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Shiloh holds a special place in my heart. My parents began taking me there when I was seven, and since then I have had the privilege of visiting, working at, and living on the Shiloh National Military Park. Many memories stand out, not the least of which are working for the National Park Service and living for several years in park housing right on the battlefield. Leading tours with the likes of Charles P. Roland and John F. Marszalek were special treats as well. Another fond memory is standing with Shiloh historians Wiley Sword and James Lee McDonough, along with others such as present Fort Donelson National Battlefield superintendent Brian McCutchen, at Albert Sidney Johnston’s death site(s) on the afternoon of April 6, 2012, exactly 150 years to the time of his death. Ironically, while I had numerous ancestors inside Vicksburg (and that battlefield definitely holds a special meaning to me), I had no one at Shiloh. But it is still my most beloved battlefield.

Perhaps that is the reason I have spent a good deal of my historical career studying the battle and battlefield. Over the years I have written nearly a score of articles and chapters in books, published two volumes of essays, coedited the famous Cunningham manuscript, and written or edited four other books on Shiloh’s battle and battlefield. Yet I could never bring myself to write a full battle history—until now. Fortunately, those detailed essays and articles have been extremely helpful in fashioning this more general narrative, and readers who desire more specifics on my thinking in the present book should consult those earlier texts.

Why another book on Shiloh? Foremost, the literature on the battle, while respectable, is not nearly as exhaustive as that of Gettysburg or even other battles. There have been, to be sure, a number of volumes that treat the battle in various ways, from novels to guides and many in between, but there have only been four major academic studies to date, by historians Edward Cunningham, Wiley Sword, James L. McDonough,
and Larry Daniel. The freshest research is that of Daniel (Cunningham’s was written in the 1960s though only published in 2007), and it is now nearly twenty years old.¹

There is plenty new to say. Even with the major books already in print, I hope to add several major attributes in this present study. One is a new way of organizing the battle. Civil War buffs and even some historians regularly comment about how fluid and confusing Shiloh was. Veteran Manning Force rightly commented, “A combat made up of numberless separate encounters of detached portions of broken lines, continually shifting position and changing direction in the forest and across ravines, filling an entire day, is almost incapable of a connected narrative.” Another veteran, Lewis M. Hosea, added a particularly adept view of the confusion of Shiloh:

It was impossible for commanders of large bodies to obtain a comprehensive view of the field so as to perceive and provide intelligently for the varying exigencies of the battle as it progressed. They could only guess the swaying movements of the fight by sounds of musketry and the chance reports of messengers, who could locate nothing by fixed monuments. Nor could the men in ranks, or even regimental officers, see beyond a limited distance; and the direction of enfilading or turning movements could be discovered only by the course of bullets among the trees or the tearing of the ground by solid shot or shell.²

Obviously, we have a little better overall understanding today than the men on the ground had in the midst of the fighting, but Shiloh is still confusing. By tying the action to the terrain and using physical features to organize the battle into phases and sectors within those phases, however, I hope readers will come away from this book with a clearer understanding of how the action unfolded in time and space. I also hope readers will gain an understanding of just how important terrain was at Shiloh; it was, in my mind, one of the two chief determining factors (the other being Ulysses S. Grant) of victory and defeat. William T. Sherman later summed up the terrain’s significance: “On any other [ground] we surely would have been overwhelmed.”³

Another major goal of this book is to spend nearly as much time on the second day’s fighting as on the first. We already know there was heavy action on the second day, with one Illinoisan writing that the fighting “commenced at day break & lasted with one continual stunning
roar until 4 p.m.” Yet most historians have given the second day less attention; indeed, each of the main studies on Shiloh gives the second day less than 10 percent of its text. Attendant to this lack of examination is the idea that the second day was a done deal and really did not matter. In examining this second day in detail within the context of the overall battle, I argue that it was not a done deal and that it was much more important to the central battle than is often thought.4

Last, Shiloh was not fought in a vacuum, and there were numerous social ramifications of the battle. Whereas other historians, particularly Larry Daniel, have sought to place the battle in its correct political and economic context, I chose to use my limited space not in rehashing what has already been argued and published but in examining other social aspects of Shiloh. Thus, I have put much emphasis on the soldiers themselves, letting them tell the story through their own words, and on the local population and how the battle affected them. I hope readers will come away with a heightened sense of just how important Shiloh was to the civilians in the area and to the Civil War’s strategic situation.

Many people have aided me in the process of writing this book. The many archivists at the various repositories were extremely helpful in providing materials in a timely and friendly manner. Historian friends also provided material they came across, especially Bjorn Skaptason and Chris Slocombe. Others offered items from their private collections, including Wiley Sword, who made a large quantity of letters and documents available to me, and Van Hedges, David Raith (descendant of Julius Raith), and Stephen E. Williams. Superintendent John Bundy and his staff at the Shiloh National Military Park deserve special mention. As a ranger there several years ago, I had the good fortune to discuss the battle daily with many of them. The current staff made my many research visits worthwhile, including Ashley Berry, Joe Davis, Heather Henson, Paul Holloway, Chris Mekow, Jim Minor, Tom Parson, and Charlie Spearman. Chief ranger Stacy Allen made the entire park’s collection available to me, and we had numerous enjoyable (and lengthy) discussions both in person and on the telephone, as well as via email, on the finer points of the battle.

I have been extremely fortunate to have had several historians read the manuscript for me, including my mentor, John F. Marszalek. His attention to detail and grammar was extremely helpful. Several historians
affiliated or formerly affiliated with the Shiloh National Military Park
also read the manuscript and made wonderful suggestions. Tom Parson
and Jim Minor, both at the Corinth Civil War Interpretive Center and
experts on Shiloh, read the manuscript and offered several revisions,
as did former ranger and current Abraham Lincoln Bookshop historian
Bjorn Skaptason. Stacy Allen is a wealth of knowledge on Shiloh, and
his detailed comments helped me fine-tune the manuscript, especially
in terms of timing issues. I would venture to say there is not a lot that
Marszalek, Parson, Minor, Skaptason, and Allen collectively do not
know about Shiloh, and their assistance is very much appreciated. Any
remaining errors of fact or interpretation are strictly my own.

Working with the University Press of Kansas has once again been a
joy. Editor in chief Mike Briggs is extremely good at what he does, and
he shepherded this project through the process with great skill and care.
Kelly Chrisman Jacques ushered the manuscript through production
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My family has been a constant source of support and love, and I
praise and thank God daily for them and all the many other blessings
in my life. My parents continue to support my various efforts; my dad
once again aided me in the research for this volume. Life would not be
complete without Kelly, Mary Kate, and Leah Grace. I can only hope
dedicating this book to them and my parents will express in some small
way my love for them.

Timothy B. Smith
Adamsville, Tennessee
Today, the area around Pittsburg Landing on the Tennessee River is a majestic national park, groomed to beautification and maintained to high standards by the National Park Service. Tens of thousands of visitors from all across the world visit the park annually. It was not always that way, however, and in the spring of 1862 it was merely home to a hard-luck population that would soon have their world torn apart.

The area that would become the Shiloh battlefield has been continuously inhabited for centuries, with the first known population leaving earthen mounds to mark their gathering places. That early population obviously declined, to be replaced by descendents who became the Chickasaw people, but by the early decades of the 1820s white men had begun to settle there as well. Statehood came to Tennessee in 1796, but the wilds of western Tennessee were not fully opened until treaties with the Chickasaw allowed a deluge of settlers into the area around 1820. Created in 1819, Hardin County became the southernmost county astride the river, although only a small strip of land west of the river was included. Yet that small strip was destined for national prominence.¹

Most early settlement in the county took place east of the river, where the county seat of Savannah grew on the east bank, but some families began to move to the west side as the years passed. The state granted land west of the river to locals beginning in 1832, when John Chambers took 200 acres at a small landing site on the west side that would eventually become known as Pittsburg. Chambers did little with his land and in fact lost his claim, and it was not until 1843 that Thomas B. Stubbs took the same 200-acre grant. By that time, other men had gained grants to parcels inland from the landing—settlers such as Larkin Bell (October 1836), Peter Spain (February 1840), Robert Grissom (June 1840), and John J. Ellis (June 1841). Jason Cloud and Jacob Wolfe also took grants later in the 1840s, and other families moved to the area after
buying some of the original granted land. Wolfe, for instance, sold land to John Rhea (also spelled Rea and Rey) and James M. Jones. Those secondhand owners likewise sold portions of their titles to still others, such as John C. Fraley, who bought a plot from Jones in January 1860. These families, whose names would become so famous in history, were soon joined by others taking additional grants, including Lewis Wicker (May 1849) and Nancy Stacy (January 1851).2

The inhabitants soon forged a small society, with social, religious, and economic bonds tying them together as a community. The settlers built a Methodist Episcopal church as early as 1835, naming it, ironically, Union. It stood near the crossing of two roads that had developed, the main road southwestward into Mississippi and the road that paralleled the river on the west side. Unfortunately, the tug of sectionalism caused by slavery affected even the isolated people west of the river when the Methodist denomination split over the issue in 1844. Baptists did the same thing around the same time, and Presbyterians would do likewise a little later. The split affected the community as political persuasions melded into religious and social concerns. There was enough antislavery feeling to keep the Union church in operation at least for a time while the proslavery Methodists moved farther inland on the road running southwestward and built a new church in 1851 on land John J. Ellis donated for a school and new church. Unable to think of a fitting name, the Methodists allowed the local schoolmaster, A. J. Poindexter, to name it, and he chose the Hebrew term Shiloh. Its meaning—a gathering place with a connotation of peace and tranquility—was fitting for the new church.3

As the population on the western side of the river grew, more accommodations began to appear, including a few cabins and a store on Stubbs’s land on the river. Pittser “Pitts” Miller Tucker soon opened a store and a ferry at the landing site, playing to a river clientele with a tavern as well. The landing eventually became known as Pittsburg Landing, and business grew as river traffic increased, a result of mechanization being instilled into the isolated region by the industrial revolution. Still, the isolated county only grew slowly. The county population was merely 8,000 by 1848. Other landings along the river, such as Crump’s, Brown’s, and Hamburg, also grew, with small communities developing around each one. Yet Pittsburg Landing soon became the most important, supplying residents in northern Mississippi where a small town emerged in the mid-1850s at Corinth. The landing was suf-
ficiently deep to allow commerce even in the highest of floods, making it ideal for almost year-round use. Major roads radiating outward from the landing area ran to all points of the compass.\(^4\)

The Pittsburg Landing community continually grew so that by 1860 some thirty or forty different families lived nearby. Many of the first-generation settlers had died or moved away; John Rhea died of a heart attack in 1848 while fetching water from the spring that still bears his name. Other initial landowners such as Jacob Wolfe, John J. Ellis, and Jason Cloud were likewise no longer around, nor were the Tucker brothers, including Pitts, who by this time had moved southward to Corinth, Mississippi. A few of the earliest settlers such as Lewis Seay still inhabited the area, but new owners including Joseph Duncan, Daniel Davis, and William C. Barnes had also moved in.\(^5\)

Most of these men worked the land as best they could, but there was also an assortment of skilled workers such as shoe and boot maker W. T. Stratton, weaver Patsy Fifis, carpenter George McCrary, and well digger Charles Hopkins. Zachariah Pickins listed his occupation on the 1860 census as a squatter. John W. Sowell wrote that he was a “farmer and officer,” apparently in some type of militia or local police force. These families were thoroughly Southern, having mostly been born farther east in Tennessee or in one of the other slaveholding states. No one in the voting district had been born in a free state, although Thomas Walker in a neighboring district hailed from England.\(^6\)

These farmers had a hard time trying to make a living on land ill suited for agriculture. One resident later admitted, “A more unprofitable spot of land, perhaps, could not have been selected . . . for a battleground, . . . with less loss to the county.” There were a few early slaveholders such as John C. Rhea and Thomas W. Poindexter, but no plantation agriculture existed in this area west of the river; only eight people in the voting district owned twenty-three slaves in 1860, an average of three slaves each. Joseph Duncan and John C. Fraley each owned one, Lewis Wicker, Dudley Jones, and W.G. Wood owned two each, and Margaret Shelby owned three. James J. Fraley and R. G. Wood were the largest owners, with five and seven, respectively. In addition, these farmers owned horses, cows, and mules or oxen, with the larger landowners such as M. G. Wood, J. G. W. Hagy, H. A. Pettigrew, J. A. Perry, Lewis Seay, and Mary Howell owning more than the others. Swine and sheep were also major commodities, with John C. Fraley having upwards of sixty pigs. These farmers grew mostly corn, while some branched out
into wheat, peas, and sweet and Irish potatoes. A few such as M. G. Wood, R. G. Wood, Lewis Seay, and H. A. Pettigrew grew cotton, but it was not a major cash crop. Only three farmers raised tobacco. Others produced beeswax and honey, and most had some type of orchard.7

As would be expected of an isolated frontier community, most of these farmers lived in crude log cabins set within their cleared farm fields. Most cabins contained only one room and a loft, but it had to accommodate the entire family and at times a few live-in hands. Only the Cantrell house near Lick Creek had any superiority. One observer noted that it was a “white, frame dwelling-house of some pretension for that region.” In addition to their cabins, many locals had outlying buildings such as barns, outhouses, and well houses, although the numerous fresh springs in the hills and hollows allowed for an abundance of fresh water. The fields were fenced—not to keep animals in but to keep them out of their crops. The locals allowed their animals to roam the open range, which had the effect of clearing much of the nearby woods of heavy undergrowth. A definite community aspect thus developed around the Shiloh area, with most of the inhabitants worshiping together at Shiloh Church, trading at the landing store, attending each others’ burials in the church or family cemeteries, and sons wooing neighbors’ daughters. For example, Manse George wooed and wed Nancy Bell, daughter of Sarah Bell, who lived on the next ridge along the road running parallel with the river.8

Whether regarded as idyllic or not, this small frontier community was not so isolated as to be immune from larger national politics. When Tennessee began to talk of secession, the people of Hardin County voted twice against leaving the Union, although what secession sentiment there was resided west of the river. War nevertheless erupted, but these isolated country folk saw or heard little of it through the first year. War talk mainly concerned what was happening farther north and recruitment activities in the area. Then in the spring of 1862, war came to these people, and it came with a vengeance.9

The inhabitants of Shiloh stood front and center in the path that armies would take. Their unenviable position, although they were isolated and of little importance, was attributable to the growing phenomenon that was the industrial revolution. The transportation and communication revolutions between the 1820s and 1840s resulted in mechanization of transportation on water and land, with steamboats and railroads developing swiftly and efficiently. By 1860, both would indwell the United
States and change how war was perceived and fought. Thus, while most of the initial year’s fighting occurred far to the north, by the spring of 1862 the Federals, utilizing steamboat transportation on the Tennessee River, were pursuing their goal of breaking key Confederate railroads that crossed at Corinth, Mississippi.

Between those two key transportation byways was a twenty or so mile stretch of land on which the fate of the nation would partially be determined. That is exactly where the unfortunate inhabitants of the Shiloh region lived.¹⁰
Shiloh
1

“A Grand Design”

Majestically, it flows even today in its great valley, draining two-thirds of the North American continent and providing shipping, sustenance, and livelihood for millions of Americans. But it was even more important 150 years ago. The Mississippi River, affectionately termed the Father of Waters, has long been a staple of American strength, might, and economic power, and its possession has caused normally level-headed men to make significant decisions and choices they normally would not make, or even need to make. To control the river and its great valley, nations would go to war.

After its discovery by Europeans, the river dominated the minds of explorers, settlers, and even kings thousands of miles away in a giant chess game of strategy and intellect. European nations battled with one another over its control and that of its major tributaries such as the Missouri, Ohio, and Red. Of utmost importance was its great port, New Orleans. Once the United States became a force in North America, its leaders likewise vied for control of the river. Thomas Jefferson more than doubled the small nation’s size when he bought the land it drained, Lewis and Clark became American conquerors when they explored the valley and its tributaries, and Andrew Jackson became a legitimate American hero when he defended the great valley at New Orleans.¹

Yet the river and its valley were destined for more tension as North and South divided, this time breaking it up not by east and west factions on either bank, as had long been the case, but in north and south demarcations. The upper region was not about to let its great trade route flow through another country, and both sides quickly jockeyed for position. Both the Mississippi and Louisiana secession conventions passed ordinances as early as January 1861 that said they “recognize[d] the right of the free navigation of the Mississippi River,” and Braxton Bragg easily
saw the importance of the river valley, early on remarking that the river was “of more importance to us than all the country together.” Many northwestern states passed resolutions stating they would fight the creation of a new nation that would hinder travel on the great river, but perhaps William T. Sherman, destined to be one of the major actors in the growing Civil War, summed up the Northern feeling best. He remarked, “To secure the safety of the navigation of the Mississippi River I would slay millions. On that point I am not only insane, but mad. Fortunately, the great West is with me there.”

When secession came, the stage was set for major military operations in the Mississippi Valley as both sides, acting in part according to the famed but debated Anaconda Plan, sought to control the great river and its tributaries. The fighting would be long and hard, requiring over two years of battles and countless thousands of lives at places such as Vicksburg, Fort Donelson, and New Orleans. The largest and perhaps most significant battle in this complex and lengthy struggle over the river valley, however, would come ironically at an insignificant location not even on the river itself, but along one of its tributaries: Shiloh.

Ironically for the Confederacy, the Mississippi River and other transportation corridors posed a major problem. Flowing as it did southward from Union territory, the river provided a wide, trusted, and year-round axis of advance into the middle of the Confederacy. Realizing that the river would likely be fought over, Confederate strategists quickly began to build defenses that would, they hoped, keep the valley safely in Confederate hands. A makeshift defensive line emerged all across the Confederacy, but the major problem spot was the area between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River. A vast expanse of over 400 miles, the western Confederacy also contained other major transportation routes, also aiming like daggers into the chest of the Confederacy. Most significant were the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers, which were actually tributaries of the Ohio, which was itself a tributary of the Mississippi. Railroads likewise pierced the western Confederacy’s defensive line, most notably the Louisville and Nashville Railroad. The Cumberland Gap on the eastern portion of this line also offered a route of invasion.

With such a defensive challenge, Confederate leaders thought they had three things on their side in 1861. One was a reliance on fixed for-
tifications, something the United States had depended on for its entire history. Confederate politicians and military leaders, most notably Tennessee’s governor, Isham G. Harris, began to build fortifications along these rivers and railroads. Second was Kentucky, which early on declared its neutrality, offering a buffer zone along the long and vulnerable Tennessee border. Third was Albert Sidney Johnston, who resigned his position as commander of the United States Department of the Pacific in California and offered his services to his friend Jefferson Davis. Johnston was perhaps the most regarded commander in the old army, with one Texan writing, “Gen. J. was tall, dark, and stern-looking, I think the grandest looking man I have ever seen.” He had served in Texas and against the Mormons in Utah, and many in the Mississippi Valley petitioned Jefferson Davis to utilize him in their most important theater. “I hoped and expected that I had others who would prove generals,” Davis remembered, “but I knew I had one, and that was Sidney Johnston.”

Johnston went to work with a will and soon fashioned a semblance of a line across the western expanse. While his command also included the area to the west, his main concern was east of the Mississippi River. Johnston placed Leonidas Polk at Columbus, Kentucky, after that general invaded Kentucky and broke its neutrality in September 1861. Around this area was fought the small battle at Belmont, Missouri, on November 7 against a lower-level Union general, Ulysses S. Grant. Johnston’s line continued to the east to the command of Lloyd Tilghman and his small forts on the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers, Fort Henry and Fort Donelson. Later a third fort was situated on better ground on the Tennessee River, Fort Heiman. Farther eastward, Johnston himself made his headquarters in southern Kentucky at Bowling Green, where eventually a small force under William J. Hardee garrisoned that place and defended against any Union movement down the rail line toward Nashville. Farther to the east, another small Confederate force under George B. Crittenden and Felix K. Zollicoffer defended the Cumberland Gap region from any Union incursions into East Tennessee.

All three of these major factors in which the western Confederates placed their trust failed. Fixed field fortifications, especially along rivers, proved too easily turned and captured. Likewise, with Polk’s invasion of Kentucky, it was no longer a buffer zone and Federal forces soon flooded into the state. Even Albert Sidney Johnston was not the major asset many, including Jefferson Davis, had envisioned. In fact, by early 1862, after a series of debacles on the twin rivers, many poli-
ticians and Confederate leaders were calling for his removal. Jefferson Davis was Johnston’s friend, but he had not done him a favor when he assigned him to command Department Number Two, the vast and indefensible area straddling the Mississippi Valley. Though not by choice, Davis gave Johnston pitifully few troops with which to defend the region. Johnston was thus in a no-win situation. He needed to be a miracle worker to fulfill the expectations of him.7

The major cause for concern over Johnston came with the surprising Federal victories early in 1862. With more men, and the ability to pick their avenue of advance while Johnston had to defend all points, the Federals had only to find capable leaders to break Johnston’s line. Abraham Lincoln tried a number of officers in the west, including John C. Fremont, but finally settled on Henry W. Halleck for the Mississippi Valley command. Old Brains, as Halleck was later termed, was certainly capable of the planning a department command entailed. He was at the time America’s foremost military thinker, having translated Jomini’s famous work and compiled his own entitled *Elements of Military Art and Science* (1846). The other major western department, the Department of the Ohio, had a continual revolving door of commanding officers, including Fort Sumter’s famed Robert Anderson, William T. Sherman, who openly argued that the war in the west would take hundreds of thousands of lives and years to complete and was labeled crazy, and Don Carlos Buell.8

Small actions resulted, including Wilson’s Creek, Belmont, and Mill Springs, but most attention remained on the Mississippi Valley, where Halleck confronted Leonidas Polk’s bastion at Columbus. Polk labeled it “well-nigh impregnable,” while Halleck termed it the “Gibraltar of the West.” It was in fact so defensible that Halleck and his commanders began to think of alternatives to get around it. Although it is not known exactly who came up with the idea, all sources nevertheless pointed to the same idea of breaking the Confederate line to the east and bypassing Columbus. The plan emerged of using the parallel Tennessee River rather than the Mississippi River as the southward axis of advance. The idea soon caught on at Halleck’s headquarters. Slowly brought back into service after a rest, William T. Sherman later told how he, George W. Cullum, and Halleck were plotting strategy on a map one night in December 1861. Halleck asked the engineer Cullum to draw the Confeder-
ate line in his department, which he did from Columbus to Forts Henry and Donelson and on to Bowling Green. Then Halleck asked, “Where is the proper place to break it?” The response was, “Naturally the center.” Halleck took a blue pencil and drew a line perpendicular to the Confederate line at the center. Sherman marveled at how “it coincided nearly with the general course of the Tennessee River.” Halleck informed his men, “That’s the true line of operations.”9

For all his intuitive brilliance, however, Halleck would not reap the glory for his plan; it would instead go to a little-known subordinate, Ulysses S. Grant. Unlike many who suffered through the war years, Grant came out of the conflict changed for the better. He went into the war as a failure, barely able to provide adequately for his family. Fortunately, Grant’s home congressman from Galena, Illinois, Elihu Washburne, was watching over him, gathering for Grant a brigadier general’s star and putting him in position to achieve great triumphs.10

Opportunity was all Grant needed. Even as action increased along the Confederate defensive line, most notably at Mill Springs on January 19 where George H. Thomas broke Johnston’s right flank, Grant investigated the twin rivers and their Confederate fortifications. When he mentioned a plan to take Fort Henry to Halleck, he was rebuffed. The “crestfallen” Grant nevertheless continued to plan even as Halleck warmed to the idea that had already been congealing in his mind. Halleck ultimately allowed Grant to make the attempt on February 1, and Grant set off the next day.11

The next fifteen days made Grant a national hero. He promptly neutralized Forts Henry and Heiman on February 6, with the navy carrying the majority of the load. Before Halleck could recall him, Grant sent word he was heading to take Donelson as well. Although he moved slower than he had planned thanks to rough, wintry weather, he did so by February 16, nabbing not only the fort but also the majority of the garrison, some 14,000 troops. Grant confronted mediocre Confederate generals such as Gideon Pillow, John B. Floyd, and Kentuckian Simon Bolivar Buckner, but in the process of taking both rivers and three forts, Grant became a hero, mainly with his “no terms except unconditional and immediate surrender” response to Buckner. Americans took to calling him “Unconditional Surrender Grant” because of his initials “U. S.” Similarly, after hearing that Grant calmly smoked a cigar during the fighting, admirers sent him boxes of cigars, no doubt unwittingly promoting the throat cancer that would eventually take his life years later.12
In the larger context, Grant had outflanked both ends of the Confederate line. Of obvious importance was the almost immediate fall of Nashville, Tennessee’s capital. The debacle at Donelson doomed the city, and Johnston later wrote how he “determined to fight for Nashville at Donelson, and gave the best part of my army to do it.” Similarly, the fall of Nashville and Federal control of the Cumberland River doomed Bowling Green. With Federal troops now as close to the city as Hardee and Johnston were, Johnston had to withdraw to keep from becoming trapped north of the Cumberland River. He issued the necessary orders to retreat as early as February 8, just two days after Fort Henry fell, obviously thinking Donelson was also doomed: “The slight resistance at Fort Henry indicates that the best open earthworks are not reliable to meet successfully a vigorous attack of iron-clad gunboats.” Ironically, it was Grant’s field army that doomed the fort, and news of the Donelson disaster reached Nashville after glorious accounts of victory. The mood of the city quickly changed, ushering in looting and crime. Making it worse, Hardee and Johnston marched through on February 17, and with them went all normality. One surgeon watched in horror, writing in his diary how “very many persons left the city in vehicles—many on cars—the Gov. & Legislature decamped—Nashville was a panic stricken city.” Federal troops soon arrived—first gunboats, then a division of Buell’s army hurriedly sent to Grant to reinforce the army at Donelson. An upstaged Buell reported that William “Bull” Nelson landed “before I was aware of it.”

Yet Grant’s victorious actions netted him trouble as well. Elated at the victories, Halleck nevertheless thought he had to rein in his newly crowned hero. Halleck and Grant seemed to speak different languages, especially when military protocol was concerned, and Halleck thought Grant was a sloppy administrator and commander, even if he did win battles. Halleck wanted things done by the book, and of course he had written the book. The many stories of “the want of order and discipline” in Grant’s army after Fort Donelson particularly concerned Halleck. Thus Halleck pounced when a breakdown in communication occurred and news arrived of Grant’s going into a different department. He took his concerns all the way to general in chief George McClellan, who gave Halleck permission to remove Grant if needed. Halleck even cheaply mentioned that Grant was reputedly up to his old habits, which the prewar army officer McClellan knew full well meant that Grant was back on the bottle. Grant was thus shocked when he received orders.
on March 4 to put the tactical army under the command of Charles F. Smith and to return to Fort Henry to act as the strategic commander of upcoming operations. Halleck added a biting scold: “Why do you not obey my orders to report strength and positions of your command?”

Many in Grant’s army came to his support, with the general receiving a combined letter from W. H. L. Wallace, Leonard F. Ross, Adolph Schwartz, and John A. McClernand, among others. The officers wrote, “We have heard with deep regret of your having been deposed from your authority as Commander in the field of the forces in this district,” and went on to say, “you have slain more of the enemy, taken more prisoners and trophies, lost more men in battle, and regained more territory to the Union than any other leader.” Others took up for Grant as well, including eventually Lincoln himself. Halleck reinstated him.

Although the fall of Donelson, its substantial garrison, and Tennessee’s capital all fittingly gathered attention in the press, it was perhaps the flanking of the other end of the Confederate line that was of more strategic importance. Grant’s twin river victories also outflanked Columbus, Kentucky, which the Confederates soon evacuated. The effects were immediate for Nashville, but it would be several weeks before Polk actually left Columbus. Evacuate he did, however, leaving the grand Gibraltar blocking the Mississippi Valley in Union hands.

While the behind-the-lines Union bickering was taking place, other, more important actions were going forward. Halleck backed down on the Grant issue, but he won another dispute with fellow department commander Buell. Both Halleck and Buell had been pestering McClellan and the War Department that there needed to be a unified command out west, and each recommended himself to be that commander. Halleck was able to claim that it was in his department that most of the victories were being won, and he argued that the Tennessee River was “now the great strategic line of the Western Campaign.” Halleck even went so far as to tell McClellan, “You will regret your decision against me on this point.” Ultimately, Halleck’s insistence paid off; Lincoln made him the new Department of the Mississippi commander on March 11, with Grant commanding the Department of West Tennessee (with the army by the same name, although it is commonly referred to by its more famous and later name, Army of the Tennessee) and Buell commanding the Department of the Ohio.
With the shift of power to Halleck, the scene of future action also shifted from middle Tennessee back to Halleck’s Mississippi Valley. In fact, once Nashville fell, all eyes turned to the Tennessee River and its path deep into Confederate territory. Grant, for example, wrote of his plans immediately after Fort Henry fell, telling Halleck that he intended to capture Fort Donelson and then to return to the Tennessee for future operations: “I shall regard it [Fort Donelson] more in the light of an advance grand guard than as a permanent post.” Geography also played a major role in the decisions. Unlike the Cumberland River, which made a shallow sweep into Confederate-held territory in middle Tennessee, the Tennessee River had a much longer arc and thus a much deeper sweep that extended all the way into the cotton states themselves: northern Mississippi and Alabama. Because the river flowed generally south to north across the entire state of Tennessee, it provided Federal armies a good avenue into those Deep South states. Obviously the taking of Fort Henry had turned Columbus and made it untenable, but now that the campaign and the operations against Fort Donelson were over, Halleck began to ponder how far southward to advance along the Tennessee before crossing back over to the Mississippi River for continued operations along that line. Looking ahead, Halleck could see where the problem was: the site where the Tennessee River made a great turn eastward away from the Mississippi Valley. Nearby was the crossing point of two major Confederate railroads. Halleck thus reported to Washington as early as March 6 that Confederate general P. G. T. Beauregard was present and using those railroads to concentrate at Corinth, Mississippi. He ominously warned, “He will make a Manassas out of it.”

By this time the Federals were privy to ample information about the Tennessee River. Lieutenant Ledyard Phelps had led three timberclads, the *Tyler*, *Lexington*, and *Conestoga*, southward along the Tennessee River immediately after Fort Henry fell, destroying boats, supplies, and bridges. He also located a nearly completed Confederate ironclad at Cerro Gordo, with valuable timber and iron strewn along the bank, ready to be used. Phelps ultimately reached Florence, Alabama, but was turned back there by shoals. He returned with a vast array of intelligence and information about major Unionist feeling in the area.

Other Federal expeditions followed in the coming weeks. One such voyage precipitated a small fight with a land force on the west side of the river on March 1. The timberclads *Tyler* and *Lexington* were patrolling the Tennessee River south of Savannah when they found an enemy force
on a high bluff about nine miles south of town. They learned that the Confederate force was situated on the eighty-foot bluffs at Pittsburg Landing. One anxious soldier aboard the boats remembered the initial confrontation: “The engines slowed down,” the soldier on the *Tyler* remembered, “the wheels revolving just sufficiently to hold the vessel nearly motionless against the current.” Lieutenant William Gwin, the gunboat’s commander, appeared “in complete uniform, with his sword by his side.” Gwin peered through his field glasses as a puff of cannon smoke from the heights appeared. A moment later, a shell flew directly over the *Tyler* and splashed in the water astern. The *Tyler* and *Lexington* promptly returned fire.20

The artillery was Gibson’s Louisiana Battery, supported by Colonel Alfred Mouton’s 18th Louisiana. They told a local farmer they intended “to put a stop to these Yankee Gun Boats coming up the river [and] that they intended to sink every one of them.” The gunboats opened fire on the bluff and the troops, prompting the farmer who lived just inland from the landing to think it “best to move the women folks farther off.” The farmer related that the Louisianans soon had the same idea: they “came running back with their cannon saying their cannon balls could not even knock off the paint from the gun-boats.” At least the Confederates hit the timberclads; Lieutenant James Shirk on the *Lexington* remembered that the enemy artillery “was exceedingly well directed;” and one of the Illinoisans wrote that the fire peppered the smokestacks and pilothouse, “marks which she bore to the close of the war.” To make sure all was silenced, Gwin sent four boats full of sailors and soldiers ashore at the landing; all the soldiers hailed from the onboard 32nd Illinois. The troops moved inland and burned one of the three small cabins that had been used by the enemy, but the Louisianans held their ground at the wood line. The Federals scrambled back to the boats while the gunboats provided covering fire. While ashore, one Federal interestingly captured a drum labeled, “Captured from the Yankees at Manassas.” Not to be outdone, the Louisianans peppered the gunboats with more musketry. Gwin wrote that his boats were “perfectly riddled with balls,” but the Confederates soon retired again under the heavy naval fire.21

The Federal gunboats were but the first wave of Union vessels that soon ascended the Tennessee River. Halleck had decided the true line
of operations was southward on the Tennessee, with the goal to break the Confederate railroads in the area. Two major Confederate railroads traversed the tristate area, the east–west Memphis and Charleston and the north–south Mobile and Ohio. Both were critical to the Confederate war effort. Jefferson Davis’s first secretary of war, Leroy Pope Walker, described them as the “vertebrae of the Confederacy.” Halleck wanted both cut. Over time, the necessity of taking their crossing point also emerged, with Halleck’s officers writing as early as late February that “Corinth, the junction of the Mobile with the Memphis Railroad, becomes an important objective point.” Halleck thus pointed his command under Smith toward the great bend in the Tennessee River in northern Mississippi and Alabama. Halleck also ordered Buell at Nashville to move to Savannah, allowing him to march overland instead of moving by water, as Halleck had suggested. Still, as unified commander, he was concentrating his forces by the book.22

What would become known as the Army of the Tennessee thus snaked its way southward on the Tennessee River, covered by land expeditions out of Fort Henry. All available forces had concentrated at Fort Henry for the trip, causing one of many uninformed soldiers to record he would “march in the morning no telling where.” Although there were several days of loading and waiting before all finally moved, they eventually did. One Federal wrote his siblings, “We had a nice time coming up the river. . . . Our fleet was large composed of 104 vessels, a grand sight I assure you.” An Indianan wrote, “The Tennessee is a beautiful river, interspersed with islands here and there. . . . The houses along the river present a lonesome deserted appearance, showing that secession has laid its blighting hand on this fair country. The houses have none of that homelike, thrifty appearance of the farm cottages of the North. Whites are scarce, but darkies are in plenty.” Those locals who showed themselves, one soldier recalled in his diary, “seem delighted to see us, swinging their hats and handkerchiefs.” Yet not all were so friendly. In addition to fog that stopped all river traffic at times, Confederates periodically fired into the boats from shore. One such incident resulted in the death of one Federal and the wounding of several more, one mortally. On another occasion, Colonel Silas Baldwin landed troops from his 57th Illinois and arrested several townspeople at Clifton, thinking they had fired the shots. It was later learned that Confederate cavalry had done the deed, but Baldwin had already taken the prisoners up the river.23
Life aboard the boats was pure misery. One Illinois soldier described “tedious travel of more than a week in the boats.” An Ohioan wrote his friend, “You may probably think that riding on a steamboat is fun, well it is a nice place to ride in warm weather but on a boat where there is nearly two thousand men on board and then stay on it over a week is one of the most unpleasant places to live yet and added to this yet we had nothing but river water to drink which is not fit for a hog to drink.” “In consequence of which,” he added, “we have nearly or about all got the same complaint that old Mrs. Ashby had.” The 18th Illinois was so exasperated that they acquired whiskey and “became beastly intoxicated.” Brigade commander Richard Oglesby had to send part of the 8th Illinois to stop it and “ordered all of the whiskey throwed over Board.” Conversely, a Missourian described how “we were constantly having our blankets, clothing, faces and hands burnt by the shower of sparks from the funnels.” Others were more in awe; one member of the 7th Illinois wrote his sister, “What would you think to see 100 steamboats loaded with soldiers, guns, horses and wagons, all going one way, and at last stopping at one place, then have to wait more than two days, before your own boat could get into land, there being so many ahead of it?” Perhaps the only enjoyable part was to “hear the music of brass bands, and fife and drum” on the boats. A few of the vessels had calliopes, and those fortunate enough to be on board marveled at the music. “A person plays upon it as he would on a piano or on an organ,” one Federal wrote; “it has keys but the music is made by steam.” Officers were, of course, better situated; John W. Foster of the 25th Indiana described a pleasant time playing chess aboard his transport. Still, a nasty feud between division commanders John A. McClernand and Stephen A. Hurlbut developed over rank and the use of particular vessels.24

Three gunboats, the timberclads Lexington and Tyler as well as the ironclad Cairo, guarded the transports, some 174 boats in total. One Federal infantryman wrote home, “Think of 50 steamboats, 3 gunboats, and 50,000 troops with numerous splendid bands of music and banners flying all in sight and moving at one time.” The supply effort was just as astounding. Charles F. Smith notified his superiors, “We need coal very much. Two barges filled with it arrived this morning, but the two gunboats here consume nearly or quite two-thirds of the quantity brought—say 8,000 out of 12,000 bushels.” He also stated that hospital facilities were crowded on the only hospital boat, the City of Memphis. Lacking enough vessels to perform all the duties, Smith sent many boats back
and forth to Fort Henry. Later, Grant wrote of needing coal because “the unusual stage of water for the last few weeks has washed away all the wood for steamboat purposes, so that coal must be relied on entirely.” Later he complained, “It is with great difficulty that quartermasters at Paducah and Cairo can be impressed with the magnitude of our wants in coal and forage.”

The first boats arrived at Savannah on March 8, with the 40th Illinois apparently the first regiment in town. Charles Smith initially made Savannah the army’s principal forward base. The Federals found the place to be “a quiet, sober looking old town, with a single street, a square brick court house, a number of buildings scattered along the street, with some pretty and rather stylish residences in the suburbs,” according to W. H. L. Wallace, a brigade commander in McClernand’s division. Indianaan S. W. Fairfield gave a detailed view of the town to his wife, describing a street perhaps three quarters of a mile long. He found mostly one-story buildings, and only a few were “respectable.” Most were log buildings; a few frame structures were painted white and red. Many buildings were very old, prompting him to write, “I think Noah’s Ark must have landed on the top of the hill & the lumber used in manufacturing some of them.” Fairfield also described a few lovely gardens, the brick courthouse, a two-story church, and a brick church that “looks as though it had been built in the year One & the bricks baked in the sun.” In all, he found the town to be about half the size of his own hometown—and similarly “half as pretty.”

The Federals were mostly greeted in Hardin County with a warm welcome, mainly because die-hard Confederates had evacuated the area upon the Federals’ arrival. In fact, many of the local Unionist citizens quickly came to town selling items and trading goods with the soldiers. Many who had been hiding to keep from being forced into the Confederate army were so pleased to see the Federals that they joined the ranks of the Illinois and Ohio units. One Federal described the touching scenes of “boys a bidding their fathers and mothers farewell, and brothers and sisters adieu, and the husband his wife and family.” Those too old to join up simply rejoiced. An Illinoisan told of one “old gray headed man who . . . when he saw the Boats come up he went down with the tears rolling down his cheeks and greeted them as hard as he could.” The most helpful civilian was William H. Cherry, who lived in an ornate mansion on the bluff of the river. He informed the Federal commanders of what was happening in the area and sent
messengers for them, one all the way to Waynesboro. He also opened his home to the generals.  

The majority of the Federals were not as fortunate and did the best they could on the transports. One wrote in his diary of the impressive scene: “A beautiful sight in the evening to see all the fleet lighted up.” Those fortunate enough to get onto dry ground, however, began to explore the area. David Claggett of the 25th Kentucky wrote in his diary: “I went into the town and visited some young ladies (misses Irwin) and had a heap of fun and got a splendid dinner.” Leonard Ross’s Illinois brigade took a more ominous tour, crossing Horse Creek east of town and patrolling amid heavy rain some eight miles to the east without finding anything except a thoroughly flooded creek, which delayed their return.

Despite the tedium, Smith began to contemplate his next move, mindful of Halleck’s orders not to spark an engagement before Buell’s troops arrived and were available to help. Obviously, Corinth was the major goal, but he explained to Halleck that Corinth’s defenses “induced me not to attempt to cut the communication at that place, as that would inevitably lead to a collision in numbers that I am ordered to avoid.” He added, “Hence my efforts [will be] north of Purdy and east of Corinth.” His soldiers were also ready, and they had confidence in Smith’s military way and striking looks. “He is an old man with a beard as white as snow,” Charles Cowell wrote in his diary. “He is a military man.”

Smith soon began his operations despite the sickness growing in the Union ranks. The wet weather and what Grant described as “alternate days of rain and sunshine, pleasant and very cool weather,” in addition to the troops’ confinement on the transports for days on end, caused many health problems. One Illinois soldier wrote of “the water which does not agree with our men at all.” Even C. F. Smith was not well. While shuttling from a steamboat to a small rowboat, the general skinned his shin. It hurt terribly, but Smith continued his duties despite the pain. Sherman later described it as a “mere abrasion,” but it quickly became, also in Sherman’s words, “swollen and very sore.”

Despite the injury, Smith continued the initiative. Protected by the gunboats, Lew Wallace’s division of two brigades commanded by Morgan L. Smith and John M. Thayer landed on March 12 at Crump’s Landing and Williams’s Landing, just north of Crump’s. Widow Elizabeth
Crump still lived there, and Wallace made his headquarters at her house just atop the bluff. The locals continued the warm welcome even on the west side of the river, with women waving their handkerchiefs, although the Federals seemed to be less than impressed: “All the inhabitants dress in butternut colored clothes and the women chew tobacco, smoke pipes, and rot their teeth with snuff.” Despite the surroundings, portions of the division moved inland toward the Mobile and Ohio in the wee hours of March 13. Wallace at Crump’s with Smith’s brigade sent Thayer and his infantry and artillery westward to Adamsville to cover Major Charles Hayes of the 5th Ohio Cavalry, who ranged far out ahead and managed to cause some damage to the railroad at Beach Creek north of Purdy around 10:00 a.m. Constantly watched by Confederate scouts, Hayes soon returned. Wallace wrote that he had felt “a little uneasy” about his cavalry and that his infantry was also suffering from a terrible rainstorm moving through the area, but all were soon safe again on their transports at the landing. Two days later, Smith ordered Wallace to encamp his miserable division. They did so on March 17, his two brigades scattering to the west with a third newly formed brigade eventually moving as far as Adamsville on April 1 to guard against any Confederate advance from that direction.

William T. Sherman commanded another raid. Ever since his early shelving because of false charges of insanity, he had eagerly supported Grant’s Henry and Donelson campaign and pestered Halleck to get a field command thereafter: “When am I to go? I prefer General Smith’s column.” Halleck had allowed Sherman to join the column with a brand new division made of four green brigades, and Sherman was philosophical and appreciative; he told his division that their expedition was “a part of a grand design, devised by the same mind that planned the victories of Forts Henry and Donelson, and led to the evacuation of Columbus and Nashville without a blow.” Obviously that mind was Halleck, whom Sherman called “the directing genius” of the campaign.

Sherman was learning on the job, as was his green division. Although he had seen the carnage of Bull Run, Sherman had to weld together a division of totally green troops with some quirky commanders—as if Sherman himself was not quirky enough. One such regimental commander was Thomas Worthington of the 46th Ohio, whom Sherman described as “a strange character.” He was far older than almost anyone else on the expedition, having graduated from West Point in 1827.
Worthington seemed to think he was an expert on all things military. Sherman remarked that he was “older than General Halleck, General Grant, or myself, . . . [and] claimed to know more of war than all of us put together.” The Ohioan quickly tested his new and tarnished division commander, moving out of line while in column on the river between Fort Henry and Savannah and actually speeding to Savannah ahead of the rest of the division, arriving a day earlier. When Sherman arrived, he found Worthington “flying about giving orders, as though he were commander-in-chief.” Stephen G. Hicks of the 40th Illinois was another excited commander who had arrived early, to Sherman’s chagrin, and likewise had to be corralled. Sherman was definitely having problems getting his inexperienced colonels to understand regular military ways.33

Despite such issues in his division, Sherman made his movement on March 14 with what he called the First Division. This time the target was the Memphis and Charleston Railroad in Mississippi. Smith wondered whether an advance to the south might work better; the high water would affect an operation toward Iuka much less than one toward Purdy. Aware of the importance of Pittsburg Landing, with one of Sherman’s staff officers reporting they were fired on as they passed, Sherman asked Smith to send a division to hold that position “as a precautionary measure” while he continued southward. Sherman reasoned that with Confederates having been at the landing, they might return once Sherman moved upriver and “embarrass our return.” Stephen A. Hurlbut’s division soon took position at the landing, although most of the troops remained on their transports for the time being. Only three companies of the 4th Illinois Cavalry debarked and scouted inland, where they encountered a small band of Confederate cavalry about four miles to the southwest.34

Accompanied by the Tyler, Sherman moved on, his men crowded into nineteen transports, the artillery disassembled and stored below deck. He landed his cavalry, five companies of the 5th Ohio Cavalry under Major Elbridge G. Ricker, at Tyler’s Landing around 7:00 p.m. on March 14 and sent them southward into Mississippi four hours later with a local guide and equipped with axes, crowbars, and other necessary items to break up the railroad. Sherman then followed with his four infantry brigades. One member of the 40th Illinois described the operation, including moving out of the bottom and up “lofty rough pine hills which were quite difficult to ascend.” Rain and even snow soon
soured the soldiers’ attitudes even more, and Sherman began to worry about the success of the operation despite an apparent clearing during the night. The clearing was only temporary; the rains returned and pummeled the troops—so much so that Sherman cancelled his two rearward brigades’ movements. The longer it rained, the worse it became. Sherman noted that “ravines became rapid torrents, creeks became as rivers, and streams such as the Sandy were utterly impassable.” Members of the 77th Ohio who built a fire on some of the highest ground in a valley were astonished to see the water rise so fast to extinguish it. Sherman especially became alarmed when he received word from his transports that the river was rising six inches an hour.35

Colonel Manning Force of the 20th Ohio (later to be part of Lew Wallace’s division) noted that the river rose so fast that the boats had only a small “strip of land” to tie up to while he and his Ohioans were detailed to form a perimeter and detain any citizens they encountered. Meanwhile, Sherman began to have second thoughts, sending some of his artillery back to the boats. The guns eventually had to be dragged under water across some bottoms, then taken apart and ferried to the transports at the submerged landing. Meanwhile, the head of Sherman’s infantry column, the brigade commanded by Stephen Hicks, stopped at a creek when the water topped the bridge and an attempt to build a second one failed. Sherman realized that speed was his chief asset and it would take too long to continue the slow process of building bridges all along the way. Moreover, word from the cavalry arrived that they were stalled as well, having lost their railroad wrecking tools to the high water and almost losing some of the men and horses. Major Ricker had conversed with his officers and decided that “farther progress would endanger the command, without any possibility of executing your orders,” he told Sherman. They turned back, and so did Sherman, confident that “no human energy could have overcome the difficulty.” By the time Sherman returned to his transports and his men waded to the boats across the now-submerged landing, the river was well on its way to rising fifteen feet in twenty-four hours.36

After getting his men back aboard the transports, Sherman tried again to find the Confederates, steaming southward to Chickasaw where Gwin “politely offered me the use of his gunboat.” Sherman shelled the area but elicited no response from the Confederates, whereupon he turned northward. Sherman’s depiction of Tyler’s Landing as “submerged from the bank back to the bluff” was a good description of most
all the landings in the area. Along the route, Sherman reported, “the whole shore [was] under water from Chickasaw down to Pittsburg.”

Significantly, that landing proved to be the only one large and deep enough to handle boat traffic even in the high water. Sherman thus decided to stay there, because Hurlbut’s division was already on site, and he sent his troops inland on March 16 after he himself made a quick trip to Savannah to report on his actions. The leading elements of the Federal force, composed of a portion of the 5th Ohio Cavalry, had a slight skirmish around Shiloh Church while both divisions climbed the steep hill. Hurlbut’s troops soon held the area where the main roads divided just half a mile out from the landing, with the 41st Illinois and half of Burrows’s Ohio Battery blocking one road leading to the Snake Creek bridge, while the 44th Indiana and the other artillerymen manned the main Corinth road. The troops also stumbled upon the remnants of the March 1 fight, with the 28th Illinois finding the partially unburied Confederates. The 32nd Illinois also found their own dead from the fight and reburied them. One Illinoisan noted that “the faces of some of them were not entirely covered;” and another Illinoisan added, “Buzzards were feasting on the remains.” “A sorrowful moment it was for the little company;” remembered one of the Illinoisans. Meanwhile, Sherman requested Smith send him “a couple thousand sacks of corn, as much hay as you can possibly spare, and if possible a barge of coal.” He reported that he would try to get as much corn as he could find locally until he could be supplied, sending “a steamboat under care of the gunboat to collect corn from cribs on the riverbank.”

Once on firm soil, Sherman took a detailed look around the high ground at Pittsburg Landing and liked what he saw; it “admits of easy defense by a small command, and yet affords admirable camping ground for a hundred thousand men,” he told Smith. An Indianan wrote that “Pittsburg once had three houses, a dwelling, a smithshop and a store in one end of which I presume was a grocery.” An Ohioan added that in addition to the cabins, the only things there were “old rebel fortifications.” With the divisions landed, a large portion of the Army of the Tennessee was thus ashore at Pittsburg Landing by mid-March 1862, with Sherman the de facto commander at the forward base while an increasingly ill Smith remained at his headquarters at Savannah. Sherman initially made his headquarters in the small cabin on the high ground overlooking the landing before moving farther out to allow more room for other divisions. Yet as more men arrived, more supplies
were also needed. Sherman soon described an “immense fleet” jutting out into the river three layers deep, alternating their unloading times at the landing: “The only drawback is that at this stage of water the space for landing is contracted too much for the immense fleet now here discharging.” Work thus began on a new landing to the north. Sherman wrote on March 18, “Colonel McArthur has arrived, and is now cutting a landing for himself.” Meanwhile, the wait affected the common soldiers crammed aboard the boats. “Today we lay on the Boat all day,” one Illinoisan wrote, “not being able to go ashore on account of so many boats.” In all, the men of the 14th Missouri spent seven days onboard their transports; the 7th Illinois was on its transport Fairchild a total of thirteen days.39

Much has been written in the century and a half since about Sherman’s initial and Smith’s official choice of Pittsburg Landing as the army’s campsite. Some historians have faulted the two generals for placing their army in a trap on the same side of the river as the enemy, and on the opposite side from its nearest reinforcement. Some have even blamed Grant, although the decision was clearly Smith’s at this point; Grant was not even on site. Certainly, if the idea was to garrison the area, the army would have been safer on the east bank, but the prevailing thought was to continue the forward movement, ultimately to Corinth. There would only be a few days of waiting until the advance progressed again. Having the army unload on the west bank thus seemed reasonable, as it saved a major crossing later. Although they did not know it yet, the Federal officers had also inadvertently placed the army in a highly defensible area: “hard to assail, easy to defend.”40

Thus the Federals were content to wait until the river fell to manageable levels, and until Buell could combine with Smith. Yet while waiting, a significant change occurred. Halleck sent Grant to retake command of the expedition. Despite two weeks of sickness, probably caused by Halleck more than anything, Grant soon moved southward and arrived at Savannah on March 17. He immediately improved, telling Sherman he was already feeling better “at the thought of again being along with the troops.” The troops felt good about the move as well; one Indianan wrote, “They say Genl Grant has come & if that is so we shall soon be doing something.” Grant quickly became oriented to the deployments and Confederate positions, although he admitted to Halleck that news of Albert Sidney Johnston being on the scene “was very much against my expectations.” Grant’s return relegated Smith to his
division, and he resumed command despite still being bothered by his leg injury. Meanwhile, the confident Federals continued to watch and wait, shipping regiment after regiment southward for the great battle all knew was looming.41