Shiloh has been treated in detail in numerous secondary sources. The authors of some monographs of particular value in understanding this complex encounter are Otto Eischiml, *The Story of Shiloh* (Chicago: Civil War Round Table, 1946); James L. McDonough, *Shiloh — in Hell before Night* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977); D. W. Reed, *The Battle of Shiloh and the Organizations Engaged* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913); Joseph W. Rich, *The*

*Battle of Shiloh* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1911); Wiley Sword, *Shiloh: Bloody April* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1974); and Thomas Worthington, *Shiloh: Or the Tennessee Campaign of 1862* (Washington: M'Gill and Witherow Printers, 1872).

Several biographies of Confederate and Union officers also offer valuable insights into this battle. General Johnston's son William Preston Johnston wrote *The Life of General Albert Sidney Johnston* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1879) which is based on many documents and letters sent him by both northern and southern combatants at Shiloh. Other biographies on southern generals which include useful material on Shiloh are by Charles P. Roland, *Albert Sidney Johnston* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964); William C. Davis, *Breckinridge: Statesman, Soldier, Symbol* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974); Lucille Stillwell, *John Cabell Breckinridge* (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, 1936); T. Harry Williams, *P. G. T. Beauregard: Napoleon in Gray* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1954); and Joseph H. Parkes, *General Leonidas Polk, C.S.A.: The Fighting Bishop* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1962). For material on William Preston, see Peter J. Sehlinger's "William Preston, Kentucky's Diplomat of Lost Causes," in *Kentucky Profiles: Biographical Essays in Honor of Holman Hamilton* (Frankfort: Kentucky Historical Society, 1982), edited by James C. Klotter and Peter J. Sehlinger. Works about Union officers who served at Shiloh include J. F. C. Fuller's *The Generalship of Ulysses S. Grant* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1929), William S. McFeely's *Grant: A Biography* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1981), Lloyd Lewis's *Sherman* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1932), and James M. Merrill's *William T. Sherman* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1971).

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Horn, *The Army of Tennessee* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1953); Thomas L. Connelly, *Army of the Heartland: The Army of Tennessee, 1861-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967); Edwin Porter Thompson, *History of the First Kentucky Brigade* (Cincinnati: Caxton Publishing Company, 1868); and William C. Davis, *The Orphan Brigade: The Kentucky Confederates Who Couldn't Go Home* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1980).

Several firsthand accounts by Shiloh veterans offer a wealth of valuable information about the preparations leading up to the battle and about the course of the battle. Of particular interest are two published primary sources by U. S. Grant and William T. Sherman: *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant* (New York: World Publishing Company, 1952) and *Memoirs of General William T. Sherman* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1875). Primary sources on Shiloh by southern officers are found in archival collections. The Library of Congress manuscript division holds the P. G. T. Beauregard Papers, the Breckinridge Family Papers, and the Leonidas Polk Papers while the letters of William Preston are found principally in the Mason-Barret Collection at Tulane University and the Preston-Davie Collection at The Filson Club in Louisville.

Many works are very helpful in identifying the soldiers who fought on both sides at Shiloh. The multi-volume series *The War of the Rebellion* (127 vols.; Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901) contains hundreds of letters and documents about Shiloh by both Union and Confederate officers, and chapter XXII in series I, vol. X, part I, of this work is dedicated to military operations in Tennessee and northern Mississippi from 4 March through 10 June 1862. Among the many volumes useful in identifying the combatants at Shiloh are those of R. U. Johnson and C. C. Buel, editors, *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (4 vols.; New York: Century Company, 1884-1888); Claud Estes, *List of Field Officers, Regiments and Battalions in the Confederate States Army, 1861-1865* (Macon, Georgia: The J. W. Burke Company, 1912); D. W. Reed, *The Battle of Shiloh and the Or-*

*ganizations Engaged* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1903); "The Compiled Service Records of Confederate Generals and Staff Officers and Nonregimental Enlisted Men," on microfilm at the National Archives in Washington, D.C.; Marcus L. Wright, *General Officers of the Confederate Army* (New York: The Neale Publishing Company, 1911); and Thomas L. Connelly, *Civil War Tennessee: Battles and Leaders* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1979).

Obviously local records also must be consulted to identify some Shiloh veterans whose military rank and deeds have not been enshrined in the pages of published works. For material about several persons mentioned in Preston's diary, I am indebted to Dr. Wilbur E. Meneray, Manuscripts Librarian, Tulane University Library; Mr. Conrad F. Weitzel of the Archives-Library Division of the Ohio Historical Society; and Mr. George A. Reaves, Interpretation and Resources Management, Shiloh National Military Park.