

The Great "What Ifs"
of the
American Civil War

Historians Tackle the Conflict's
Most Intriguing Possibilities

Edited by
Chris Mackowski & Brian Matthew Jordan

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Savas Beatie
California

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To all of those who taught, mentored, encouraged,
and supported us along the way—
to those who never doubted and dared to ask, “What if?”

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We have also been fortunate along the way to work with a diverse array of colleagues who posed some fascinating “What If” scenarios to us. We wish we could have fit more of them into this volume (more on that to come. . . .) We are grateful to the Emerging Civil War community for providing an intellectual and digital space where we can all bounce ideas around.

The historians whose work we are privileged to include in this first collection make up an extraordinary who's-who of emerging and established talent in the Civil War field: Dwight Hughes, Frank Jastrzembski, Barton Myers, Kevin Pawlak, Evan Rothera, Timothy B. Smith, Kristen Trout, Peter Tsouras, Dan Welch, Kristopher D. White, Cecily Nelson Zander, and cartographer Edward Alexander. We are grateful for not only their excellent contributions but also for giving us a lot of thought-provoking material along the way.

Finally, we'd like to thank all those with whom we've engaged in lively conversation over the years regarding this or that counterfactual question. No battle is quite so fascinating as the one we can armchair-general our way through with good friends and sharp colleagues.

From Chris: Brian and I first met on July 1 of the Gettysburg Sesquicentennial. He and I and Kris White were being interviewed in a pop-up tent by the Pennsylvania Cable Network as part of PCN's live coverage of the anniversary. I was the monkey between two 800-pound gorillas! I've been sharply impressed by Brian ever since, and I always leap at an opportunity to collaborate with him because I know I'll always get a lot out of the experience. This was our first chance to co-edit a book, and I'm grateful for the opportunity. He's a brilliant mind, an insightful historian, and an exacting editor—and, man, can that guy write!

My thanks, too, to Dean Aaron Chimbel of St. Bonaventure University's Jandoli School of Communication for his ongoing support of my scholarship.

And most of all, thanks to my family: my daughter, Stephanie; her husband, Thomas; their daughter, Sophie (my first grandchild!); my sons, Jackson and Maxwell; and my wife, Jennifer. I cannot imagine life without them.

From Brian: This book was the brainchild of my co-editor, Chris Mackowski, with whom it has been a genuine pleasure to work. I hope this is just the first of many fruitful collaborations. I thank my friend for his patience, sharp insight, and collaborative spirit; it is an honor to share a title page with him. Legions of young scholars—including many whose work appears here—have been the beneficiaries of his generosity and vision.

Thanks to my hard-working colleagues in the Department of History at Sam Houston State University, and to Chien-pin Li, Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, for his always cheerful support of my scholarly endeavors.

A book about counterfactual questions necessarily invites some personal reflection. I have been unusually fortunate to work with teachers and scholars at every level who sharpened my thinking, improved my prose, and otherwise took a chance on a kid from Akron, Ohio. Lorraine Caswell and Nancy Drugan taught me how to write. Gabor S. Boritt, Allen C. Guelzo, Matthew D. Norman, David W. Blight, Bruno Cabanes, and John Demos taught me the historian's craft. My family made it all possible; they continue to make it all worthwhile.

“Wars tend to be iffy. And there were undoubtedly ifs in the Civil War—historians are still engaged with them.”

— Robert Penn Warren,
Jefferson Davis Gets His Citizenship Back

“Might-have-beens was a stupid game, when you got right down to it. Look back on things, and you couldn’t help but see they’d come out the way they had to come out.”

— Harry Turtledove,
The Great War: Breakthroughs

Paths Not Taken

Thoughts of an Alternate Historian

Foreword by Peter G. Tsouras

I've followed these paths for twenty-eight years now, with four battle alternate histories and seven anthologies (that paid for a few college semesters for three children). I took my first step when approached by Lionel Leventhal, the grand old man of British military history publishing, with an intriguing idea. It was 1992, and he reminded me the fiftieth anniversary of D-Day would be coming in two years. There would be any number of histories written for the anniversary. Then, he said, therein lay a niche: "Let's have the Germans win."

Until that time, alternate history was not a thickly populated genre. The number of serious alternate history books could be numbered on the fingers of one hand, if you had had a chainsaw accident. The author of one of those few books, Ken Macksey (*Invasion 1940*, the German invasion of Britain in Operation Sea Lion), was a retired British colonel, one of the most distinguished British military historians, and an actual veteran of D-Day. He recounted to me that he had been signing his book in Dover when a middle-aged woman remarked that she had lived there all her life and had never known there had been a battle!

Lionel and I leapt into the project, and *Disaster at D-Day: The Germans Defeat the Allies, June 1944* came out just in time for the anniversary.

I had to understand the battle that actually happened and its strategic, operational, and tactical dynamics. Only then would the critical decision nodes that could plausibly be altered by the stream of chance become apparent. I chose to write it in the style of an actual history, complete with endnotes. Lionel suggested fake footnotes to reference the new realities of this alternate outcome. The idea of fake endnotes adds a great deal to the alternate world that the book describes and offers

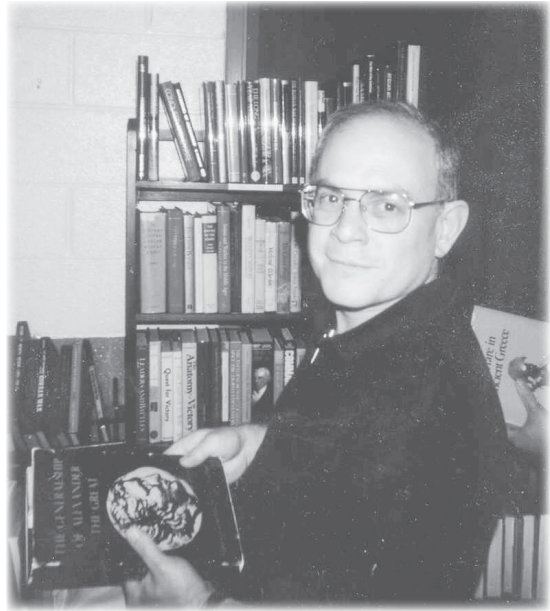
the chance to add tantalizing hints of the nature of that future. I have used them in all my alternate history writing since then. To prevent the reader from fruitlessly chasing after a fictitious title, each alternate history footnote is preceded by an asterisk.

In the end, the book had to stand on its own as an entirely plausible alternate reality. There would be no *Deus ex machina*, the bane of alternate history. A note on this term is important to illustrate its meaning. In ancient Greek theater, a tangled plot would often be

resolved by the appearance of a god lowered onto the stage by an intricate piece of stage machinery to announce how he has resolved the story with one stroke of divine intervention. The Romans defined this as *Deus ex machine*, god out of the machine. An example of this would be the appearance of Stonewall Jackson at Gettysburg, which would not take into account all the changes his survival would have entailed in the events leading up to Gettysburg, probably ensuring that there never would have been a battle of Gettysburg at all.

All the realities of wind and wave, march rates, the physical characteristics of weapons, etc., all had to be strictly within the realm of reality. Historical figures had to act within their own characters. You gain a truer appreciation of the dynamics of an actual battle by finding those decision nodes, understanding how contingent they were, and realizing how many different roads beckoned. You realize there was nothing inevitable about any particular outcome. History does not roll down a smooth groove but bounces all over the place. Alter one critical thing and the emerging changes are geometrical. A different rock thrown in a pond at different time makes different ripples that rush out, pushing everything into different paths.

I approached the book from the point of view of a historian. This would not



Peter G. Tsouras: for alternative history to be truly effective, “the arts of the historian and storyteller must be given full play.” *Peter G. Tsouras*

be a novel although it would not be shorn of character development. My emphasis in writing alternate history is the word "history." It would not be a dry history full of mummy dust. No, there must be the drama inherent in such desperate affairs. Alternate history, like all good history, is at its core story telling. A note here for those who quibble that the proper word should be "alternative" rather than "alternate" history. True—but even by the time this book was written, the use of "alternate" had become fixed.

Lionel told me that three experts who had reviewed the manuscript insisted it not be published because it was too real and might confuse the general public. One of them made a special trip into London to urge Lionel not to publish it. All three reviewers insisted that book was so real it would confuse readers. Lionel instead thought experts' criticism was an enormous selling point in favor of the book. The book was grandly reviewed as mind candy by the *New York Review of Books* while we were at the American Booksellers annual fair in 1994, a fact Lionel was able to take immediate advantage of.

D-Day was a thoroughly and cleverly planned operation, for which Field Marshal Montgomery has not been given just credit. But as the great Prussian chief of staff, Field Marshall Prince Helmuth von Moltke, had said, "Plans are nothing; planning is everything." Something must be left to chance as in all human affairs and most powerfully in war. The effort in planning provides the flexibility to meet unexpected events. Montgomery and his planners realized that all the landing beaches must be both secured and united to create sufficiently large enough lodgment to allow the large-scale build up of forces for a decisive breakout and exploitation. The American Omaha Beach was the hinge of that strategy for it connected the British-Canadian beaches on the east with the American Utah beach on the west. If Omaha failed, neither of the eastern or western beaches could have sustained the vital buildup. As it was, Omaha came within a hair of disaster. In an excusable intelligence failure, the Allies failed to detect the replacement of a weak coastal defense division with the tough, veteran 352nd Infantry Division. These Germans made the Americans of the 1st and 29th Infantry Divisions pay an enormous price in blood.

Two men, Brig. Gen. Norman "Dutch" Cota, assistant division commander of the 29th Infantry Division, and Col. George A. Taylor, commander of the 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, were responsible for preventing the hinge from snapping. The fate of the entire invasion then fell upon these two men as they rallied their bloodied and stunned men off the beaches to break through the Germans. A third decisive man was the one who was not there on Omaha Beach—Field Marshall Erwin Rommel. The Allies could not have wished for a

greater gift than his absence on leave in Germany as the invasion unfolded. Such a man would have been immediately at the point of action to organize the Germans for maximum effort. Rommel had an amazing sixth sense for the *Schwerpunkt*, the decisive place and time of any battle. Without him confusion reigned, into which the heroic initiative and courage of Cota and Taylor was the sword throne on the scales of the battle. Imagine, though, Rommel's presence at Omaha. Any number of events could have postponed his departure for leave in Germany the day before the invasion.

At the time, I was a military intelligence analyst working for the U.S. Army's National Ground Intelligence Center (NGIC) of blessed memory. The skills of military intelligence analysis were well-suited to this project, in particular of the subset of order-of-battle analysis that addresses the organization and strength of military organizations. It is important to know whether a regiment had three or four battalions, what its actual strength was, its recent battle-worthiness, and combat record. All counters on the board are not the same. A story in point. In the Boer War, a British train was ambushed by the Boers. The surviving train guards did not surrender until all the survivors were wounded. Asked why they did not give up sooner, one replied, "But we are the Gordon Highlanders!" Or the bitter fruit of two world wars—Churchill's comment that one does not know war unless one had fought the Germans, "a valiant and disciplined" enemy. Still, such things have a shelf life. In Afghanistan, the modern Bundeswehr instead of an Iron Cross for heroism gives a soldier a day off. *Sic transit gloria mundi*.

* * *

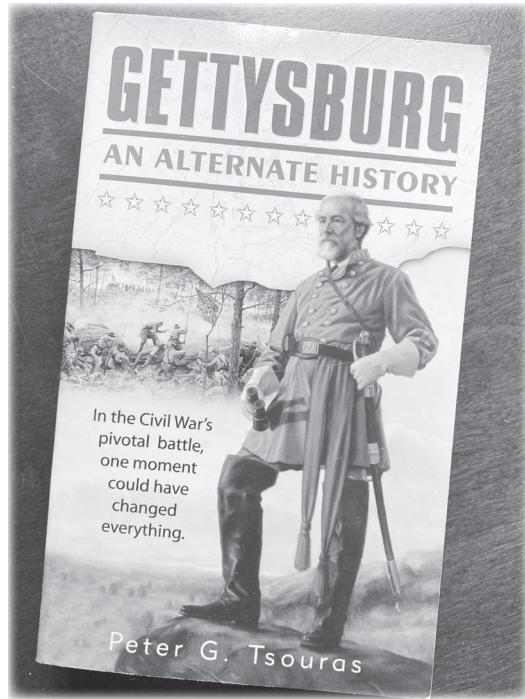
My next book for Lionel was *Gettysburg: An Alternate History*, which came out in 1997. This book was banned from the Gettysburg Military Park bookstore by the park historian because, as he said, it was too real. He even had to look some things up because he said fact blended into fiction too well to be easily detected. The objection to its sale was that it would surely confuse the peasantry that shopped at the bookstore, a policy that persists to this day. Despite that, the book was nominated for the Lincoln Prize, the most distinguished Civil War literary prize. So, there!

Again, I wrote this book as history, exploring the roads not taken in the three great controversies that continue to haunt the study of this greatest battle ever fought in North America: (1) Stuart's arrival late on 2 July; (2) Lee's refusal to let Longstreet maneuver around the Union flank on 2 July; and, (3) Lee's failure to properly organize the attacks on 3 July. I must have walked almost every foot of the battlefield,

getting a feel for the ground and the alternate possibilities inherent in it. In one trip with my good friend Jay Zollitsch, we walked through the marsh on the other side of Big Round Top to see if troops could move through it. Checking each other for ticks was male bonding at its most noble. My wife even volunteered to go to Gettysburg for our anniversary because she knew I needed one more trip there. She is the most unselfish person I know. God bless her.

It became apparent in studying the battle that the balance of the armies was highly unstable. Riding a floodtide of victories, Lee thought his Army of Northern Virginia was invincible.

Most contemporaries would have agreed. Yet, this was seed of Lee's undoing. In expanding his army, he found it necessary to split it into three instead of two already existing corps, requiring two new corps commanders, Gens. Richard Ewell and A.P. Hill, who would prove to be bruised reeds. Too high a proportion of division and brigade commanders were also new to their commands. A professional staff would have done much to help the new command arrangements sort themselves out, but such Lee did not have. This resulted in a lamentable failure of coordination and initiative at all levels. Lee had been fortunate in that, previously, he had had in Stonewall Jackson and James Longstreet two subordinates with whom he worked brilliantly at an intuitive level. He fatally assumed that he could do so with Ewell and Hill. Lee also had suffered a heart attack in March and said thereafter he had never been as mentally or physically fit as before. Fate must have licked its lips at the opportunity to punish hubris. The alternate history does not have to look forward to find in this numerous pivot points.



The battle of Gettysburg spawned so many "What Ifs" they could fill a book of their own—and they have. Peter G. Tsouras's novel-length alternate history explores them. *book cover courtesy Presidio Press*

Compared to the new brittleness of the Army of Northern Virginia, the Army of the Potomac was far more tempered, something that escaped most observers. Finally, the army had a sound and competent commander in George G. Meade. The man knew his job, as did his experienced corps commanders. They did something their Confederate counterparts did not do: they cooperated and showed initiative to do as the situation demanded. Reinforcing this was a highly professional staff that served Meade well. The Army of the Potomac's artillery was also vastly superior. The chief of artillery, Brig. Gen. Henry Hunt, had had the gutsy initiative to acquire, outside of regulations, a second artillery train that proved decisive in breaking Pickett's charge. The Confederate artillery, on the other hand, had been threatened by the infantry never to fire over them in support because so many badly manufactured rounds fell short into their ranks—the very reason the artillery support for Pickett's charge lifted before the attack. Into this mix of the brittle and tempered waited immense opportunity for history to leap onto a new path.

Finally, what saved Lee from a crushing counterattack after the collapse of Pickett's Charge ironically was his own failure to properly coordinate the attacks of 3 July. Meade observed that morning that Lee had struck his right and his left and would surely now strike his center, a prescient analysis. He said that he would then have a golden opportunity to counterpunch. He had more than twenty thousand men in reserve, including most of the yet-uncommitted tough 6th Corps. Yet when Ewell's attack went in on time and Longstreet's did not, Meade concluded he had been wrong and concentrated on the attack on Culp's Hill. Thus, when Longstreet's attack struck and failed, Meade had not been able to assemble his counterattack force which could well have smashed through a disorganized and demoralized Confederate center, fatally shattering the Army of Northern Virginia.

* * *

Stalingrad was the subject of the third of my alternate histories. In July 1992, I attended a military history seminar at the Russian Military History Institute in Moscow. The Russian military historians stated how vital Lend-Lease was even before Stalingrad, contrary to Western historians who said it was too early to have been decisive. They stated that British and American aid in October of 1941 already exceeded their own production. Lend-Lease supplied half of the magnesium, aluminum, and copper the Soviets used to build their vast fleets of tanks and airplanes. The British transferred their entire clothing allotment for 1942 over to the Soviets. General Chuikov, who commanded at Stalingrad, was almost

shot by a sentry who did not recognize the British raincoat he was wearing. Outside of Stalingrad, the Germans captured a train carrying a vast amount of American engineering equipment.

The fate of the battle ran then not between the Don and the Volga but across the North Atlantic to Murmansk. Crimp it to cut off the metals for building tank and aircraft engines, and far fewer would be built, altering the correlation of forces. The battle of Stalingrad would then logically be decided in the cold waters between Iceland and Norway, entailing a major fleet action.

* * *

Waterloo was retold in *Napoleon Victorious*. It was clear, in examining the battle, that Napoleon caught very few of the breaks. Yet his organization for the battle was superb. He concentrated his Grande Armee in complete security undetected by Wellington and Blücher. His opening moves were such a surprise and so adroit in breaking the ability of the enemy to unite against him that Wellington said of him, "He does war honor." Things should have gone well for Napoleon from there. Wellington's army was especially vulnerable—three nationalities speaking four languages, more of whom were Germans than Britons. Not enough were his old tough-as-nails Peninsular veterans, too many of whose lives had been thrown away at the battle of New Orleans. Too many senior commanders he did not trust, especially on the Dutch side, had been forced on him. There was no love lost in the British-Prussian alliance either. Blücher's chief of staff, von Gneisenau, detested the British, who saw treachery in their every move. By inclination he was all too happy to fall back on his main supply route than risk his army in coming to Wellington's aid. The Prussian Army of the Rhine was not the best of the Prussian service, either, consisting of far too many inexperienced *Landwher* regiments and, until recently, thousands of unreliable Saxon troops.

Napoleon should have shattered them. Yet most of the bad breaks fell to him, some through his own fault—mostly faulty command choices who let him down—and others by chance. The rain on the night of 17 June left the battlefield so soaked that it delayed the battle by hours and even then reduced the power of his artillery by smothering its shot in mud. Even so, Napoleon handled Wellington so hard that he prayed for the Prussians or night in what he would later write, "It has been a damned nice thing—the nearest run thing you ever saw in your life." Rarely has a battle trembled on such a knife-edge. The weather can't be changed but events can lead to the battle on the day, as Napoleon probably planned, before it actually

happened, when the ground was rock hard, ideal for the bloody work of ricocheting shot, an important contemporary gunnery technique.

Wellington put a lot of pressure on the “nearest run thing.” A glaring example was how close Blücher came to getting killed. At the close of the battle of Ligny, leading a last forlorn charge, his charger had been killed falling on him, pinning him to the ground as French lancers leaped over him. He only survived when his aide stopped a few uhlans to rescue him. If he had perished or been captured, von Gneisenau would have been reluctant at best to come to Wellington’s rescue, and far more likely to gather up the shattered army and retreat upon his communications. Then it would have been only night upon which Wellington could have prayed. Such are the contingencies upon which history is built.

* * *

My most ambitious alternate history project was a Civil War trilogy with the point of departure being Britain stumbling into war with the Union in late 1863, triggering a world war, in this new reality, the Great War or the First World War. The books of the trilogy were *Britannia’s Fist: From Civil War to World War* (2008); *A Rainbow of Blood: The Union in Peril* (2010); and *Bayonets, Balloons, and Ironclads: Britain and France Take Sides with the South* (2015).

Ever since I had written the paper, “God Bless the Russians,” based on the visit of the Russian Baltic Squadron to New York and the Pacific Squadron to San Francisco in October 1863, for that same seminar at the Russian Military History Institute in Moscow, I had been intrigued by the Russian influence on events in our Civil War. Russia at that time was our only serious friend in Europe, offering us invaluable diplomatic advice and frustrating every British or French attempt to force a mediation that would have resulted in the independence of the South, an outcome eagerly sought by both powers. That friendship was based on the fact that we had no strategic conflicts and Russia’s fear of British world hegemony, rubbed in their face by their defeat in the Crimean War. Russia saw the United States as the only counterbalance to British world hegemony.

A world war with Russia and the United States allied against Britain, France, and the Confederacy was a real possibility, especially since the reckless building of commerce raiders for the Confederacy in British shipyards forced Lincoln to draw a line in the sand and threaten the British with war in September 1863. Luckily for everyone, the British finally saw the danger and seized the warships in question. But what if they had miscalculated? And those last moments were filled with dangerous

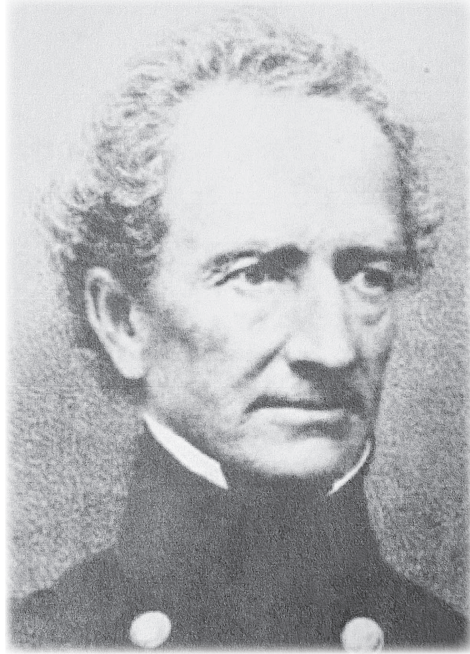
miscalculations. That was a very real possibility since their margin of error in actual events was so very thin. Upon this flimsy margin, the pivot of history turned in this trilogy.

Unable to subdue the Confederacy, the Union now finds itself at war with the two greatest powers in Europe, whose industrial and manpower resources far outweigh the Union's. How does Lincoln narrow the odds? Firstly, Russia has now entered the war on the side of the Union, forcing the British and French to fight on two widely separated fronts and fear that the rest of Europe would be dragged into war on either side.

Secondly, there were also two wasted opportunities in the Civil War to create combat multipliers that screamed out to be explored:

(1) the failure to create a national intelligence service, and, (2) the failure to properly exploit the Union's long lead in military technology, especially in repeating weapons, balloons, and the revolutionary monitor warship wedded to superlative Dahlgren guns. The heavy Dahlgrens were deadly ship busters, far more destructive than anything the British or French had. They were the apogee of the muzzle-loading gun. The British had been so impressed that they had tried unsuccessfully to buy them before the war. A pair of heavy Dahlgrens in a monitor turret were more effective than a broadside of contemporary British guns, even those on their broadside ironclads whose armor was not resistant to the American guns.

American technological superiority in repeating weapons was single-handedly sabotaged by the Army's Ordnance Bureau chief, Brig. Gen. James Ripley. He even disobeyed Lincoln's direct order to produce such weapons by putting poison pills in the contracts. He was conservative in the most negative connotation, considering technological innovation as "newfangled gimcracks." He was blind to the possibility that early mass production of the several effective repeating weapons would have



What if someone with more vision than Brig. Gen. James Ripley had been in charge of the U. S. Army's Bureau of Ordnance? Ripley, "a crabbed and visionless old cog," stayed married to old technology in a way that single-handedly dragged out the war effort. *Library of Congress*



George Sharpe modernized the Army of the Potomac's intelligence-gathering capabilities, creating remarkably accurate reports that first came into play under Maj. Gen. Joe Hooker. In contrast, detective Allan Pinkerton had provided intelligence reports for former army commander Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan—reports that proved wildly inaccurate and inspired McClellan to inflate Confederate numbers by twofold or more. What if McClellan had been given the kind of reliable intelligence information Sharpe later produced? *Library of Congress*

achieved such firepower dominance on the battlefield that no Confederate army could have even come close to matching. Those few Union units that were actually so equipped crippled their opponents. It would not have taken more than a few battles to melt away the armies of the Confederacy as well any British or French that opposed them. The vastly greater military production of the British and French would have been useless for it would have been producing out-of-date technology.

Ripley would stipulate that if the contractor was one day late, the contract was cancelled. When Maj. Gen. Rosecrans inquired of the proto-machine guns that Lincoln had given Ripley a direct order to buy, he lied and said he knew nothing about them. He then ordered the 50 guns already purchased to be withdrawn and put into storage despite the gun's only successful use at Chantilly, Virginia, where it cut a Confederate cavalry

unit to pieces. Ripley was viscerally opposed to modern innovations.

The opportunity to create a national intelligence service lay unused, though the first professional all-source military intelligence organization in history was in existence. The Bureau of Military Intelligence (BMI) had been created in the Army of the Potomac by Col. George H. Sharpe. This brilliant man had built his fully functioning organization from the ground up between February and April in 1863. He was able to hand Robert E. Lee's head on a silver platter to the commander of the Army of the Potomac, Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker, before the Chancellorsville Campaign. He was able to report Lee's ration strength within 1.5 percent. It was not Sharpe's fault that Hooker bungled the battle. As it was, Sharpe's subsequent

provision of timely actionable intelligence was crucial to Meade's victory at Gettysburg. Grant would make him one of his trusted family of generals, promoting him to brevet brigadier. Sharpe and his staff were, I maintain, crucial to the victory of the Union.¹ Tasking Sharpe with replicating his achievement at the national level would indeed have extended this combat-multiplication to the entire war effort against both the Confederacy and Britain and France.

* * *

For many historians their field of study moves under the pressure of great causes and inexorable tides of human development. That approach betrays the taint of too close an affection for the idiocies of Marx and his disciples. History, all too often, pivots on great or petty men, mixed signals, lost letters, spite, nobility, greed, sacrifice, and the like as much as it does on the great transformations produced by sharp bronze, the industrial age, democracy, and the sublime message of a Galilean rabbi. Two centuries ago, Samuel Johnson had already put his finger on it.

It seems to be almost the universal error of historians to suppose it politically, as it is physically true, that every effort has proportionate cause. In the inanimate action of matter upon matter, the motion produced can be but equal to the force of the moving power; but the operations of life, whether private or public, admit no such laws. The caprices of voluntary agents laugh at calculations. It is not always that there is a strong reason for a great event. Obstinacy and flexibility, malignity and kindness, give place alternately to each other, and the reason of these vicissitudes, however important may be the consequences, often escapes the mind in which the changes are made.²

Johnson's observation reaches deep into the past. The great Theban general Epaminondas (418-363 BC) called the great plain of Boeotia "the dancing floor

1 For a biography of Sharpe and his BMI, see Peter G. Tsouras, *Maj. Gen. George H. Sharpe and the Creation of American Military All-Source Intelligence* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2018).

2 Samuel Johnson, "Thoughts on the late transactions respecting Falkland islands" (1771), *Political Writings*, Vol. X, 365-66, cited in Geoffrey Parker, *The Grand Strategy of Phillip II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 293.

of war,” a primal description of that blood-soaked ground of battle. There have been many, many more. The task of alternate history is to change the tune on those dancing floors, to see what unexpected fate the new beat and step will bring forth.

To describe these new beats, the arts of the historian and storyteller must be given full play. Writing alternate history must follow rigorous rules to create plausible scenarios. Author, historian, strategist and soldier Ralph Peters has described the ‘Five Pillars of alternative history,’ in Frontline’s recent *Disaster at Stalingrad: An Alternate History*. They are worth summarizing here for there is no more perceptive analysis in the requirements of writing for this new genre. Good alternate history must have:

The Five Pillars of “Alternative” History

1. *A compelling, convincing vision.* “If the alternative-history does not grip us with logic—the recognition that this could have happened—the entire structure falls flat. . . . We have to be captured by the recognition that, yes, but for a few matters of happenstance, the author’s vision might have come to pass, changing history.”

2. *Historical and technical knowledge.* The writer must know “what has happened” down to the “sub-atomic” details. He must also grasp “why things happened” and how slight alterations in events or personal relations might have led to very different outcomes. He must also “know what soldiers can do and won’t do” and know “not only what political leaders are supposed to do, but what they actually end up doing.”

3. *Grasp of character.* “Alternative history doesn’t work if the author doesn’t understand the actual personalities of the figures he enlivens on the page—or human complexity in general. . . . [T]he actions men make and the actions they take must be grounded in their actual psychology and mundane circumstances.” Characters must “make credible decisions based on the different developments confronting them.”

4. *Writing ability.* “In alternative history, the focus should be on events and characters presented in transparent prose that never calls attention to itself. The writing should be so clean and clear that it disappears leaving only the author’s vision. . . .” Even when addressing “inferably complex situations

or arcane technical details, the writing is a spotless window that lures the reader to look deeper inside.”

5. *Storytelling ability.* “Writing ability and storytelling are often confused with one another, but while related involve separate talents and skill-sets. . . . The novelist/storyteller . . . is a literary Dr. Frankenstein, struggling bravely to create not only a living being, but an entire living world . . .” choosing “from an infinite number of possibilities, the unique combination of body parts that will spring to life for the reader. The non-fiction writer declares, ‘It’s a fact.’ The novelist cries ‘It’s alive!’”³

One last thought: no greater example of how history all too often pivots on the oddest things is that of the already-mentioned Brig. Gen. Ripley, a crabbed and visionless old cog who single-handedly saw that our Civil War went on and on, ever increasing its butcher’s bill. History is replete with such cogs and nonentities and all too often they have a greater effect on events than the great captains of mighty hosts. We remember U.S. Grant and Robert E. Lee as titans of the battlefield, yet both danced to Ripley’s tune on the American dancing floor of war, Shakespeare’s “harsh discords and displeasing sharps.”⁴

Peter G. Tsouras
Lieut. Col., USAR (ret)

3 Ralph Peters, “A Matter of Mastery,” introduction to Peter G. Tsouras, *Disaster at Stalingrad: An Alternate History* (London: Frontline Books, 2013), xi-xv.

4 William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act 3, Scene 5.

Introduction

Chris Mackowski

Two of the most underrated tools of the historian's trade are beer and cigars. Their potent value comes from their ability to stimulate lively discussion in a relaxed environment, promoting the free exchange and exploration of ideas—sometimes crazy ideas. The Civil War has been refought many a time over many a pint. If the cigar smoke is a poor imitation of the smoke of gunfire, it emulates the scale of battle encapsulated in these conversations, where everyone becomes their own armchair general.

“That was a bad decision because. . . .”

“That wouldn't have happened if. . . .”

“What if such-and-such happened instead. . . ?”

In 2018, Emerging Civil War published the first book in the Engaging the Civil War Series, *Turning Points of the American Civil War*, which examined key shifts during the war and the context surrounding them to show that a chain of many events caused the course of the war to turn and turn again. In its way, this book is the beers-and-cigars version of *Turning Points*. It similarly looks at pivotal moments of the war and wonders aloud about the inevitable question that arises each time: “What if a turning point had turned in a different direction?”

The pastime of asking “What if?” about the Civil War dates back as far as the veterans themselves with their own home-brewed or home-distilled libations and rolls of tobacco. Civil War buffs have carried on the tradition; novelists have joined in, too, as have, more recently, some historians. It's a huge question, really, and one endlessly fun to ponder even if ultimately impossible to answer.



Cigar in hand, Ulysses S. Grant seems primed for a good “What if” discussion. His memoirs have provided excellent fodder for armchair generals, but consider all the things he did not have the chance to write about because he suffered from terminal throat cancer as he wrote. What if, for instance, he had written about his presidency? Or his post-presidency round-the-world trip? Or more about controversial battles like North Anna or Cold Harbor? *Library of Congress*

that employs the techniques of creative writing. The second is called “counterfactual history,” a nonfiction approach that employs the same methodologies and analysis used in traditional history writing.

Alternate histories are typically shelved at the local bookstore under “science fiction.” “Both seek to extrapolate logically from a change in the world as we know it,” explains novelist Harry Turtledove, dubbed by *Publisher’s Weekly* as “the master of alternate history.”² Says Turtledove:

Perhaps for that reason, “What If” is not respectable conversation in professional history circles. Sure, it’s fine for the pub, but “What If” is not ready for prime time. It doesn’t show up in conference presentations or on panel discussions. Historian Robert Cowley describes “What If” as “the historian’s favorite secret question” because no one likes to ask it aloud.¹ In that way, at least, the beer and cigars provide a smokescreen.

Writers who tackle “What If” questions typically follow one of two traditions. The first is called “alternate history” or “alternative historical fiction,” an approach

1 Cowley, What If?, quoted in Roger L. Ransom, *The Confederate States of America* (New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 4.

2 Mellissa Mia Hall, “Master of Alternate History,” *Publishers Weekly*, 7 April 2008. <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/authors/interviews/article/6996-master-of-alternate-history.html>.

Most forms of science fiction posit a change in the present or nearer future and imagine its effect on the more distant future. Alternate history, on the other hand, imagines a change in the more distant past and examines its consequences for the nearer past and the present. The technique is the same in both cases; the difference lies in where in time it is applied.³

The results can fall anywhere on a spectrum that novelists Newt Gingrich and William Forstchen define as “a rigid adherence to reality” to “an exercise in fantasy.”⁴ Books like Ward Moore’s 1953 *Bring the Jubilee* fall into this latter category. In *Jubilee*, a time-traveler from a future where the United States lost the “War of Southron Independence” travels back to see the moment the South won the battle of Gettysburg—but in doing so inadvertently changes the course of events, leading to a northern victory. Turtledove’s 1992 *The Guns of the South*, where time travelers from Apartheid-era South Africa show up to give AK-47s to Robert E. Lee, is another example—great brain candy but of little historical value.

However, Turtledove’s 1997 *How Few Remain: A Novel of the Second War Between the States*—which kicks off a mammoth eleven-part series that runs through World War II—is predicated on a much more realistic premise: “What If George McClellan had never found Lee’s ‘Lost Order’?” Similarly, Terry Bisson’s 1988 *Fire on the Mountain* is predicated on the question, “What If John Brown’s raid on Harpers Ferry had been successful?” Kevin Willmott’s 2004 “mockumentary” *C.S.A.: The Confederate States of America* is predicated on the question, “What If Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation failed, and Europe intervened in the war?” Similarly, Robert Conroy’s 2006 novel *1862* asks “What if Great Britain intervened in the war as a result of the 1861 Trent Affair?” Such stories—with their “rigid adherence to reality”—spring from tantalizing questions arising at key turning points. Peter Tsouras’s trilogy beginning with *Britannica’s Fist*, tackles a similar scenario but with Great Britain and France entering the war in 1863 and triggering a First World War.

3 Harry Turtledove, “Introduction,” in *If the South Had Won the Civil War* by MacKinlay Kantor (New York: Forge, 2001), vii-viii.

4 Newt Gingrich and William R. Forstchen, “Introduction,” *Gettysburg: A Novel of the Civil War*, audiobook edition (New York: Recorded Books, 2003).

Such stories—with their “rigid adherence to reality”—spring from tantalizing questions arising at key turning points.

Good alternate history doesn't just explore the historical questions, either. They have a richness of vision, as one of Turtledove's editors, Betsy Mitchell, once explained. “His novels illustrate the differences radiating from his ‘what ifs,’” she said of Turtledove, but could have been referring to any well-written novel of the genre, “not just through what happens to history's famous names but by showing us changes in the lives of everyday workers as well: secretaries, truck drivers, soldiers in the trenches.”⁵

Other alternate histories weave their stories from a “magic bullet or acts of God,” as Gingrich and Forstchen call them.⁶ As an example, MacKinlay Kantor's *If The South Had Won the Civil War* begins with Ulysses S. Grant—renowned as an excellent equestrian—getting pitched from a spooked horse following the May 12, 1863, battle of Raymond, Mississippi. Grant hits his head on a rock in the road and dies, and thus the Federals never take Vicksburg and end up losing the war. Kantor throws in a Confederate victory at Gettysburg for good measure. “The Past is immutable as such,” Kantor waxes poetically. “Yet, in Present and in Future, its accumulated works can be altered by the whim of Time. . . .”⁷ Or, as it happens, by the whim of a fiction writer.

Gingrich and Forstchen describe their own approach as “active history,” which requires thinking about alternate history that would have been “within the limitations of the circumstances.”⁸ Such novels are “based on solid historical facts combined with a clear understanding of the nature of the leaders who ultimately made the decisions, their leadership style, their ability to react, and their historical behavior,” Gingrich and Forstchen say. The goal of such an approach, they argue, is “to grasp the reality of the moment when critical decisions were made and consider the alternatives of decisions *not* made.”⁹ Their Gettysburg-based trilogy—*Gettysburg*

5 Quoted in Hall, “Master of Alternate History.”

6 Ibid.

7 Kantor, 1.

8 Ibid.

9 Gingrich and Forstchen, “Introduction.”

(2003), *Grant Comes East* (2004), and *Never Call Retreat* (2005)—falls into this category. They maintain Lee worked best on the operational level, basing their argument on his plans and performance at Second Manassas, Chancellorsville, and even Antietam. What if he maintained that same level of perspective at Gettysburg rather than getting sucked into a poor tactical situation because his blood was up?

Gingrich and Forstchen hope their approach can “show how much can be learned by thinking about history in an active rather than passive sense and then exploring in a disciplined manner the options that were not taken,” including an examination “of the principles and systems which shape and enable events” and an “understanding of the subtleties and shadings that are at the heart of decision-making.”¹⁰

This has particular applications for understanding leadership decisions and crisis response. “This is precisely what professional soldiers are taught to do,” the authors say, pointing to the modern staff ride, where officers learn about decision-making by examining options on a battlefield. It’s why the army conducts wargames and maneuvers and, they add, “why Napoleon said officers should immerse themselves in history.”¹¹

Despite the intellectual underpinning of “active histories,” some historians dismiss fiction as a useful tool for understanding history. “[T]he novelists writing alternative historical fiction avoid dealing with the myriad of historical details that arise from their choices of counterfactual worlds,” argues historian Roger L. Ransom in the preface of his 2005 *The Confederate States of America*. “They simply present the counterfactual events as backgrounds to the plots rather than the focus of historical inquiry.”¹² It’s a mistake, however, to dismiss fiction’s incredible power to get at truths that traditional fact-bound histories cannot. For instance, Turtledove’s eleven-book series, Bisson’s *Fire on the Mountain*, and Willmott’s *C.S.A.*, among others, probe vital questions about race relations, class struggle, politics, and more, making their alternate histories worthwhile explorations of universal human conditions.

The second writing tradition that explores “What If” questions embraces

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ransom, 12.



The bronze figure of "Fame" on the Iowa state monument at Shiloh "with immortal pen/Inscribes their names on the enduring rock." Is history quite so set in stone, or does it become mutable as new information emerges and our understanding of events changes? What if . . . ? *Chris Mackowski*

a more fact-bound approach: counterfactual history. Counterfactual history seeks to better understand what actually happened by understanding what *might have* happened. How can we know the true importance of an outcome, for instance, unless we understand what other possible outcomes existed in a given moment? "History is not merely what happened: it is what happened in the context of what might have happened," historian Hugh Trevor-Roper has pointed out.¹³ As Roger Ransom goes on to add, "[W]hat historians looking at the problem years later treat as 'counterfactual' possibilities that did *not* happen, contemporaries at the time viewed as possibilities of the future that *might* happen."¹⁴ Taking that a step further, Cowley asks, "At what point did possibilities become impossibilities?"¹⁵

13 Hugh Trevor-Roper, quoted in Ransom, 4.

14 Ransom, 14.

The greatest value of asking “What if” is that it embodies an inherent invitation to stretch one’s critical thinking skills. “Counterfactual questions, if kept more or less within the parameters of what was possible at the time and place, can often help us better understand events of the past . . .” argues historian Richard M. McMurry in the prologue of his 2002 counterfactual book *The Fourth Battle of Winchester*. “To the extent that such inquiries fulfill that purpose and lead us to a fuller appreciation of history, they can be legitimate and useful devices for the study of the past.”¹⁶ They have a unique way of illuminating facts, says Cowley. “Counterfactual history may be the history of what didn’t happen, a shadow universe,” he admits, “but it casts a reflective light on what did.”¹⁷

Counterfactual history requires an explicitly analytical approach, although a dose of creativity also helps. Ironically, opening the door for imagination makes some professional historians uncomfortable or even dismissive. Ransom describes a “general aversion of historians to counterfactual history” because it deals with “unprovable might-have-beens, requiring powers of imagination that belong more to novelists than historians.”¹⁸ However, this very same combination of analytic and creative thought, deeply rooted in the liberal arts tradition, has become prized in the Information Age workplace.

In this book, we’re coming at the question “What If” a little sideways. We’re not just asking the question, we’re trying to subvert it. When someone asks “What If,” we want to challenge them to really examine the question and all the assumptions that might surround it. We want to, in the words of Gingrich and Forstchen, pay special attention to the “limitations of the circumstances.” When people ask “What If,” they tend to forget about those limitations.

Take, for instance, the wounding of Stonewall Jackson, which historian William C. Davis has called, “The oldest and most often asked ‘What if’ question of the Civil War.”¹⁹ If Stonewall Jackson doesn’t get shot, he’s of

15 Robert Cowley, editor, “Introduction,” *What Ifs? Of American History* (New York: G.P. Putman’s Sons, 2003), xiii.

16 Richard M. McMurry, *The Fourth Battle of Winchester: Toward a New Civil War Paradigm* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1998), xvi.

17 Cowley, xiii.

18 Ransom, 2.

course rolling up over the top of Cemetery Hill in Gettysburg two months later. And if he does that? Well, Confederates win the battle of Gettysburg and probably the Civil War, too!

Um, no. And it doesn't matter how many beers or cigars you have, that answer won't change. See Kris White's essay in this volume, "What if Stonewall Jackson had not been shot," to find out why.

Stonewall Jackson's death became one of the fundamental pillars of the nascent Lost Cause mythology, which elevated Jackson to martyrdom. So, too, did Albert Sidney Johnston's accidental death along the banks of the Tennessee River. That's one of several topics Timothy B. Smith addresses in his essay, "The What Ifs of Shiloh." Smith's conclusions about the many possibilities raised in that battle might surprise you.

Kevin Pawlak takes a similar approach in his essay, "What Ifs of Antietam." Among them are another of the most popular what-if questions of the war: What if George McClellan hadn't found Lee's "Lost Order"?

Dwight Hughes touches on a political topic in his essay, "What if Great Britain and other foreign powers had intervened in the war?" Dwight parses the complicated international dynamics at play in 1862.

Gettysburg could merit a "What If" volume all its own, but Dan Welch tackles one of the most popular questions from the battle, "What If Longstreet had moved around to the right at Gettysburg?" Other military topics include Chris Mackowski's "What if Lee had struck a blow at the North Anna River?" and Kristen Pawlak's "What if Sterling Price had secured Missouri during his 1864 campaign?"

Another key theme that weaves through several essays is leadership. Cecily Nelson Zander looks at the seemingly baffling loyalty Jefferson Davis showed toward Army of Tennessee commander Braxton Bragg. Barton Myers considers the character of Robert E. Lee when Lee is faced, near war's end, with the choice of embracing an irregular strategy. Most tantalizingly, Brian Matthew Jordan asks, "What if Lincoln had not been assassinated?"

Unfortunately—but understandably—when people ask these and

19 Davis's comment comes from the book blurb for Douglas Lee Gibboney's *Stonewall Jackson at Gettysburg* (Sgt. Kirkland's Press, 1996), which gives the scenario book-length treatment. See also R. E. Thomas's *Stonewall Goes West* trilogy (Black Gold Media, 2013).

other “What Ifs,” they often jump to the conclusions they prefer without really thinking through the facts of the moment. “Wishful thinking is an unhistorical trap,” Cowley cautions, “and one we can do without.”²⁰

Each of the questions we present in this collection represents a potential turning point in the war.²¹ Each turning point, in turn, spawned one or more “What Ifs,” with one or more potential outcomes. We invite you, before jumping to your preferred pre-ordained outcome, to consider the situation on the ground, understand the context, look at the potential courses of action as confined by the limitations of the circumstances. Use the lens offered by Peter G. Tsouras in the foreword to this book. Be creative, but be critical.

Of course, we can’t fit all of even the most popular “What Ifs” into this single volume. In order to provoke more thinking for our readers, though, we’ve tried to raise as many questions as a single book will let us. To that end, we hope our photos captions will pose more interesting topics of speculation for you to mull over. Look for more “What Ifs” from us down the road, particularly on our blog, www.emergingcivilwar.com.

20 Cowley, xvi.

21 In that vein, you can look at ECW’s essay collection *Turning Points of the American Civil War* (SIUP, 2017) as a companion volume to this collection. Each “turning point” represents a variety of potential outcomes, inviting good “What If” fodder.



What if Death and Night had not conspired to snatch victory from the Confederates at Shiloh on April 6, 1862? So asks the Confederate memorial on the Shiloh battlefield. *Chris Mackowski*

CHAPTER ONE

Persistently Misunderstood

The What Ifs of Shiloh

Timothy B. Smith

In the center of Shiloh National Military Park stands one of the most impressive monuments on the battlefield. The United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) monument, erected in 1917 at a cost of \$50,000 and dedicated in front of a crowd of fifteen thousand, is very impressive in its elegant lines, moving statuary, and symbolism. Erected with money raised by school children and the ladies of the South to mark a battlefield at that time (and still today) sharply tilted toward Union memorialization, the UDC monument loudly proclaims the honor and duty of Confederate soldiers at Shiloh.¹

Besides the beauty, elegance, and size of the monument, the symbolism it portrays is perhaps most important. Placed on the battlefield in the heyday of the Lost Cause movement wherein proud Southerners sought to explain their defeat in the Civil War, the symbolism of the monument is classic Lost Cause. The bronze figures adorning each flank represent the four branches of the Confederate army (infantry, artillery, cavalry, and officer corps), with each providing their own view of the fighting. For instance, the infantry and artillery proudly look to the field while the cavalryman, little used in

1 “The Confederate Monument” Series 1, Box 26, Folder 373, Shiloh National Military Park.

the heavily wooded terrain, spreads his hands in frustration and the officer bows his head in defeat. The heads on each side represent the two days of battle, with eleven (for the number of Confederate states) on the right denoting the first day's fighting and lifted up in victory and the ten (fewer because of casualties) on the left bowed in defeat on the second day. Even the placement of the monument, at the high water mark of the Confederate struggle on the first day where the Hornet's Nest defenders surrendered, speaks volumes.²

The most symbolism resides, as would be expected, in the center of the monument. There, three bronze figures are caught in a seeming dance of defeat. Two veiled figures are taking from a front feminine figure a laurel wreath. The two veiled figures represent death and night, and they are symbolically taking the laurel wreath of victory from the figure in front, who represents the South. In effect, the Lost Cause argument is that death and night stole victory from the Confederates at Shiloh, the night of April 6, 1862, coming too quickly and many Confederates later arguing that if they just had a few more hours of daylight the victory would have been complete. Similarly, death stole victory from the Confederacy in the form of Albert Sidney Johnston, whose bust profile can be seen directly below the three central bronze figures. Many Southerners argued that had Johnston not perished on the battlefield, he would have continued the victory on to fulfillment while his successor threw away the triumph. As a result, the what-if questions have long raged over what would have happened if Johnston had not died or if his successor had not thrown away the victory by calling off the assaults because of looming darkness.³

These questions are central to understanding Shiloh as a whole, and they are certainly not new, and they were not in 1917 when the two foremost what ifs were put on such beautiful display. The question of what would have happened had Johnston not perished or if P. G. T. Beauregard had not called off the final attacks of the day due to the lateness of the hour have

2 Timothy B. Smith, *This Great Battlefield of Shiloh: History, Memory, and the Establishment of a Civil War National Military Park* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2004), 89-90. For the Lost Cause, see Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, The Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

3 William Preston Johnston, "Albert Sidney Johnston at Shiloh," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 4 vols. (New York, 1884-1887), 1: 540-568; P. G. T. Beauregard, "The Campaign of Shiloh," *Battles and Leaders*, 1: 569-593.

been debated since the battle ended and well before their Lost Cause personification in 1917 in the UDC monument. No less an authority than Ulysses S. Grant himself wrote in 1885 that Shiloh “has been perhaps less understood, or, to state the case more accurately, more persistently misunderstood, than any other engagement . . . during the entire rebellion.” Similarly, the first park historian David W. Reed wrote in 1912 that “occasionally . . . some one thinks that his unaided memory of the events of 50 years ago is superior to the official reports of officers which were made at [the] time of the battle. It seems hard for them to realize that oft-repeated campfire stories, added to and enlarged, become impressed on the memory as real facts.”⁴



Lew Wallace, ordered to join the rest of the Federal army at Shiloh, took an alternate road—one that ultimately would have led him onto the battlefield on the left flank of an unsuspecting Confederate army. Instead, he doubled back to take the main road and got to the battle late. What if he had continued on his original path instead?
Library of Congress

Certainly, many other what if scenarios abound at Shiloh as well, including questions such as what would have happened if the Confederates had managed to attack on April 5 instead of the next day? What would have happened if Buell had not arrived at the end of the first day? What would have happened if Lew Wallace had not been delayed in arriving on the field? What would have happened if Benjamin Prentiss and W. H. L. Wallace had not held the Hornet’s Nest to the point of sacrifice? The evidence indicates that few if any would have made much of a difference if the “what if” had been true. The record is clear that the paltry number of troops Buell managed to put into line on the evening of the first day made little difference in blunting the Confederate attack. Consequently, had the Confederates attacked as intended on April 5

4 Ulysses S. Grant, “The Battle of Shiloh,” *Battles and Leaders*, 1: 465; *Annual Report of the Secretary of War – 1912* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913), 195-196.

or even April 4, as some historians claim but the evidence does not back up, the same problems would have appeared to stymie the Confederate advance short of Buell's arrival, which made little actual difference in reality. So his absence would not have made much difference a day or two earlier. As Grant was able to hold his final line at Pittsburg Landing without Lew Wallace's arrival, he certainly could have done so if he had shown up on the battlefield hours earlier, making the Confederate advance only that much more difficult. And finally, would a lesser defense of the Hornet's Nest have given the Confederates a victory? Modern research and a growing school of thought is that Grant's final line was so strong and was developed so early in the day (started around 2:30 p.m.) that Wallace and Prentiss holding out until nearly dark provided little additional benefit. Certainly, Ulysses S. Grant did not single the Hornet's Nest defense out as the key to victory.⁵

Despite these what ifs potentially making little difference in the result of the battle, what about death and night stealing victory from the Confederates? Of all the questions that the soldiers of the battle as well as historians and buffs ever since have debated, Johnston's death and the stoppage of the Confederate advance at night have emerged as the key explanations causing defeat for the Confederates at Shiloh. But did they?⁶

The effect of Albert Sidney Johnston's death has long been a source of debate. Participants in the battle itself first made claims as to whether his death affected the outcome, and the major actors in the debate, or in the deceased Johnston's case his son, succinctly analyzed both arguments in major articles that appeared primarily and most concisely in the famed *Century (Battles and Leaders)* series of publications in the 1880s.⁷

5 Timothy B. Smith, *Shiloh: Conquer or Perish* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2014); Larry J. Daniel, *Shiloh: The Battle That Changed the Civil War* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1997); Edward Cunningham, *Shiloh and the Western Campaign of 1862*, Gary D. Joiner and Timothy B. Smith, eds. (New York: Savas Beatie, 2007); Timothy B. Smith, "Myths of Shiloh," *America's Civil War* (May 2006): 30-36, 71.

6 Grant, "The Battle of Shiloh," 465-486; Don Carlos Buell, "Shiloh Reviewed," *Battles and Leaders*, 1: 487-536; Timothy B. Smith, "Historians and the Battle of Shiloh: One Hundred and Forty Years of Controversy," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, vol. 62, no. 4 (2003): 332-353.

7 Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel, eds., *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War; Being For the Most Part Contributions By Union and Confederate Officers: Based upon "The Century" War Series*, 4 vols. (New York, 1884-1887).

The arguments are plain on the surface. Johnston’s son, William Preston Johnston who was later an aide to Jefferson Davis in Richmond, argued that his father was on the verge of victory at 2:30 p.m. when he bled to death. Johnston had moved to the right of the Confederate line, where the all-important turning movement around the Union left flank was to occur. Because the right flank was stalled, Johnston determined he had to put his substantial leadership abilities in the fight and lead from the front. It worked, at least on the isolated tactical level at the time, and the charge Johnston led in part moved the Union line rearward through the Peach Orchard area.⁸



After Shiloh, the Confederacy suffered from command problems in the western theater for the rest of the war, from incompetent leadership to infighting. Win or lose, what if Albert Sidney Johnston had lived beyond the battle of Shiloh? *Chris Mackowski*

Unfortunately, during the advance Johnston took a bullet in the right leg just behind the knee and in the course of thirty minutes or so bled to death right on the battlefield. A simple tourniquet could potentially have saved his life, but Johnston probably did not even know he was wounded until far too late. And, his staff surgeon, D. W. Yandell, had been left in the rear to care for wounded in some of the Union camps. The result was that Johnston perished in a ravine behind the lines, his call to conquer or perish

8 Timothy B. Smith, “To Conquer or Perish: The Last Hours of Albert Sidney Johnston,” in *Confederate Generals in the Western Theater: An Anthology*, Volume 3, edited by Larry Hewitt and Art Bergeron (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2011), 21-37.

Shiloh

Argument over what would have happened if Albert Sidney Johnston had lived at Shiloh has raged since the afternoon he died. Having put the Confederate army in motion and attacking on the morning of April 6, 1862, Johnston perished in the early afternoon, a result of bleeding to death because an artery in his leg had been hit. Many historians have argued that Johnston was in the process of winning the victory at the time of his death but that his successor, P. G. T. Beauregard, threw away Johnston's victory when he called off the final assaults on the Union last line of defense nearer to Pittsburg Landing. In reality, Beauregard continued Johnston's push forward after the army commander's death—even faster that Johnston had been pushing, in fact—and managed to neutralize the famed Hornet's Nest, something Johnston had failed to do throughout the day. And Beauregard's final recall order stopping the attack came when Confederates at the front, on the ground itself, had already come to the same conclusion and were themselves stopping the attacks on their own. Beauregard did not throw away Johnston's victory, which Johnston was not actually winning when he died. As a result, the "what if" of Johnston living would have made no appreciable difference in the outcome of the Battle of Shiloh.

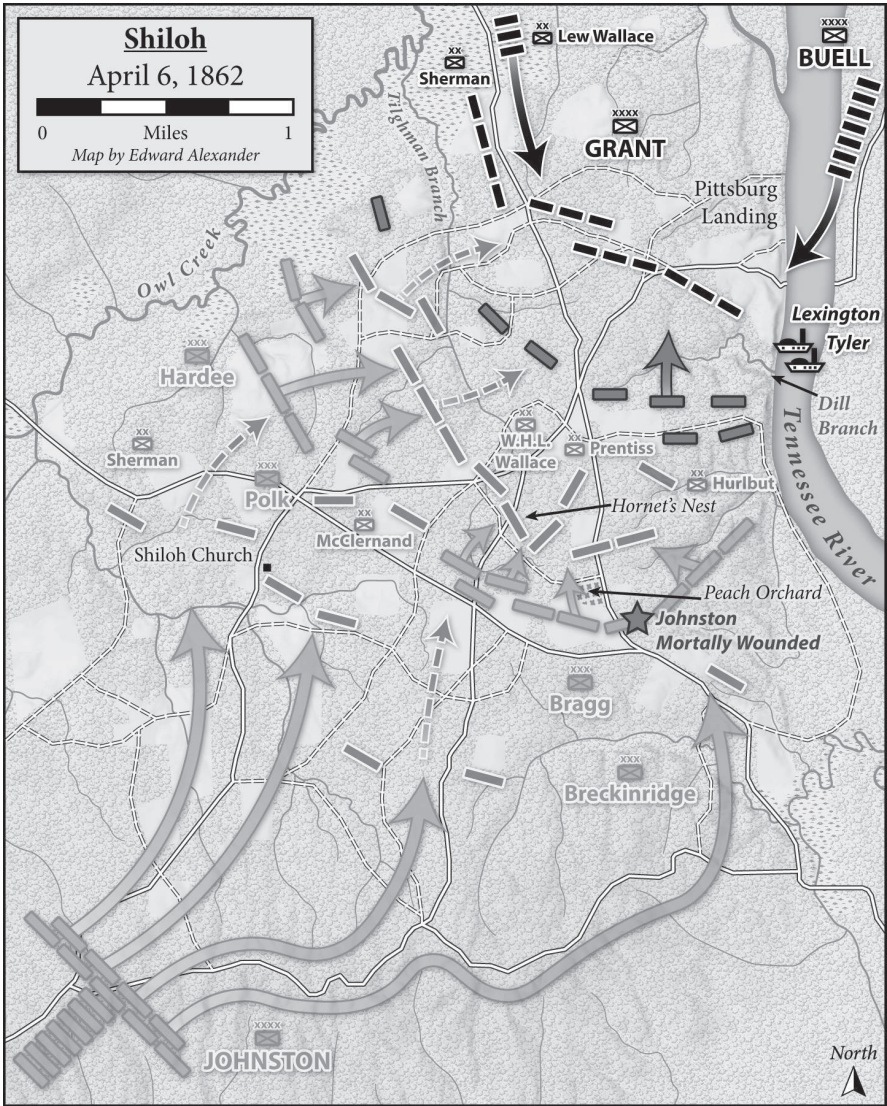
having become partly true as Johnston perished in the attempt. Whether the conquer part would fade would be up to his successor in command of the army, General P. G. T. Beauregard.⁹

William Preston Johnston argued that his father was on the verge of victory, the successful charge he had just led a case in point. He made elaborate arguments in both his article for *Battle and Leaders* as well as a lengthy biography of his father published in 1879. It was there that he argued that his father died at the height of victory but that Beauregard took the reins of command and promptly threw away the hard earned success. He wrote that up until his father's death there was "the predominance of intelligent design; a master mind, keeping in clear view its purpose." This argument, of course, made its way into the UDC monument at Shiloh, where Johnston's bust figured prominently on the center front and where the veiled figure of death (Johnston's) snatched the laurel wreath of victory from the South. Illustrating the importance of Johnston to the Confederate effort at Shiloh, the UDC placed a lock of the general's hair in the cornerstone of the monument.¹⁰

Others elaborated on the effect of Johnston's death as well, the major theory being that a supposed lull took place after Johnston's death, some

9 Charles P. Roland, *Albert Sidney Johnston: Soldier of Three Republics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), 336-338.

10 William Preston Johnston, *The Life of Gen. Albert Sidney Johnston: His Service in the Armies of the United States, The Republic of Texas, and the Confederate States* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1879); Johnston, "Albert Sidney Johnston at Shiloh," 1: 565, 568.



said for many hours’ duration. In that time, Johnston’s supporters argued, the Federals were able to reform their lines with little to no pressure on the Union left, where the Confederate push had to succeed if they were to have any chance of victory. In particular, William T. Sherman described a pause, as did William J. Hardee, who spoke of “a lull in the attack on the right and precious hours were wasted.” He went on to say, “It is, in my opinion, the

candid belief of intelligent men that, but for this calamity, we would have achieved before sunset a triumph signal not only in the annals of this war, but memorable in future history.”¹¹

Others involved in the war also agreed, none more influential than Confederate President Jefferson Davis himself. Johnston’s close friend and significantly a bitter enemy of Beauregard, Davis argued in his mammoth *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government* that the fault for defeat lay squarely on Beauregard’s shoulders. And in some cases, the effect was larger than just at Shiloh; the younger Johnston used one Confederate officer’s quote that “the West perished with Albert Sidney Johnston, and the Southern country followed.”¹²

Modern historians have taken this debate to new levels, with many of the stalwart historians siding with the younger Johnston that the elder’s death made a huge difference. Most notably, Johnston’s biographer Charles P. Roland argued in his major work in the 1960s, and then in a smaller volume since, that Johnston’s death was the key factor in defeat. He asserted that the “Confederate drive lost momentum when Johnston fell” and that “the fury of the Confederate assault waned.” Most significantly, he added that Beauregard threw away the victory, and had Johnston lived “he might well have achieved it.”¹³

Wiley Sword in *Shiloh: Bloody April* continued the emphasis on Johnston’s death, stating that “no one now seemed to be in control of the situation on the extreme Confederate right.” Sword went so far as to begin a single handed process to locate what he viewed as the correct death spot on the battlefield and in doing so labeled it “as perhaps an ultimate Confederate shrine; it is the spot where the South may have lost the war.” More recently, Larry J. Daniel in *Shiloh: The Battle that Changed the Civil War* also argued that there was a lull.¹⁴

11 William T. Sherman, *Memoirs of General William T. Sherman: Written by Himself*. 2 vols. (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1875), 1:247; OR, 1, 10(1): 569.

12 Jefferson Davis, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*, 2 vols. (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1881), 2: 60-61, 66; Johnston, “Albert Sidney Johnston at Shiloh,” 565, 568.

13 Roland, *Albert Sidney Johnston*, 341-342; Charles P. Roland, *Jefferson Davis’s Greatest General: Albert Sidney Johnston* (Abilene: McWhiney Foundation Press, Texas, 2000), 82.

14 Wiley Sword, *Shiloh: Bloody April* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1974), 274, 320, 310, 447; Larry J. Daniel, *Shiloh: The Battle That Changed the Civil War* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1997), 228.

Of course, there were detractors as well, most notably Beauregard himself. In his own *Battles and Leaders* article and then in a ghost-written biography by Alfred Roman, Beauregard insisted there was no victory to throw away. He particularly railed against the idea of a lull on the Confederate right, arguing that if there was one it was no more than fifteen minutes. Major historians have also ascribed to this view, including James Lee McDonough in *Shiloh: In Hell Before Night* who argued there was no lull after Johnston’s death. Edward Cunningham similarly argued that although a lull did develop on the field after Johnston’s death, it was no more so on the right than anywhere else.¹⁵

In actuality, Johnston’s death made little difference in the fighting. He had long by this point in the battle given up any role as army commander, and was acting at the time of his death as a brigade commander would, leading troops in an assault. In a larger context, the Confederate army had by this point spent much of its force, and while Johnston’s attack drove the Federals back momentarily, there was still no clear path to turning the Union left. As for the lull, there is no clear consensus if there was even one, and certainly none on how long it was. And while the participants who were there certainly deserve our respect and ear, it is important to note that the two main sources of the lull thesis, Sherman and Hardee, were significantly on the other side of the battlefield at the time of the described lull, nearly two miles away. Clearly, there were lulls during all battles, Shiloh included. Braxton Bragg described as much: “all parts of our line were not constantly engaged, but there was no time without heavy firing in some portion of it.” Grant similarly wrote, “there was no hour during the day when there was not heavy firing and generally hard fighting at some point on the line, but seldom at all points at the same time.” Thus, any lull was due more to the natural flow of battle than because of Johnston’s death. If there was a critical lull, it actually took place during the hours of little movement before his death. That lull in forward movement

15 Alfred Roman, *The Military Operations of General Beauregard in the War Between the States, 1861 to 1865: Including a Brief Personal Sketch of His Services in the War with Mexico, 1846-8*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1883); Beauregard, “The Campaign of Shiloh,” 1: 589-590; Cunningham, *Shiloh and the Western Campaign of 1862*, 278; James L. McDonough, *Shiloh: In Hell before Night* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977), 153-155.

cost the Confederates more in time and space than that which occurred after Johnston's death, when the Confederates followed up the Union line more quickly.¹⁶

If the UDC monument at Shiloh made grand claims that Albert Sidney Johnston's death helped cause the Confederate defeat at Shiloh, the parallel argument, as encapsulated in the other veiled figure (night stealing victory from the South), also hinged somewhat on Johnston's death. When the army commander perished, that left command in the hands of Beauregard, who had actually wielded more control of the army throughout the battle than Johnston had anyway. Beauregard had been on the front lines at Manassas while Joseph E. Johnston oversaw the entire operation from the rear. This time the tables were turned and Beauregard remained more in the rear conducting the battle while another Johnston went to the front and died as a result. Accordingly, little changed in terms of the Confederate high command and the direction of the overall battle when Johnston died, adding further fuel to the idea that Johnston's death did not cause defeat.¹⁷

In fact, Beauregard continued the attack across the board, and contrary to those who argue that he squandered Johnston's offensive success, he actually pushed the majority of the Federal army back. It was on Beauregard's watch from around 2:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. that both flanks of the Union army were driven back into a final line of defense nearer the landing, a seismic shift in the fighting wherein the Federals abandoned the major line from the Peach Orchard to the Hornet's Nest and on to the Crossroads that they had held since mid morning. Johnston's isolated attack around 2:00 p.m. did not accomplish that, but rather drove back a portion of one wing into a new line a few hundred feet in the rear. Additionally, it was on Beauregard's watch after Johnston's death that the Confederates captured and neutralized the Hornet's Nest, again something Johnston had been unable to do while he lived. The result is that contrary to anti-Beauregard partisans, Beauregard continued the advance after he took command, all the way nearly to Pittsburg Landing.

16 Smith, *Shiloh*, 193; OR, 1, 10(1): 465, 469-470, 569; Grant, "The Battle of Shiloh," 1:473; Sherman, *Memoirs of General William T. Sherman*, 1:247; Johnston, "Albert Sidney Johnston at Shiloh," 1:565; Beauregard, "The Campaign of Shiloh," 589; Alexander R. Chisolm, "The Shiloh Battle-Order and the Withdrawal Sunday Evening," *Battles and Leaders*, 1:606; Roman, *The Military Operations of General Beauregard*, 1:551; McDonough, 154.

17 For Beauregard, see T. Harry Williams, *P. G. T. Beauregard: Napoleon in Gray* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1954).

If anything, Beauregard continued the victory Johnston was winning, if he was indeed winning at all at that point, which is doubtful.¹⁸

The major argument concerning Beauregard throwing away the victory, however, comes in regard to his final actions of the day. Once the Confederate army drove back the flanks and captured the Hornet’s Nest defenders, they reorganized and portions of the army attempted to storm Grant’s last line. One Louisiana brigade assaulted the right center of the line by crossing Tilghman Branch and making a bloody attack that the Federals easily repulsed. The more famous attempts came on the far Confederate right where portions of four brigades crossed the massive Dill Branch ravine and tried to attack the heart of Grant’s defenses near the landing. But before night fell, Beauregard’s orders arrived to stop the advance. Thus was born the idea that had Beauregard continued the attack, he could have broken the Federal lines, perhaps driven the enemy into the river, and won the battle.¹⁹

Obviously, the major proponents of this theory were Johnston’s backers, namely his son who wrote in his biography as well as his *Battles and Leaders* article how Beauregard failed to push his army and thus negated his father’s success. Beauregard literally snatched defeat out of the jaws of victory, so the younger Johnston thought, and willingly squandered the victory his father had so sacrificially won. In the younger Johnston’s words, “complete victory was in his grasp, and he threw it away.”²⁰

Many have disagreed over the years, and in fact the major historians of the battle have come to a rather firm consensus that Beauregard did not throw away a victory. James Lee McDonough argued that there was no lost opportunity and that the correct decision was to call off the attacks. Edward Cunningham stated that the Confederates could not have taken Grant’s last line. Wiley Sword agreed, and Larry Daniel argued that the Confederates had no chance to break Grant’s last line, although it should have been tried more forcefully than it was.²¹

Many factors abound that illustrate just why Beauregard did not throw

18 Smith, *Shiloh*, 217-218.

19 Ibid. 217-232.

20 Johnston, “Albert Sidney Johnston at Shiloh,” 1:568.

21 McDonough, *Shiloh*, 181; Cunningham, *Shiloh and the Western Campaign of 1862*, 324-325; Sword, *Shiloh*, 450-452; Daniel, *Shiloh*, 255-256.

away Johnston's victory. One was indeed the coming of night, although Beauregard's stoppage order arrived well before it was too late to see or fight anymore. By the time the encircling Confederates rounded up the last defenders of the Hornet's Nest around 6:00 p.m., that left only about one hour of daylight to reorganize, reposition, and continue the attack. Several brigades were able to do so and actually crossed the ravine only to meet a massive barrage of Federal fire.²²

Beauregard himself was not on the front line but back nearer to Shiloh Church, nearly a couple of miles away, when he made the fateful decision that would haunt him in Lost Cause mentality. Examining what he knew at the time so close to dark, however, paints a picture wherein Beauregard thought the heavy lifting had already been done and that the rest would be a

mopping up action. He had continued Johnston's attacks and broken the major Federal defensive line of the day along the Peach Orchard-Hornet's



Following the defeat at Shiloh and subsequent siege and abandonment of Corinth, Mississippi, Gen. P. G. T. Beauregard took medical leave in June 1862—without permission from his superiors in Richmond. Events of the spring had stained the reputation of the “Hero of Ft. Sumter,” so President Jefferson Davis used the opportunity as an excuse to eventually transfer Beauregard back to Charleston. The relationship between the two would continue to worsen thereafter to the detriment of the overall Confederate war effort. What if Beauregard and Davis had found a way to work past their differences? *National Archives*

²² Smith, *Shiloh*, 223-229.

Nest-Crossroads axis, the one that had held out for many hours from mid morning to early evening. Now, the beaten Federals were in retreat and huddled near the landing, probably ready to give in.²³

Similarly, Beauregard thought there would be no help for these defeated Federals. He had gotten word from north Alabama that Don Carlos Buell’s Army of the Ohio was spotted there and thus would be of no aid to Grant at Pittsburg Landing. While in reality one division was indeed in north Alabama, five more were being even then funneled to the battlefield, the advance of one already coming ashore on the western bank of the river and going into line. Beauregard clearly thought he had the Federals right where he wanted them and saw no need to push further this late in the day when it could be done easily the next morning.²⁴

The exhaustion of the Confederate army was also a factor. The battle had begun at daylight, now some thirteen hours earlier, so the army had been in action a long time and was tired, bloody, and hungry. Moreover, the three or four days previous had been anything but easy as well, with long marches, harsh weather, and much chaos. Beauregard simply thought that instead of making his famished troops do any more today, he could let them rest during the night and mop up the next morning.²⁵

Accordingly, Beauregard sent the fateful message to end the action late in the evening. It was certainly the right choice, given all the contributing factors, but perhaps Beauregard can be faulted for making this right decision for all the wrong reasons. For whatever reason, however, the choice was correct, although the crux of the debate is whether a continued assault, had Johnston been around to push it, would have won the victory. Much evidence says it would not have.²⁶

The Federal defense at the last line was enormously strong. Grant’s chief of staff Joseph D. Webster had begun forming this line as early as 2:30 that afternoon, studding it with assorted artillery that had not yet gotten into the fight, including huge siege guns intended for use at Corinth,

23 Williams, *P. G. T. Beauregard*, 140-142.

24 Ibid.

25 Smith, *Shiloh*, 230.

26 Ibid., 232.

Mississippi, when the army advanced on that defended bastion. Other artillery batteries also went into the line (ultimately making around fifty guns in a short span of ground near the landing), as did those coming in from the field itself in retreat. Masses of retreating infantry also followed northward (as well as the first companies of Buell's army arriving via Pittsburg Landing), and they all, with the exception of those captured in the Hornet's Nest, went into line and solidified it even more. That the battlefield continually narrowed the farther northward the fighting moved also aided the Federals as their required lines of defense were much shorter and thereby much stronger. Adding more defensibility to this last line were the huge ravines that fronted most of it, Dill Branch on the east and Tilghman Branch on the western side. Just getting across them without any defense is difficult even today, but was significantly more so under fire then. And then, of course, the naval gunboats *Tyler* and *Lexington* in the river firing up Dill Branch ravine also aided the defense and shocked Confederate morale. While their role in the battle and contribution to Union victory, like Buell's arrival, has been debated just about as much as any of the other questions of Shiloh, it is no doubt that the gunboats were an important part of the last Union defense.²⁷

Making a successful assault across this harsh terrain against so much defensibility was a recipe for disaster. But Beauregard was not on site and knew little if any of the details facing the Confederate brigades that managed to cross Dill and Tilghman branches. For that reason, Beauregard made the right decision but for a completely different set of reasons. It is the remarkable consensus that the Confederate assaults would not have succeeded had they been fully launched, but in part because of Beauregard's order, they were not pushed forward with any gusto at all. Thus emerged the argument that Beauregard threw away the victory Johnston had won.²⁸

There is yet another factor in the wilting Confederate advance at dark on April 6, however, and that regards who actually made the decision to call off the assaults. While Beauregard received the blame in Lost Cause mythology as Confederates were casting about looking

27 Ibid., 217-235.

28 Johnston, "Albert Sidney Johnston at Shiloh," 1: 567-568.

for those to fault, there is much evidence that the actual decision to stop the assaults was made not by Beauregard but by those lower-ranking officers physically on the ground who saw the enormous factors against them and the seeming impossibility of succeeding, and that was before Beauregard’s order arrived. Colonel Robert A. Smith of the 10th Mississippi in James Chalmers’s brigade, the only one who actually even attempted an advance, explained that “several ineffectual attempts were made to induce a charge but the exhaustion of the troops was so great that . . . our weakened line could not attempt it and a retreat to the ravine back out of range was ordered.” Chalmers described how his men were “attempting to mount the last ridge” and were “met by a fire from the whole line of batteries protected by infantry and assisted by shells from the gunboats.” In fact, Chalmers declared that he never got an order to fall back but did so on his own. Similarly, John K. Jackson commanding another ammunitionless brigade that crossed the ravine under fire wrote, “Finding an advance without support impracticable, remaining there under fire useless, and believing any forward movement should be made simultaneously along our whole line, I proceeded to obtain orders from General Withers.”²⁹

Even more telling, there was at the time little if any remonstrance against Beauregard’s order when it did come, it merely stamping official approval on what had already been decided on the ground. Some Confederates stated years later that they had objected, but no contemporary evidence shows any argument against Beauregard’s order that evening. An officer on Braxton Bragg’s staff (Bragg having come to the right to oversee operations there after Johnston’s death) wrote, “At the time the order was given, the plain truth must be told, that our troops at the front were a thin line of exhausted men, who were making no further headway, and were glad to receive orders to fall back,” adding that the recall order was “most timely.” Another Bragg staff officer explained, “My impression was (this was also the conclusion of General Bragg), that our troops had done all that they would do and had better

29 Robert A. Smith Report, April 9, 1862, Robert A. Smith Papers, MDAH; OR, 1, 10(1): 134, 386-387, 410, 534, 550-551, 555, 616-617.

be withdrawn." He also related, "If he had received and disproved such an order, it is probable that something would have been said about it."³⁰

Consequently, Beauregard has been faulted for calling off attacks that would almost certainly have failed and for that reason were abandoned on the spot even before Beauregard's formal orders arrived. Thus, the idea that night came on too soon and stole victory from the Confederates is a what if of mammoth proportions that has no base in reality. The Confederate army by 6:30 p.m. on April 6 was so tired and disorganized and facing such a strong line of defense behind almost impossible terrain to surmount that even several more hours of daylight, or Johnston's presence pushing his men onward, would likely have made little difference.

As the congress debated creating the Shiloh National Military Park in 1894, Representative Joseph H. Outhwaite of Ohio argued that establishing the park would "put at rest once and for all time to come the uncertainties and misrepresentations surrounding the battle." Such has obviously not been the case as historians and buffs have debated the battle of Shiloh ever since, perhaps even more so since the park's establishment and the erection of its attending monuments such as the UDC memorial with all its symbolism.³¹

Yet those debates are central to the history of the battle and cannot be delineated specifically in facts, but are more akin to how to interpret the facts. And those debates rightly include some of the major what ifs of Shiloh, although it is prudent to remember that what ifs are just that, possibilities. One can ponder what would have happened if Lew Wallace had arrived on the field earlier, or if the Confederates had attacked a day or two earlier, or if Buell's army had not arrived when it did, or if the Federals had not sacrificed themselves at the Hornet's Nest. In each case, the evidence points to the fact that none of these what-if scenarios would have made any difference at Shiloh.

Certainly, the two main debated points concerning Johnston's death and Beauregard's calling off the final attack at nightfall seem equally as evident. Although some claimed a lull occurred or that there was no direction on

30 OR, 1, 10(1): 410, 467; Roman, *The Military Operations of General Beauregard*, 1:535-536, 551; "The Battle of Shiloh: The Second Day's Fight," *Southern Watchman*, April 30, 1862 (copy in E. Merton Coulter Collection, UGA); David Urquhart to Thomas Jordan, August 25, 1880, David Urquhart Letter Book, UNC.

31 House Reports, 53rd Congress, 2nd Session, Report No. 1139, 1-5.

the Confederate right after Johnston’s death, it is clear that Beauregard continued the advance and actually gained more ground under his watch than Johnston had done for hours. Similarly, the idea that Beauregard called off the attack at the end of the day because of the coming night is equally odious, the commanders on the ground themselves calling it quits with no correlation with Beauregard’s order.

Thus, had Johnston lived, it is hard to believe he could have done any more than Beauregard did in reality, when he would have faced the same daunting defense and terrain Beauregard did. And had Beauregard not called off the attacks at the end of the day, it is equally evident that they would not have succeeded, those tasked with making the assaults having already decided among themselves to stop for the day. Accordingly, Beauregard did not throw away Johnston’s victory. In fact, there was no victory to throw away. Thus, there is no basis for the Lost Cause argument that death and night stole victory from the Confederates at Shiloh, although it does make for a provocative and beautiful monument.

While many cannot even concur on what did happen at Shiloh, agreement over what might have happened, while certainly in the realm of debate, is extremely elusive. Yet the most likely outcome for all is that none of the what ifs would have made much difference. Shiloh, a gamble as described by Albert Sidney Johnston himself, was from the beginning an extremely long shot for the Confederates, even if everything had gone perfectly for them.³²

32 Timothy B. Smith, *Rethinking Shiloh: Myth and Memory* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013), 28.



Lincoln restored George B. McClellan to command in September 1862 because he said he had to work with the tools he had available. What if Lincoln had more tools to choose from?

photo illustration by Chris Mackowski from photos at the Library of Congress