

# CCWRT Shiloh and Corinth Tour 2011

By Dan Bauer

## Saturday, April 30<sup>st</sup>

On Saturday April 30<sup>th</sup>, nine members of the CCWRT traveled Corinth, MS in a rented 15 passenger van. We left from the Drake Center at 8:00 and enjoyed a beautiful day for driving. After checking into the Hampton Inn, at 3:30 Central Time, we headed strait to the Corinth Civil War interpretive Center to meet with our tour guide, Jim Minor. Our tour was scheduled to run from 4:00 to 6:00 PM.

Jim explained to us that following the defeat from Shiloh, the P.G.T. Beauregard and his Confederate Army retreated to Corinth and spent the majority of April 1862

constructing and occupying a defensive line of earthworks about two miles from town on the northern and eastern sides of Corinth. Nevertheless, Beauregard realized they were no match for Halleck's oncoming

Northern Army. Corinth was surrendered on May 29 without a fight.

Jim took us to a site just north of downtown Corinth where some of these earthworks have been preserved. The site has three wooden decks which allow the visitor to get a view of the works without trampling them. The earthworks are on NPS property, but to access them we had to drive over some private property.

Many thanks to Jim for showing us these earthworks which otherwise would have been inaccessible. The photo at above is one of the decks.



**From left to right: John McGee, Bob Limoseth, Mike Meese, Randy Donohue, Mark Fidler, Andy Simmons, Tom Williams, Esly Caldwell, Dan Bauer**



Once inside the city the Federals realized the old Confederate earthworks were too extensive to defend. William Rosecrans ordered a new series of fortifications built meant to be stronger than the old Confederate works and serve as an inner line of defense for the town and the ammunition magazines near the junction of the two railroads. Through the summer of 1862 the Federals built six artillery fortifications around the southern and western approaches to the town. These gun positions, including Battery Powell and Battery Robinett, were connected by breastworks.

Undaunted by the fortifications, in late September 1862 Earl Van Dorn advanced his Army of 22,000 men in an effort to attack the Federal positions and retake the city. Rosecrans countered by positioning three divisions into the old Confederate defense works north and northwest of town in anticipation of the Confederate attack. Rosecrans's plan was to absorb the expected Confederate advance with a skirmish line at the old Confederate entrenchments and to then meet the bulk of the Confederate attack with his main force along inner line, about a mile from the center of town.



For the first stop of our tour, Jim Minor took our group to Oliver Hill (pictured below), where the Battle of Corinth began. I must admit that Jim went into far more detail than I was prepared to comprehend. Because much of it went in one ear and out the other, in putting this report together I had to do a little more research on



my own. It was here at Oliver Hill that on the morning of October 3<sup>rd</sup>, Van Dorn began his assault at 10 a.m. with Lovell's division attacking the Union divisions of Thomas Davies and Thomas McKean. Van Dorn's plan was a double envelopment, in which Lovell would open the fight, in the hope that Rosecrans would weaken his right to reinforce McKean, at which time Price would make the main assault against the Federal right and enter the works. Lovell made a

determined attack on John Oliver's Union Brigade of McKean's Division. McKean's other Brigade commander, John McArthur, quickly moved four of his regiments to Oliver's support. These movements left a gap between the two Union divisions, through which the Confederates forced their way about 1:30 p.m. The

Union forces retreated to the inner defense line as the first days fighting ended. During the night the Confederates slept within 600 yards of the Union works.

Next, Jim Minor took our group to the site of Battery Robinette. Battery Robinett, more correctly called a lunette, is located behind The Corinth Civil War Interpretive Center. From here Jim

described the action of October 4<sup>th</sup>. At 4:30 a.m. on October 4, the Confederates opened up on the Union inner line of entrenchments with a six-gun battery, which kept up its bombardment until after sunrise. When the guns fell silent, the Federal troops

prepared themselves to resist an attack. But the attack was slow in

coming. At 7 a.m., Van Dorn's Division commander Lois Hébert sent word to Van Dorn that he was too ill to lead his division, and Brig. Gen. Martin E. Green was ordered to assume command and advance at once. Nearly two hours more elapsed before Green moved to attack with four brigades in echelon on Battery Powell on the Union right.



**Corinth Civil War Interpretive Center**



**Battery Robinette**

As soon as Confederate Division commander Dabney Maury heard the firing on his left, he knew that Union forces would be kept too busy to interfere with his movements, and gave the order for his division to move straight toward the town. His right encountered a stubborn resistance at about 11 a.m. from Battery Robinett. The lunette was protected by a five-foot ditch, sporting three 20-pounder Parrott rifles commanded by Lt. Henry Robinett. Fierce hand-to-hand combat ensued, and he was forced to retire with heavy losses from arguably the hottest action of the two-day battle.

One of the more dramatic moments of the battle involved Col. William P. Rogers of the 2nd Texas. As Confederate dead lay gathered at the bottom of the parapet of Battery Robinett, Col. Rodgers seized his colors to keep them from falling again and jumped the five foot ditch, leaving his dying horse and assaulted the ramparts of the battery. When canister shot killed him, he was the fifth bearer of his colors to fall that day. The photo at right shows the monument memorializing the actions of Col. Rodgers.



At 4 p.m., reinforcements from Grant under the command of Brig. Gen. James B. McPherson arrived from Jackson. But the battle of Corinth had effectively been over since 1 p.m. and the Confederates were in full retreat.

Rosecrans's army lost 2,520 (355 killed, 1,841 wounded, and 324 missing) at Corinth; Van Dorn's losses were 4,233

(473 killed, 1,997 wounded, and 1,763 captured or missing). Although his army had been badly mauled, Van Dorn escaped completely. He attributed his defeat to the failure of Hébert to open the second-day engagement on time.

Both Battery Powell and Robinette have been lost to development. However, part of Battery Robinette has been reconstructed by the NPS and serves to show what the lunette would have looked like. After our visit to the Confederate earthworks described earlier, we headed back to the motel, broke for dinner, and called it a night.

## Sunday, May 1<sup>st</sup>

We woke Sunday morning and found the rain to be pouring down. Memories of last years rainy trip came flooding back, and we could help but think “here we go again.” By the time we finished our breakfast the rains lessened a bit and we headed to the Shiloh Battlefield. Our route to Shiloh roughly following the same path the Confederate army took the first few days of April, 1862 when they advanced to Pittsburg Landing. We arrived at the Shiloh Visitor’s Center around 8:30 and met our tour guide, Chris Mekow. Chris began our tour with an overall description of the battle using the large maps on the walls of the visitor’s center.



By early April, all six of the Union divisions making up Grant's Army of the Tennessee were encamped on the western side of the Tennessee River. Grant's encampment at Pittsburg Landing displayed a lack of concern for



being attacked. His army was spread out in bivouac style, many around the small log church named Shiloh. While Grant was waiting for Buell's arrive, the army spent the days in drills for his many raw troops without entrenchments or other awareness of defensive measures. On the Confederate side, Johnston's newly assembled force the 55,000 men, the Army of Mississippi departed from Corinth on April 3 and headed for the Grant encampment. They were organized into four large corps commanded by Polk, Bragg, Hardee and Breckinridge.

Our first stop after we left the visitor center was the landing itself. The photo at left is of Pittsburg Landing. The photographer's back is against the Tennessee River. It was still raining at this point so we did not get out of the van.

On the eve of battle, Grant's and Johnston's armies were of comparable size, but the Confederates were poorly armed with antique weapons. Johnston's second in command was P. G. T. Beauregard, who urged Johnston not to attack Grant. He was concerned that the sounds of marching and the Confederate soldier's test-firing their rifles after two days of rain had cost them the element of surprise. Johnston refused to accept Beauregard's advice. Despite General Beauregard's well founded concern, the Union forces did not hear the sounds of the marching army in its approach and remained blissfully unaware of the enemy camped 3 miles away.

Johnston's plan was to attack Grant's left and separate the Union army from its gunboat support (and avenue of retreat) on the Tennessee River, driving it west into the swamps of Snake and Owl Creeks, where it could be destroyed.

At 6:00 a.m. on April 6, Johnston's army was deployed for battle, straddling the Corinth Road. In fact, the army had spent the entire night bivouacking undetected in order of battle just two miles away from the Union camps. Their approach and dawn assault achieved almost total strategic and tactical surprise. Sherman, the informal camp commander at Pittsburg Landing, did not believe that the Confederates were anywhere nearby. Early that morning Colonel Everett Peabody, commanding Prentiss's 1st Brigade, had sent forward part of the 25th Missouri Infantry on a reconnaissance, and they engaged Confederate outposts at 5:15 a.m. This early part of the fighting occurred on today what is known as Fraley Field and is shown in the above photo.



Our morning tour of the Shiloh Battlefield followed the same ten stops as is set up by the NPS as part of their regular tour. These stops do not necessarily follow the timeline of the battle. Rather, they follow a convenient loop from the visitor's center out to Fraley Field then back towards the visitor's center. Consequently, neither these photos nor our stops followed the order of the battle. The photo at left shows part of the monument dedicated to Andrew Hickenlooper's 5<sup>th</sup> Ohio Battery. Hickenlooper managed to save four of six guns and was considered hero for his brave stand in slowing Braxton Bragg in the Hornet's Nest. Hickenlooper went onto become a prominent Cincinnati and is buried at Spring Grove Cemetery. Throughout our tour, Chris



Mekow made special effort to describe some of the Ohio monuments.

The photo at right shows a portion of the "Sunken Road" which is part of the Hornet's Nest. It had just stopped raining so the puddles were still fresh. Chris pointed out how the Sunken Road was not really sunken at all. Furthermore the casualties on this part of the battlefield were not nearly as great as early accounts of the battle led us to believe.

The corps of Hardee and Bragg began the assault with their divisions in one line, almost 3 miles wide. As these units advanced, they became intermingled and difficult to control. Corps commanders attacked in line without reserves. Artillery could not be concentrated to achieve a breakthrough. At about 7:30 a.m. from his position in the rear, Beauregard ordered the corps of Polk and Breckinridge forward on the left and right of the line, diluting their effectiveness. The attack therefore went forward as a frontal assault conducted by a single linear formation, which lacked both the depth and weight needed for success. Command and control in the modern sense were lost from the onset of the first assault. The photo at left shows another portion of the "Sunken Road" taken later in the morning. The Confederate assault, despite some shortcomings, was ferocious, and some of the numerous inexperienced Union soldiers of Grant's new army fled for safety to the Tennessee River. Others fought well but were forced to withdraw under strong pressure and attempted to form new defensive lines. Many regiments fragmented entirely; the companies attached themselves

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to other commands. During this period, Sherman, who had been so negligent in preparation for the battle, became one of its most important elements. He appeared everywhere along his lines, inspiring his raw recruits to resist the initial assaults despite staggering losses on both sides. He received two minor wounds and had three horses shot out from under him. Sherman's division bore the brunt of the initial attack, and despite heavy fire on their position and their right flank crumbling, they fought on stubbornly. The Union troops slowly lost ground and fell back to a position behind Shiloh Church (pictured at right). Overall, however, Johnston's forces made steady progress until noon, rolling up Union positions one by one. As the Confederates advanced, many threw away their flintlock muskets and grabbed rifles dropped by the fleeing Union troops. The present day Shiloh Church is a recreation of the original church.



The photo at left depicts Ruggles' concentration of 11 batteries consisting of over 50 cannons that was massed against the Hornet's Nest. Their bombardment allowed Confederate forces to encircle and capture General Benjamin Prentiss and nearly 2,100 Union soldiers.

General Grant was about ten miles down river at Savannah, Tennessee, that morning. On April 4, he had been injured when his horse fell and pinned him underneath. He was convalescing and unable to move without crutches. He heard the sound of artillery fire and raced to the

battlefield by boat, arriving about 8:30 a.m. He worked frantically to bring up reinforcements that seemed near enough to arrive swiftly: Bull Nelson's division from Savannah and Lew Wallace's division from Crump's Landing. However, he would wait almost all day before the first of these reinforcements (from Nelson's division) arrived. Wallace's slow movement to the battlefield became particularly controversial.

After our tour of the Hornets Nest, we broke for lunch. Chris took us to the famous Catfish Inn which is just off the park grounds and overlooks the Tennessee River. After lunch, we caught the tail end of an artillery demonstration near the Visitors Center. Even though we missed the main demonstration, Chris was able to offer his own description of the artillery used at Shiloh.



Eager to take advantage of the favorable weather, Chris got us back on battle tour. Tour stop 15 marks the site



of Albert Sydney Johnston's death. Johnston was mortally wounded at about 2:30 p.m. while leading attacks on the Union left through the widow Bell's cotton field against the Peach Orchard when he was shot in his left leg. Deeming the leg wound to be insignificant, he had sent his personal surgeon away to care for some wounded captured Union soldiers, and in the doctor's absence, he bled to death within an hour, his boot filling with blood from a severed artery. Although tour stop 15 is adorned by a large monument which is focal point of the stop, Chris Mekow pointed out that spot at which Johnston actually died is about 50 yards to the right of the main monument, in the woods, down a hill, and next to a creek. This spot is marked by a steel plaque and is pictured at left. Some old timers of may remember the old death tree that was adjacent to the

main Johnston monument. The bogus death tree has finally been removed.

Tour stop 14 is the field hospital. Here Federal surgeons set up one of the first tent hospitals of the Civil War. Up until this time each military unit was responsible for caring for their own wounded. By concentrating medical services on the battlefield, patient care was greatly improved and the death rate lowered. Using the field markers as aide, Chris made a special point to describe this effort.

Just behind the field hospital marker sits the monument dedicated to the much maligned 71<sup>st</sup> Ohio Regiment. Many in the CCWRT will remember the talk that Martin Stewart gave to our Round Table in



March of 2011 in which he gave his regimental history of the 71<sup>st</sup> Ohio. Chris Mekow gave his own assessment of the 71<sup>st</sup> at Shiloh. Chris believes their poor performance at Shiloh was due to drinking tainted water which made many of the members sick. The marker for the 71<sup>st</sup> Ohio is shown at left.



The Union flanks were being pushed back, but not decisively. Hardee and Polk caused Sherman and McClelland on the Union right to retreat in the direction of Pittsburg Landing, leaving the right flank of the Hornet's Nest exposed. Just after the death of Johnston, Breckinridge, whose corps had been in reserve, attacked the extreme left of the Union line. However, they paused to regroup and recover from

exhaustion and disorganization, and then chose to follow the sound of the guns toward the Hornet's Nest, and an opportunity was lost. After the Hornet's Nest fell, the remnants of the Union line established a solid three-mile front around Pittsburg Landing, extending west from the Tennessee and then north up the River Road, keeping



the approach open for the expected belated arrival of Lew Wallace's division. The defensive line included a ring of over 50 cannons and naval guns from the river. A final Confederate charge of two brigades, led by Brig. Gen. Withers, attempted to break through the line but was repulsed. Beauregard called off a second attempt after 6 p.m., with the sun setting. The Confederate plan had failed in their attempt to force the Union Army west into the swamps.

The above photo at left is of the peach orchard. We stayed inside the van while Chris described the actions in the Peach Orchard.

On the morning of April 7<sup>th</sup>, Beauregard was unaware that he was now outnumbered,

planned to continue the attack and drive Grant into the river. To his surprise, Union forces started moving forward in a massive counterattack at dawn; Grant and Buell launched their attacks separately; coordination occurred only down at the division level. The Confederate defenders were so badly commingled that little unit cohesion existed above the brigade level.

Due to this lack of cohesion, Chris told us historians have a hard time confirming much of what was purported to have occurred on the April 7<sup>th</sup>.

On the Union left, Nelson's division led the advance, followed closely by Crittenden's and McCook's, down the Corinth and Hamburg-Savannah Roads. After heavy fighting, Crittenden's division recaptured the Hornet's Nest area by late morning, but Crittenden and Nelson were both repulsed by determined counterattacks launched by Breckinridge. The Union right made steady progress, driving Bragg and Polk to the south.



In early afternoon, Beauregard launched a series of counterattacks from the Shiloh Church area, aiming to ensure control of the Corinth Road. Although the Union right was temporarily driven back by these assaults The Confederates were driven back to the Prentiss's old camps. Realizing that he had lost the initiative and that he was low on ammunition and food and with over 10,000 of his men killed, wounded, or missing, Beauregard knew he could go no further. He withdrew beyond Shiloh Church, using 5,000 men under Breckinridge as a covering force, massing Confederate batteries at the church and on the ridge south of Shiloh Branch. These

forces kept the Union forces in position on the Corinth Road until 5 p.m., when the Confederates began an orderly withdrawal back to Corinth. The exhausted Union soldiers did not pursue much past the original Sherman and Prentiss encampments; Lew Wallace's division advanced beyond Shiloh Branch but, receiving no support from other units, halted at dark and returned to Sherman's camp. The battle was over.

The two-day battle of Shiloh, the costliest in American history up to that time, resulted in the defeat of the Confederate army and frustration of Johnston's plans to prevent the joining of the two Union armies in Tennessee. Union casualties were 13,047 (1,754 killed, 8,408 wounded, and 2,885 missing); Grant's army bore the brunt of the fighting over the two days, with casualties of 1,513 killed, 6,601 wounded, and 2,830 missing or captured. Confederate casualties were 10,699 (1,728 killed, 8,012 wounded, and 959 missing or captured). The dead included the Confederate army's commander, Albert Sidney Johnston; the highest ranking Union general killed was W. H. L. Wallace. Both sides were shocked at the carnage. None suspected that three more years of such bloodshed remained in the war and that eight larger and bloodier battles were yet to come. Grant came to realize that his prediction of one great battle bringing the war to a close was probably not destined to happen. The war would continue, at great cost in casualties and resources, until the Confederacy succumbed or the Union was divided. Grant also learned a valuable personal lesson on preparedness that (mostly) served him well for the rest of the war.



Although our group did not have time to tour the Shiloh Cemetery, some in our group took photos of it from just beyond its walls.

Throughout our tour Chris referred to a new Shiloh film which had been shot to be shown at the visitors Center in time for the Shiloh's Sesquicentennial. Although the film is not yet ready, Chris offered to show us some of the unedited footage. We gladly took him up on his offer. In watching the film, we discovered that our tour guide plays PGT Beauregard. I must say, I do see a resemblance.

With that our formal tour ended. Our group returned to a few places at Shiloh on our own and took a few additional photos. After that we drove back to Corinth, had dinner, and retired for the night.

## Monday, May 2<sup>nd</sup>

Our plan for Monday was to either visit more sites on Corinth or if it was raining in Corinth, hit the road and perhaps visit the Parkers Crossroads Battlefield on a self guided tour. After finish breakfast on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, and then checking out the weather radar, it appeared Corinth would be dry for a couple of hours while appeared rain was heading north towards Parkers Crossroads. Mother Nature made our decision for us. More Corinth!

One of the places we wanted to see in Corinth was the famous railroad crossing. After all, this is what all fighting in the area was all about. We couldn't help but pose right on the crossing.

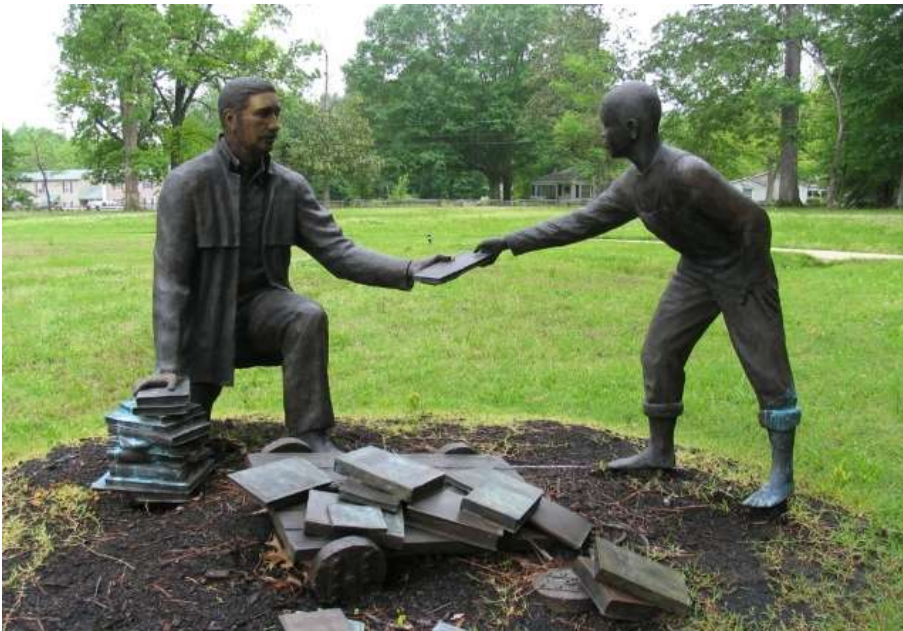
The photo at right is where the Memphis & Chattanooga and the Mobile & Ohio intersect. Behind the group in the above photo is the Crossroads Museum. Unfortunately the museum is closed on Mondays.



A second place we wanted to visit was the Verandah-Curlee House which is located in downtown Corinth. On the evening of April 2, 1862, Gen. Albert Sidney Johnston met with Gen. Braxton Bragg in his bedchambers at the Verandah House to officially sign Order No. 8 to launch the Confederate counter offensive against the Union army that ended in the Battle of Shiloh, April 6-7, 1862. Throughout the war, generals from both the Confederacy and the Union were quartered in this house. Although the house is closed for repairs, it is still an impressive looking building. The house is pictured at left.

The final place we wanted to visit was the Contraband Camp. The security offered by United States forces occupying Corinth after May 1862 attracted enslaved African Americans who fled plantations and farms seeking freedom. The migration of these people (first called “contraband of war”) into occupied Corinth. To accommodate these refugees, Union Gen. Grenville M. Dodge established a camp northeast of town. What began as a tent city in late 1862, by mid-1863 had blossomed into a thriving community of homes, a school, church, hospital, and a progressive cooperative farm program. Northern white men and women from abolitionist and benevolent organizations came to Corinth to provide the freedmen with religious, academic, and vocational

instruction. The camp, considered a model of its kind, served a temporary home for 6,000 ex-slaves during its operation. Nearly 2,000 African American men who passed through the camp were enlisted in the Union Army.



The site is a couple of acres in size and includes a looped walking path which features about a half dozen life size bronze sculptures depicting daily life in the camp. The photographers in our group took great interest in the sculptures taking many photos from different angles.

This concluded our visit to Corinth and we began the long drive back home. The group all seemed to have a good time and we look forward to next year’s field trip.

Special thanks needs to go out to Bob Limoseth who took many of the photos shown in this report and was gracious enough to put together a CD ROM of 200

photos that members of the group took during the course of the trip. Additional recognition needs to be made to Wikipedia where much of the text appearing in this report was taken.