

NOTES OF A CONFEDERATE STAFF-OFFICER AT SHILOH.



AFTER ten o'clock at night, on the 2d of April, 1862, while in my office as adjutant-general of the Confederate army assembled at Corinth, a telegram was brought to me from General Cheatham, commanding an outpost on our left flank at Bethel, on the Mobile and Ohio railway, some twenty odd miles northward of Corinth. General Cheatham had addressed it to General Polk, his corps commander, informing him that a Federal division, under General Lew Wallace, had been manoeuvring in his proximity during the day. General Polk had in due course sent the message to General Beauregard, from whom it came to me with his signed indorsement, and addressed to General A. S. Johnston, the substance of the indorsement being: "Now is the time to advance upon Pittsburg Landing." And below were these words, in effect, if not literally: "Colonel Jordan had better carry this in person to General Johnston and explain the military situation.—G. T. B."

At the time Colonel Jacob Thompson, formerly Secretary of the Interior of the United States, was in my office as my guest. I read the telegram aloud to him and immediately thereafter repaired to General Johnston's quarters, nearly a quarter of a mile distant, where I found him surrounded by his personal staff, in the room which the latter habitually occupied. I handed him the open dispatch, and he read it and the indorsements without comment; asked me several questions about matters wholly irrelevant to the dispatch or what might naturally grow out of it, and rose, saying that he would cross the street to see General Bragg. I asked if I should accompany him. "Certainly," was his answer. We found that General Bragg had already gone to bed, but he received us in dishabille, General Johnston handing him the dispatch at once, without remark. Bragg, having read it, immediately expressed his agreement with Beauregard's advisement. General Johnston thereupon very clearly stated some strong objections, chiefly to the effect

that as yet our troops were too raw and incompletely equipped for an offensive enterprise, such as an onset upon the Federal army in a position of their own choosing, and also that he did not see from what quarter a proper reserve could be assembled in time.

As General Beauregard had discussed with me repeatedly within a week the details of such an offensive operation in all its features, and the necessity for it before the Federal army was itself ready to take the offensive, I was able to answer satisfactorily the objections raised by General Johnston, including the supposed difficulty about a reserve—for which use I pointed out that the Confederate forces posted under General Breckenridge at several points along the line of the Memphis and Charleston railroad, to the eastward of Corinth, could be quickly concentrated at Burnsville, and be moved thence direct to Monterey, and there effect a junction with our main force. General Johnston at last assented to the undertaking. Whereupon I turned to a table in General Bragg's chamber, and wrote a circular order to the three corps commanders, Major-Generals Polk, Bragg, and Hardee, directing that each should hold his corps under arms by 12 Meridian on the 3d of April, ready to march, with forty rounds of ammunition in their cartridge-boxes, and sixty rounds for each man to be carried as a reserve; three days' cooked provisions per man in their haversacks, with three more to be transported in wagons. This circular also prescribed the ammunition for the artillery, and the number of wagons each regiment would be provided with; all of which was approved by General Johnston when I read the rough draught of it. Afterward the copies were made by an aid-de-camp on the staff of General Bragg.

These orders were delivered to Generals Polk and Hardee at 1:40 A. M., as shown by their receipts, which I required to be taken. The orders to General Breckenridge were given by telegraph, he having been called by me to the military telegraph office nearest his headquarters to receive them and to answer queries regarding his command.* Thus did it happen that the Confederate army was brought to undertake the offensive against General Grant upon Pittsburg Landing.

* As I find from a paper officially signed by me April 21, 1862, this reserve consisted of 6436 rank and file effectives. ("Official Record War of the Rebellion," Series I., volume X., page 396.)

II.

UPON quitting General Bragg's quarters I proceeded immediately to the tent of Colonel A. R. Chisholm, aid-de-camp to General Beauregard, separated from my office by some thirty or forty yards, roused him from sleep, and asked him to inform the general at daylight that the order to advance at midday had been issued.

Soon after sunrise I was called to the quarters of General Beauregard, whom I found with the notes of the plan of operations and orders of engagement. These, I may add, had just been copied by Colonel Chisholm from the backs of telegrams and envelopes upon which the general had made them during the night while in bed. Taking these notes and the general's sketch-map of the roads leading from all surrounding quarters to Monterey and thence upon Pittsburg Landing, I returned and began to draw up the order, which will be found in the "Records of the War of the Rebellion," Series I., volume X., pages 392-395.*

Called to my breakfast before the order could be framed, I met General Johnston en route for General Beauregard's quarters, where I said I would meet him as quickly as possible, and where I did soon join him. General Beauregard was explaining the details as to the roads by which the several corps would have to move through the somewhat difficult, heavily wooded country, both before and after leaving Monterey; and to make this clear, as I had from General Beauregard the only sketch extant, General Beauregard drew a rough sketch on his camp-table top. Meanwhile, first General Bragg and afterward Generals Polk and Hardee had joined the conference. As I remarked that it would take me some time to formulate the order and issue all the requisite copies, General Beauregard explained orally to the three generals their routes of march for the first day, so that they might not wait for receipt of the written orders, which would be in all proper hands before night. Accordingly, these explanations were carefully made, and the corps commanders went away with distinct instructions to begin the movement at midday, as prescribed in the written orders subsequently issued. Pursuant to the terms of the circular order which I had written and issued from General Bragg's headquarters the night before, the troops were brought under arms before noon, by which time the streets and all approaches to the railway station, as well as the

roads leading from Corinth, were densely packed with troops, wagons, and field-batteries ready for the march. But no movement was made; General Polk's corps in some way blocked the line of march. This having been reported to General Beauregard at a late hour in the afternoon by General Hardee in person, an aid-de-camp was sent to General Polk, when, to the surprise of all, General Polk explained that he had kept his corps at a stand awaiting the written order. Thus it was so late before the movement actually began, that it really cost the Confederate army a whole day and their arrival in the near presence of their adversary twenty-four hours later than was intended, as, by reason of this tardiness, it was not until the late afternoon of the 5th of April that the head of the Confederate column reached a point within less than two miles of the Federal lines instead of on the 4th, in which case the battle would have been fought with General Grant alone, or without the material and moral help derived from the advent of Buell on the field, as on the night of the 6th and the morning of the 7th of April.

III.

GENERAL BEAUREGARD with his staff left Corinth the afternoon of the 4th of April, and reaching Monterey, eleven miles distant, found the Confederate corps massed in that quarter. He was hardly encouraged, however, by the manner in which they had been handled to that stage in the operation. General Johnston and his staff were already at the same point, in occupation of a house at which we dismounted just as some cavalry brought from the front a soldierly young Federal volunteer officer, Major Crockett, of the Seventy-ninth Ohio, who had just been captured a few hours before in a skirmish in close proximity to the Federal lines brought on by a Confederate reconnoitering force pressed most indiscreetly from General Bragg's corps almost upon the Federal front line. As this officer rode beside his captors through the mass of Confederate infantry and batteries, and his eyes rested intelligently on the warlike spectacle, he exclaimed, "This means a battle"; and he involuntarily added, "They don't expect anything of this kind back yonder." He was taken in charge by myself, and, assisted by Major Gilmer, chief engineer on the staff, I interrogated him with the least possible semblance of so doing, with the result of satisfying me, as I reported to Generals Johnston and Beauregard, that we

* As I framed this order, I had before me Napoleon's order for the battle of Waterloo, and, in attention to ante-battle details, took those of such soldiers as Napoleon and Soult for model—a fact which I here mention because the ante-Shiloh order has been hypercriticised.

should have no earth-works to encounter, and an enemy wholly unaware of what was so near at hand.

IV.

It has been more than once represented with pencil as well as with pen, that there was a somewhat dramatic conference of the Confederate generals around the camp-fire the night before the battle of the 6th of April. The simple fact is this: Hardee, whose corps was to be in the advance in the attack, having reached a point known to be somewhat less than two miles from our adversary, was halted and deployed in line of battle across the Pittsburg road to await the arrival and formation in his rear of the rest of the army as prescribed in the battle order. As this was not effected until after three o'clock, it was too late to make the attack that day. As a matter of course in such a contingency, the corps commanders were called to meet Generals Johnston and Beauregard, who, having gone from Monterey together with the general staff and their respective personal staffs, had taken a position, dismounted, on the Pittsburg road, somewhat to the rear of Hardee's corps. The meeting took place about four o'clock. General Polk now reported that his men were almost destitute of provisions, having either already consumed or thrown them away. General Bragg reported that his own men had been more provident, and therefore could spare enough for the emergency. Deeply dissatisfied with the inexplicable manner in which both Bragg's and Polk's corps had been delayed, both before reaching and after leaving Monterey, as well as by the injudicious manner in which a reconnaissance had been made with such aggressiveness and use of artillery as ought to have apprised any sharp-sighted enemy than an offensive army was not far distant, General Beauregard — though it had been upon his urgent instance that the advance had been made — did not hesitate to say that, inasmuch as it was scarcely possible for the enemy to be unaware of our presence and purpose, should we attack next morning we should find the Federals intrenched to the eyes and ready for us; that the whole success of the movement had depended on our ability to assail our enemy unexpectedly and unprepared. Therefore, he advised the return of the Confederate army to Corinth, as it assuredly was not in a condition to attack an army superior in numbers and behind the intrenchments that would be now thrown up in expectation of an onset.

General Johnston listened attentively to what General Beauregard said, and at length

replied in substance that he recognized its weight; nevertheless, as he hoped the enemy was not suspecting our proximity, he felt bound, as he had put the army in motion for a battle, to venture the hazard. Whereupon the officers rapidly dispersed to their respective commands for that venture. As I have seen it intimated, among others by General Bragg, that this conference was a mere casual or "partly accidental meeting of general officers," it may not be amiss to recall that such a conference was the inevitable consequence of the arrival of the Confederate army at the point from which it was to spring upon the enemy, as it were from an ambush. Naturally, moreover, by a conference with their corps commanders, Johnston and Beauregard could best ascertain the condition of all the troops and determine the best course to be pursued. It was after the reports thus made and the mutual blame of each other of two of the corps commanders for the delay, that Beauregard had been confirmed in his apprehension that the campaign had miscarried, and therefore its objective should be given up,—much as Wellington once, in Spain, after taking the field to attack Massena, finding the latter more strongly posted and prepared than he had been misled to believe, had not hesitated to retire without fighting.

V.

THAT night, soon after supper, an aid-de-camp from General Johnston informed me of the general's desire to see me, and guided me to where he was bivouacking in the open air. I was wanted to issue the order for the immediate transfer of Maney's regiment of Tennessee infantry from a brigade in Bragg's corps to a certain brigade in Polk's corps, of which Colonel Maney would have the command as senior officer, which order I wrote, in the absence of any table or other convenience, outstretched upon General Johnston's blankets, which were spread at the foot of a tree. After this was done, and the order dispatched by a special courier so that the transfer might be made in time to place Colonel Maney at the head of the brigade in the coming battle, something led us to talk of the Pacific coast, in which quarter I had served eight years. Having been at Washington during the momentous winter of 1860-61, I spoke of the fact that when Colonel Sumner had been sent *via* the Isthmus of Panama to supersede him (Johnston) in the command of the Department of the Pacific in April, 1861, Sumner's berth in the steamer had been taken under an assumed name, so that the newspapers might not get

and divulge the fact of his departure on that errand in time for intelligence of it to reach the Pacific coast by the overland route, and lead General Johnston to act with a supposed powerful disunion party in California in a revolt against the Federal authority before Sumner's arrival. "Yes," answered the general, with much quiet feeling in his manner, "while distrusting me sufficiently to act thus toward me, my former adjutant-general, Fitz John Porter, was induced to write me of their great confidence in me, and to say that it was their purpose to place me in command of the Federal army, immediately next to General Scott." He had evidently been deeply hurt that his personal character had not shielded him from the suspicion of doing aught while holding a commission that could lead his superiors to suppose it necessary to undertake his superseding by stealth. (See p. 634.)

VI.

THE next morning, as the Confederate army, deployed in the three lines prescribed in the order of march and battle, moved before sunrise down the gentle wooded slope toward Shiloh Chapel, Generals Johnston and Beauregard, with the general staff as well as aids-de-camp, stood upon a slight eminence, delighted with the evident alacrity, animated faces, and elastic gait with which all moved forward into action. Hardly had the last line passed them before the rattle of musketry announced that Hardee's corps was engaged. General Johnston now informed General Beauregard that he would go to the front with the troops engaged, leaving General Beauregard to take the proper central position from which to direct the movement as the exigencies of the battle might require. Then General Johnston rode off with his personal staff exclusively, except possibly Major Gilmer, the chief engineer. Soon the sound of the battle became general; and as during the battle of Manassas I had been left at headquarters to send reinforcements into action as they came up by rail, I reminded General Beauregard of the fact, and requested to be dispatched to join General Johnston. He assented, and I set off, accompanied by my friend Colonel Jacob Thompson. In a little time I found that the corps commanders were ahead of or separated from a material part of their troops, whom I repeatedly found halted for want of orders. In all such cases, assuming the authority of my position, I gave the orders in the name of General Johnston. At one time I had with me the chiefs-of-staff of Polk, Bragg, and Hardee, Colonel David Urquhart, the chief aid-de-camp of Bragg, and Colonel William

Preston, the chief aid-de-camp of General Johnston, all of whom I employed in assisting to press the Confederate troops toward the heaviest firing, and to keep the batteries advancing. Colonels Preston and Urquhart remained with me the longer time and assisted greatly. Finally, however, Urquhart, learning from some of the troops encountered that he was in proximity to his chief, General Bragg, left me to join him, while I, accompanied by Colonel Preston, rode to the right wing in the direction of sharp battle. Soon we came in near view of a deserted Federal encampment in an open field, with a Federal battery of four or six guns unlimbered and horseless, while in advance of it were to be seen a brigade of Confederate troops at a halt. Urquhart now galloped up and informed me that, having found Bragg, that officer had sent him with the request that I should find some troops, and employ them to turn and capture some batteries just in his front which obstructed his advance. I at once pushed across a deep ravine with Urquhart and Preston to the troops in view, which proved to be Statham's brigade of the reserve under General Breckenridge; but because it belonged to the reserve, I hesitated to take the responsibility to employ it, and said so; however, asking Colonel Preston—the brother-in-law as well as aid-de-camp of General Johnston—the hour, he replied, from his watch, twenty minutes after two o'clock. I then said the battle ought to be won by that time, and "I think the reserve should be used." Colonel Preston expressed his agreement with me, and I rode at once to General Breckenridge, who was not far to the rear of his troops, surrounded by a number of officers. Addressing him, I said, "General, it is General Johnston's order that you advance and turn and take those batteries," pointing in the direction indicated by Urquhart, and where was to be heard the din of their discharges. As the order was given, General Breckenridge, clad in a well-fitting blouse of dark-colored Kentucky jeans, straightened himself in his stirrups. His dark eyes seemed to illuminate his swarthy, regular features, and as he sat in his saddle he seemed to me altogether the most impressive-looking man I ever saw.

I then turned, accompanied both by Urquhart and Preston, with the purpose of going to the camp and battery previously mentioned, and from that point to observe the movement. On reaching the ravine, which we had crossed, Colonel Preston, who possibly had just heard from some of the officers of the command just set in motion of General Johnston's recent presence with them, said to me, "I believe I will make another

attempt to find General Johnston," and rode down the ravine to the leftward, and as it so happened, did find General Johnston, but already unconscious, if not dead. He had received his death-wound with the very troops I had found standing at ordered arms, but who were unaware of it, and therefore were not, as has been written, brought to a stand-still by reason of it, and who were put in effective forward movement by me within twenty minutes after his wounding.

A striking incident of the first day's battle may be here mentioned for its novelty on battle-fields. A completely equipped Federal battery was so suddenly turned and environed by the Confederates, that it was captured with all the guns limbered up *en règle* for movement as upon drill, before its officers could possibly unlimber and use its guns in self-defense. The drivers were in their saddles, the gunners seated side by side in their places upon the ammunition-boxes of the caissons, grinning over the situation, and the officers with their swords drawn mounted on their horses. Not a horse had been disabled.

VII.

At the time of the reception of the order given late in the afternoon of the 6th of April by General Beauregard for his greatly disorganized advanced troops to withdraw from action and reorganize for the next day's operation, I had reached a point very close to the Tennessee River where it was densely wooded. The large ordnance of the gunboats were raking this position with their heavy projectiles, creating more noise, however, than harm to the Confederates, as they tore and crashed in all directions through the heavy forest. Riding slowly backward to the point at which I understood I should find General Beauregard, it was after sunset when I dismounted at the tent of a Federal officer, before which the general was standing with some of his staff and an officer in the uniform of a Federal general, to whom I was introduced. It was General Prentiss. Several hours previously a telegraphic dispatch addressed by Colonel Helm to General Johnston, as well as I now remember, from the direction of Athens, in Tennessee, was brought me from Corinth by a courier, reporting that scouts employed in observing General Buell's movements reported him to be marching not toward a junction with Grant, but in the direction of Decatur, North Alabama. This assuring dispatch I handed to General Beauregard, and then, at his order, I wrote a telegraphic report to the Confederate adjutant-general, Cooper,

at Richmond, announcing the results of the day, including the death of General Johnston.

Meanwhile, it had become so dark that I could barely see to write, and it was quite dark by the time that Generals Hardee and Breckenridge came to see General Beauregard for orders for the next day's operations. General Bragg, who had also come from the front, had taken up his quarters for the night in a tent which General Sherman had previously occupied near the Shiloh Chapel. This chapel was a rude log-hut of one story, only two or three hundred yards distant from the spot at which I had found General Beauregard. Leaving General Prentiss in my charge, General Beauregard soon after dark took up his quarters for the night with General Bragg. The corps commanders had meanwhile been personally directed to assemble their respective commands at the earliest possible moment in the morning to be ready for the final stroke.

Colonel Thompson and myself shared, with General Prentiss sandwiched between us, a rough makeshift of a bed made up of tents and captured blankets. Prentiss and Thompson had been old acquaintances, and the former talked freely of the battle, as also of the war, with a good deal of intelligence and good temper. With a laugh, he said: "You gentlemen have had your way to-day, but it will be very different to-morrow. You'll see! Buell will effect a junction with Grant to-night, and we'll turn the tables on you in the morning."

This was said evidently with sincerity, and was answered in the same spirit of good temper. I showed him the dispatch that had reached me on the field. He insisted, however, that it was a mistake, as we would see. Tired as we were with the day's work, sleep soon overtook and held us all until early dawn, when the firing first of musketry and then of field artillery roused us, and General Prentiss exclaimed: "Ah! Didn't I tell you so! That is Buell, you'll find!" And so it proved.

VIII.

Up to half-past two o'clock on the 7th of April, or second day's conflict, General Beauregard had his headquarters at the Shiloh Chapel or immediately at Sherman's former headquarters. The Confederate troops, now hardly 20,000 men, were all either directly in advance of that position or, on right and left of it, somewhat in advance, hotly engaged, only having receded from the places occupied during the night sufficiently to be better massed and organized for fighting. But our losses were swelling, and the straggling was growing more difficult to restrain. A little

after two o'clock, Governor Harris of Tennessee, who, after the death of General Johnston, had joined the staff of Beauregard in action, taking me aside, asked if I did not regard the day as going against us irremediably, and whether there was not danger in tarrying so long in the field as to be unable to withdraw in good order. I answered that I thought it would soon be our proper course to retreat. Having an opportunity a moment later to speak to General Beauregard in private, I brought the subject before him in almost these words:

"General, do you not think our troops are very much in the condition of a lump of sugar thoroughly soaked with water, but yet preserving its original shape, though ready to dissolve? Would it not be judicious to get away with what we have?"

"I intend to withdraw in a few moments," was his reply.

Calling upon his aids-de-camp present, he dispatched them with orders to the several

corps commanders to begin the rearward movement. He also directed me to collect as many of the broken organizations as I could,—both of infantry and artillery,—post them in the best position I might find, and hold it until the whole army had passed rearward of it. Such a position I quickly found on an elevated ridge in full view of the chapel and the ground to the right and left of it, and also somewhat more elevated, rising abruptly toward the enemy and receding gently toward Corinth. There I collected and posted some two thousand infantry, making them lie down and rest. I also placed in battery some twelve or fifteen guns, so as to sweep the approach from the direction of the enemy. There also I remained until after four o'clock, or until all the Confederate forces had retired, General Breckenridge's troops being the last, and without seeing a single Federal soldier. I then retired, carrying from the field the caissons loaded down with muskets and rifles picked from the field.

Thomas Jordan.

MEMORANDA ON THE CIVIL WAR.

The Offer of Union Command to General A. S. Johnston.

[THE following statement was written in response to an inquiry by us as to the details of the offer of high command referred to in the two foregoing papers.—ED.]

The circumstances which gave rise to the expressed desire of the administration in 1861 to retain General Albert Sidney Johnston in the Federal army were as follows:

Early in April, 1861, while on duty in the adjutant-general's office in Washington, I learned that Colonel Sumner had been dispatched *incog.* to California, with secret orders to assume command of the department of the Pacific, and that this unusual course had been prompted by the fear that the forts and arsenals and garrisons on that coast would be placed in the hands of the secessionists by General Johnston, the then commander, who was reported to be arranging to do so.

I had just received a letter from General Johnston expressing his pleasure at the large and handsome parade of State troops in San Francisco, on February 22d, and at the undoubted loyalty to the Union cause of the whole Pacific coast, and also his earnest hope that the patriotic spirit manifested in California existed as strongly in all other States, and would as surely be maintained by them as it would be in the Pacific States in case of attempted secession.

Fearing the effect of the superseding orders upon a high-toned and sensitive officer, one whom I esteemed as a brother, and earnestly desired to be secured to our cause, I induced Major McDowell to show the letter to Secretary Cameron, and to urge every effort to keep General Johnston from leaving the service. His

superior qualifications, his influence among prominent citizens at the South, and especially among his relatives in his native State, Kentucky,—which it was exceedingly desirable to keep in the Union,—were strong inducements to these efforts. My desire was met as cordially and earnestly as it existed, and I was authorized to send, as I did through my friend "Ben Holliday," in New York, for transmission by telegraph to St. Louis, and thence by his "pony express" to San Francisco, the following message: "I take the greatest pleasure in assuring you, for the Secretary of War, that he has the utmost confidence in you, and will give you the most important command and trust on your arrival here. Sidney is appointed to the Military Academy." This message reached General Johnston after the arrival of Colonel Sumner.

In response to the above, and by the same channel of communication, I received this message: "I thank you and my friends for efforts in my behalf. I have resigned and resolved to follow the fortunes of my State." His letter of resignation was soon received, and put an end to all hope, especially as Texas—which had then seceded—was his adopted State.

I felt in 1861, as I now know, that the assertion that General Johnston intended to turn over to the secessionists the defenses of California, or any part of the regular army, was false and absurd. Under no circumstances, even if intended, could such a plan have succeeded, especially with the regular army. But no such breach of trust was intended, nor would any graduate of West Point in the army have committed or permitted it. It had no better foundation than the statement of Senator Conness of California, who three years later urged and secured the assignment of Gen-